

The papers in this volume are edited versions of the talks given at the conference *Mobile Communication: Social and Political Effects*, held on 29–30 April 2003 in Budapest. It was the sixth conference, and the third international one, within the framework of the project “Communications in the 21st Century”, a joint interdisciplinary social science project of Westel Mobile Telecommunications and the Institute for Philosophical Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.¹

The project was initiated by Westel Mobile, and launched with a meeting on January 17th, 2001, chaired by CEO András Sugár. At that meeting, Mr. Sugár made it clear that Westel did not expect the project to come up with short-term, practical suggestions. Rather, the idea was to work together on a long-term vision of the coming mobile information society. The Institute for Philosophical Research was a likely choice when it came to such collaboration. The Institute had by then for a number of years conducted investigations along lines one might call the Hungarian Paradigm in the Philosophy of Communication – lines rooted in early-twentieth century Hungarian intellectual history. One should refer here, mainly, to the work of the historian István Hajnal on the role of alphabetic literacy in the development of medieval and early-modern Europe; the classical scholar József Balogh on the history and significance of silent reading; and Béla Balázs, author of a pioneering book on film – on the language of pictures. These theorists exerted an obvious influence on Marshall McLuhan’s Toronto circle in the 1950s and 60s; the subsequent arrival of McLuhan’s ideas in Hungary amounted, really, to a homecoming. To state this is not to say that Hungarian social science, and in particular Hungarian philosophy, was in past decades generally sensitive to issues related to the technology of communications. The opposite was the case. Our collaboration with Westel – which involved not just generous sponsorship on their part, but also a mutual intel-

¹ For a regularly updated overview of the project see the website <http://21st.century.phil-inst.hu>.

lectual exchange – has perceptibly changed this state of affairs.

We held three conferences in 2001 – in March, May, and December – and published two volumes in that year.² Among the topics discussed in these volumes were the close connection between *communication* and *community*; the anthropological priority of communicating via perceptual symbols as contrasted with verbal ones; the difference between “knowledge” and “information”; the impact of mobile information technologies on the economy, and on political communication; the mutually reinforcing effects of telecommunications and travel; the transformation of the public sphere; mobile communications analyzed from the point of view of Walter J. Ong’s concept of “secondary orality”; possible changes in our cognitive architecture, and obvious changes in children’s cognitive development; the psychological makeup of the network individual; the myth of mobile phone addiction; the effects on linguistic change, alleged or real, of the mobile phone, in particular SMS texting; mobile phones and pictorial communication, with special regard to multimedia messaging; mobile phones and the beginnings of a new visual folk art; the transformation of philosophy in a transforming world of communication technology; changes in the patterns, and indeed the content, of scientific communication in the mobile age; and, last but not least, a new context for what is known as the theology of communication. The main findings of the two volumes can be summed up in the theses that, first, ubiquitous mobile communication satisfies deep, primordial human urges, and, secondly, mobile telephony is an answer to the challenges represented by the complexities of a decentralized global mass society – our post-modern society.

Encouraged by Executive Director of Communications György G. Németh, co-ordinator of the project on Westel’s side, we organized our first international conference in May 2002. Its proceedings are now available as the English volume *Mobile Communication: Essays on Cognition and Community*,³ and also in a German translation.⁴ In the volume *Mobil-*

² Kristóf Nyíri (ed.), *Mobil információs társadalom: Tanulmányok* [The Mobile Information Society: Essays], Budapest: MTA Filozófiai Kutatóintézete, 2001; Kristóf Nyíri (ed.), *A 21. századi kommunikáció új útjai: Tanulmányok* [New Perspectives on 21st-Century Communications: Essays], Budapest: MTA Filozófiai Kutatóintézete, 2001. Both volumes were accompanied by summaries in German and English, and the summaries – along with the complete material of the volumes – have been placed on the web, cf. http://21.sz.phil-inst.hu/hn_volumes.htm.

³ Edited by Kristóf Nyíri, and published in Vienna by Passagen Verlag in early 2003.

⁴ Kristóf Nyíri (ed.), *Allzeit zuhänden: Gemeinschaft und Erkenntnis im Mobilzeitalter*, Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2002.

közösség – mobilmegismerés, our third Hungarian volume, we have added a number of extra chapters to the translations of the English talks.⁵

In November 2002 there followed a second international conference, the proceedings of which have been published in April 2003, under the title *Mobile Learning: Essays on Philosophy, Psychology and Education*,⁶ as the second volume in our English series. The present volume, then, is the third in this series.

At the conference *Mobile Communication: Social and Political Effects*, six plenary speakers gave talks, starting with James E. Katz, continuing with Kenneth J. Gergen, Mark Poster, Joachim Höflich, Richard Harper, and concluding with Joshua Meyrowitz. Twenty-two more talks were given in two parallel sessions. The order of the chapters in the present volume reflects a different structure, one convincingly suggested by the drift of the edited papers themselves. We found that the papers could be felicitously grouped under five headings. Of the chapters under the first heading, “Communicative Dissonance, Communicative Assonance”, four focus on the strange, indeed often disturbing, communicational choreography mobile phone use implies, with its blurring of private and public, leisure place and workplace, and being on the move or being at a fixed site. The fifth chapter, by György Csepeli and Klára Benda, adds an old-new topic to the discussion of emotional and cognitive obliquities engendered by the virtual space: that of the often phoney conformity created by group pressure even in an online, mediated environment.

The topic of situational fluidity in mobile communications is then taken up again by Joshua Meyrowitz, in his paper opening the second section of this volume, “Communication and Community”. The eight chapters grouped together here give a comprehensive historical picture of the role of communication technologies – pre-literate, literate, and post-literate – in the shaping of everyday life, social patterns, and the image of the self. The third section, under the deliberately Nietzschean-sounding heading “All Too Human”, comprises three chapters focused on the truly personal, and emotionally liberating, aspects of mobile telephony, especially texting. The seven chapters making up the fourth section, “Democracy and Mobile Communication”, form a comparative survey of the political and social impact of mobile communication, from the Philippines, Korea and Japan to Italy, Hungary, and Sweden. Finally, the fifth section, “Networks, Work, and Labour”, investigates issues

⁵ Kristóf Nyíri (ed.), *Mobilközösség – mobilmegismerés: Tanulmányok* [Mobile Communities – Mobile Cognition: Essays], Budapest: MTA Filozófiai Kutatóintézete, 2002.

⁶ Vienna: Passagen Verlag.

such as mobile communication and social capital in Europe, the U.S., and Japan; the potentials of the internet and the mobile phone for creating a more adaptive employment market in the developed world; and, with Jonathan Donner's paper, the significance of mobile telephony for small enterprises in the developing world. The last chapter, Csaba Szabó's analysis of the way pre-existing social networks and the new mobile networking become juxtaposed with each other in the Hungarian town of Szeged, also amounts, together with Donner's chapter, to a study of psychological types as set against the background of mobile communications.

I would like to thank the authors of this volume for their fascinating, and profound, contributions. Also, allow me to express, on behalf of all participants in the continuing research project "Communications in the 21st Century", our indebtedness to the management of Westel Mobile Telecommunications, for their partnership and support.