Who Moved my Conversation?
Instant Messaging, Intertextuality and New Regimes of Intimacy and Truth

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Abstract: The article investigates the shift of much interpersonal communication from phone or face-to-face interaction to Instant Messaging, especially among teenagers. This objectification of conversation enabled changes in myriad social practices, as well as in regimes of intimacy and truth: New, invisible audiences are introduced to hitherto intimate situations for real-time consultations; intimacy, traditionally based on exclusivity in access to events and information, has to be reshaped under the new conditions as “network intimacy”; formerly separate events collapse into new frames, challenging traditional temporal sequencing of sociability; conversations are imbued with performativities of different sorts; and proof and evidence are introduced into interpersonal sphere where they weren’t common before.

Keywords: blogs, conversations, gossip, instant messaging, interpersonal communication, intimacy, performativity, youth.

At the age of 23, Y. from Tel-Aviv received an unusual present from his father: a book, containing transcripts of many past family conversations. The book also contained nasty things Y. and his parents said to one another, which, for Y., proves his father to be ‘fucked-up’. Y.’s father printed another copy of the book as a gift for Y.’s mother, a memento, a family album of sort. This anecdote may be considered idiosyncratic, but the materials it is made of are becoming salient in our culture, and represent a wide shift, motivated by certain technosocial developments.

A large part of interpersonal interaction has recently been relocated to Instant Messaging software (IM) and phone text-messages (SMS). Y.’s father had conversation transcripts because many of his interactions with Y. were IM-conversations (and even more so when Y. was abroad). IM software (like ICQ, MSN-Messenger and Google-Chat) enables users to initiate a written real-time dyadic conversation with another person from a contact-list. Its use is most common among teenagers and tech-savvy young-adults. Every casual IM conversation leaves behind it a digital trace: a full protocol or log, often archived by default. Thus, unlike earlier mediated-communication technologies (like phones), IM objectifies interactions, turns them into data-objects, fixed in time, subject to search-queries, copying, sharing, quoting, and re-use. IM totalizes a large share of social interaction in the form of a database, and introduces evident intertextuality to sundry social practices. Spontaneous conversation is an extremely important component of sociability. Thus, whereas the classical literature on literacy focused on how writing and print moulded subjectivity (Ong, 1982, on consciousness and memory; Eisenstein, 1980, on imagination and individuality), it seems worthwhile to study IM while focusing on how writing spontaneous conversation affects intersubjectivity and interpersonal relations.

Some social aspects of the shift from oral communication to written chats have already been studied. For example, Mantovani (2001) and Ben-Ze’ev (2004) explored online romance, including changes in the criteria for initial evaluation of potential partners; information management; and the construction of self and other through mainly textual identity-cues. But the afterlife of conversations has remained unstudied, as if researchers still think of conversations as fleeting and evanescent beings. Yet, what Boyd (2007) wrote on social network sites (SNSs) also applies to IM: 'Digital bits are copyable; this means that you can copy a conversation from one place and paste it into another place'. Subrahmanyan &
Greenfield (2008:123) merely say that 'although e-mails and transcripts of instant messaging conversations can be forwarded to third parties, they still remain among the more private spaces of the internet', avoiding any discussion of protocols' circulation. Lewis & Fabos's (2005) ethnography is the only one to refer to circulation of IM logs, including 'clandestine circulation'. However, they regard it as a mere 'mechanism of surveillance': Participants circulate messages to reinforce social connections, creating bonds with particular users based on the surveillance of others. This is, however, a highly reductionist description of the protean functionalities of IM-circulation as I will demonstrate below. Furthermore, once 'surveillance' is identified, we ought to further inquire what social possibilities and sensitivities it engenders.

This article examines emergent repertoires of re-using conversation-qua-artefact; and their impact on the social production and circulation of truth, intimacy, and entertainment; and on the distinctions between different relationships and situations. I thus place IM in the wider context of objectification of experience, alongside digital photos and videos. The article relies on three kinds of data: ca. 100 IM Hebrew-speaking conversation-protocols copy/pasted by the interlocutors, both teenagers and adults, into online-diaries (blogs) or (less frequently) internet forums; extracts from formal and semi-formal interviews I conducted for a research project on self-documentation; and contextualized cases of IM usage described in internet forums and blogs.

