

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON 21ST-CENTURY COMMUNICATIONS

Summaries

Translated by Zsolt Bánhegyi

Kristóf NYÍRI: Foreword.

In his introduction (http://21st.century.phil-inst.hu/nyiri/nyiri_bev.htm) to the first phase of the project *Communications in the 21st Century*, and in the talk „The Mobile Information Society: Back to the Roots“ given at the May 29 conference (http://21st.century.phil-inst.hu/2001_maj/Nyiri_prez/nyiri.htm), the author made the following observations: **1.** Communication and community are interdependent. **2.** Communicating via perceptual signs is anthropologically prior to communicating via verbal language. Multimodal communication is more fundamental than verbal communication. **3.** As compared with communicating in spoken or written language, computer networking vastly increases our capabilities for multimodal communication. A new type of personality emerges: the network individual. **4.** The rise of the internet leads to more, not less, physical movement; and to more, not fewer, personal contacts. Increased volumes of communication can imply increased levels of travel and transportation, while more travel leads to an increase in the demand for mobile internet access. **5.** Information does not amount to knowledge; knowledge is information in context.

These observations inevitably lead to issues bound up with the dichotomy between the two concepts of „community“ and „society“ as formulated in Tönnies' classic *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), as well as with the related dichotomy between „culture“ and „civilization“. In the present foreword the author indicates that under the conditions of mobile networked multimedia communication it is possible not only that the gigantic torrent of information by which we are confronted may become transformed into flows of real knowledge, but also that today's society of mere civilization might become a community of culture.

Vilmos BENCZIK: *Secondary Orality and Mobile Telephony*

To date, man has steadfastly regarded multimedial direct human communication as the paragon of communication. All the numerous communication technologies devised in the past aspired to broaden the scope of this communication and at the same time to preserve its specific features. The value of a given technology is judged by the yardstick of how much it is capable of simulating direct human communication. In the course of emerging communication technologies the invention of the telephone was a revolutionary step, for this instrument was the first to operate in two of the three dimensions of direct human communication: the suprasegmental and segmental language dimensions, or stated differently, the vocal and verbal dimensions, and to transmit the product of our body, the human voice, in its unencoded, original form. The relatively successful replication of direct human communication transcending spatial limitations has caused the telephone's development to skyrocket. However, the localized nature of the cabled network substantially subverts the natural hue of telephone-based communication, since man is by nature a mobile creature. Mobile telephony that emerged in the last decades of the twentieth century as a result of a long-standing development in technology marks a giant stride toward the perfect simulation of human communication. Moreover, elements of direct human communication which are virtually present in communication via other technologies tend to be reappearing in mobile communication as well.

Tamás RITUPER: *Mostly Harmless: Chat on WAP*

Chat is an extraordinary form of communication that owing to its peculiarities constitutes a transition between oral and written communication and can be termed as a kind of written orality. The communication that is carried on in WAP-based chats is aggravated by a variety of factors. The limits to space in the choice of name and the written text, the hardships of keying on the mobile phone and the speed of chat shunts the user into a different yet by no means worse use of language. The study, based upon the scrutiny of approximately 8 hours of conversation as well as more than 5400 contributions, was aimed to assess the habits of name selection by the WAP-chatters, the users' insistence upon these names, the language use, the shortening, the modes of greeting, the role of these in group formation and the role of time and space on WAP-chat. The findings confirm that the chatters, even though they do their best where they can to widen the bounds of chatting, by and large comply with the rules and enjoy now in frolicsome mood, now in serious discussion the extraordinary situation of communication.

András NYIRŐ: *What Is the Oplogo Good For? On the New Visual Popular Art*

With the aid of the oplogo-editor accessible at the URL: www.777sms.hu, 25 thousand oplogos were created in one year. It is by no means a crop of some lunatics' burning fury for action: the daily creation of 60-to-80 brand new oplogos may well be the manifestation of a new visual popular art. The oplogo is small, of poor resolution, and black-and-white. There is no use blowing up or scaling down, the image will crumble. He or she who wants to draw an oplogo must think in terms of the oplogo. Incidentally, the visual folk arts favour hard, uncomfortable surfaces. Conventional art would rather be inclined not to stoop for the capabilities which is the stuff of egg painting, graffiti, and tattooing. Motifs originating in these three forms of art do emerge in oplogos. *The caliber of the fashion of oplogos may be measured in the future by the degree how this motif-borrowing will be utilized by high art.*

