Where are you?
A Heideggerian analysis of the mobile phone

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Phenomenology, the method of investigation used in this paper, was designed to give access to the essence of phenomena (*e.g.*, Husserl 1964, 1970; Heidegger 1962, 1978, 1977). As such, it holds the promise of clarifying what phenomena are. In order to do that as far as the mobile phone is concerned we attempt here a phenomenological description of the mobile phone via its contextualisation within an ontological background. This paper aims at reaching the fundamental meanings that constitute the founding criteria on the basis of which we recognise mobile phones as such. The mobile phone is analysed here not as an empirical object, event, or state of affairs, but as an intentional object of consciousness, as the grounding notion against which a concrete mobile phone is recognised as a mobile phone and not as something else. We suggest that phenomenology offers a relevant way of enhancing our understanding of our involvement in the world, namely concerning the pervasive information and communication technologies (ICT), particularly the mobile phone.

ICT is characterising our engagement in the world (Castells 2000, Giddens 1999, Borgmann 1999, McLuhan 1994) – talking on the mobile phone, through interaction with the personal computer (PC), surfing on the Internet, watching television (TV), or using any other of the multitude of ICT devices. "Our daily lives are performed within an encompassing technological milieu" (Cooper 1991: 27)

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– we are awakened by a mobile phone alarm, while driving to and from the office we are on the mobile phone, we check and send SMS and emails throughout the day and so on. At the office many of the matters in which we are involved arise by phone. Action is often taken over the phone. ICT are the mediums of our daily life (Feenberg 1999, Idhe 1990, Borgmann 1984). It is within this context that we analyse the mobile phone.

This paper is structured as follows: first, we present a brief review of the ontology on which this investigation rests, Heidegger's *Being and Time*; then we introduce the Heideggerian notion of *Ge-stell*, as the essence of modern technology (Heidegger 1977); next, this notion is explored within the realm of ICT, opening up the possibility for a phenomenology of the mobile phone, which is then explored.

In-The-World

Heidegger, in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1962), tries to give an account of the world as it is, i.e., tries to uncover the world as always and already previously experienced by us, before empiricism or intellectualism elaborate any explanations whatsoever. The world *is* instead of is not, and because we are always and already in the world, the beings we ourselves are, are revealed as *beings-in-the-world*. Thus, already in-the-world, that is, always and already involved with a future and a past, we are experts in being-in-the-world, in acting.

In-the-world, Man is the kind of being whose *Being*, that is whose essence, is the central issue for him. Thus, in-the-world, humans are essentially *ahead* of themselves, always and already projecting into the future. In this projecting we, humans, are revealed as beings *thrown* into the world, because always having a past and a future in which we are to make something of ourselves – whether we like it or not, we are *already-in*. Thus, as a *having been* in-the-world, we care: things matter to us. As beings-in-the-world we are *with-others*. Most commonly we act, choose, think, and live, mainly as *they* do.

Intuitively, dealing with beings, we choose, abandon and fulfil the possibilities we open up for ourselves. The having-been that we are and the possibilities in which we are immersed shape us, mould our dispositions, and, as such, open up specific possibilities for us into the future. The congruence that leads us to repeat what has worked is the instinctive behaviour to maintain ourselves as what we are for ourselves, a projecting having been, explicitly or implicitly assuming possibilities for being into the future. Always involved we take stands, choose, and go along with others, on account of the *throwness* and the projections we *are*.

Thus, in-the-world, as a projecting having-been, we are grounded in the future. It is the future, the possibilities for being in which we are always and already projecting ourselves, that makes us the kind of beings we are. The future grounds the present and the past. The future *per se* belongs to the essence of man. In action we are primarily directed towards the future; in this directedness we are again directed towards a successful adaptation to our environment, which is something accessed in our own terms, that is, according to our identity or in *mineness* in Heidegger's words (Heidegger 1962).

