

Katie Mitchell

Joe Wilferth

ENGL 4860

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### Farther Apart in a Smaller World

Early one morning in April, the town of Bristol awoke to a unique surprise. On a boarded up doorway next to a youth center was a piece of graffiti artwork, later confirmed to be the work of famous guerilla artist Banksy. The image is done in black and white paint. It depicts a man and a woman who could be considered to meet the socially idealized standard of being attractive, holding each other in a loving embrace. They are realistic looking, with careful details and characteristics. The fact that they are a couple is displayed in their stance. The man's right arm is wrapped lovingly around the woman's waist, while her left hand rests intimately on the right side of his chest as they embrace. They are wearing formal clothes, the man dressed in a suit and the woman in a pants suit. They are not a young couple; rather, the image depicts two mature people in the prime of their lives. From their clothes, we can assume they have decent jobs, and they have modern, professional hairstyles. While their hair is black and their clothes are in grayscale, their faces are illuminated. It is the source of illumination that is thought-provoking. Instead of gazing at each other lovingly, as one would expect from a couple so closely entwined, their attention is instead devoted solely to their cellphones, held behind each others' backs. The phone screens are bright, showing that they are on and drawing the viewers' attention to them. Banksy, the image's creator, is well known for his graffiti. Whether people appreciate the work or consider it vandalism, many people feel deeply affected by the messages the artist instills in his work. His works often contain controversial political, social, and economic elements that face today's society. He places his work in public areas, serving a widespread audience, enhanced by

the advent and expansion of the internet and the sharing of images across the world. The piece in question, "Mobile Lovers," was posted near a Bristol youth group. The youth group took possession of the work and after a struggle of ownership with the city that was resolved by the elusive Banksy himself, the group sold the work and the profit is going to fund it. It can be assumed, however, that Banksy intended the image to do more than become a fundraising opportunity. "Mobile Lovers" is a statement on a rapidly growing social phenomenon.

"Mobile Lovers" is an iconic image in that it closely resembles an actual couple embracing and holding their cell phones. However, the image goes much deeper than that. It is a representation of the growing affect technology is having on the societies that use it. There are several interpretations to Banksy's work. An optimistic interpretation is that Banksy could be displaying the beauty of how close electronic devices have brought people together. More couples than ever are meeting online. Long distance relationships are made easier through the advent of mobile phones and text messaging. Even regular relationships are made closer through this in that couples can be in constant communication. However, a more realistic interpretation of Banksy's work would be that while technology has made the world seem like a much smaller place, it draws the people closest to us away. What Banksy seems to be drawing the audience's attention to is the startling fact of where the lovers' gazes fall. While they hold each other lovingly, they stare at their phones instead of each other. This is a comment on the dehumanization of relationships and the breakdown in communication that has been caused by the increasingly obsessive nature in which people treat their phones and other electronic devices. All though we are constantly together and communicating, as suggested through the embrace, we no longer listen and pay as close attention to our partners because we are saturated in communication and distracted by technology. The increasing overuse of technology is quickly

becoming a social norm that could be dehumanizing our relationships with other people. Furthermore, the coloring of the piece serves a message as well. While Banksy's work seems to usually be displayed in grayscale, some are known to have splashes of color. "Mobile Lovers" however has no such aesthetics. Perhaps the color is to interpellate how identity has been lost through the overuse of technology, which is supported by the phones being the greatest source of light. This loss of identity is also suggested by the clothing and hair, which is formal and businesslike and expresses nothing about the subjects' personalities. It also implies that though they are a loving couple, they do not know each other well. Technology has pulled them apart to the point that they don't see each others' unique characteristics, but rather only a watered down version of their partner. The work could also fall under the categories of Kitsch and Guerilla art because of the nature of its creation and location. The image was painted illegally and uncommissioned on public property, and many people consider it tacky and a form of vandalism.

While the image quickly became well-known and wide-spread across the internet, it might not have had the impact that Banksy intended. Instead of being left where it was to be appreciated, the image, painted on a door, was taken down by a local youth group, who held it on display in their building and requested donations to view it. The image was repossessed by the city, but after a legal process and written permission from Banksy himself, the image was returned to the youth group, who sold it for over £400,000. While the image still had an impact, the struggle of the youth group and the economical value and authenticity of the work seems to have overshadowed the intended meaning of it. Also, the work is now in private ownership. Therefore, while some people might have received the intended message, the depublishation of the work and the overriding publicity of the youth group caused the image to fail in its intention to make a statement about the affect technology has on our relationships.