Kristóf NYÍRI: *Pictorial Meaning and Mobile Communication. An Outline*

Face-to-face communication is, generally speaking, richer in content than written text, for the latter is devoid of the dimensions of body language, facial expression, gesture, and intonation. Face-to-face communication is also richer in content than verbal communication lacking visual support, such as a telephone conversation. The background assumption of the present research is that computer graphics could alleviate these deficiencies. – While the attention of mobile service providers becomes increasingly concentrated on the application of visual and sound symbols, the screen, and in particular the small screen, has been discovered as a promising domain of research by experts on visual languages. The issue, clearly, is not just one of technology. It raises the question of the verbal and/or pictorial nature of thought: if our mental mechanisms are – wholly, or in part – pictorial, perceptual, then pictures could conveniently serve as vehicles of thoughts, as instruments of communication. The issue of visual languages also raises the question of linguistic redundancy: iconic languages have to make do with a rather less complicated syntax than, say, Hungarian, German, or even English. And it raises the philosophical question of the completeness and unambiguity of pictorial meaning: in twentieth-century philosophy doubts were very much alive as to whether pictures, by themselves, are really suited to carry meanings – do they not, invariably, rely on the interpretative support of words? The research adopts the hypothesis that ambiguous pictures might be disambiguated by some appropriate animation; while static pictures are often in need of interpretation, the resultant dynamic pictures would be self-interpreting.

Béla BUDA MD: *The Seamy Side of the Culture of Electronic Communication? Concerns and Facts about the Abuse and Overuse of the Internet and the Mobile Phone*

As every technical device that emerged in the history of global communication, the personal computer and the mobile phone too have elicited a number of negative statements from the quarters of social criticism. These two principal instruments of modern electronic culture, as well as the modes of communication, e-mail and the presence on the net enabled by them, are put to scrutiny by many researchers who are exploring the potential drawbacks these devices may entail in usage. The chief concern is the stunting of direct human relations, the decline and disintegration of interpersonal contact and unmediated verbal communication. The new gadgets might also be instrumental in making one's escape into the virtual world from immediate human and social challenges. The study surveys the various viewpoints from those of anxiety to the critically driven professional and social opinions and analyzes the empirical content of reality in each. While accepting the potentials of abuse and excessive use (stressing at the same time that these existed also with the electronic devices of the personal space and under the conditions of earlier forms of communication) the author tries to strike a balance taking stock of the positive features and perspectives as well. He claims that every new technical tool poses a serious challenge and lure offering up opportunities of recompense for coping with the problems of personality development or existential predicament, yet having an effect of stimulus as well. The negative effects of the new technical devices, Buda concludes, are insignificant and do not imply any peril, and even these minor ill-effects can be prevented or treated with a dose of care.

Attila KRAJCSI – Kristóf KOVÁCS – Csaba PLÉH: *Habits of Communication of Internet Users*

Habits of communication (in the use of the Internet and the mobile phone) of frequent Internet users were investigated with questionnaires that were accessible via the Internet. From the data, the study strives to extract partly general answers. The results show that among the frequent Internet users the dependent and alienated types of usage are not characteristic, the latter can be markedly distinguished from other intense uses of the net. Among the intense users of the Internet e-mail has become the prevailing tool of communication compared to other means. The anxiety of people who thought the lack of authentication dangerous has not proved true: methods develop with the users that check the trustworthiness of the source. Concerns of employers appear to have been proved,

however, that employees, when they have the opportunity, do gladly resort to forms of communication by which they can tend to their private matters discreetly. Beside the phenomena described here, the study analyzes a number of detailed data.

Miklós SÜKÖSD – János L. LÁSZLÓ: *The Prehistoric/Heroic Age of M-Government. How Do Self-Governments in Hungary Use the Mobile Phone and Who Settles the Bill?*

