THRESHOLDS OF INTIMACY IN TEENAGE SMS

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Abstract

Starting from the ostentatious presence of the SMS to teenagers, my interest was to identify the values of its appropriation process and to draw the trajectory of SMS within teenage culture. My hypothesis is that the SMS develops two trajectories of use which interpenetrate: individual line and collective line, the last one becoming cultural logic. The relation between the object of consumption and the individual is a complex one, described by specific values of use and regulated by cultural practices. In this article, I will present the ways that the intimacy is being incorporated and ex-corporated through the teenage expressivity. Through comparative field between Romania and Belgium, I have realized participative observation in places that are frequented by teenagers, interviews for both spaces and I have collected more than 300 text messages.

Keywords: *communication, consumption, incorporation, intimacy, link-up, implicit rules.*

The SMS, object of consumption

The study of the discourses which characterize the youngsters' culture, pinpointing the way they elaborate certain strategies to overcome the restraints imposed by the objective limitations of the technical object, and the analysis of the way in which the young users construct their self image through the text message are indispensable for understanding the relation between the subject (the individual) and the object (the SMS). I shall discuss apparently contradictory realities, inscribed within the paradigm of the teenage praxis; the implicit rules of the usage of the message by teenagers (the collective norm) are opposite, in practice, to the differentiation strategies between individuals (individual practices). The direction chosen in the present study consists in

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repositioning the mobile phone and the practice of the SMS within their cultural and historical frame, retracing their trajectory – or, better yet, their "career" (Bonnot 2002; Bromberger/ Chevallier 1999). Three phases come to mind: adopting the object, building the uses and consolidating them. The practices we can now observe in a particular space – Bucharest, for instance – have been accumulated in time. By reconstituting this process, we can better understand the meaning the users grant these practices and we can identify more accurately the factors which determine the making of the « manières de faire » repertoires and also of the frames in which these are applied.

I chose to focus only on a particular category of users – teenagers –, examining the way in which they build their relation with the mobile phone and with the SMS. Many anthropologists and sociologists, as I mentioned above, today think of this relation as being reciprocal; on the one side, the user acts upon the object and he modify its characteristics directly and indirectly, and, on the other side, the object acts upon the user who tames it and incorporates it in his praxis (Akrich 2000; Warnier 1999). In what concerns the practice of the SMS, I feel that it is mostly this second process which is more visible and which seems to be playing a more determinant role. Individual use becomes collective use because of factors which are endogenous and exogenous to the teenage culture. The individual use of the SMS is completed with the usage of technical networks, which strengthens its features and leads to the specialization of the new technologies. Teenagers use the technological mediums more and more, handling their technical and relational features. The high specialization of the technological and communicational mediums creates new forms of sociability.

The construction of the intimacy within the teenage SMS

The frequent usage of the SMS and the long practice determine the manifestation within these communities of common practices and rules shared by all the users. I shall try to describe the way that the intimacy is being constructed starting from an individual level, passing through group level and getting to cultural level.

Individual level. Friendship and love messages

Amity and friendship. Keep in touch through SMS

The condition which determines a relation of acquaintance to turn into one of amity and friendship is that the relations should be maintained and nurtured by other elements. This is the explanation Claire Bidart (1997) gives in

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her study: teenagers have a peripheral representation of the idea of friendship, a representation of a peripheral social category; permanence and presence seem to be the two elements of fervent which maintain friendships among teenagers. A friend must be constantly available. « Les jeunes y associent principalement le partage d'activités, alors que pour les gens plus âgés, c'est surtout une compagnie, un antidote à la solitude » (Bidart 1997: 15[2]). Friendship for teenagers has at its core sharing activities, passions. Every teenager, according to Claire Bidart, associates friendship with the idea of relaxation and entertainment. These two values are expressed best through the third type of message, the ludical SMS.

The function of this type of message is the expressive interaction with friends, arbitrary function which implies maintaining contact in a ludical way, cheating or playing jokes. Keep *in touch* is the next level of what we presented before, the *link-up*; in practice, establishing contact is followed by building a relationship. A relation of acquaintance may turn into friendship only if the former is nurtured with constant communication for which SMS-ing is essential. Family dramas are "consumed" through the textual strictly dual communication; messages concerning such subjects are in the logic of maintaining the relation, of confessing, of looking for help and emotional support. They do not submit to the collective logic of the group. So, Monica writes to Marcel: „Nu pot sa dorm. K plng si ma doare kpu imi vine sa. Tata ma face proasta. Ceam fkt sa merit asta? Nb dk t culci io no sa dorm..."[3]. Such messages are proof of a consolidated friendship and of a shared intimacy. It is absolutely obvious that the interlocutor knows Monica's family situation and understands it.

