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A QUESTION OF PROGRESS: FACE-TO-FACE RELATIONSHIPS VERSUS FACE-TO-SCREEN RELATIONSHIPS

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Abstract

Information and communication technology (ICT) is widely considered to be an essential factor in qquiring what is commonly known as 'progress'. The proliferation of this technology has determined the proliferation of social relationships as space-time bonds have been overcome. Moreover, due to widespread communication devices, individuals are more accessible and we are able to reach whoever we want, whenever we want to – this happens almost seamlessly.

Are the dynamics that characterize relationships mediated by ICT the same traditional unmediated relationships? In other words, is the nature of the interaction that characterizes a phone call the same as a face-to-face one? It is in this context that face-to-screen relationships have been identified in contrast to the face-to-face relationships. This contraposition is useful in order to examine the difference between these kinds of relationships.

This paper will explore the content of social relationships: everyday life comes to the fore through the perspective endorsed by Heidegger (1962) in his most important work: Being and Time. Through the concepts of idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity it has been possible to emphasise those aspects of every day life in which social relationships constitute a basis in order to question if the spread of mediated relationships supports the dynamics in relation to these three concepts.

Finally, the proliferation of mediated relationships and the contextual decrease in importance of face-to-face relationships has led to a scenario whereby the term 'progress', introduced in the beginning of this introduction, is not representative. This is an introductory paper in which a series of hypotheses have been posed on the proliferation of social relationships mediated by ICT, but these hypotheses require an empirical validation.

Keywords: face-to-face relationships, face-to-screen relationship, ICT, scopic media.

1 INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technology (ICT) is considered to be an essential factor in reaching what is commonly known as 'progress'. At the beginning of the 1990s the fact that the expression *information society* was already a buzzword is significant in this respect. *Information society* is a much sought after goal in advanced societies and ICT has constituted the backbone on which to build such an *Information Society*. In this paper, the focus is on a specific type of ICT, identified by the term mediating technology (Thompson 1967) and scopic media (Knorr Cetina 2005). Mediating technology (scopic media can also be considered to be a part of it) differentiates itself because it supports and enables interaction and coordination among people. The telephone, for example, is a typical example of mediating technology, but nowadays this kind of device is far more widespread. The proliferation of such devices has determined the spread of social relationships, which in turn have been mediated by ICT. In the past, mediated relationships required an exchange of letters, this relationship has changed significantly. Space-time bonds have been overcome and due to widespread communication devices, individuals are more accessible and we are able to reach whoever we want, whenever we want to – this happens almost seamlessly.

At this point, it is beneficial to ask the question: Are the dynamics that characterize relationships mediated by ICT the same traditional unmediated relationships? In other words, the nature of the interaction that characterizes a phone call is the same as a face-to-face one? In order to investigate this question, it is necessary to explore the work of Schutz (1962), Berger and Luckmann's (1967) phenomenological sociology which draws on the philosophical perspective of phenomenology founded by Husserl (1931). This perspective posits conscience as the basis on which intentionality and, then, the construction of reality takes place in each of us. This questions whether face-to-face relationships impose themselves on our conscience in the same way as in the case of relationships mediated by ICT. It is important to mention that this work focuses only marginally on the latter, as his work dates back to the beginning of the last century in the Husserl's case, the 1930s and the 1960s in the case of Schutz, Berger and Luckmann's cases respectively. Knorr Cetina and Bruegger (2002a; 2002b) also explores phenomenological sociology, but their studies are more recent and focused on social microstructures established in global financial markets where ICT lay at the very heart of how they operate. It is in this context that the face-to-screen relationships have been identified in contrast to the face-to-face relationships. This contraposition is useful in order to examine the difference between the two kinds of relationships which also takes into consideration the distinctions that typified the functioning of global microstructures and social relationships mediated by ICT.

The main body of this paper is more dedicated to the content rather than the nature of social relationships. More precisely, every day life comes into focus through the perspective posed by Heidegger (1962) in some parts of his most important work: Being and Time. Through the concepts of idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity it has been possible to emphasize some aspects of every day life in which social relationships constitute its basis in order to question if the spread of mediated relationships supports the dynamics related to these three concepts.

