

Domesticating Feelings Through Short Message Service (SMS)

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Abstract: Starting from the ostentatious presence of the SMS for teenagers, I attempted to identify the values of its appropriation process and to outline the trajectory of SMS within teenage culture. My argument is that the SMS develops two interpenetrating usage trajectories: an individual and a collective line, the later bearing a marked cultural logic. The relation between the object of consumption and the individual is framed by specific values of usage and regulated by cultural practices. In this article, I will present the factors that regulate the individual usage of the SMS, incorporating this form of communication in teens' universe. Through ethnographic fieldwork in Romania, I have carried out participant observation and interviews in places that are frequented by teenagers and I have collected and analyzed more than 300 text messages, written by teenagers in daily personal journals of communication.

Keywords: *communication, consumption, incorporation, intimacy, mobile phones, implicit rules*

The SMS as an object of consumption

If one needs to understand the relation between the individuals and SMS, one needs to take into account several dimensions. These include the study of the discourses which generated by the youngsters' culture, pinpointing the way they deploy strategies to overcome the restraints imposed by the objective limitations of the technical object and

the analysis of the ways in which the young users construct their self-image through the text message. I shall discuss the apparently contradictory realities, inscribed in the paradigm of the teenage praxis and how the implicit rules of the usage of the message by teenagers are opposed, in practice, to the differentiation strategies among individuals.

Emerged during the 1990s, the

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anthropological studies on the new informational and communicational technologies (NTIC¹) are of recent, compared to the birth moment of anthropology as a discipline. The initial studies were mostly descriptive and empirical, since they were the product of the research of separate groups of researchers, working independently from one another. The SMS was presented as an 'exotic' reality². This image has dominated the anthropological discourse for quite a long time, until the end of the 1990s, when the reviews of anthropological studies NTIC have concluded that the period of descriptive studies must end and that a new stage, based on interpretation, must begin. Thus, anthropologists still focus on the relation between the new and the old in the NTIC mediated communication. In the recent years, researches also began approaches the topic of SMS in order to complete a theory of the new communicational patterns. The anthropology of communication at the end of the 1990's and the beginning of the 2000's has distanced itself from similar studies sociology through a comparative and diachronic endeavour (Millerand, 1999; De Gournay, 2011; Johansson-Snaragdi, 2001; Manceron, 2011; Rainie, 2001; Livingstone, 2002; Haddon, 2004). Usage has been replaced by the concept of practice, which implies an interpretation of the usages in action.

The synchronic perspective has declined, relative to the diachronic one. Anthropologists began to emphasize the way in which communication practices of a particular electronic environment gain new significances, in accordance with their contexts

and to the individuals using it. This new emphasis was also important for making the object of research more precise. The new anthropology of communication has emphasized the relations between NTIC, the type of electronic object (mobile phone, computer etc.) and a particular function of the technological object which allows for surprising upgrades (SMS, video call, MMS, chat, Instant Messenger, Facebook, Myspace etc.). The studies have moved from a *computer mediated communication* to communication practices specific and to each function. One witnessed the move from singular to plural. It will probably not be long until the technological subject becomes the subject to interrogations in the study of material culture. As for recent studies, both Anglo-Saxon (Horst and Miller, 2006) and Francophone (Blandin, 2002) research place consumption at the core of their analysis, i.e. the relation between the individual and the technological subject. This implies a double movement: the incorporation of the object (it activates upon the individual) and its ex-corporation (the individual acts upon the object). This relation has been analysed in its peculiar manifestation in various places in the world. Anthropologists have presented the adaptations of practice, technology and representation of any technological object to local conditions. The material culture perspective recuperates thus the synchronic dimension (the usage in its various contexts) within the broader diachronic frame, defined by its phases of the appropriation process (adoption, creation of utility and usage consolidation). The hermeneutics of practices and representations of the

users are analysed by researchers at every stage.

