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Touch Screen Theory

Digital Devices and Feelings

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2 The “interface, represented as a skin”: Oleophobic Coatings, Touchscreen “Scars,” and “Naked” Devices

Women with longer fingernails, as I indicate in chapter 1, are often depicted as frivolous and as having chosen their aesthetic appearance over technological proficiency. In such cases, fingernails and the associated women may also be understood as dirty and contaminating. While fingernails function as screens, as I suggest throughout this book, they are also figured as hindering people’s employment of capacitive screen technologies. Fingernails screen people’s nail art, function as ready-to-hand tools, figure the position of individuals and their hands, and cover the soft tissue under their surfaces. Fingernails can also screen technologies from the embodied traces that people leave on touchscreens. However, this requires screen technologies that are resistive (and respond to pressure) rather than capacitive (and reliant on skin’s ability to conduct electricity). These and other narratives about cleanliness and dirt, as I suggest in this chapter, are part of people’s ongoing conceptions of mobile, touchscreen-based devices. While some individuals identify dirt and damage as records of their positive engagement, many people lament and mock dirty and damaged screens. They also relate varied device films and skins to embodiment, thus further meshing technologies and individuals. Filth and failure are also too often correlated with women and femininity. I critique the ways people on technology forums focus on the aesthetics of screen technologies and touching but dismiss women for being interested in nail aesthetics and other beauty cultures.

Screens are archives of individuals’ touch. For instance, *iphonereak450* describes having “fingerprint and smudges” on the iPhone “screen since it is so humid.”¹ Despite “cleaning it with a microfiber cloth,” *iphonereak450* still gets “this film all over” the screen. So *iphonereak450* asks for assistance in cleaning and maintaining this screen. In a similar manner, *AmazingTechGeek* wants to know how to “avoid fingerprints/smudges

from attracting on an iPhone.”² These forum posters see their bodies and oily residues on screens and chronicle them for a readership with similar experiences. At the same time, as they express some level of concern about embodied experiences with screens, their member names assert technological proficiency and relationships with mobile devices. This may provide them with some separation from the described screens, which are coated with a “film” and provide imprints and versions of the associated individuals’ skin. While touchscreens offer versions of the individual, which are related to how computer technologies are understood as a form of the owner and as addressing the ideal user, these dirty and damaged screening surfaces and the associated residues are ordinarily identified as undesirable, tainting, and disgusting. They are correlated with the stickiness of humid weather and the damp bodies that imprint themselves on shiny and smooth surfaces. Screens can be records of other everyday but disagreeable bodily practices. Yet dirt is distinguished from and purportedly repelled by the oil-resisting oleophobic screen coating that I consider later in this chapter.

Applejuiced correlates screen smears with the supposedly uninformed act of eating a “cheeseburger or a slice of pepperoni pizza” and then wondering “why there’s smudges” on the “screen and other peoples iphone’s are cleaner.”³ Newtons Apple also takes a dismissive position when identifying “people eating and using their phone at same time. No way those French fries are not smeared on the screen. Just wash” your “hands several times a day.”⁴ The associated screens are supposed to show the unhealthy and unaware actions of such individuals. For instance, Newtons Apple dismisses purportedly uncontrollable and unreasonable fat by rendering the initial poster as a child who is in need of control and instructions about handwashing. Individuals are imagined to be producing and desiring greasy devices (and foods), which continues stereotypes about uncontrollable bodies and excessive consumption. In her fat studies book *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture*, Amy Erdman Farrell indicates the “enduring power of fat stigma; the way fat denigration overlaps with racial, ethnic, and national discrimination; the connections between both of these (fat and ethnic denigration) and class privilege and, finally, the ways that all of these elements” contribute to a “properly gendered subject.”⁵ People’s figurations of unacceptably fat bodies and greasy devices thus enable them to articulate embodied norms and clean devices that recognize their touch and expertise.

Applejuiced, Newtons Apple, and related commenters establish their more culturally acceptable embodied practices. They also convey their potentially excessive Apple fandom through member names. Given the multiple things associated with apples, they risk rendering themselves as food products as a means of self-identifying as scientific apples, including references to Isaac Newton's experiments and the fact that Apple named one of its personal digital assistants the Newton. These commenters' narratives about messy and disordered eating in front of and on screens are related to the dismissive figurations of inactive, gluttonous, and fat computer users that I critique in *The Body and the Screen*.⁶ People understand fat as contaminating, and as differently coding men and women, because of its association with femininity. These chronicles about dirt are also associated with ongoing fears of viral contamination and COVID-19, which I analyze in the afterword to this book.

In this chapter as well as the entire book, I extend my considerations from *The Body and the Screen* and study the ways normative male bodies, including not-too-fleshy or -greasy bodies, are elevated and privileged through screen engagements. My earlier research notes the ways screens are effaced in order to make it seem as if empowered male bodies can move because of the affordances of digital media and operate as part of online representations. In this chapter, I focus on the specific ways people correlate devices with versions of individuals and corporeal skin. Mobile touchscreen-based devices are further enlivened when they are wrapped in and thought of as skin, including human skin. People associate these broad notions of digital and human skins and connections with sensations. Individuals articulate pleasurable feelings about and attachments to undamaged devices and uncomfortable engagements with screen technologies (and thus the self and the other) when screens are cracked and thought to be otherwise contaminated. In a similar manner to the ways that theories of spectatorship indicate how the ideal viewer is produced as a means of regulating nonnormative individuals, I consider how the production of the skin and body of the mobile phone and its owner render normative users and specify how individuals should appear and act. This includes articulating normative men as intended users and employing women as methods of explaining devices and objectifying and dismissing women's bodies.

My inquiry in this chapter is informed by scholarly considerations of the body, which have been prevalent in the last few decades. This includes

body studies scholars' generation of and association with skin studies. I employ the scholarship on skin, including theorizations by Sara Ahmed, Didier Anzieu, Nicolette Bragg, and Naomi Segal, to analyze how devices become conceptually intermeshed with and impressed in individuals' flesh.⁷ Body studies researchers address such things as the ways the body is correlated with gender and other identity positions and less valued than the mind and thinking. They foreground sensations in considering how the body is experienced through a variety of feelings and is deemed to be disgusting and too fluid, especially when it is associated with women and other denigrated subjects. Bodies are thought of as more ideal when they appear to be coherent and impermeable. The properties of skin, as Steven Connor indicates in his book on the topic, have often been ignored as a means of conceptualizing the body as a delimited object that concludes with and is defined by the skin.⁸

Connor does not connect methods of foregrounding skin, and thereby ways of advancing more fluid and expansive notions of the body, with the digital. However, skin is correlated with digital technologies and devices through the common identification of interface options and mobile phone cases as "skins." In this chapter, I consider how the cultural articulation of touchscreen-based phones and other devices as skins intensifies the ways people associate these devices with individuals' bodies and feelings. I analyze the similar online formulations of touchscreens, especially notions of oleophobic coatings, dirty devices, and cracked screens, that appear in blogs, manufacturers' websites, news articles, patent literature, and technology forums. These texts conflate dirty and cracked phones with skin and script the associated individuals in relation to gender norms. While women's phone use tends to be culturally denigrated, especially for women with longer fingernails, men's aesthetic interests in skinlike phone cases and other peripherals are encouraged in technology forums and the other sites that I study. People's correlation of culturally acceptable skin, bodily feelings, and digital technologies, as I argue, results in people managing dirty and damaged devices. While some people render themselves as composed and rational bodies by indicating their lack of concern about the condition of mobile devices, and positively self-assess in comparison to more emotional users, individuals tend to be concerned about how technologies challenge their identity.

Skin Studies

Skin studies, as the sociologist Marc Lafrance indicates, focuses on the surface of the body and is informed by some of the same critical interests as body studies, including concerns about identity, power, and cultural classification.⁹ Skin studies also troubles the notion of skin as a container and as a singular, thin wrapper. It considers the ways the surface of the body is tenable and understandable. Research in this area also understands skin to be "processual, relational and sentient"; "human and non-human, material and immaterial, indeterminate and multiple"; and "bound up with thinking and, indeed, rethinking agency, experience, power, and technology."¹⁰ Lafrance notes that skin is a persistent aspect of people's experiences and always changing. He underscores the importance of skin as individuals' largest sense organ (and the largest organ more generally), the heaviest part of the body, and a key component of sensing and living. He also mentions the French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu's similar arguments, which I employ in this chapter.

The term "skin" is commonly used to convey a variety of states through such phrases as "skin and bones," "soaked to the skin," "skin in the game," and "skin of one's teeth." People understand the body and the world through these phrases and through skin. Lafrance describes skin as the "frontier of inside and outside" and "self and other, subject and object."¹¹ Skin is thus in between. This in-betweenness is related to Lafrance's description of skin as a "fluid boundary and a leaky interface."¹² Skin is not seamless, being constituted of wrinkles and openings that enfold and drive things into and out of it. As I suggest later in this chapter, Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection references different types of film and skin as examples of disgusting things and as properties that must be expelled to retain a notion of self.¹³ While skin can be experienced as an in-betweenness and a series of opposites, including such binaries as delicate and resilient that are part of mobile phone owners' narratives, it can also be perceived as a border, a shield (or screen), and protective armor. Skin is believed to bind the individual into a comprehensible whole and to distinguish the individual from other people and things. The cultural insistence on distinguishing between the self and the other must manage conceptions of the body and skin as open and fluid. Lafrance's description of skin as a leaking interface references the imperfect

boundaries that can never fully be controlled and the ways skin and fingers are conceptualized as a conduit, including a connection to hand-pointers and a form of digital interface.

