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REVIEWS

Prates, R., De Souza C., Barbosa, S.: *A Method for Evaluating the Communicability of User Interfaces*, in *Interaction*, January-February 2000: 31-38 (also available at URI: <http://peirce.inf.pucrio.br>).

One of the challenging research focuses of SERG, the Semiotic Engineering Research Group affiliated to the Informatics Department of the Pontificia Universidade Católica in Rio de Janeiro (Brasil), is the communicability evaluation of user interface in software applications.

Communicability is defined by the authors as «the property of software that efficiently and effectively conveys to users its underlying design intent and interactive principles». This definition stems from the thesis that user interfaces are considered as one-shot, high-order messages sent from application designers to the expected users.

Though a main stream in interface analysis research focuses on the concept of usability, this study points out that communicability is worth consideration as the semiotic counterpart of usability engineering. While usability aims at providing the user with *usable* computer systems, communicability evaluation features its own distinctive scope, which is to evaluate how designers communicate their design intentions to the user, thus complementing traditional usability techniques.

Employing a semiotic perspective, the authors consider a software system as «discourse deputy» for the designer. The deputy, which can be also viewed as an ambassador for the designer, can only communicate to users the set of conversational rules, the interaction tools, and the themes predicted by the designer at design time.

The relevance of communicability evaluation reveals its strength as the authors claim that the degree to which a user interacts successfully with the application and is thus able to accomplish his task is closely related to whether he understands the designer's intention that shaped the interface artifact.

The communicability evaluation method proposed comprises three steps: tagging, interpretation, and semiotic profiling.

Tagging consists in recording users' reactions to what happens during an interaction session with the system.

In order to express these reactions in an understandable manner, a set of standard utterances is chosen (e.g.: What's this, Where is that, Where am I? and so on). Tagging is performed both by users (during the session or later reviewing themselves) and by designers (or HCI experts), who verify the Tagging and try to capture the interactive breakdowns that occurred in the session.

The second step (Interpretation) is intended to map the utterances stated

during the tagging process to well-known and more general HCI and usability problems. For example, the tag «What's this» correspond to the problem of «Meaning Assignment». HCI experts perform an Interpretation step. Studying and analyzing more in depth the communication breakdowns, they can provide guidelines to re-design the interface.

Semiotic Profiling, the third step of the evaluation method, moves into a higher conceptual order of analysis. Making use of the results achieved in the tagging and interpretation phases, semiotic engineers now try to discern the original conception of the designer as to who the users are and what their needs and expectations are. In other words, the «meta-communication» of the designer has to be stated (e.g., the application was addressed to novice users and not to expert ones, and so on).

These considerations, which, at first glance, could be considered as the starting point of an application analysis, are achieved — according to the SERG method — only at the end of the evaluation process, which first and foremost focuses on the actual user usage of the application. Such an empirically oriented approach seems to be very fruitful. SERG applied it successfully on a large variety of software applications (from operative system utility tools such as CD players to widely used Web editing programs).

As an interesting methodological remark, we should note that SERG communicability evaluation also reveals that a cross-discipline team (HCI experts, linguists, semiotic experts, software engineers) is a necessary condition to achieve appreciable results.

Finally, the proposed method could perhaps be susceptible of some improvements if other kinds of software application become objects of study. Let us think of modern Web sites, whose complexity of hypertextual architecture often reveals navigational paths to the reader that go far beyond designer expectations and intentions. In such cases, how strong is the relation between interaction breakdowns and designer's intentions? Is the responsibility of the designer always discernible?

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Trevor Ponech: *What Is Non-Fiction Cinema? On the Very Idea of Motion Picture Communication*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1999.

