Heidegger's cell phone – ubiquitous communication and existential distance

ANTÓNIO FIDALGO*

Professor of Communication Sciences at the
University of *Beira Interior*, and director of the
Laboratory of On-line Communication
at the same University

ABSTRACT

Is the cell phone an indispensable identitary element in the contemporary society or a factor of existential alienation and inauthenticity? Starting from the Heidegger's analysis of human identity in *Being and Time* (first part) and from a wide-ranging literature review about mobile communication (second part), we try, in the third part of the text, to refuse Manichean positions, both the ones that condemns the cell phone as an alienation instrument, and the ones that greet them as a crucial object for the economic and social development. In the end, we outline an ethics of the cell phone from the conception of existential distance.

Keywords: cell phone, Heidegger, identity, authenticity, ubiquitous communication.

IDENTITY AND AUTHENTICITY

If Martin Heidegger had born 100 years later, in 1989; nowadays he would have 20 years. Would he, like almost every young people, use a cell phone or would he reject it in the name of an authentic existence as it was outlined in *Being and Time* (1927)? The question is hypothetical and rhetorical, and can be used to discuss the cell phone (also known as mobile phone) as a modern identitary element, an "individual identity reinforcement" and a "youth identity symbol" (Castells et al., 2007:252). In fact, *Dasein`s[1]* identity question is one of the constitutive moments from the existential analysis made by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, an issue which is first presented in terms of authenticity and inauthenticity.

According to Heidegger, since the beginning and regularly, the human being embodies on a daily basis an inauthentic existence, determined by the others that coexist with him. The identity of this inauthentic existence is the people[2], in the sense that, at the everyday life, what remains identical (Heidegger, 1979:

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[1] Given the specific semantics of the term *Dasein* in Heidegger, the option is often not translate the term. For those unfamiliar with the Heidegger`s terminology, *Dasein* is the "human being in the world". I will use this text indiscriminately, *Dasein* and "human being".

[2] The original Heidegger`s term "Man" (translated into French by the impersonal "on") has the term "people", an excellent Portuguese translation, as seen by Delfim Santos at his study on Heidegger`s work. (Santos, 1973, 356-369).

114)[3] with the change of experiences and attitudes from each one is our way of being people. There is definitely a people's "dictatorship". "We appreciate what the people appreciate, we read, see and think about literature and art, as the people see and think, we think that it is revolting what the people think it is revolting" (Ibid: 124)[4]. Presently the cell phone confirms and reinforces the inauthentic existence of its users. Not only we have and use the cell phone as everyone else, but above all, we are and we perform always and everywhere, thanks to the cell phone, what everyone usually is and performs.

The ubiquitous communication maintains and promotes the inauthentic identity by contributing to a better relationship among individuals and the respective normalization and uniformity. When permanently linked to others, the human being finds himself released of any responsibility. Insofar when this being thinks and acts like the people think and acts, the weight of the decision and the consequences that may arise are taken from him. We relieve him daily, we make his life easier. And as we are everyone and no one in particular, each one is the other one and nobody is his own self.

So, we are this nobody to whom every human being is entrusted, since ever, at the coexistence with the others (Ibid: 128)[5].

Before questioning the very terms in which Heidegger places the analysis of the human identity, about authenticity and inauthenticity – that by the way, it was always strongly contested, in particular by Theodor Adorno in the text entitled *The Jargon of Authenticity* (1997) – it is important to follow the Heideggerian analysis of the people, as the human's everyday life way of being, in order to better critically analyze the identitary elements of the cell phone and its utilization.

Among the existential characteristics of the people exposed by Heidegger, the chatter, the curiosity and the ambiguity; we are especially interested in the analysis about the chatter[6]. This is, according to Heidegger, a positive phenomenon that constituted the existential form of comprehension and explanation of the human being at his daily life (Ibid: 167)[7]. This means that, at the everyday life, the human being finds himself, from the beginning, entrusted to a type of language that structures and

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[3] The paragraph 25 of *Seen und Zeist*, entitled "*Der Ansatz der existentialen Frage nach dem Wer des Daseins*" thematizes the question of identity, of the self, the subject: "*Das Wer ist das, was sich im Wechsel der Verhaltungen und Erlebnisse als Identisches durchhält und sich dabei auf diese Mannigfaltigkeit bezieht*".

[4] The paragraph 27, dedicated to the analysis of people as human being identity in everyday life entitled "*Das alltägliche Selbstsein und das Man*".

[5] "*Jeder ist der Andere und Keiner er selbst. Das Man, mit dem sich die Frage nach dem Wer des alltäglichen Daseins beantwortet, ist das Niemand, dem alles Dasein im Unterandersein sich je schon ausgeliefert hat.*"

[6] The term chatter is a poor translation, but it was used for a lack of better term. "*Gerede*" has in "German the meaning of "chatter", "stupidity", "absurd". Heidegger changes the meaning of the expression, giving it a positive connotation as a form, even than inauthentic, of comprehension and world explanation.

[7] "*Gerede … bedeutet terminologisch ein positives Phänomen, das die Seinsart des Verstehens und Auslegens des alltäglichen Daseins konstituiert.*"

delimitates the world comprehension, where this being moves and acts on. The language is not external to mankind, neither posterior to his experience of the world. By the contrary, it is something intrinsic and essential to the understanding that, with the others, makes the world and what occurs in it.

