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HUMANITIES

Report on the supervision of the demo seminars
of the communication sciences thematic study group

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Executive Summary

This report is a preliminary attempt at explaining how the co-ordination of the HUMANITIES Project' demo seminars in Communication Sciences has been perceived as seen from an make do co-ordinators' point of view.

After an introduction setting this action within the perspective of innovative practices introduced in Universities in the field of Human Sciences, a first chapter describes in some detail the process of the distance teleconferences that took place around video transmission of courses given by Umberto Eco in Bologna (Italy), Mr P. Marion in Louvain (Belgium) and Mr Brucke and Bauer in Vienna (Austria). After retracing the history of the experiment (chapter 1.1), this paper deals with the issues raised by setting goals for a improvised supervision and animation of these tele-seminars (1.2.1) and concludes with the necessity of a formally acknowledged management. It then describes the general schedule followed by the seminars (1.2.2) and evokes some the activities that took place, as preparatory work, over Internet (1.2.3) among students, tutors, teachers and members of the task force. Section 1.3 describes in more detail the actual work that took place during the Seminars and summarises in a few recapitulative charts attendance and technologies used by the different sites/universities.

Chapter two deals with the two audio conferences held by the tutors in Communication Sciences co-ordinated by Geneva University acting as supervisor for the project. The following two sections, as they describe and summarise the main points that have been discussed during these conferences, show that much could have been done to help the tutors by providing them with a structured and moderated virtual electronic forum (sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2). Section 2.3 further discusses of a possible complement to HUMANITIES' "hybrid" model by concluding on the difficulties encountered by the tutors. The obstacles encountered may point to another dimension of the distance education model proposed. Why not complement virtual learning over communication networks with vigorously sustained electronic mail debate structures, even if they look less glamorous than centralised shows of academic stars□?

The third chapter exposes in an informal manner some evaluation points raised by the tutors of the sites/universities that took part in the demos, as a response to a request by the Geneva co-ordinator. Sub-sections 3.1.1 to 3.1.5 give an over-view of criticisms, suggestions and hopes expressed by the tutors along the following headings□: organisation, technology, learning & pedagogy, culture and future perspectives. Section 3.2 treats of two evaluative messages by the professors of Aarhus (Denmark) and Vienna (Austria) insisting on planning, sustained collaborative debate and the creation of a culture of responsibility to sustain new ways of communication and learning. As a conclusion, a quotation is made by summing up suggestions by a Leuven literature professor on some of the shortcomings of HUMANITIES (end of section 3.2) such as lack of explicit rules, want of unambiguous didactic options and default of liable chairmanship.

Chapter four is a conclusion to this paper and points - beyond the problems that were mostly due to the very short time span within which these seminars had to be set up and delivered - to past and future pitfalls. Discussing pedagogy and didactic issues, it summarises essential points about the use and pertinence of the communication tools chosen as the projects seems to lean towards heavy broadcasting technology instead of using and improving on existing low-tech channels and making adequate use of human competence already present on each site. Citing a human resource management model, it reasserts the necessity of a debate on management issues and also emphasises on the need for more consensus making. Emphasis is laid on attention and observation of other virtual mobility schemes tried elsewhere as inspirational cues for the best use of

the goodwill and the enthusiasm created by this initial effort of the HUMANITIES project.

Chapters five and six serve as documentary resource as they suggest some further reading reference and give, in extenso, the evaluation papers written by tutors and teachers after the seminars.

Introductory comment on innovation

A preliminary note on innovation and traditional Universities' teaching habits is perhaps in order, to begin with. HUMANITIES, by implementing with some abruptness a high-tech model of distance learning in an academic setting, is dealing, or rather demanding Universities to deal - with three rather intricate issues :

1 the question of relevance and approachability of technical tools for teaching and research brought into play in any given subject matter and, almost recursively, in subject matters such as communication sciences and literature;

2 the evolution of learning activities in the context of human to machine interactions over networks in Universities' settings, to be clarified in the perspective of the tasks at hand and of usual practices in academic teaching;

3 the subject of the necessary steps to go through in any endeavour implying intensive use of new technological and communication tools.
Novelty has to be domesticated and has many social implications. This process is highly time dependant. Inescapably, HUMANITIES had to confronted these constraints.

Treating of mainly organisational issues, this report is not, of course, to give answers to these difficult and fundamental issues of OFDL, but the questions raised by these issues have been sensed all along during the demo-seminars and are pretty clearly of basic significance.

1 Organisational points

1.1 Supervising the Communication sciences demo seminars

As a reminder, during the second fortnight of April, acting on a non official request from Mr V. Grementieri, I took up (from Geneva) the function of (improvised) animator for the Demo-seminars on Communication Sciences planned as they were for the first three weeks of May 1995. An effective technical support was provided through the collaboration of Mrs M. Eisner (EuroMedia Link, Milan).

1.1.1 History

Of the four planned, finally three demo-seminars in Communication Sciences took place, each representing an important aspect of the field.

On May 3, 1995 : as a historian of Communication, Umberto Eco lectured on the "Future of the Book", during a broadcast carried out in mixed ISDN and satellite mode. For technical and financial reasons, Geneva could not provide itself, within the very short time available, with the necessary technical material, hence this seminar was moderated by D. Apollon from a media centre situated in Norway (Bergen).

On May 15, 1995 : P. Marion from Louvain (Belgium) had chosen to lecture on "Narrative structures of TV News Broadcasts", illustrating basic linguistic and rhetorical concepts at work in mass communication. On Geneva's request, this course was realised under a subcontracting agreement between Geneva and Louvain, since the former institution does not have an established unit specialising in Communication Sciences but rather scattered teachings in the field, professed in different faculties. A recorded video tape in the form of a 60-minute lecture, was sent a week in advance to the participating universities and discussed during a one-hour audio-conference, moderated from the Geneva site.

On May 21, 1995 : from a socio-economic stand point, Professor Brucke from Vienna gave a course on the "Future Uses of TV Broadcasts in Mass Communications". The presentation and technical format was the same than for the Louvain lecture : sending a video tape beforehand and explanations/discussions through audio conferencing.

1.1.2 Technological know-how

As a methodological background, it is worth remembering that quite a bit of training has been taken up by Mrs Eisner, who gave a lot of support and served as a regular and reliable source of information on the realisation and co-ordination of the distance audio seminars. She even carried out a distance teaching course through audio conferencing on the moderation of audio conferences, and gave many important and useful tips to both Mr Apollon in Bergen and myself in Geneva.

1.2 Supervision

1.2.1 The task at hand

The basic task at hand in taking up the moderation of the demos, represented a bit more than just to chair discussions.

Basically, it implied the following points□:
1) trying to stabilise the schedule of the seminars;

2) informing and getting regular feed-back by from the participants mainly tutors and (possibly) professors;
3) doing the actual moderation during the conference and overcoming the limits of a "blind" device like audio conference connecting several groups;
4) evaluating the work done immediately afterwards, on a impressionistic basis, as an additional input to the research work to be done by implementation and R&D partners of HUMANITIES, who will take a more enlightened view on the assessment of the experiment.

1.2.2 Schedules

Scheduling problem were a consequence of difficulties in creating and maintaining a consensus over decisions taken during (perhaps too few) meetings of the Task Force (TF) through February and March '95. Besides the TF was itself plagued with an inconsistent participation of its own members and with an elusive chairmanship. As a consequence, communication among the sites was far from easy, and very little actual information was exchanged on contents-related issues, participation, schedules, etc. making it difficult for the co-ordinator to have a clear picture of the state of active and passive members all along. An notable exception has to be made for both Groningen and - to lesser degree - Vienna Universities who were both pretty much active (see below the point of the tutors conferences, section 2).

Thanks to the efforts of Mrs Eisner, the Eco lecture was maintained at its original date but both Louvain and Vienna rescheduled their performances several times. The Belgian Professor had to solve the difficulty of having to record his course during semester holidays and the Austrian orator was first absent during the Easter break and then had to count more time into the actual completion of his recorded lecture than he had planned for.

But in spite of all these limitation, it is astonishing to see how well the overall workings of the seminars evolved.

1.2.3 Discussions and preparation of the demos on the Net

Following their exposure to e-mail conference on the Web in Leuven, tutors did try to shape up a discussion to discuss matters of substance and to keep up with the virtual learning scheme promoted by the project. A flurry of messages ensued without much attention taken for the categories proposed by TechNet to shape up the discussion groups.

Pretty soon, it became obvious that a lack of co-ordination and moderation, together with no guide-lines on the format and contents of the messages exchanged themselves, transformed the communication sciences e-mail part of the project into a mixture of self-advertising signalling combined with more or less pertinent complaints of any meaningful feed-back to the messages sent.

A few structured responses, like, for instance, a brief discussion about "Internet ethics" or a draft proposals for discussion of Eco's course represent most of the formalised attempts extracted from theses interactions between the April and June. TechNet, through a message from H. Markannen, did ask the question of the utilisation of e-mail conferences, but he got precious little feedback from anyone. My own attempts at discussing this issue through the discussion groups, was met with not much response.

This lack of support over the Net was probably one of the reasons why the Dutch tutor form Groningen asked for audio-conferences to be held - with the project's help - on practical and pedagogical matters HUMANITIES tutors had encountered.

1.3 Outcomes and attendance

The following tables summarise technologies used for each demo and the attendance to the various conferences.

Some preliminary remarks :
- no previous verification could be made, in spite of asking both Task Force members and individual sites, of the Universities who had actually planned to take part in any one of the teleconference;
- the late date for the Vienna lecture, added to the problem of Universities' exams and terms' ending as well as mailing delays may explain why attendance to this seminar was less than expected.