Il saggio di Trevor Ponech, *Associate Professor* di Inglese alla McGill University di Montréal, indaga l'ambiguità della natura comunicativa insita nel testo filmico, evidenziando le incertezze alla base di una rigorosa distinzione tra finzionalità e fattualità filmica. Obiettivo dello studio, facendo riferimento più alla teoria degli atti linguistici che a quella del cinema, è quello di definire un modello di differenziazione e caratterizzazione del film fattuale. Nei primi sei capitoli Ponech dimostra come per una corretta differenziazione tra questi due macrogeneri, i presupposti siano da ricercarsi innanzitutto nel fatto che la finzionalità o la fattualità filmica sono determinate dalla precisa intenzionalità autoriale, e, secondariamente, dall'inequivocabilità, essenzialità ed ineliminabilità di tale distinzione. Viene

quindi illustrata la nozione di fattualità, le condizioni che un testo filmico deve soddisfare per essere considerato *non finzionale*, e come il processo attraverso cui l'autore crea un'opera di tale natura si sviluppa.

Negli ultimi tre capitoli Ponech considera invece le problematiche precedenti secondo una prospettiva pragmatica, analizzando la visione e l'interpretazione filmica dello spettatore.

Oltre ad affrontare la differenziazione tra i due macrogeneri il volume si sofferma anche sui pericoli manipolatori e distorsori derivanti da un'utilizzazione del materiale fattuale finalizzata a rendere il testo filmico più coinvolgente o collimante con l'«agenda» personale degli autori.

Argomentazioni ponderate e intelligenti fanno di questo studio un testo di riferimento per la comprensione delle specificità della rappresentazione e comunicazione filmica fattuale, del modo in cui il cinema si confronta con la realtà extra-filmica e delle modalità con cui gli autori usano elementi fattuali per tentare di collegarsi con il proprio pubblico. Un testo, in ultima analisi, di sicura affidabilità per riflettere ulteriormente sulla questione sempre aperta del valore di verità proprio e improprio dell'immagine filmica documentaria.

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Mattelart, Armand: *L'âge de l'information: genèse d'une appellation non contrôlée*. In: *Réseaux* n° 101. Questionner la société de l'information. Paris: Hermès Science Publications 2000: 19-52.

Mosco, Vincent: *Les nouvelles technologies de communication: une approche politico-économique*. In: *Réseaux* n° 101. Questionner la société de l'information. Paris: Hermès Science Publications 2000: 93-118.

The articles by Armand Mattelart and Vincent Mosco appeared in number 101 of the French review *Réseaux*, dedicated to the theme of the information society and edited by Professor Bernard Miège.

The main purpose of the dossier is to inquire about the meaning of the information age concept and its representations. Mattelart tackles the theme by going back over the genesis of the notion of the information age, while Mosco treats it from the standpoint of political economy.

The paper of Mattelart, a scholar of the history and theory of communication, is inspired by the work of the American sociologist Daniel Bell entitled *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, published for the first time in 1973 and reissued in 1999. The study's purpose is «[...] revenir sur la configuration politique et idéologique qui a donné sens à *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* dans les décennies soixante et soixante-dix, et de le resituer par rapport à d'autres scénarios sur la société technologique du futur apparus au cours de cette période particulièrement foisonnante en néologismes.» (p. 22)

The definitions and the arguments of Bell, Toffler, Brzezinski and other experts are collected and analysed by the author according to three categories: the sociological debate, the forecasts of consultants, and the geopolitical approach.

At the end of the fifties, the sociological debate revolved primarily around two theses: the end of ideology and the *Managerial Society*, which, ten years later, become tangled into the concept of post-industrial society used for the first time by Bell in 1959. «Ce qui est inédit, et décisif, dans la société postindustrielle, c'est l'expansion des «services humains» (santé, éducation et services sociaux) et des «services techniques et professionnels» (recherche, évaluation, traitement informatique et analyse de systèmes).» (p. 29) Mattelart compares Bell's view with the view of the French sociologist Alain Touraine, who prefers the expression *société programmée* instead of the expression post-industrial society.

In the same years, many research centres focussed their studies on planning methods and on futurology, trying to develop forecasts which represent the society of the future (Mattelart argues that, in some cases, these scenarios turned out to be extreme). In this context, the American sociologist Alvin Toffler coined the term *super-industrial society*, considering the existing definitions as incomplete: «Expression par laquelle il affirme vouloir signifier une «société complète, au rythme rapide, reposant sur une technologie extrêmement avancée et un système de valeurs postmatérialiste.»» (p. 38)

Among the authors that adopt a geopolitical approach and claim the advent of a new form of universalism and the information age due to the expansion of the communication technologies, Mattelart places Zbigniew Brzezinski and Marshall McLuhan.