**IM as a Secondary Orality**

Internet-based IM software has existed since 1996. The transcript of each dyadic conversation appears in a small window, and multiple conversations are often conducted simultaneously and while doing other activities (Nardi et al. 2000; Lewis & Fabos, 2005). The basic structure of IM conversations is borrowed from face-to-face conversations: In Conversation Analysis terms, it is based on adjacency pairs like question-answer or complaint-remedy, thus similar to phone conversations and SMSs and dissimilar to multi-user chats, which use a different turn-taking system (Hutchby, 2001; Garcia& Jacobs, 1999; Spagnoli & Gamberini, 2007). The conversation tempo is also closer to face-to-face conversation than to other forms of written correspondence, including e-mail: Turns are often replied within seconds or a few minutes (although conversations may be interrupted and re-established after several hours: Nardi et al. 2000). IM conversations often adopt an oralized or quasi-oral style, including emoticons, expressive punctuation and graphics, etc. (Serfaty, 2002, 2004a; Yates & Orlikowski, 1993; Voida et al. 2002).

IM is conceived of as a substitute or equivalent alternative to face-to-face or phone conversations (Nardi et al., 2000): People say they 'talked' with a friend on ICQ (rather than 'corresponded', e.g. Lewis & Fabos, 2005). Conversation topic-range covers everything that could be said, be it work-related, relationship talks or smalltalk. Yet, unlike phone or face-to-face conversations, IM-conversations are self-documenting. Protocols are kept in the conversation-window until it is closed and may be saved or copied. Users may choose to automatically save all chat-logs for future consumption, which is often the software's pre-defined default state. IM users search protocols for details given earlier in the conversation (which helps them re-establish conversations after a break: Nardi et al. 2000) or in previous conversations (combining different conversations into a single mega-conversation), cite and refer to extracts from the transcript, hold interlocutors to their own words, etc. The chatted word (although perceived as 'spoken') is granted the fixity and binding force of writing. The spontaneous use of language in a format which can be reproduced and distributed is what Ong (1982) called 'secondary orality'. However, IM's secondary orality is different from that of video or sound recordings: it is the peak of the transition from hearing-dominance to sight-dominance, portrayed by Ong. The least phatic communion (Malinowski, 1923) turned into text.

Indeed, the log is not exhaustively equivalent to the conversation: it excludes the room where the interlocutors sat, their sitting poses, background music, other persons present, and their subjective feelings – all non-textual ingredients, which should not be undervalued. Yet, the log is relatively close to the conversation-experience, since it contains all the information transmitted to the partner in the interaction (unlike face-to-face or telephone conversations, IM does not transmit visual/aural information that cannot be reduced to text). Hence, chat logs do not resemble diaries or photos, but rather recorded phone calls. But while recording phone calls with friends is not a normative behaviour, keeping logs is.

Hence, IM enables people to share conversations not by **telling** but by **showing** them: not as a subjective memory, the accuracy of which we usually mistrust (according to Ong, an attitude typical of oral societies, which attribute greater authority to texts than to spoken words), but as objective evidence
for how it actually was. Even in a spoken conversation, direct reported speech is an effective and often-used instrument which gives statements a sense of credibility (Holt, 1996), as if it granted access to the reported conversation, in spite of researches demonstrating its infidelity. Logs may indeed be easily fabricated, but usually people justly believe that their friends do not show them false evidence, and if they found the opposite to be true, they would consider it an illegitimate fraud (unlike spoken rhetoric exaggerations, which are usually excused). When a homosexual teenager published in his blog the protocol of an IM conversation, in which he gave his best friend his blog's URL, thus coming out and getting the first reactions – he gave his readers access to the totalized objectification of his coming out moment, rather than an account of the event. The same is true for many other bloggers who publish conversations in which by the power of words, in illocutionary acts, romantic relationships are formed or ended.1

These protocols are sometimes consumed by their producers, as in practices of prosthetic reminiscing. Here, technological affordances mean that people do not have to rely on subjective, ever-changing memories of the past (reminiscence), nor on documentations that fix and perpetuate subjective accounts of the past (as in reading diaries), but rather can consume raw snippets of the past (IM protocols). This means a change in the practices of memory: as Van Dijck convincingly demonstrate, memory and media are indistinguishable. Memory always works through and informed by technological media. More specifically, digital media re-define memory as networked rather than personal, since digital memories are often embedded in networked systems (Van Dijck, 2007), a point I develop below. Lev Manovich (2001) conceptualized digitization as a shift from narrative-culture to database-culture, which represents the world as a database (unordered lists and search mechanisms) rather than causal narratives. Simplistic as this dichotomy may be, it is beyond all doubt that the IM protocols (like photos, according to Kitzmann, 2004:151–152) do not represent a certain narrative concerning the past, but an extension of the past into the future, an accessible past that may also be used as raw material for the production of future narratives. In this article, I explore how these objectified pasts function when shared with other people, while solitary reminiscing techniques are left for future research.