The research path chosen for the present study consists in repositioning the mobile phone and the practice of the SMS usage within their cultural and historical framework, retracing their trajectory, or, better yet, their 'career' (Bonnot, 2002; Bromberger and Chevallier, 1999). Three phases are most relevant: adopting the object, building the uses and consolidating them. The practices one can observe in a particular space, in this case, Bucharest, accumulate over time. By reconstituting this process, one can better understand the meaning that users grant to these practices and one can identify more accurately the factors which determine 'les manières de faire', repertoires and also of their application frameworks.

I choose 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 practices. As I mentioned above, nowadays many anthropologists and sociologists think of this relation as being reciprocal. On the one hand, the user acts upon the object, modifying its characteristics directly and indirectly. On the other hand, the object acts upon the user, who thus tames it and incorporates it in his praxis (Akrich, 1993; Warnier, 1999). For the practice of SMS, I feel that it is mostly this second process which is most visible and which seems to be playing a more determinant role. Individual usage becomes collective usage, because of both endogenous and exogenous factors relative to the teenage culture. The individual usage 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.

I shall present the way in which relationships evolve through the SMS, from the level of acquaintance to that of lover. The evolution of relationships through the SMS is important for the teenagers whom I have observed for three years (since 2008). The interviews with them and the actual analysis of their text messages reinforce the conclusion of the observation. SMS usage (and other environments) also leads the emergence of implicit rules. Tacit rules are built by several user communities. This is what I will describe below, in the present article. The collective usage (found at the level of groups of users) is inscribed within a cultural logic, thus both incorporating and ex-corporating the SMS.

My fieldwork has started in public spaces of Bucharest that are intensively frequented by teenagers and youngsters (commercial centres, squares, cafés³) and education institutions (the high schools where I have been teaching). It continued with in-depth interviews and even passive observation in their domestic and private space. I tried to identify the relation between their testimonials and the effective practices of cell phone and SMS. I also used a journal of communication, asking subjects to keep a daily journal. There, they were transcribed their messages, both received and sent, but also their emotions towards the subject of the

message and the person who has sent it. The data thus gathered is represented by 300 text messages and several interviews with my subjects about those messages.

Teenage sociability expressed by and in the SMS

Taking into account the frequent usage of SMS among teenagers, one may describe them as community of common practices, which have rules shared by their members. I will attempt to describe them, by advancing a typology of SMSs. I classified them into functional, ludic, contact-keeping and affective. I will not present them separately. Rather, I will describe the way they work in the stages of teenagers' relationships. These begin by acquaintance, continue by amity and end up, sometimes, in an affection stage.

Acquaintance. *Link-up*

Acquaintance, the incipient stage of the relationship between teenagers is expressed through the functional SMS. Messages reveal that for the majority of subjects, the discussion topics are factual and functional. The functional SMSs (one might also call it utilitarian) are those messages which contain practical information: the place and date of a meeting, request for another person to bring something to school or information queries. The functional SMSs micro-coordinate family and group activities (Ling, 2004). The vertical socialization expresses itself at the debut of the SMS usage.

Parents' control is a key dimension of the contact-keeping SMSs. The teenagers' obligation to follow the rules imposed by parents and relatives implies the formation of a family communicational system through the SMS; the forms of this *kinship* have been studied by H. Horst and D. Miller (2005) in the case of the appropriation of the mobile phone in Jamaica. In such SMSs, parents ask their children to mention the time of their arrival back home, details about their get together in town or simply on their whereabouts and the people they are with. Cases of control messages are quite rare, because such details are established at home, negotiated before going out. Also, for such purposes, parents use the phone call. I was able to discern the control purpose of a message, hidden under the form of a contact-keeping SMS. In order for the children not to feel the parental restriction, parents send their children apparently innocent messages, in which they ask them how they are, if they arrived safely. In fact, parents want to know where they are, who they are with and what they are doing. In Maria's case, she answers to such a message from her mother in the following way: 'Mom, I've arrived really OK, kisses'. Her mother replied the following: 'No sign from your. Call me immediately'. Teenagers recognize the overtones, but state that they find it less intrusive than a direct form of control.