1.4 Contents and formats

A few charts as over-view of the technologies used and the activities that took place during the demo seminars as supervised.

date	**site**	**author**	**subject**	**nb. tapes sent**
3.05.95	Bologna	U. Eco	books	NA
15.05.95	Louvain	P. Marion	narratives	7
21.05.95	Vienna	Prof. Brucke	future	8

Technologies used

date	**site**	**moderation**	**broadcast technology**	**conferencing technology**
3.05.95	Bologna	Bergen	satellite, ISDN	satellite, ISDN, phone, email
15.05.95	Louvain	Geneva	mailed video tape	audioconference
21.05.95	Vienna	Geneva	mailed video tape	audioconference

Attendance

date	**site**	**length of conference**	**recpt. sites* annouced**	**recpt. sites present**	**site feed-back**
3.05.95	Bologna	-35'	16	6 (?)	6
15.05.95	Louvain	55'	10	7	6
21.05.95	Vienna	63'	10	4 (1)	6

***Sites & tutors quoted** : Aarhus, A. Boek Nielsen; Galway, S. O'Grady; Geneva, D. D'ancona; Groningen, C. Govaars ; Iceland, G. R. Arnasson; Louvain, I. Willot; Pavia, E. Crivelli; Siena, C. Cambignanu; Uppsala, L. Hall; Vienna, A. Schnoetzinger.
For the Eco Broadcast : Bologna, G. Blasi, Gottingen; H.D. Haller, Jagiellonski, T. Gobain-KlasLeuven, T. Biletreyst, Slalamanca, A. Oria (source : EuroMedia Link)

1.4.1 Eco

Supervision of the Eco lecture was Bergen's responsibility, so we leave to Mr Apollon the task of reporting about this teleconference. We shall rather comment on one noteworthy subsequent attempt - emanating from the Dutch University - at trying to formalise a Web discussion on the issues propounded by Eco in his analysis of the evolution of the printed word vs. computer-mediated hypertext. An attempt was made in the form of broad formal questions put on line through the Web and could have served as excellent basis for further discussion (see attachments). They were proposing lines of debates such as : use of hypertextual information, creativity and technology, visual vs. textual communication, knowledge transfer and evaluation research. As far as we know, not a single communication science site responded. For reasons that still need to be uncovered : a hypothesis could be that no formal provision of e-mail access time, in a recognised academic setting was being laid down yet, a point that may explain the overall frivolity prevalent in most of the e-mail exchanges.

1.4.2 Marion

The Louvain lecture, produced in French (with English doubling) had been sent beforehand to active sites and had a good number of questions to answer from the participating universities on the date of the conference.

The format of the lecture was that of a traditional, mostly frontal, lecture, illustrated by video examples - taken from the March News extracts sent by HUMANITIES' participants - and by questions to the lecturer brought by the tutor of Louvain, Miss Willot. During the audio conference, Mr Marion who has a limited mastery of English did his best to understand the questions (albeit at a somehow slow rhythm) and can be praised for the way he answered them since they sometimes lacked in clarity.

Technically speaking, monitoring of the conference itself was quite a bit problematic to begin with, since communication lines' availability made it necessary to have a two-step access to the telephone bridge. The operators at the bridge itself were lass than helpful, offering no cue on technical matters. Moreover, the line from Geneva fell once in the beginning making the opening a somewhat difficult.

The actual animation of discussions followed a pattern proposed during earlier discussions with Mrs Eisner. The basic scheme was to allow two questions per site present, on a alphabetic order of turns, followed by a new round of questions from the sites who still wished to intervene. It was an relatively effective way of shaping the discussions, although some frustration was expressed at the lack of "horizontal" exchange and at the difficulties in coming back on questions already treated for more in-depth analysis. The obvious need here is for an further analysis and creative testing, in order to make the best use of audio conferencing technology for learning purposes.

In its attempt to come to terms both with cultural and organisational barriers, this conference served as an inspiring example and led to a satisfactory overall performance. The concluding proposal to lead on the discussion on the themes of rhetorical, theatrical or visual settings of news broadcasts was not followed by any practical move on the Web. Here, again, a instituted setting for debating on a formalised basis (whether academic or project based) was lacking... This may probably be one of the prerequisites for future long-term operations of a distance a learning programme like HUMANITIES : take the task of virtual mobility to its consequences and build network alive with suggestions, recognition and extended participation.

(No audio tape of the interaction could be made on the Geneva site.)

1.4.3 Brucke/Bauer

The Vienna lecture was produced and sent in time for most sites except one : Siena, Italy.

The format of the taped video course was broadly that of Louvain although actual examples were replaced by articulations such as titles, inserted screens showing links in the lecture, and showing questions set up to be asked by professor Bauer to Mr Brucke.

The audio conference went on smoothly and the lecturer's mastery of English was an evident asset for the quality of interactions. The number of sites seemed closer to the ideal for an active interactive session. The scheme of interaction that was the same than the one followed during the Louvain lecture. It might be added that here, as time elapsed during the audio conference, it would have been perhaps necessary to think of

ways of summing up the point discussed to help the attendees concentrate on the issues being discussed.
Technically speaking, the experiment was OK as far as the bridging service was concerned. One site (Pavia) however had not the necessary audio equipment and was forced to quit after a while for it produced much Larsen and background noise on the network.

As seen from Geneva, the experiment was a pretty good success, both in quality of exchanges and for good technical conditions. An audio tape of the audio exchanges made in Geneva is available on request.

2 Tutors' audio conferences

2.1 Background

Many reasons made the organisation of Tutors' audio conferences a useful activity:
- to provide the tutors with the opportunity of organising and - later on - of monitoring an audio conference to discuss their problems;
- to attempt to give some zest to the virtual forum on issues of tutoring and virtual space studies;
- to find a complement, if not an alternative, to the shortcomings of HUMANITIES' failing email conferences;
- to offer tutors an additional occasion for hands-on practical experience and learning over an electronic network and to implement a virtual mobility scheme of their own within the HUMANITIES framework.

The actual impulse for both conferences came from the Dutch tutor from Groningen (Miss C. Govaars) who took the initiative of asking for the audio bridges through myself, and who overtook successfully the task of organising both conferences through e-mail.

2.2 Outcomes

Two teleconferences took place, under supervision of Geneva University (resp. on May 12 and on May 22, 1995). The following table summarises the outcomes.

date	managing site	length of conference	sites* annouced	sites active	site feed-back
12.05.95	Geneva	45'	5	4	1 (Groningen)
23.05.95	Geneva	50'	5	3	NA

***Sites**
Geneva, Groningen, Siena, Uppsala, Vienna

2.2.1 May 12 on tutors' work

The agenda proposed was loosely structured around the following points :
- relevance of the HUMANITIES project to the students' work and studies in each individual university;
- tutors' organisational issues : the workings of their face to face learning as a complement to distance activities;
- knowledge sharing on the Net, issues of computer-mediated activities within the project.

Moderated by Geneva, the discussion had been organised on the condition that at least five tutors would be on line. Actually, only four were present. The exchange lasted for a good 50 minutes on the general agenda proposed and following the format outlined above for the demo-seminars (a fixed number of questions asked by each attendee before a more general discussion).

Technically, the interaction was satisfactory.

The point of on-going contacts among tutors was perhaps the item the tutors needed most to emphasise on, and this audio-conference filled a motivational need as well. The lack of any usable scheme to make an effective use of electronic mail conferencing was clearly expressed. Some solutions were envisaged such as IRCs (Internet Relay Chats), just-in-time moderation, but the proposal of continuing the discussion over the Web was, here again, not followed by any concrete step.

2.2.2 May 22 on student activities

Drawing on the experience of the first tutor audio-conference, the Groningen tutor was in charge of both the contents and the actual moderation of the discussion for a second encounter. The motivational aspect of this second conference was clearly stated and all questions turned around the comparison of work being done in various sites and the possibility of finding common grounds for collaborative work. This issue - called by them "internationalisation" -, of sharing learning goals in order to create and maintain a appropriate methodology and culture was the basic need at the base of this audio exchange.

Unfortunately, even if the level of discussion was excellent, because it failed to attract much of the expected attendance, the outcomes of this audio-conference were rather limited, and probably did not go much further than having tutors tamper with technology, stating again the obvious shortcomings of a medium which makes egalitarian debate nearly impossible as it enforces a top-down, controlled, pyramid-like model of exchange. A definite disenchantment with these sessions was further confirmed as the Groningen initiator/tutor did not even bother to give back a written feed-back to Geneva.

2.3 Virtual networking constraints

Feasibility and motivational issues are at the heart of the tutors' work, and the actual experiments they were allowed to undertake were a good example of the search for a balance between face-to-face work and distance communications. Complementing the contacts made during the Leuven face-to-face seminar, the audio conferences seemed to serve an intermediate step, insofar as it obviously helps to consolidate both effectiveness and motivation of virtual studies.

But, concerning the actual deepening of academic understanding and pedagogical research on the effects of communication tools on distance studies, much remains to be studied, formalised and tested. In this respect, a further request for still another audio conference to be held among students and tutors taking as basis a demonstration tape produced by the media group of Groningen was proposed. No organisation could be put to effect, since the academic year was dawning and time to get any practical work done was running short.

Nevertheless, this type of project might serve as a possible example for a future plan for the tutors of the HUMANITIES project. It could further help to build among them a shared, debated culture of distance education as a background to effective distance mobility schemes.

3 The Demos of combined video cartridges completed by audio conferences - as evaluated by users.

Acting on a request from Geneva, six informal evaluation reports on the demo-seminars (see grid above) were produced by the tutors. Two professors added their own comments to those of the tutors.

3.1 Overview of tutors' feed-back (Aarhus, Geneva, Groningen, Pavia, Siena and Vienna)

As a way of summing up the various answers collected, a few excerpts from the tutors' considerations are quoted below. They elaborate on a number of subjects put together below. (Please note that references to the texts enclosed in the attachments of this report are given by site name and paragraph numbering of each contribution.)

3.1.1 On organisation

Schedules

About the necessity of a clearer scheduling and reliable time constraints□: "it's important that there will be more time to preparations next time" (Aarhus : 5); "we had problems with the demo's being rescheduled over and over again and even getting cancelled, but I suppose that is not the ordinary way of organising and we hope this will be better next time" (Groningen : 1 see also Siena : 4).

Responsibilities

The point of the lack of obvious allocation of responsibilities and functions in the Task Force was very clearly felt : "... it [should] be clear in the organisation who is doing what, and when [decisions are made] to participate, the duty towards the project must be fulfilled. Otherwise some people working for the project feel [rejected], when others don't do their work [as agreed]" (Vienna : 2.1). "[...] It seems like no one is in charge" and "...more attention should be paid to agreements and the follow up of agreements" (Groningen : 5 and 6.1). If the Italian tutors voiced also their frustration, they nevertheless keep faith in the project : "...the consideration that the project is just an experiment has been the consolation for all the problems" (Pavia : 2; Siena : 4).

Clarifications

Some tutors saw an answer to the lack in management of the project through a clarification of rules of the game (Aarhus , Groningen : 6.1, Leuven; Siena : 4). This last point is further discussed in section 3.2, below.