Berger, Luckmann's (1967), Knorr Cetina, Bruegger (2002a; 2002b) and Heidegger's work represent the foundation on which it has been possible to explore the differences between mediated relationships and unmediated relationships, such as face-to-face ones and, more generally, every day life. The last part of this paper is dedicated to analyzing if the spread of mediated relationships and the contextual decrease in importance of face-to-face relationships led to a scenario whereby the term 'progress', introduced in the beginning of this introduction is appropriate. At a first glance, it would be difficult to say that the term "progress" can represent the proliferation of mediated technologies. However, this result is not based on an empirical work, it is not based on research work carried out in the field. This is an introductory paper in which a series of hypotheses have been formulated on the proliferation of social relationships mediated by ICT, but these hypotheses require an empirical validation.

2 MEDIATING TECHNOLOGY AND SCOPIC MEDIA

The term technology evokes different objects and for this reason it is not an easy task to define. Several tentative definitions have been proposed in this respect but Thompson's work (1967) is insightful and lends itself to this paper's objectives. Actually, Thompson uses a specific meaning of the term technology which

encompasses the entire activities which enable a desirable outcome to be reached. Therefore, there are technologies that can reach, from an instrumental point of view, a nearly perfect outcome (i.e. chemical process) and others in which the outcome is not so straight forward. This is the reason why Thompson talks about variations in technologies rather then technology in its strictest sense and these variations are subdivided into long-linked technology, mediating technology and intensive technology. The assembly line exemplifies long-linked technology due to the fact that it works out a serial interdependence among its elements in order to reach a specific outcome. Intensive technology functions differently: the interdependences among its elements are not established but are subject to the feedback produced by them. In this proposal, let's consider hospitals and the process of medical treatment, the steps that characterise it are directly related to the effects produced by previous actions. Mediating technology operates differently from other technologies, it is not characterized by the fact that it enables a sequence of interdependences that leads to an outcome, but brings together actors, both individuals and organizations, who intend to be interdependent amongst each other. One such example is represented by telecoms as they provide communication services among people eager to be in touch.

ICT can be subdivided into long-linked technology (i.e. Enterprise Resource Planning Systems), mediating technology (i.e. groupware systems) and intensive technology (i.e. videogames) (Ciborra 1993). The fact that mediating technology is currently proliferating across all social levels takes on an important relevance here. If the land phone can be considered the precursor in this respect, the introduction of the mobile phone has considerably changed the modalities through which mediated personal communications takes place. Once, phone calls require the subscribers' presence in a specific place, essentially the home and the workplace, but now this is no longer necessary. Space-time bonds have been overcome and calls can occur at any given moment. With the introduction of SMS (short message service) and MMS (multimedia messaging services) texts and images have been added to voice communication as far as it concerns communication means supported by telephone sets.

The widespread use of the internet has allowed other types of mediating technology to enter in our every day life. Usual examples are e-mail, online chat rooms and more recently social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. In particular, social networks are considered to be a peculiar mediating technology. The notion of scopic media (Knorr Cetina 2005) can be useful in this respect. In fact, this media not only supports personal relationships or coordination actions amongst individuals but also to "see" what is allowed within the realm of scopic media. A good reference point in this respect is the periscope. Through this instrument, it becomes possible to monitor a specific context. In other words, this media not only supports data and image transmission but also enables the collection and the display of events, interests and activities in order to be accessed by a large audience. Materials of different features such as pictures, videos, texts and audios are collated and assembled questioning and stimulating whoever comes in contact with them.

The philosophical concept of appresentation (Husserl 1960; Schutz & Luckmann 1973) is introduced by Knorr Cetina (2005) in order to analyse in more detail the concept of scopic media. In particular, this work explores stock exchange traders and states that it is possible to see what they do and what they think only by observing what happens on the screen which, in turn, describes how the markets function. In other words, by having access to price fixing, the screens "appresents" the financial markets. Only some clues (e.g. prices) are detectable and they often evoke something else (e.g. the supply and demand relationship). The so called wall on the social networking site, Facebook, is beneficial to explain this concept. Having access to a friend's wall, there is not a direct connection with the individual. Nor is there any interaction but, in some sense, the individual can be "seen", it is possible to acquire information about what he/she is doing, where he/she is, what he/she is thinking about etc. without establishing any sort of link. Indeed, Facebook works in similar way to how the screens function for stock exchange traders - market activities continue to operate across time zones without any interruption.