The horizontal socialization is central in the teenagers' universe. Maintaining an acquaintance and, potentially, deepening a relationship may be expressed through the contact-keeping SMS. Establishing contact with a person they recently met, either

to a professional or a collegial end represents another value of the contact-keeping SMSs. The English name for this communication value is *link-up (idem)*, a term which expresses its essence, that of creating a social link and maintaining it. From all collected messages, one may stress the fact that this category was the most common.

A first pragmatic level of the messages sent is represented by the locutionary announcement type SMS. The SMS users confirm their affiliation to the network of friends by sending messages announcing a concert or the presence of a band on a TV show. Here is an exchange of messages reflecting this first under-category: 'It's Vita de Vie⁴ on tv klumea at magnetik!!!'⁵. The importance of the message is reflected in the plural use of exclamation signs. This type of message establishes a connection with the emitter at the moment of sending; the implicit meaning being 'I am keeping you posted with the things we have in common, thus I care about you.' This is the first level of what I call expressive interaction, a topic which I shall develop in the next section.

The next level in the relation between teenagers is expressed in the SMSs which initiate contact at a particular moment of the day. From the corpus of messages collected, these are the most numerous, representing 60% of the total. In a considerable number of messages having the function of 'making contact' through a support text, the teenagers think of somebody and send them messages. At a first glance, these messages may seem to have a gratuitous function. The meaning of this practice is, actually, deeper, outlining a logic which may

be summarized as 'I am sending you this message because I am thinking about you.' Sometimes such messages may be just an interjection (such as the greeting 'Hey').

Another level of the *link-up* contact, expressed through messages is the reconstruction of a relationship. To re-establish a relationship with someone may be a delicate action, depending, of course, on the reasons why that relation had been interrupted: it may have been a situation of conflict or geographical separation (moving to another school, going to college etc.). In the case of a previous conflict, all the teenagers claim that they had been faced with such situations because of an intrusion made by another person who abused their phone number. Explanations are often required and given via SMS: 'Why did you tell M that you're not coming tomorrow?'⁶. Similarly, one emitter offered a provable explanation: 'Hello! Hmm...Sorry I can't call you. I told you I bought myself a scooter. And I had an accident. And I have bruises all over me and I feel totally dizzy. What did you do at the exam? Kiss sis Lil'⁷. Contact messages are bound to have risks, especially when they involve interlocutors of opposite genders and the subject initiating the communication must calm the other one down concerning the purpose of his/her message. That person must have the preliminary agreement of the remitter to initiate a communication via SMS.

The environment of the SMS remains, thus, closed in what concerns the accessibility and integration of someone in a teenage community. Having someone's phone number does not imply, necessarily, that that

person agrees to communicate via SMS. The contact may be interrupted also when compliance with the implicit rules is violated, with the unwritten conventions of the SMS practice. A long term practice of the SMS has determined the creation of unwritten rules, shared by the frequent users. These rules, which I will cope with in detail later, are imperative in building social relations, starting from the first contact.

We have seen so far how the SMS, as an object, acts upon individuals' social universe, reflecting the first direction of the relationship between a technological object and the teenager. What I am more interested in is the way that the teenagers (and the plural being used here is very relevant) act upon the technological object, redirecting its initial value of use. Functional, utilitarian and contact values are reasons for the adoption of the SMS in the first place. Being free and after that cheaper than a phone call, young people have integrated this form of communication in their social universe. This integration has not been done in an automatic way, as we have seen so far; new forms of sociability being constructed. Next, I will describe how teenagers modify the initial values of use of the SMS, transforming this communication form in a medium where socialization and ludic attitude are extremely important for the subjects of this study.

Amity and friendship. Keep in touch through SMS

'I only lie very rare people like me :)
I won't go online today, my mom is sick and she's at home and she put me to study. Good night. Keep in touch.'⁸

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

The function of this type of message is the expressive interaction with friends, arbitrary function which implies maintaining contact in a ludic way, cheating or playing jokes. Keep *in touch* is the next level of what I 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. Emotional support is granted through the SMS; this is the case with Georgiana who wrote to Iuliana the following message: 'I don't know

when I am going to sleep tonight, so I send you know this message: D Good luck to Bac⁹, break a leg! I am there for you! Kiss¹⁰. This message comforts the remitter and expresses a type of solidarity specific for an amity relation. The high-school leaving exam is an extremely tense context. A person's emotions are expressed and they imply, from a good friend, comforting. Beside such school related contexts, emotional support is necessary and expressed even in the situations when a friend faces problems. These problems may have multiple causes, ranging from a simple physical discomfort to real family dramas.

