

James E. KATZ

***Are We Entering a World of Perpetual Visual Contact?
Uses, Concerns and Paradoxes of Visual Telecommunication Platforms***

Increasingly displacing written and oral/aural modalities in interpersonal telecommunication, the exchange of visual information through both photographs and video now plays a prominent role in many people's lives. This change naturally raises the question as to whether modern life will be increasingly characterized by "visual absent presence" in which people stay in visual contact despite their physical separation. Emerging applications and services, such as Skype, Snapchat, and emailed photos, problematize the ontology of a photographic image as well as stimulate the creation of novel sets of social norms and protocols. In this address, I explore the evolution of visual perpetual contact via Skype and related technologies. I also address the contemporary meaning of these services, in particular as seen by young people in the United States. I close with speculations about the possibility of visual dialogues as a new language, which though domain restricted can approximate universality.

James E. KATZ, Ph.D. is the Feld Professor of Emerging Media at Boston University's College of Communication where he directs its Center for Mobile Communication Studies and Division of Emerging Media. His work on the internet, social media and mobile communication has been internationally recognized. His latest book, *The Social Media President: Barack Obama and the Politics of Citizen Engagement*, has been published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Prior to his Boston University appointment, he was Board of Governors Professor of Communication at Rutgers University (the title being the highest honor that can be bestowed by Rutgers on one of its faculty) and served two terms as chair of its Department of Communication. Preceding his tenure at Rutgers, Katz was a Distinguished Member of Staff and director of the social science research unit at Bell Communications Research (Bellcore). Earlier, Katz taught at the University of Texas, Austin, where he was elected chair of the Austin World Affairs Council, and at other universities.

His books include *Magic in the Air: Mobile Communication and the Transformation of Social Life*, *Social Consequences of Internet Use: Access, Involvement, Expression* (with Ronald E. Rice) and *Handbook of Mobile Communication Studies* and his publications have been translated into seven languages.

In 2013, the *Doctorem Honoris Causa* (Dr.h.c.) was conferred by *Budapesti Műszaki és Gazdaságtudományi Egyetem* (Budapest University of Technology and Economics, BME). Among his other awards are the Ogburn career achievement award from the American Sociological Association and the Fulbright Distinguished Chair in Twentieth Century Communications History. He received from the Università Cattolica del Sacro



Cuore di Milano the *Medalion per il Lectio Magistralis*, an esteemed honor in the European academic tradition. He is a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement Science (AAAS), one of America's most important scientific societies, and has been awarded fellowships at Harvard, Princeton and MIT. Additionally, he holds two U.S. patents, one of which has been patented internationally. A member of many editorial boards, Katz was editor-in-chief of the International Communication Association's flagship journal, *Human Communication Research*, and chair of its Division on Communication and Technology. E-mail: Katz2020@bu.edu.