After saying that, what kind of language is the "chatter" as the language of the people? It is mainly a language of communication, of conversation with others. More important than what we are talking about is sharing with the listener what is said. The meaning of the chatter remains at the mutual understanding among the ones who talk. Everyone understands what is said in the chatter, even though just "more or less" or "superficially" in relation to what this talk is about. The chatter gains an appropriate sense when disentangles itself from reality and get concerned primarily with its own continuity. That is, the sense of the chatter is within the same chatter that follows it, the one where it becomes a chatter subject, and so on (ibid: 168)[8]. Giving motive to new chatters, linking to other successive occasions, the chatter becomes assertive and gains authority. The things are like that because the people say so.

The lack of foundation *in re* from the chatter does not prevent it from becoming public. On the contrary, favors it. The chatter is the faculty to understand everything without a prior apprehension or study of what is being discussed. Moreover, the chatter avoids, through the shallowness of its explanation, any failure at the subject understanding. Thereby, nothing stays outside from the chatter scope. It can talk about everything, because it levels everything into a uniform comprehension.

The chatter uprooting, the conversation just for the sake of the same conversation, without a genuine cognition of the thing spoken, ends by turning off the human being from his primary roots with the world. In the chatter the *Dasein* finds the everyday life reality in which it maintains itself and, after all, in which he finds refuge from the world inhospitality.

This quite elongated exposition from the Heidegger's analysis (1927: § 36) about the chatter phenomenon serves to better understand the communicative dimension of the human being's inauthentic identity. The people, who make the human being's identity of the ones lost in everyday life, have a conversational dimension, to be precise, of spoken cohabitation. Heidegger realized that the human being, in principle, is not an isolated monad, it exists, since always, in the mode of the co-existence with others and that this fact determines his identity on a daily basis.

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[8] *"Und weil das Reden den primären Seinsbezug zum beredeten Seienden verloren bzw. Nie gewonnen hat, teilt es sich nicht mit in der Weise der ursprünglichen Zueignung dieses Seienden, sondern auf dem Wege des Weiter- und Nachredens."*

But if the people are the inauthentic identity of the human being, so what is his authentic identity? It does not make sense, in fact, to negatively classify a way of being without pointing its positive correlate. Heidegger answers to this question in the second part of *Being and Time*, second chapter, paragraphs 54-60 (1979: 267-301)[9]. The authentic existence is presented as a possibility that must be created from the state of inauthenticity. That is, at the man's existential analysis the first data is the inauthentic identity, the living in the form of people. The authentic being is obtained from an existential modification of the people (Ibid)[10].

Heidegger clearly assumes a different position from the usual one, which is to consider authentic what came first in order of time. However, at the human identity analysis, the authenticity and the inauthenticity appear as two existential possibilities, being justly the unauthentic form the first one to be assumed by the human being, not by his choice, but by the very world facticity where he is at the beginning. That is, what first emerge for a human being's phenomenological analysis is that he finds himself released (*geworfen*) in an inhospitable world (*unheimlich*), lost in the crowd (*das Man*). Only at posterior moment this man will search the possibility of an authentic existence at the very structure of the *Dasein*. This possibility is open by the research about "the possible totality of *Dasein* and the being for death" (Ibid.: 235-267)[11], which constitutes the first chapter of the second part of *Being and Time*, and precedes the chapter on the issue of authenticity. Indeed, the death experience is the existential element that does not fit, or stays out of the comprehension and explanation of the people. It is true that everyone dies, but this assurance does not relieves me from my death, that is very much mine and from which nobody can free me. Death is, therefore, something that each one has to assume as its own thing (Ibid.: 240)[12]. This assumption sends the human being to a self dimension, of anguish before his end, and for loneliness state, that makes him see another life possibility beyond the everyday life existence, dominated by the people. It is death, while an existential possibility, that confronts the human being with its most genuine way of being (Ibid.: 250)[13].

The death phenomenon reveals the failure of people to a full and complete understanding of the human being. Death is part of human existence and to assume is required an authentic existence manner. But, lost in the world, living the everyday life at people's indefinition, and dodging the death thought, how can

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[9] Chapter whose title is *"Die daseinsmäßige Bezeugung eines eigentlichen Seinskönnens und die Entschlossenheit"*.

[10] *"Das Wer des Daseins bin zumeist nicht ich selbst, sondern das Man-selbst. Das eigentliche Selbstsein bestimmt sich als eine existentielle Modifikation des Man, die existenzial zu umgrenzen ist"* .

[11] *"Das mögliche Ganzsein des Daseins und das Sein zum Tode"*, is the chapter covering paragraphs 46-53.

[12] *"Das Sterben muß jedes Dasein jeweilig selbst auf sich nehmen. Der Tod ist, sofern er 'ist', wesensmäßig je der meine".*

[13] *"Mit dem Tod steht sich das Denken selbst in seinem eigensten Seinkönnen bevor. (…) Wenn das Dasein als diese Möglichkeit seiner selbst sich bevorsteht, ist es völlig auf sein eingenstens Seinkönnen verwiesen. So sich bevorstehend sind in ihm alle Bezüge zu anderem Dasein gelöst."*

the *Dasein* wake up to the possibility of an authentic existence, how find his true identity? The answer given by Heidegger is that the loss in daily life do not shut the "voice of conscience"[14], which, at any time, can make itself heard. This "voice of conscience" is a call (*Anruf*) to the *Dasein* and, simultaneously, an appeal (*Aufruf*) to the authentic existence (Ibid.: 269)[15].