Family dramas are 'consumed' through the textual strictly dual communication. Messages concerning such subjects follow 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, for instance, Monica writes to Marcel: 'I can't sleep. 'Cause I cry 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'¹¹. Such messages are proof of a consolidated friendship and of a shared intimacy. It is absolutely obvious that the interlocutor is familiar with the situation of Monica's family and understands it.

At the other side of the spectrum of intimacy and bound to a grouped communication, the gossip, the 'hot' information, the jokes, the stories, the various futilities are used to maintain the tone of the group. The SMS thus become the channel for individual expression and maintaining the membership inside a group of

friends. In the case of birthdays, cheers are sent through SMS, but they are personalized and keep a playful tone. Developing new friendships is another reason integrated to the use of this type of message. Demonstrating your aptitude to play games and make jokes is a means for distancing oneself from the others and of showing off one's personality. One subject, Maria sent Marcel the following message 'Hey, what are you doing? Did you finish? How was it? You did, right? Aaaa, too many questions... Peak one and answer. : P Kisses to you, brother'¹². In this message the SMS combines the contact function with the ludic one. To say funny things, to make jokes, these are the features of the social life of the teenagers. The general scope of the ludic messages is sharing the small every-day life futilities.

For both intimate and ludic messages, the gender of users determines the nature of the practices. As I. Pierozak (2003) has shown for 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. 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 male socialization defines itself by the diversity of the original groups. It uses weaker, yet more diverse connections. After analysing the corpus of SMSs, I was able to notice that, at this level, this type of socialization reflects itself in the diversity of the remitters of the messages boys send each other and also in the content of the messages: movies, sports and music. The male

socialization begins with common passions and communication occurs mostly on such subjects. Acquaintances made, for example, during sports activities may be maintained through practical or empty of content messages. Here is an example, which reflects the male socialization: 'My dad really wants me to see Standard playing, but I have to make arrangements for place and transportation'¹³. In turn, females 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. Their socialization revolves around telling the story to the tiniest detail. Communication through SMS reflects the dynamic of a female friendship. They range from futile subjects, such as establishing a meeting, to love affairs confessions. Sometimes, girls ask for information about a guy they like, other times they narrate failed dates. Such examples prove the SMS' capacity to correspond to the pre-existent practices of socialization. Words, stories, emotions may be the same, but their context is different. It is, in fact, the modern version of the *boudoir* socialization theorized by Georges Duby and Philippe Ariès (1985).

Above, I have described how teenagers build new forms of relating to a communication technology, bringing their generational characteristics and putting them at work through a complex network of social relations expressed and maintained in a ludic way. Starting from describing their social universe and how it is expressed through the SMS, I narrowed the perspective to

gender socialization in order to reflect the communication differences to girls and boys. Next, I will describe the specificities of SMS communication for couples. The analysis approaches now a different universe, that of the dual communication, which has a very powerful stake, the feeling of love.

Affection and love, the need of privacy expressed by SMS

'Do you know that I love you.....?
Or do you need more proofs? :)'¹⁴

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 SMSs, the affective ones also constitute an important component, especially if one takes into account their quality. Although they are not numerous, this type of SMS emerges after a quite complex process of integration in the teenagers' groups. My access to these messages in the fieldwork was directly proportional with the level of my integration in their group. Thus, I had access to the affective SMSs of the teenagers I interviewed, only to those of whom I got to know very well. This has been a great advantage for my fieldwork, because I was able to observe the values of the usage of the affective SMS within the symbolic teenage universe. The messages were not out of context. The context was revealed to me with many nuances.