3.1.2 On technology

Innovation in organisations

The issue of resistance to technology-supported innovation was felt in some universities or faculties within universities, to quote the Geneva tutor : "The source of this problem of access to electronic communications tools is due [...] to the structural inefficiency of academic structures themselves, [...] a specific [...] slowness in managing any kind of innovation. On one hand, top-down management to change something or introduce something new takes a long time before it is really implemented. And when it's finally done, technology has evolved so much that chances are that the hardware will be obsolete before anyone will have had the possibility of using it. With bottom-up initiatives, on the other hand, when someone decides, on its own, to do something to accelerate things, all the existing forces will, in one way or another, do their best to make the task as difficult as possible because it is perceived as an impingement on established prerogatives. Another one of these nice 'double bind' situations" (Geneva : 1.2.4).

Access

Technical and economic problems for accessing technology are at the forefront of some reports. Thus, in Pavia, Internet access was less than easy and this site felt isolated (Pavia : 1) whereas Siena quotes cultural limits put on the expansion of satellite dishes mounted in graceful historic buildings... More seriously, the question of economic resources to pay for lengthy and expensive telecommunications through telephone lines is also mentioned (Siena : 1, 2, Geneva and Pavia).

Prerequisites

Typically emanating from a high-tech centre like Groningen, the proposal of minimal technical requirements for participating universities is also quoted "it should be made a condition for entrance in this project to have access to necessary equipment. If some sites do not even have email, how is it possible to have fluent and efficient interaction□?" (Aarhus : 2; Groningen : 2, 6.2; Pavia : 1, 2; Siena : 2.)

The case of First Class

A special mention should be made about the lack of follow up on the First Class e-mail software (Siena, Pavia). (As a side comment, it might be touched upon the fact that the use of this software in sites already equipped with email seems pretty far from obvious, and even more so with sites who have Netscape Internet connections available, as basic interaction tool...)

To stay with the subject of technology, three more topics of importance are also discussed by the tutors. They concern the interface of technology and its human users in a teaching and learning setting :
- representation of courses and teaching material through audio-visual means (discussed in section 3.1.3 below);
- use of audio conferencing for teaching and research;
- e-mail conferencing for learning;
- cost issues of high-tech media.

Producing audio-visual documentation

On using audio conferences effectively in an academic context, the Aarhus site shows clearly the limits of this device : "...we have experienced that the audio conferences lacks the elaborated discussions that you can have sitting in the same room. Often you have to wait so long before you get the floor, that you have almost forgotten why you wanted to put your question. You can't interrupt the order of the "question row" with a question to something that have just been said. In that way the discussion jumps from conclusion to conclusion without ever being substantial." (Aarhus : 4). Groningen elaborates and tries to find some cues towards a better form of audio conferencing : "...questions [asked] vary a lot [and] stand more or less on their own, and [this perhaps explains that] when answered, there is no reaction following. Every site, every individual interprets the lecture in his/her own way. We do not react on other remarks or other questions. And there is no discussion starting. Maybe it is because of the technical problems. Some questions have to be repeated several times, because sound [is] of, or echo [is] on. Maybe it is a language problem. Do we find it to much trouble explaining each other what we mean ? Or maybe we are still [too] exited about the technologies used and our own involvement in it. [...] We are too much [concerned] on how these new technologies work and too [little] on what we are talking about." (Groningen : A3).

E-mail, research and teaching

Electronic mail forums raise their share of comments : it is felt as a suitable answer to the shortcomings of audio conferences, but it takes time to familiarise users to this new medium : "... e-mail of course represents a solution to [the lack of real debate in audio conferences] and used in the right way it's a very good tool. Unfortunately I haven't succeeded in getting my students to use the e-mail - which I have observed is the problem all over." (Aarhus : 4) The role of a committed regulating authority behind effective email to help elicit answers from all involved, to summarise frequently asked questions and to lend energy to the exchanges is also a matter that gets a attention from the tutors (Groningen : 5; Pavia : 2; Siena : 5; Geneva).

Cost considerations

Finally, Sienna and Pavia remind us again of the problem of paying for long international phone calls on sites that are not very well supported economically (Siena : 2; Pavia).

3.1.3 On learning and pedagogy

Relevance

If knowledge gains related to the subjects treated in the distance courses are felt as basically positive, it is with some reservations : "The content of the project was [very] interesting. [...] News [...] represent a very important aspect of TV. Anyway, we would have preferred to have [...] whole news programmes instead of cut-outs ordered in themes. It is almost impossible to get an impression of a news programme that you can't watch all through" (Aarhus : 4.2). The Eco Demo was felt as mostly irrelevant, as seen from Vienna, but recognised as a good publicity move for the project as a whole (Vienna : 1.1 and 5).

Mass-oriented teaching (dehumanising)

The didactic implications of OFDL were acutely felt among social sciences students :"... in Geneva, [...] the question of the social implications of the use of new technologies was central in the debate. The idea of exchanging with other European countries is very well received, but needs [...] reflection on the effective ways to achieve it." (Geneva : 1.4, 1.7 and also Groningen : 3, A1 and A2). The foremost reaction here, are the fear of a progressive dehumanisation of teaching and the dangers of a way of learning that isolates the student away of the social community.

Mass-oriented teaching (standardised)

Reflecting on the limits of the "internationalisation" of knowledge, Aarhus brings up an interesting point in criticising the way the one-hour tape on news was structured : "[Working by] selected themes [is] too international - and therefore too stereotyped" (Aarhus : 4; see also Groningen : 5; Pavia : 4). This issue is an important one and is linked to the dangers of a technology that does not take into sufficient account the essentially controversial dimension of academic knowledge. It is also a health reaction against the cutting up of education, a definite pitfall in European large scale projects to which HUMANITIES needs to give more thought.

A new paradigm for new tools

Pedagogical and motivational issues in the perspective of the effectiveness of distance learning draws a significant comment from Vienna, echoed by a number of tutors: "the didactic necessity for the presentation of contents via TV screens and new technologies [entails] a new 'programming' format' for the presentation with [...] the technology available. I think [that], from that point of view, the lecture from Louvain showed us a little bit the direction to go. It's different to hold a piece of paper to the camera (as Prof. Eco did) [than] to analyse things exactly demonstrating it on the concrete material available, as Prof. Marion did." (Vienna : 3). Continuing on the difficulties set by the representation of teaching material through audio-visual means Geneva asserts that : "Contents must be adapted to the technology. An audio-visual media should use more images and sounds as examples, and have a different rhythm than a normal conference. A reflection must absolutely be made on these aspects of teaching through media." (Geneva : 1.2.1). And Groningen is struck by an apparent paradox in Eco's formalism : "... [W]e found [perplexing] the contrast between the extreme[ly] different media that were used in his lecture : on one side the satellite transmission, [on] the other [...] Eco showing ancient, hand-drafted pictures on yellow[ish] paper." (Groningen : A1, A2)

Knowledge transfer

One last point we would like to quote is the essential point of transferability of knowledge by sharing and capitalising the results of the learning experience. As the Groningen tutor puts it : "[The] possibilities these new means of internationalisation offer [us] are not benefited from. [Each] site [is] still working [in its] own way and there [are] only few interactions. I do not think we can speak yet of real working together or any open learning. Maybe a group work can still be developed [if] we put all the individual work done by students together on the Web and link things via [a] hypertext [... thus] future projects might be able to work further on existing results and reports. [...] It is a pity that [the] few questions posed (via Internet/fax) do not always get reactions, [neither] from the lecturer[s], nor from other 'members of the [learning] public'" (Groningen : 5, 6, A2, A3; see also Vienna : 3; Pavia : 3; Geneva passim).

3.1.4 On cultural issues

Language difficulties

Cultural and language problems are discussed by tutors who cite a number of difficulties. Shyness and relatively low proficiency in English could have been overcome by adequate and timely documentation and background reading which would have helped participants to prepare themselves to the debates. Some site (like Siena and Pavia) were limited in their access to the experiment because students thought did not master English sufficiently (whether in writing or orally). The problem of foreign accents when talking a common foreign tongue is also mentioned : it makes understanding even more difficult, as was the case for P. Marion's course that was doubled with poor English translation. Audio interaction with Louvain were hampered by language difficulties, due to problems of language mastery. (Aarhus : 3; Vienna : 1.2; Groningen : 3, A2, A3; Siena : 3).

3.1.5 On future perspectives

A programme

As a final point, proposals for further action were voiced by tutors and are well summarised by a quotation from the Swiss tutor in Geneva :

> "... - *encourage students activities;*
> "- *allow more time for the discussion and the preparation of the debate;*
> "- *encourage students participation and interactivity among them (horizontality): for "example, create a specific news groups where students*

could exchange their "impressions, questions, demands, etc., but also ask directly questions to professors: a "kind of 'virtual seminar', open all day long. This would be an effective way of "increasing time allowed for discussions for a negligible cost;
"- *work in smaller "discussion groups (six to eight students);*
"- *interact with a smaller number of co-acting conferencing groups (a maximum of five per subject "matter seems ideal);*
"- *go deeper in the task at hand (tutor-student work);*
"- *accompany the modules with a critical reflection on the social impacts of new "technologies;*
"- *integrate cultural discrepancies as a dynamic factor.*" (Geneva : 1.8; see also Groningen : 5 and 6; Siena : 6;)

Feasibility

Nevertheless and in spite of all difficulties, the general impression to be extracted from tutors' reports is that a demonstration of feasibility has been made, and that most problems can be solved by adequate time and effort. There is no shortage of enthusiasm and motivation on the part of students and tutors and this is perhaps the most precious capital to invest in the future of the project.

(Note : Tutors' texts are attached to this document for further analysis.)

3.2 Overview of teachers' feed-back (Aarhus and Vienna)

On commitment...

Expectedly, teachers answers - a precious few two - are more concerned with broader perspectives concerning the contents and format of long term commitments. Let's cite essential points :
- the necessity of careful previous planning and debates on formats, contents and didactic topics (Prof. Bauer, Vienna);
- the importance of continued use of electronic communications to support the project (Prof. Bang, Aarhus);
- the proposal of an on-going inter-university collaboration (Prof. Bang);
- the need for shared material and common reference tools as background prerequisite work (Prof. Bang);
- the hope of creating an international HUMANITIES culture by the promotion of "international students working groups, in order to mobilise the political responsibility of what they have learned" (Prof. Bauer, Vienna).

