

Richard HARPER

The Communication Paradox

In this paper I will summarise some arguments I am putting forward in my latest book, *Texture: communications in the 21st century* (MIT Press, forthcoming). In particular, I will present an empirical and conceptual picture of our current communications patterns and habits as well as provide some historical reflections on the same. My remarks will not simply be about facts and figures though – volumes of traffic, mobile device ownership, modes of social expression enabled by the Internet, etc—but will be rather more interested in the ways in which the world-as-experienced is constructed and understood through various narratives, metaphors and vocabularies. I will want to suggest that our age is replete with such narratives. Castell's coinage of the phrase, the *Networked Society*, for example, is simply one of the many tropes that we have for our current world. I will argue that this and other related linguistic formulas suffuse and infuse our daily experiences. I will note that these metaphors and tropes lead some to suggest that 21st Century individuals lead more intense lives than those of prior generations. I will end my discussions by asking whether this is true. I will want to ask whether Shakespeare had more time than the contemporary individual, and if so what he might have done with that time. My reflections on this will lead me back to our current world and to what I suggest is the communications paradox one can see within it: to the idea that we communicate so much that we have little time for doing the things that justify the communication.

Richard HARPER is Senior Researcher at Microsoft Research in Cambridge. He has published nearly 90 papers, has numerous patents and is about to publish his 10th book, *Texture: Communication in the 21st Century* (MIT Press). Amongst his prior books is the IEEE award winning *The Myth of the Paperless Office* (MIT Press, 2002), co-authored with Abi Sellen. Prior to joining MSR, Richard was director of various technology innovation companies, including *The Appliance Studio* and *Social Shaping Research*. In 2000 he was appointed the UK's first Professor of Socio-Digital Systems, at the University of Surrey, England, where he set up the Digital World Research Centre. He completed his PhD at Manchester in 1989, prior to joining Xerox EuroPARC in 1992. He lives in Cambridge with his wife and three children.

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