The "voice of conscience" is itself an opening to another chance of being. It encloses an understanding other than that of the everyday, which will mess with Dasein and swings from his comfortable situation, which is provided by the people. It is that voice coming from afar, from the being's deepest region, which calls the human being to a new identity, the authenticity of a full existence (Ibid. 271)[16].

But the most important for us, when we conjugate the mobile phone and the human identity, is the silent form, without words, as the voice of conscience makes itself heard. That is, at the call out of the conscience there is nothing to say or to communicate. It is not even a monologue. The call out is only directed to the human being's possibility of being authentic, a call out that is made "only and always" in the silent mode (ibid.: 273).[17]. It is made in such a way that drives the same *Dasein,* who was also called into the silence. There is nothing to answer to that call out. Moreover, the voice of conscience, which gets to be heard always unpredictably and even against the expectations and desires of the call out, without, however, fail to ever be a call out from itself to itself, it rises from the chatter in a request to the authentic existential possibility silence.

What is this existential possibility? First of all, it means to not want to have this conscious, that is to say, at absolute availability for listen the voice of conscience. This availability means opening up (*sich erschliessen*) to the existence possibilities, as possibilities, and, thus decide (*sich entschliessen*) in behalf of the genuine existence truth. Is in this way that the human being is only authentic, while as an always open project, and he is only truthful when decides to project himself into the future into death. *Dasein's* authentic identity consists at being determined (*Entschlossenheit*) to project himself into an existence towards death as the most genuine of all the possibilities (Ibid.: 307).[18]

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[14] The Portuguese word for "conscience" translates two German terms with quite different meanings: "*Bewußtsein*" and "*Farbe*". "*Farbe*", the term used by Heidegger in this passage from *Being and Time*, in German means running conscience. Heidegger, however, withdraw the ethical and moral connotations. I will use the term "voice of conscience" to translate *"Farbe"*, considering that, in Heidegger, "*Farbe*" always assumes the form of voice (*Stimme des Gewissens*).

[15] *"Die eindringlichere Analyse des Gewissens enthüllt es als Ruf. Das Ruf ist ein Modus der Rede. Der Gewissensruf hat den Charakter des Anrufs des Daseins aus sein eigenstens Selbstseinkönnen und das in der Weise des Aufrufs zum eigensten Schuldigsein."*

[16] *"In der Erschließungstendenz des Rufes liegt das Moment des Stoßes, des abgesetzten Aufrüttelns. Gerufen wird aus der Ferne in die Ferne. Vom Ruf getroffen wird, wer zurückgeholt sein will."*

[17] *"Das Gewissen redet einzig und ständig im Modus des Schweigens."*

[18] *"Das Verstehen des Gewissenrufes enthüllt die Verlorenheit in das Man. Die Entschlossenheit holt das Dasein auf sein eigenstens Selbstseinkönnen zurück. Eigentlich und ganz durchsichtig wird das eigene Seinkönen im verstehenden Sein zum Tode als der eigensten Möglichkeit."*

Once finished the exposure of Heidegger's analysis of human identity, in terms of authenticity and inauthenticity, and returning to the initial question regarding Heidegger's cell phone, it seems that the philosopher should reject the mobile phone use. However, as not everything is what it seems, and because it is necessary to clarify the identitary status of the cell phone, it is convenient to suspend the judgment and only return to this question after a review of the most relevant literature about mobile communication. The fact is that a more detailed analysis, not of the technical functions, but from the social uses of the cell phone, will reveal an extreme plural reality, impossible to classify in terms of white or black. It is true that, at first glance, the mobile phone seems to greatly enhance the social and cultural uniformity of the end users, at the detriment expense of their respective individualities. But the cell phone also offers genuine possibilities of being human, both at a personal and a social level, that without it never existed. In fact, the cell phone extends the boundaries of the communication in time and in space, and with this extension opens up new possibilities of being, acting and co-existing with the others ones.

UBIQUITOUS COMMUNICATION, AUTONOMY, REGRESSION AND ALIENATION

The studies about the cell phone give a great emphasis on the identity question, that is, about how the introduction and use of cell phones affect and determine the identity of their users. Obviously that the possession or the use of a cell phone does not transform a person into another one completely different. With or without a cell phone, an individual continues to be the same one, with the same parents, natural from the same place, with the same language and the same religion. However, as we say that literacy changes not only people's capabilities, but also their behavior and even their way of being, so we can also say that the cell phone use changes also capabilities, behaviors and ways of being. And this is how the authors who address the identity question when they study the cell phone use, they consider that the identity is not something given from the beginning, but a plural and complex constitution process as people see themselves and feel the same at different actions, experiences and contexts.