The first, taking the United States as an exemple, states that the spread of

the communication network will bring to the global society a *technocratic era*.

The second argues that the instantaneousness and the globality of the information will produce a mass participation and involvement process that will take humanity back to a primitive cohesion; McLuhan synthesizes this thesis with the metaphor of the *global village*.

In the seventies, the expression *information society* came into use and, twenty years later, it merged with the concept of globalisation into the formula *global society of information*.

The article by Vincent Mosco, Professor of Communication, Sociology and Political Economy at Carleton University of Ottawa, can be split in two parts.

In the first one, he describes the state of the main theoretical knowledge acquired by political-economic research in the field of communication and proposes to rethink and reinvent this approach in the light of the latest developments in the field.

Even if there are exceptions, in Mosco's opinion, it is possible to classify the theoretical models of the political-economic approach according to three currents: the North American approach, the European approach, and the approach of the states of the Third World.

The American research, strongly influenced by Dallas Smythe and Herbert Schiller, has centred its attention on the power and the influence of the multinational communication industries.

In Europe, the research has developed according to two guidelines. One has focussed on the relationship between the field of communication and

the power of the social classes. This approach is present in the works of Gartham, Golding, Murdock, and Miège. On the other hand, the second approach has focused on the class struggle and can be found in the works of Armand Mattelart, who considers communication as one of the main resources to resist the centralization of power.

In the research done in the states of the Third World the view that considered the means of communication a sign of development and an impulse towards modernisation has been questioned by different experts since it is too characterized by technological determinism.

* * *

Mosco suggests some useful ideas to rethink the political-economic research in the field of communication.

In this view, the evolution of social processes and relationships must have priority over social structures and institutions. For example, the author stresses the notion of *spatialisation*, which is the control process of space and time contaminations in the social life. «La communication est au centre même de la spatialisation, car les méthodes et les technologies de la communication et de l'information permettent un contrôle et une flexibilité dans le monde des affaires en général, et dans les entreprises de ce secteur des communications et de l'information en particulier.» (p. 102)

In the second part of the study, taking as an example Western Union and Microsoft, the author states that the monopoly is a type of regime which has characterized the communication field from the telegraph to the internet.

Mosco challenges the myth of a technological revolution which glorifies the convergence and states that the technology makes drastic changes and concludes by arguing in favour of regulation.

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Schreiber, G.; Akkermans, H.; Anjewierden, A.; de Hoog, R.; Shadbolt, N.; Van de Velde, W. & Wielinga, B.: *Knowledge Engineering and Management. The CommonKADS Methodology*, Cambridge: MIT Press 2000.

This book sheds light on the role that the scientific tradition of Knowledge Engineering (concepts, methods and instruments) can play in the more recent practice of Knowledge Management. Therefore overlappings between Knowledge Engineering and Knowledge Management are pointed out.

Specific reference is made to projects where the Knowledge Management solution is the construction of a knowledge system. In this case the relationship between Knowledge Management and Knowledge Engineering is clear: Knowledge Engineering supplies the methodology to build a tool used in Knowledge Management.

In all other cases Knowledge Engineering provides: useful concepts and methods for knowledge-oriented organization analysis, modelling techniques for tasks and agents, techniques to represent (often graphically) knowledge intensive activities and knowledge items. Moreover research experience in Knowledge Engineering provides li-

libraries of structures that recur in different domains: structures that have already been formalized and that can be reused.

In fact, identifying and modelling knowledge are central activities in any kind of Knowledge Management project. In order to complete those activities, a methodology is needed, and it can be cleverly supplied by Knowledge Engineering. For this purpose, the authors propose CommonKADS, a model used in knowledge systems design that has been developed over the past ten years by an industry-university consortium led by the authors.

In the book the whole model is explained; crucial project steps involving various professional figures (the knowledge analyst, the knowledge system developer, the knowledge manager, and the project manager) are pointed out.