Anzieu uses the term “Skin-ego” to convey the ways people are defined by and experience other people and the world through their skin and tactile relationships. Anzieu highlights the vital role of skin in identity construction. According to his psychological account, the child comes to understand itself and the world through the processes of mothering and the associated physical engagements with people. Anzieu’s concept of Skin-ego refers to a “mental image used by the child’s Ego during its early stages of development” that contains “psychical contents, based on its experience of the surface of the body.”¹⁴ In Anzieu’s account, the skin is experienced as multilayered and enacted through varied kinds of cutaneous contact. The mothering atmosphere encases the baby and includes an “external wrapper made up of messages.”¹⁵ The “double feedback” between the inner and outer wrappings and between other people, especially the mother and child’s engagement with and production of skin, results in an “interface, represented as a skin common to the mother and the child.” They are “‘plugged in’ to each other through the common skin” and thereby “communicate directly, with reciprocal empathy and an adhesive identification: it is a single screen that resonates with the sensations, affects, mental images, and vital rhythms of both.” Anzieu’s description of a shared skin provides a method for understanding the connection between individuals and devices, including the ways mobile phones are incorporated into people’s skin and identity and the shared surfaces and experiential interfaces that result.

Anzieu refutes the notion of the skin as a border that protects and leads to an essence or central core. Naomi Segal, who has translated and analyzed Anzieu’s work, suggests that the “skin has a double surface.”¹⁶ Anzieu describes a protective skin on the “outside and, underneath it or in its orifices, another layer which collects information and filters exchanges.”¹⁷ Segal indicates that this conception of complicated and communicating surfaces can assist people in comprehending the corporeal, psychical, and cerebral realms in a different way and replace the more traditional explanation of how thinking penetrates an essential self and establishes notions of truth. Such conceptions of surfaces and layers offer methods of theorizing the relationship between individuals and devices and their shared and impressed skins. I employ Anzieu’s and Segal’s research and recent feminist

scholarship to underscore the ways skin is collaboratively produced and influenced by others.

The feminist research of Nicolette Bragg theorizes this enmeshed and resonant skin through her own bond with her infant child. She notes that her "daughter's body is never without another, supplementary surface" and that bodies in contact produce indents.¹⁸ Bragg proposes the concept of "beside oneself" as a means of understanding the mother's position in child development and the ways people experience their bodies relationally. This concept "describes the non-possessed self marked by the possible and creative re-formulation of one's own contours into another's boundaries."¹⁹ Employing this and related theories, as I do later in this chapter, the individual using the mobile phone can be conceptualized as experiencing the body beside itself as the person is the phone *and* the user of the phone. The phone pushes, vibrates against, and claims to be a version of the body as the individual is activated through these signals, accepts the associated calls and embodied configurations, and resists these states.

Ahmed's indication of how feelings influence understandings of inside and outside is related to Bragg's analysis. According to Ahmed, "to say that feelings are crucial to the forming of surfaces and borders, is also to suggest that what makes those borders also unmakes them."²⁰ She suggests that instead of thinking of the skin surface as a container, that skin should be understood as the site "where others *impress* upon us," which might include the ways mobile phone screens can become impressed with the texture of people's clothing, stuck in pockets where they indent skin, and scratched by belongings.²¹ This notion of impression is similar to Bragg's narration of bodies indenting other bodies. It evokes the emotional, willing, and coercive features of skin contact and molding. Ahmed encourages individuals to "unlearn the assumption that the skin is simply already there, but begin to think of the skin as a surface that is felt only in the event of being 'impressed upon' in the encounters we have with others."²² This includes the ways individuals read and form the skin of different people. Thus, communities and things are participants in and co-constitute physical and emotional feelings.

Apple produces a version of these intertwined sensations and skins when noting that the "textured back glass" of its 11 and 12 generation iPhones "provides an elegant look that is also tough, slip resistant, and feels good in your hand."²³ With this text, Apple continues to emphasize

the connections between design, aesthetics, and embodied fit and pleasure, which, as I suggest in chapter 1, are not delivered or addressed in instances where women cannot use iPhones because of their fingernails. Women's bodies and methods of skin contact are expected to change for the phone, while men's associations are allowed to be more malleable and modify the device. As Apple has indicated, the mobile device's "textured glass may show signs of material transfer from objects that come in contact with your iPhone, such as denim or items in your pocket. Material transfer may resemble a scratch, but can be removed in most cases." Thus, iPhones act as a version of Lafrance's leaky interface where hands, other body parts, clothes, and the world slip in and impress themselves on the phone. As Bragg similarly suggests, it is a relationship where the individual is beside oneself and produces the object through a series of indents and transferences that are the body and the phone and that are removed from the body and the device. People's experiences with impressions combine close readings of device surfaces with critical proposals for how such arrangements function. I thus employ these theorists' considerations of skin as a means of considering the relation between the body and device and how online posters' descriptions of devices influence other participants.

A growing number of contemporary film and media theorists account for the skin and body in their studies of production and viewing. In Vivian Sobchack's phenomenological scholarship, which I mention in the introduction, she describes watching the opening of the 1993 movie *The Piano* (directed by Jane Campion) and feeling the scene with her body and fingers. Since the scene is blurry, she cannot immediately identify a point-of-view shot that depicts the world through the fingers of the character. Yet her "fingers *comprehended* that image, *grasped* it with a nearly imperceptible tingle of attention and anticipation."²⁴ Sobchack indicates how something is cognitively "grasped" by being felt in the individual's fingers. The term "grasping," as Sobchack intimates, combines tactilely touching and knowing. She thereby chronicles how her skin responds to and is influenced by the film. The ways film texts render forms of skin contact and reshape bodies is expanded with touchscreens, which are often so closely in contact with individuals that they indent bodies and amplify emotional connections.

Laura U. Marks's *The Skin of the Film* similarly suggests how "vision itself can be tactile, as though one were touching a film with one's eyes."²⁵ Touchscreens further intermesh conceptions of seeing and touching, and

sometimes displace seeing with feeling. They render touch as a form of seeing and knowing. Touchscreens also make fingertip contact, as my introductory analysis of N. Katherine Hayles's comment about digital research indicates, into a form of reading.²⁶ Marks argues that conceptualizing film as skin "acknowledges the effect of a work's circulation among different audiences, all of which mark it with their presence."²⁷ This marking is personalized with digital devices, as I elaborate in the following sections, and becomes records of individuals' engagements. This includes people noting pleasurable marks of use in the form of stickers and familiar rough spots. Individuals also experience their cracked screens as painful scars that continue to abrade skin when they rub against these surfaces.

People imagine unmarred phone skins and surfaces and identify "good" corporeal skin as smooth and pale (but not wan). However, theories of skin assert the varied ways skin is experienced, its myriad surfaces, and its plethora of functions. As Steve Pile notes in his research on skin, "More than a container or boundary layer or frontier even, the skin ego is lumpy, misshapen and unevenly developed."²⁸ Lafrance evokes a seamed skin and related notion of self that has pores, orifices, and other cavities that are open to and enwrap people and the world.²⁹ Seams and scars are sites of rupture and contention that may be worriedly picked at. People may more neutrally trace the seam between parts of cellphones or other handheld digital devices. The skin that is shared by the person and touchscreen is sometimes also tentative and torn by attractions to and rejections of other bodies and surfaces.

People associate broken skin with abjection and related feelings of bodily disgust. Kristeva identifies abjection as things and experiences that disrupt identities and systems and that do not respect boundaries, situations, beliefs, and rules. According to her, food revulsion is the most basic sort of abjection. In her account, such unexpected and improper skins as the film over milk cause individuals' distressing encounters with the other and experiences of disgust. When Kristeva sees or her "lips touch that skin on the surface of milk—harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring," she experiences a "gagging sensation and still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body."³⁰ Kristeva identifies the ways thin films repulse individuals. They barely cover surfaces but act as a kind of caul when fluids are engaged. The associated ruptures in films and skins challenge notions of unitary and consolidated

subjects. For instance, Kristeva asserts that leprosy “visibly affects the skin, the essential if not initial boundary of biological and psychic individuation.”³¹ She also risks articulating a coherent and consolidated body and rejecting differences through this account. The coronavirus and other communicable illnesses further disrupt notions of individuation and render and fracture communities. The coronavirus encourages and interrupts people’s desires to feel and touch, as I suggest in the afterword, by entering, exiting, and connecting bodies. The spread of viral particles and fluid droplets sometimes results in COVID-19 and the catastrophic death of individuals and groups.

Fluids, according to Segal’s study of Anzieu and skin, are disrupting agents. Body fluids “breach the bounds of the body” and “provide the skin-ego’s grievous inability to contain, they become both dangerous and ambiguous.”³² The feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz chronicles attempts to shore up this open body and argues that the “obedient, law-abiding, social body” is developed through directives about body fluids.³³ There are also concerns, especially when referencing men’s corporeality, about anything that breaches, penetrates, opens, and liquefies the skin and body.³⁴ It would also be productive to consider dry, grained, and cracked skin that separates at points and hangs loosely over internal supports and viscera. In this chapter, I consider such embodied, fluid, and digital surfaces and indicate how skin studies and related research elucidates gendered conceptions of mobile touchscreens. I consider the ways people identify touchscreens, including oleophobic coatings and dirty and broken surfaces, as sites of feeling and personal skins. Individuals who use mobile, touchscreen-based devices are linked to their hardware through expansive notions of skin and often repulsed by the filthy and broken skinlike features of touchscreens.

Gender, Dirty Hands, and Oleophobic Coatings

People frequently conceptualize Apple’s oleophobic coating as a protective and delicate skin, which they worry about damaging. Apple introduced and began marketing the oleophobic coating with the 3GS.³⁵ According to ajinkya@tmrresearch.com, the term “oleophobic” “refers to materials with zero affinity to oil” and the coatings are “ideal for preventing fingerprints on smart device displays.”³⁶ People’s explanations of oleophobic coatings are often contrary accounts of smudge-free displays and cleaning the screen.

