The Faculty of Language: What Is It, Who Has It, and How Did It Evolve?

There seemed to be some biology jargon in this essay which made it slightly more difficult (but not less interesting) to read. The fact that this is indeed a biology-themed paper confused me for the most part. There are multiple things we can take from this report, for example: sometimes using different analysis techniques, even if unorthodox, can yield new results; and that one feature may be developed for one use but fit another even better than the original. Still, I think an article which focused less on the pure biological aspects of language, like non-human animal communication, would have served the same purpose in a more efficient manner. I do hold a personal interest in this type of discussion, but I believe only select parts of it directly pertain to this course.

Since we’re on the topic of visualizing faces with audio in the class, there’s not much I can comment on, respecting whatever was presented in this paper. However, most of it was thought-provoking and it was interesting to see connections between recursive processes and linguistics. It appeared that the most relevant point the authors of the essay reached was that comparative studies on current language and social behavior may produce better, more real-world usable results than methods of the past. The focus on empirical data makes for conclusive studies that might even find unexpected outcomes.
Social Catalysts: enhancing communication in mediated spaces

I’m happy that insightful comments were included as side content. One which I found important (on page 20) considers a wider range of the impacts of telephone communication. Negative critics of breakthrough technologies like the telephone usually fail or refuse to see the benefits and focus only on what has changed for the worse.

The paper also mentions many points which may seem obvious but are often ignored/overlooked, the most apparent being that more people sit where there are more seats. Perhaps if designers thought more like users there’d be better spaces and interfaces.

We had seen most of the final implementations of the featured visualizations in class before, but it was refreshng to read more in-depth details concerning other phases of each project such as installation and earlier versions. It is interesting that even before a communications system is in place, impressions are made and some preliminary results can be predicted by how the target audience reacts.

As it was the goal of many of these projects to increase interaction among random or semi-random strangers in public places, it’s strange to see that there was not further investment in long-term or permanent deployment of most if not all of them. In particular, Telemurals showed signs of the possibility of extended life and maybe the dormitory halls should have further funded the project to provide an enhanced atmosphere for its residents.

My favorite piece of work was Visiphone. It might just be my inclination towards quick, simple, and useful tools and intuitively interpreted informational displays, but if I had to choose any piece to either use or work on, it would definitely be Visiphone. It seems to have been the most successful at attaining its goal but may just be providing more inspiration to me right now because it most closely relates to the current topic in the class.

As specified in the conclusion, some sort of recreational interaction probably serves as the best social catalyst. In that regard, Carousel probably attracted the most users. However, its visualizations also appeared to have required the most amount of effort to manipulate and so may as well have driven many away.
Primates on Facebook

It’s been about a year since I effectively stopped using Facebook so my experience with it may not be as relevant now, but I checked my approximate numbers and they seemed to be nearly perfectly in line with the findings. I find it funny that some people have huge numbers of friends like those above 1000, but I was honestly surprised that people usually can’t maintain more than 150 “real” friends.

The third diagram in the Facebook Notes shows what look like somewhat standard social network visualizations. One thing that might be worthwhile to note is that only Facebook has the internal data necessary to make those nice visualizations. However, even its own analysts understand that the data are somewhat incomplete because of Facebook’s age and the fact that not everyone in the world uses it, and they accordingly remark that this was simply an observation in a non-controlled environment. Nonetheless, the consistency with Dunbar’s hypothesis may be an indicator that people haven’t changed too much since the partial transition to maintaining relationships online and that networks may not necessarily be expanded only due to the move to a digital system. I agree that this electronic form of networking does make it easier to keep friends and acquaintances, but there’s no evidence so far supporting the ability to actively sustain a truly bigger network online.