The study is the result of an empirical pilot project conducted at self-governments of fifteen townships in Hungary. Within the framework of this, the habits of local decision-makers and officials in the use of the mobile phone in 2001 was investigated and analyzed by members of the e-Democracy Workshop. In the course of the research, a total of 38 questionnaire-based interviews was made involving the following types of settlement: 10 villages (10 interviews with villages' mayors and notaries); 3 small-towns (18 interviews with small-towns' mayors, their deputies and representatives); 2 districts of Budapest (10 interviews with self-government representatives, one deputy mayor, and two heads of office). It was found that local politicians and decision-makers, by actively making use of the mobile, have quicker access to information which is more voluminous and more substantial than prior to the inception of the device. Primarily, this has an impact upon the preparation for decision-making. It was mostly in situations of „physical and political emergency“ that politicians of local governments had come to realize advantages stemming from the mobile phone. Decision-makers on all three levels of settlement regard the mobile phone as a device of work, a warranty for connectivity, accessibility, security, and exchange of information. Most interviewees fill the post of representative or mayor as a supplementary activity, in addition to a primary job or business. As a consequence, their mobile communication is perpetually pursued across networks of the working place, the self-government, and that of private life. Earlier boundaries of life rhythm are, therefore, being eroded toward those detached previously and the blocks of private life too are partly sliding into one another. The subjects' life of mobile communication is found to be characterized by an incessant alertness, a continual constraint of responding and of compliance in the different systems of communication, and the parallel functioning of networks which were discrete and separate in time earlier. This mobile existence is interpreted by the authors as a kind of schizophrenia kept under control and limits. Practically, local politicians fail to filter their incoming calls. Half of the small-town office-holders do not turn off their devices even at night. A significant minority of our interviewees favours all-round public presence and unrestricted access and even makes public their

mobile-phone numbers. In spite of this, the electors would not communicate with their elected ones via the mobile or in SMS. The political and administrative leaders of self-governments – mayors and notaries – receive free mobile use. This, however, is usually not granted to representatives. The mobile privileges are decided upon by those who in most cases secure an unlimited mobile use for themselves. The distribution of privileges along these lines strengthens the oligarchic tendency of local authority.

Béla MESTER: *Political Community and the Media. The User as Citizen*

In every structured society, political community is of a hierarchic structure. This is obvious from the phenomenon that different strata of education in society maintain a qualitatively different relation with the media they have access to. As early as in oral cultures, the *official commemorators* have an erudite faculty of mnemo-technique not amenable to all for storing and evoking important information. And starting from *chirographic* societies, the primary instrument of rule over the minds is the faculty of traversing between diverse and simultaneously present media. The concept of *bimediality* worked out to describe this specific formation of culture can be applied not only to the traversing between hand writing and orality but also to the newer range of media. It must be admitted though that this latter poses a much more complex picture, and it is harder to determine what a new medium is. For a moment, the *homo typographicus* held that the (educated) public opinion might become homogeneous, everyone was thought to be able to individually create ideas committed to written works and to judge these in a self-contained manner. This is where some of our notions originate, like freedom of the press and censorship, which presuppose that ideas arise in the minds of the individuals independently of anything and then the (improper) power would destroy a number of modes recorded in documents of some of them. Still, the more frequent form of power technique is to determine what the citizens should think and less to monitor the exchange of their thoughts already in existence. It follows, then, that instead of the concepts freedom of the press and censorship the adoption of the concept rule over the minds and the broader category of freedom of this could be more fertile, particularly in the *semi-typographicus* political public realm of our era.

Péter GEDEON: *Market and Money in the Mobile Information Society*

By creating market co-ordination, modern society brought about a complex economic system based on impersonal relations among individuals. In order to stabilize inter-personal transactions in the modern economy, the trust resided in

personal relationships is substituted for by trust in money. Indeed, the personal confidence felt toward members of the community is replaced by confidence in money. Mass production dividing work processes into homogeneous entities and turning out standardized products fitted well in to the logic of regulation requiring mainly impersonal trust. In mass production, the single units of products, of the workforce as well as of the consumer became replaceable with one another. The market of mass production did not require personal relations and personal trust between the actors. By contrast, in the new production and regulation paradigm that builds on the introduction of information technology and supplants mass production the mass consumer has become an individualized and personalized consumer with whom the seller must build up personal contacts owing to the pressure of market-driven competition. The importance of trust between seller and buyer will be enhanced. In this new paradigm of production and regulation accomplishing the mass customization of products the prevalence of impersonal trust in money is supplemented in market transactions with an aspiration to personal relationships. As a result of these two tendencies, the market is now governed by the principle of „impersonal intimacy“ – the impersonal as personal. The appearance of the mobile phone spawns between the actors of the market a relationship even more personal and more direct than that spawned by the internet. In addition, by means of the mobile phone the sellers are able to customize the commodities of mass production along the dimensions of locality. Information technology, then, clears the way not only for electronic commerce but for the advent of electronic money as well. The spontaneous emergence of electronic money may question the role of nation states in the process of money-making. Also, the mobile phone is readily applicable for mediating micro-payments bound to locality. Information technology makes possible not only the customization of mass production but also that of money mediating the exchange of goods and services.