At Katz and Aakhus's pioneer book (2002) regarding mobile communication, Berit Skog (2002) studies the role of the cell phone at the young Norwegians' identity. In this work, the author defines identity as the process where the social actors use the culture to recognize themselves and to build meaning. How this is done in case of young people? Through three processes: reflexivity, flexibility and individualization. Reflexivity is the way to culturally project the identities in symbols, in the language or in the face to face interaction. Flexibility indicates that both, personality as the way of life, it is influenced, that individuals make choices at the of identity process, and do not easily accept what tradition tries to impose them. Individualization means that the importance of the social origins decreases while the subjective inner

world importance increases (Skog, 2002: 255).

Castells (2007: 247-266) sees the cell phone identitary function at young people, above all, at the creation of a specific culture and as a differentiation mean from the adults, particularly their parents. Young people perform a very specific appropriation of the mobile communication technology, with specific uses and symbols, giving rise to the "emergence of a collective identity." Castells see, for example, the intensive use young people have with the SMS, and their respective option as a form of privileged communication, a specific identity, creating links with other young people and, at the same time, detaching themselves from the older ones' world.

A second aspect highlighted by Castells is the strengthening of the autonomy, especially of movements, that the cell phone brings to the youngsters. At the same time this allows a greater surveillance of the parents upon the children, the last ones gain time and space that were banned to them before the cell phone. The safety and, not least important, the security feeling that the device confers to parents and children, is a two-sided coin, having on one side a greater parental monitoring and at the other side a greater movement freedom in behalf of the young people. In every way, the cell phone opens up new possibilities for youngsters and emancipates them from the proximity and the confinement from the family space and respective rules.

Another element is the customization of the cell phone and the fashion formation. Each youngster seeks to provide the cell phone with their own designation elements, such as ring tones, music, specific and individual settings. Having a cell phone it is not enough, it must be the appropriate model with the group and with the individual style. "However, having the appropriate equipment is not sufficient; it must be customized, as at the end, it is an expression of style and personal lifestyle" (Castells, 2007: 253). Richard Ling, when analyzing the cell phone impact at the society (2004), focuses on the private sphere and at the cell phone role at people's everyday life. One way or another, cell phones altered the sociability forms and changed attitudes and moods, creating security feelings and allowing a greater social activities coordination. Ling avoids the analysis narrowness ruled by technological and social determinism, and chooses to address such changes in the light of the information technologies and communication domestication (2004: 26-34). Under the concept of "domestication" - introduced by Roger Silverstone and Leslie Haddon (1996), (Haddon, 2003) - of certain technologies and related devices it is understood a complex and continuous process of technological introduction and social adaptation. First, it is not about a study only on the acquisition of new equipment, but also to its consumption, and about how we started using it. Subsequently we should consider that the technological device adoption is a social process,

discussed, evaluated and negotiated with others. Young people, for example, will have to convince parents to buy them a more expensive cell phone and negotiate its use (the amount of costs and the calls occasions, away from the meals and how late at night) within the family sphere. The "domestication is not only a simple mental process undertaken by an individual, but a social interaction among individuals (...), so that the use we make of a device becomes an integral part of our social identity. "(Ling, 2004: 27).

An approach to the mobile phones domestication process, therefore, will have to look at their acquisition, exhibition, function and consumption. Indeed, the cell phone is, in addition to being a mere communication means, a physical object with certain characteristics, of a particular brand, that their owners should know how to elegantly exhibit at the right moments. At this point it does not differentiate itself from other consumer items, such as cars or watches, which, in addition to having a well-defined function, they have an important aesthetic dimension and are symbols of social and cultural status.

The technology domestication is processed through several stages: imagination, appropriation, objectification, incorporation and conversion. From the moment we have, by the first time, an idea of the object and how it could be useful, beginning by their entry into our personal sphere, to the way as how becomes an expression of ourselves, the device domestication itself is the reverse of a constitutive process of the end user identity. Through the imagination there is an anticipation of the future, at a moment when the object is still *in effect* exterior to the personal sphere of our belongings. The object enters into our conscience; we predict the possible uses that we can give it, its usefulness. This is when we pass to the appropriation moment, when it ceases to be an object among many others from the commercial world and enters at the personal sphere of our objects. At this stage we try to situate it within our world, our actions, and our values.

The objectification signifies how the object starts to materialize, and at the same time to exhibit our values and our aesthetic sense. The objects are the ones, in fact, that show and translate what we think, and what objectify what we think and feel. The externalization from the subjective view is made by its objectification into physical objects, at procedures and actions visible to the eyes of the others ones who coexist with us. What we are and what we think is revealed through the objectification. Our identity is exposed, precisely, through these objects and which may be intangible, such as, for example, phone sounds. Richard Ling relies to the Goffman's dramatic model of representation of everyday life to frame the objectification in the wider ambit of the facade creation where we try to be seen by the others.

The integration is the correlate objectification, the other side of the coin. While the objectification belongs more to the aesthetic realm, the integration is focused at the device features, the ones taught by the manuals and the ones learned by ourselves. "The objectification is how a device crystallizes in a certain way what we are, our own *self*" (Ling, 2004: 28). In turn, the integration comprehends the assimilation period of the objects, the time we take to insert them into our routines.

