

Stefan BERTSCHI

Convergence as Religion: Is There Morale in Telecommunications?

Convergence is the “Sign O’ The Times” of the early twenty-first century. Everything – and telecommunications in particular – seems to converge and calls for its philosophical investigation. It is just a matter of taste whether one resists the urge to follow the negative tone in pop star Prince’s lyrics and use it as follows: Is convergence a deadly narcotic drug – or is it a healing religion? Focussing on the second assumption, it seems reasonable to impregnate the proposed paper sociologically. This can be achieved by relating Georg Simmel’s concept of interaction or reciprocal effects (Wechselwirkung) to the hyped notion of convergence (Annäherung). Convergence, it is argued, cannot replace interaction; it makes it more intense. Using the mobile phone as the starting point of this investigation, I shall ask (1) whether telecommunications convergence can be considered a religion, (2) to what extent we may speak of morale in telecommunications, and (3) to what extent the connection of convergence and interaction leads to a better understanding of an “engineered” society. In order to reveal answers to these questions, my previous notion of the mobile phone as a cultural artefact is extended into the realm of pervasive computing, ambient intelligence and nanotechnology. The paper concludes by discussing the ability of such an approach to recognise novel types of interaction and to explain the new converged realities.

Stefan BERTSCHI is an independent management consultant (in strategic development and change communication) and a sociologist, currently affiliated to the University of Zurich, Switzerland. He is founder of loginb.com, a research-based consultancy specialising in understanding social and cultural processes, and co-editor of *Thumb Culture: The Meaning of Mobile Phones for Society* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2005). Current interests include social cognition, cultural sociology and classical sociological theory. E-mail: stefan.bertschi@loginb.com.

