

she is Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours, Our Lady of Good Help, keeping an eye on the Red River levels near the Metis wayside shrine. She works cross-country days, and night shift. She is Mother of Consolation in Winnipeg's north end and other Canadian cities' though downtown neighbourhoods, while she steadies the wheel for tired drivers at Our Lady of the Highway on the road east of Vegreville, Alberta. [58-59]

This style is almost liturgical, and although it expresses ritualistic rhythm well suited to the topic, it becomes dull at times.

In her 305-page-long quest to find Mary in Canada, Skogan looks beyond devotional places to find Madonnas in art, literature, history and nature. Her Mary is as multicultural as Canadian society. She is a Viking woman, the Norse dying of smallpox, a native musician, a traveller and explorer, a religious symbol, a nation builder, a political supporter, a patient observer of, and an active participant in, Canadian life. Skogan's Madonna is omnipresent in Canadian history, geography, literature and art. She is found in movies, songs, novels, poetry, plays, and political memoirs; in paintings and sculptures; in gardens, rivers, cities, ship names, credit unions, lawn ornaments, and editorial cartoons. Mary lives in Canada: Skogan has proven that beyond any doubt in her exhaustive list.

Unfortunately, Skogan notices and marks a Marian presence in Canadian culture, but rarely comments on the found imagery. Her book reads

like a catalogue rather than a thoughtful study or analysis of the topic. She only rarely draws any analogy between the images of Mary and Canadian women. She does not explain how unique or typical the Canadian Mary is in the worldwide context, and does not discuss social, cultural, economic or political implications of such an extensive presence of the Madonna in this country.

The editorial organization of the book also poses a problem. There is no index. Duotone illustrations, although they depict a variety of images such as tapestry, sculptures, paintings, maps, and even pillows, hide the richness of Marian imagery in their lack of colour. Moreover, not only are captions for illustrations placed at the end of the book, but any image or part of an image that is repeated throughout the book is described under its first appearance. Therefore, the reader looking for a caption to an image placed on page 53 in Chapter II, will only find it listed in *Image Notes* under Chapter I, page xiv.

Even though there are numerous studies of the religious or social meanings of Mary published in Canada in both English and French, Canadian Marian images and material culture are rarely if ever included in international literature on the subject. Comprehensive books on Mary tend to focus on European and South American shrines, and on imagery found in European art. Skogan's book may have been an excellent and much needed addition to the subject literature, yet without a deep and clear analysis of Marian images as representations of Canadian social beliefs and values, this opportunity was lost.

Jon Agar, *Constant Touch: A Global History of the Mobile Phone*

BRYAN DEWALT

Agar, Jon. *Constant Touch: A Global History of the Mobile Phone*. Cambridge: Icon Books, 2003. 172 pp., 20 illus., cloth \$20, ISBN 1-84046-419-4.

If we could name just one, defining addition to the material culture of personal communications in the last decade, it would have to be the cellular, or mobile, phone. Introduced in the 1980s to share out scarce radio frequency in chronically overtaxed mobile radio networks, cellular technology allowed users with relatively small and low-powered transceivers to connect to the public telephone network via nearby radio base stations. Large cities would be broken into small cells, each with its own base station that in an urban core might serve just a few square blocks. Cellular radio depended on technical

advances in integrated circuits, microprocessors, software, antennas and batteries. Over time, manufacturers made transceivers smaller, lighter and with a wider array of functions. But as Jon Agar argues in *Constant Touch*, the commercial explosion in mobile telephony also was driven by social and cultural factors.

It might be an exaggeration to call this a central thesis of *Constant Touch*, for this book is not a probing work of research and analysis. It is one of a series of slim volumes published by the British firm Icon Books. The "Revolutions in Science" series is aimed at a general audience and presents scientific and technical history in a lively narrative style. *Constant Touch* has no footnotes, a meagre bibliography of secondary sources and a text that runs

to just 169 generously spaced, small format pages. Feather light and full of chatter, this book is much like the ubiquitous mobile phone whose history it tells. In fact, as a hardcover priced at CDN\$20 *Constant Touch* might be overpackaged and overpriced for what it delivers.

For all that, the book is not without merit. Jon Agar is a young historian of technology who spent seven years as director of Britain's National Archive for the History of Computing and has published several books on this and other science-related subjects. He is also a habitual, perhaps even passionate user of mobile phones, which gives him a sympathetic perspective that is often lacking among older, crankier scholars struggling to understand communications technology and social change. These attributes equip Agar to address a pressing need in the scholarship of communications for a survey history of the mobile telephone.

Agar is even sympathetic to a material culture perspective on history, one that is too often missing in the ethereal world of communications studies. In the first chapter he takes a hammer to his old Siemens S8 cell phone to explore its inner workings, though his treatment of technical matters both here and elsewhere is disappointingly cursory. More significantly, Agar introduces the general reader to the concept that "you can tell what a culture values by what it has in its bags and pockets."

What values, then, are embodied in a mobile phone, and how does Agar support his case? Here is where *Constant Touch* lets the reader down. For all the bold talk in the introduction and conclusion about material culture and contingency and demotic devices, the heart of Agar's book is a breezy chronology of cellular phone services around the globe that has all the depth and gravitas of a magazine article.

Unfortunately, the disemboweled Siemens S8 that frames this narrative never rises above the status of a convenient literary device. Only one object does approach the power of a fully developed protagonist, the Nokia 3210. The author recalls the

"thrill" he felt on first eyeing the elegant lines and slim proportions of this mobile phone, "moulded to fit perfectly in the hand." Launched in 1999 the Nokia 3210 featured electronic games and software that enabled text messaging using the numeric keypad. It was also designed to accept a wide variety of interchangeable faceplates. This for Agar is the key to its iconic status. Yes, the cellular telephone was about mobility and communication. But the Nokia 3210 was an attractive and inexpensive bauble. It offered play, a face that could change with mood or fashion, and an ability to send cute cryptic notes to your friends. It was a "cheap, beautifully engineered vehicle for mass communication."

For Agar, the success of mobile telephony was not predetermined in the designs of network and handset engineers. It was the users who discovered its value, who essentially invented it. Initially conceived as a utilitarian business tool, it was transformed by users into a device for building social networks without sacrificing the essential mobility that feeds both the appetites and the anxieties of modern life. Agar even links its remarkable popularity to the emergence of new social and political values since the 1960s, values that favoured decentralized, horizontal networks over centralized, authoritarian hierarchies. This places Agar in a long line of communication analysis that, ironically, has even been applied (by Colin Cherry) to the rigid old public telephone network he dismisses.

It's hard not to like the sunny tone of this little book. For those whose first reaction to that oft overheard monologue, "Hi, I'm on the bus," is annoyance, *Constant Touch* might offer something of a tonic. But like a glib acquaintance whose good cheer can't hide a frustrating lack of introspection, *Constant Touch* is ultimately a disappointment. Content to paddle in the shallow end, Agar limits himself to easy questions and never dives far for answers. Like a text message on your mobile phone, this book is short, cheerful and, I fear, ephemeral.