Call for papers - Transparent Communication. Organisations, Communication and Transparency.
International scientific conference - Brussels, 21-22 November 2013

General presentation of the theme
This international conference is grounded by the desire to review current research in several countries on the issue of "transparency", as current central element of organisational communication – whether as content (communicating on transparency) or as communication modality (transparent communication).

As underlined by J.-J. Boutaud (2005, see also N° 52 of Quaderni, 2003, and N° 97 of Pouvoirs, 2001), and as evidenced by the frequency of occurrence of the term in social actors’ discourse, transparency has now become a protean figure or value. It is potentially invasive and able to most largely determine the construction and movement of objects and practices that are current signifiers of our “hypermodern” societies, paving the way to a transparent form of social life.

The conference will focus on the presence of transparency in the field of organisational communication. The organisation that wants to (or should) be transparent – and therefore legitimate and trustworthy – must unveil itself and its entrails, pertaining to the “glass house” model, which very significantly, gave its name to the first French professional association of public relations in 1950 (“la maison de verre”). In order to ensure stakeholders’ trust, organisations ought to make their inner confines and compartments transparent and permeable.

If transparency is an affirmed and guaranteed “quality”, it may also be perceived as trickery, as an instrument of power and domination, as a source of mistrust and suspicion. Paradoxically, the hyperbole of “making things known” can generate opacity (as mentioned by Serge Daney, “to reveal things, one needs shadow and light”). The strive for transparency may spill into a “show everything” tyranny, as already pointed out by a number of science fiction authors (Orwell, Huxley). This tyranny would replace trust and the respect for intimacy. Transparency is in a permanent dialectic with its direct opposite: secret (State secrets, trade secrets, professional secrecy, etc.). The organisation must always position itself between these two extremes as regards speeches or behaviour.

Transparency, whether as a form or as a content of communication, establishes itself as an ethical imperative (a “duty to inform”), and reciprocally as a “power of knowing”. These imperatives appear as absolute: the “social inward dimension of organisations” is called to become more and more exteriorised. But, as already emphasized by Boutaud, this ethical dimension of organisational transparency must not overlook the aesthetic dimension at its base. Transparency never ceases to incarnate into sensitive configurations. For example, office settings, buildings, but also textualities, instructions and regulations, forms of enunciation, types of physical or mediated exchanges. Social media plays here an important role in the current claim that considers transparency as a central element in organisational communication, a claim to be verified in concrete cases.

Focus of research and areas involved
Different approaches and research areas in organisational communication sciences are solicited when it comes to the issue of transparency. Participants may develop approaches in the fields of critical theory, systemic theory, pragmatic analysis, semiotic analysis,
narratology, mediology, constitutive theory (i.e. the analysis of communication as a constitutive dimension of organisations), as well as discourse analysis and linguistics. The analysis shall not be limited to verbal aspects, but will also include the analysis of other communicational aspects such as image, architecture, behaviour, etc.

The **main areas** of work, in which submissions are expected, will focus on:

**Theory: transparency, communication, and organisations**
Participants targeting this particular area are invited to reflect on the general relationship between transparency and organisational communication, i.e. theorisations of transparent communication. E.g. what effects has “transparency” on communication theory? Certain paradigms of thought seem to allow an integration of “transparency” as a necessary step towards a fully humanizing communication, as for instance in Habermas’ thought. But in the Social Media and collaborative Web era, how must we rethink these paradigms, in particular at a time where mistrust towards institutions and globalisation is generally increasing? From a critical point of view, and with regards to the analysis of the circulation of power and influence, how does transparency position itself in relation to the current communication practices?

**Internet and transparency**
The outburst of the 2.0 Internet profoundly affects our society and shapes a particular media environment suitable for the dissemination of the “transparency imperative” in organisational communication. In addition, companies and institutions now seek to use new digital textualities of conversation to support their transparent image, i.e. portraying themselves while practicing and “celebrating” transparency. Participants may choose to analyse this specific triangle (Web 2.0, transparency and organisations) thereby identifying the links between these different elements, and reflect about the increased media revolution that is underway, i.e. the search for transparency within organisations.