A logical and equiprimordial feature of being-in-the-world, as ontological ground, is thus the assumption that action is primary; that it precedes reflection. Action is that which always and already is. We are always and already acting within our own history against the background of temporality: we are action in essential terms. It is important to note that *being-in* (Heidegger 1962) is formally indicated as a verb, and that a verb is the disclosure of an already in place action because it points to movement, a change, a deed, a result, an action. Absorbed in coping with day to day activities, immersed in *the they* (Heidegger 1962) or in a *moment of vision* (Heidegger 1962), we are always acting, either appropriating possibilities for being or putting them aside. All the phenomena of communication rely on these grounds: we are always already involved, acting.

The way the world is self-evident is first revealed *as we live in the world* – as we are already going on in our dealings in and with the world. World, firstly and primordially, reveals itself in the background practices in which we dwell. *Being-there* is an embodied understanding of the world in-the-world. The modes of being we encounter in the world – the *ready-to-hand*, that is, the transparency of a thing while we use it, and the *present-at-hand*, that is, the thing as we analyse it and look at it – are founded upon an always and already unfolding acting-in-the-world. The present-at-hand is founded on a primordial ready-to-hand that world as such already is. It is on the basis of a *withdrawn* world, a ready-to-hand background, that something present-at-hand can show itself. Either modes of being presuppose the unfolding of action.

Other people, mobile phones, PCs, desks, cars, books, memos, and all other devices, in order to be what they already are taken to be, presuppose a context of action-in-the-world. A person's dealings in the world constitute the background on which he himself or she herself distinguishes any entity. The modes of being of entities he or she encounters come from his or her own already acting; not from some specific action, but from himself or herself as action. The person is thus action as such, and it is from that perspective that one has to make sense of his acting. While the objects are unavailable or occurrent – that is, present-at-hand – the person

analyses or stares at them, taking those specific kinds of action, already relying on a context of *ready-to-hand* equipment.

Since we-already-are-in-the-world, the mode of being of ready-to-hand uncovers itself as a primordial access to the world in which we dwell. This means that dealing-with is fundamental to an essential knowing of what an item is. A media professional, a consultant, an academic, a technician has always and already an understanding of the world. His *existence* is, in each case, the possible ways for him to be – to choose, to take, to fulfil, to disclose, or to pass over; this is precisely what it means to be acting. We-are-always-already-alongside-the-world-the-others-the-objects-and-nature, involved, deciding, moving, choosing, going, standing, taking sides, fulfilling possibilities, happening; in short, we are *acting(being)-in-the-world*.

Hence, before focusing our attention, we are already coping with the world. Whenever we notice something that requires our deliberate attention our absorbed coping experiences a break. Heidegger points out that mental content, in the sense of Cartesian subject/object epistemologies, arises whenever the situation requires deliberate attention – the point at which there is a *breakdown*, for example, when the mobile phone cannot be turned on, the keyboard does not type the expected characters, the mouse does not click, and so forth. In these situations, absorbed coping is gone, and we notice a new strangeness in the equipment: "a more precise kind of circumspection, such as 'inspecting', checking up on what has been attained" (Heidegger 1962: 409) comes into play. The malfunctioning of equipment is shown to us in "a certain unavailableness" (Heidegger 1962: 102). In most cases we have ways of coping with that malfunction – we just do what is supposed to correct the disturbance, and then carry on coping. This doing of 'what is supposed' is done on the basis of the availableness of something with which one concerns oneself (Heidegger 1962: 103), never losing sight of the readiness-to-hand of the equipment itself. Strictly speaking, our transparent coping is disturbed but does not come to a pause.

We always have a knowing how of being-in-the-world. As we find mobile phones, PCs, TVs, cars, and other entities in the mode of ready-to-hand, we enter a knowing how of these entities, that is, we understand them – "understanding a [mobile phone] at its most primordial means *knowing how* to [*mobile-phoning*]" (Dreyfus 1991: 184), how to use it. ICT devices – hardware, software, or even concepts – are things to be used, as "[...] things are objects to be treated, used, acted upon and with, enjoyed and endured, even more than things to be known. They are things had before they are things cognized" (Dewey 1929: 21). To have something, while acting with it, using it, or engaging ourselves with it, means to know

it; the contemporary meaning of the verb 'to have' includes this 'to know' (OPDT: 342). As we experience the world, we *know* the world. Whenever we reflect upon something, we always assume another something on which we base ourselves, in which we dwell. Knowing that is, in turn, based on a knowing how, in the sense that "knowing presupposes dwelling" (Polt 1999: 48).