Both in the case of intimate messages and in the case of the ludical ones, the gender of the users equally determines the nature of the practices. Like I. Pierozak (2003) shows, in what concerns chatting, the first contacts are established in special contexts, when youngsters meet in accordance with their interests and when the phone number is given freely. But what follows in text exchanges differs according to the gender of the users.

Boys are active and they develop the connection established through common activities. The masculine socialization defines itself by the diversity of the original groups and characterizes itself through weaker, yet more diverse connections. After analysing the corpus of SMS-es, I was able to notice that, at this level, this type of socialization reflects itself in the diversity of the remitters of the messages the boys send each other and also in the content of the messages: movies, sports, music. The masculine socialization debuts based on common passions and communication occurs mostly on such subjects. David

[2] Approx. trad.: *Youngsters associate the share of activities, when for older people it's more like having company as an antidote to solitude*.

[3] Translation: *I can't sleep. 'Cause I'm crying and my head really hurts me and I just want to...My dad makes me stupid. What did I do to deserve this? Good night if you sleep, I won't.*

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writes Michel a message: « Tu sé ki y a 1 2 ma clase ki a ecou t 2 la zik? »[4]. Acquaintances made, for example, during sports may be maintained through practical or empty of content messages: examples such as « Mon père ve bien que j aie voir standard mais faut que je marrange pour la place et le transport »[5] or « a l aise ? t ou a l ecole? ptain standard y dech jvais aller contre parme »[6] are examples which reflect the masculine socialization.

In turn, girls function in smaller groups, dominated by affective links and where SMS gravitate around funny stories, gossip and rumours. The feminine socialization is more intimate and more prone to the rules of storytelling. The must for their socialization is telling the story to the tiniest detail. Communication through SMS reflects the dynamic of a feminine friendship. From futile subjects, such as establishing a meeting „c faci, tina? n intalni, in lapt (in fata l tnb) l 5 45. vii? anunt-o p iul" [7] – to love confessions : „ghici am vb cu tipu ala! s n intelegem sup bine. u c mai faci? n mai treci s u p la irina?:)"[8]. The girls ask for information about a guy they like, and the answer quickly comes: „nu cre k il cunosti e roller k s mine doar k se da mai bine decat mene da cik t cunoaste doar din vedere pa bafta! te-am pupat"[9]. Also, a failed evening must be narrated at once : « Salut! Jviens dlire ton msg! Bon, chui degoutée! Le type ki devait mconduire s'est désisté et g trouvé personne d'autre! BISOU »[10]. Such examples prove the SMS' capacity to correspond to the pre-existent practices of socialization. Words, stories, emotions are the same; the context is different. It is actually about the modern version of the *boudoir* socialization theorized by Duby and Ariès (1985).

Affection and love, the need of privacy expressed by SMS

The final stage in the consolidation of a relationship is love. The affective SMS probably constitutes the most spectacular type of text message and it implies specific rules of communication. From the total corpus of collected

[4] Translation: *Did you know that there's a guy in my class that listened Zik?*

[5] Translation: *My dad really wants me to see Standard playing, but I have to make arrangements for place and transportation.*

[6] Translation: *Are you ok? Where are you, at school? Shit, Standard really kicks asses, I'm thinking to be against Parme.*

[7] Translation: *What you're doing, Tina? Meet me in Laptarie (front of TNB) at 5.45. Come? Let Iuli also know.*

[8] Translation: *Guess, I talked to that guy! And we really connected! How you're doing? Pass over Irina?*

[9] Translation: *I don't think you know him. He's a roller, just like me, only that he rules better than me, but he know you from sight. Bye, good luck! Kiss you.*

[10] Translation: *Hey! I just read your message! Well, I am disgusted! The guy who should have taken me home ditched me and I couldn't found somebody else! KISS YOU.*

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SMS-es, the affective ones also constitute an important component from the quality point of view; I am talking about the fact that although they are not numerous, this type of SMS comes after a quite complex process of integration in the teenagers' groups. My access to these messages in the field was directly proportional with the level of my integration in their group. Thus I did not have access to the affective SMS-es of the teenagers I interviewed, but only to those of whom I got to know very well. This has been a great advantage for my field, because I was able to observe the values of the use of the affective SMS within the symbolic teenage universe. The messages were not out of context, the latter was revealed to me with all its valences and nuances.