A first characteristic of the affective SMS is the ludic transmission of feelings. The SMS addressed to the

loved one implies 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? One female wrote to her boyfriend: 'I am now in bed, we waked 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! :)'¹⁵. Time is an important dimension: 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 logic; it often turns into 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 communication faults that may hurt the members of a couple do not occur in the evening.

For the girls having a long distance relationship such as Julie (17 years old) and Marie (18 years old), their boyfriends living in France, the number of SMSs they send is higher than in the case of the other girls. The SMS is the means of communication they prefer (for financial reasons, but also because of the intimate character) for sharing their thoughts and feelings. Although they do not exclude the phone call to hear the loved one's voice, they

consider the SMS to be the best means of communication of the couple.

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. Such affective SMSs may be critiques (such as: 'Hate you. You didn't come to school'¹⁶) but also the environment for love declarations ('I love you in conclusion and that's it. :) Ah, and I hope to make you happy because you have been the nicest guy with me. You deserve what's best'¹⁷). SMSs addressed to the loved one are loaded with emotions. Affective messages create ways of sharing emotions, communicating small nothings which connote, implicit meaning such as 'I am thinking about you, so I tell you everything.' This confirms Jean-Claude Kaufmann's statement about love in a couple: "Soft or passionate, soothing or troubling, it is the emotional cover and the openness to the other that save us from the selfish aridity of modernity. That is why we tell ourselves stories. Again and again. Love stories, always relived" (2007: 5).

Another reality instituted by the SMS is somehow paradoxical. 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 following message may be a relevant example for this attitude: '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!¹⁸. The frivolity and lack of seriousness of the SMS reconfirm its ludic character. One interviewee stated that she prefers to use tender words with moderation: 'you can't know if the other is truthful, so I don't want to take any chances'¹⁹. 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 SMSs: for her boyfriend, the implicit norm was taking seriously words and their written expression. It was exactly the contrary for Carolina. While she had a rather ludic perception on the affective message, her boyfriend considered that taking it seriously and respecting one's feelings is more important than playing games.

The timing of the affective messages offers 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 'Hi, 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'²⁰ was 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 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 words choice, of what she wanted to communicate have been carefully thought through, an aspect 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. Sending the message is marked by what I might call a type of affective reflection. The content of affective SMS is very powerfully connoted emotionally, which implies a long reflexivity and which determines a strong mark on the text message.

Establishing new relations has a 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 timing. Maria (18 years old), sent her boyfriend the following message: '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...:)'²¹. This apparently incontrollable flux of questions reveals the girl's inner anxiety. Maria is placed in this first stage of reciprocal

discovery through SMS. Answering is another action, depending on the remitter's choice. 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 one may have noticed in the previous example.

Sending and receiving the message are two actions, integrated in the logic of expressive interaction. They confirm the adhesion of the young ones to the mature couple. Another temporal action concerning the SMS is saving it, keeping it in the phone's memory. Storing affective messages to one's self confirms the rule of intimacy. It is widespread for all most 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, two interviewees, talked about the need to keep the messages, to remember the evolution of the relationship. The message is a memory trigger which starts a cognitive memorizing 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 limited phone memory, another potential action is copying the messages in a personal diary or a special notebook. Three interviewees confirmed this practice. They copy the messages and put them in a typographic context, also adding their commentaries. One interviewee said: '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.' This graphic representation of the SMS integrates it in the category of the artefacts. For B. Blandin (2002), these objects are defined by a direct relationship with the social individual and which are built by specific registers, logic, strategies and actions. Sharing an affective or ludic 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 teenagers' popularity among his friends.

Building the implicit rules of the teenage SMS

I have outlined so far the ways that the SMS is domesticated by teenagers, by its integration in their social and cultural universe, but also how it is being regulated by interpersonal characteristics. Following the 'wire' of a relationship between two teens, I have shown how it reflects mostly the process of incorporation of this communication medium. The actual signs of excorporation the SMS was the ludic usage. Another dimension which reflects even stronger this process is represented by the implicit rules built through the use of the SMS.

