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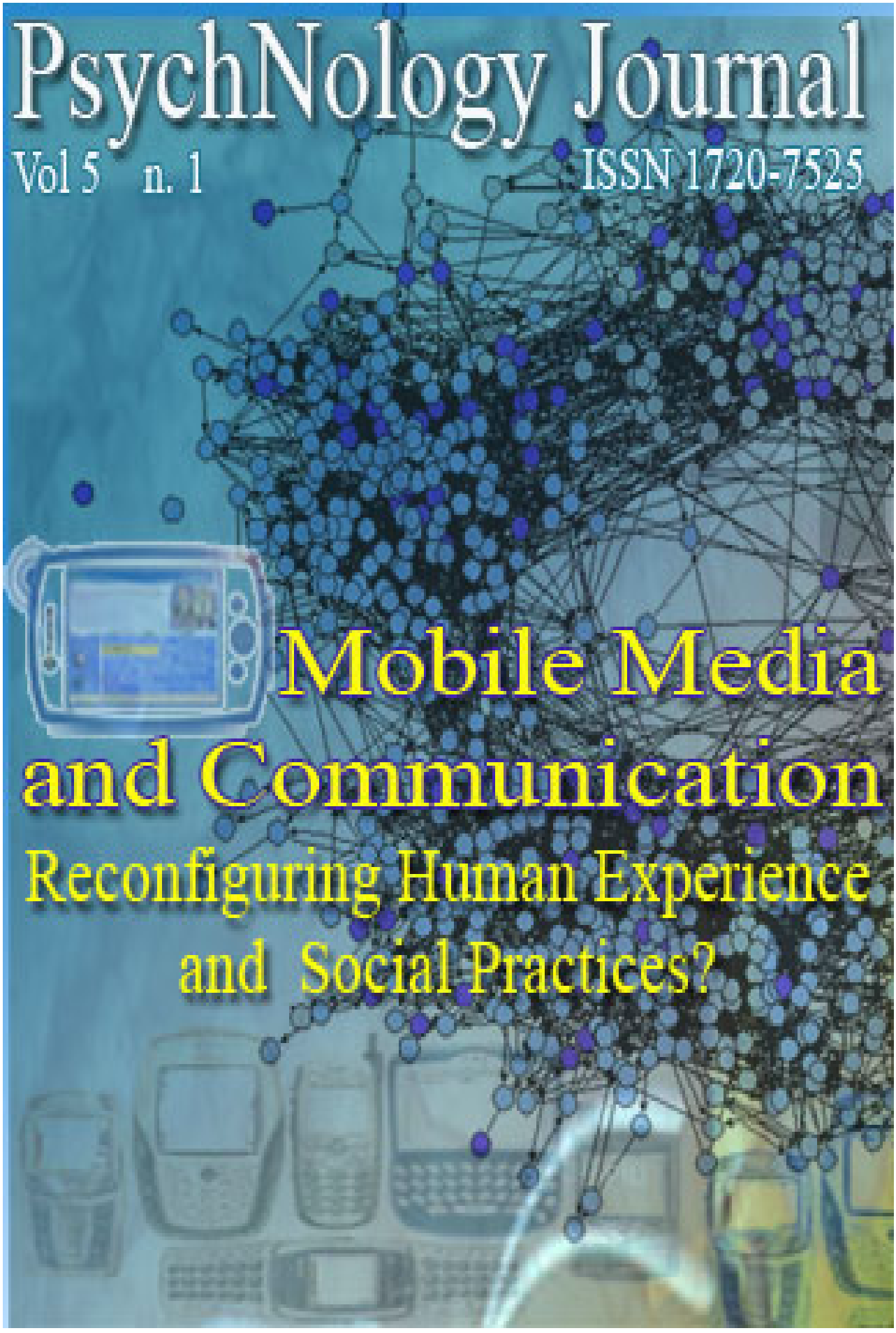

Mobile Media and Communication

Reconfiguring Human Experience and Social Practices?