Intimacy, temporal organization and the situation’s boundaries

The total objectification of the IM conversation introduces people to situations to which they wouldn't have been privy earlier: third parties are invited to read chat-logs, even in real-time, and influence the interaction, turning backstages into frontstages (just like the effect of mass media on other events: Meyrowitz, 1985). For instance, during IM intimate or relationship talks, teenagers often share the utterances of their partners with same-sex friends, thus introducing them to the event. One youth told me how he found out that his girlfriend shared their relationship talk with a good friend of hers: he suspected it, since she lingered longer than usual between turns, and because she used her friend's recognizable style. When confronted with the suspicion, the girl admitted it. In spite of the youth's reservations, my impression is that the girl's practice is normative, and legitimate in the eyes of many, not considered a violation of intimacy. Another teenage girl was helped by her mother while chatting with potential romantic partners. This practice is not restricted to teenagers: Israeli adults in their twenties, who increasingly use IM in courtship (e.g. with prospective partners contacted through dating websites), consult with friends (both co-present and through IM) in real-time on the right interpretation of the partner's utterances and the appropriate responses. A similar consultation between two American teenage boys is mentioned in Lewis & Fabos (2005). Thus, the flirtatious conversation text is a document co-authored by up to five people or more. Not long ago, all talks on such matters were private-conversations between two participants, without an audience: the rules of intimacy exclude any third party from such face-to-face conversations; phone calls do not facilitate real-time sharing or simultaneous consultation that would remain invisible to the partner; whereas written correspondence has not been dialogical and immediate enough to substitute for spoken relationship talk. In Goffman's (1959) terms, IM turns the conversation with the romantic partner into a frontstage performance and introduces a backstage event – the conversation with the best friend. Curiously enough, both take place simultaneously, thus re-defining intimacy.4 Can such a romantic conversation still be considered (and experienced as) intimate? Answering this question requires a more thorough exploration of the concept of 'intimacy'.

Intimacy is usually an emotional effect of discrimination in access to 'information' (i.e. accounts of either external events like interactions, or personal thoughts and feelings), and often strengthened by
spatial seclusion (‘privacy’). As Simmel (1950: 122—136, 307—338) brilliantly demonstrated, privileges and discrimination in access to private information are the building blocks of modern interpersonal relations and intimacy. Hence, techno-spatial configurations that affect information-sharing patterns also impact intimacy. A good example is Ben Ze’ev’s (2004) analysis of the increased intimate disclosure in internet-romance, due to its anonymity and decreased vulnerability. Psychologists define intimacy as a sense of connectedness and being-understood, which is the outcome of mutual self-disclosure and empathetic responses (e.g., Prager & Roberts, 2004; Laurenceau et al. 2004), but they usually miss the fact that intimate interactions and relationships are always defined relative to the remainder of social interactions.

Knowledge shared by some individuals but inaccessible to others often defines groups and their boundaries. Following Goffman (1959), the only way to differentiate between situations and between relationships, the only way for a person to play multiple roles in various performances, is to differentiate between frontstage and backstage, i.e. to discriminate different audiences in their physical and informational access to events.

Simmel goes even further, arguing that secrecy is an act of producing value: Since certain information is denied to the many, it turns into a valuable possession, which may be given to others. The private/secret not only creates barriers between people, but also helps bring them down through the technique of confession. The disclosure of information that is usually kept private dubs interactions and relationships intimate, differentiating them from casual interactions and relationships. Disclosure is a gift, which invites a counter-gift in the Maussian sense; but unlike material gift-exchange, which ideally results in zero material gain for both sides, here both sides are informationally profited. In our Cartesian cosmology, the most noble of gifts is the authentic truth, which is always internal and hidden. Its giving is a risky step that must be taken cutiously and calculatedly. Simmel describes disclosure of one's interiority and multifacetedness as the fuel of intimate relationships, the source of intimacy (an extreme case is online romance, where verbal intimacy is all there is: Ben Ze’ev, 2004). But for Simmel, intimacy also relies on exclusivity, on the ‘ingredients’ that ‘each of the two participants gives or shows only to the one other person and to nobody else’. In the century following Simmel’s book, the therapeutic discourse helped one of these ingredients, namely verbal sharing of emotions, surpass all others. For women and middle-class men, verbal sharing equals intimacy equals friendship or romance (Fehr, 2004; Ilouz, 2008). The raison d’être of contemporary close relationships is defined more than ever in terms of subjectively feeling/experiencing intimacy: a ‘confluent love’ based on opening up and revealing oneself to the other (Giddens, 1992; Ilouz, 2008). Sharing always implies hierarchies: The closest individuals are those with whom everything is shared, and the interaction with whom is exposed to no one. Whereas IM-protocols of an intimate conversation with a new romantic partner may be shared with a friend, institutionalized partnerships may demand avoidance of sharing if they are to remain qualitatively more intimate than friendships.iii