If we move on from the expansion of telecommunication networks to phones to explore the widespread usage of palms (personal digital assistant) and of so called smartphones it leads to an overlapping of technologies which had previously been confined to the use of the handset and personal computers. For instance, to have portable access to an e-mail box is easily achievable through the use of a smartphone. Similarly, phone calls can be made from a personal computer through a software package such as Skype.

This phenomenon throws light on two important characteristics of mediating technology: the development of standards and of social and technological networks (Ciborra 1993). Regarding the first characteristic, the potential of mediating technology is directly related to its capacity to support different means of

communication which are independent from any one technological device. The fact that an individual can access an e-mail box through a smartphone, or can update a Facebook profile, or talk on the phone or send an SMS is relevant to this proposal. All of these elements contribute towards establishing favorable conditions in which to interact due to such widespread technological networks. In this way, the possibility of setting up and cultivating social relationships is greatly enhanced and promoted.

Among the effects considered to be related to the current proliferation of mediating technology, there is the so called "textualization" (Zuboff 1988). The man-machine interface, typical of this technology, is characterized by a screen, the component through which interactions take place. The screen, even though it supports multimedia content such as video and images, mainly enables the textual form in the communication process rather than other forms. The propagation of "textualization" raises issues related to implications on a cognitive and social level to the use of this technology.

One of the first solutions to this issue dates back to studies promoted by the Rand Corporation (Hahm & Bikson 1988; Bikson 1991) at the end of the 1980s. In these studies, the effects of mediating technology on a cognitive and social level has already been emphasized. For instance, personal relationships benefited from several solutions designed to overcome space-time bonds in the fields of communication, exchange data and information. New collaborative forms may well emerge as innovative socialization processes due to the fact that interactions tend to take place according to the modalities experienced before (i.e. the so called virtual reality).

Rand Corporation studies advocate that mediating technology and scopic media are seen as instruments to pursue what, may be an outdated term, 'progress'. The bonds and obstacles to communication has been overcome in a relatively short time giving way to more innovative interaction modalities whereby new forms of collaboration become possible. As far as it concerns creativity and other cognitive processes: to have at one's disposal the kind of data and information (in terms of its quality and quantity) never experienced before has meant a positive contribution to the learning processes and self perception of that society.

As in this case and the one detailed by the Rand Corporation, the objective is not to examine mediating technology or scopic media in a specific context such as in the workplace or relationships with public administration (e-government) or entertainment. Nowadays, this technology is no longer confined to a specific place (e.g. the home or the workplace) it is a highly portable device which slips neatly into the pocket. What are the consequences of these situations in which highly portable and accessible devices are with us? What can be taken as a point of reference from what has been proposed in these studies? Is it, actually, "progress" to significantly increase the range of social relationships available, to cultivate them, to overcome the issue of space-time bonds, and to have at one's disposal a quantity and quality of data and information in real time that was unthinkable a few decades ago? To investigate these points, the focus must centre, firstly, on direct social relationships. Relationships in which the other person is physically present as in face-to-face relationships. This investigation needs to be followed by relationships in which the other person is not physically present but is in a response-presence way (Knorr Cetina & Bruegger 2002).

3   UNMEDIATED SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FACE TO FACE RELATIONSHIPS

The perspective used to examine face-to-face relationships refers to phenomenological sociology and, in particular, to Berger and Luckmann's work (1967). This perspective has at its foundation Schutz's research (1970) which attributes the importance of the conscience to define a sense of reality. His research follows the philosophical school founded by Husserl (1931). The conscience is in fact considered to be the origin of intentionality and, as such, it is always directed towards an object. This means that whatever is the entity to which intentionality is addressed, a conscience is aroused. This entity could be the New York skyline or the perception of a state of anguish. However, it renders conscience perceivable and its nature leads individuals to confront themselves with different spheres of reality. Dreaming and everyday life, for example, represent two distinct spheres even though the latter is the dominant sphere, it is a reality par excellence, and one that imposes itself on conscience in an intense and profound way. Individuals pay attention to the here and now and are often only aware of what the body is doing at that precise moment. But at the basis of the concept of reality lays not only the intentionality towards what surrounds ourselves, but the notion of social interaction and language (the means through which they take place) which contribute to the definition of reality as well.