At last, the conversion is the domestication stage where the others see and evaluate the devices the same way they see and evaluate the people who use them. Moreover, with it, the people who acquired and use the artifacts wish to achieve the desired social effect. In other words, what it is wanted at the conversion stage is that others do not look our objects in a singular and disperse way, but see a reflection of ourselves at them. Through these objects, the others realize who we are, or, as Goffman would say, who we want to be.

One of the most dense studies on the cell phone is certainly the text of Hans Geser, *Towards a Sociological Theory of the Mobile Phone* (Geser, 2004), where, through frequent and extensive quotations, reflects much of the literature produced about the mobile communication. From the various chapters he divides his work, we are interested at, for the specific theme of identity, especially the third chapter, dedicated "to the implications of the mobile phone at the individuals". And those implications are, indeed, vast and differentiated. Firstly by the cell phone use expansion, progressively from the occasional emergency situations to the entire everyday life, and, simultaneously, the fact of evolving from specifically informative communications to expressive communications, where the phatic function of the phone call is more important than the communicated information.

Individuals emancipate themselves from the spatial conditionings, from one side, maintaining social relations via remote, the same ones that previously required the interlocutors simultaneous presence, and by another side, getting away from the present interaction conditions with others, in order to direct the attention to remote interlocutors. From such spatial or local emancipation does not necessarily follow, however, a greater opening to new relationships, or to a more cosmopolitan spirit. On the contrary, in most cases represents a social regression, an encapsulation at the small native community. That is, outside the familiar and habitual context, an individual avoids the novelty and the strangeness of new places and new contacts, finding refuge in the mobile phone and keeping in touch with small sphere from the ones that are closer from him. The cell phone then becomes something like a social and cultural shell that covers the individual wherever he goes. It is frequent to observe someone who, in a strange environment, avoids the regular embarrassments related with the relationship with new people. By clinging to the cell

phone, this individual shows that his universe is not that one, that he has his own personal relations circle, and thereby creating a barrier against the approach of others. More and more the act of being at a cell phone serves as a sign of unavailability for the progress of the others within the same space, as were used before the newspaper reading or the writing act. The cell phone thus reinforces a narrower communitarianism, constituting even a social danger, inasmuch as, at more complex circumstances, the individual is driven to consult relatives and friends and to act upon such consultation, rather than creating their own assessment. The local peculiarities impose themselves at open social ambiences. Hans Grese discusses the same question, in a subsequent text (Grese, 2005), if the cell phone is not subverting the social order when reducing the individuals' normative context to the small group of the primary relationships.

The ubiquitous communication promotes, on the other hand, the agendas deregulation and the lack of coordination of the social roles. Indeed, the complex planning of actions, characteristic from advanced societies, and which required a timely coordination with multiple players, now gives way to a micro-management of agendas, made by cell phone, where the players constantly negotiate with each other, and sometimes until the last minute; at what time, their meeting points and actions. With this, we witness, simultaneously to mitigate the boundaries between the working world and the leisure one, between the time dedicated to the profession and to the family, between the public and private sector.

There is no doubt that the cell phone increases freedom and end users' autonomy when giving them much wider options when taking positions and actions. But, at all these autonomy gain cases, there is a corresponding increase in responsibility and control over the choices made. It is through the ubiquitous communication that individuals feel a bigger social pressure and face a greater demand for justification and legitimization of their actions.

> The freedom that is gained by being able to contact any person at any time is contradicted, at least partially, by the growing obligation to answer incoming calls and to keep in touch with their family and friends who are expecting to be contacted (Geser, 2004, 16).

In the other hand, the advantages of temporary disconnection are also lost. The social relations are developed in alternated phases of interactions and latencies or stops. At this stage the actors recall separately the previous interactions, evaluate what is being done and get prepared for the next meetings. Such interruptions can be of prime importance, to motivate reflection, and also to allow the cooling of emotions, in order to avoid exaggerated reactions at the discussion heat. The ubiquitous and permanent communication, to be always in touch, brings the dilemma of deciding when to disconnect and connect

the cell phone and who will have this number. Being available all the time implies a continuing tension, from which get liberated just when we are effectively disconnected.

The social regression induced by the mobile phone, with emphasis at the communication within small communities, led to consider the ubiquitous communication as a less alienated communication form. Kate Fox (2001) sees at the mobile communication an "antidote to the pressures and alienations from the modern life"[19]. And that thanks to the "gossip", as one of the predominant application for the cell phone (Ibid)[20]. Indeed, far from considering the gossip as a negative communicational phenomenon, Fox evaluates it as a crucial means of human development as a way to

> Establish, develop and maintain the social relationships; to strengthen the ties among the members of a community, to clarify our position and social status, to create and to manage reputations; to acquire social skills; to learn and reinforce common values; to solve conflicts; to win friends and influence people (Fox, 2001).

Thus, the cell phone is the best antidote to loneliness, the isolation and alienation of the contemporary urban life. It is an escape mean from aggressive environments, such as the streets filled with unknown people at the big cities or at competitive workplaces. The cell phone is the umbilical cord with our tiny homelike world, filled with peace and harmony.

