

« ... il y aura toujours une marge d'indécision; la distinction ne sera pas source de classements sûrs, le paradigme grincera, le sens sera précaire, révocable, réversible, le discours sera incomplet »²

(Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte*, 1973, p. 10)

Abstract

This article proposes a thesis on communicational phenomena, which are considered “tentative”. We have adopted as reference the five theses presented by Ciro Marcondes in 2004 about the rarity of communication, which include a viewpoint about its absence. In conjunction with and extending these arguments, the article develops the proposition that a tentative nature is manifest in the variable probability of achieving communication objectives, as well as in the degrees of imprecision of the process itself. A correlation is drawn between these characteristics and the activities of the participants and socially produced interactional devices. A reflection upon codes and inferences is presented to epistemologically support the proposed thesis. The thesis is then readdressed as a heuristic hypothesis for empirical research and for praxeological work in the field of communication.

Keywords: Probability. Tentative communication. Interactional devices. Abductive inferences.

Introduction

This article puts forward a thesis about communication phenomena, characterizing them as “tentative”. A preferential reference for the development of this outlook is the set of five theses proposed by Ciro Marcondes in 2004, entitled “To what extent do we actually communicate.”

Our thesis and the viewpoints of Marcondes have several things in common with respect to some of the characteristics the author proposes for the communication phenomenon and to certain instigating and corroborating elements we address. On the other hand, our thesis diverges from those propositions, seeking to shift some of the aforementioned characteristics to another sphere, which modifies them. We consider communication processes tentative from at least two standpoints. In every communicational episode, the existence of a greater or smaller margin of trial and error renders the outcome probabilistic, regardless of the criterion adopted to evaluate the success of the interaction. This “tentativeness” is also the awareness of some degree of imprecision (uncertainty, multivocity, absence of control) in every step of the process.

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² “... there will always be a leeway for indecision, the distinction will not be a safe source of classification, the paradigm will creak, its meaning will be precarious, revocable, reversible, the discourse will be incomplete” (our translation).

To guide and substantiate this thesis and clarify its scope, this article is divided into four sections, as follows. The first section discusses the five theses of Ciro Marcondes. The second one develops the proposition of “tentative communication” by examining its constituent aspects. The third seeks to provide an epistemological underpinning of the proposition through a reflection about codes and inferences. The fourth section returns to the thesis but in another notation, that of a heuristic hypothesis. Lastly, the conclusions summarize some of the core aspects of this proposal.

The five theses of Ciro Marcondes

We will not make an in-depth analysis of the five theses, since that would require a specific article dedicated exclusively to their study. Our objective here is simply to point out a few aspects that are more relevant to our purpose. The five theses (Ciro Marcondes, 2004) are as follows:

- 1) “We do not communicate through structured language because it masks communication” (p. 83).
- 2) “Communication does not exist because we are ‘closed systems’” (p. 85; citing Niklas Luhmann).
- 3) “Communication is above all extralinguistic and promoted by human interaction” (p. 88).
- 4) “In structured language, communication becomes ritualized, means nothing, so we seek other less encoded and ineffective forms. For instance, in silence, in physical contact, in environments” (p. 93).
- 5) “In communication there are labyrinths whereby communication is achieved through the power to overcome the constraints to communicate imposed by “communication society” (p. 98).

Taken together, theses 1, 3, 4 and 5 comprise a joint perspective about communication phenomena, whose main aspect is a distrust of “structured language.” This distrust arises from the ease with which institutional crystallization occurs: “language produces invariable, fixed perceptions” (2004, p. 84). There is, thus, an autonomic regularity that leads to a loss of flexibility.

Hence, communication would stand a better chance in extralinguistic spaces. Citing Piaget, Marcondes points out that before individual thinking – the separation between the “inner self” and the outside world – the process of relating to the world, for young children, is one of indistinction. He uses Merleau-Ponti’s expression “fusion of all awarenesses” (p. 89). However, this separation does not exclude “sensitive consciousness, which conflicts with intellectual consciousness” (p. 89).

