

# From the communication of ecology to the ecology of communication

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This post relates ecology with communication and presents two ways of dealing with this relationship: the first would consist in communicating ecology, and the second is developing ecology of communication.<sup>[1]</sup>

## **1. Communication of ecology**

In this perspective, information and communication technologies (ICT) are seen as mere “means” or “tools” to communicate and achieve a particular effect. To this end, in the ecological field, the most effective strategies are sought to raise public awareness of the seriousness of the ecological crisis. By using these “means” well, we try to provoke a change of mentality and behaviour at the individual and collective levels.

Therefore, a message is conveyed to achieve an effect, inculcating norms and patterns of behaviour. Communication is basically understood as a linear process, in which the sender sends a message to the receiver using a channel and an encoding/decoding process. The language used must be precise, to ensure faithful transmission of the contents.

The most recent sociological literature is far from this perspective and, above all, from theories that hint at the direct and immediate effects of the media. Rather than targeting the individual with their own messages, the media would be suppliers of symbolic products that each individual will then use creatively. So, instead of talking about effective communication of ecology, it is proposed to focus on the ecology of communication.

## **2. Ecology of communication**

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This perspective focuses on the ecological nature of communicative interactions. Communication is understood as a process of exchange that makes survival possible. Therefore, priority is given to the study of the relationships that individuals and species establish between them, leaving in the background the analysis of the effectiveness that the media can have in the transmission of content or in the defence of the environmental issue.

Different disciplines relate media to ecology and talk about a media ecosystem that configures the global ecosystem. For example, *Media Ecology* considers the media as environments and studies the important influence they exert on the way in which the human being thinks, feels and behaves. They “create an environment that surrounds the subject and shapes his perception and cognition,” [2] giving him the symbolic structure he will use to encode and decode the information he receives. In addition, the media interact with each other as a “species” of the same ecosystem, conditioning each other. [3][4]

The ecology of communication, in fact, does not reduce the media to simple tools to advance the environmental cause, causing effects on the public. More than tools to convey information, the media help us create the symbolic environment in which we live.

## **3. Natural environment vs symbolic environment**

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Since ancient times, the human being has used his contraptions to create the living environment on which he depends and in which he lives. Instead of in a natural environment, *Homo sapiens* lives in a symbolic world, which depends on his invention and the communicative processes that he himself generates as an individual and as a group. [5] “The forest is not only a forest for man: for the lumberjack, it is a source of wood; for the poet, a source of inspiration; for the fugitive, a shelter; for the vacationer, a place of recreation. [...] Water is a chemical component in the laboratory, but it is also a poetic element, a resource for quenching one’s thirst, for bathing, for cooking.” [6]

Every human community receives and inhabits a symbolic world that it must recreate and transmit to subsequent generations, thus carrying forward the creativity of the historical process. As individuals and as a group, we are all immersed in this permanent process of interpreting and constructing meaning through negotiation and narrative interpretation. [7]

Some authors have pointed out that technology has a considerable influence on social organization and, through it, on culture and religion. With the expression [8] “the medium is the message”, [9] McLuhan had drawn attention to the fact that the medium used

conditions our perception of the world, that is, that technology determines in a certain way the type of society. <sup>[10]</sup>

Digital culture now presents new challenges to language and theological thought, that is, to the “intelligence of faith”. In fact, “new technologies are not only changing the way we communicate but are undergoing a vast cultural transformation”.<sup>[11]</sup>

We must learn to live and express ecological issues today, relating the web of life with life on the net.

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[1] We have delved further into this topic in our book: Carbajo Nunez M., “*Everything is connected*”. *Integral ecology and communication in the digital age*, EDI, Naples 2020.

[2] Scolari C.A. (ed.), *Media Ecology: Environments, Evolutions and Interpretations*, Gedisa Barcelona 2015, 29 [Trad.].

[3] Kong Lum C.M., «Media Ecology: contexts, concepts and currents», in Fortner R.S. – Fackler P.M. (ed.), *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, John Wiley & Sons, Boston 2014, 137-153, who 141.

[4] «The Radio changed the form of the news story as much as it altered the film image in the talkies. TV caused drastic changes in radio programming». McLuhan M., *Understanding Media. The extensions of man*, McGraw-Hill, New York 1964, 61.

[5] Husserl And. *The crisis of European science and transcendental phenomenology*, Gallimard, Paris 2008; Protection A., *The phenomenology of the social world*, Northwestern UP, Evanston 1972.

[6] Cf. Rodriguez A.D., «Communication by ecology or ecology from communication?», in Seixas N. – Da Costa A.C.S. – Costa The .M. (ed.), *Communication: Visualidades and Diversities on Amazon*, Papersp, Bethlehem 2013, 17-24. In these paragraphs I am inspired by this author.

[7] On the symbolic and interpretative activity of the human community cf. Todorov T., *Symbolism and interpretation*, Naples 1986.

[8] The writing Had also a remarkable influence on religion: Request I., *Holy Book –A treasury of the Incomprehensible. The invention of writing and religious cognition*, in *Numen* 46 (1999) 269-290. About the influence of printing in the way of doing, teaching and living theology: Eilers F.-J., *Communicating in the community*She of us, Leumann 1997, 204.

[9] McLuhan M., *Understanding media. The extensions of man*, Mentor, New York 1964<sup>2</sup>, 24.

[10] «Man is an extension of nature that re-makes the nature that makes the man». McLuhan M., *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout*, Harcourt Brace, New York 1972, 66.

[11] Benedict XVI *Address to the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications*, 28-02-2011, in *AAS* 103 (2011) 188-191.