**The rhetoric of transparency in organisational communication**
This aspect mainly focuses on the presence of transparency as rhetorical figure and as communication content. How do organisations and their members communicate about transparency? Which rhetoric emerges, built on these semiotic constructions? Participants may therefore epitomise the different practices, mobilisations, instrumentalisations and emergences of transparency in speeches, texts and media. Different approaches to textualities and organisational conversations are envisaged: the ones being more attentive to interactions and to the dynamics of the construction of meaning around transparency. Others will be more interested in the internal architecture of produced textualities (semiotics, narratology, etc.) or seeking to combine different aspects. The research field is rather large: internal, external, corporate, or financial communication, commercial-product communication, communication practices of associations or public institutions, etc.

**Communication, labour, management, control and transparency**
In this area, we are looking for studies focusing on the relationship between transparency and management, regulation and organisation practices in organisations. Ethics and legal aspects will hereby be discussed. Regulations requiring, for example in the public domain, access obligations to information are an interesting example of norms influencing communication activities and the construction of meaning by organisation members. These rules, laws, codes, and the general trend towards “judicialization” of organisational communication helps building the context of transparency as genuine contemporary imperative. In this particular
focus, one shall reflect on ways to “socialise” members of organisations to the transparency issue, in their working life (through training, internal communication actions such as launching new social corporate networks, etc.).

Crisis and transparency
This section focuses on the relevance of transparency in crisis communication. Researchers may propose studies and reflections on specific cases of crisis communication policies, examining the relationship between strategies, devices, crisis situations and the requirement of transparency. They could stress the importance of transparency in crisis communication strategies, or analysis the perception and the feedback of actors about it. Is transparency relevant in crisis communication policies? Is “transparency” really present? What visions do internal and external actors share as regards “transparency” in corporate communications?

Environmental communication, CSR and transparency
How do communication practices use the notion of transparency as regards the protection of the environment or the issue of corporate social responsibility? While environment and CSR are now central elements in the discourse of public and private organisations, they lost in the same time part of their influence in giving credibility and legitimacy: transparency thereby appears as an essential prerequisite (though partly mythically and rhetorically grounded, as mentioned above). The exploration of this triangular relationship (organisations, environment/CSR and transparency) will be the main focus of this section.

Practical information
The conference will be in English and French.
The conference will be held in Brussels (IHECS, Bord de Verre building, Rue du Poinçon 15).
Abstracts in English or French to andrea.catellani@uclouvain.be or thierry.libaert@uclouvain.be. Max. 2000 characters, references excluded. Deadline: 30 March 2013.
Notification of acceptance: 30 April 2013.
Deadline for full articles: 15 October 2013.

After the conference, a selection of papers will be made for an ensuing bilingual publication (English and French) on transparency and organisational communication.

Steering committee
Thierry Libaert (UCL), Andrea Catellani (UCL), Audrey Crucifix (UCL), Gervais Cwako (UCL), Christine Hambursin (UCL), François Heinderickx (ULB, president of ICA), Béatrice Jalenques-Vigouroux (INSA Toulouse - LASCO), François Lambotte (UCL), Mélanie Notte (UCL), Sophie Pochet (UCL), Joël Saucin (IHECS - UCL), Emmanuel Wathelet (UCL).

Scientific committee
Thierry Libaert (UCL), Andrea Catellani (UCL), Françoise Albertini (Université de Corse), Françoise Bernard (Université d’Aix-Marseille), Jean-Jacques Boutaud (Université de Bourgogne), Anne-Marie Cotton (Arteveldehogeschool, Gand), Nicole D’Almeida (Université Paris IV-Sorbonne), Gino Gramaccia (Université Bordeaux I), Anne Gregory (Leeds Metropolitan University), Oyvind Ihlen (University of Oslo), François Lambotte
The conference is organized with the support of SFSIC (Société Française des Sciences de l’Information et de la Communication).
The conference will be opened by prof. Marc Lits (UCL).
Invited speaker: Timothy Coombs (Univ. of Central Florida).