When investigating the phenomenon of the mobile phone phenomenologically, what we have to bear in mind is not the kind of communication we work with while using a mobile phone, but rather the whole phenomenon of the-mobile-phone-in-the-world, in its mobile-phone-ness – this is the reason why an explicit ontology, Heidegger's *Being and Time* for our case, is needed in this investigation.

In this paper we seek to view the mobile phone as the content of a specific understanding of the world, and as a part, an enabler, or an element of an actual way of technologically relating ourselves to and in the world. Because of the technological nature of the mobile phone, we present below the Heideggerian notion of *Ge-stell*, the essence of modern technology (Heidegger 1977), which we will use in order to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon in question.[1]

Ge-stell

The work of Heidegger (1977) on technology is a recognized turning point in Western thought on this theme, so it is likely that it might only be a matter of time before Heidegger's influence on research on the nature, contours and consequences of ICT is felt more heavily. Heidegger (1977: 6) stressed that although the tool character of technological objects is obviously correct, by no means does it signify that technology is itself *essentially* a tool. The tool-ness belongs to the realm of appearances, that is, to particular and actual technological devices. In contrast, when phenomenologically investigating technology one needs to uncover the essential common-ness of appearances, which belongs not to actuality but to consciousness, not to existences but to essences. At this level of understanding, as we will briefly review below, for Heidegger the essence of modern technology is anything but a tool. This paper phenomenologically works out *Ge-stell,* the essence of modern technology, in the realms of ICT.

Historically, techniques were organized groups of movements, generally mostly manual, united to reach a particular end. As such, techniques mix with the origins of human history. "[I]n all civilisations technique has existed as a tradition, that is, by the transmission of inherited processes that slowly ripen and are even more slowly modified" (Ellul 1964: 14). Before the arrival of industrial technol-

ogy there was not the technological but rather there were techniques. People have their techniques for hunting, for fishing, for clothing, for fighting, for transport, for building, and so forth.

The involvement of man in his activities as they were delivered to him by culture and tradition suddenly changed from the activities themselves to the way in which those activities were performed. This shift has the relevance of a changing of worlds. "[W]hat we talking about is a world once given over to the pragmatic approach and now being taken over by the method" (Ellul 1964: 15). Hence, in this passage from the realm of techniques and tradition to the domain of the technological there lies the essence of technology. What precisely led from techniques to the technological no one knows.

The technological is a deliberate grasping as *a unity* of the ways, both manual and mechanical, in which activities are performed. The technological does not rely on the tradition of the many techniques. It relies rather on the ever greater efficiency it brings to human activities. The technical procedures must fit the criterion of being the most efficient way of achieving a result. This is the ordering process towards an ever more efficient relationship of man to his world; its tradition becomes its own path of efficiency. Heidegger (1977) indicates this course as the essence of modern technology.

Heidegger (1977) took Aristotle's thesis of the *four causes* (Aristotle 1998) in order to de-construct causality, which reigns in the instrumentality that characterizes the tool-ness of technology. He asks what unites the four causes from the beginning (Heidegger 1977: 8). He shows that causality is grounded on a revealing, which in itself is a granting of the possibility of truth, of *Wahrheit* in German.[2] This revealing is an already there that gathers the four causes of occasioning, letting beings come into unconcealment, to presence as beings to be preserved *(bewahren)*, to endure *(währen)*, to be watched over and kept safe *(wahren)*, to be manifest *(Wahrnis)*. "Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing" (Heidegger 1977: 12). This way of revealing is an ontological one because it not only concerns the beings that come into presence, a craft's work or a machine, but also and fundamentally it is the disclosure of *is-ness* as such. The technological revealing is primarily and foremost the background against which that which *is* appears. This ontological revealing is the fundamental nature of technology – an enframing of all that comes to presence.