A first characteristic of the affective SMS is the ludical transmission of feelings. The SMS sent to the loved one presupposes the accumulation of communicational practices as rules, which are implicit in the couple's socialization through SMS. Which are these practices and what defines them? „aku mam pus in pat, am mers azi o groaza, iti pov knd vin. Maine merem l manastire. Totu e ok aici, ink t iubesc, mie dor d tn, si nb k imi pik oki'n gură...wove ya! ☺"[11], Doris writes to Marcel. The sending time, thus the time of initiating the communication is one of the first rules: each of the interviewed teenagers said they talk more with their partner in the evening. The practice of the affective SMS sent in the evening has its grounds and creates a habit: couples feel the need to respect the other's time and, supposing he/she is busy until then, they create in the evening a time of their own. In every couple there are practices that give the lovers the feeling that they belong to one another, that their couple has a history which they are building together. The evening is, thus, the moment they feel most safe emotionally, because they know their messages will be answered, the other one's availability being predictable and necessary.

The content of the affective messages is very diverse: teenagers narrate their day, share their stories and their experiences with the group of friends or they organize their common activities. From reproaches: „H8u. nu ai vnt la skl."[12], the affective message may also be the environment for love declarations: „in concluzie te iubesc şi gata ☺ aa si sper sa te fac fericit pt k tu ai fost cel mai dragutz ku mn... meritzi c e mai bun"[13]. Each message addressed to the loved one is loaded with emotions. Affective messages make ways of sharing emotions, communicating small nothings which connote: "I am thinking about you, so I tell you everything". Just like J. Cl. Kaufmann (2007: 5) says about love in a couple: "soft or passionate, soothing or troubling, it is the emotional cover and the

[11] Translation: *I am now in bed, we walked today all day long, I will tell you when we'll see. Tomorrow we're going to visit the monastery. Everything's ok here, I still love you, I miss you and good night because I am so tired. Love you! ☺.*

[12] Translation: *Hate you. You didn't come to school.*

[13] Translation: *I love you in conclusion and that's it. ☺Aaa, and I hope to make you happy because you have been the niciest guy with me. You deserve what's best.*

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openness to the other that save us from the selfish aridity of modernity. That's why we tell ourselves stories. Again and again. Love stories, always relived".

Another reality instituted by the SMS is a paradoxical one: teenagers have declared they use messages for delicate matters which cannot be discussed in a direct communication – the graphic space and synchronic nature of the SMS offer them the emotional protection they need to "go further", to make declarations, to say tender words, under the implicit cover of the semi-frivolous text message. The next message may be a relevant example for this attitude: „si te iubesc d nu mai pot simt k dau pe afara... si e patu asta aj d mic... si c mumos neam inghesui noi in el...sa ma incolacesc in jurul tau...baiat mumos c am!"[14]. „It's common knowledge that the sms isn't that serious and that we allow ourselves to say I love you in one, then take it back the next day", says Carolina, 19 years old, student at the University of Bologna[15]. The frivolity and lack of seriousness of the SMS come from its ludical character and that is why Ohana prefers to use tender words moderately: "you can't know if the other is truthful, so I don't want to take any chances"[16]. These risks, though, are part of the game of love. For Carolina, the frivolous character of the SMS is one of the unwritten and unsaid rules shared by the users of the text message. When she broke it off with an ex boyfriend, he sent her an email with all her previous love messages. This gesture reveals the difference of perception on the use of tenderness in SMS-es: for her boyfriend, the implicit norm was taking seriously words and their written expression. It was exactly the contrary for Carolina. The timing of the affective messages gives a more complete image on all these nuances. Sending affective messages is integrated in the logic of socialization, in maintaining the social connection, but it also implies a lot of potential and emotion, more than any other type of message. The potential of the act of sending an affective message implies the choices the sender makes in order to build it. Let us explain the choice factors that regulate sending the message in case of a concrete SMS. The message „Buna iubitule. Voiam dkt sa consum 7 centi spunanduti k t iubesc mai mult k niciodata si kmi lipsesti... sper k si u ma iubesti si ai sami raspunzi in urmat 10 minute..."[17] is sent by Doris, 17 years old to her boyfriend, Marcel, 18 years old. Doris thought about the time to send it, so that Marcel could receive it, *could* read it and *could* reply. The content of the

[14] Translation: *And I really love you. I feel that I will burst... and this bed is so small... and how nice would be to be together... you're such a nice boy!*

[15] Fragment of an interview realized with an Italian student came with Erasmus scholarship To Free University of Brussels. Our field, realized from a comparative manner, was completed by discussions with foreign students came in Belgium with mobilities scholarships. This example seemed to me representative for the described practice and that's why I gave it as example.