Since words are related preferentially to intellectual consciousness, Ciro Marcondes seeks other processes of interaction. Underpinned by Merleau-Ponti, he proposes that in dialogue “words cannot be limited to their known meaning, but must impel us toward a new signification we were heretofore unaware of.” (p. 91)

The author distinguishes “formal communication” from a “second level of communication” through sensitivity. “Words fall short of translation in this entire inner world.” (p. 96) The “communication of consciousnesses” (Merleau-Ponti) “operates on another level, in a dimension that transcends the norm.” [...] “And it cannot be encoded in language; rather, it is captured by other means.” (p. 99)

Beyond the limits imposed by formal language there is a warning against large systems that disseminate messages but do not communicate. Systems of relationships are deceiving – “it is difficult to make others feel what we feel.” [...] “But even more difficult, if not impossible, is [...] to include them in our joy or pain.” (p. 98)

Conclusively, therefore, “communication is achieved through the power to overcome the constraints to communicate imposed by “communication society.” (p. 98)

Contrary to the above propositions, the second thesis expresses Luhmann’s position: social systems are closed – people as well as the other systems. These systems do not communicate with the “outside world;” what lies outside them merely *annoys* them. Because the main process of the system is the quest for self-regulation, it carries out reformulations in response to continuous irritations, using its internal criteria. Social systems communicate *internally*, but do not communicate with the outside world. In short, communication does not exist.

At the end of the passage, Ciro Marcondes clearly states his discordance. Based on Merleau-Ponti, he argues that “the world enters us and we enter the world. That is the opposite of Luhmann.” (p. 88) Instead of seeing “systems, men and the world as isolated monads,” Marcondes believes that “communication is effectively interaction, whereby something truly new emerges.” (p. 88)

One might find it odd that the author includes in his five theses one that he actually disagrees with. However, the space of validity of this inclusion is traceable. Like Niklas Luhmann, Marcondes is concerned about systemic self-regulation, which creates barriers and

immutability. In a world of institutional autonomization one can infer that this effectively restricts interaction, particularly if one considers that the institutional penetrates the individual and molds him. Like Vincent Descombes (1996, p. 280), we also believe that “language is [...] a social institution.” What Ciro Marcondes calls “structured language” would correspond to the autonomic forms of instituted language, in which autonomization leads to context-indifferent self-regulation.

Thus, we find that some of the aspects of Luhmann’s thesis reinforce and complement Ciro Marcondes’s theories. The five theses can thus be summarized in a joint proposition of the set. Structured language (in its aspects of ritualized, rigid codification) masks communication (T1). Hence, communication should be sought (produced) in interactional extralinguistic processes (this leads us to assume that human interaction *precedes language*) (T3). Forms that are less encoded than structured language favor communication (T4). Although instituted systems are closed (T2 – Niklas Luhmann), the limits imposed by “communication society” (characterized precisely by such systems, which are the major media) can be bypassed (T5). Hence, real communication is the one that, through sensitive processes and work at the interstices, is able to elude the dominant processes of rigid codification and find loopholes in closed systems. The arguments presented here redirect Luhmann’s theory of the impossibility of communication to an inference of rarity.

The relative divergence we wish to expound on does not involve the overall content of the proposition, but its assumed scope. We see a framework in which the thesis is valid – and in which rare communication processes do actually occur. But we consider that such phenomena and this sphere of rarity do not account for the entire communicational phenomenon. Furthermore, we believe that it is within the general scope of far more diverse processes (in modes and results) that we should find the explanation for the very existence of what Ciro Marcondes considers “communication,” as well as the explanation for the rarity of this *specific interactional mode*, which we can call “communion communication.”

In most of his five theses, Marcondes emphasizes interpersonal communications between the *self* and the *other* – in the effort to achieve mutual recognition. Similarly, he adopts and emphasizes an essentially high value of “communication.” In other words, for the

author, “communication” is *good communication*, which is successful and which articulates, integrates, links, and creates mutual recognition.