Would this revealing be the essential nature of modern technology as well? Heidegger's (1977: 14) answer is unambiguous: "It too is a revealing". "[A] tract of land is challenged into the putting out of coal and ore. The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as mineral deposit [...]. The field that the peasant

formerly cultivated and set in order appears differently than it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and to maintain" (Heidegger 1977: 14-5). Modern technology changes decisively the coming into presence of humans, things, animals, tangibles and intangibles; of that which appears for man. A revealing not only reveals that which is different, but also reveals and conceals differently. Truth, meaningfulness, thus being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1962) is differently grounded. There is nothing metaphorical here. Modern technology changes substantively that which is decisive in-the-world. It lets unfold a whole conception of *is-ness,* engulfing *what-to-do/what-to-be*, and appearing as a challenging. Everything technological, a mobile phone for example, in itself, in being-what-it-is-in-the-world, lets unfold a particular conception of being, a specific mode of revealing – everything is part now of the ordering of efficiency.

This challenging forth is a setting-in-order that *sets* upon nature. As a challenging-forth of nature, technology is always directed from the beginning "toward driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense" (Heidegger 1977: 15), that is, towards efficiency. In this way technology reveals a world of resources. These resources belong to an already ongoing process, which essentially does not designate the dam, the hydroelectric plant, the machine, or any other typical technological object, because it rather chiefly designates "nothing less than the way in which everything presences" (Heidegger 1977: 17). The unconcealment that the technological revealing brings about is a particular standing in which beings show themselves in their belonging to an efficiently ordering process. This is for Heidegger what is most essential about technology. He calls it *Ge-stell*, *enframing* in Lovitt's (Heidegger 1977) translation.[3] In *Ge-stell* the real is revealed in the mode of ordering; that is, enframing reveals, that which it reveals is ordering. Thus, the essential ordering element of *Ge-stell* is the very technological nature of ICT. ICT endorses its essential belonging to *Ge-stell* precisely because it is order about information and communication; it is an efficient ordering process directed to information and communication, and thus to meaning. Hence, essentially ICT is order about meaning, which implies that within ICT meaning is dominated by order.[4] But how can meaning be dominated? The answer has been given: ICT dominates meaning in that *Ge-stell* is an ontological revealing.

ICT brings efficiency directly to the domain of language, that is, to man's essence (Heidegger 1962, 1971, 1978), to human fundamental coupling in/with/to the world. Acting in language ICT affects horizontally each and every kind of human activity. It is because information is an integral part of all human activities that all processes of our individual and collective existence are directly shaped by ICT Castells (2000: 70).[5] Language is that which adjusts us to environment and to

others. We are what we are in language. Affecting our adjustment in and to the world, ICT substantively affects us. Fundamentally acting in language and in communication, ICT is a part of being-in-the-world, opening up a way for the ontological decisiveness of *Ge-stell* to unfold further.

Heidegger pointed out that the typewriter reveals the intrusion of technology into the domain of language (Zimmerman 1990: 206). Yet, neither the typewriter nor handwriting provide the efficiency of the production of texts as successfully as the contemporary word *processor. Mutatis mutandis*, neither postal letters nor the telephone provide the efficiency of interpersonal communication as successfully as the mobile phone. In *processing* words and communication, language enters the ordering process of technology: "In the technological world, even language becomes an instrument serving the production process. Heidegger [in the 1950s] argued not only that German dialects are being pushed aside by standardized German (promoted by radio and television, as well as by schools), but that the German language itself is being replaced by Anglo-American – the universal language of modern technology" (Zimmerman 1990: 215); indeed we might say the same with regard to all languages touched upon by ICT.[6]

Hence, ICT essentially is a background against which that which is appears. Within ICT the real shows up as an environment overloaded with detailed and towards-ordered information. Ontically, the domination of ICT is linked to this planetary spreading of technological information and communication; ontologically, that domination is the very spreading of the essence of ICT. As more and more ICT devices penetrate every corner of the earth *Ge-stell* unfolds, enframing *enframes* – with the mobile phone, the Internet, etc. it is *Ge-stell* itself that is ready-to-hand. To confirm this we need only to conduct a thought experiment.

Let us think, how would we all live without ICT?

