

From the Editor in Chief

MAKING IT POSSIBLE

Pertti Saariluoma

*Cognitive Science, Department of Computer Science and Information Systems
University of Jyväskylä, Finland*

In a world not so long ago, it was a common belief that humanism and technology belonged to different worlds. Such thinking was embodied in the well-known book *The two cultures and the scientific revolution*, by C. P. Snow (1959). In his terms, these two disciplines are distinct and do not relate much to each other. In the nearly half century since Snow penned his treatise, however, more and more people are coming to see that the discourses about and within the technology fields and the humanistic fields are not separated by such high a wall—or even a wall at all. In the past decade, abundant research has pointed to the value—indeed, the need—for technology to be continually influenced by humanistic ideals. As a result, technologies of diverse purposes are slowly becoming more human-centered and humans are finding new ways to view and use technology.

Snow (1959) also noted that the most fruitful outcome for people arises from the clashes between the technologist perspective and the humanist perspective. One might consider this outcome creativity.

In the dictionary sense, creativity is the ability to transcend traditional patterns, relationships, rules, and assumptions to create meaningful (and useful) new ideas, interpretations, patterns, relationships, and methods. In the humanistic sense, creativity can lead to new forms of emotional expression, new perspectives on the human condition, new interrelatedness among peoples and with the objects and concepts that surround us. In the technological sense, creativity can lead to new methods of expression, new gadgets that facilitate or alter thinking and behaving, and new patterns of social interaction. In a sense, the meeting of humanism and technology on an equal plane results in the opening of creative possibilities that are limited only by the human imagination.

Humans have always used technologies to express their creativity, and some fields, such as art and entertainment, have been quite adept at adapting current technologies to fit their expressive needs. However, the limited access to items such as printing presses, celluloid film, gallery space, and audio broadcasting equipment necessarily had narrowed the avenues that individuals had for distributing their creative outputs. They had to rely on others for access (and approval) in order to have their products or thoughts dispersed to others.

With the dawn of the Internet a bit more than a decade ago, and its exponential growth, the number of distribution channels has opened for the average person; various new technologies provide the access for just about anyone to express himself or herself, with little censure or direction from the traditional distribution gatekeepers. As long as one has constructed the necessary preconditions for creativity (the hardware, software, and connectivity needed for access to the Internet, access to raw materials—video, digital animation tools, etc.—and access to editing tools, to name a few), the possibilities are almost limitless.

Certainly creative expression does not necessarily equal creativity. Looking at the thousands of new postings each day to YouTube demonstrates this fact. However, millions of people go to YouTube and similar distribution services regularly because they are seeking entertainment, or perhaps inspiration. In many ways, watching the poor production qualities of most YouTube videos is like watching the early days of the cinema, much of which has been forgotten. But the creative talents of those early cinematic years—the Buster Keatons and the Charlie Chaplins—were easy to identify and their productions have survived the test of time. It would not be surprising, then, that the works of the Keatons and Chaplins of the 21st century—actors and producers from around the world with imaginative talent and innovative minds—are available now somewhere on the Internet, amid the millions of miscellaneous videos of newsy events, family happenings, shameless self-promotions, and pirated broadcasts. But the truly creative gems, unlike the movie studio distributions in past decades, are available for anyone to seek and see, if you have access to the technology.

The new reality in distribution exists not only for videos but also for myriad other creative outputs, such as music, writing, artwork, and philosophical thought. Digital libraries and downloadable music have become a common part of ICT world (e.g. Jones & Jones, 2006; Witten, 2006), with millions of people turning to the Internet as their first source of information and entertainment. Indeed, as the technologies fuel the creative expression of potentially billions of people around the world, these same technologies fuel the search for personal visions of what constitutes entertainment—and so these new technologies provide a space for the meeting of the entertaining and the entertained.

Certainly this unprecedented era of personal freedom of expression and access raises social concern and, at times, animated discussion regarding issues such as personal privacy, child protection, and intellectual property rights, to name a few. Meanwhile, various fields engage in the never-ending debate regarding what is art, what is creativity or innovation, and who decides such matters. And amid this all, the creation and distribution of individuals' personal expression continues. It is clear that technological advances, enabled by the humanistic philosophies, have laid the foundation for distribution of creative expression (as well as a lot of junk) at levels unmatched in human history. What does this mean for societies, for individual creativity, for future forms of creative expression?

We can see that, in the last 50 years, the discourses about technology and humanism—those two disciplines explicitly, but certainly among other scientific fields as well—has gradually melded into a new discourse, new ways of thinking and imagining. It challenges the scholars in these fields to different perspectives, and to the evolving discourses about and definitions of their fields, and more closely tied the research with human implementation. It makes room for revolutionary concepts and activities—some of which can't even be imagined today. But most importantly, this interdisciplinary interaction between sciences—between emphasis on technology and emphasis on humanity—makes possible creativity on

many levels and for many people. And, in the end, the ideals of humanism—that is, emphasis on human values and perhaps a deeper existence—are the winners.

REFERENCES

Jones, J., & Jones, M. (2006). Digital libraries for the developing world. *Interactions*, 8, 24–27.

Snow, C. P. (1959). *The two cultures and the scientific revolution*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Whitten, I. H. (2006). Digital libraries for developing world. *Interactions*, 8, 20–21.

All correspondence should be addressed to:

Pertti Saariluoma

University of Jyväskylä

Cognitive Science, Department of Computer Science and Information Systems

P.O. Box 35

FIN-40014 University of Jyväskylä, FINLAND

psa@it.jyu.fi

Human Technology: An Interdisciplinary Journal on Humans in ICT Environments

ISSN 1795-6889

www.humantechnology.jyu.fi