CommonKADS (Fig.1) is a model-suite widely based on the UML notation standard: every model comprises the grids to be filled in each project phase; each grid comprises the necessary semantic links to objects described in the other grids. The book describes and gives reasons for each grid. Case studies are added, so that it is possible to understand how the grids support the formalization of a complex situation.

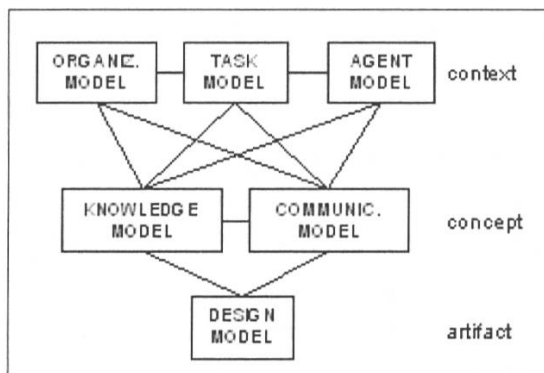


Figure 1: The CommonKADS model suite

Organization, task and the agent model constitute the context analysis. The *knowledge model* provides a conceptual, implementation-independent description of knowledge items and of their role within different tasks completed by agents. The *communication model* provides a description (conceptual and implementation-independent as well) of agent interactions, during the execution of tasks. The *knowledge model* and the *communication model* represent together the concept level. Finally, the *design model*, based on requirements defined in upper levels, supports the system specification (architecture and software modules). It is specifically derived from the function described in the *knowledge* and *communication models*.

On the whole, CommonKADS can be used as a guide for knowledge identification and representation during any Knowledge Management project. In addition to that, specific techniques typical of Knowledge Engineering can be borrowed from CommonKADS. An example are the knowledge elicitation techniques described in the *knowledge model*: interview (structured or not structured), protocol analysis, laddering, concept sorting, and repertory grids.

Finally, one of the positive features of this book is that it translates the insight — a technological solution must be born integrated into the organizational context — into a project methodology: even the decision itself to adopt a technological solution has to come from an accurate analysis of structures, processes, agents, communication and knowledge flows. This is an important contribution, because, in Knowledge Management, there is often a di-

cothomy between developing up to date technological solutions and strategic-organizational studies.

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Italian Communications Authority, *The White Book on Digital Terrestrial Television*, Rome, 2000. Available at URL: <http://www.agcom.it/provv/libro%5Fb%5F00/librobianco00.htm>.

The White Book on Digital Terrestrial Television, published in May 2000 (the «White Book»), sets out the results of the activity carried out by the Committee for the Development of Digital Systems, which was set up on 25 November 1998 by the Italian Communications Authority with the purpose of laying down conditions and objectives for the development of digital technology in Italy, both in radio and TV broadcasting as well as multimedia applications. Members of the Committee were, among others, the Ministry of Communications, RAI, Mediaset, Tele+, Stream, REA (Association of European Radio and TV Broadcasters) and the Italian Communications Authority.

After completing the technical work with the assistance of experts, the Italian Communications Authority has prepared the White Book in order to promote in Italy the rapid transition from analogue to digital TV as well as to provide a technical contribution to the implementation of the digital technology.

Digital standards open up new opportunities for service suppliers, net-

work operators, the industries of the sector and the end-users within a market which sees an increasing co-operation and convergence among broadcasting, telecommunications and information technology. The advantages of the digital standards, as detailed and discussed in the White Book, are the enhancement of the service in terms of quality and quantity, the provision of additional interactive TV services — such as enhanced broadcasting, interactive TV and Internet access by TV — and the replacing of the current analogue devices.

The White Book puts forward some solutions as to the planning of the digital terrestrial TV networks and their interaction with the existing analogue TV networks, by considering the various available options and describing the different scenarios for the distribution of transmission devices and the allocation of frequencies. It further proposes solutions for the definition of the structure of networks suitable for the development of digital terrestrial TV in Italy, with specific reference to the codification systems, multiplexing, distribution and diffusion. The possibility to use digital TV service with a «single decoder» as well as the operational scenarios proposed for the start-up and the development of digital TV are the most interesting issues raised by the White Book and will be examined here below with particular attention.