Using Kate Fox's footsteps, Kristóf Nyíri advocates that the ubiquitous communication "represents a genuine communication revolution, no less than the reversal of centuries of communicative alienation" (2005: 164). Indeed, the communication history can be seen as an ever increasing mediation, particularly with the emergence of the external memory, together with the invention of pictorial, ideographic, and phonological systems. Although such systems have increased communication, surpassing the space and time limitations, they "also gave rise to a growing disharmony among the original intent and some of the communications vehicles" (2005: 161). The greater sophistication of the communication vehicles lead to a distancing from what was originally thought by the sender and what was effectively received by the final recipient. The original communication face to face, predominantly at the basic social communities, such as family or the small tribal group, were being tampered over the centuries, exactly by the introduction of

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[19] "The space-age technology of mobile phones has allowed us to return to the more natural and humane communication patterns of pre-industrial society, when we lived in small, stable communities, and enjoyed frequent 'grooming talk' with a tightly integrated social network. In the fast-paced modern world, we had become severely restricted in both the quantity and quality of communication with our social network. Mobile gossip restores our sense of connection and community, and provides an antidote to the pressures and alienation of modern life. Mobiles are a 'social lifeline' in a fragmented and isolating world." (Fox, 2001).

[20] "Most human conversation is essentially gossip, so it should come as no surprise that most conversation on mobile phones is also about social matters. Only 17 per cent of respondents in our national survey said that they use their mobile phones mainly for 'work purposes'; the majority use their phones mainly for 'keeping in touch', social chatting and gossiping. Our survey found that three quarters of respondents gossip on their mobiles at least once a week, with about a third indulging in mobile gossip every day" (Fox, 2001).

technologies that, facilitating the message content transmission, omitted the phatic and emotional contextualization from the intervenors. Nowadays, the mobile communication "points to a future where some of the communication characteristics from local communities will be restored" (2005: 169). Obviously, Nyíri is referring, from one point of view, at the communication immediacy, to the fact of speak directly, in real time, with other person and to be able to react at the same moment, preventing and correcting misunderstandings, but on the other hand, this author has in mind the full richness of the communicative act, carrying with it all the sensorial and emotional components; as voice tone, pauses, silences, hesitations, that distinguish any real and concrete communication.

Closing this brief review from the recent literature regarding the cell phone role at the modern human identity, we can see that the picture is differentiated, with some authors emphasizing the potential autonomy of action that the cell phone promotes, and with other authors, namely Hans Gese, pointing to the social regression, and even to a narrowed experience field, caused by the cell phone. The ubiquitous communication can open up the world, but may also close it, keeping us locked up inside the cultural and social group shell built by the cell phone around us, and that we carry like a snail wherever we dislocate. After stating this point, let's get back to Heidegger's cell phone, to the question of the cell phone as a contemporary human existence constituent, to the uses that characterize the inauthenticity from everyday life and to the possibilities that open to a more authentic life. The answers to these questions will inevitably refer towards a cell phone ethics and aesthetics .

EXISTENTIAL DISTANCE, THE CELL PHONE ETHICS

According to Heidegger, the mode as the human being is in the world is radically different from other worldly entities mode. While these creatures are purely and simply here or there, located in their extension by other extensions that enclose them, the human being is more characterized by the distance (*Entfernung*) than by the place. So, in his spatiality, he is never here, but always there, from where he returns to his place, here, by the interpretative care (*Besorgnis*) (Heidegger, 1979:. 107-108)[21]. Undoubtedly, the *Dasein* is always situated, but this situation is, rather than locative, the caring type (*umsorgend*) and provident one (*vorsorgend*). This distance does not mean, however, distancing (*Entfernheit*). On the contrary, this distance is the *Dasein`s* ability to make the distancing disappear, as the remoteness, meaning the capacity to get closer (1979: 105)[22]. Just as far from their starting point, wherever

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[21] *"Das Dasein ist gemäß seiner Räumlichkeit zunächst nie hier, sondern dort, aus welchem Dort es auf sein Hier zurückkommt und das wiederum nur in der Weise, daß es sein besorgendes Sein zu ... aus dem Dortzuhandenen her auslegt".*
[22] *"Entfernen besagt ein Verschwindenmachen der Ferne, das heißt der Entfernheit von etwas, Näherung".*

they are, human beings have the tendency to turn near what is far away. *"Dasein has a major tendency towards the proximity"* (ibid.)[23].

It is precisely at this point in the exposition about *Dasein's* existential distance, that Heidegger refers to the role of the radio (a technology that just then beginning to become popular) "at a still inestimable approach within the world, via an enlargement and destruction of the everyday world around us" (Ibid.)[24]. It is a brief reference – as an aside, that by the way it is not repeated during his work – a subject that Heidegger does not deepen, not even develops, but that it is extremely valuable to analyze the cell phone in the perspective of the existential analytics and the end users identity.

The existential distance, inherent and structural to the human being as being- -in-the-world, does not disappear by any social, cultural or technological circumstance. Even though being "body and soul" anywhere or fully engaging to a task or enterprise, the human being does not get confused with that momentary "there". There is something like a gap that prevents the total immersion and the corresponding identity loss. The innate tendency of *Dasein* to become near what is far away lies precisely at the primordial distance compared to what surrounds it and to other people that the *Dasein* lives with and shares the everyday life. Thus, the cell phone, far from annihilate the existential distance, potencializes it on an extraordinary way. To a higher degree than the radio, the cell phone reform, transform and readjust our relations of proximity and framing with the vast faraway world and with the familiar world near us.