Teenage sociability, as I showed previously, is governed by certain, well-established principles. Juvenile social networks have a special configuration. They are extended and, at the same time, tight on

the age. Forming and maintaining friendships require precise contexts and group identities. Claire Bidart (1997) defined the teenage networks as ‘gigogne’²², i.e. less involved by personal connections than habits of frequentation and the recognition that comes from other persons that are being used to it. Friendships appear and dissolve during school. Outside school, social links are established in contexts such as the block, the neighbourhood, holidays, common leisure time. Thus, teenagers cultivate at the same time a large number of weak connections and a small number of strong ones. As I have already showed, gender is a key factor for these social practices. If boys privilege weak links, girls establish strong ones. Both genders, though, are faced with what D. Pasquier (2005) calls in his book ‘high-school culture’, based on the distinction between ‘friends’ (low investment) and ‘buddies’ (higher investment).

The implicit rules which function as prohibitive in high-school culture are heavier on the weak links than on the strong ones. This is yet another paradox that defines teenage culture. These restraints refer to declaring and showing off cultural preferences. In the network of weak connections, there is a very high pressure on imposing conformity and low tolerance to express difference. Groups dictate codes, thus producing marginalization social stigma within teenage culture.

The same logic of conformity and compliance with rules may be noticed in the case of the use of SMS. The use comes from a continuous negotiation between the user and the object used. This negotiation creates rules concerning usage in the case of the

SMS and other technological objects and socio-technological networks. These rules stabilize and become a frame of communication for different teenage groups.

Implicit rules and honesty

One first such rule refers to the access to the SMS network. It means asking for permission to having a phone number and to use it. This rule is immediately followed by that of respecting the emitter’s right to receive a reply. The remitter has the right to think about the content and the answer, but he/she must reply. From the examples given in the previous section, one may notice that the ending of the messages inevitably contains a request for reply.

Practical, functional, warning SMSs do not always require for textual messages, but the remitter must let the emitter know that he/she has read the message. Delay is accepted, but it must not be longer than the period in which the message is still fresh. The actuality of the information determines how rapidly the remitter reacts. Not answering may trigger accusations and conflicts. Cristina, for instance, was asked by her friend to bring her to school something ‘important’. She should have replied very quickly. She did comply (she neither brought along the item, nor, at least, replied) because, according to her, her father had taken her mobile phone. The next day, she negotiated with her parents, obtaining the mobile back. She thus found two unread messages: ‘You showed me how much you really care for me. Second message: I can see that you really don’t give a s...t. That’s all I wanted

to tell you. Excuse me if I disturbed you²³. Eventually, this episode and the messages it contained led to the dissolution of their friendship.

As Chantal de Gournay (1997: 82-83) stated in her study, honesty is not imperative in communication. It is merely ethical, coming from a reciprocal engagement that implies the frame of an inter-personal relation. Still, I would add, the inter-personal ethics which integrates the principle of honesty becomes, in the case of SMS, convergent with the ethics of communication. Or, better said, honesty becomes imperative in the communication through text messages. There are two technical features of the object which determine the formation of a certain perception: the mobile phone's mobility (therefore the expectation that the owner is accessible at all time) and the guarantee of sending the text (despite any inconvenient, of any nature). This rule undermines the type of personal communication as described by de Gournay (1997: 23): 'Finally, if we should give a simple definition to personal communication, I would say it is a simple exchange that involves the exclusion of a third-party, whose content makes sense only for the two persons.

The technical features are being reinforced by cultural aspects. I have previously touched upon the specificity of teens' socialization and also pointed out that their social universe is defined through permanence and presence. The SMS communication integrates itself in this predefined framework. At the beginning engaging with the practice of SMS, the indirect character of this form of communication creates, for teens, the impression that they

could also trick the other one. I have already discussed the perception that my subjects had about the fact that the SMS is a medium that allow them to be free, in order to confide themselves and to tell to the other person things that could never be said in a direct communicational context. The question that emerges as the relation advances is if the confessions and the statements were 'real' and 'valid.' Proofs were needed and, if lies are discovered, the effects are devastating, leading to the dissolution of relationships. Therefore, the potentiality of being more outspoken in a SMS has been regulated by the imperative of honesty in teens' communication or, as Carolina told me, 'You have to find a balance between those two. It is very easy to say more than you could say in a direct conversation but the risks are major.' (Her story proves this; she broke up with her boyfriend through SMS and he sent her, in an email, all love text messages that she ever sent to him).