[16] Interview extract.

[17] Translation: *Hy, my love. I just wanted to consume 7 cents to tell you that I love you more than ever and that I miss you ... I hope you love me too and that you will answer to me in the following 10 minutes.*

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message expresses a tactical self-positioning of the emitter: the girl transmits that she wants *nothing* more than to tell him she loves him, so that in the second part to express her desire to know if he loves her too and to ask for a reply in the next minutes after receiving the message. Her choice of words, of what she wanted to communicate have been carefully thought through, which is reflected in a content that allows for various degrees of affectivity and different phenomena of expressing identity.

Another type of potentialities is transmitted upon the act of sending itself: sending such a message implies the risk of initiating a conversation whose affective stake is high, risk I have already resumed. Sending the message is marked by what I called a type of affective reflection. The affective SMS has a content which is very powerfully connoted emotionally, which implies a long reflexivity and which determines a strong mark on the text message.

Establishing new relations has great impact on sending the message: the asynchronic nature of the SMS allows a fresh couple to establish common areas of interest and a slower rhythm of time. Maria, 18 years old, sends her boyfriend the next message: „Unde ai mintit si unde nu? Iti place vocea mea? Mai intri pe net? I like your voice so much...me cannot tell...☺”[18]; in it there is an apparently incontrollable flux of questions that reveals the girl's inner anxiety. Maria is in this first stage of reciprocal discovery through SMS. Answering is another action depending on the remitter's choice, but the emotions described in the message may be contested by the emitter in case the answer comes too late or fails to come at all. Thus this message is the carrier of a certain degree of uncertainty about the truthfulness of the feelings declared in it, as we saw in the previous example.

Maintaining relationships and selecting others strengthen the intimacy in textual messages; teenagers from the same group of friends have their subjects of discussion, contents sending to previous experiences and which are rememorized in SMS-es through ludical allusions, like we can see in Cristina's SMS to her boyfriend: „Scriam msj bebe iartama sper k ejti bine io sunt superfericita am stat lipita de tv. Te iubesc mult reply knd poti”[19]. Or in the case of Julie's message to her boyfriend: "Arrete tu va m' fére rougir 2 semaine sans se voir mé tu mank sourtou à Fio tu lui a anvoié 1sms j esper biz so”[20]. These references to previous experiences shared only by the two teenagers is a way of strengthening the group's socialization.

[18] Translation: *Where did you lie and where not? Do you like my voice? Do you still go online I like your voice so much...me cannot tell...☺.*

[19] Translation: *I was writing the message, baby, sorry. I hope you are ok. I am super happy. I stayed tuned at TV. I love you a lot. Reply me when you can.*

[20] Translation: *Stop it, you'll make me blush 2 weeks without you. Fio misses you mostly. I hope you sent her the SMS kiss you So.*

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In general, teenagers have stated they send pairs of messages: sent-reply which flow, with no interruptions, no dead time. Sending and receiving the message are two actions integrated in the logic of expressive interaction: they confirm the adhesion of the young one to the mature couple. Another temporal action concerning the SMS is saving it, keeping it in the phone's memory. Keeping affective messages to one's self confirm the rule of intimacy and is general for all the teenagers, because they feel the need to reread the small texts, to relive the moments and the emotions at the moment of receiving it. Julie and Florie talked about a need to keep the messages, to remember the evolution of the relationship. The message is a memory trigger which starts a cognitive rememorizing process, of voluntary memory. Julie states that, rereading the messages received by her boyfriend, she relives the feelings she had at reading it. Because of the reduced phone memory, another potential action is copying the messages in a personal diary or a special notebook: Julie, Florie and Alix confirmed this practice. They copy the messages and put them in a typographic context, copying completed with commentaries on the texts. "I think I do it for the pleasure of rereading them, of seeing them, it's just like with a letter. You receive a letter, but you don't want to throw it away. And since I didn't see my boyfriend a lot, I thought I better copy them and reread them, so it has become something common for me", says Florie. This representation of the SMS integrates it in the category of the artefacts (objects defined by a direct relationship with the social individual and which are built by specific registers, logic, strategies and actions – Blandin 2002). Sharing an affective or ludical message determines another temporal action: narrating it, integrating it in direct, verbalized conversation. These types of messages are shared in a friendly environment and their purpose is showing the teenager's popularity among his friends.