Heidegger, although making an exception regarding the unpredictability of the approximation of the world operated by the radio, believes that this approximation happens through the widening and the destruction of the everyday surrounding world (*Umwelt*). More than eight decades later, enriched by the experience with technologies even more powerful in bringing the world together, such as television, phones, the Internet and cell phones; and familiar with multiples theories about the electronic media, we see that the world approximation, happened through several forms, not the ones supposed by Heidegger. More than approximate the vast world, the media has fragmented it, creating new worlds, and turning some near and others distant. The radio was an important factor in the nationalism emergence that would lead to World War II and nowadays the media plurality and diversity approximates as well as tribalizes

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[23] *"Im Dasein liegt eine wesenhafte Tendez auf Nähe". (p. 105)."* Italics in the original.
[24] *"Mit dem Rundfunk zum Beispiel vollzieht das Dasein heute in eine in ihrem Daseinssinn noch nicht übersehbare Entfernung der Welt, auf dem Wege einer Erweiterung und Zerstörung der alltäglichen Umwelt".*

what it approaches. The widening of the everyday small world happened in a partial and unilateral way, leading to the planet urbanization, the creation of megalopolis of tens of millions people, who know about the faraway and ignores the nearness. What about the world approximation through the destruction of the small world, the nuclear communities, namely of the family, we can not say, by no means, that has occurred in a single direction or uniformly. The media developed both centrifugal and centripetal forces. The communication theories, namely the *two-step flow* one, the *agenda setting* and the spiral of silence theory, showed how the world got closer to the vision of the surrounding world. That means that, the big world approaches us, shaped by the small world surrounding us. The media effects on the relationship of the *Dasein* with the world have been far more diverse and complex than the ones previewed by Heidegger.

Let's return to the question of human identity and the use of mobile phone as an identitary element. We saw at a first approach that the cell phone would contribute to an inauthentic identity when it reinforces the chatter as a usual way of comprehension of the *Dasein's* at the everydayness. However, the Heidegger's analysis of human identity, simply seen in terms of authenticity and inauthenticity, sins for being too short. There is no need to recur to the radical critique of Adorno to reject Heidegger's analysis as "jargon of the authenticity that constitutes *par excellence,* in the XX century, the German phenomenon of resentment" (Adorno, 1997: 209); very close thinkers to Heidegger as Eugen Fink (1995) and Karl Löwith (2002) recorded basic insufficiencies in this analysis. Fink considered, and very well, that the *Dasein*, even though breaking – by its essential mundaneness - with the tradition of the formal and vague subject from the transcendental philosophy, does not have a real concreteness. Indeed, it is not masculine, neither feminine, slave or master, and existential phenomena as fundamental as love, work and play, are ignored in the Heidegger's analysis. Löwith, in turn, denounces the nihilism from the decision as an authentic existence, and even ironizes about the authenticity vacuum, saying that they, Heidegger's disciples, were determined, just did not know to what (2002:29)[25].

Despite the insufficiencies from *Dasein`s* identity analysis, Heidegger's deep intuition that human identity is projective, that is not given from the beginning, but something to build in an existentially way; it is a still valid concept. And it is from this point that we should face the cell phone role in the personal identification process. But such process should be analyzed *in concreto*, taking into account the existential peculiarities of the human being. As the love letters, in the XIX century, were a crucial element in the identity of two lovers, today we do not see a passionate relationship between two young people without

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[25] *"Wodurch Heidegger zunächst auf uns wirkte, war nicht die Erwartung eines neuen Systems, sondern gerade das inhaltlich Unbestimmte und bloß Appelierende seines philosophischen Wollens, seine geistige Intensität und Konzentration auf 'das Eine was not tut'. Erst später wurde uns klar, daß dieses Eine eigentlich nichts war, eine pure Entschlossenheit, von der nicht festand, wozu? 'Ich bin entschlossen, nur weiß ich nicht wozu', hieß der treffliche Witz, den ein Student eines Tages erfand."*

the cell phones mediation. Nowadays, the constant requirement to say to the other one that we love him/her and to listen back that we are loved; it is only solved via cell phone. The care of a parent for small children in a large metropolis requires the umbilical and permanent communication through the mobile phones. And certain professions, which require a total availability at any time, as firefighters or rescue teams, can not dismiss the ubiquitous communication. In these concrete existences the cell phone is a necessary element from the assumed and intended identity. If it is difficult or even impossible to tell if an authentic existence is compatible with the cell phone use, it is relatively easy to say it in defined circumstances and ventures. An authentic love may demand a cell phone, a full commitment to a cause may demand a cell phone, and so in multiple life options.

Obviously, the acquisition and use of cell phones do not result in most cases, existential specific requirements. It has a cell phone because it solves things, because it is practical, because everybody has one. The lack of a compelling reason to have and use a cell phone is not, however, synonymous with an inauthentic existence. It is a fact that many of the uses of the cell phone can be considered as alienating, as an escape from reality, as an excuse to make decisions autonomically, as a way to live in the margins or on the surface of things. But the normal use of cell is not usually based on criteria of authenticity or alienation. Therefore, more important than to differentiate among the alienating and not alienating cell phone uses will be to make the distinction among its uses and abuses in their application and, thus, establish the principles of the cell phone ethics.