... and explicit agendas

In this context, it is well worth referring to Professor F. Truyen of Leuven University, who sheds some light on the basic shortcomings of the project by laying attention to three essential points (the full text included in the attachments and has been taken from TechNet's Netscape email conference on HUMANITIES) :
- the requirement of a clear agenda stating the basic aims of the interactions/courses within a global perspective that includes explicit specifications on sources, contexts subject matter and partnerships;
- the formulation of an unambiguous didactic scheme : whether research oriented (open to debate and questioning) or based on well-established frontal ex-cathedra courses;
- the support of liable rules of the games through the presence of reliable and recognised organisers taking responsibility for the project as a whole.

PART FOUR

4 A few (in)conclusive remarks

4.1 Time constraints

A pervasive question that arose during this experiment, was the - short - time factor. This aspect is a highly sensitive one for academics who bring about knowledge on the structure and production of communication. This lack of time had a negative impact on contents and organisation as well as pedagogical and technological goals of the project.

4.2 Co-ordiniation needs clear responsibilities

Geneva functioning as a loose and mostly unacknowledged connection between an elusive task force and Universities, even with the help of highly motivated - if only intermittently available - tutors, made the co-ordination of these distance education courses modules a sometimes cumbersome and mostly guess-work task. The lack of a recognised and agreed upon control centre further added to the fuzzy state of the exchanges.

4.3 Pedagogy at a distance

On the design of pedagogical material, short time spans forced the providers of lectures into fixed and all too well practised schemata of teaching, reinforcing once again the fixed model of the all-knowledgeable Professor, who delivers a lecture in front of a passive audience (even if the latter was represented by a questioner, interrupting form time to time the flow of discourse). It acutely underlined the necessity of new teaching paradigms to be experimented to promote effective networking (and hence virtual mobility) and to come to terms with the question of effectual and relevant action in innovative computer-mediated learning.

4.4 Didactic hybridisation

On the pedagogy of the project, the "hybrid model" of mixed face-to-face and distance learning proposed by HUMANITIES as a first approximation to provide the necessary basis for practising and learning by doing provided a positive basis to the project as a whole. But, again, time was not really allowed for the actual careful implementation and evaluation of this model and it seems that its feasibility will in the future have to be demonstrated by, perhaps, making better use of technological tools that were set aside in the priorities of the project like electronic mail, asynchronous Internet conferences, WWW pages, virtual worlds (moos), IRCs.

4.5 Technology (use)

Beyond pedagogy issues, one has to remember that an initial stage of psychological fascination taking the shape of (almost) random exploration of new worlds (whether virtual or actual) is probably advisable. Before any shared culture or community of interest can be built, some messiness has to be allowed for a relatively long time. Once the fascination for technology begins to subside, it gives way to a more critical perception of its applications and, very quickly, a regrouping of forces and of perceived shared interest begins to unfold and provides itself with an efficient way of making significant use of technology. A bottom-up process of construction, gradually reinforcing the level of communication, adapting the new tools to familiar (and efficient) schemes of learning and interchange can then take place. HUMANITIES has a role to play in this process by providing structure and support to a slow, long term process of socialisation and adding significance to the acquired knowledge.

4.6 Technology (pertinence)

The pertinence of the technological tools that were being used in the context of HUMANITIES needs to be further discussed in the light of responsibilities entailed by new communication tools. This kind of project which implies much more than general agreement among traditional universities, ought to rely on the whole gamut of communication tools available, to allow for an in-depth familiarisation with distance and virtual learning to build a progressive culture of virtual universities - with affordable technologies. Other experiments have been tried elsewhere, they may serve as inspiration and example to gain additional insight on the already recognised questions of computer and communications mediated learning. A on-going technological watch of other actors in the field would be a precious asset both for finding pertinent research models and as basis for critical auto-evaluation. All these elements could serve as a background to help build a meaningful culture to share with other significant virtual learning communities.

4.7 Technology (management)

On the organisational side, the hectic search for co-ordination measures and for the availability of communication know-how had the obvious (and perverse) effect of favouring the most high-tech members of the community, further enhancing the gap between already handicapped participating institutions - with little or no technological background and even less technological know-how - and state of the art technologically rich centres with satellite down- and up-links readily available, ISDN lines used on a regular basis, etc. This development stands in a striking paradox to the goals of a project that has as its primary objective activities aiming at promoting and encouraging technological access to participating universities.

4.8 Human resources

An additional aspect of the organisational difficulties exhibited by the seminars - that needs further in-depth debate at the task force level - is neatly explained by the following passage, taken from Prof. Truyen's letter (see attachment) which describes a model of human resource management followed by HUMANITIES that would need some pondering :

> *"Given the absolute openness of the [scientific] and didactic components of the program and given the openness of the new communication channels, the rules of the game have been left open (except in matters of technology). It is predictable what happens in such cases, in particular in new kinds of (international) societies: since the initiative is left open and since even the respect of clear academic/scholarly rules is not established, no real progression nor planning is possible and those who have a chance to occupy the forum finally play the role of the organiser and the man-in-power: they tell who is invited to speak and who is supposed to shut up. Little by little, they define the object of study/discourse, without any further consideration and without justifying [properly] their arguments or informations, just because the forum is empty.*
> *Psychologists and sociologists use this kind of scenario in order to observe human behaviour. Would this be the purpose ?"*

4.9 Concluding note

As a conclusion, lets say it again: the communication sciences demo-seminars with their positive but circumscribed outcomes have demonstrated the goodwill of most partners and have paved the way for further efforts in many directions : it would be a shame not to develop this positive drive, and not to allow it appropriate time and opportunity to take it's full shape through honest and sustained debates on the experiments being carried out in an expanding community of researchers and learners.

PART FIVE

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6 Attachments

Note: these texts were sent by e-mail and are reproduced here with minimal layout.

6.1 Communication sciences teachers' reports on the demos-seminars : Prof. Bauer,Vienna and Prof. Bang, Aarhus.

Vienna University
Institut für Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft
Prof. Dr. Thomas A. Bauer

EVALUATION OF THE DEMO SEMINARS/ COMMUNICATION SC. / HUMANITIES

1. The Idea of connecting students all over Europe for having discussions on subjects most important and relevant for the cultural development of societies and democracies is a great one and should be developed in organisational, didactic and technical aspects.

2. The technical organisation takes quite a lot of attention of students, tutors and teachers. The worse the technical equipment works, the more it is so. So it happened, that the content sometime came into the situation of being deprived. This was applicable especially to the second demo seminar. The first demo seminar was very interesting as far as the content of lecture and discussion is concerned. Of course a video-discussion transports more communication than an audio-conference. The third demo seminar, I think , was in technical and didactic aspects quite satisfying, but correctable.

3. I saw, that the tutors were very well prepared. A lot of work was theirs. For a good part they carried what was successful in this pilot. So it was a very good idea to install them within the humanities-programme.

4. The demo seminar should be equipped with a more specific and further going aim. It should not be the end of communication among the students but a new communication initiative. So the demo seminars should work out resolutions or international students working groups, in order to mobilise the political responsibility of what they have learned.

5. I find, the moderation of the audio-conference through Pierre Dunand was very helpful for constructing relational feelings between the groups and for constructing a good exchange of contributions.

6. All in all we will have to discuss the whole programme, in order to find a more demanding didactic-structure.

Thomas A. Bauer, 30.5.95

Aarhus University
Department of Information and Medie Science
Joergen Bang, Associate Professor

I find it appropriate evaluate the seminar according to 3 dimensions:

- *technology*
- *content*
- *future*

Concerning technology:

Allan Beak Nielsen has already given a very accurate description of how the technological parts of the seminar (Satellite-TV, video cassettes, audio conferencing, e-mail and computer conferencing) worked from a Danish perspective.

Most of the problems could have been solved by a better and earlier planning of the project.

In a broader perspective I am most concerned with the fact that we didn't manage to involve the participating students in an ongoing discussion across the European borders. If students don't use telematics and electronic communication in their daily studies, they will need an introduction to this way of working.

Concerning content:
The decision to focus on a theme for the project (in this case: television news) which could only have been organised on a national level with great difficulties was a very impotent one. The European dimension in the project was what made it attractive.

On the other hand the project has shown that access to common materials aren't enough to stimulate a discussion among the participating students. It is my feeling that a common curriculum consisting of 5-6 basic articles or books could have created a background for comparative analysis and exchange of views.

Concerning the future:
The realisation of the demo-seminars with the available technology is, maybe, the most important outcome of the project. We have demonstrated that lecturing via telematics followed up with audio and, possible, computer conferencing is a viable way for adding a European dimension to national-based university studies.

Two perspectives are of interest:

On the one hand a serial of lectures could be organised (e.g. one every month) within a specific topic following the concept of the Umberto Eco lecture: a 45 minutes televised lecture - a 15 minutes break - 1 hour of audio conferencing followed by computer conferencing or e-mail discussions.

On the other hand an electronic seminar using video conferencing combined with computer conferencing or e-mail discussions in which professors and students from several universities collaborate on the same topic through the exchange of materials, lectures, papers etc. Such seminars have to be carefully planned in advance !

6.2 Communication sciences tutors' reports on the demo seminars : Aarhus, Geneva, Groningen, Pavia, Siena and Vienna.

University of Aarhus
Department of Information and Media Science
Allan Baek Nielsen

1 The Danish group attended all three seminars, but due to the very late time of the semester there were only a few students attending the two taped seminars Organisationally we only had minor problems. The rescheduling however did represent a problem, because students at the time were doing papers and had to plan their time in details. The reception quality was OK. both according to the broadcasted Eco-seminar and the following taped seminars - we got them in good time so that I could watch them before I showed them to my students .

2 Technologically we survived. We had to buy a new dish since the one we had couldn't receive the needed frequency. (we got the data by fax only five days before the seminar so we had to work hard to get the permission to spend money). The University of Aarhus has the facilities for ISDN, but within our Faculty we haven't got the equipment - yet. We decided not to rent. In the audio conferences our technical staff put in loudspeakers and microphones connected to the phone which worked all right. In the last audio conference we used a plain phone with inbuilt loudspeaker because we were so few. All students have their own e-mail address and access to computers whenever they want. They have been introduced to Internet and e-mail. The first class didn't work and we tried to contact Mr. Lindquist - in vain. We received more details on the First Class two weeks ago, but we didn't install it since we almost had no students left.

3 Language represents a special problem: Which language(s) to use. In Denmark most people speak and understand English and every student do since they have been taught English for 8-10 years. German is also well known, but French is only mastered on a very low level by most people. Therefore English is a natural choice for us and as long as the conversation has been in English we have had no problems in understanding. However the sound level in the Louvain taped seminar was very bad and our reception was disturbed by the mixture of French and English - I personally think that subtitling would be better - but then again it might have to do with the fact that I am used to subtitling from Danish TV.