What makes a conversation intimate, what gives it value, is the very prohibition on sharing its content with others. Yet, intimacy between friends and lovers is often achieved through the sharing of intimate memories – past moments of intimacy (involving one of the two parties and a third party) are thus recycled for the production of intimate feelings in the present and the cementing of a different intimate bond. While same-sex friendship is the second most important source of intimacy, after love (Fehr, 2004), intimacy between friends is usually achieved through the mutual sharing of facts and emotions concerning intimate romantic interactions. However, the new practices of IM usage reshape the technique of intimacy recycle: The time gap that separated the two events has disappeared. Thus, in some cases, the conversation with the romantic partner does not remain exclusive for even a single moment. Yet, at least for one of the other parties, it may feel exclusive, since sharing is invisible to the partner. It is this invisibility of sharing which may save intimacy in conversations that are accessible to others. For the teenage-boy who caught his girlfriend consulting with a friend and using the friend’s words, intimacy was broken – not because he knew that his girlfriend might always share their conversations with others, but because he discovered she actually did.

Taylor & Harper (2003) offer fascinating examples of how access to objectified communication in the form of SMS is incorporated into gift-exchange between teenage girls. Teenagers share both new messages upon receiving them and messages they write while composing them. They also give friends access to their phones, which contain their entire SMS-archives. They do this as part of a mutual exchange system. While doing it in public, they overtly privilege one friend over the others in access to information – strengthening a dyadic bond at the expense of the bond with the others, ‘establishing a temporarily
bounded sense of intimacy and necessarily excluding those around them' (2003:281). The IM protocols I study are also shared between friends in a similar manner."

IM protocols are shared with friends not only for consultation, but also for show. Often, the boasted achievements are emphatically gendered: girls share with friends romantic messages from boys, whereas boys share girls' sexual statements or dirty-talk. Accordingly, one teenage girl told me how, when her boyfriend wrote her 'something really beautiful' in an IM-conversation, she 'printed the screen right away, like, and I sent it to a friend of mine (...) the whole conversation' (she also kept herself a copy of the protocol until she and her boyfriend broke-up, and then destroyed it, in a modified version of the destruction-of-photos break-up ritual). Another girl flirted with a boy although she had a boyfriend, for her own entertainment. When the boy confessed his love to her, the girl sent the chat-log to a close male friend of hers, commenting in addition 'LOL, see how he was carried away' - boasting their unequal power relations.

Making private conversation public is a technique often wielded by girls for female empowerment: a 16-year-old blogger published an IM-conversation with a boy she didn't know who tried to lead the conversation to sex, while she played dumb, wittily using puns and double-meanings she found in his formulations to respond to all of his questions with innocent, non-sexual answers. Sharing the evidence of her victory, the girl won her friends' esteem (one friend even claimed her share in the achievement, presenting herself as the blogger's role-model). Here, success means avoiding romantic/sexual connotations, not facilitating them. Similarly, a girl asked by a boy whether her breasts were real published the IM protocol in her blog, light-heartedly dubbing it harassment. Thus, she proved that she was not embarrassed by the question, possibly embarrassing the boy by exposing the intimate interrogation."

Two teenage boys, good friends, told me that whenever a girl flatters one of them or talks 'erotically' on IM, they share the chat-protocols with each-other in real time. Obviously, 'kiss and tell' is nothing new. But here the peers are given objective evidence, direct access to (part of) the intimate conversation as an objectified experience, often in real time. Since evidence is distributed in real-time, the 'kissing event' (exhibiting romantic skills which arouse the partner's desire) and the 'telling event' (boasting romantic prowess) can no longer be distinguished: they collapse into a single event, in which a boy sends protocol-extracts to his friend while still chatting with the girl simultaneously. The girls, being unaware of the real-time-sharing, may have experienced the conversations as intimate ones, whereas for the boys intimacy was qualified, turning into a quasi-performance: while they indeed kept parts of the conversations private, they still shared highlights with each-other in real-time (thus informationally privileging the bond between them over bonds with girls).

These cases, like the cases of real-time consultation mentioned above, indicate significant alterations in the temporal sequencing of sociability: Traditionally, the sociability of heterosexual teenagers was structured by an alternate pattern – interactions with prospective partners (face-to-face or by phone) were usually inaccessible (unless done in public, with the risk of losing face). Nonetheless, good friends played a major role in the prelude to romantic interactions, in their backstage preparation (giving advice, gathering background information on the prospective partner, helping initiate a connection) as well as in their aftermath (questioning and hearing details, being an audience for boasting, analysing the event, and framing it within a narrative) (Harper et al., 2004). Thus, two separate forms of intimacy used to nurture each other. Whereas the interaction with actual or potential partners by phone is basically dyadic,\textsuperscript{7} IM conversation introduces a third mode: neither dyadic interaction nor group interaction, but rather a web of dyadic simultaneous conversations, where each participant may make any of her dyadic conversations (partially)-transparent to anyone else in her network, yet no one can know for sure to whom a conversation is shown by one's partner. The collapse of the alternate temporal pattern may be redefining the manners in which romance, as a privileged sphere of sociability, relates to other sociability spheres in a way that invites further research.