* * *

By using digital TV services with a «single decoder», customers are able, through the same set-top box, to receive TV programs offered by different oper-

ators, both «in-clear» and «hidden», and also digital TV programs through different transmission systems (cable, satellite, terrestrial). This means that the opportunity for the consumers to use a larger spectrum of digital TV services with a «single decoder» is faced with two scenarios whose dynamics are different: on the one side, the market for analogue and satellite TV, which shows a significant increase in the sale of decoders, mainly due to a broad offer of pay and «in-clear» TV programs; and on the other side, the market for digital terrestrial TV.

In addition, the moving from analogue to digital TV will involve costs for the viewers, since they will have to adjust their TV aerials to the reception of programs and to have a «set top box», i.e., a decoder with a good memory and data processing capacity for which the White Book recommends «the use of a single technology».

The crucial issue in allowing digital terrestrial TV to make a successful start is the way digitalisation is going to take place, i.e., which development strategies should be used in the transitional period, whether a «spotted» covering or rather one following the recommendations of the National Frequency Plan. The White Book details pros and cons of the two available options.

In conclusion, the White Book emphasises that the introduction of digital terrestrial TV will be beneficial to the whole national economic system. Particularly, as a result of such an introduction, the industrial and business sector of information technology, for both professional and private purposes, will see the opening of a market whose value is estimated at around ITL 60,000 bn.

The development of this market, particularly in the start-up and transitional phase, is, however, also dependent on careful promotional and regulatory activity aiming to reduce the charges arising for both operators and end-users.

The importance of the White Book, initially aimed at the operators active in the various sectors of the television market, is shown by the fact that its publication has reached a considerably wider range of readers.

The White Book, which has an institutional character and sets out in detail official proposals in the digital terrestrial television sector, is easy reading for people expert in the field but appears to be too technical for students, for whom it may nevertheless represent a valuable learning experience.

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Jürgen Wilke: *Grundzüge der Medien- und Kommunikationsgeschichte*. Von den Anfängen bis ins 20. Jahrhundert, Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau 2000.

Da kommunikationshistorische 436-Seiten-Bücher mit Lapidartiteln wie dem hier gewählten relativ selten erscheinen, gilt der erste Blick der Einleitung, wo wir die Prinzipien des Werkes suchen. Sie steht — als Kapitel 1 — unter der Überschrift, Begriffliche Vorbemerkungen und Eingrenzung des Gegenstandes' und umfasst ganze 115 Druckzeilen. Der Autor klärt uns über seinen, den publizistikwissenschaftlichen Medienbegriff auf, distanziert sich von den Aufweichungstendenzen, die in den letzten Jahren ganz generell den Begriff Me-

dium haben beliebig werden lassen — die «Wand als Medium» — und erklärt seine Absicht, an der konventionellen Begriffsfüllung festhalten zu wollen. Er räumt ein, dass demnach eine Medien-geschichte mit Gutenberg einzusetzen hätte: Kommunikation *vor* der technischen Erfindung des Druckens falle eben schlicht unter Kommunikation, und als solche komme sie im Buchtitel vor, allerdings im Buchtitel den Medien nachgeordnet, und dies mit Absicht: Autor Wilke wolle bewusst «in erster Linie die durch Medien vermittelte Kommunikation» anvisieren (S. 2).

Die Absichtserklärung ist ob ihrer Klarheit akzeptabel, umso mehr als der Autor sehr wohl weiß und zu erkennen gibt, was auch anders gesehen werden kann und was sich zur Zeit tut («neue Medien», einmal mehr). Sie ist jedoch insofern enttäuschend, als sie (wie die ganze Einleitung) jeglichen Beitrag zur Diskussion des kommunikationsgeschichtlichen Paradigmas verweigert. Wilke hat solche Beiträge an anderen Stellen sehr wohl geleistet, und seine Verweigerung ist wohl so zu lesen, dass er in diesem Buch schnell und gründlich zur Sache kommen will. Die Sache, das ist eine *histoire des événements*, und nicht — oder nur gelegentlich — die Auseinandersetzungen mit Strukturen und Konjunkturen, die Verwobenheit des Langsamen und des Schnellen, des Veränderlichen und des Bleibenden (F. Braudel).