Clearly, it is possible to state such a preference – and in this restricted ambit, the theories are not only proven but also conceptually build the space of their affirmation. *Within this space*, they are verifiable. The value of this search for places of strong ethical, aesthetic, psychological and cultural requirements of communication as a process of *encounter*, of “rare communication,” is undeniable.

However, if we confine our view to this aspect, we become constrained – in face of all the interactional phenomena that constitute human practice and that challenge knowledge – to deny their communicational nature, which leaves the problem of defining *what they are*; or to scorn them for their low value, thus risking losing sight of everything that, even ineptly, constitutes an ordinary life – which is, after all, where those rare flashes of meeting with the world and with others take place.

Thus, in line with our thesis, “communication” is not only that of high value, of inestimable and rare success, but the entire exchange, the conjunction, the passage between groups, individuals, social sectors – frequently divergent, conflictive, involving all kinds of interests; marked by fortuities that go beyond or fall short of “intentions” (which, in fact, may be valid or subservient). Communication is the process aimed at reducing isolation – whatever the objectives and by whatever means. Communication is always performative, whatever the outcome – recognizing, precisely because it is “tentative” (with variable probability and low precision), that its adjustment and consonance are only approximately predictable and usually of low quality. But this, I believe, is precisely what we need to understand, i.e., how it works, what its margins for “possible improvement” are; and in which spaces, due to its very imprecision, flexibility is expected for the human and the social. Indeed, in some situations, it is this very imprecision that offsets communicational oppression and stands as the ultimate barrier against “single thought.”

Within this general process, whose very essence is tentative, and through the sometimes random conjunction of favorable circumstances, rare moments of “communion communication” occasionally occur. However, our perspective takes into account the entire spectrum of communication, involving, so to speak, everyday communication of high and low value; successful or unsuccessful; and including, particularly, multiple modulating processes

and objectives: aesthetic, affective, rational, intellectual, scientific, practical, learning, and political.

Communication is tentative

In an earlier article, upon discussing issues of aesthetics and communication, we cite authors who assumes the aesthetic issue as essentially relational. In so doing, the work of art ceases to be the center of attention and is seen solely as the “*medium* that enables individuals to become aware of their own experience,” (Guimarães, Leal and Mendonça, 2006, p. 8).

Thus, we find that this transition leads to a change of scale, rendering the aesthetic experience merely probabilistic and not necessarily connected to the high value of the work. The main focus *on the work* could be considered the result of a complex social process aimed at probabilistically maximizing the aesthetic experience.

In our current research, upon studying a set of articles presented at Compós that report or refer to empirical researches, we began to perceive the possibility of broadening the scope of this target probability. Unlike other themes, objects, approaches and theoretical references, the various communicational phenomena examined in the aforementioned articles – according to our interpretation – point to some aspect of tentative interactional processuality.

As mentioned in the initial formulation of this thesis, in the Introduction of this article, the notion that communication is tentative is expressed based on at least two standpoints. From the first standpoint, communication episodes are probabilistic – meaning that *something relatively predictable may occur*. From this standpoint, then, we should perceive different degrees of probability ranging from the effective occurrence of outcomes to a poor outcome or none at all. This, of course, involves studying the conditions that lead to such variations.

From the second standpoint, communication processes are approximative – exhibiting greater or lesser precision within different, possibly internal criteria of “precision,” and always out of reach of the possibility of strict control. To grasp the conditions of adjustment between concrete communication processes and the acuity of their realization involves a discussion of what can be considered successful communication, together with the criteria adopted in the process to judge its good outcome.

To argue that communication is “tentative” is not the same as stating that it will or will not take place – in an attitude of “everything or nothing” – which would merely confirm the

rarity of its occurrence. A mutually exclusive alternative between perfect communication and the radical absence of communication does not seem to exist in society. These two possibilities would only be the abstract extremes of a continuum with variable degrees, levels and routes to achievement.

