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IN Network,
 by Michael MANDIBERG and Julia STEINMETZ
 (United States), 2005

IN Network grew out of the changing material conditions of a romantic relationship. I moved to New York from Los Angeles for a job; Julia had to stay behind for nine months due to work commitments. In preparation for this separation we did the eminently practical thing: we switched our cell phones to the same provider to get free "IN Network" minutes.



As we began talking longer and longer - not worrying about running out of minutes - our use of the technology shifted. We were not only having conversations on the phone, but we were hanging out on the phone. We would spend hours on the cell phone, moving in between work, home, the store, the car, and even falling asleep on the phone. We had a fluid telepresence where we were (kind of) experiencing the same thing that the other person was experiencing.

After three or four months we decided to publicly document this private performance. From March 1st - 31st, 2005 a moblog at <http://www.turbulence.org/Works/innetwork> hosted a podcast of our conversations; we routed all of our text and picture messages through this moblog. At several points during the month we also webcast the sound as we slept on the phone.

At the same time that I was in both places, in a way I was nowhere. I like to say that I lived in the Mountain Time Zone - the time zone where Colorado and the Rocky Mountains are, two hours later than New York, but an hour earlier than Los Angeles. I would stay up to spend time on the phone with Julia late into the night (though she would always stay up later than me). I woke at 11 AM well after everyone else had risen in New York, but before I could call anyone in Los Angeles. I was (tele)present in Los Angeles only through a cell phone, but that was enough to keep me from really being present here in New York. Now, a few months after Julia's arrival, I feel like I am actually starting to live here.

This project reflects my interest in ubiquitous telepresence: the role of the cell phone, instant messaging etc, and how these normalized forms of telepresence change the way we interact with other humans, changing our relationship with, and construction of, our shared reality.

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