A formally correct answer is that that world would indeed be *another world*, which means that ICT is a *world*. The kind of possibilities, thus of intentions, aspirations, and actions, that these two worlds reveal are evidently substantively different. The possibilities for being that ICT has brought to us, and the way in which these possibilities address the whole earth and all human activities, is *per se* the dominating character of *Ge-stell* as an essential element of the essential way in which ICT unfolds in the world. It is in accordance with the possibilities revealed by ICT as background that man nowadays is experiencing the real.

Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) argues that modernity is founded, besides the discovery of America and the Reformation, on Galileo's invention of the telescope, which first made it possible to consider the nature of the earth from the perspective of the universe (Arendt, 1958). Not only is *Ge-stell* fundamentally linked to the

Renaissance and Enlightenment, but also the telescope might indeed essentially be understood as an ICT device. This fundamental perspective began to come to actuality as a distinctive sign when the project of landing a man on the moon showed its factual possibility in the 1960s. By landing on the moon it was the earth and not the moon that was mainly discovered in a new way. The pictures of the earth taken from the moon offer us an impetus for the historical theme of the globe to enter its own epoch. Thus, man's landing on the moon might not have brought a new fundamental perspective on human experience, but having relied on an opened perspective which Arendt claimed the invention of the telescope belonged to, it might have recovered and strengthened that same perspective, so that it is in our epoch what is more typical and decisive.

Abstractly, the mobile phone links the globe as a whole to all humans all over the planet. At once, because everybody is now at the same location – the globe – communication is now instantaneous with the mobile phone. Mobile phone orders us humans as always reachable, always on call beings. In its ordering in communication, ICT shows up the real as a systematic way of rendering meaning, which is the same as saying that ICT shows up as a *system of information*. The meaning of the world revealed in/within/through ICT, for example, is identifiable in exact science through calculation so that it remains orderable. It is because technology unfolds in this way that it *enframes* and nature "remains *orderable as a system of information*" (Heidegger 1977: 23; our italics). Here Heidegger addresses indirectly the essence of ICT that we are indicating by suggesting that ordering meaning is the evident nature of a *system of information.* The meaning of the real, in the sense of the world in which we always already find ourselves, is identifiable so as to remain orderable. As a systematic way of rendering meaning – as a system of information – ICT changes the perception of the real, which is the same as saying that it changes reality. "[R]eality, as experienced, has always been virtual because it is always perceived through symbols that frame practice with some meaning that escapes their strict semantic definition [...]. Thus there is no separation between "reality" and symbolic representation" (Castells 2000: 403). The perception of reality depends upon the structure of information, which is substantively affected by ICT. For example, with the mobile phone a professional can call and be called, receive and send SMS to any of his/her colleagues, partners, clients, etc., wherever they are on the globe. In-the-world, he does not thematically bring this possibility to his attention. He rather relies on that possibility for his own activity as a professional, and on many other ICT possibilities as well. He reads the report on the latest sales figures, and calls with some instructions intended to affect the next sales figures. He already takes into account the figures of the competition as he has just

been told them over the phone. He checks the macroeconomic indicators, spots the differences from what was expected by the markets, and calls his staff. A press release is prepared to be sent to the media. The whole process keeps on running over the mobile phones' network. The flow of information is always running, feeding its own movement, showing as the environment in which that which matters appears for the professionals involved. He lives within technological information that for him is much more real – it is what matters.

The technological understanding of *what is* "is obsessed by the latest news, and regards them as the only thing that is real" (Heidegger 1969: 41). This replacement of the real, so to speak, is neither something linear nor obvious. ICT is what it is as we operate in society relying on the readiness-to-hand of the devices of this new technology. Because these devices are transparent while we use them, they recede into the background escaping our attention. Thus, we cannot thematically and intuitively grasp what they affect the most. In order to do this, one must make explicit an ontology, which would enable the ways in which a particular phenomenon manifests itself to be pointed out. In this paper we use Heidegger's accounts of humanness (1962) and technology (Heidegger 1977).