The technosocial configuration of IM is thus the habitat of 'network-intimacy': mediated intimate interactions which may take place alongside any number of other events (both online conversations and offline activities), are totalized as texts, and may be shared both in real time and \textit{post factum} with any number of persons, who thus gain direct access to the intimate interaction. Real-time sharing may result in real-time advice, in practice, involving more people in the intimate interaction as active agents. But though active, these agents remain invisible. Thus, a technosocial ensemble that seemingly ruins the foundations of intimacy – seclusion, exclusivity and discrimination in access to information – does not exclude intimacy altogether. People are aware of the possibility that conversations may be shared – in many cases
sharing is considered a legitimate behaviour. As we shall see later, in some cases, this awareness leads to increased performativity or self-censorship. But usually, as long as this possibility remains abstract and is not given a concrete face, disclosure still takes place and intimacy may still be experienced. Is this intimacy emotionally-devalued by real-time sharing of information, which violates the interactional seclusion of the friends or lovers? This requires further investigation.

**IM as a mine of performativity**

As we have seen, intimate conversations beget intimate conversations, and the objectification of conversation enables new ways of re-using intimacy. However, intimacy is not the only resource that can be mined from IM-logs. Capitalizing on entertaining interactions is even more common and important and has an immense impact on performativity.

Performativity is an aspect of most social interactions (Schieffelin, 1998), yet not all events are characterized by the same sort and degree of performativity, and media may supply resources of increased performativity (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998). Many workaday conversations surely gained playfulness and performativity due to the usage of IM programs, which transform them from ephemeral dyadic communication into the co-authoring of a text fixed in time, a collective production of an artefact which may later be consumed by the interlocutors for future reminiscing or evocation of nostalgia; shared with friends; or published in blogs. Talking styles may be changing: my impression from IM protocols published in blogs and analysed for this study as well as from the personal experience of me and some of my friends, is that IM performativity infuses romantic conversations with 'playful romance' on expense of 'meditative romance' (Frosh, 2003: 123–127). The fact that conversation has turned into a co-production of a written text invites formal word-plays uncommon in oral conversation, while demonstration of verbal creativity is what makes one a good IM-partners (Lewis & Fabos, 2005). Even when protocols are not shared with others, conversations are thus objectified and subjected to different, quasi-literary appraisal criteria. However, sometimes they are shared.

IM conversations are often published in blogs (*post factum*, though occasionally only a few moments after the conversation ended). Published conversations regard a wide range of topics: casual smalltalk, gossip, business (from amused grumping to serious discussion of investment strategies), studies, and relationships (including flirty chats between strangers, declarations of love, negotiating sex-life, and making plans for the evening). IM protocols published in blogs often disclose the dynamics behind their publication: right after something witty, funny or interesting has been told, one of the interlocutors suggests that the protocol may/should be published on her own or her conversation-partner's blog, and conversation is interrupted in favour of negotiating publication (this also happens when funny moments are filmed or photographed). Sometimes a witty dialogue is followed by a suggestion that it should not be published (which indicates that otherwise, it could have been published without explicit permission).

Bloggers do often have an evident interest in publication: witty dialogues may entertain readers, thus help bloggers satisfy their readers and improve their ratings. However, this is true not only for bloggers: Non-bloggers are also encouraged to produce entertaining dialogues to share with friends. Even in intimate talks one may be aware of potential audiences, since it is always possible to copy/paste only one witty remark and publish it out of context, without violating confidentiality. Many teenagers publish such brief excerpts on internet-sites or as their personalized-signatures in forum-messages. Especially among teenagers, it seems that entertainment is mined all over the place and its production is highly encouraged.

Making casual conversations productive is part of a wider trend, in which leisure time and social relations become productive through "a highly self-conscious process of self-exploitation, performed in the interests of material gain or cultural status" (Hearn, 2008:204,205). Being able to capitalize on every silly smalltalk that demonstrates some verbal wittiness undoubtedly contributes to the playful, performative and amused nature of many IM conversations, and eventually affects the nature or 'feel' of relationships based to a high degree on IM interactions, and interaction-styles in general. Increased performativity is thus a feature of IM's 'network intimacy', which contributes to the evolution of emotional styles. Obviously, the increasing playfulness of romance was not *caused* by IM, yet it has been encouraged by the performativity with which IM infused casual interaction. Entertainment and fun are goods in high demand in our society. The objectification of interaction makes it possible to produce them effortlessly, as a by-product of having a small talk, and keep them in an accumulated form: an economically profitable
Gossip, evidence and the production of truth