They are also articulations of the connections between individuals' dirty hands, skins, and devices. Thus, PaulK offers an article titled, "Oleophobic coating – what it is, how to clean your phone, what to do if the coating wears off."³⁷ He also relates and distinguishes bodily traces from screen surfaces when noting that the coating is a form of "finger smudge resistance." This oleophobic coating is represented as skin or, as PaulK indicates, a "layer." He recommends against cleaners, which can "easily wipe off the oleophobic coat and leave your glass 'naked.'" This notion of the "naked" links digital devices to corporeal embodiment. The tactile features of the caseless, "naked" phone are celebrated, and its fragility is worried over, as I indicate later in this chapter. These frameworks, in a similar manner to the cultural conceptions of oleophobic coating that I consider in this section, employ women's bodies and stereotypes as a way of explaining and coding touchscreen devices.

In a post that is supposed to explain the oleophobic technology, the science writer Bill Nye uses an analogy about water droplets sticking to the "nylon fibers in a bikini strap, the swimsuit feels wet (or so I'm told). When they don't stick to the surface they're resting on, they bead up, like in the car wax commercials."³⁸ Women's bodies and clothing are thus employed to explain the features of the oleophobic coating, but it is other things, such as waxed cars, that Nye associates with desirable properties. It is worth noting that "waxing the car" is a metaphor for male masturbation.³⁹ Since the bikini is also culturally figured as one of the clothing items in which women erotically appear, these swimsuits help produce what Laura Mulvey identifies as women's proscribed position as to-be-looked-at-ness.⁴⁰ This composition of women as the object of the look is combined with the constitution of them as to-be-touched-ness, as I have outlined in earlier parts of this book. Women are rendered as to-be-touched-ness because of the materiality and tactility of Nye's formulation.

Nye articulates women as touchable while trying to distance himself from feminine experiences. He asserts his intellectual rather than prurient interests by denying that he knows how a wet bikini strap "feels." This positioning of women is underscored in reports about this post. For instance, Bryan Chaffin identifies Nye's explanation as "fun and easy to understand" and renders women's bodies as pleasurable and simple cyphers.⁴¹ The commenter ch3burashk highlights the ways Nye frames women as objects when writing, "Nylon bikinis? Wet (or so he's told)? Bill is a freakin' player."⁴²

ch3burashk foregrounds the ways Nye buttresses his masculine position and uses the narrative as a means of establishing a shared site of male heterosexuality and technological homosociality. Technology designers, marketers, manufacturers, and consumers produce gender scripts, as I suggest in more detail in chapter 1, when they identify expected participants as men and employ women's bodies as mere frameworks to explain the ways individuals should understand and engage with devices.

Other commenters on Nye's article assert their masculine position. I closely read such texts throughout this book as a means of demonstrating the ways participants collaboratively produce their identities and beliefs. For instance, wigin produces a gender script when equating the iPhone's scratch-resistant glass to men's association with ruggedness and unfettered sexuality. wigin argues that safeguarding the phone and oleophobic surface with a "screen protector was like getting a vasectomy, a full testicular removal and then ten years later putting on a condom just to not knock her up. Totally unnecessary."⁴³ This commenter understands the more durable iPhone as a corollary for the male body, and specifically for men's sexually active genitals and procreativity. Any restraining of genital and sexual activity is figured in wigin's account in relation to heterosex and skin. Yet wigin may efface safe sex practices in figuring vasectomies as replacements for condoms, even though the associated medical procedures can prevent pregnancy but do not offer any protection against sexually transmitted diseases. Nevertheless, this account hints that there are more masculine iPhone engagements, which according to wigin are intermeshed with men's sexuality, penetrative sex acts, and digital barebacking and other forms of unprotected sex. Through such narratives, wigin extends and changes Nye's gender script about the oleophobic coating to more overtly incorporate heterosexual activity.

The Manly Housekeeper's title and banners, which are design elements that often articulate the identity of sites and are thus worth considering, establish his and the whole site's masculine identity. He also maintains a claim to normativity by referencing his wife when explaining oleophobic coatings and "The Proper Way to Clean and Disinfect Your Smartphone."⁴⁴ He manages his interest in cleanliness and the ordinarily gender-demarcated housekeeper role by noting that his "wife is a bit of a germaphobe, so she frequently asks" him to "disinfect her iPhone." Through this and related narratives, he renders himself as unconcerned about germs, as a problem solver, and as a form of masculine savior. He enhances his authorial position

and prestige by indicating that he is acknowledged by the mainstream press and that he communicated with the *Wall Street Journal* "about the difficulty in cleaning smartphone screens." He also employs the site tagline "Man. Evolved," which positions him as having a more equitable position to gendered labor than other men. Nevertheless, an attention to punctuation, which is also an online close reading strategy, suggests how he employs a period to emphasize and bound his position as a man. In addition, online men's groups often figure men as more evolved and technologically savvy workers as a means of dismissing women's knowledge and labor. For example, the Manly Housekeeper's site banner supports this position by depicting an ape slowly advancing, standing upright, and changing into a man who flips food in a pan. The Manly Housekeeper, in a similar manner to Nye, uses women's bodies to explain the technology and, in this case, to blame them for obsessively desiring clean devices. However, the numerous technology forum posts by men that I study later in this chapter convey their preoccupations with dirty and damaged devices and how they feel.

The popular writing about mobile phones and oleophobic coatings connect the texture of devices to feelings. Nye relates the oleophobic coating to sensations and how a bikini feels when waterlogged.⁴⁵ This experience may convey erotic sensations and abjection because of the ways damp clothing feels against people's skin. The journalist Chris Chavez associates oleophobic coatings to pleasurable forms of touching in his instructional article, "Bring back the slick 'new phone' feeling to your display using this amazing wax."⁴⁶ He acts as the representative and the company's ideal male user in re-creating the new phone's tactile pleasures, and thereby banishing dirt and unpleasant surfaces. According to Chavez, "There are few things in this world better than taking a brand new smartphone out of the box and sliding your finger across that cold, silky smooth glass. It's an almost sensual experience." As in other texts, Chavez persistently employs the term "feel" and related language. He relates the feeling of fingers on the phone surface to the coating, or skin. In the associated video, Chavez's hands engage in a kind of autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) when they constantly touch the screen and rub against each other. His hands act as specialists on touch and as representatives of how, as he rhapsodizes in a kind of postcoital exclamation that "it just feels so good." Chavez's emotive narratives about feeling touchscreen surfaces are also present in Nye and the Manly Housekeeper's discussions.

Popular accounts usually emphasize feeling, but they do not always represent the slick (or textured) surface as delightful. People associate slickness with slipperiness and the fragile nature of the phone, which can be difficult to grasp, slip through fingers, and break upon impact. Rachel Plotnick's research on buttons indicates how individuals reject the "slick, flat, glass" of touchscreens.⁴⁷ In a related manner, BigDaddy0790 comments on how his new phone is as "slippery as freaking soap" and has been dropped so many times that "all the edges are roughed up, and mute button gets stuck."⁴⁸ dodger_m's "fingers get a little sweaty" when using the phone and the oleophobic screen feels a "little sticky and grainy."⁴⁹ These commenters focus on the ways hands feel when in contact with the phone and how individuals may refuse the device's constitution as to-be-touched-ness, including hands that pause at the texture, move away because of dirt, and are not wrapped around and meshed with screens.

Reporting on the Touchscreen and Viral Contamination

People reference women's purported interests in cleanliness when writing about digital devices and the coronavirus pandemic. In a similar manner to the Manly Housekeeper, aldo82's concerns about coronavirus spread and contaminating the "phone and phone case" is buttressed by a reference to the commenter's "wife, who is a doctor" and "has the same apprehensions."⁵⁰ Thus, aldo82 moderates individual unease and the risk of a single status by referencing a worried woman. This commenter's position is further elevated by indicating that she is a doctor, and presumably versed in medical issues (although, of course, there are many kinds of doctors, some of which are not medical professionals), and the real distress aldo82 is feeling is for her. aldo82 establishes the couple's physical and emotional relationship and places limits on other types of skin contact, including the Apple leather case's connection to animal and human skin. The Apple leather case's position as skin, as I suggest later in this chapter, is another instance where individuals produce a form of skin-to-skin contact, render layers of flesh, and accelerate concerns about bodily filth.

Reporters and commenters often associate dirty phones with contagion. These concerns have escalated because of the coronavirus. For instance, Paul Czerwinski, who is a director of healthcare sales, offers cleaning and disinfecting methods because "COVID-19 has drawn increased attention to

the need to sanitize mobile devices.”⁵¹ The journalist David Levine’s “How to Clean Your Germy Phone” encourages readers to engage in collaborative forms of disgust and to respond by cleaning.⁵² He asserts, “Our phones are really dirty,” and while overlooked, they are the “one thing we handle more during the day than perhaps any other object.” Levine encourages people to amplify their feelings by Googling “cellphone germs.” They will “be grossed out by headlines screaming warnings like *Your Cell Phone Is 10 Times Dirtier Than a Toilet Seat* (Time magazine), *Your Smartphone Screen Is Probably Disgusting* (USA Today) and *The Dirty Cell Phone: 25,127 Bacteria per Square Inch* (StateFoodSafety.com).” Levine thus articulates and remains outside a frantic journalism where writers textually shout until readers’ bellies wrench. The screaming journalist is thought to frighten readers into following health protocols *and* to emotionally sicken them. Like Kristeva’s narrative about the thin film on top of milk, which causes people to gag, these narratives about biological traces out of place are designed to produce extreme feelings.⁵³ They script a body that follows journalists’ directives and potentially develops more healthful and sanitary practices.

Levine’s methods of scripting disgust, in a similar manner to the other practices that I have identified, employs women when referencing filth and demands for cleanliness. His article is illustrated with a photograph of a woman’s hands cleaning her phone. In another image, a smiling woman cleans a wood surface. This depiction is linked to a slideshow where women appear to further consent to cleaning, including kneeling to scrub the floor. As Ahmed’s consideration of women’s hands suggests, these women smile welcomingly and accept directives for their hands to be at the service of others and to fulfill cultural scripts. Some of the women’s heads are cropped out of the photographs, as if to suggest that only their laboring hands are necessary. These women are representations of cleaning, and thus the site of dirty devices and hands. Such frameworks, as I continue to suggest in this chapter, use conceptions of filth (and viral contamination) to render women, people of color, individuals in the global South, and other oppressed subjects as servile bodies who are less civilized and human.