There are occasions when the use of the cell phone is dangerous, endangering the lives of people. The most known is certainly when someone is driving a motor vehicle. Studies have shown that the cell phone use and driving, even when using the headset, it is equally or more dangerous than drunk driving (STRAYER, DREWS and CROUCH, 2006:381-391). Also in other circumstances requiring strong concentration, such as in medical interventions, the cell phone alien use can and should be considered a serious ethical flaw. It is not necessary; however, go through such extreme cases to verify that there are rules of conduct for the cell phone use. The interruption of a simple face to face conversation to make or receive calls on the cell phone can set not only a lack of respect, but even the humiliation of the immediate interlocutor. It is a rule that nobody should make calls during a religious ceremony or a sacred space. One can certainly break the rules, but we will feel guilt, a sign of the ethical nature of the same rules. There are, thus, activities, circumstances, times and spaces, which, by principle, it is forbidden the cell phone use.

But what is the ethical foundation of these rules? There is a commitment or an inalienable obligation of the human being with the surroundings and, in particular, with other human beings who share it with him. If a stranger falls helplessly in front of me on the street is my duty to help him, if a danger threatens

someone close to me is my duty to do everything possible to prevent or avoid it, if something happened and I witnessed is my duty to tell the truth. If the cell phone, in any way, breaks this physical presence solidarity, then it should not be used, but it should be used if such solidarity requires it, to call a doctor or the police asking for help.

This solidary commitment with the surroundings and with the fellow ones is based on the existential distance. Indeed, if the human beings were in a place as any other entity, as a thing or an animal, this stay would be only at a physical or physiological order, subject to the natural needs and outside an ethical framework. But if the human being is always solidarity committed with the surroundings, this is due to the opening from the very existential distance. The freedom that the ethical commitment of being human presupposes has a shape of projection, which, in turn, it is only possible by the existential distance.

When arriving to the foundation of the ethical rules of the cell phone use, it becomes easier to analyze the more trivial situations of this use and to establish the basic rules of a correct use.[26] In the literature devoted to the cell phone there are several references to its intrusive nature (Ling, 2004:123-143).[27] Leaving aside the extreme cases of cell phone dependence or addiction, some of them at the almost pathological forum, we only need the everyday experience to verify abuses with the cell phone. To receive and make calls when using a public transport or at enclosed public spaces normally cause discomfort and even a disturbance to the surrounding people. In such circumstances it is expected, at least, that the phone call may be done quietly and for a short period, and if there is a possibility, it is hoped that the tele-speaker get away or even leave the site. However, from an ethical point of view, far more important than the rules of the use related with the external context, are the rules of bilateral conduct among those who make and receive calls. While, sometimes, violations to external regulations are only anecdotal episodes, with no moral relevance, there are cell phone uses that are true abuses and serious ethical faults. To successively call, and at inappropriate times, to someone as a form of pressure is clearly an abuse; putting out loud, listen by everyone listen; a call that the interlocutor believes to be a conversation between two persons is clearly an abuse; not answering a scheduled call from someone who needs to talk to us and that we have the compromise to hear it, it is clearly an abuse; call indiscriminately to several contacts, merely to escape from their very boredom is clearly an abuse.

The intrusive nature of the cell phone, the possibility of someone entering the life of someone else at any time and instant, turns always in an abuse when this someone tries to tie a person to a situation. We saw

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[26] Obviously I limit myself to the cell phone use as mobile phone, apart from other functions that the devices now incorporate, as the photographic camera, productivity tools, contact list, calendar, and games.
[27] In particular Ling, 2004. Chapter VI entitled "The Intrusive Nature of Mobile Telephony"

earlier that the way to be truly human is the distance. Because whenever someone uses cell phone seeking to eliminate this form of being, or when we seek to condition the human being in the form of being, stealing the choice of options given by the existential distance, so we have an abuse. The fundamental ethical restriction on the cell phone use is not to eliminate, not to condition, not to constrain, the interlocutors' existential distance, including his own.

The multiples and various appropriations of the cell phone by different people, countries, cultures and generations, with its own rules and different use habits, may not be sufficient cause to advocate an ethical relativism when it comes to the cell phone.[28] If a region of the world has its own uses rules for it, different from those followed in other cultures, it is for ethical research to ascertain the common grounds and dialogue points of between the different positions.

To conclude; the phone not only started a new era of human communication, as introduced and changed the form of be and being. The reactions may be of euphoria, technological optimistic, as can be apocalyptic, of deep pessimism regarding the human being future in the midst of a technological society. My intention with this text was reject both ways, the euphoric and the apocalyptic, and show how the Martin Heidegger's existentialist philosophy can contribute to a cell phone theorization. It is possible to live authentically using the cell phone, as to live inauthentically without it. There are the specific circumstances, the demands raised by the concrete forms of being human, which determine whether the cell phone use contributes or not to a full life project. From all means, the mobile phone use must be done within ethical guideposts established by the existential specificity of the human being, of being in the world in the distance form and of living the existence as a project.

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[28] See more on this subject at *Digital Media Ethics* (Ess, 2009).

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