

The papers in the present volume are revised and edited versions of talks given at the conference *Towards a Philosophy of Telecommunications Convergence*, held on 27–29 September 2007 in Budapest. This was the sixth international conference within the framework of the COMMUNICATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY project, a joint interdisciplinary social science project of T-Mobile and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.¹ The project was initiated by T-Mobile Hungary (until 2004 Westel Mobile), and launched in January 2001. The aim was to gain a broad, so to speak philosophically informed, perspective on the collective and personal needs that mobile telephony fulfils, and the changes it gives rise to in society and in the life of the individual.

In the course of the T-Mobile/HAS collaboration, altogether twelve volumes – four Hungarian, one German, and seven English – have been published. These volumes witnessed the history of the mobile between 2001 and 2007, no doubt the most dynamic aspect of the recent history of technological and social transformation. But most of all they amount to the first laying of the foundations for, and at the same time the awakening to consciousness and self-reflection of, a young discipline: the social science of mobile communication. Initially, research on problems pertaining to the mobile arose as an interdisciplinary task. From this interdisciplinary research, each of the participating disciplines profited, being forced to take account, on the level of theory, of the new medium which by now has come to constitute their main communicational environment. As a consequence of this taking account of the new realities, by 2005 or so a transformation was occurring which today has clearly become irreversible: *the internal adaptation of the social sciences to the world of mobile communications*. At the same time, an autonomous line of research emerged, based on a set of well-established paradigms of its own: the social science of mobile communication, *mobile studies*.

¹ For a regularly updated overview of the project, with a substantial proportion of our publications made available online, see the website <http://www.socialscience.t-mobile.hu>.

Let me here recapture very briefly some key ideas from our previous volumes. The first two Hungarian collections – *Mobil információs társadalom: Tanulmányok* [The Mobile Information Society: Essays] and *A 21. századi kommunikáció új útjai: Tanulmányok* [New Perspectives on 21st-Century Communications: Essays], both published in 2001 – on the one hand gave an initial inventory of the pertinent research problems and conceptual resources, and on the other hand, by way of drawing, as it were, a sketch of the mobile horizons of the future, formulated the following theses/hypotheses: 1. Mobile communication and physical mobility mutually reinforce each other – the internet and mobile telephony ultimately result in more, not less, travel and personal encounters. 2. Since knowledge is *information embedded in context*, and mobile communication is markedly situation-dependent and thus context-creating, the mobile information society is likely to be a society of *knowledge*, not of mere information. 3. Mobile, interactive, multimedia communication amounts to a return, on a higher level, to primordial, less-alienated forms of communication. 4. Mobile communication induces changes in human cognitive faculties. 5. The nature of political communication becomes transformed. 6. The nature of scientific communication becomes transformed.

Our third Hungarian-language collection appeared in 2002, under the title *Mobilközösség – mobilmegismerés: Tanulmányok* [Mobile Community – Mobile Cognition: Essays], as an enlarged variant of the parallel German and English volumes *Allzeit zuhanden: Gemeinschaft und Erkenntnis im Mobilzeitalter* (2002) and *Mobile Communication: Essays on Cognition and Community* (2003). This collection discussed in depth the notion of the information society as a *knowledge community*; among its chapters were Robin Dunbar's essay on gossip as a mechanism for maintaining community cohesion, and a definitive study on m-politics by Miklós Sükösd and Endre Dányi.

The fourth Hungarian-language volume, *Mobiltársadalomkutatás*, together with its English counterpart, *Mobile Studies: Paradigms and Perspectives* – our sixth English-language volume – was published in 2007. These two volumes aimed at a summary of the results of social science research on mobile communication, underway worldwide since 2000 or so, and pursued in Hungary since 2001. On the one hand they took stock of the paradigmatic theses and hypotheses of mobile studies, and, on the other, highlighted some of the new perspectives of the social sciences becoming aware of their mobile environment.

Of the four other English-language volumes following upon *Mobile Communication*, a further two appeared in 2003: *Mobile Learning: Essays on Philosophy, Psychology and Education*, which played a pioneering role in the

social scientific exposition of the notion of “m-learning”, a notion that today is very much in the centre of educational theory; and *Mobile Democracy: Essays on Society, Self and Politics*, presenting the mobile phone as the very answer to the communicational challenges of a decentralized global mass society. In the collection *A Sense of Place: The Global and the Local in Mobile Communication*, published in 2005, we strove to demonstrate that the mobile phone is not just an instrument for enabling global contacts, but also a means to maintain local bonds, organizing the life of small regions and small territories. Finally, appearing in 2006, the volume *Mobile Understanding: The Epistemology of Ubiquitous Communication* once more turned to the issue of m-learning, this time on a markedly philosophical level. It told of the revolution in epistemology, in particular *about the revolution in educational theory*; of our mobile companion as part of our mind; of the return of collective thinking; and of the development of the world of non-formal learning.

The present volume – our seventh English-language one – addresses a new trend: that of telecommunications convergence, the trend which, by 2005 at the latest, became the background against which mobile communications must be analyzed. The volume shows telecommunications convergence to be a many-faceted process, creating radically novel and complex patterns of mediated culture, posing new challenges to the humanities. The various dimensions of convergence – digital, technological, socio-cultural, linguistic; of content, devices, businesses, markets, even of scientific theories – do not fuse seamlessly. From a philosophical point of view, telecommunications convergence, in the last analysis, creates the conditions for C. P. Snow’s notorious “two cultures” to merge into one single culture; and indeed the conditions for the re-emergence of a unity of knowledge, absent from Western thought since the eighteenth century, by which time primitive medieval and early-modern frameworks of such a unity had ultimately become dissolved.

In this series, we do not follow the convention of indicating, for internet references, the date when authors last accessed the site they quote. Rather, each internet reference has been checked by the editor; all internet references contained in the present volume were valid at the time the material went to press, that is, in August 2008.