The reporters John Harrington and Charles B. Stockdale propose that the coronavirus and fears of contamination have left people to “their own devices at home, and those include cellphones, laptops, iPads, video games and television remote controls.”⁵⁴ They employ the term “devices” in the kind of ambiguous manner that Barbara Johnson interrogates.⁵⁵ In

Harrington and Stockdale's formulation, the pandemic left people to their own somewhat disorganized plans, which include engaging with touch-based devices. The journalists connect the coronavirus to touch and then encourage more managed forms of sociality, contact, and digital device use. State control may also be justified through this analogy. They note that the position of these devices as "high-touch items" and their potential use by many people have increased during the coronavirus pandemic. Touchscreen devices therefore conceptually (and potentially physically) develop a form of ominous shadow or grimy skin—concepts that I discuss in more detail later in this chapter—because their use produces what Harrington and Stockdale describe as the "specter of spreading the dreaded coronavirus." Harrington and Stockdale, as well as other authors, identify viral aspects of touchscreens, which include their mass marketing, adoption as necessary parts of contemporary culture, scripting of cultural mores, and contribution to health risks and contagion. Concerns about touch during the pandemic, as I continue to indicate in the afterword, sometimes downplay viral spread through droplets and aerosols by emphasizing easier-to-manage contaminated surfaces. Nevertheless, a growing number of reporters have identified the focus on cleaning as misdirected and as a form of comforting theater that elides more uncontrollable threats.⁵⁶

Despite greater airborne risks with the coronavirus, people's uncomfortable feelings about contaminated surfaces are emphasized by Juna Xu, who notes, "Sterilising your mobile phone is a smart idea to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but a leading expert has suggested we're not doing it enough."⁵⁷ These encouragements to do more cleaning, which can be useful with some illnesses and contaminants, is amplified by titling the article, "Yikes! You should be cleaning your phone more regularly than you think, *takes out antibacterial wipe*." This title is designed to generate shared emotional responses to notions of being polluted. The emotional "Yikes!" with an exclamation mark conveys voices raised in concern. Xu's visceral chronicle of producing an antibacterial wipe to separate the narrator from the device and dirt produces a version of Kristeva's narrative about abjection and wanting to push away other people, bodily products, and polluting things.⁵⁸ Xu tries to further prompt people's gut responses and alarm over bodily effluvia when advising that phones are "dirtier than a toilet seat." This vision of a dirty phone and body is tied to women and femininity because the article includes an image of a woman in a pink shirt who is sitting on the toilet

and holding a pink phone. While pinkness often evokes normative forms of femininity, her perch on the toilet renders the referenced femininity as more disgusting.

Tali Arbel's article also includes a photograph of a woman using a digital device as a means of representing the "bundle of germs that is your phone."⁵⁹ She chides readers, "You should also wash that extension of your hand and breeding ground for germs – your phone," and only then warns them about phone damage. Josh Ocampo references similar cultural aversions, which often do not stop the conveyed practices, by writing that phones are taken "everywhere: Bathrooms, gyms, subways, and buses."⁶⁰ Yet Ocampo underscores the associated intimacies that make mobile phones "like an extra limb or appendage." Arbel and Ocampo allude to the ways devices function as cyborgian extensions and bodily parts, as I note earlier in this book. Extra limbs can also be monstrous when they do not meet expectations for physiognomic symmetry and other norms. While they do not all work in this manner, many of these texts represent men as authoritative users who instruct about cleaning practices. Worried women are supposed to do the cleaning, and thoughtless women and flawed subjects are envisioned employing dirty phones. In each of these scenarios, the associated individuals embody gender norms.

Ocampo continues to try to escalate readers' emotional responses to filth when indicating that his "phone is disgusting." The phone becomes a dirty secret (and a record of something like erotic acts). If "you were to flash a blacklight on it, you'd likely find oil, grease stains, and blood" because Ocampo "cracked it six months ago and it's cut" him "several times." The phone is thus portrayed as an intimate clothing article or bodily part, which, like the phone, can be culturally rendered as repulsive. It is also alienated and threatens to "bite back," as Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree suggest happens with technologies that are thought of with optimism.⁶¹ The mobile phone acts as a kind of stealth actor and wounds him, and it also potentially physically cuts him out of the relationship and emotionally hurts him. The phone's association with the bathroom replaces the usual correlation of digital processing with the mind and thinking. Such frameworks turn the body and phone on and point it away from the head. They relate the mobile phone to such lower bodily acts as wiping the anus, and more generally to the lower bodily stratum, as Mikhail Bakhtin identifies the flipping of cultural norms.⁶² The phone is envisioned as an active

agent in its own troubling position, agitating individuals when revealing the dirty nature of owners, and opening them up to other bodies and surfaces. In such instances, people employ narratives about filthy phones to regulate what bodies do and what bodies can be. Thus, people's accounts of mobile phone and other touchscreen devices rely on gender scripts and health concerns as a means of producing the most binding of norms.

Individuals and the state enforce norms and try to retain varied forms of autonomy and control, especially at times of uncertainty. People's embodied attachments to digital devices, frustration and disengagement because of malfunctioning operating systems, and panicked reactions to slippery and dirty mobile phones can threaten cultural investments in the bounded body and conceptually and physically stain objects. The related texts and authors, as my close readings suggest, point to the ways digital practices advance bodily disgust and incoherence at the same time as they try to maintain some bodily stability. In many ways, the Internet is part of a gross-out culture, which is produced through such things as unlabeled pictures of "goatse" enlarging his anus and revealing the interior of his rectum and texted penis pics. This gross-out culture could be further addressed through the literature on abjection, feelings, and attempts to banish some viewers.

Bodily abjection is also linked to device features when zenpoet notes that the term "oleophobic" makes the poster "think of Olestra chips. Use the iPhone's new coating, and it causes anal leakage, because the oil on your fingers no longer has anything to stick to, so it dribbles out your anus."⁶³ In a similar manner to the identification of phones as tainted by overuse, the commenter imagines that the device and coating's bodily refusal can cause excrement and bodily fluids to become more animate and flow. This series of skewed cyborgian bodily relations alludes to the literature on the unhealthy aspects of phones, including the tendency of these devices to support colonies of bacteria. zenpoet's comments link skin (and the body's abject effluvia) to the device and evoke a version of Marc Lafrance's understanding of skin as a leaky interface.⁶⁴ This theory of a leaky digital interface can also be employed to address such disparate practices as the release of private information, hacking, digital cum shots, and spamming. In much of the popular literature, contaminated devices and the associated leaky interfaces are correlated with ill humans in a manner that escalates the identification of computer hacks and failures as "viruses." This intermeshing of technology and the body has been emphasized during the coronavirus

pandemic.⁶⁵ So too have people's interests in understanding touchscreen-based phones as clean and smooth embodied extensions been confounded by narratives about exposure and abjection.

Feminizing Dirt and Dust in Technology Articles and Patent Literature

A Microsoft at Home article called "How to clean your computer," like many of the texts that I have outlined, associates gender positions with technological hygiene by framing the document with a photograph of a woman. Television and print advertisements for domestic goods, including cleaning products, also represent women working to maintain the home. The author supports cultural constructions of feminine inadequacies and contamination when narrating a "dirty secret" about never cleaning the computer or removing the "crumbs lurking inside" the "keyboard."⁶⁶ In adopting this narrative about the "dirty," the text performs some of the same kinds of gender and sexuality scripts as Nye's analogy. This reference to lurking, as well as its association with feminine violability, render women as endangered (and as needing to remain in the purportedly safe home). The text also figures device maintenance as a kind of housekeeping and connects it to women and women's domestic work. The article correlates women with cleaning, but a reference to Jonathon Millman, a chief technology officer of a computer company, stands in for technological authority. He is quoted as noting, "Your computer could fry if you don't keep it clean."⁶⁷ The text also confuses the relation between functionality and aesthetics, as these concepts are hierarchized and conflated in many cellphone posters' narratives, when the company provides "five simple steps in the cleanup and maintenance routine" to "keep your computer and accessories looking shiny and new." In many narratives, the gleaming, new-looking phone is correlated with functionality rather than aesthetics. However, as I demonstrate in chapter 1, women are often mocked for choosing what are purported to be aesthetic fingernails rather than dexterous fingers.

Computer and patent literature emphasizes the problems that occur when dust and related contaminating materials get into computers and peripherals. Patrick Bass's 1986 article about the hard disk before the move to solid-state drives relates high speed and the microscopic distance between the reading head and disk with potential risks to the device and encoded information. The author argues that if the "distance between the hard disk

and the R/W head was scaled up to one inch, the diameter of a typical human hair would be over 16 feet” and could cause disk damage.⁶⁸ Bass scales up connections and thereby amplifies the potential risks and monstrousness of hair and other bodily effluvia. James Stephen Rutledge, Cory Allen Chapman, Kenneth Scott Seethaler, and William Stephen Duncan’s patent outline from 2006 similarly notes the risk of forced air-cooling bringing “dust or other particles,” which include large amounts of sloughed-off human skin, into the computer enclosure.⁶⁹ They warn that these bodily and other residues can produce computer and component failures and fires. Such authors suggest that the body and its parts should be kept away from computer processing. Of course, the body also builds aspects of computers and online systems, codes software and sites, and engages with devices and settings. Keys, buttons, fingerprint readers, hand-pointers, and fingernail grooves reference and establish the link between specific bodies and digital devices.