Revealing the real, forming the background, establishing itself as a world, ICT determines the relation of man to that which exists. "Through technology the entire globe is today embraced and held fast in a kind of Being experienced in Western fashion and represented on the epistemological models of European metaphysics and science" (Heidegger 1984: 76). This all inclusive human experience of reality was first concretely unveiled in the sixteenth century by the 'Memory Theater' of Giulio Camilio (Borgmann 1999: 175), in which all information about reality would be gathered in one well-ordered information-space (Borgmann 1999). The prototype of this space is today the gigantic digital web of mobile phones and the Internet, and its logic of communication and navigation, of hypertext, and search engines (Borgmann 1999). With a mobile phone *at-hand,* Camilio's Theater is entering its age.

This power of *Ge-stell,* concealed in modern technology, "rules the whole earth" (Heidegger 1966: 50). Ruling the whole earth, it logically and necessarily reveals what the earth is as such. The earth, our world, is now *enframed*, that is, united, and thus it appears as something, as the *globe,* for the case of our age. As the earth is ICTised, it becomes global. This globe, hanging suspended in space, is a technological being because it relies, depends, and appears only on the grounds of a world previously revealed by *Ge-stell*. Phenomenologically we confirm this by describing the event of the globe in space, which is not something *we perceive directly with the eyes,* much in the sense Aristotle (1998) used this

expression to refer to knowledge, and which Parmenides (quoted in Heidegger 1985) used to indicate thinking as such. On the contrary the globe hanging suspended in space is a photograph, a picture, or a video. Only a very few men actually saw, with their eyes, directly and *naturally* we could say, the globe in space as such. Hence, this globe in space, the icon of our epoch, is a technological being. The globe is now part, a constitutive element, of being-in-the-world. Against this background, mobility emerges because it does not matter anymore where you are in the globe in order to be connected, to be communicating, to be in touch, to call and be called.

A Phenomenology of the Mobile Phone

We have seen how ICT, and the mobile phone in particular, is entangled action in-the-world. This belonging to a place of ICT devices is primarily, and fundamentally, a belonging to a *situation*: to work, leisure, travel, and so forth. This explains why the portability of ICT devices is a trend on the move. ICT devices are becoming smaller and smaller. The mobile phone is an example of this trend. In looking at experiences of using the mobile phone, it becomes clear that the *belonging to a place* of ICT devices is primarily and fundamentally a belonging to a situation. The situation shapes and is shaped by the device. This is why the mobile phone, computer, TV, and many ICT devices are becoming mobile.

As the mobile phone is portable, it can be said to be located with our body. Close to our body, *within* our 'bodily experiencing of the world' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, Varela *et al.* 1991, Borgmann 1999, McLuhan 1994), the mobile phone is coupled to us and it pertains to our structural coupling in the world. A mobile phone is light and small; we usually carry it without noticing it either when using it or not. Our primary contact with the mobile phone is one of holding it, carrying it, speaking, and hearing through it. This contrasts, for example, with the experience of TV, which is one of seeing and hearing, and with working with a PC, which is an experience of seeing, reading, and keying.

We use the mobile phone to speak to people who are out of sight, whose whereabouts we need not know. This is a key difference to the traditional telephone, which belongs to a physical place – not to a person. When we dial the number of a fixed phone we need to assume that the person we want to reach is in a particular place at a particular time. Because it is evident that, when dialling a fixed phone, we always want to talk to a person, most of the time to a particular person, one should admit that the mobile phone improves the efficiency of our communicating with

others as it improves the effectiveness of reaching the person we want to reach. This efficiency is a manifestation of *Ge-stell*. Borgmann identifies this efficiency as the aim of the 'device paradigm', which is the formative principle of a technological society that is developing with ICT (Borgmann 1984: 40-48). Thus, as mobile phones belong to individuals, each user becomes *a-person-always-reachable*. The mobile phone number is now the *location* of people (Angell 2000), thus a key entity of the ICT society. Hence, more precisely, what this reasoning means is that the *place* of the mobile phone is not our own body but rather our experiencing of the world. Actually, as we will argue below, the mobile following is a step towards disembodiment.