4 When evaluating this project I have to concentrate on two aspects:

* *The communicational devices of the project*
* *The content of the project*

4.1 communicational devices
In theory the audio-visual and interactive aspects of this kind of project are fruitful. The techniques are quite easy to handle and the possibility to "meet" interesting and/or well-known persons widen the perspective on the way you handle things at your University and in your country. At the same time it's a cheap way to meet people from abroad.
Unfortunately we have experienced that the audio conferences lacks the elaborated discussions that you can have sitting in the same room. Often you have to wait so long before you get the floor, that you have almost forgotten why you wanted to put your question. You can't interrupt the order of the "question row" with a question to something that have just been said. In that way the discussion jumps from conclusion to conclusion without ever being substantial.
The e-mail of course represents a solution to this problem and used in the right way it's a very good tool. Unfortunately I haven't succeeded in getting my students to use the e-mail - which I have observed is the problem all over. Maybe we just have to get used to the new technologies?

4.2 content of the project
The content of the project was absolutely interesting. We all have news and they represent a very important aspect of TV. Anyway, we would have preferred to have the whole news programmes instead of cut outs ordered in themes. It is almost impossible to get an impression of a news programme that you can't watch all through. Besides the selected themes were too international - and therefore too stereotyped. Comparing news stories about Somalia for instance is not very interesting when most of the material are from the European Broadcasting Union. More local founded news would tell more of the way every country do their news stories. The relevance of

the seminars to the content was all right. Especially the Louvain seminar but also the Vienna seminar. The Eco seminar however had no direct relevance to the content of the project and was mainly interesting because of Eco himself. All in all we are a bit disappointed that there has been that few discussions across the borders. We have been introduced to the world out there - but we have not yet had a proper conversation.
However, here in Aarhus we look forward to use the collected material in coming internal projects. Now we can present new students to the European world of news.
5 Conclusion
I certainly hope that projects like this will take place in the future, but I think that it's important that there will be more time to preparations next time. In the start of September we will evaluate the project together with the students.

University of Vienna
Arnold Schnoetzinger

Following some evaluation remarks on the Demo-Seminars from the Vienna Group:

1 Demo-Seminars:

1.1 Eco Lecture:
The Eco lecture was according to the Content interesting to us, although it had nothing to do with the general subject about TV-News, which we discussed in the other sessions before and after the Eco-lecture. Sure, that the Eco-lecture also had more a symbolic value for the demonstration and application of these new technological communication tools, and for that aim it was the Eco-event was quite OK. But for the future, if seminars will take place, there should be a general subject, which can be elaborated by different professors from different countries with different aspects but to the same topic. To organise such projects in future, to our opinion, according to the content but also to used methods it's necessary to have a fixed curriculum.

1.2 Marion-Lecture:
With the lecture from Belgium we really had a lot of troubles with the sound quality and to understand the text, because it was a simultaneous translation with two voice-traces at the same time. And also the English translation had a strong French accent, which made it difficult for us to understand. The content of the lecture was good, because Prof. Marion demonstrated how to analyse TV-News and so we could have a profit for our own analyses of the videotapes from the TV-News from the 1st of march. The audio conference to the Belgium lecture showed us obviously how important is a good combination of language and scientific competence will be for the survival of such communication tools. It was difficult to understand first Prof. Marion's answers according to the language but also following that the argumentation structure. Anyway we want to thank Prof. Marion (and Isabelle) for his courage to do the audio conference and to give his best, as maybe many other professors in his situation wouldn't have done.

(Here in Vienna we are not the right persons to give final judgements about our own lecture.)

2 Organisational points:
2.1 Responsibility
As mentioned before it's necessary to have a fixed structure of planing such courses with fixed dates and times, topics, lectures, language. The extent of responsibility towards such a project must be increased for everyone, professors, tutors and students. Who is participating, has to do that in a suave manner. So It must be clear in the organisation, who is doing what, and when decided to participate, the duty towards the project must be fulfilled. Otherwise some people working for the project feel lacking, when others don't do their work fixed before. (For example until this day we do not exactly know why the Sienna-lecture was cancelled)

2.2 Animation
I don't know how to animate, but maybe people (professors, tutors), who are working for the project, should also be paid, students should at least have a profit for their studying-plans. So the project should be implemented in the local study-plans at each university and the exams must be accepted. From a certain point on curiosity in the new technologies and tele-learning-forms will be fed up in future.

3 Didactic remarks:

As mentioned before, there should be a language competence plus a scientific one, but don't let's forget the didactic necessity for the presentation of contents via TV-Screens and new technologies. So there must be a new 'programming' format' for the presentation with and this point we should use the technology available. I think, from that point of view the lecture from Louvain showed us a little bit the direction to go. It's different to hold a piece of paper to the camera (as Prof. Eco did) or to analyse things exactly demonstrating it on the concrete material available (as Prof. Marion did).
As I already said on the phone the moderation of the audio conferences was well done by Pierre Dunand and also Daniel Apollon. No complaints about that.

4 Technical Matters:
We had all the technique available to participate in the project in a good way: so we had the Sat-Receiver, the e-mail and WWW-access and an ISDN line. I had 8 students and until now all of them got their e-mail-access. From autumn 1995 on every student at the University of Vienna - we have about 120.000 students here in Vienna - will have the right and the possibility for an Internet-access. Although then it will be a problem to find a free terminal in the several departments. Anyway for a course like ours there won't be troubles. (Although I have to say, that the Department of Communication is from a technological point of view a privileged partner within the whole faculty of Human-Sciences.)

5 General Feedback from my students:
My students found it interesting to have a new form of learning in our department available and so they liked it', despite some technical or understanding troubles, which were always solved. We never doubted that the main-language in the project should be English, as the discussion was going for some times in the literature group. So English was accepted at all not because the students were fascinated by the English language, but for functional reasons. So it was clear from the beginning that who wants to participate must have a good competence in English language. My students liked the project at all - and the group of 8 persons was ideal for the demonstration - and we would like to go on in this direction of tele-learning and open distance education, in which way ever.

University of Groningen
Communication Sciences
Colette Govaars

1 Lectures attended

Groningen attended all three demo's, the Eco broadcast, Marion tape and Brucke/Bauer tape. Concerning the last two we also attended the audio conference. But at the first demo we did not have a connection with Bergen. We were ready with the video-conferencing equipment and telephone. But something did not work in Bergen, so we only posed a question via email. That was treated. Although we were a little bit disappointed that we could not use the VC equipment at this time, we were lucky the one question got an answer.

The quality of reception was OK. No extreme situations.

Off course we had problems with the demo's being rescheduled over and over again and even getting cancelled, but I suppose that is not the ordinary way of organising and we hope this will be better next time.

2 Technicalities

We used the following technicalities:
satellite dish
2- way (ISDN) video-conferencing with rented material,
telephone
audio conference
email
fax
We have a very good and motivated audio-visual (studio) department. The technical people are very eager to work with these new technologies. All students (can) have an email address and access to the Web/Internet. The only problem we encountered in using, especially the new

technologies, is that no optimal use is being made of especially the audioconferencing and video conferencing possibilities. We found it a bit strange that certain participating universities had still problems with access to technology. We think these basics should be arranged before the project starts. Maybe it should be a condition for participation to have certain technical possibilities, like access to email for example.

3 Language

The Marion lecture we had some problems following because of the over voice. The Eco lecture we could understand, but the Brucke/Bauer lecture was no problem to follow. It was very clear. The English of our students is sufficient, but in the beginning they have some speaking fear. The students can apply the contents of the demo's to their own work. Some do. But this could have been much better if more was known about the content before (summary and bibliography for example).

4 Tutor-students

I as a tutor was mainly concerned with supplying information to the students, trying to find overlap with other TSG's and stimulating the interaction. This succeeded, but not as much as I would have liked. The lack of structure concerning the content had a negative effect on the students motivation towards this project. They asked for example why other groups did not analyse the tapes, like was the agreement. These students had not chosen themselves to participate in this project. The project was integrated in an already existing course. Next time, if students inscribe themselves, they might be more motivated. The tutor-student interaction was a two way interaction as supposed to be. It was not only me supplying them with information. Students came with questions and own initiatives as well.

5 Moderation

If you mean co-ordination by moderation, there were some problems. we missed an overall co-ordination from the task force. At the end however Pierre did some co-ordination work in the audio conferences and in asking us for these reports (see also earlier reports about this moderation part). In the email-discussion there was no co-ordination at all. Worse, so far there has almost not yet been any discussion in our group, apart from organisational things. This is a pity. It seems like no one is in charge. All possibilities these new means of internationalisation offer are not benefited from. All sites are still working their own way and there is only few students interacting. I do not think we can speak yet of real working together or any open learning. Maybe a group work can still be developed when we putt all the individual work done by students together on the Web and link things via hypertext, as was suggested by Enrica (tutor Pavia). Future projects might be able to work further on existing results and reports. Because of the non being prepared students do not know that quick how they can apply the content of the demo's to their personal work/situation. This results in few questions to lecturers. It is also a pity that those few questions posed (via Internet/fax) do not always get reactions, nor from the lecturer nor from other 'members of the public'.

6 Perspectives

We Communication Sciences group Groningen are very enthusiastic about the learning method and use of new technologies we have met in the Humanities project. We are going to think about possibilities for the near future and some of us teachers/students/tutor will certainly continue to work in this field. So far we have no concrete plans yet concerning ODL. But within the University of Groningen there are several departments and people interested.

Concerning propositions for the next experiment. We have one central points. The co-ordination. The co-ordination problem can be divided into three sub-points.

6.1 More attention should be paid to agreements and the follow up of agreements. Before agreements are being made it should be very clear what possibilities every single university has. Now we sometimes had the impression that agreements were being made without the representatives of each university exactly knowing if this was possible for their university. So representatives of the universities who are going to talk with the overall organisation and the other representatives must know in advance what is possible at their site. This prevents that agreements can not be followed.

6.2 The second point is linked to the first. It is about technicalities. Maybe it should be made a condition for entrance in this project to have access to necessary equipment. If some sites do not even have email, how is it possible to have fluent and efficient interaction ?

6.3 More should be clear about the content, so that students can prepare better. The better the learners can prepare themselves, the more benefit they can get from ODL. Maybe it is an idea to think of some overall question(s) where all research from the students can resort under. If we all work on some kind of the same question but in different ways, it can be nice to exchange information, results and experiences.