Keith Evans reminds eHow readers that dust is “composed of dead skin cells, smoke and ash particles, pollen and other natural materials” in “How Does a Computer Monitor Get Dirty?”⁷⁰ He notes, “When dust is left uncleaned, as is common on the back and less accessible portions of a monitor, it can permanently stain the monitor’s plastic housing.” Individuals thus influence monitors through their skin and other bodily traces, which are impressed onto devices and produce their features. In these cases, the body is also beside itself and technological devices, as Nicolette Bragg and others highlight such relationships.⁷¹ Evans notes, “When a person touches the plastic casing of a computer monitor, the natural oils in the person’s hand are left behind and can cause dust and dirt to adhere.” In these and other cases, the skin of the individual and the accumulated bodily detritus on the computer act as part of the device’s leaky interface, which positions and repositions the individual in relation to the technology and expands LaFrance’s conceptions of skin.⁷² Individuals and computers are also, as evoked by Didier Anzieu’s theories, connected through this shared skin.⁷³ These narratives about computers correlate touching and dirt and indicate that the body makes things dirty.

Annett Davis’s Fit Moms Fit Kids Club also suggests how bodies, including children’s bodies, produce dirty screens. She furthers the kinds of embodied and gender scripts that I discuss earlier in this book and tries to correlate clean devices with women’s ability to meet normative criteria and the household

management of dirt and children. She argues, "Cleanliness provides a sense of peace (less stress=better health)," while also narrating her inability to maintain these states.⁷⁴ The feminist authors Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English argue that such household technologies are designed for women and should be more carefully interrogated because they represent the "material embodiment of a task, a silent imperative to *work*."⁷⁵ There have been debates about the relation between innovations in household technologies and women's time doing domestic work. However, Michael Bittman, James Mahmud Rice, and Judy Wajcman employ data that correlates women's time working in the home with their available appliances to demonstrate that household technologies rarely reduce women's unpaid domestic labor and in some cases they increase such efforts.⁷⁶ Ehrenreich, English, and other feminists emphasize that it is impossible for women to meet cultural directives about maintaining perfect households, families, and personal appearances.⁷⁷ By titling her site "Fit Moms Fit Kids Club," Davis may remind readers of cultural expectations about women's self-maintenance and caretaking, but the blogger also figures lapses in such control and concerns about contamination. For instance, she identifies how people with children "probably have a ton of finger prints" on their "computer screen. Yucky prints, and nasty kid germs." Davis uses and markets a product that allows Fit Moms Fit Kids Club to reprieve normative gender positions and make computer and phone screens "mirror reflection clean!"

Mirror screen reflections address individuals with images of blurry audiences that look like and are them. They are thus a form of direct address that acknowledges the viewer and a tactile address because this recognition is organized around embodied traces and touching. These references to the mirror and the relationship between caregiver and child evoke Jacques Lacan's and other psychoanalysts' conceptions of the mirror stage.⁷⁸ In this stage, the child is expected to begin to acquire a sense of self and notice the agency of the body through a series of identifications and discoveries of differences. Christian Metz employs the mirror stage as a way of analyzing cinema viewers' association with the ideal image on the screen.⁷⁹ In his theory of Skin-ego, Anzieu suggests a more messy and embodied series of connections where the body and skin have what Segal describes as a "double surface."⁸⁰

Bodily mirroring and "maintained" screens may work to produce a coherent self by effacing such fragmented traces as body oil, fingerprints, and skin

debris. However, the touchscreen-based phone produces multiple and fragmented versions of the self through user names, avatar images, face and fingerprint identifications, app logins, and selfies. With these mobile phones, the individual's skin is wrapped around the screen's skin, illuminated by ambient light and glow, and engaged or disaffected by promises of connectivity. Cultural expectations for clean digital mirror screens also produce a group of women and feminine laborers who watch over and stand in for cultural norms. Ahmed's framework suggests how these women's arms and hands are caught and directed to work at the bequest of cultural expectations. People also dismiss these hands and their fingernails, as I note in chapter 1, for being too embodied and contaminated by dirt from their labor.

Collaboratively Amplifying the "dirt problem" in the MacRumors and Apple Community Forums

People share their intense responses in technology forums when they notice that their mobile phones have bodily matter on or under the clear surface. Skin and hair are often imagined to constitute bodily boundaries, but they generate disgust when found in other people's environments. In many cases, these individuals employ gender scripts to explain their positions. For instance, *texasstar1981* foregrounds these feelings about other people's detritus when beginning a MacRumors forum thread with a post titled, "freakin' hair on camera lens - iPhone X."⁸¹ The poster writes, "WTF. just got it 15min ago and immediately spotted a hair under (!) the camera lens." In a similar manner, *gbrancante* notes how the "freeking Phone has a hair and some dust!"⁸² These and other commenters employ curses and intensifying exclamation marks, which I suggest should be noted when closely reading online texts, to convey extreme irritation. They also direct other people to amplify their own feelings.

The post by *texasstar1981* focuses people's looks and sentiments by including an image with the hair circled, in red, thereby suggesting that the hair should be bordered off from the owner and the rest of the device (figure 2.1). Given that dirt is what Mary Douglas identifies as matter out of place, *texasstar1981*'s drawn circle is a means of containing such objects and repositioning them in a more acceptable manner.⁸³ This need to control matter out of place and the body is advanced when predation (whose



Figure 2.1

Screenshot from texasstar1981, “freakin’ hair on camera lens - iPhone X.”

member name evokes sexual violation and concerns about such abuses) notes, “At least it’s not squiggly hair.”⁸⁴ This mention of the improperly located pubic hair is a reminder that cultural conceptions of the sexual, especially when referencing the feminine and nonnormative bodies and identities, produce “dirty” bodies and intensified forms of disgust. There are persistent cultural directives to keep a distance from other people’s body fluids, especially fluids that, as Kristeva suggests, are deemed more repulsive because they are not clear.⁸⁵ People amplify such rules when they express concern about devices being contaminated by fluids and debris and incorporate touchscreen-based phones and other technologies into their notions of self and everyday experiences.

Muriel Dimen describes related forms of excited disgust and shared affective contagion in her article on the “Eew! Factor.” She states, “Feelings arrive at once corporeally and psychically.”⁸⁶ This corporeality “is as much a two-person as a one-body phenomenon.” People experience these

sensations when their bodies are forced into association with the bodily detritus of unknown individuals. This may happen when people examine texasstar1981's image, read related narratives, and detect more debris in the photograph and other places. Such excitement is also conveyed when martin-2345uk writes, "Another one with a hair?! Does Cousin It work on the production line?"⁸⁷ martin2345uk figures a monstrous and nonbinary body contaminating the manufacturing process and the clean and smooth surfaces that people want to associate with their mobile phones. Some facets of cleanliness are also reasserted when texasstar1981 posts an update about getting the "hairy X swapped out" for an "absolutely spotless 'white envelope' unit."⁸⁸ In this narrative about improvement, texasstar1981 distinguishes whiteness and spotless packaging and devices from the experiences of production-line workers, dirty hair, and the racialized bodies that are marked as hairy.

Commenters collaboratively produce desires for clean whiteness rather than interrogating the racist aspects of some posts and the experiences of people who produce these technologies. Normative cultural conceptions of body hair, as Elena Frank suggests in her analysis of shaving, elevate white, clean, intelligent, and hairless individuals while denigrating people of color by depicting them as hairy, dirty, lower class, and stupid.⁸⁹ These hierarchies provide a structure where fault is found to be with the worker and the worker's bodily matter. This legitimizes corporate control and the drive to efface individuals who manufacture technologies, especially the elision of their bodily labor and calls for recognition, from the devices that they produce. Commenters push workers' hands down, as Ahmed outlines these practices and I consider them in chapter 1, and tie workers' hair up as a means of privileging buyers and the clean, unmarked device. In such narratives, consumers indicate that they want workers' bodies and labor to remain undetectable.

Forum threads about hair and dirt generate affective contagion and upset readers who anticipate similar troubles and imagine themselves in the roles of commenters. If the "phone arrives" with the dirt chronicled by other posters, suggests UL2RA, "it's going to trigger" further "anxiety."⁹⁰ In such cases, commenters collaboratively intensify feelings about dirty and otherwise imperfect phones. People's narratives animate the bodily debris and other dirt and intervene in commenters' experiences with devices. For donster28, "Just knowing something is moving inside" the device makes the commenter "cringe."⁹¹ Cringing is an embodied response where individuals

try to move their bodies corporeally and emotionally away from contaminating elements and people and express extreme affect. Cringing thus suggests a problem for device manufacturers that try to link people to their touchscreens through a variety of design and advertising practices.

In a consideration of cinema as skin, Tarja Laine argues that such bodily experiences as shivering (and I think its relationship to cringing), transform the “skin into a kind of ‘resonating membrane.’”⁹² She references Steven Connor’s indication that when people have an aversion to something, the skin squirms and thus becomes a version of the shifting or disgusting thing that they want to escape.⁹³ The shared features of skin and the ways people are shaped through contact are foregrounded by these scholars’ arguments, including Connor’s persistent identification of skin as a membrane. Yet cringing is also an attempt at articulating the bordered body and individuation of the person. Cringing is too often an expression of intolerance that allows people to establish physical and conceptual distance from nonnormative identities and practices, but it can also disrupt the intermeshing of bodies and devices and the associated presumptions that such representations and sensations are unmediated. I employ Laine’s and Connor’s analyses to indicate the ways individuals and devices resonate with *and against* each other because of responses to the other and dirty devices. This notion of skin as a resonating membrane is also useful in considering, as I do in chapters 3 and 4, the ways emoticons and emoji are designed to get readers to collaboratively feel. It also evokes the ways autonomous meridian sensory response (ASMR) video producers work to facilitate viewers’ intense embodied experiences with resonating screens.