Face-to-face relationships have a particular importance among modalities, and it is through these modalities that social interaction occurs. It is in this instance that a person is able to acquire awareness of other persons in a distinctive way. It is at the precise moment when an individual encounters another person that he/she becomes aware of the other person's subjectivity as it becomes fully realised in these relationships. In fact, I would go further in this analysis to suggest that in face-to-face situations the other person becomes more real than onself. It is evident that each of us, as individuals, have a better knowledge about ourselves but this demands the individual to engage in reflection. This results in focusing on a different sphere of reality. But this involvement is impossible in this case, due to the interaction with the other individual who becomes the focus of attention. In other words, attention is focused on the relationship rather than the mood of the protagonist..

The dynamics which characterise face-to-face relationships leads to further considerations. Usually, an encounter with a third person is guided by a reciprocal typification through which all interactions are based. In other words, I categorise the persons who stands in front of me: as a colleague, a client, or an enemy etc. and the other person does the same. This attitude determines the nature of the relationship established with a specific person. However, in face-to-face situations this is only partially valid. The why is related to the fact that the interlocutor's expressiveness is fully accessible as is his/her way of behaving, his/her way of speaking so that, inevitably, these ways interfere in the reciprocal typification. It is in these situations that the concept of realty acquires a specific meaning, reality is not established once and for all in these situations, it is always subject to the evolution of the relationship. These interferences tend to lose momentum as in the case of indirect interactions such as those written in correspondence, for example by e-mail.

Focusing on the means through which social interactions take place, a further difference emerges between direct interaction and indirect interaction. In the latter, language is the only way in which to interact but this is not the case in face-to-face situations. Certainly, language continues to be fundamental but other factors contribute to also characterise interaction. Facial expressions, gesturing, the tone of voice etc. reinforce meaning in these situations, and only then, can the terms of reality take shape.

Face-to-face relationships impose themselves on a conscience in a particular way in comparison to other forms of social interaction. Here, the emotional aspect is decisive but it is not the same in indirect interactions. This is the reason why the role of these relationships is important in the construction of identity and the socialisation process. In the process of primary socialisation which takes place early in life (in childhood and adolescence), the emotional sphere is determinant and is fundamental for the appropriate evolution of this process. It is during this phase of the life-cycle that we identify with people who are vitally important to us and, who are normally inside or near to the family circle. It is in this context that our own orientation about our position within social life becomes apparent. Primary socialisation constitutes the basis for secondary socialisation which is represented by the knowledge related to a specific role within the society. Here, the "world" par excellence transmitted to us by our loved ones loses its imprint on us in favour of institutional "underworlds" established by the division of labour processes and positions occupied in society. This provokes a detachment away from the safe harbour provided by the primary socialisation process.

If individuals are to become aware of their role in society, these processes have to work within a specific framework which in turn supports the individual's role. Conversation as a means of communication is also a crucial factor in this regard. However, the actual conversation is not as important as the context in which it takes place, the atmosphere, what is taken for granted and the contextual framework. All of these factors contribute to give shape to what has been defined as the plausibility structure in order for that identity to be maintained.

Berger and Luckmann's work (1967) not only focus on factors which are at the basis of the socialisation process and the construction of identity but also focus on those ones which can hamper this process. In particular, problems can emerge when primary socialisation has not been fully accomplished. When, for instance, an individual's of relationships has not been characterised by the affective and emotional spheres which are so important in the construction of identity during childhood. However, socialisation problems can surface when the individual finds him/herself in a situation in which there are alternative plausibility structures. In such circumstances, it is not so easy for the individual to identify him/herself in a specific role. A deficiency in the identification process that mainly typifies secondary socialisation is directly related, even in this case, to situations in which the affective sphere is not fully involved/engaged. It is in these situations that the "acting" phenomenon can appear. In this instance, individuals, to some degree, calculate their role

and are acutely aware that other roles are possible at the same time. This, obviously, leads to negative effects towards the construction of an identity. The idea of what is taken of granted is extremely important in creating that background in which personal traits are formed. However, in the case of the "acting" phenomenon there is a large discrepancy between how an individual sees him/self and how he/she is perceived by others.