Additional Evaluation of Demo by Groningen (C. Govaars)
A1 Eco
A2 Marion
A3 Brucke

A1 Demo 1 - Eco
The students in Groningen, like other students (and teachers) probably, were very excited to hear and see Umberto Eco talk through the satellite, especially for this project. Eco 's story was found quit interesting. For some students his views were new, others were a bit disappointed in not hearing any shocking or revealing ideas.

Despite the Eco-excitement, a few critical points arose in Groningen. Eco talked in one go. He was not interrupted. Interruption would have made the presentation more attractive. We in Groningen did not find any connection (yet) between Eco's lecture and the news analysis component. The information Eco gave can be considered as background information, theory. But application to the (recorded) news items must be made afterwards by ourselves. We would like to know if and how other TSG's apply Eco to the news analysis.

We were a little bit disappointed in the way Eco presented his lecture. In stead of reading from a piece of paper, the talk could have been more lively, if spoken out spontaneously.

Funny we found the contrast between the extreme different media that were used in his lecture. One side the satellite transmission, the other side Eco showing ancient, hand drafted pictures on yellow paper.

A2 Demo 2 - Prof. Marion
The Isabelle-Marion experience was different. The setting was very pleasant. Marion telling his story, watching the viewers all the time, using gestures, and Isabelle interrupting him once in a while to clarify or give the public time to breath.

The content was very useful to our group. It was nice to learn how Philip Marion and the Belgium group analysed the recorded news and to hear their views. We also liked you showing examples. This was good because it explained what you mend. And it was good from the pedagogical point of view. It made watching easier.

A problem, however was the sound. The English over the French. The English was a bit monotonous while the French was not. If you know a few French words you get distracted by these. Furthermore the voice of the translator was not congruent with the picture (gesturing) of Philip Marion. This made processing the audio- and visual information more difficult. It was very difficult to stay really concentrated for one hour. Besides there were to few pauses and we had the feeling not to have any time to let the content of the lecture get into our minds.
Therefore we had some problems with formulating relevant questions.

This was a problem with the Eco lecture as well. Maybe it is better to have a bit more time to breath and think things over, have some discussion in your own group, recapitulate and come out again on the air. I think if we react to quick on the lectures, we do not get a maximum effect out of it.

In future we must pay more attention to the reception of the lectures. Receiving in foreign language costs more energy than receiving in your own language. Speakers should not talk all the time. Not even if it is your mother tongue. A bit more amusement, jokes for example or some *little dance (:-)) has a positive effect on information processing. Then the audience has time to think about what was just said and interaction will have more quality.*

A3 About the audio's:
We have got three main points with some possible explanation-/solutions.

A3.1 The first thing that appeared to us (and to others probably as well) is that questions posed vary a lot, stand more or less on their own, and that when answered, their is no following reaction. Every site, every individual interprets the lecture in his/her own way. We do not react on other remarks or other questions. And there is no discussion starting.
We talked about this and thought of following explanations:
- Maybe it is because of the technical problems. Some questions have to be repeated several times, because sound was of, or echo was on.
- Maybe it is a language problem. Do we find it to much trouble explaining each other what we mean ?
- Or maybe we are still so exited about the technologies used and our own involvement in it.
Thereby I mean that we are to much concentrated on how these new technologies work and to less on what we are talking about.

A3.2 The second thing that appeared to us, concerning the audio conferences, is that questions are not always understood by listeners (ourselves for example).
- Questions posed are sometimes still to complicated. Maybe we must be more precise. Short sentences and exact words.
- Maybe we must pay more attention to the pronunciation and tempo. This means of communication needs a specific kind of behaviour, to which we are not that familiar with yet.

The third and last remark we would like to make on the audio is about the organisation. Especially if the communication is problematic is it in that case not the role of the animator to structure and clarify and negotiate between the talking participants more severely ? Maybe the animator should play a more dominant role.

[...]

A.3 Demo 3 (22.5.95) Prof. Bauer -Prof. Brucke

The third Humanities demo seminar was very well received by the Communications study group in Groningen. This applies to the technological, as well as to the didactic, as well as to the pedagogical aspect.

The tape, image and sound was of good quality. Both professors were clearly audible and one could follow the content very easily. We liked professor Brucke's way of speaking, it seemed spontaneous and lively. The questions by Prof. Bauer gave breathing space and structured the lecture. That was also good. The demo seminar was a joy to absorb.

Concerning the content we were also pretty content. The way professor Bauer and Brucke put things into perspective was very interesting to us and gave the students something to reflect on, not only for this particular project, but also for more general and future purposes.

The questions afterwards encouraged some of our students to have further interaction with others, within the project, to exchange information.

We will ask professor Brucke via email for some comment on several issues. And maybe the interest exists with other participants to have some more discussion on subjects spoken about.

University of Pavia
Enrica Crivelli

Report on the activities carried out by the communication sciences work group in Pavia

1 THE WORK GROUP

In addition to the teacher, Prof. Anthony Baldry and the tutor, Dr. Enrica Crivelli, the CS work group in Pavia includes 15 students plus an English mother tongue supervisor, Dr. Robert Morley who helps them with English. They work in a group and I meet them once a week (on Wednesdays). They all attend the Faculty of Letters (Modern Languages) and they study English as foreign language. They joined the Project out of personal interest and were very excited about the idea of Open and Distance Learning; besides the Project content (TV news analysis), their main interest was to exchange ideas and information with other people all over Europe and, at this stage of the Project, they are particularly concerned with the expectation of a future experience abroad (placement in enterprises), I hope we won't disappoint them!

The relationship among the students and between students, tutor and teacher is very friendly and based on mutual support and open dialogue. Of course, at the beginning the students were (and they are still a little) disappointed about the structure, the content and the aims of the Project but, by the time I came back from Leuven I could answer some of their questions and they completely relied on me as concrete reference point and they started to BELIEVE in the Project and to consider themselves as a real active part of an international work group.

Unfortunately, I only took the chance to make them use an e-mail system a few weeks ago, so they could not directly interact with other students or tutors since then and they mainly concentrated on TV news analysis; they did an excellent work focusing their attention on the analysis of the OPENINGS.

Despite of the lack of international contacts, they really felt as being part of the Project and their enthusiasm and motivation remained high maybe just because they considered this possibility of interaction as one of the future goals to achieve. They were and are not really used to open and distance learning and in particular to the use of technology as a mean of communication, so everything concerning the Project was a sort of new exciting experience and even if we had to face many problems, they never complained.

2 TECHNICALITIES

As regards technical equipment, we bought the dish to receive satellite transmissions, a TV set and a video and audio recorder. We had to rent a room from another Department to locate the equipment and to use a viva voce telephone. We still do not have the possibility to be directly connected to Internet and we use a simple e-mail system and the fax to keep in touch with the other tutors. I only had the chance to see and send some messages through Internet once a week (and not every week) because I was allowed to use the system in another Department. Of course, as you already know, technicalities represented our weakest side and that was a shame because we are all convinced that the most important thing concerning the Project is to develop contacts and interaction among the participants and we were just partially cut off.

We were able only to attend Eco's video conference. Even if it was not concerned with the content of the Project we found it interesting, because we work with hypertext materials. We sent our question through e e-mail and we got a satisfactory answer, but we thought that everything was too constrained by time: we would have had much more questions but there was so little time! Besides, we had some technical problems: at the beginning we could not receive the audio signal, just because they changed the frequency and they did not communicate the new one, in addition, they said that Pavia had not sent the phone number to be called at and that was absolutely false!

We could not attend the audio conference from Leuven la Neuve because we (my students and I) were busy with other important duties. Anyway, we watched the tape and we sent our questions by fax, but we are still waiting for the answers. My students found the conference very interesting and well structured and animated (apart from the quality of the audio), they were very happy to see that the basic method of analysis suggested was almost the same they adopted; they realised that they were not wasting their time and their conviction about the good quality of their work was reinforced. But, as I said before, they would be glad to have the answers to their questions.

The third audio conference was the worst experience: in Pavia the audio signal was terrible, we could not understand almost anything and we decided to quit because it had no sense to pay an expensive bill for nothing. Anyway, even in this case we found the tape interesting and we sent our questions by fax. Once again we got no answer! Apart from technical problems (we know that this is only a pilot project), if we remain with our questions to be answered, what have we achieved in the field of open and distance learning? We still have our open and distance local doubts.

3 FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

As regards further developments of the Project, my students are all convinced that the Project will have a FUTURE and they are ready to go on and see what will happen. My personal suggestion is to exploit the materials collected from the analysis of TV news to create self-access documents using an hypertext system and providing the access to such materials through Internet (WWW). It could be considered as a sort of large-open database collecting all the works developed by the different CS work groups to which anyone could have free access to provide new materials or just to upgrade or consult the ones already included.

Our suggestion in general is to increase direct contacts among students and tutors through e-mail, telephone and fax. I think we will be directly connected to Internet by the end of Summer (they said so); my teacher and I are constantly pushing on the so called Univer University Authorities (people who really count) and I think that our tenacious efforts showed positive results: my students and I suffered from the lack of technicalities and I often got mad thinking that nobody really cared about our work, but recently (just last week), after having clearly expressed my disappointment once again, they made me understand that the overall positive results achieved in this preliminary part were very appreciated and Pavia will be suitably equipped for future developments of the Project, aiming at being in POLE POSITION.

My personal idea is that the University of Pavia really cared about the whole Project, but they wanted to see how things worked out in its preliminary part (Pilot Project). I think they just tested our capability to manage the whole situation (BIG DEAL!!!). Now, it seems to me that, apart from the anger I accumulated in my stomach, we passed the exam and won our battle. They are making great plans for the near future: they are building up a sort of multimedia laboratory including all the tools we bought, a number of computer pentium with Internet connection and they are even determined to buy an ISDN system in order to have the possibility to deliver video conferences in the future.
Therefore, even if we had to face many problems, we think that it was not a negative experience. We had been able to stimulate the attention of many Prof. professors and, at this stage of the Project, we do not feel left alone any longer. Maybe, from now on, according to all the plans they are making, we will be able to overcome all the problems we had.

This last part of my report is dedicated to acknowledgements. I have to thank my students, not only for the good quality of the work they have developed, but for their devotion, enthusiasm and joy. They built up a wonderful work group and I'm proud to be their tutor. I know that this is not really concerned with open and distance learning, but this experience contributed to s to shorten social and cultural distances at local level. I must also thank Colette Govaars from Groningen who played an important role as (I would say) "leader" of the CS tutors; she worked hard to co-ordinate our activities and to keep contacts among the different work groups. Of course, she was supported by a high level technology, but she really took the Project at heart and she also gave me a hand and moral support through an assiduous exchange of e-mail messages.