Chantal De Gournay (1997) made a distinction between a personal and a private communication. He has argued that personal communication includes the exclusion of the third-party. One may ask if intimacy belongs to the former or to the latter. First, let us see how intimacy is expressed in the practice of the SMS. Intimacy reveals itself an important rule in textual communication: to respect the right to the privacy of the messages. The teenagers share the message with someone because they want to. Reading the messages to somebody else is a proof of lack of respect and may lead to conflicts. One interviewee declared that the first thing she told someone who uses her mobile phone

is to not read her messages. This right to intimacy is extended to friends and colleagues, rather than parents. If parents are totally excluded from this new universe created via SMS, friends have limited access. Teenagers share the message with their friends only if they want to, and usually what they share are the ludic messages, with stories and jokes.

The girls are much more open to insulating from the rest of their groups in their relationship with their best friend. Female friendship is very different from the male one from this point of view. A very important rule in the feminine friendship is sharing secrets, especially those concerning boys, by telling the best friend everything about the first dates and asking for advice. Letitia, an interviewee explained, that it is 'hyper-important' to tell your best friend everything. That is a way to nurture the relationship and to confirm such a status. If the couple relationship evolves and matures, the girl with serious relationships cannot share everything anymore. A certain break occurs between such friends, with the boyfriend taking over the duties of confessor.

For boys, the rule of sharing small secrets through SMS applies if the relationship with a girl is not serious. Boys do not consider necessary to share every private detail. This does not create distancing between them. A boy is even more valued by his friends when he keeps certain secrets. They share other type of information from SMSs, such as funny stories, what is new in the topics they are interested in - movies, music or sports.

This game of sharing or not sharing the message, according to its content,

gender socialization and age makes it difficult to integrate this principle within the frame of the personal or the private communication. Are we to believe that teenagers do not know yet the difference between the two types and the two relational-communicational registers or that, on the contrary, they master them very well intuitively and used them in a specialized way? We may say, like so many famous theoreticians of pragmatics before us, that 'meaning is usage' (Wittgenstein, *apud* Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, 2003: 12), and that integrating intimacy in a communicational frame depends on the adequate communicational context or frame.

Another rule of the SMS practice is clarity and the lack of ambiguity. One must make oneself clearly understood in SMS in order to be understood. Ambiguity may lead to indifference. Clarity deals with content, rather than form. All users know the linguistic rules for communication in 160 characters, knowledge gained after a long practice of this technology. The logic for SMS writing is very well established: the beginning is marked by greeting formulas, the body of the message must efficiently express what they want to communicate (it must answer the question 'what do you want to communicate?'), and the ending must also contain specific formulas.

Conclusions

Starting from the description of the communication and socialization through the mobile phone, I have tackled with the specifics of the SMS' mobility, as individual practice and I

have analysed the specific of teenage sociability expressed by and in the text message. Teenage sociability 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 usage and in the logic of dyadic communication. Then, I analysed the correlation between the stages of a relationship between two teenagers and the values of using the SMS. These correlations are acquaintance – link-up; amity, friendship – keep in touch; affection/love – intimacy. I analysed these relations in detail, paying special attention to the gender and mentioning, for each stage of the relationship, the type of SMS utilized: functional, contact, affective and ludic SMS. Noticing the differences in sociability practices via text messages for males and females, I think that it is very important to take into account gender differences.