The economies of intimacy and fun/entertainment are not the only ones affected by IM practices: the economy of truth is not left untouched either. IM protocols supply the interlocutors with evidence for the existence of the conversation and for its content, evidence which may be instantly shared and distributed. These affordances have social significance: when gossip may be supported with non-negotiable evidence, like IM protocols (as well as photos, videos and sound recording), it gains strength. When X tells Y about her conversation with Z, Y may choose to doubt X's version and challenge it, depending on the credibility of the story, and on the social and power relations between the three. For example, Y may refuse to believe that Z slandered her if she does not want to bear the consequences, i.e. cut off their friendship. However, if the conversation was documented, and X supplemented her version with the protocol, doubt is no longer available as a strategy for saving face. Among teenagers, IM protocols are used to uncover and identify gossipers and slanderers, and impose sanctions against them: in some cases, girls who received a slanderous message shared the protocol with the victim – simultaneously providing evidence for the act of defamation, the slanderer's identity and their own fidelity to the friend. Teenagers also show protocols to substantiate their innocence of false accusation (when X tells Y that Z defamed her, Z occasionally shows Y the log of her conversation with X to disprove the allegation).

Not only slandering – even romantic overture gains transparency. Above I described new practices of tactic consultation during romantic overture. Now I discuss conversations in which one party sends a messenger to talk to the potential partner and find out what he/she feels. This pattern of face-saving overture-by-proxy is ancient indeed, however, nowadays many of these conversations are carried out using IM, hence the messenger is required to 'pass on' the objectified conversation rather than tell about it. For instance, 14-year old 'Sunnygirl' was happy to receive from her friend B an IM protocol in which a boy (common friend of them both) confessed to B on his love to 'Sunnygirl'. Yet, not all overtures have happy ending, whereas one effect of the shift from telling to showing is the inability of the messenger to soften insulting formulations: in undocumented interactions, girls did not tell their friends that guys were not interested, instead saying they were 'unavailable' (Harper et al., 2004). Now insulting formulations made under conditions of confidentiality (like 'I'm sick of her'), must be and are passed on. And once passed on, logs of confidential conversations about a third party are highly authoritative.

While shared with friends or published in blogs, IM-logs usually remain undocorated, in the original font and design of the IM-software – not only because introducing graphic changes requires putting some little extra time and effort, but also because of its evidence-aura (a quasi-indicator that the text wasn't manipulated). When texts are doctored, bloggers usually feel obliged to make proper disclosure (however, bloggers do sometimes remove interlocutors' names from protocols, to avoid identification). Thanks to these norms, logs remain highly authoritative.

These evidences are often shared with friends or published in blogs without asking the conversation partner for permission. Even when asked, partners have no veto power: publication is negotiated. Sometimes the slightest reservation suffices to put publication off the table, whereas other times even resolute resistance and threat of sanctions are not enough. The final outcome depends on stances and notions of privacy rights on IM, which differ among bloggers (Boyd, 2006): as well as situational power-relations and interests. Negative consequences of documentation are avoided by growing caution. Some teenagers I interviewed demonstrated awareness of the possible uses of protocols they produce, and said they take caution not to discuss sensitive matters on IM with people they do not trust. However, my impression is that this is not the norm: IM is often used for revealing conversations with potential romantic partners, as well as with good friends. Furthermore, IM conversations are usually fast, using a casual, synchronous and unedited style close to that of oral communication (Voida et al., 2002). For Voida, the combination of this quasi-oral style with record-keeping, borrowed from written communication, represents 'colliding conventions', which must be manoeuvred. This might be done by the development of local ethical norms that delegitimize and penalize unrestrained publication. Simmel suggests that it is the very defencelessness of the objectified, written word which protects its secrecy: it encourages the development of social norms in order to regulate the sharing of private textual communication and to guarantee privacy (1950:352–355). A 15-year-old boy I interviewed learned the hard way the price of too liberal a publication policy: a good friend stopped talking to him for two months after he published an
entertaining IM conversation which embarrassed the friend, who, talking of something as 'stinks', said 'yee, I just released a warm fart' - a joke he could share with a good friend, but did not want to be publicly credited for. As a result of this and other similar conflicts, the boy no longer publishes 'anything said that was funny' as he used to do.