Passing to a group level...

Once the teenager advances in the use of the SMS, he/she diversifies its potential interactive groups or communities to connect with. To a first look, the SMS conforms itself to the dyadic communication pattern. One person sends the message, the other one receives it. But this image becomes more complicated if we take into account the telephone repertory or agenda and the way it is being organized by the user. In the case of most cell phones, this agenda allows to form groups and sub-groups, established and used by the user (acquaintances, contacts, friends), like the Instant Messenger. These groups know communicational and relational potentialities that can be activated according to the user's wish. They reflect the social networks, but also the relation maintained with the members of the network. Or, the communication through the SMS doesn't allow the group socialization: an SMS is not sent to a

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group, but to only one person. This use allows the possibility to use the cell phone to define and to strengthen the already existent networks. Let's suppose that a teenager has integrated in the cell phone agenda a network of acquaintances; when he/she decides to strengthen the friendship with them, he/she will do it by an individual selection that will allow him/her to use the SMS (Matsuda 2005: 19-41). The action of managing and organizing that the user applies to its list of acquaintances requires the understanding of the type of social link that the user has with each of his/her contacts, in order to determine the way to categorize them.

The teenagers' communities formed through the use of SMS are family, friends, school peers. The use of SMS becomes complementary to the one of voice call and tends to replace it. The voice call is "indispensable" (Alix) because, hearing the other one's voice, communicating by hearing and perceiving the other one's emotions is also an important dimension of the social interaction; the direct communication, through its non-verbal indicators, tests the sincerity of "what is being told" (Ohana). On the other way, the SMS is friendlier (Julie), in order to keep friendship relations and socialization links. The reestablishment of a social link with a person is rapidly solved with a SMS of re-connecting: "How are you doing?". For the majority of teenagers, the communication through SMS is with those persons that "you have the habitude" to communicate: a person that is an intensive SMS user, that would be available to answer to a message and with whom they would already have a social link. So, for the group communication the SMS has the role of strengthening the relations between friends and pals more than the development of dispersed social links. The youngsters send the majority of messages to a restrained group of acquaintances. This usage is named individual selection. The value [+known] offers to young people the emotional comfort that they need in order to initiate a textual communication with someone through SMS.

Through its communication and socialization functions, the SMS defines itself as a technical network; in the menu of the cell phone, the cell phone agenda is the technological *place* where the contacts are being inscribed accordingly a relational logic (the type of relation that the user has with the person that is being integrated in his list). The list of contacts itself is a function of the cell phone that, in the case of teenagers, acquires valuing dimensions in front of the others; the activation of contacts through the textual communication is another story if we refer to teenager users. The categories of contacts created inside of the cell phone (if the technical object allows it) show the integration inside of the instrument of social pre-existent networks, formed outside the cell phone. The way that teenagers integrate their contacts and in which they classify them accordingly to a specific logic, denotes the complexity of communicational practices created by the appearance of technological object.

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Getting to a cultural level...

We have seen how the intimacy is being regulated to an individual level and group level by the SMS users and by the functions of cell phone. The club logic that teenagers manifest by using the SMS to the group level is being reinforced to the cultural level. We have mentioned in the introduction of the present article that we have realized a comparative analysis between Romanian and Belgian space. So far, we have outlined the similarities concerning the use of SMS in both spaces. As it follows, we will show how the cultural level can separate the practice of the SMS.

The practice of beep is a relevant case of differences. The beep or « l'appel en absence » (as it is called in Belgium) appeared in Romania as an effect of a marketing campaign between 1997-1998 of cell phone company Connex[21]. The campaign consisted in not charging the first minute of conversation. It has to be mentioned that, since the 1996[22] when cell telephony appeared in Romania, the charge has been done per minute. After the 2001, the charge is being realized per second. Therefore, in 1998, Connex, one of the most powerful Romanian brands, addressed to its consumers with the campaign of not charging the first minute of conversation. The users and mostly the students and teenagers (the young people that had in those times a cell phone were pretty few, the use of cell phone not being yet a mass phenomenon) have determined the appearance of an unusual practice: they were calling someone and they were trying to say everything in the first minute. Obviously, this was not possible only in one voice call; in exchange, the young users have overpassed this insufficiency by giving as many voice calls as they needed to transmit the whole information, by using only one minute per each voice call.

