

Life's remote controller

We recently talked with Academy-member **Kristóf Nyíri**, leader of the interdisciplinary research jointly conducted by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) and T-Mobile on the social science aspects of mobile telephony; the occasion was that after the last years' researches, many international conferences and the publication of a volume of studies, he is dedicating this year to synthesizing and systematization.

■ **How long have you had a mobile phone and how much do you need it for your research area?**

■ I have had a mobile phone for ten or eleven years. The same thing

happened to me as to many others: my car broke down in the middle of a forest and I did not know how to get help. The next morning I went to buy my first mobile phone.

However the social science interdisciplinary research jointly started in January 2001 by T-Mobile (then Westel) and MTA did not develop from this practical experience but from my previous research area that covered the philosophical and human impacts of communications technology.

The direct advantages of mobile telephony can be listed rationally, the disadvantages are used as a kind of threat.



I see few disadvantages. New technology always triggers fears in the given age. When fixed telephony entered the scene, for a long time the upper middle class would not have it in their homes because they felt that letting anybody phone to the family instead of sending in their visiting card with the valet would disrupt the rules of social contact. Our research started from the point that mobile telephony belongs to the natural condition of humans through the omnipresent communication. Humans initially lived in small groups and could continuously communicate with those whom they knew. The centuries

when these connections were cut by the relations of the mammoth society and we were disconnected from our loved ones and the society was too large to be transparent were unnatural – in philosophy this is called communication alienation. In this context mobile telephony is a communication liberation or, if you like, a home-coming. This is a new natural condition at a higher technical level.

■ **What can this technology still bring us?**

■ Mobile is diversifying through convergence with the other communication devices. It uses the networks of telephone operators

or when necessary enters a WLAN node that is independent of operators. A process of rapid and full convergence is taking place between mobile telephony and broadband internet which means that the age when what we call mobile telephone becomes life's complete remote controller is within our grasp. Everything can be reached with it, institutions, individuals, contents, entertainment, television. And a future is taking shape in the background where we will be in permanent communication also with the world of objects.