4   MEDIATED SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FACE-TO-SCREEN RELATIONSHIPS

So far, the focus has been on unmediated interpersonal relationships of which face-to-face ones are the most relevant example. But relationships can also be mediated. Correspondence is a classical example in this respect as it is possible to establish and maintain a relationship despite problems relating to the individuals proximity to each other. The development of ICT has allowed the proliferation of modalities by which interpersonal relationships can be mediated both through synchronous (phone, chat etc.) and asynchronous (email, SMS, etc.) means. To put at the centre of the analysis mediated relationships means to set aside the typical communication mode face-to-face relationships in order to examine if we are actually dealing with something different or not.

As it has previously been mentioned, Knorr Cetina and Bruegger's work (Knorr Cetina & Bruegger 2002a)(Knorr Cetina & Bruegger 2002b) are the crucial points of reference in this regard. Here, ICT is conceived of as the nervous system through which mediated interactions develop given that traditional correspondence has been ousted by such technology. This technology, specifically in the case of synchronous systems, differentiates itself from correspondence because it forces the other person to be present, albeit in a way mediated by these systems. Therefore, it is possible to talk about relationships in which the interlocutor is not present physically but is in a so called response-presence (Knorr Cetina & Bruegger 2002a). This means that at any given moment and wherever, we can be questioned, engaged in and accessible to such interaction.

References to correspondence could suggest situations in which only two people are involved but this is no longer true nowadays. The characteristics of scopic media are insightful in this respect but also the use of the mailing lists via email enables a series of interactions amongst a group of people to be monitored. What happens in these situations is that we do not watch each other but we watch what goes on on a screen. With the exception of phone calls, the screen becomes the interface through which it is possible to monitor the direction of a series of relationships in which we are participants in. This is the reason why it is possible to talk about face-to-screen relationships (Knorr Cetina & Bruegger 2002a). All of this leads to several implications. Firstly, the 'here and now', that characterises face-to-face relationships no longer has any relevance. Only time (synchronous ways) and not space can be the common dominator of such relationships. Furthermore, if a specific place is no longer a unifying pint in which to interact, there are nowadays conditions to establish such interactions at any given time. To have at one's disposal a device such as a smartphone enables the possibility to maintain a series of relationships in a continuous way. Here, to maintain means one's intention to call or to be called in a specific interaction but also to control it, to monitor and to be continuously concerned about its evolution. In theory, all important relationships are characterised by around-the-clock response-presence. Relationships with colleagues, friends and family members, who were circumscribed in a specific place, expand and overlap without interruption.

So far, the analysis has not taken into consideration the role of face-to-face relationships. Of course the latter continues to be fundamental and everyday life is still characterised by these relationships. Therefore, there are situations in which, on the one hand, attention is paid to a screen or a handset which enables a relationship to be maintained in a mediated way, but, on the other hand, attention is paid to the person who is physically present during face-to-face interactions. Knorr Cetina & Bruegger (2002a) refer to the concept of double orientation (Goffman 1981) in order to analyse this phenomenon. Double orientation outlines a situation in which a subject is simultaneously exposed to both a screen or device and the physical presence of another person. In this respect, it is possible to envisage a division of labour of the senses whereby, on the one side, the sight is involved, and, on the other side, the voice and hearing is engaged. The concept of disembedding, proposed by Giddens (1990) in order to describe the passage of social relationships from contexts in which they are embedded in local milieus to those contexts in which they have been reformulated due to the fact that they cover undetermined space and time spans, is useful for investigating situations

whereby different interactions can take place simultaneously. On the one hand, there is the interlocutor that talks to me and looks at me or the social context in which I find myself in. On the other hand, the screen or handset continuously reflects and mirrors what is happening remotely and this becomes the object of interest.

The notion of a community of time (Schutz 1970) informs not only the characteristics of unmediated relationships but also of mediated ones. In fact, the latter is qualified by temporal synchronicity, continuity and immediacy and there is also the possibility of following their evolution. The point, here, is to see if these relationships differentiate themselves or not. In other words, are the modalities through which they impose themselves on the conscience the same? Certainly, in the case of scopic media, it is possible to access a narration of a series of events. Images, audios, videos and texts can be combined so that it becomes possible to follow the pattern of specific relationships.