In 1998, the SMS is being launched. We cannot say if the appearance of the SMS is being an effect of the already mentioned practice; what is certain is that once Connex finished the marketing campaign and reintroduced the charge of the first minute of a voice call, the users had nothing free anymore and it didn't exist any functionality financially advantageous. This is how the beep appeared; a practice that has developed in a spectacular manner and that is strongly connected to the other technical functions of the cell phone. The beep replaced a communicational practice that disappeared by not having any more the economical support; how did it adapt and in what type of relations did it enter with the other functions of cell phone?

Romanian teenagers use the beep in the detriment of voice mailbox. The Belgian interviewed teenagers were using the voice mailbox of the cell phone. This observation comes from two sources: the interview and the content of SMS. During our interviews we did in Brussels, we have observed that the teenagers didn't know what beep (« appel en absence ») meant. But, in the case of Romanian teenagers, the practice of beep was a developed use and the proof was the numerous text messages that were referring to the action of giving a beep. What are, therefore, the explanations for this development?

[21] *Report of history of cell phones in Romania,* Orange, 2007, http://www.wall-street.ro/files/29871_1.pdf (viewed last time 22-06-2007).

[22] *Ibid*.

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In the case of SMS, the principle of functionment is the following: the message is written, is sent to the recipient and, if this one's cell phone is closed or the recipient is not in the coverage area, once the service rebecomes free, the recipient will receive the message. The voice mailbox, as a functionality of cell phone, could have solved this obstacle; in exchange, the youngsters say that „is being even worse with the voice mailbox" (Ciprian, 16 y.o.). A first reason is that this function has to be activated, and then the user has to lose some time doing that. For the person that calls, if the other'person's voice mailbox is activated, he will be charged.

In this point of mediate communication, the beep intervenes, functioning as a warning practice. For Romanian teenagers, the beep completes any type of SMS: in the case of a message that doesn't receive any answer, the transmitter gives more beeps in order to warn the addressee to read the message. Also, for the addressee, the beep can be his/her answer. These are the cases when the SMS does not require a textual answer. Therefore, the teenagers have built a common use, an implicit code of communication, and also behavioural rhetorics. To functional SMS-es ("Are we going to see each other today?"), the answer can be "yes" (one beep) or "no" (two beeps). The same code in the case of the SMS-es of establishing the contact: the beeps have to say implicitly to the addressee that the transmitter wants to talk to him, that he/she doesn't have credit anymore so the other one has to give him a call or an SMS. In the case of affective rhetorics, the beep can replace an affective SMS, an "I love you" or even "I think about you". The meaning of the beep is given by its frequency (one beep, two beeps etc), by the type of relationship that exists between the two users and by the communicational context in which that beep is being given.

Conclusions

Starting from the description of the communication and socialization through the mobile phone, I have tackled with the specifics of the SMS' intimacy, as individual practice and I have analysed its teenage specificity expressed by and in the text message. Teenage intimacy expressed through the SMS is built progressively and is integrated within the logic of the dual communication emitter-remitter. We are, thus, still in the register of individual use and in the logic of communication in two. Then I analysed the relation between the stages of a relationship between two teenagers and the values of using the SMS which are: amity, friendship – *keep in touch*, affection, love – the need for intimacy; these relations are analysed in detail, according to the gender and mentioning at each level of the relationship the type of SMS implied: the contact SMS, the affective SMS and the ludical SMS. Observing all the differences in sociability practices via text messages at boys and girls, we considered necessary to take into account the gender differences.

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The next level of the SMS practice is the group level. Individual usage become, progressively collective, inscribed in a group logic. Contrary to the common perception accordingly to which the SMS is a dyadic form of communication, we have demonstrated that the SMS has multiple potentialities of becoming and being a social network. Just the same, another stereotype about the mediate communication was that users develop recklessly contacts and even risky ones. We have shown how teenagers maintain and strengthen their pre-existent contacts through the SMS communication.

Moving from group usages to collective and even cultural ones is reflected in the process of incorporating the object. At this time, the mobile phone is becoming a "total" object, meaning that it takes technical features from other instruments, but it improves them and adds new ones. GSM is, now, an aesthetic sign, practically incorporated within the social body of teenagers, and the SMS becomes a common and normal practice, so that the user is perfectly comfortable in using it. Still the process of incorporation is a reciprocal process; teenagers also build relations with the electronic objects. These relations establish a generational profile which explains the appearance of the SMS and its success at teenager of all spaces (Romania or Belgium), like the practice of the beep.

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