Now, we ask: does any other ICT device resemble the mobile phone? There is indeed one device whose physical appearance is rather similar to the mobile phone: the TV remote control; moreover, surprisingly perhaps, some of the key traits of the mobile phone are the same as those of the remote control. As a communicating device, the *remote* character of the mobile is obvious. But is it a device of control? The control the mobile phone brings to our lives seems intuitive. In allowing for a more unplanned daily activity, it would appear to diminish the control over the activities in which we are involved. Yet, it is because the mobile has made them controllable, that unplanned patterns of activity are able to thrive. This is captured in a common mobile phone promotional message '*always connected, you are in control*'. Connected, thus, is grounded on *being-in*, and on *being-with* because being connected is being gregarious, is being social, is being 'as they are'.

Described from this perspective, the mobile phone can be seen to be a device that accelerates the unfolding of the orderability of the real. It reveals people and other entities as permanently and instantaneously controllable. The mobile phone apparently promises to free-up its user's time. However, the logic underlying its functioning is mainly one of greater efficiency. The always-in-a-hurry hero in a David Lodge novel is asked: "What do you do with the time you save?" The answer to this question highlights a central feature of the maturing of ICT in our contemporary world. The time saved by the mobile phone is intuitively overlooked; having saved time, we keep on doing more of the same, thus aiming at raising the output/input ratio to improve efficiency.

The mobile phone, just like other ICT devices, is a ready-to-hand entity. We count on it as it allows for possibilities for the unfolding of our involvement in the world. The more we rely on this potential, the more it shapes our actions, attitudes, and options. This kind of support affects most decisively the pattern of our daily activities, not just the actions of each person on each particular day. The emergence of new contemporary management trends, such as the club-company

or the shamrock organisation, teleworking, the extended enterprise, freelance experts, or even downsizing practices, are supported by this new pattern of mobility.

The mobility of the mobile phone apparently removes all relevance of the place in which we are. The location where we are and where the person we call is, apparently, does not concern us; we can always reach and be reachable. This 'death of distance' is a recurrent claim of some literature on the social and business implications of ICT (*e.g.*, Cairncross 1997). But this claim does not hold up entirely under phenomenological scrutiny. Today we call a friend's mobile phone and usually ask where he is?! We must admit that many of the conversations we have while using mobile phones begin precisely by asking and answering where we and our interlocutor are: Where are you? Have you arrived yet? Are you near here? Where are you calling me from?

This initial coupling, asking for the places where the interlocutors are, has two different and apparently contradictory meanings. It means that what is critical for the being of the mobile phone is not the places where the interlocutors are; they do not need to know where each other is in order to communicate. This is the novelty the mobile phone has brought to our contemporary lives; before the mobile phone arrived, rigorously speaking we used phones to call places – houses, rooms, offices, etc. – not to call the person we want to talk to. Nonetheless, the content of many initial conversations means exactly the contrary of what this might apparently suggest. The fact that talk on mobile phones, in a great many cases, starts by asking about the places where the interlocutors are means that, after all, the location does matter; and it matters most in many cases. This points to the unavoidable fact that we are bodily beings in-the-world. All possibilities for action emerge against the primacy of this ontological background. That is, although getting in touch without the need to know the place where our call will reach is a hint at disembodiment, the fact is that the pre-replaced world – humans as bodily beings – is called on as a way to reveal the situation in which one is.

As electric light ended the regime of night and day, of indoors and out-of-doors (McLuhan 1994: 52), so the mobile phone ends the physical necessity of being 'in person' where the action is. Mobile phone networks promise to disembody our capacity of action. On the phone we are just a voice – "when you are on the phone you have no body", said McLuhan. On the air, firstly, we are a mindful voice, an intentional, acting voice, a digital being without a body. Yet, as being-in-the-world, we are in a situation. This situation, that is, what one is about to do, where one is moving to, where one has engaged his or her attention, what worries one at a particular moment, is revealed precisely by his or her body presence in-the-world.

