In 2003 the community of Salesians Don Bosco’s in Munich started a campaign to get in contact with adolescents by cell-phone; there is no other object that is a part of adolescence in the same way as a cell phone when focusing on age group from 10 to 18 years. The Salesians offered pictures of saints as background pictures for the cell phone display. The money they got through this campaign was reserved for charity. St. Martin was swinging his sword above the dial buttons to cut his coat; Francis of Assisi blessed some birds; and St. Valentine brought a couple together. Every saint formulated a wish related to an everyday blessing such as St. Christopher in the form of “Good journey,” St. Elisabeth of Thuringen by saying “Get well,” or Archangel Michael saying “God bless you” to be with growing life.

Related to this event—that followed the motto “Best wishes for your life” which are both diaconical and poimenical aspects—were also explicit religious symbols that were reactivated. Transferring these symbols had stopped. It had been usual until several years ago in Catholic influenced districts to put up signs of St. Christopher in the car or to give votive pictures to the children as a reward. But these habits have decreased. It was the goal of the event described to let the adolescents know about the saints. The fact that the Salesians use the cell phone shows that they have a good feeling for the current life-world orientation of adolescents. But it is a problem that they only focus on the cell phone as a medium for symbols not as a symbol itself. Also the cell phone itself is closely related to individual life experience. The religious symbols offered and expressions transported by the medium instead can be understood as quite radical and a sign for exclusiveness and for a special individuality. This only works until the once exclusive motives find a widespread way of distribution. When too many pictures of saints are distributed the motives have to be changed in order to maintain this exclusiveness.
It would be much more helpful not to understand cell phones as merely carrying a message but to understand them as a message in themselves and to try to understand their horizons of meaning for the everyday life they are related to. A heuristic view on present culture is an approach that was put forward by H.-G. Heimbrock (Failing & Heimbrock 1997). This view will be developed in the following for cell phones. This approach is not meant to compensate, but to complete an ethical view on cell phones in a constructive way. That a critical view concerning cell phones is necessary is not up for discussion here. The psychosocial consequences of cruel pictures transported by the medium cell phone as well as the costs of extensive usage of cell-phones have to be discussed in a critical way. So unlimited cell phone-usage can be so costly that adolescents get trapped in debt before they even earn their own money.

But banning the cell phone as a medium instead of the problematic messages transported by cell phones will not stop the distribution of cruel videos nor explain the addictive nature of cell phones. It is true that the costs of special accessories like screensavers, ring-tones, photos, and Internet access can be quite large, because the unlimited information accessible—the world in my hand in very little time—is seductive, can lead to addiction and promote the development of a potential for being addicted. In order to avoid this destructive development a critical view is necessary.

But the fascination that can derive from specific items can be seen in the fact that the point of view put forward is oriented in a phenomenological way as far as possible, so that the hidden potential of items referring to their users can be seen (Mädler 2006). From that perspective—which has to be reconstructed in a qualitatively empirical way—cell phones are not only seen as connected with symbols but as symbols themselves. These symbols can also be of implicit religious character that can be understood itself within materialized layers of meaning. The recent contribution is oriented first towards analyzing the anthropological relevance of personal items in general that can be used as identity symbols and represent a meaning of life. Within the symbolic construction of identity more items are involved than just the cell phone. In a second step also exemplary categories of layers of meaning concerning cell phones are presented that derive from a practical project in the 9th grade in grammar schools.