Sienna University
Elena Bagagli

1 SEMINARS ATTENDED.

All the students (18) and me attended the ECO video-conference and the two Audio-conferences (Prof. Marion and Prof. Brucke/Bauer). We left the Prof. Brucke/Bauer audio-conference at the very beginning, because we didn't receive the tape in time for the audio-conference. I did not attend the first tutor audio-conference organised by Colette, because I was not in Sienna on that *day, because of work's deadline. All the students and me attended to the second audio-conference organised by Colette.*

We did not have organisational problems to follow the conferences, neither for the rescheduling, because one of the room of the University was dedicated to the project for the entire month of may and the students were all in Sienna in that period. Indeed, all the delays were communicated in time to manage everything.

2 TECHNICALITIES.

ISDN
I think that the University of Sienna has not the facilities for ISDN. For the lack of time and money, and because we didn't know how many University were going to use it, we forgot the possibility to rent the equipment and experiment ISDN.

SATELLITE BROADCAST
We had most of the equipment to receive the satellite broadcast.
We bought just the parabolic antenna. For the audio reception, we put in two loudspeakers and microphones connected to the phone, which worked all right. The biggest problem was to put the antenna on the roof of the University, because the ancient palace is in the medieval centre of the town and is protected from the Department of Fine Arts. We did not have the permission, but we put anyway the antenna.....we didn't received any fine (UNTIL NOW!!).

E-MAIL, INTERNET
All the students have access to the computers of Sienna's Multimedia Lab. Whenever they want. They navigate quite well on Internet. Some of them are very good (together with me are preparing the WWW pages of the University of Sienna). Many of them have their own e-mail address. It takes just one day to have the humanities group's account (humanities@unisi.it).

FAX- TELEPHONE
The biggest problem is to know who will pay for the telephone and for the faxes: first of all for the audio-conferences (even if we had to call a number in Italy) and especially for all the faxes we sent to the enterprises for the placements, and for those I sent to the partners of the project. We have lack of founds at the Multimedia Lab. and there are lot of problems to pay for things that does not concern with the laboratory activities, but with the didactic matters. All this financial problems will arise soon!!

FIRST CLASS SOFTWARE
The first class software didn't work at all. We didn't have any support to use it and to install it properly.

3 LANGUAGE

There have been many problems regarding the language.
3.1 In fact, the use of English made difficult the interaction of all the students with the other ones of the various European universities. Many of the students didn't use e-mail because of their lack of English knowledge: they were scared of not being able to examine theoretical problems and going deep inside them. During the video conferences there were many audio noises which added themselves to the understanding problems.
3.2 The Marion tape has been absolutely impossible for us to understand because of the mixture of English and French together. In the future, it would be better trying to send with the tape a transcription of the interview too or at least to subtitle all the tape. By the way, the understanding level was in general quite good, and enough to let all the students take part to the event.

4 EVALUATION

4.1 The project as perceived by my students, could be very useful for what regards the future working opportunities offered them by the enterprises (the placement opportunity and the relevance of it for a students' curricula). The people who organised the project, anyway, completely failed in this relevant part of the program. Especially in Italy, where the University is completely isolated from the working world, it could be a good thing to organise the placements *in big enterprises, or with more connections with the media, following at least student's preferences. As of today, we exactly don't know in which enterprises the students will be placed.*

4.2 From the theoretical point of view, we think the project was absolutely not useful for what concerns the application of any sort of analysis criterion applied to mass-media work. The video conferences have been interesting, but the lack of interaction made us impossible to understand deeply other universities' methods of analysis. The impossibility to interact (for technical and language problems) has often been the only discussion they had with the other students in Europe and within the work group in Sienna during the project. The communication has been effective for the theoretical analysis they made and they waiting for the others European universities, but is just "papers" and not a sort of virtual mobility or two-way interaction.

4.3 Besides simple audio-conferences, for a project which planned 4 video-conferences, disappointed my students' expectations. The only video-conference the attended, moreover, was one-way interaction (Prof. Eco didn't hear student's questions).

The positive thing have been the enthusiastic approach of the students to meet in some way other students in Europe in a virtual way. The consideration that the project is just an experiment has been the consolation for all the problems

5 The DEMOS

5.1 The Prof. ECO lecture
The conference made by Prof. Eco was judged very interesting by all the students involved in the project, especially because it concerned a subject that regarded them in a direct way (they are really into semiotics).
We also think that the lecture made by Eco was very general, but properly because of the students' good competencies in semiotics, the lecture has been perceived only as a good framework
The use of technologies was only apparently of help. In fact we thought it was not very good for the students not to have the possibility to talk directly with Prof. Eco. Besides, the mediator totally misunderstood the question the students wanted to put to Prof. Eco. The use of video-conferencing revealed not useful in its effect, 'cause the students only saw a sort of video, listening to what Eco was talking about, without any kind of interaction.

5.2 The Prof. MARION tape/audio conference
Unfortunately, the Marion tape has been difficult for us to understand because of the mixture of English and French together. We guess it was very interesting. The answers of Marion during the audio-conference were, instead, very complete and exhaustive, and useful for the analysis criterion improvement.

5.3 The Prof. BRUCKE-BAUER tape/audio conference
As I told you before, we didn't receive the tape in time to see it, so we decided to leave the audio-conference. May be some of my students will see it and will put their questions to them via e-mail. Unfortunately is late to organise some work groups for this tape, because is exams period.

6 VIRTUAL MOBILITY/GENERAL EVALUATION/ PERSPECTIVES
(GLOBAL FOR THE PROJECT)

All the students really enjoyed taking part in the project. As an experiment is not that bad, but as a project it really needs to be partially revisited:
To develop effective ways of interaction (the only real way to interact each other has been, with no doubt, e-mail) and placements' organisation are the points which need more effort.

Finally, a lot of problems have been caused by the lack of financial support: (technologies, placements and tutors need this "support").

Daniel D'Ancona
Social Sciences Unit

(This is an extract from a more comprehensive report on HUMANITIES' activities in the Geneva University)

1 OVERALL EVALUATION

(This chapter is tentatively written according to the guidelines Pierre Dunand Filliol sent us via E-mail and will serve as summary of the Geneva side of the project.)

1.1 Seminars attended and organisational issues

Geneva's group of students followed only one demo-seminar in communication sciences (LNN, 15 May 1995). A group of 16 people watched the Marion/Willot tape, and then attended the audio conference. As a tutor, I attended Demo 3 so as to say alone. We received the tapes normally, and before the audio conferences. There were no technical problems for watching them, except, perhaps that we had to change rooms during the process. Consequently, there has been a very short time (20 min.) for the discussion after watching the tapes. Needless to say, it was too short to do a really interesting work.

The quality of audio reception was medium. Some groups were well audible, some others were not. It must be possible to improve technical troubles like echoes, larsen effect, blowing in the microphones, people speaking and laughing in the background, speaking slowly and articulately, pertinence and accuracy of the interventions,... But, of course, we have absolutely no mean to act on troubles like the quality of the telephone lines, which are of analogue nature and thereby noisy...

1.2 Technology

Three technologies were used in Geneva:
- video;
- audioconferencing;
- E-mail (tcp) and Internet (WWW).

1.2.1 Video

Contents must be adapted to the technology. An audio-visual media should use more images and sounds as examples, and have a different rhythm than a normal conference. A reflection must absolutely be made on these aspects of teaching through media.

1.2.2 Audioconferencing

As analysed above, it is a very problematic tool because of technical, linguistic, financial and then structural problems. It doesn't seem to be a really adequate media for virtual mobility.

1.2.3 E-mail and Internet

I used it myself to communicate with the other tutors and I therefore subscribed to all general interest lists (hum-tutors, hum-chat...) and to the lists concerning hum-com more specifically. Globally, the communication worked well. E-mail seems a pertinent tool to organise and plan tutors' work, because of its flexibility (asynchronicity), and the possibility to communicate on equal terms in a performing way. A good example is how Colette Govaars, in Groningen, managed the second tutors' audio conference.

There is one point I would like to make, though, about the web: many messages were sent directly to the tutors, but also, at the same time, to the news groups on the web. This causes an important redundancy, every message being received twice (one directly, and the second one through the mailing lists). I feel that something should be done to improve this. And, as it was used, I wonder if the web server of Humanities was really useful. Personally, I only used it once, by curiosity. E-mail appears quicker, and more efficient. Maybe the web server can be interesting for the general promotion of the project through flashy pages ?

Sociology students in Geneva have temporary personal accounts during their second and third year of studies :

- they use terminals, but have no access to applications like Netscape because they have no personal partition on a hard disk on their individual machines (sic!);
- they can post and receive messages through an IBM 3090 machine (i.e. neither a Windows nor a Macintosh environment), but they don't do it because they don't even know they have the possibility to do it!
Nobody has explained them what E-mail is, and how it works, and they do not know how they can get information about it !
- their terminals are exclusively 'designed' to use applications like SPSSx, EXCEL and WORD.
1.2.4 Technological innovation in institutions

The source of this problem of access to electronic communications tools is due both to the structural inefficiency of academic structures themselves, and to a specific Swiss slowness in managing any kind of innovation. On one hand, top-down management to change something or introduce something new takes a long time before it is really implemented. And when it's finally done, technology has evolved so much that chances are that the hardware will be obsolete before anyone will have had the possibility of using it. With bottom-up initiatives, on the other hand, when someone decides, on its own, to do something to accelerate things, all the existing forces will, in one way or another, do their best to make the task as difficult as possible because it is perceived as an impingement on established prerogatives. Another one of these nice 'double bind' situations.

I have a very specific example to illustrate this point: my own troubles, as an assistant relatively up-to-date with computers, to get an access to Internet. It took me four months, and I had to multiply contacts with a number of different offices: one for the computer, one for the ethernet card, another one for the link with the main machine and the configuration of the communication application, another one to get an account on the main machine, another one to have the information on E-mail, and friends to know where and how to download applications like Netscape... It is of course out of question for a standard student, with a bare basic knowledge of computers, to undertake this alone...

Conclusion: the technical possibility of using E-mail for students does exist, but some introductory lessons to the E-mail and Internet would be necessary beforehand. It should be possible to manage this (this is to be confirmed by the informatics responsible here) if necessary, at no cost to the project.