The indexicality of IM-protocols is taken to its limit in another common practice which I term the quoted monologue. Here, the blogger does not use the protocol to show the reader the conversation event, but rather to tell him about an undocumented event discussed in the IM conversation, thus endowing telling with an indexical, showing-quality. This practice has two main advantages: economy (no need to re-formulate the story in a more objective/literate style) and endowing the blogger's version with an aura of truth/indexicality, due to the very fact that the conversation is copy/pasted. Another advantage is the usage of the second interlocutor's empathic reaction to model the reader's responses. A story published on a teenage girl's blog makes a good example. According to her version, a boy from her school tried to touch her breasts and open her trousers. She pushed him off her right away, yet the boy told his friends a different story, as if she let him touch her. One of his friends called her and asked her questions about the incidence while recording the conversation. However, he hung up just after she confirmed that the boy touched her, without letting her finish the story and defend her reputation. She was thus humiliated in front of her peers as a disreputable girl, while he gained reputation as a macho lad. The girl defended her reputation through the publication of her own version in her blog, but since she lacked electronic evidence to compete with the sound-recording the boy had, she artificially produced evidence: After she told the story to a friend, she published in her blog their IM conversation log. Though not evidence in the logical sense, the protocol supplied A with a quasi-equivalent to the boys' recording in the inter-communal conflict.

Yet, the usage of evidence in communal and interpersonal conflicts should never be taken for granted. Even formal law has a category of illegitimate evidence ('the fruit of the poisonous tree doctrine'). The production of truth is subject to culturally specific and historically changing norms. In non-legal context, many evidences may not be legitimately used (e.g. you may tell a good friend who pretends not to have been at home yesterday evening, you believe you saw the light on at his place, but you may not show him a photo of himself at the window as an evidence he was lying). Simmel (1950) suggested that in his time, the legitimacy criterion rested on a degree of passivity: One may look carefully and use reflection and psychological deduction, but is not allowed to do anything active or use tools external to one's mind. These norms have changed.

Lately, spying techniques traditionally used by state agencies and multi-corporations shifted to the interpersonal sphere (Andrejevic, 2005. for an alternative interpretation of the same trend, see Green, 2002). For Andrejevic, the growing demand for hard proofs is a product of what Ulrich Beck called 'risk society'. I believe that an approach which takes into consideration the changes in technological affordances accounts better for the normative change: 'googling' someone's name is an easy, costless and invisible act, unlike hiring a private detective, just as the record of an IM conversation is kept by default, whereas recording phone calls requires an investment of money and effort, which in itself may indicate malicious motivations. The totalization of reality into a digital record is not an instrument intended to support spying or malicious gossip. Precisely for that reason it may give rise to new repertoires of normative, legitimated practices (some of which were discussed above) which reshape interpersonal relations and interpersonal communication in unexpected ways.

Between Intimacy and Truth: Bloggers Ask for Advice

Readers are not the only ones to assume that IM protocols give privileged access to truth. The bloggers themselves seem to believe that letting their readers 'peep' into their objectified intimate conversation supplies readers with direct access to the truth about their relationships. Hence, they use such extracts not only to fascinate readers, but also to get their advice, giving them all the information needed for judgement. Since getting advice and support are among the main uses of blogging, it is no surprise that bloggers publish IM chat-logs in order to share conversations with audiences of friends and strangers and explicitly ask for their assessments of the portrayed situation and their consequent advice (typed by readers in the post's reader-comments section). IM protocols are also published in internet forums dedicated to relationships, for the same reasons. Some consultations concern concrete conversations which are copy/pasted, whereas other have more general nature, where one conversation with a (potential or
actual) romantic partner functions synecdochically as a representative sample of the whole relationship, gaining the status of a diagnostic tool. This is a very common practice: the reader's ability to offer folk-therapy, to produce truth, depends on their access to the raw material so central to this new regime of truth – the most intimate interactions totalized as transparent objects.

Conclusion

IM communication reshapes regimes of intimacy and truth. It introduces the network-intimacy – disclosure and closeness that take place under new conditions. IM's communicational structure is a web of dyadic simultaneous conversations, invisible to one another (challenging the traditional categories of temporal melting ly-differentiated dyadic interactions and group interactions). Thus, IM communication reshapes the temporal sequencing of sociability. Formerly-separated events coalesce and take place simultaneously, with information leaking from one to the other: IM introduces into intimate interactions new audiences, which remain invisible to the conversation-partner and with whom one may consult. These different interaction-frames (e.g. friendship and love) were traditionally characterized by different levels and sorts of intimacy, which nurtured each other. In IM, structural components most important for the production of traditional intimacy – interactional seclusion, secrecy and discrimination in access to information – are being challenged. But intimacy is not excluded altogether: IM is used in both emerging and established close relationships for intimate interaction. Still, as long as (real-time and future) audiences are mere potentialities and not concrete actuality, they are tolerated, disclosure is not avoided, and subjective intimacy may still be experienced. In which sense is this experience different from intimacy achieved in other contexts, e.g. phone calls? The emotional regime of network intimacy and its 'feeling rules' surely deserve further research.