Die einleitenden Sätze sind also von arbeitsökonomisch bedingter *austerity* geprägt. Das gilt auch für die ebendort notierte geohistorische Einschränkung: es lasse sich zwar «weniger noch als bei anderen, Geschichten» eine «isolierte, nationale Perspektive wählen oder

durchhalten», aber die Darstellung beschränke sich aus guten Gründen «auf die Entwicklung in Deutschland» (S. 3).

Der Leser weiß jetzt, woran er ist, und falls er Gourmet ist, fühlt er sich wie ein wenig wie ein Witzigmann-Adept, der eine Tisch-Reservierung ergattert hat und in der Speisekarte liest, dass heute abend Dr. Oetker-Rezepte à la Witzigmann auf dem Programm stehen. Was findet er bei Wilke? Kapitel 2 macht bereits die Zentrierung auf «Massenkommunikation» deutlich, und alle anderen Kapitel (3 bis 8) folgen ihm: Es gibt keine Kapitelüberschrift, in welcher «Massenkommunikation» nicht vorkommt. Ihr zugeordnet werden systematisierende Phasenbegriffe: Vorgeschichte (= Kap. 2), Entstehung (3), Institutionalisierung (4), funktionale Erweiterung (5), Expansion und Diversifikation (6) Retardierung und Entfesselung (7) und schließlich Plurimedialität (8). In diesen Begriffen und den diesbezüglichen kurzen Kapitel-Einleitungen liegt die durchaus theoretische (aber auch didaktische) Leistung des Buches. Man kann sich ihnen und ihrer zugleich ordnenden wie erhellenden Kraft unterwerfen, dies umso mehr, als sie sich auch noch einigermaßen passend Zeitabschnitten und Medientypen zuordnen lassen: die *Entstehung* dem 15. und 16. Jahrhundert und den nichtperiodischen Druckwerken, die *Institutionalisierung* der Zeitung (1. Hälfte des 17. Jahrhundert), die *funktionale Erweiterung* der Zeitschrift (2. Hälfte des 17. Jahrhundert), die *Diversifikation* dem 18. Jahrhundert (Periodika unter dem Einfluss von Aufklärung und Klassik), die *Retardierung* (Zensur) und *Entfesselung* (Pressefreiheit, Massenpresse) dem 19. Jahrhun-

dert und die *Pluralität*, wen wundert es noch, dem 20. Jahrhundert.

Das alles passt zueinander, nimmt man es mit dem berühmten Körnchen Salz zu sich. Verläßt man den Ansatz der Wilkeschen Generalisierung per Kapitelüberschrift, so findet man sich einerseits zurückgeworfen auf Differenzierungen, wie wir sie z.B. aus herkömmlicher nationaler Pressegeschichtsschreibung kennen, andererseits aber einen (längst erreichten!) Schritt vorwärtsgebracht: Die «Massenpresse» (im Sinne von erschwinglicher Hochauflagenzeitung) ist zu recht krummer Zeit (1830er Jahre) und aufgrund ganz verschiedener gesellschaftlicher Gegebenheiten in zwei ganz verschiedenen Ländern (USA und Frankreich) ins Leben getreten, weil, so hätte es der alte Prutz gesehen, «der geistige Zustand der Welt ein solches Mittel allgemeinsten Mittheilung nöthig machte». Die beiden Innovationsmeilensteine, nämlich Benjamin Days «Sun» (1833) und Girardins «La Presse» bzw. Dutacs «Le Siècle» (1834) finden wir zwar im Nachklapp des 7. Kapitels («7.7 Die Presse in anderen Ländern»), und im Falle der «Sun» vermittelt Wilke auch, dass er sich des «radikalen Bruchs» bewusst ist, den Day in die Zeitungsmacherei eingebracht hat (S. 301). Die zur Wende in Frankreich wie zu jener in den USA — beide waren nicht nur ökonomisch- sondern auch stil- und habitusprägend — mitgeteilten Daten und Fakten sind, wie wahrscheinlich alle in diesen «Grundzügen», richtig, aber sie gehen unter in der Überfülle von Einzelinformationen, die es in den nationalen Sachkapiteln zu verdauen gilt. Ich greife als Beispiel willkürlich eine Seite aus dem Abschnitt 7.2.3 (Zeit-