This process determines a complex probabilistic diversity – since there may be multiple “interactional success” criteria for the same interaction. These criteria vary according to the participants’ intentions, the clarity of their statements, the realization of diverse goals, and the balance or imbalance among participants.

“Communication” should therefore not be mistaken for “successful communication” or “good quality communication,” and even less for an extreme standard of outcome control. Of course, high values and successful communication should be understood and pursued, as should their criteria – but we must have a more comprehensive grasp of the process, including its “deviations”, inefficiencies, low values, and ineffective outcomes, in order to understand what is defined as value.

The criteria themselves are part of the communication problem. Efficacy and value criteria are part of the things that must be negotiated socially by means of communication processes and will be addressed differently according to the various issues that modulate the processes. The explicit or implicit adoption of this or that criterion should be suitable for the specific communication system (socially *established*). Something considered a success in a given system could be seen as frustrating in another.

At the same time, from a constructionist standpoint, such success criteria are probably displaced *through the social performance of the search itself*. This means that it must be difficult, if not impossible to establish a priori criteria for “success” in the interactional attempt that constitutes communication.

However, we should not align the “tentative process” exclusively to what the *speaker* tries to achieve in a communicational episode – which corresponds to his skill in communicating what he intends to convey (be it information, a controversial proposal, an interpretation, an aesthetic stimulus, or a feeling).

What one might call the “participant’s attempt” is unquestionably a relevant part of our thesis. This attempt is expressed particularly in the pursuit to obtain an interpretation of

the message that is coherent with the starting point (emission). The attempt of the receiving participant, in turn, would be that of interpreting the message according to his cultural outlook, breaking down possibly misleading elements and subtleties; and of using his critical judgment to choose, among messages, those that are deserving of his attention. But to take the receiver's achievement of consonance or his active appropriation as the only criteria of success overemphasizes these two extremes, reducing communication to the particular objectives of its parties while neglecting to consider the broader social process.

It is relevant to our thesis to point out not only that the participants in an interaction trigger their attempts (and succeed, or not, in different degrees and ways, according to their own criteria), but also that *communicational processes*, from a more encompassing standpoint than that of their participants, are tentative.

We can therefore distinguish the participants' attempts and the social attempts that are actualized in each interactional episode – *the attempts of the process*. The participants' attempts (each, with his specific purpose, trying to succeed in the exchange) take place in a processual context in which there is something at stake. The participant's attempt takes place *within this framework*. The processual context not only organizes the various attempts but also states the kind of thing that can be attempted and develops certain social attempts.

The basic way in which society organizes these attempts is embodied in the creation of *social devices* for communication. The “attempt of the process” is manifested through the social production of interactional devices.

In this article, we expand the concept of social devices expressed in the book “A sociedade enfrenta sua mídia – dispositivos sociais de crítica midiática” (Braga, 2006 - Society faces its media – social devices of media criticism), which examines exclusively critical devices. Here, we engage in a general discussion of all the frameworks developed socially (and under constant redevelopment), which humans activate in one way or another in order to interact and communicate. In this thesis, the important point to highlight is that these devices are developed through the process of tentative interactions itself. Through successive approximations, developing in practice objectives and criteria for success indicators, interactions generate modes and tactics in the search for an expanded productivity.

The social creation of “interactional devices” produces frameworks that provide the participants of an interaction with shared rules and standards to “ensure” some probability of

success and some possibility of accuracy. Moreover, it enables inferential processes to conform these rules to their conjunctural objectives, and to adapt its objectives and processes to the possibilities of the available frameworks. Strategies that may favor one or another participant are developed *within this space*.

An interactional procedure that is normatized is *the attempt to maximize intended interactions*. These rules are established to reduce “probabilistic risks,” and the participants in communicational episodes rely on this regulated practice to stimulate intended inferences. Nevertheless, tentative elements are always present – in each triggered device, in each interactional episode.