In the previous paragraph the focus centred on conversation as an instrument for defining reality which in turn helps to identity each of us. But what is the nature of mediated conversations? Certainly, the differences are not significant when speaking on the phone even though the other person is not physically present. However, it is not the same talking on the phone to a person and interacting with him/her face-to-face – there is always a physical distance when communicating by telephone. But what happens when using SMS, for instance? How do the bonds which surround communication capabilities influence conversations? Unquestionably, the richness of expressiveness typical in face-to-face relationships is not present in mediated relationships and in the case of email the terms of conversation are not so distant from those present in correspondence. In this instance of scopic media, they (scopic media – the latter) not only support indirect conversations but also conversations as appresentation. As it has already been mentioned above, relationships occur on the basis of language and other modalities such as images, videos and sounds. The possibility to follow the hoarding of all such media, step by step, allows us to construct a series of meanings which has reference to a specific relationship.

Inevitably, to be involved in relationships has to do with body parts. During face-to-face relationships, the body plays a direct role and actively contributes to the interaction process, so much so, that Goffman (1983) talks about bodily anchoring in the meaning transmission due to physicalness present during the interaction. Given that relationships are mediated, it does not mean, however, that the body is not involved in defining the nature of relationships. To have any sort of device in the pocket or to sit down in front of a screen we are unavoidably exposed to other people and to their calls. Each and every one of us is continuously subject to the other's "closeness" and at any given time the other person's communication can interrupt the course of our every day life. It is this interruption, incursion and overlapping with other ongoing relationships that influences the corporeity of each one of us.

5   EVERY DAY LIFE: IDLE TALKS, CURIOSITY AND AMBIGUITY

One of the objectives of this paper is not only to study the nature of mediated and unmediated social relationships but also to investigate the contents of such relationships. In other words, how does every day life continue? What sort of relationships emerge from how we relate each other? Which dynamics characterise these relationships? How are they, experienced, interpreted and understood?

In order to try to answer these questions, Heidegger's work (1962) is used as point of reference. At this point, it is important to outline some preliminary remarks. References to Heidegger's work is circumscribed and is considered to be arbitrary. Only some parts of his work have been considered due to the fact that it focuses on every day life. In particular, attention has been paid on some factors that determine everyday life rather than its philosophical interpretation.

In some sense, everyday life impresses itself onto our existence. A specific way of doing things and of behaving that is both recognized and legitimised in a large part of society is imposed on. In other words, specific rules for interpreting what is going on become enforced. Ordinarily, all of this goes unnoticed. As it has already been mentioned, reciprocal typifications can be used as guides in order to establish relationships with each other. These typifications follow the same logic as far as it concerns modalities through which they impose themselves. They are, to a large extent, taken for granted, but they considerably determine the characteristics of relationships. In this context, each one of us is influenced by this state of affair. Inevitably, it is the comprehension and the interpretation of events which plays a defining role.

So called idle talks contribute towards defining the characteristics of everyday life. Heidegger (1962) points out that there is no depreciative intention in the use of these terms. Rather, the phenomenon of idle talks is indicative for understanding and interpreting everyday life as it reveals certain comprehension modalities and emotional situations. Such idle talks brings with them an installed interpretation of the world. There is not the aim to go into great depth as far as it concerns the subjects of the discussion. In contrast, the focus is centred on discourse. Subjects are dealt with in a superficial and rough way leading to a common intention (it is the discourse that brings about comprehension). It is discourse which is relevant and is orientated towards larger groups in society and therefore acquires an authority. The state of affairs related to a specific issue provides a common understanding but this is at a risk: that this understanding becomes groundless. Idle talks generate the capacity to understand everything but in a superficial and unarticulated way. In some sense, they prevent understanding being imposed in a determined way to see things and the possibility to experience them emotionally not according to pre-arranged modes.