schriften [19. Jahrhundert]) heraus; dort müsste ich, wenn ich als Student für eine Vorlesungsprüfung zu lernen hätte, u.a. folgende Titel in meinen Kopf bunkern: Germania, Europäische Annalen, Der Rheinische Bund, Kieler Blätter, Nemesis, Oppositions-Blatt, Zeitschwingen, Des Deutschen Volkes Fliegende Blätter, Isis, Die Waage, Dramaturgische Blätter, Thusnelda, Hermann, Der Sächsische Patriot, Deutsche Blätter, Journal des Dames et des Modes..., — die Seite ist noch nicht zuende, aber der altgediente Professor denkt an seine Vorlesungskundschaft: Wie könnte er bewirken, dass ein einziger Titel aus der Litanei, vielleicht die «Nemesis», in den Köpfen bliebe?

Damit habe ich die Hauptschwäche der Gesamtdarstellung berührt, ihre überbordende Daten- und Faktenfülle; sie ist mit Personen- und Titelregister gut erschlossen, d.h. ich finde die «Nemesis» und auch Luden mit Hinweis auf S. 177 und komme damit zu einer Stärke des Buches, von der ich nicht weiß, ob der Autor sie seinem Hauptzweck zugeordnet wissen will: Es ist ein Nachschlagemittel hohen Ranges, denn wenn ich per Register zu einem Titel bzw. einer Person gefunden habe, so werde ich fast immer mit den einschlägigen Literaturhinweisen versorgt: Das Literaturverzeichnis umfasst 63 Seiten. Die Literaturunterfütterung verdichtet sich im 8. Kapitel (20. Jahrhundert), wo es dann — endlich, aber leider relativ knapp, auch um Film, Radio und Fernsehen (zusammen 37 Seiten) geht, um ein gut beforschtes Feld mit überwiegend junger Literatur. Angesichts der quantitativen Asymmetrie ist das Buch also eher als Pressegeschichte mit einem Ergänzungskapitel über auditive

und visuelle Medien einzustufen.

Eine abschließende Erörterung hätte der Rezensent dem Titelbestandteil «Grundzüge» zu widmen. Grundzüge, auch Grundrisse, Grundfragen gehören in der Regel zur didaktischen Literatur. Sie vermitteln entweder das schlechthin Wesentliche eines wissenschaftlichen Feldes in lapidarer Form (Droysen) oder den Bauplan eines theoretischen Versuchs (Krumbach) oder die programmatische Lehre eines neuen Anfangs (Hagemann). Bei Wilkes Grundzügen stellt sich auch der Gedanke an das gegenwärtige Hörerpublikum der Publizistikwissenschaft ein: In der nicht enden wollenden Ausdifferenzierung des Faches, in seiner überwältigenden Gegenwarts-, sogar Zukunftsbindung und angesichts der darin untergehenden geschichtlichen Orientierung zeigen sich Grundzüge als Rettungsfluß; wenn die Studierenden, bitte, wenigstens die Grundzüge zu erfassen vermöchten... Ja, wenn: Wenn es denn Grundzüge im eigentlichen Sinn des Wortes wären, die wichtigsten Linien, definierte Gewichtungen, ein paar Anschaulichkeiten in Wort oder Bild, vielleicht auch das eine oder andere persönliche Bekenntnis. Das sind sie nicht. Aber sie sind ein formidabler Thesaurus, den man jetzt erproben sollte.

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Lynn Cherny: *Conversation and Community. Chat in a virtual world*, CSLI Publications, Stanford 1999.