The concept of the resonating membrane conjures individuals sharing their concerns about device screens with forum commenters. Irritated commenters offer methods of identifying and responding to what Bleifuss describes as a “dirt problem.”⁹⁴ These posts about mobile phone problems provide individuals with assurances that they are not alone, a community to fret with, and information about diagnoses and solutions. Some individuals also refuse to be irritated by problems and instead express annoyance with posters who itemize device deficiencies. For example, some posters negatively responded to rmliv’s concern that the new iPhone “got scratched all over.”⁹⁵ Starship67 argues, “Most people cant be bothered to look that hard to find something wrong.”⁹⁶ MacDawg “can’t even be bothered to turn” the “phone over to look.”⁹⁷ Such commenters convey indifference and

turn toward and away from the problem object and poster. Their dismissive responses are in some cases designed to bait and intensify the bother experienced by concerned commenters. To insist on being unbothered is to place pressure on other individuals to accept their position, even if it is troubling or unlivable. Such commenters convey indifference as a means of producing the kinds of emotional baiting that Sarah Sobieraj and Jeffrey M. Berry analyze and that I consider in more detail in chapter 1.⁹⁸ While the posts that I have outlined are designed to further incite participants, they do not challenge the cultural structures and hierarchical identities produced in the original posts.

Most of the posts that I consider in this chapter are not feminist. Some of them contain anti-feminist and misogynistic conceptions in their addresses to “guys”; in their insistence that women function as erotic objects; in their association of dirt with women, the feminine, and people of color; and in their indications that women have delimited relationships with technologies. However, I employ Ahmed’s analysis to consider the ways contemporary culture displaces critics and critiques, as well as how it dismisses feminisms. Ahmed notes, “We learn about the feminist cause by the bother feminism causes; by how feminism comes up in public culture as a site of disturbance.”⁹⁹ Thus, as I suggest in chapter 1, feminist politics is understood and encountered by anti-feminist culture and society more broadly as disruptive. The “bothered” forum commenter is also made into a bother and a problem that disrupts the comfortable flow of technological and consumer pleasure. People self-present as unaffected as a means of preventing other individuals from expressing their dissatisfaction. Purportedly unbothered people switch the problem and the bother from the device to the individual. Nevertheless, these critiques receive less vitriol than women’s challenges to gendered iPhone scripts.

Scratching, Irritating, and Feeling Fingernails

People’s queries about greasy and smudged screens are reminders of the ways bodies (and phones) act as leaky interfaces, including the ways they combine with bodies and leak personal data. Remington Steel proposes that a poster who asks about fingerprints has “greasy finger syndrome,” as a means of creating a category of abject people and separating them from normative masculine bodies and clean screens.¹⁰⁰ Newtons Apple

dismissively constitutes MacKid1983 as an obsessive and filthy nerd for asking, “Anyone experience really bad smudging on your iPhone 7 display screen?”¹⁰¹ MacKid1983 also notes that the “fingerprints are ridiculous” and wonders about “bringing it to apple and complaining.” Newtons Apple blames MacKid1983, suggesting, “Clean the screen once a day and try not to use it while you are eating fried chicken.”¹⁰² While the nerd has historically been characterized as immature, engaged in poor eating habits, and unconcerned about “his” body, as I suggest in *The Body and the Screen*, the more recent mainstreaming of computer culture has resulted in the elevation of the associated individuals and conceptual, if not physical, reshaping of their bodies.¹⁰³ Remington Steel and Newtons Apple engage these shifted frameworks and try to elevate their positions by articulating, and then distancing themselves from, abject bodily traces and the associated people.

Apple’s marketing of iPhones, as I suggest in chapter 1, identifies fingers as the ideal interface tool for touchscreens. However, Remington Steel and Newtons Apple indicate instances where the actions of fingers on screens cause problems for people who are using touchscreens, as well as for the people who rely on aspects of screens for their identities. People’s negative comments about greasy phones suggest that bodies must remain nonporous and bordered so that they match the requirements of devices. People also identify fingernails, which evoke women, femininity, and the nonhuman, as problems when engaging with the capacitive touchscreen interface, as I note in chapter 1 and in this section. The nail evokes feelings because it is hard in a way that other parts of fingers are not.

People express concerns about fingernails touching computers and capacitive touchscreens. For instance, johnny_240sx is concerned because a friend’s “nail made contact.”¹⁰⁴ johnny_240sx provides a kind of schematic map of personal and technological risk wherein fingernails and their feminine connotations are less threatening because they “weren’t long and they were plain (it wasn’t painted it had no fake crap on it just straight up vanilla).” The poster also wonders, could they “create a scratch on the display” when someone uses a “fingernail to point” and rub “it across the screen?” CCato77’s visceral response is an expletive like “*****.”¹⁰⁵ While individuals are understandably concerned about potential damage to their screens, fingernails do not ordinarily pose such risks. Fingernails are less likely to smudge screens than are greasy fingertips. Yet, like the willful, raised, and insistent arm that Ahmed references and I theorize about in

chapter 1, the feminine and pointing fingernail with polish is refused and pushed down by posters' narratives about contamination.

Individuals indicate that the small physical influence of fingernails has intense emotional impacts. Lika_tm proposes that a fingernail made a "tiny scratch on the touchpad."¹⁰⁶ The commenter questions "why a touchpad should be so easily damageable if it requires constant touching." In writing this, Lika_tm offers a concept of touching that incorporates and resists fingernails. The poster also appears to temper the negative gender connotations produced by fingernails by insisting that the nail is "not a very sharp one." These comments may continue the identification of women, and the fingernails that they are thought to select "instead" of technological proficiency, as unintelligent. A large number of technology forum posters respond negatively to longer fingernails and ornate nail art, as the previous comments indicate. These posters correlate such embodied and aesthetic choices with unappealing forms of femininity, race, sexuality, and class. Of course, the varied sites where people share and demonstrate nail polish applications tend to promote positive reactions to fingernails, nail polish, and nail art. Nevertheless, even in nail art forums, which I have considered at length in previous research, individuals articulate limits on what is deemed to be acceptable forms of nail length, decoration, and femininity.¹⁰⁷

Fingernails, as I have begun to suggest, are feeling devices and tools. Yet their work on screens also causes concern and unease. For instance, jazzdude9792 describes being "pretty happy" with his iPod until noticing a "small scratch in the glass screen. This isn't any ordinary scratch," argues jazzdude9792; he could feel it with his "finger nail pretty easily meaning that it is a substantial gouge in the screen."¹⁰⁸ The "grooves" in alyabiev's screen "can be felt not just by a nail, but with a naked fingertip."¹⁰⁹ These posters' pleasure is disrupted by the investigative abilities of nails and fingertips, which they employ even while knowing what they will feel and find. On such occasions, the fingernail is hooked into and feels the scratch, which causes the nail and the individual's attention to the larger surface to stop. Zach the Apple User's "distracting" iPod scratch can be felt when running a "finger nail across it."¹¹⁰ Individuals use their fingernails to detect changes in surface and texture, but these instances of feeling nails, which sense surfaces and convey physical and emotional information about fingernails and other things, also cause commenters to be uneasy and trigger

unpleasant feelings in other people. As Dimen suggests, such affective experiences are collaborative.¹¹¹

People's concerns about scratches and the many incidents that produce them are amplified when kaans warns that the iPhone X "screen literally gets carved just by random dust, it's not something you can ignore either, your fingers/nail will catch onto it."¹¹² Fingernails thus function as useful tools and discover and know the screen, surface, and individuals' feelings. Fingernails recognize scratches in a manner that seems to shift knowledge processing and storage from the brain to the hand. The nail functions in a similar manner to Vivian Sobchack's hands and emotionally feels and physically recognizes things.¹¹³ Narratives about screen scratches tend to emphasize the experience of feeling the screen surface by touching rather than seeing it. This happens when WISG.1 pushes on the "iPhone screen (SC)" and it "moves in and out."¹¹⁴ Individuals press and pry at seams in the smooth surfaces of devices. Anne Cranny-Francis describes a related physical and narrative "seamfulness" and semiotic "semefulness" where individuals attend to multiple meanings, "seams," and how technologies are sutured into everyday life.¹¹⁵ According to Cranny-Francis, the identification of the "seamful interface is also 'semeful' in that it draws the attention of users to the interface and hence to the ways in which it 'makes meanings.'" Digital scratches and seams are thought to become a kind of bad writing and meaning production. However, they direct individuals to focus on how devices are conceptualized and produced.

Nanna Verhoeff proposes the concept of the theoretical console to explain individuals' employment of the dual screens of the Nintendo DS. She argues that the interface encourages people to think about how multiple forms of engagement and representation are enabled. As Verhoeff suggests, such devices act as theoretical objects and consoles because they raise "questions about the specificity of the screen gadget as object, and about the entanglement of technologies, applications, and practices."¹¹⁶ The scratch does similar work in getting people to conceptually engage multiple registers of the device, including as a screen object and a technological apparatus. These marks link and shift individuals between finger digits and the digital device. When individuals use their fingers to pick at flaws and seams that they fear will open and spread, the sensed scratches generate affective experiences that are related to individuals' apprehensions about dirt in devices.

Such marks function as a form of punctum, which I elaborate on in the introduction and chapter 3, that shocks and wounds device owners when they unexpectedly discover damage. While Roland Barthes's theory of punctum addresses photographs and is at least initially associated with visual objects that produce feelings, these touchscreen wounds are experienced through hands as well as eyes and shift between haptic and optic experiences.¹¹⁷

Cracked Screens

Individuals' hands and fingernails as well as eyes experience tactile surfaces and pause at scratches and other abrasions when employing touchscreens. Bodies may be mirrored and marked on devices, as I suggest earlier in this chapter and in chapter 4. In *The Body and the Screen*, I consider how the positioning of women webcam operators as objects is torqued by their control of the technology and the ways viewers are reflected on screens and conflated with screen images.¹¹⁸ Viewers thus watch versions of themselves. Touchscreens broadcast material traces of individuals to owners and onlookers and provide fingers and nails with unwanted information about damage. Dirty and damaged screens frustrate and otherwise emotionally influence individuals by failing to deliver on corporate promises of new and "self-cleaning" oleophobic surfaces. People also associate cracked screens, which are often viewed as dirty because they gather bodily and other matter in their crevices, with emotional sentiments.