Such socially produced frameworks can be considered at different levels: from everyday conversational devices between two or a few people to macro-devices such as mass media processes or systems that organize online relationship networks. One could ask questions about probabilistic tentative elements at the level both of large techno-corporate structures and of personal interactions, passing through intermediate processes mediatized in sub-business organization.

Of course, the normatized aspects and inferential opportunities will be different in each instance, for each type of medium or communicational process. However, in research, the possibility of posing questions in the same order, according to the same heuristic, about these different objects should shed some light on the continuum, conjunctions and extensions between the different levels.

We therefore propose an encompassing characteristic – expressed not only in a single form or special quality of communication but in communication processes in general. This characteristic would not be seen as an intervention or noise in communication, but as an intrinsic aspect. We consider that this phenomenon is *structurally* tentative and that it could not be otherwise.

The outcome of communicational interactions is likely to be more probable the less it modifies social and human relations, and to be less probable the more it modifies them. Clearly, however, in certain historical moments there is greater receptivity for renewal attempts, while at other times the space is reduced, beset by all kinds of hypercodifications.

However, in communication, to classify the attempt as structural is the same as considering total closedness impossible.

Codes & Inferences

This section aims to provide an epistemological foundation for the theory that communication processes are structurally tentative.

It is worth emphasizing the “encodedness” of verbal language from various standpoints, to wit, in the concept of “grammar” itself; in its aspect of a pre-existing and profound “structure” that governs discourse; in Saussure’s perspective of language as an autonomous system in face of reality; in the relationship between language and thought (the “expressive function” whereby language works as an organizer/translator); in its association with worldly things (the “substantiative”, “representative” or “descriptive” function, which deals with the world in logical terms and/or as it relates to the truth of statements).

In effect, the entire tradition of the philosophy of language, in one aspect or another, stresses the predominance of codes. Language studies, even when they take into account relationships of flow with what is not code, often develop their ideas taking code as the starting or end point. This also seems to occur when, going beyond the focus on the verbal, they address other substances – sound, images, gestures. What is sought for in the latter is above all regulated elements, even when they do not allow for more than one categorization from paracodes to observed constructions. That is why one speaks, for instance, of a “grammar of television.”

However, when it comes to *the uses of language* in a concrete situation – the interaction, “speech” from a communicational standpoint –, concentrating on the aspects of codification no longer seems to suffice. This can be seen clearly in language act theory. Statements – which, according to Austin, are not simply “true or false” but, from a performative standpoint, “happy or unhappy” – are not so due to the clarity or stringency of the code, nor due to formalized rules, but rather because of their non-encoded relationship with the variable circumstance of the concrete situation.

Thus, the study of Communication – without ignoring the strong presence and triggering of encoded elements in every interaction, particularly of paracodes – should emphasize the subtler and less controllable non-encoded processes that are necessarily set in

motion to integrate and complete any and all communication, however encoded it may be. In short, the inferential processes.

In their critique of the “code model,” Sperber and Wilson assert that “understanding implies more than decoding the linguistic message,” (in Pascal Ludwig, 1997, p. 189). They thus propose that:

There is a gap between the semantic representations of phrases and the thoughts actually communicated by statements. This gap is not filled by further encoding, but by inference (ibid, p. 189) [our translation from the French version].

Moreover:

Pragmatics should explain how listeners resolve ambiguities, how they complete elliptical phrases [...] how they identify intentions of reference and illocutionary force, [...] in short, how they retrieve what is only implicitly communicated (ibid, p. 189).

This corresponds to stating that, in the process of producing and recognizing meaning, the participants of an interaction must produce hypotheses in order to inferentially relate the utterances with what is presumably the speaker’s intention and with the contextual situation in which the utterances are made.

Grice (1979, p. 57 to 72) proposes a set of “universal rules” (the cooperative principle, and rules of quantity, quality, relationship or pertinence, modality) that are imposed universally, ensuring the interpretation of the implicit and enabling its meaning to be retrieved. Sperber and Wilson consider that “disambiguation, as well as the determination of referents, is performed systematically through interpretation, albeit according to the rules [of Grice] of conversation” (1979). They also suggest that these rules can be encompassed in a single axiom – inferences derive from an effort to maximize pertinence (between the interpretation and the utterance). Hence, what is emphasized here is the possibility of deductive-logical and/or universal standards.