PSYCHNOLOGY JOURNAL

The Other Side of Technology

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Editorial Preface

Mobile media have already become an essential aspect of everyday life. They alter existing communication patterns, enable new kinds of contacts between people, and yet remain embedded in prevailing social relations and practices. Mobile communication has been said to have created "timeless time" and freedom from place. Although this new social and communicative development has been characterized as revolutionary, the uses of mobile technologies are solidly anchored in local circumstances and prevailing forms of life. Neither have all mobile technologies proved successful. The adoption of mobile media has been much slower than anticipated in many respects. Is there a contradiction between the revolutionary technological potential of mobile media and embodied, habitual human experiences? This special issue addresses the potentially tense relationship between the development of mobile technologies and mundane experience.

The issue opens with the neglected theme of the limits of mobile technologies. A positive bias reigns in technology studies just as in medical research, distorting our view of history. Much of the public discussion concerns only new, "revolutionary" aspects of mobile media, and the failures of technologies are neglected. Much of the potential of technologies is still actively resisted. In his ethnomethodological study "Is it Fun to Go to Sydney? Common-Sense Knowledge of Social Structures and WAP", Ilpo Koskinen addresses the elementary properties of technologies in use, and their reliance on common-sense knowledge of social structures. In the Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) this turned out a source of unresolvable problems. The article allows readers to understand the properties of technology that lead people to the navigation problems that Lucy Suchman has called garden paths and false alarms. The article both links previous research on navigation in technical environments (in Psychnology, and elsewhere) and offers an opportunity for a new line of research. The focus on the interface between common sense and technical media identifies challenges that any appropriate technical solution has to face.

Ruth Rettie's "Texters not Talkers: Phone Call Aversion among Mobile Phone Users" associates evolving patterns of usage of media with the socio-psychological characteristics of users. The study shows the ways in which the adoption of technology is directly related to local personal characteristics, thereby pointing out the close connection between technology and psychological realitities. In line with earlier research, two different groups have been separated: Talkers, who prefer verbal communication on the phone and use text messages as a complementary medium, and Texters, who prefer text messages and avoid talking on the phone as much as possible. The article relates phone aversion to difficulty in the presentation of self. SMS is shown to be a ground-breaking technology, in particular for people suffering phone aversion. The article demonstrates how local contexts other than technical may play a critical role in a media choice and appropriation.

"Discourses on Mobility and Technological Mediation: The Texture of Ubiquitous Interaction" by Giuseppina Pellegrino concerns mobility-centred theories of globalization (academic discourse), the relationship between the media and mobility (mass-media discourse), and

the designers' discourse focusing on the notion of ubiquitous interaction. Pellegrino argues that discursive frames and technological artefacts centred on mobility configure a new type of mediated interaction. Apart from amounting to actual changes in communication patterns, it is proposed that the concept of ubiquitous interaction forms a new theoretical framework. The article discusses the ways in which discourses circulating in different public arenas shape core meanings attributed to technologies, beliefs about them, and their research and development.

Kathleen Cumiskey's "Mobile fantasies on film: Gathering metaphoric evidence of mobile symbiosis and the mobile imaginary" addresses the imaginary concerning mobile media. Taken the fact that the mobile technology has become increasingly prevalent in popular media, the topic is most natural but still rarely addressed. Scenes from two mainstream American films were analyzed to illustrate dimensions of imagined patterns of usage and their cultural meanings. This kind of imaginary is a relevant aspect of the ongoing reinvention of mobile media. New and creative usages of mobile technologies are a key aspect of the relationship between people and technology, which do not follow simply from the real, prevailing patterns of usage but also from imaginary and ideological visions. The article moves beyond what is physical and measurable into the imaginary, virtual space created between two people talking on the phone to capture new emerging, dimensions of mobile communication.

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Guest Editor of the Special Issue
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