People regularly reference emotional reactions to phone cracks as means of establishing differences in age, class, gender, race, and sexuality. In many accounts about women's broken screens, men distinguish between men's responsibility and women's technological disinterest. For instance, nasa25 notes that his girlfriend's "screen already looks like its been through a gulf war."¹¹⁹ Another commenter, kayzee, indicates that his girlfriend has "completely destroyed her Z3 Compact :disappointed: cracked both the front and rear."¹²⁰ These people figure themselves and other men as judges of technologically acceptable behavior and as the more adult and knowing employers of devices. Thus, men who break or worry over their phones are often characterized as childish in a manner that sustains patriarchal structures where older men are privileged. However, men's "girlfriends" and other women who are romantic partners are still considered with increased scrutiny. While ThatiPhoneKid, who self-represents as a juvenile

brand enthusiast through his member name, narrates multiple technological disasters, forum participants are particularly interested in his concerns that his girlfriend's "hoovering" over his phone produced "internal damage."¹²¹ Commenters correlate "hoovering" to oral sex and represent women as capacious erotic objects. Women's adequacy is further questioned when Relentless Power asks, "How did your girlfriend end up vacuuming over your iPhone without seeing it?" ThatiPhoneKid replies, "shes reckless lol." Commenters use the post as a means of reasserting traditional women's roles and produce the kinds of gender positions that I analyze in this and other chapters. For instance, keysofanxiety suggests that women have limitations when writing, "at least your missus does some housework."¹²² keysofanxiety thereby encourages the misogynistic idea that women should do household labor and disappointment that they inadequately perform this work.

HappyDude20 wonders about and reproduces class structures when asking, "Is a Broken iPhone Screen Unprofessional/Embarrassing" and "do you think it looks bad?"¹²³ The commenter inquires about "bad" appearances and connects professionalism to aesthetic norms and economic attainment, such as being able to pay for new phones. Other participants, including scaredpoet, respond using the same terms. For instance, scaredpoet feels "bad for them, both for having such bad luck and for not being able to get it fixed."¹²⁴ HappyDude20 is warned by scaredpoet not to expect other people to "use your busted phone and risk cutting" their "fingers." Such warnings suggest that cracked screens *and* dirty devices and bodies produce abject experiences and keep other people at a distance. Furthermore, scaredpoet, whose user name expresses apprehension, indicates that the skin and fingers of viewers respond to individuals with broken screens and conceptually move away from any contact.

HappyDude20 asks about different factors that might result in a person with a cracked screen looking unprofessional. His digital self-presentation and query are also tempered by his member name, which evokes the relaxed and unambitious guy. However, many individuals who reply correlate touchscreen-based phones with white-collar professionals. JohnLT13 asserts, "If one can afford an iPhone, you would figure they could afford to get it fixed" and "Broken screens look shabby."¹²⁵ This associates new screens with respectability and financial success and broken screens with poor economic decisions and dilapidated environments. This indication that screen aesthetics (and possibly functionality) influence people's status

is also established when babycake describes a school administrator with a cracked screen, “who’s reprimanding an ambassador’s kid.”¹²⁶ According to babycake’s scenario, the ambassador meets with and sees the administrator’s cracked screen, thinks “how trashy, can’t even afford to fix his phone,” and identifies “how ghetto your school is.” In using a version of the phrase “that is so ghetto,” babycake continues the unfortunate association of economic and educational disparity with violent crime and blackness.¹²⁷ Early uses of the term “ghetto” referred to areas where Jewish people were confined. It now describes an extremely populous slum, which is occupied by minority groups who are situated there because of economic and social factors. As Kenzo K. Sung suggests, describing something as “ghetto” is ordinarily disparaging. It essentializes the “structured oppression of impoverished and racially segregated communities as pathologically inevitable and isolated from ‘mainstream’ society.”¹²⁸ Individuals are blamed for living in poverty in a ghetto and believed to behave in a criminal and indolent manner that explains and justifies such habitation.

Class positions are further established *and* babycake self-identifies as distinct from poor individuals with broken phones when instructing readers, “When you get into a high power position, looks matter; you have to tie your tie right, wear the right glasses, have the right type of skin, and have a nice phone.” The reference to skin connects individuals employing phones to the culturally acceptable surfaces of bodies and devices. babycake correlates power with norms and suggests that individuals should follow cultural proscriptions. The poster recommends the “right type of skin” and risks making racial judgments that suggest that whiteness should be associated with authority. If “ghetto,” as it ordinarily does in contemporary narratives, is intolerantly associated with black viciousness, depravity, and bad taste, then good skin proposes the opposite: an attractive and enabled white subject. Through such accounts, skin is rendered as an attribute and component of the individual that can be prosthetically donned and removed in the same way as well-styled ties, new and pristine mobile devices, and other accoutrements are purportedly under the control of every individual. This elides systemic racism and other forms of disenfranchisement and renders people’s positions as personally achieved or their fault. People employ the mobile phone and skin in such narratives as a form of theoretical console, but these elements are largely referenced to reinforce hierarchies rather than as means of intervening in cultural structures.

Phone Case Patina and Skin

Commenters mention skin in their writing about smudged and dirty phones and in their considerations of phone cases. For instance, as I suggest earlier in this chapter, *iphonereak450* describes such screen buildup as fingerprints, smears, and “film.”¹²⁹ *BugeyeSTI* chronicles “clear skins that can be applied to the back of the phone” to prevent scratching.¹³⁰ Individuals also associate embodied and device skins in posts about Apple’s leather cases, which were once a part of an animal. In general terms, phone cases are records and extensions of skin and of individuals’ actions. Commenters establish these connections in posts where they describe the tactile aspects of leather cases and the ways their embodied engagements influence the color and feel of the case. For instance, a thread about “Apple Leather Cases - Patina Proud Photos” convinces *sean000* to get a saddle brown case “because it looks so great as it darkens over time.”¹³¹ In such threads, leather case patina is ordinarily identified as the changing color and texture of the case.

Some people insist that patina is beautiful and others assert that the production of patina through bodily excretions is disgusting. In each case, they focus on the kinds of aesthetic concerns about embodiment and connections to phones that women are condemned for. Posters frame their positions in such threads as “Which Apple leather is best for not showing dirt/patina?” As the original poster of this thread, *MrMister111* indicates that he owned an “Apple leather Red” but “must have greasy hands as it wore bad, and always looked dirty.”¹³² The poster suggests that the case functions as a kind of theoretical console and informs him about and makes him recognize the filthiness of his body and the characteristic of his skin. In a related manner, *Ralfi* is “not a fan of the ‘Patina’ effect” because “it’s mainly a buildup of body oils/gunk on your case.”¹³³

By expressing dislike for what they identify as the residual sweat and accumulations of owners’ bodies, *MrMister111*, *Ralfi*, and other individuals foreground the sticky ties that bind phones, cases, bodily residue, and individuals together. Whether classified as an ideal or unappealing conjunction, posters make decisions based on these connections. For instance, *Ralfi* chose “Silicone instead of leather” because the “weekly wiping down with a damp cloth will remove the sweat, dirt, lint etc. in one *foul* swoop.”¹³⁴ This represents cleaning, like the use of leather cases, as a disgusting activity and something that purifies surfaces that are not leather. The condition of the

leather case “grosses” Ralfi out because the commenter keeps “thinking this Patina effect is just a combination of the absorption of human oils, grime & wear on the case. Does the case start to smell at all after a while?”¹³⁵ This poster provides details about bodily effluvia as a means of establishing a distance from the associated mobile bodies, which mesh embodied traces and mobile devices, and the material feel and content of cases. Ralfi and other commenters who resist leather cases also enact a version of excited disgust, which Dimen identifies, and thereby they reanimate the cases even as they try to keep the associated notions of contamination away from their bodies.¹³⁶

Ralfi argues that new leather cases “look brilliant, but then they change into something that’s not very attractive.” Cases are figured as unappealingly morphing and transforming. Such unstable objects and bodies may cause unease in situations where individuals and cultures are already being reconceptualized by varied social and political movements. Ralfi wants to keep at a distance from the material shifts of these mobile device conglomerations and “wouldn’t want to touch a typical owners leather case after they’ve had it a while - like shaking hands with someone who hasn’t washed in months.” Ralfi renders the case as a stand-in for and corporeal version of the owner, and as part of a great unwashed culture (and phones), which evokes babycake’s rendering of the ghetto. As such comments and the earlier posts that I outline suggest, people construct the status of and feelings about iPhone and other touchscreen-based phone owners in their narratives about the cost, condition, and usability of devices.

Some commenters reject the functions of phone cases and devices as points of contact. chriscrowlee echoes the aforementioned desires to separate from other bodies when writing, “Leather is skin...and even when treated is a bacteria magnet.”¹³⁷ As the commenter suggests, leather is skin and thus has a material and structural relationship to individuals’ bodies and hands. Anzieu describes how multiple layers of skin wrapping facilitate interfaces and communication between people and things.¹³⁸ Skin is a layer and a wrapping that covers and protects devices, connects individuals to technologies, and manages owners’ feelings about devices. Ralfi, chriscrowlee, and other posters’ resistance to material changes, which is also a resistance to certain cultural notions of movement, is not consonant with the notion of mobile phones. Yet they advance the idea that cases and devices extend owners’ bodies toward repulsed individuals by buying and

encouraging a different relationship. Fingernails and their links to women and people of color, as I suggest in chapters 1 and 4, are also identified as horrifically moving toward other individuals, extending through the interface, and turning into animal and monstrous claws. Thus, device films and fingernails are useful for scripting normative ends and should be further read and theorized as a means of considering what these practices produce and how they might be changed into a form of Ahmed’s resistant arms.