Idle talks go along with another phenomenon that characterises everyday life: curiosity. Curiosity is related to seeing. Saint Augustine (1999) linked seeing to the interpretation of concupiscence. In the case of curiosity, it affirms itself in the specific way it sees things. In many respects, it is important to see rather than to see in order to understand what is being watched. Looking for something new is the springboard towards finding other new phenomena. The search for truth becomes not so relevant, what becomes vital is the possibility to dedicate him/herself to this search. Curiosity is the incapacity to dwell upon as it "does not seek the leisure of tarrying observantly, but rather seeks restlessness and the excitement of continual novelty and changing encounters" (Heidegger 1962). It leads to permanent agitation and to distraction. It is important to distinguish curiosity which, on the other hand, is the fruit of our labours and our desire to know only for knowing sake. Astonishment and wonder can be characterised differently from curiosity as it takes shape from the incapacity to dwell upon the phenomena that leads to distraction and a state of restlessness. Furthermore, curiosity is base on idle talk which suggests what are important things to read and to see reinforcing this attitude. Finally, see as a form of curiosity and conversing through idle talk actually could leads to an eradication condition.

Ambiguity is the third factor to be explored which relates to everyday life. This phenomenon originates from talks that are related to facts where, usually, there is no wonder if they have been object of reflection or not (attention is not paid on talks content. In other words, there is not the tendency to see if what is object of discussion has been the result of deep considerations or not). This means that everyone engaged in a conversation has the freedom to dispute. There is the impression that comprehension is a prerogative of everybody but there also emerges a specific way of understanding which is shared by everybody. This approach is about what has not yet happened and what is not yet available but has to be done by hearsay. It is in this area that ambiguity emerges. A form of meaning takes shape so that interest manifests itself only in the form of curiosity and idle talks – it stops when widespread premonitions about a specific phenomenon vanish. In other words, the occurrence of an object of widespread premonition removes all ambiguity, curiosity and idle talk. This is also due to the fact that there are no longer any opportunities to make conjectures and predictions. In a situation such as this one, what Heidegger (1962) calls a primary and authentic comprehension of a phenomenon can become a common understanding when it is no longer considered interesting but old and outdated and then not subject to idle talk and curiosity. It seems that idle talk and curiosity are appropriate instruments in order to disseminate information but fall short if it is related to authentic knowledge.

Idle talks, curiosity and ambiguity contribute to determine the behaviour codes of everyday life. It certainly would appear that ambiguity provides the raw material for curiosity and gives idle talks the illusion that everything is decided through this kind of discourse. These are some of the dynamics that each of us face. Certainly, these kind of dynamics influence the characteristics of relationships in which we are involved. This raises the question: what is the role of ICT in all of this? In other words, are idle talks, curiosity and ambiguity strengthened or not due to the spread of mediated relationships? Do mediating technologies such as scopic media favour what Heidegger (1962) calls a primary and authentic comprehension of phenomena or, on the contrary, do they favour a superficial and rough comprehension?

6 DISCUSSION

The scenario already outlined by the Rand Corporation studies at the end of 1980s, has already taken place. The proliferation of mediating technology and, more recently, scopic media, have brought about tangible effects which, had previously only alluded to. The fact that data, information, documents, images, videos and audios are exchanged in real time greatly favours their collection and elaboration. The same is true of coordination and collaboration among people which enables people to to overcome the bonds of space-time related to the communication process. Furthermore, the cognitive and relational faculties of users have also benefited. This means that several positive aspects can be related to the development of these technologies and their proliferation in large sections of society. The point now, is not to question the 'progress' generated by this situation but rather, to shed light on those effects related to the characteristics of social relationships and more generally on those triggered by mediating technology and scopic media in everyday life.

The features of face-to-face relationships form the points of reference in this regard. The "here and now" that defines these relationships provokes a series of dynamics that do not take place in the mediated ones. The modalities through which reality impresses itself upon the conscience in this way are without parallel in respect to other ways of interaction. It is during face-to-face situation that personalities physically encounter and for this reason what is taken for granted in the relationship disappears and is brought into question. It is during face-to-face relationships that each of us is exposed to the other person's personality and emotional and affective aspects contribute to outline the result of the interaction. What is the difference in the case of mediated relationships? Which model of interactions do they support? How do they impress themselves on the conscience and, then, on reality?