Thus, the 'where are you?' question at the beginning of many mobile phone conversations, trying to identify the situation where one is, points out one's body as one's own context. 'Where I am' is the context of my intentional life as it is right now when two people are speaking over the mobile. That this is the case, that what one is asking for is the actual referential whole that involves the one we are calling and not the specific spatial location, is strengthened by the fact that often the 'where are you?' question is answered by sentences like 'I'm in a meeting', 'I'm driving', 'I'm shopping', etc., which do not in fact reveal the location where one is, but the actual situation in which one is involved.

The logic of mobile phones actually suggests that our body is our context, and pushes forward the disembodiment rationale of the hyper real (Baudrillard 1981, 2000, 2005). On account of the always already available infrastructure of information and communication networks, which are now a fundamental part of the referential whole wherever and whenever we are, we take action disregarding our embodied grasping of the specific situation addressed. This kind of action thus follows a new pattern which does not rely on bodily presence and face-to-face contact, but on our recovering what matters in that situation.

Since one has experienced the realness of ICT our sense of reality changes as it can no longer fail to take into account the possibilities disclosed. The ICT reality is not a mere way of adjusting ourselves to the real. Once absorbed, it is the real, and as such it is human action that seems to have to adapt to ICT. For example, a mobile phone indicates the possibility of reaching and being reachable by every other person on this planet at any time. As this possibility is grasped, and appropriated on a societal basis, it cannot be reversed and actually imposes itself as a new mode of being and acting. The mobile phone promises to make what matters available permanently. Every place is a proper location either for work or leisure. People and materials tend to be dealt with only on the grounds of the consequences of the symbolic activity.

As ready-to-hand beings, mobile phones become part of the background against which we dwell. As ready-to-hand entities they withdraw from our attention. Either they hide their presence when we do not use them, or, while used, they mobilise our actions, and often also our physical presence, as they locate our activity. They are often the *medium* of the focus of our concerns in a given situation. ICT devices, in general, gather people and shape their actions – the mobile phone is the *ex-libris* coordinating machine of this technological, ontological, gathering. It is a gathering that refers to the people we are talking to on the phone, to the people with whom, all over our country or the world, we are watching TV, to the people with whom we share the same Internet sites, and so forth.

As a background, ICT in general and mobile phones in particular do not come to our explicit attention, precisely because a background is in the background. Either being used, or hidden in the background, ready-to-hand entities do not come explicitly to our attention but rather they shape our behaviour, attitudes, and involvement. They affect what we are and what we do in-the-world, shaping what is decisive and relevant for us in-the-world.

NOTES

[1] Somewhat contentious, our position is that one can use early (1962) and later (1977) Heidegger together in the same investigation. There are no reasons for not doing so: ontologically and episte-mologically, these two Heidegger works (1962 and 1977) are fully coherent and consistent. Moreover, the use of both works together should be promoted because it holds interesting potential in the field of ICT. This position is explained in detail in Ilharco (2002) and in Ilharco (forthcoming) "The Backgroundness of New Technologies or the Readiness-to-Hand of *Ge-stell*".

[2] In order to clarify some of the central meanings in our argument below we refer to the original German words used by Heidegger, paying attention, as Heidegger (1977) suggests, to their syntaxes.

[3] In the ordinary usage *Gestell* means some kind of apparatus, frame, shelf, or skeleton. Hyphenating the word – *Ge-stell* – Heidegger both wants to highlight the gathering that the prefix *Ge-* denotes, and to open us up to the whole realm of meaning addressed by the family of verbs centered in the verb *stellen,* and in the noun *Stell*. The noun means place, spot, location. The verb *stellen* means to place, to set, to put, to stand, to arrange, to regulate, to provide, to order, to furnish or to supply, and in a military context, to challenge or to engage (Lovitt in Heidegger 1997: 15 fn. 14; Ciborra 1998: 318). *Ge-stell* is translated by Lovitt (*ibid.*) as *enframing*, trying to suggest through the use of the prefix '*en-*' "something of the active meaning that Heidegger gives to the German word" (*ibid.*: 19 fn. 17).

[4] Literally, 'order about' means domination (OPDT: 522).

[5] Castells adds: "(although certainly not determined)".

[6] The fact that this paper is presented in English in a Portuguese journal is an example of this argument.

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