The leather case, in a similar manner as the mobile phone, is animated and attached to the owner. It wraps the owner (and the phone) in a desired or an objectionable additional skin. Thus, Anzieu’s and other scholars’ theories of skin provide methods for understanding how individuals, devices, and cases become incorporated. Feminist theory, including Bragg’s writing about mother-child bonds, also foregrounds the relative and amorphous nature of the individual body and how it is shaped when enmeshed with other forms.¹³⁹ Ryan1524 proposes the ways objects combine and that it is “almost as if the device, as a thing, is more complete with the leather cases.”¹⁴⁰ The case is also incorporated into the device in a manner that continues its wrapping and covering of some of the phone’s surfaces. Ryan1524 considers the “phone with an Apple Leather case as the more complete product now. Naked feels...naked. Anything else feels and looks wrong.” This poster picks up on Apple’s marketing of accessories and peripherals and becomes a brand supporter. The associated comments figure the leather case as a skin wrapper, as clothing, and as less naked (and possibly less embodied) than the device. Ryan1524 identifies the “naked” phone, which is how people describe the employment of mobile devices without cases, as being incomplete. Yet many positive narratives about naked iPhones, as I suggest next, portray uncased phones as the ideal versions. In these instances, the naked device is thought to better connect the individual to the mobile phone and digital embodiment and to provide erotic experiences. As with other structurations of mobile phones, the naked phone is also correlated with women and the feminine.

Screen Protectors and Going Naked

Molly McHugh reports that the “call to ditch the iPhone case has been around as long as the iPhone has” and “it’s a style choice.”¹⁴¹ Her article emphasizes consumers’ investments in the aesthetic features of iPhones,

but she also wonders why a device that has been around in varied iterations for many years is not accepted if it has “scars. Why is something that is increasingly ordinary also deemed increasingly precious?” McHugh’s articulation of the scarred phone is similar to other individuals’ figurations of the phone as a version of the individual and as a skin. While she suggests that individuals should be less concerned about phone aesthetics and embrace the device without a case, many commenters espouse the phone without the case as a way of celebrating its design features. The associated transference of the individual’s skin to the phone and its surfaces results in referring to the uncovered phone as “naked.” In addition, the user of the phone is identified as male, but the phone itself is usually explained through women’s bodies, as I have already outlined.

People’s normative conceptions of nudity and nakedness are ordinarily linked to binary gender and sexuality categories. Art historians have noted the historical tendency to produce paintings and other visual versions of the female nude.¹⁴² The underlying canvases, like iPhones and their features, are often explained by referencing women’s bodies.¹⁴³ This is related to the continued eroticization of women, including their constitution as to-be-looked-at-ness and to-be-touched-ness, and their association with the natural (and contrarily artifice and the artificial). NBAasDOGG figures the naked iPhone as a form of visual, haptic, and erotic pleasure when telling “you a story” that is also a gender script.¹⁴⁴ NBAasDOGG “saw a girl” with “her (naked) iPhone X” and thought “WOW, that’s a gorgeous phone when you see it in someone else’s hands.” The author notes that the device is scratched but concludes, “she was gorgeous and she was enjoying the heck out of her gorgeous phone. Maybe we should do that as well.” In NBAasDOGG’s story, it is unclear if the narrator and readers are supposed to enjoy the woman, her phone, or both.

The narrator here and in too many other frameworks controls the “girl.” Jessalynn Keller argues that girling supports dominant culture and tries to keep girls and women from participating in the political sphere.¹⁴⁵ In the case of NBAasDOGG’s narrative, the girl is employed as a means of tantalizing and instructing readers. She remains not fully formed because of the poster’s employment of the diminishing term “girl” and because of the ways she melts into the device, heterosexual male viewers’ desires, and the moralizing account. The woman’s attractive body is thus a script and a lens that focuses and reflects male viewers’ interests in the phone and

constitutes the woman and device as to-be-touched-ness. Even more than the digital phone, she is a story and a device that allow him to make a point. The digital scholar Sarah Murray addresses such practices and, in a similar manner as gender script theorists, encourages scholars to consider "which bodies find themselves with a recognizable fit" when engaging with popular culture and technologies.¹⁴⁶ In NBAasDOGG's and other accounts, heterosexual males are coupled with and enabled to fit the gendered device. I also note, and suggest scholars should consider, the bodies (such as the "girl") that are imagined as mere controllable devices and being directed to fit other individuals. NBAasDOGG employs the figure of the girl in the manner that Ahmed critiques, and also encourages men to imagine women as (and in) their hands and as their erotic laborers.¹⁴⁷

A similar gender script is employed by *daidec* to encourage people to use the phone without a case. *daidec* states that if he is buying a "technological artwork," then he is "going to enjoy it in its naked beauty." When he married his wife, he "didn't cryogenically freeze her to stop her showing the signs of ageing."¹⁴⁸ It may seem as though *daidec* is accepting women's changing appearance, which of course would be consonant with his own aging. However, he does this in order to make women into tools and examples. Men's processes of embodied change remain unaddressed in his narrative, so that men can nobly accept imperfect women while remaining rational thinkers rather than bodies. In a comparable manner to Bill Nye, *daidec* and NBAasDOGG use women's bodies as methods of explaining their relationship to technologies. Through such texts, men script the gender and sexual position of the ideal user as male and heterosexual. Male posters' assertions of being sexually interested in women and being experts on women's bodies and experiences may thus work as a form of "no homo," which protects men from and connects them in queer relations with each other and the iPhones that they admire and desire. The phrase "no homo" evokes gay relationality, including men's desires for and associations with digital devices, where such erotics have not been previously highlighted. Men's use of "no homo" excessively, and thus queerly, denies such attachments.

When *iwonder36* references the naked phone and notes, "So few things can now be enjoyed without protection," he asserts an active and unimpeded sexuality, which is shared mostly among men.¹⁴⁹ The commenter associates the naked phone with sexual liberation that is not constrained by concerns about sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, or

consent. In a related manner, wiggin, as I note earlier in this chapter, relates the decision to use a screen protector to the purportedly excessive choice to get a vasectomy and then use a condom.¹⁵⁰ These posters celebrate an active sexuality that tends to be withheld from or used to denigrate women. The phone is further equated to sex when bigjnyc titles a post, “One month later...anyone else’s iPhone X still a virgin?”¹⁵¹ This phone too becomes the fixture of the owner’s interests and an available, but also dismissed, erotic object. The original poster looks at the lightning port and realizes that “nothings ever been in there.” This narrative about penetration is echoed by Vermifuge, who “jammed the dongle up in there day one” and understands the cellphone as a passive and feminine receptacle.¹⁵² Such texts figure a form of heterosex where male penetration and control are imagined as the qualifications for sexual activity and device use. The employment of terms like “jammed” and “violated” renders aggressively male gender and sexual scripts where the pleasures and consent of women or bottoms are displaced.¹⁵³ These dismissals of consent, as I suggest in the afterword, are escalated because of people’s mourning of close contact during the coronavirus pandemic and the overblown claim that #MeToo activism is an earlier instance of, and at fault for, contemporary curtailments of touching.

Conclusion: Naked Devices and Feeling Hearts

People’s concepts of naked phones, like their narratives about touchscreens, convey ways of feeling, including aesthetic admiration for devices and tactile pleasures in experiencing material objects. For instance, haqsha23 notes that the “silver version is just so damn beautiful and feels so good in your hand.”¹⁵⁴ In such instances, feeling is a cultural narrative that allows people to claim their individuality and difference when engaging with massified objects. The individual object is supposed to be personally felt and held in a specific hand, which, as Murray suggests, is organized around particular embodied and identity fits.¹⁵⁵ Yet feelings, as this and other chapters in this book indicate, can convey company frameworks through personal narratives that erase or ignore underlying cultural strictures. The term “feeling” is supposed to designate very particular engagements while pointing to an array of physical sensations and emotional sentiments. It also underscores corporeal connections and culturally shared moods, which in the cases that I consider are technologically facilitated and mediated but often identified

as being without intervention. When experienced as abjection, sensations distance individuals from things that make them feel badly or feel too much. Thus, feelings allow individuals to move away from the very elements that trigger and render feelings while maintaining cultural standards.

Touchscreens can be understood and theorized by attending to how these devices are associated with skin and bodies. This includes the ways touchscreens are in contact with, enwrapped in, maintain residues of, and are identified as versions of skin. The features of this skin are also designed to suggest how people should feel about other bodies and devices. Researching the relationship between devices and skin thus illustrates the deeply produced and scripted features of digital experiences and devices. Such research can also be employed to consider how embodied skin functions and the ways it is constructed and technologized. Skin and body studies do not ordinarily address the ways digital devices are connected to embodied individuals and the ways they are identified as skin. Nevertheless, scholarship on embodiment, identity, and new media are advanced and complicated, as I suggest in this chapter, by recognizing the persistent association of skin and touchscreens. This includes how such connections produce gender and other scripts. Feminists can also further intervene in traditional identities and embodied norms by highlighting the functions of and critiquing such digital formulations. Critical interventions into the ways devices structure bodies and script expected users become increasingly important as people further incorporate mobile touchscreens and other screen-based digital devices into their everyday lives.

Some people refuse to interrogate the ways devices are scripted, as suggested by individuals' dismissals of Erica Watson-Currie's critique of the affordances of iPhones, which I analyze in chapter 1. The normative commenters that I study throughout this book enforce ideas about unmediated and intimate connections between bodies and touchscreens by expressing love for their devices and the brand. Love is culturally identified as one of the more powerful and elusive forms of feeling. Love and hearting are also insistently represented through online communication and interface options, including Facebook's heart reaction and Twitter's heart that conveys a like. People's love can also be turned into indifference and disgust. This includes the kinds of revulsion that I consider in this chapter, where intuitive tactile experiences are interrupted or experienced as too much. For instance, individuals who notice their damaged or otherwise compromised

screens often express their disengagement because they conceive of device use as intimate and unmediated. As I indicate in the introduction, Apple promotes the idea of intimate engagement, including the notion that devices provide access to loved things. People's investments in and companies' consumer interests in unmediated feelings, and the associated risks of engaging in sentiments such as hearting that are culturally identified as low and feminine, suggest why online representations of hearts and love have been understudied. This critical displacement of the structuring of feeling, which too often produces normative identity scripts, is also why I advocate for such analysis in this chapter and the following chapters.

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