János LAKI – Gábor PALLÓ: *The World of Projects and Informal Network in Science*

Big Science: the concept conveying the new form of scientific work emerged in the wake of World War Two. It helped the community of scientists reflect upon the slow changes evolving in the organization of science that had culminated in the Manhattan Project. It was recognized that an ever growing area of research was moving beyond the bounds of a given discipline into multidisciplinary and mobile collectives organized for resolving well-defined problems. This situation implied the danger of an ultimate fragmentation of knowledge. However, the new communication technologies, especially the Internet, engender not only the continued relations within projects but opportunities for linking between projects

as well. Our study explores these relations and links by using a novel terminology that aims to render the novelty of the situation. Referring to project management when the issue is organization, the study describes the actual cooperation in research as a notion of data mining (shared use of databases) from the side of the input, and as a notion of publication scouting (functioning of gateways designed for scientific purpose) from that of the output, while this latter serves also the daily routine of research. The new form of the operation of science puts some fundamental questions of the philosophy of science into a light not seen before: the correlation of the empirical and theoretical plane, the decision made between competing theories, the activity of the individual and collective agent of cognition (episteme). Also, it demonstrates the new form of the unity of knowledge vis a vis fragmentation.

Ulrich KISS, SJ: *The Theology of Communication*

It is the expressed will of the author to spark a dialog between scholars of the theology of communication and those of communication theory for the benefit of both disciplines. In the Catholic Church, the theology of communion assumed a central role in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. *Communio* has a dual meaning of community and unity. For the first time in the history of the Church the Vatican II has drafted a unified and coherent tenet concerning communication and determined as its chief aim the unity and advancement of men living in society in the pastoral instruction titled *Communio et Progressio*. The theology of communication is centred around the Holy Trinity and it contemplates the inner community and communication of God as a model for human communication. This latent divine communication revealed itself in Jesus Christ, who Himself is the supreme communication – that of the Father – and the Perfect Communicator. The Spirit sustains His work, and Pentecost is the symbol thereof, and the Church is its concrete locale, its sign, its sacrament. In Christ, the communication of man is restored which in the ‘original’ sin had broken between man and God as well as between men. How does the Church communicate all this? Not only is the adaptation into practice deficient, the author claims, but theology itself stands in need of new impulses as well. The desirable dialogue with the world is introduced with the following proposition: the intimate communication in the womb appearing with the mammals may well be the paradigm and primordial experience of community-building and mutuality-based communication.

Kristóf NYÍRI: *Manuel Castells, The Information Age. A Review*

Castells’ celebrated three-volume work presents a wealth of new insights and perspectives. The review attempts, first, to convey a general picture, or impression, of Castells’ *magnum opus* by citing from some of his own summary passages in the book. It then concentrates on a single phrase of Castells’ – „space of flows“, his most famous phrase – trying to uncover its meaning by tracing it, in a kind of backward narrative, to its first occurrence in his work, the essay „Crisis, Planning, and the Quality of Life“ written in 1982. That essay was a highly interesting and important one; the review will summarize its main theses, and then follow up those theses, this time in a forward narrative, by working through some of Castells’ main writings, before arriving at the book *The Information Age* once again. The survey concludes by emphasizing that Castells’ analyses on nations and nationalisms constitute a major topic which was absent from his earlier work.

Csaba PLÉH: *Merlin Donald, A Mind So Rare. A Review*

Merlin Donald, Professor of Psychology at Queens University, Province of Ontario, Canada is an extraordinary author representing that Canadian tradition we usually specify and evoke with the name of Marshall McLuhan. It is a tradition that, in its psychological message, aspires to locate a connection between procedures of communication, techniques of communication and the architecture of mind. Donald’s new book combines this approach to communication with an analysis of the process of human evolution and the nervous system of man. Consciousness develops in idiosyncratic steps that secure the detachment from dependency on our immediate environment. This however is not enough for the human mind. Some other agents are still required for the specific human consciousness to develop: the enormous plasticity of brain, the augmented capacity for working memory as well as the formation of symbolic fields which clear the way for new distributed functions and social semantics. It is pointed out in the review that this concept is a provocative synthesis for the current trends in neurology and in evolutionary theory while at the same time it singles out the motif of communication as the key to the non-reductive interpretation of man’s gregarious and societal being.