The higher level of the SMS practice is creating implicit rules. Individual usages become progressively collective, thus defining a group logic. The rules for using the SMS reflect the relation between individuality and conformity and they prepare the inscription of SMSs in a cultural logic. The approval to communicate via SMS with someone recently met is given implicitly, by the signs the other sends back to the emitter. The rule of the immediate answer is differently regulated: one may trace a perfect equivalence between the types of SMS and the progression of the rule. The stake of the relationship and the importance of receiving the message are the elements that regulate

the consistency of this rule. Honesty becomes a rule of the inter-personal communication, once teenagers begin using the SMS. The rule is so imperative that non-compliance triggers exclusion and the final rejection of the person who violates it. The implicit rules of the SMS are influenced gender. Thus, feminine socialization presupposes sharing secrets, while male socialization excludes it. Rules, even if implicit, are made to be broken. But the specific feature of the implicit is that it makes rules all the more important, thus their breaking triggers consequences expressed by and in SMSs.

I have outlined in the present article a *micro-career* of an object of consumption. The progression of a relationship between two teenagers highlighted through the SMS is a good example for explaining the way that SMS has a trajectory of usage and consumption in youth culture. The progression of a relationship also reflects at its best the link between technological object and its users. Thus, I reflected the way that the object acts upon its users (as in the stage of acquaintance and contact), showing us how the object is being incorporated, in the stages of friendship and love how the user takes control of the technological object, constructing new significations and usages. At this time, the mobile phone becomes a ‘total’ object, meaning that it assumes technical features from other instruments, but it improves them and adds new ones.

Notes

¹ New Technologies of Information and Communication.

² The SMS became a research object later, its appearance in practice being so much earlier than the time studies about SMS start to appear. Therefore, researchers found on the field a reality that was already mature that they have been interpreting as being new and specific because of the absence of a diachronic and comparative perspective. It's exactly what R. Ling and L. Haddon (1998) admit in *'One can talk about common manners!' The use of Mobile Phones in inappropriate situations.*

³ In Bucharest, meeting places for teenagers are public squares in center of the town like University Square, Romana Square etc.

⁴ A Romanian rock band.

⁵ 'vita de vie p tv klumea la magnetik!!!'

⁶ 'D c iai zis lu M k nu vii maine?'

⁷ 'Hell'o! Hmz...Sorry k nu pot sa t sun. Ti'am zis k mi'am luat scuter...Si am fkt accident...Si's taiata&ametita. Ce'ai fkt la simulare?...pup Lil'sor.'

⁸ 'Eu nu mint rar oameni k mine :) azi nu mai intru, mai greu zilele astea k mama bolnava si sta aks, ma pune la invatat. Noapte buna.'

⁹ Bac is the shortcut for high-school leaving exam.

¹⁰ 'Nush la kt vei adormi in seara asta asa k yo iti trimit d aqm sms :D.Bafta la bac, la fiekre proba in parte, s le rupi kpu ! T sustin psihic! Pup'

¹¹ '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...'

¹² 'Ce faci? Ai terminat? kum a fost?ai

fkt nu?...aaa prea multe intrebari... alege una si rasp :P ksz bro'

¹³ 'tata are alte planuri ku mne. Vbim maine'

¹⁴ 'Stii k te iubesc.....? sau e nevoie d mai mult pt atzi dovedi? :)'

¹⁵ '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! :)'

¹⁶ 'H8u.nu ai vnt la skl.'

¹⁷ 'in concluzie te iubesc și gata :) aa si sper sa te fac fericit pt k tu ai fost cel mai dragutz ku mn... meritzi c e mai bun'

¹⁸ '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!'

¹⁹ Interview extract.

²⁰ 'Buna iubiture. 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...'

²¹ 'Unde ai mintit si unde nu? Iti place vocea mea? Mai intri pe net? I like your voice so much...me cannot tell...:)'

²² *Gigogne* = noun. fem., is used in the popular expression. 'C'est une mère Gigogne' means a woman with many children, alluding to a character in the doll theater, who was resented surrounded by many kids. In analogy, 'Table gigogne' means furniture composed of several tables coming out from one another.

²³ 'Mi-ai demonstrat cat tii cu adevarat la mine', followed by 'Se vede ca te doare undeva doar asta am vrut sa vad scuza-ma ca te-am deranjat.'

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