Interpersonal conversation also turns into an object, a shareable and reproducible entity, and gains performativity, since it may always be presented to new audiences either in real-time or post factum. As a digital object, it always has the potential to be embedded in networks (Van Dijck, 2007). This encourages certain interaction-styles (e.g., witty and entertaining) and emotional styles (e.g. playful romance) at the expense of others. Interlocutors may also capitalize on conversations by quoting them in blogs or otherwise, as sources of both entertainment and authenticity/realness, thus not only transforming every interaction into a spectacle in the sense offered by Abercrumbie and Longhurst (1998), but also objectifying and commodifying interaction, translating every interaction into a productive act. The surplus value produced may be entertainment (goods in high demand among blogs-readers and in sociability at large), intimacy (exported from one context to the other), or truth (offered to readers for the production of further truths, given in exchange to the blogger). Thus, the spheres of consumption, production and leisure are being de-differentiated, but the agency behind this shift does not belong to the corporations alone (as suggested by Andrejevic, 2002), but also of the so-called "produsers". Like reality-show participants, bloggers reconstitute the "rhythm of their day-to-day lives" as "a form of value-generating labour" (Andrejevic, 2002:262), but the capital produced is social, not economical.

Regimes of truth are being reshaped: In IM communication, every casual conversation leaves behind its digital footprints, and we can now be held to considerably more words than before. Due to the IM-log's evidential aura, it is often used in its original graphic style not only in interpersonal communication (either shown face-to-face or sent via IM or e-mail), but also in blogs (including the quoted monologue tactic, in which a subjective telling masquerades as an indexical showing). The access to the exact formulation of anything said before enables us to prove what was said in a conversation, in order to boast or consult, gossip or refute gossip, and do it with non-negotiable statements, which can hardly be dismissed by strategic doubt. Conversations are also incorporated into widely-accessible blogs for various reasons. Although it is technically possible to easily tamper with protocols without leaving any tracks, as emphasized by van Dijck (2007), logs are not only conceived of, but are actually evidential, since their use is subject not only to technological affordances (in any deterministic manner), but also to emergent usage practices and ethical norms (e.g., 'doctoring IM excerpts constitutes a fraud'). However, new technologies encourage the reformulation of some ethical norms concerning evidence: the legitimacy of evidence-collection, the situations in which it may be collected, and the manners in which it may be used once collected. In all these senses, objectification of interaction ascribes evidence much greater a role in interpersonal interaction, at the expense of trust. Pace Andrejevic (2005), this article demonstrates why we should incorporate the material characteristics of technosocial networks into our explanations of this
trend.

Nevertheless, all these practices and norms are local: they use the technology's affordances, but are not determined by them. I surely believe that many of the patterns I have recognized will also be found outside Israel. Yet, to what extent do practices and norms concerning IM intertextuality differ along age, class, gender and nation lines? This remains to be studied.

The collapse and dissolving of intimate romantic conversation by showing-off to or consulting with good friends also raise important questions for further research. Is the way romance (as a privileged sphere of sociability) relates to other sociability spheres being re-defined? Are social roles in romance and friendship affected? Does simultaneous chatting deplete the experience of intimacy? Are new temporal patterns of sociability emerging, and what is their nature? I truly hope that this initial work will be supplemented by further research, which will attempt to at least partially address these questions. One thing is sure: So thorough a shift in our daily patterns of conversation is too meaningful to be ignored any longer by sociologists and communication researchers alike.

References


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1 Already on 2001, 17% of instant messagers in the US have used IM to ask somebody out, while 13% have used IM to break up with someone (Lenhart, et al. 2001).

2 A similar but lesser distinction exists in telephone, when one party displays boredom and impatience using body gestures but without changing one's voice, as a performance for a co-present third party compelled to wait for the phone conversation to end: Goffman, 1971:220–222.

3 Other non-verbal methods of producing intimacy through discrimination, like physical touch or sexual contact (Prager & Roberts, 2004), are irrelevant in purely textual interactions.

4 Although no conclusion can be drawn without systematic survey which I haven't conducted, it may be more than a coincidence that I haven't encountered any cases of married adults who share intimate IM logs with third parties.

5 Yet, SMS conversations are usually much shorter and less-developed then IM conversations, and are usually not forwarded but shared with other spatially co-present. One reason for this is that SMS users have to pay for each message sent.

6 This happens not only on IM: In another case, two girls videotaped an old man trying to seduce them and published it online, thus exposing and ridiculing him.

7 Indeed, friends may be present in the same room during phone calls with date partners, yet they cannot listen to both sides of the conversation, nor can they give simultaneous advice during the conversation.

8 In some other cases, the sole motivation for using quoted monologues is economic, when bloggers admit not having the power to write, using protocols as substitutes.
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This is evident in Israeli girl's blogs which I studied. See also Serfaty's (2004a) claim that blogs incorporate bloggers into readers-communities which grant them psychological and social support.