Il libro di Lynn Cherny descrive l'emergere di una particolare comunità virtua-

le per mezzo di un'analisi dettagliata di alcuni fenomeni linguistici riscontrati nell'interazione fra gli utenti della comunità stessa. La comunità in questione è nata su ElseMOO, un MUD (Multi User Dungeon) al quale l'autrice ha partecipato a partire dal 1994. Un MUD è un ambiente virtuale creato da un programma al quale più utenti possono connettersi contemporaneamente per interagire in tempo reale; si tratta dunque di un tipo particolare di chat.

Dopo una breve introduzione ai MUDs in generale, Cherny descrive dettagliatamente ElseMOO, delineandone la storia, le caratteristiche tecniche, le caratteristiche degli utenti, la struttura gerarchica che gli utenti si sono dati, e i principali tratti della comunità che su ElseMOO si è formata. L'assunto fondamentale è che la percezione che gli utenti hanno di formare una comunità e di appartenere ad essa si fonda sul riconoscimento di una cultura e di alcune convenzioni che sono caratteristiche peculiari della comunità stessa. Questo riconoscimento è dovuto in gran parte alla percezione dell'utilizzo di un linguaggio comune, un vero e proprio gergo condiviso dai membri della comunità.

I capitoli dal terzo al quinto sono quelli di taglio più propriamente linguistico. Nel terzo capitolo vengono descritte e analizzate le particolarità linguistiche della comunità: alterazioni morfologiche e sintattiche come la soppressione di preposizioni (es.: «Henry nods George»), l'uso convenzionale di svariate contrazioni («Pete dunno») e la duplicazione («Colm laughlaughs»); l'uso di abbreviazioni e sigle tipiche della cultura hacker e degli utenti di Usenet in generale; l'uso di procedure standar-

dizzate, espressioni idiomatiche cristallizzate, o formule che si ripetono frequentemente (*routines*).

Il quarto capitolo affonda invece le sue radici nella letteratura sull'analisi della conversazione, focalizzandosi in particolare sui metodi del *turn-taking*. Cherny analizza il modo in cui i processi di *turn-taking* vengono negoziati dai partecipanti durante la loro interazione su ElseMOO, giungendo a contraddire la tesi secondo la quale la lunghezza dei turni conversazionali sarebbe più lunga negli scambi scritti (o digitati) che nelle conversazioni faccia a faccia.

Nel quinto capitolo l'autrice propone un'analisi semantica dell'utilizzo del tempo presente nei comandi *emote* nei MUDs: gli *emote* sono una serie di comandi grazie ai quali gli utenti possono parlare in terza persona di se stessi (ad esempio, usando l'apposito comando, Tom può fare in modo che sugli schermi degli altri utenti collegati compaia un messaggio come: «Tom hates that film» al posto del più frequente «Tom says: 'I hate that film'»). L'utilizzo del tempo presente in questo tipo di messaggi viene confrontato con l'utilizzo del presente negli enunciati performativi e con l'uso che se ne fa nelle cronache sportive.

L'ultimo capitolo mette a fuoco la nozione di 'comunità' da un punto di vista più strettamente sociologico ed antropologico. Cherny individua cinque tradizioni di studi, che raggruppa in altrettante categorie: definizioni di 'comunità' basate sulla tradizione e sulla pratica, studi sulle reti sociali, definizioni basate sulle azioni collettive e i beni collettivi, teorie sui confini, e definizioni utopiche e simboliche. A partire da questa analisi, l'autrice si chiede fino a

che punto la comunità nata su ElseMOO possa rientrare nelle definizioni tradizionali di comunità.

L'opera di Cherny si colloca nel filone di studi sulla Computer-Mediated Communication e le comunità virtuali. Il suo approccio può essere definito 'etnolinguistico': lo sguardo etnografico su di una particolare comunità viene sostenuto da un'analisi linguistica dei modelli discorsivi adottati dai membri della comunità; i fenomeni linguistici non vengono analizzati in astratto, ma all'interno del loro contesto di occorrenza, che viene descritto e analizzato in tutta la sua complessità sociale, linguistica e tecnologica.

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