The following list could delineate the phenomenon that identifies the attributes of personal interactions and those of everyday life in situations in which mediated relationships are relevant:

- reciprocal typifications as the basis of relationships (a friend, a professor, a policeman etc.) are no longer subject to the same dynamics typical of face-to-face relationships. This means that they tend to take relationships and interactions for granted and do not subject them to any reflection. In other words, those taken for granted elements that distinguish an interaction prevail in contrast to the step by step shaping of reality that takes place during direct interaction with the other person;

- physicality continues to lose importance. Facial expressiveness, a glance or a gesture, for example, which are instrumental to the evolution of a relationship give way to language. It is language, and in particular, written language, the means through which, relationships are increasingly taking place. In this respect, Zuboff (1988) introduces the term "textualization" in order to represent the importance of the written language in comparison with oral culture and action culture;

- the affective sphere and, in general, the emotional sphere find expression difficult in mediated relationships. It is clear that emotional feelings can be manifested and perceived when talking on the phone with a person. It is not the same in the case of a chat room, for example, in which the distance of the other person is to a greater extent perceptible;

- the conversation and its circle, as fundamental instruments to state what is important in our everyday life and our sense of reality, the context in which conversation takes place if it is mediated by technology requires reformulation. In other words, the plausibility structures that take shape in this case and the atmosphere in which the conversation is conducted do not provide the same environment that typifies unmediated relationships;

- the points mentioned above contribute to affecting both the primary socialisation process and the secondary socialisation process. The consequence of this is that mediated relationships are not so incisive in the individual's construction of identity and a question arise regarding the relevance of these relationships mainly in primary socialisation. Interestingly, a favourable environment related to the "acting" phenomenon is able to come to the fore/materialise. In fact, both mediating technology and scopic media provide several opportunities for concealing the users' identities and to create situations of parallel realities that, obviously, influence secondary socialisation negatively;

- it is not only necessary to discuss the impact of mediated relationships on everyday life but also to examine how such relationships can collide with unmediated and face-to-face relationships. Normal life situations are often characterised by an eventual overlapping so that the subjects are exposed to

what Goffman (1981) calls a division of labour of the senses that can lead to the disembedding phenomenon (Giddens, 1990);

- Goffman (1983), proposing the concept of bodily anchoring, outlines modalities whereby mediating technology and scopic media stimulate physically and make vulnerable those subjects involved in a relationship. In face-to-face relationships, physicality is a factor that characterises inter-subjectivity. On the other hand, in mediated relationships, continual exposure to stimulus from existing relationships prevails;

- so far, the scenario outlined suggests how the idle talks phenomenon can find a favourable environment in a context characterised by mediated relationships. Given the fact that language prevails as a means of expression and the interlocutor is only response-present, the content of relationships tends to be superficial and ambiguous. This understanding is pre-established and takes advantage of mediating technology and scopic media for its proliferation;

- the scopic media description outlined above is directly connected to the conception of seeing typical of curiosity. In other words, to see and not to dwell upon what is seen for any deeper understanding which is typical of curiosity. This curiosity is not only confined to scopic media but also to other mediating technology. However, a social network like Facebook can be envisaged as a display case whereby users are made aware of a series of events that continuously collide and make an impact but have no real logic. Furthermore, an impression prevails that everything is temporary, transient, short-lived, and is a never-ending flow of image, sounds and texts that refer to each other. However, the characteristic of this context does not support what Hiedegger would call an authentic understanding of these flow of events;

- Mediating technology is seen as an instrument for creating those conditions in which the content of relationships are related to what has not happened yet, to what should be done and in which way according to hearsay. It is in these circumstances that interest is expressed through conjecture and guess work ('reading between the lines'). These are elements that give rise to situations where moods such as uneasiness and agitation can develop.

7 CONCLUSION

The objective of this work is to principally evaluate the effects of social relationships followed by the effects on our everyday life due to the proliferation of mediating technology and scopic media. The scenario explored, on the basis of the phenomenological sociology, departs, to a certain extent, from the rhetoric of progress that, to some extent, is in built by the introduction of ICT in our society. The situation is much more complicated than it would first appear. However, as one would expect, our lives consist of grey areas, areas of light and shade which distinguish our daily situations. Therefore, it makes perfect sense to consider the impact of this technology.

However, as I stated at the beginning of this paper, this is not an empirical work. A range of hypotheses have been proposed and a series of questions strictly related to them have been posed. In particular, those concepts elaborated in the field of the phenomenological sociology represent a secure backdrop for any analysis of social relationships that seem valid for also investigating relationships mediated by ICT. It is from this understanding and perspective that the opposition between face-to-face relationships and face-to-screen relationships emerge and further research on this point would be hugely beneficial.

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