1.3 Virtual mobility and language

Quality of understanding here in Geneva among social sciences students was globally poor. Language problems were especially felt in comprehension and concentration issues.

1.4 Quality of learning

- through video: fair to good, depending mostly on the professor's skills.
- through audioconferencing: poor.

1.5 Tutor-students work

Centrally important. Works as a buffer between virtual and physical activities, and between global and local perspectives. For Geneva's experience, it worked well, but let's remember that there has been only one actual 20-minutes group discussion - before the LNN audio conference.

1.6 Moderation

I believe the moderator did his job accurately during the audio conferences, and that a revision of his role during an audio conference will not be of any help because of the structural sources of the problems with this technology.

1.7 Academic relevance

Interesting project, but a definite lack of organisation.
In Geneva, relevance of the question of the social implications of the use of new technologies was the central debate. The idea of exchanging with other European countries is very well received, but needs more reflection on the effective ways to achieve it.

1.8 Perspectives

Here are some suggestions to improve the efficiency of the project based on the answers to questions 6 of the questionnaire handed to the Geneva students - 'What suggestions would you formulate for a later discussion ?' -. They summarise as follows:

- encourage students activities;
- allow more time for the discussion and the preparation of the debate;
- encourage students participation and interactivity among them (horizontally): for example, create a specific news groups where students could exchange their impressions, questions, demands, etc., but also ask directly questions to professors: a kind of 'virtual seminar', open all day long. This would be an effective way of increasing time allowed for discussions for a negligible cost;- work in smaller discussion groups (six to eight students);
- interact with a smaller number of co-acting groups (a maximum of five per subject matter seems
ideal);
- go deeper in the task at hand (tutor-student work);
- accompany the modules with a critical reflection on the social impacts of new technologies;
- integrate cultural discrepancies as a dynamic factor.

2 ENCLOSURES TO THE GENEVA TUTOR EVALUATION :

1 EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE FOR DEMO 2 (translated from the French)

I. VIDEO

1. What do you think about the video ex-cathedra lesson ? (please develop)

2. Was Prof.. Marion's lesson interesting to you ? (justify your answer)

3. What are your main criticisms of this video lesson ?

II. DISCUSSION

4. Did the discussion that followed watching the video seem useful to you in a pedagogical perspective ? (please justify)

5. Are there issues that seem essential to you that weren't mentioned during this discussion ? If yes, which ones ?

6. What suggestions would you formulate for later discussion ?

III. DISTANCE LEARNING

7. What do you think about the hybrid formula (face-to-face activities complementing a virtual activity) ? (Please develop)

8. Do you think, at the light of this experience, that distance learning is able to offer you a 'plus' in the context of your studies ? For what reasons ?

9. What is your general impression of the HUMANITIES project ? (justify)

10. What are your main criticisms to the HUMANITIES project, on the ground of the demo-seminar you experienced ?

11. Any complementary observations or remarks ?

6.3 Proposition for the HUMANITIES' Literature panel discussion of May 12 1995

by Fred Truyen, faculty of Arts KU Leuven as extracted from the electronic discussion group "hum-lit-content@dipoli.hut.fi"

[...]
To Professor Daniel Apollon

Dear Colleague,

You may have noticed in the e-mail that the Panel is being questioned, a.o. because the second of the four speakers announced, i.e. your humble servant, is not supposed to be compatible with the literature topic as conceived/defined by Heaven knows whom. I have been suggested to shut up by some partners in a program that claims to promote discussion and interchange. Given my very busy schedule I would have cancelled my participation if I had not happened - for several weeks - to tease the apparently anonymous and almost mute Task Force to make their literary component more explicit. Taking part nevertheless becomes a nice challenge, right!? And I am happy to believe that my neighbours during the debate will stimulate rather than censure discussion. Hence I herewith forward a menu full of brainstorming topics. When starting by general organisational matters I follow the point of view of the organisers. It is not by hazard that I stop exactly where a list of questions that are more specific to literature (literary research?) should come: I suggest that this becomes the main component during the discussion and I have many questions / comments / suggestions, but it might be wise to work out that section with the colleagues who will be at Bergen, first of all with Els Jongeneel.

Suggestions for the Panel Discussion

There are clear indications that our participants do expect something particular from the Panel Discussion. Hence it may be relevant NOT simply to trust video and rather to prepare the discussion in written form. In case thunder, rain and other tempests keep away we may even have a good time.

- It is full of notes and comments in the e-mail files, often in key words from forecast (good/bad), TV/soccer games and other 3- or 4-letter words-games. I like them much as an object of study, but I feel bad at ease when they are applied to Umberto Eco - we are in good company - and to other Humanities experiences. Anyway, whatever happens and whatever has happened so far I would like to support the enterprise while on the other hand keeping radically and openly critical, just because it is worthwhile. Many remarkable things have hardly been noticed, several shortcomings remain to be discovered, but it may often be a matter of goals, resources, etc. Hence I need just a bit more than four letters while knowing on the other hand how short time is on video.
- After a series of "lectures" and a beginning of real interaction (with certain partners and lectures rather than with other ones) we wonder what may come next. My own first and main question is to what extent the Panel will correspond to the expectations of the Task Force: two participants who have been announced a long time ago both as speakers and as members of the panel will not be there. Would they have ignored what was expected from them? I feel ashamed anyway for keeping my own promise (i.e. for not abandoning the program) since people may have the impression that those who take part in the Panel do so because they have no busy schedule...After all it is not too clear any more on behalf of whom the Panel will be speaking.
- I would like to hear again also that the aim of the enterprise was/is indeed to promote discussions and interaction.
- I would like to know whether the topic of our group was/is just open ("anything goes": e-mail, forecast, my favourite dish or whatever), whether we had explicit purposes and a.o. whether they were linked with literature (cities, research on literature, etc.);
- neither my Department nor myself have ever received any answer from the Task Force about the - very promising - title(s) of the seminar: "A Literary Journey Through Europe". According to academic requirements the authors of such a title would be expected to offer a "Course Description" in which they make their goals more explicit. (By the way do you know any such programs without course descriptions?) It would be the right place for indications about the links between the various components of the program: dealing with various cities (in Europe), how exactly does it make a journey, and how European is such a journey? What can we learn from the

- very rich - accumulation of cities, writers, texts, moments, etc., that has been offered or from the programmatic statements about them (in the one programmatic lecture)? And would there be any specific reasons for linking such themes with Distance Learning/telecommunications?
- In the many international programs known to me so far the exact partner groups, their traditions, their knowledge of literature and (why not?) of languages, their curricula, their bibliographical, methodological and theoretical backgrounds as far as the topic (literature, cities, etc.) is concerned, are an initial matter; who has a panoramic view on their profile and how has it been used during the lectures?
- It is according to these circumstances that the exact didactic formula of the program is being scheduled: will it be a research oriented program (with open discussions, on the basis of what kind of models, etc.?) or rather an ex cathedra program with lectures and unidirectional question/answer relationships? (And do you really need all this equipment, and why don't you show on a screen or old-fashioned blackboard all those exotic names and titles and quotations that only 25 % of our students understand when pronounced in one of the many foreign languages in this so-called monolingual English program?)
- In case the aim of the program is to be equivalent to a well-planned course on say literature, one would expect that such questions are explicitly and systematically formulated at the beginning, if not from the beginning to the end of the session (as I have written several times on beforehand). Now it seems that the Panel has to answer this kind of questions, at the very end and as if they had been responsible.
- Given the absolute openness of the literary (and didactic) component of the program and given the openness of the new communication channels the rules of the game have been left open (except in matters of technology). it is predictable what happens in such cases, in particular in new kinds of (international) societies: since the initiative is left open and since even the respect of clear academic/scholarly rules is not established no real progression nor planning is possible and those who have a chance to occupy the forum finally play the role of the organiser and the man-in-power; they tell who is invited to speak and who is supposed to shut up. Little by little they define the object of study/discourse, without any further consideration and without justifying their arguments or information, just because the forum is empty. Psychologists and sociologists use this kind of scenario in order to observe human behaviour. Would this be the purpose?
- Let us see then whether it is still possible to start talking. Those who are really responsible are not those who now discuss the goals of the program, hopefully with a larger audience and on the basis of explicit rules.

- From our baskets full of questions on literature:

Do we (want to) deal with individual cities, writers, texts? Do the different lecturers agree on their own goal? Do they rather deal with space, or even with "space and time" (as said by Els Jongeneel)?

Why then would the city topic be relevant in our specific didactic frame? Or would it have a particular relevance nowadays from the point of view of literature itself? Would this be the case in all traditions, or rather in particular ones?

- Last but not least, it is of no use to deal with the language-and-communication component except if done seriously, i.e. on the basis of an explicit agenda. I shall deal with it elsewhere anyway, but in written reports.

[...]

6.4 Some examples of questions for debate posted on the HUMANITIES WWW Newsgroup

by the Groningen Tutor during and after the Demo Seminars

[…]

In Groningen we formulated a few questions for Eco, but we did not get the chance to pose them. We bring these questions in the content list so that we, listmembers can exchange some ideas. I suggest we use a new message for every topic. So that one can easily distinguish what is being spoken about.

CREATIVITY QUESTION
1 What is the influence of all this new technology on human beings creativity (in solving problems) ?
or
2 Does it and in which way does new technology change our way of thinking ?
and
3 Do we need to and how can we adapt our way of thinking ?

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HYPERTEXT QUESTION

Do you think the different versions of one news item may be consideredas a kind of hypertext reconstruction ?

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[QESTION IN VISUAL COMMUNICATION]
Eco spoke about restrictions of images. Images are not exact enough.
If you see an image of a situation you do not know for what other situations this counts. It is not clear if it is an exeption or if it is a rule. He explained with the biting dog example. Text are according to Eco much more reliable, because you have got words to express and for making nuances.
But what about the saying then that
ONE IMAGE SAYS MORE THAN THOUSAND WORDS
What do you think is more reliabel text or images ?

****

NEWS ANALYSIS QUESTION
How can we apply the content of Eco's lecture to the news analysis of the recorded news items ?

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[ON NEWS]
Do you think it can be possible to direct all contributions concerning content (so students essays and papers), in one way, in order to get an overall framework ? If we do so, maybe we can get an answer to one central question and then we really have a group work. I do not mean that everyone should have the same problem to write about, but everyone should make a link from his/her contribution to the central question.
I was thinking about the following central question:

1 What does good quality news look like ?
and
2 How can we improve the newsquality in future ?

Geneva, July 21, 1995