The two standpoints are interesting in that they reveal that the linguistic code, even in the stringency of its structure, is insufficient to ensure social communication. Between the code and its use lie the extralinguistic conditions of the world, of thought, of the relationships between the participants of the interaction, of the conjuncture of the episode – which require an additional active process (inference) to complete the communication.

However, although reason and logic are, pragmatically, very interesting processes for maximizing stringency (reducing imprecision) and augmenting the probability of successful communication, it should be noted that not every human “communicational program” relies

mainly on controls aimed at univocity, nor, correspondingly, on the adoption of logical inferences related to stringent codes. Aesthetic, as well as affective and practical behavioral processes tend, diversely, to seek other spheres of communicational passage – preferring to gamble on complex and diffuse transactions, playing with the “attempt” and with imprecision in the hope of creating consonances based not on univocity but on the potentiality of accords created among the participants.

Thus, more than a logical game, inferential processes are a practical problem for which the participants must offer some solution – which may be good or bad; and whose criteria will be guided by specific contextual conditions, e.g., a conversation in a bar or a meeting of epistemologists.

Practical inferences commonly correspond to *an abductive inferential process*. In the words of Antônio Zilhão (2006), abduction is an “inference to the best explanation” – based on information available at the time the hypothesis is made. *This means that abductive inference is always tentative – since there is no limit to the addition of new information and of other contextual aspects that lead to reformulations of the hypothesis.*

If interpretation (reading) is required and varied even in the simplest exchanges, it is because communication does not require merely the triggering of codes – but involves, structurally, a part of abductive inferences that are not calculated abstractly and are not *entirely* calculable in concrete situations. In other words, the accuracy and reliability of inferences cannot be regulated in advance. One cannot establish a supercode that solves all the vaguenesses of the code with respect to a given situation, since this supercode would still be tentative and would, in turn, require inferences of adjustment to each unique situation.

Inferences do not correspond solely to the interpretation of the most probable meaning of the received manifestation. They are also consistent with the best fit of this manifestation to the recipient’s perspectives and experience. This means that one cannot regard inferences inherent to communicational processes as hypotheses that take into account only the “search for the best meaning” or the disambiguation of the speaker’s manifestation. “Hypotheses for the best explanation” include references to information such as, for instance, the participating listener’s experience and the contextual conditions of the interaction *according to the interactional device that is triggered*. They also include the possibility of practical extensions between different overlapping devices.

Interpreting the meaning of an utterance and adjusting this meaning to the recipient's repertoire are two codependent aspects. In other words, we assume that interpreting and adjusting resonate mutually – we adjust the perceived meaning, we perceive the meaning according to the possible adjustments to our repertoire [or experience]. The final outcome of this game indicates that interactional episodes are inferential (and hence, tentative) *as a whole* – because it is not merely a question of disambiguating an utterance, but of achieving some kind of adjustment of the process among all the participants, and among them, their contexts and objectives.

However strongly these processes may be marked by uncertainty and imprecision, it is thus – tentatively – that interactions advance and that communication develops pragmatically, with its variable margins of trial and error.

Inferences are largely guided by triggered codes (linguistic, cultural, or institutional). But they also act upon the code, extending, weakening or obstructing it. In the long term and/or according to the intensity/novelty of the situation, they eventually modify or create new codes through transformation or supplantation (see Braga, 2009).

Stated simply, inferences enable the code to be updated, extending it beyond the confines of a literal and mechanical encoding/decoding process that does nothing but convey information – which, of course, is a possible component of the communicational process, but which does not by any means characterize it as a whole.

However, it should be noted that maximization of the “code” elements (normalization) does not necessarily mean greater probability and precision; the rules may also lead to closed systems, lacking in interpretive flexibility, “deterministic.” Inferential openness, in turn, does not necessarily mean flexibility, room for creativity, democracy in participation; it may simply reduce clarity, lead to misunderstanding or produce interactions that are too dependent on fortuity.

Therefore, in addition to valuing the joint use of codes and inferences in the communication process, we should avoid a simple interpretation whereby the code (verbal, cultural or institutional) is a solid, strict part and inference a merely complementary tentative component. Although the rules in the code (according to its degree of openness or closedness) largely guide these processes, *codes are also tentative* – since they are produced and developed through concrete interactions and activated strategies. In other words, codes

develop probabilistically, with some prevailing over others and taking over the scene while other tentative codes fade. In practice, codes work with variable degrees of imprecision and are therefore “improvable” up to a certain point, according to the criteria of their own dynamic logic, and also as a result of the opposition they face from the concrete conditions in which they are used (activation) and according to the interfaces with which they are led to interact socially.

Although the structure and scope developed in this study to address the phenomenon of communication differ from the five theses of Ciro Marcondes, the epistemological foundations of our approach are clearly in strong consonance with the aforementioned theses. Some of the basic perspectives of Marcondes’ writings converge with what we have presented above, namely:

- there is a counterpoint between structured language and interactional extra-encoded processes;
- in view of the ritualized process (i.e., normatization), it is considered that less encoded forms may be more effective;
- communication is promoted by human interaction; interaction precedes language; there is a strong presence of extralinguistic processes;
- even in the face of “closed systems” there is a space (which we characterize by the necessary presence of “tentative” elements) in which closedness can be overcome.

Thus, we can predicate that the two positions imply shared deductive bases, although these bases, here, are directed towards other objectives.

From thesis to heuristic hypothesis

A thesis is an argument in defense of a theoretical view about certain aspects of reality. In this sense, it aims to make an explanatory contribution, which may be formulated entirely or partially according to hypothetico-deductive reasoning. However, to validate and expand its explanatory value, it should meet other desiderata besides conceptual rigor. It is a question of activating the thesis as a heuristic hypothesis. In this configuration, what is important is its potentiality to come up with extensive issues, research questions, and ways of addressing, with specificity, proven phenomena and unique objects of the empirical world, favoring the emergence of new insights and implications rather than simply providing a ready explanation about the world.

For investigative work, which is of direct concern to our ongoing research, the object about which questions should be posed will be both *singular episodes* of communication and

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interactional devices, which lend themselves to social or individual activation. Simply to exemplify, we list below some types of questions that can be directed to such objects through our heuristic proposal:

- what are the normatized processes and what is the degree of openness of the rules?
- how does the device deal with its specific margins of imprecision and probabilism?
- which “social attempts” transcend the participants’ unique communicational goals?
What does society convey in the processes of the device?
- what interactional skills are required of participants to ensure that the development of an interaction (within the bounds of a given device) stands a good chance of being achieved with adequate precision?
- how does one explicate the risk of autonomization of codes and rule systems, which eliminates the flexibility for fine-tuning to experienced situations?

In the study of concrete interactional devices, one of the particularly pertinent angles of investigation is the perception of their processes *for the production of predictability*.

Another relevant research issue is the possibility of observing flow relationships among the “attempts of the process” in interpersonal instances and in mediatized instances of communication.

Heuristic hypotheses may also offer inputs for praxeological action, serving as a perspective that not only affords an understanding of the diversified social practice but also enables one to *ponder upon social practice*. They may serve as reference for an interactional ethic. This issue corresponds to formulating the following kind of question: If things take place thus, in line with such a thesis, what social behaviors should be elicited?

From this praxeological viewpoint, one could consider questions such as:

- how can interactional openness and flexibility be ensured within the ambit of highly regulated processes?
- how can consonance be ensured within the sphere of processes that are open to a diversity of contributions and interpretations?
- how can good conjunctions and a dynamic of mutual feedback be achieved in every dimension among criteria, processes, diversity of outlooks and convergence of purposes in the face of differences? How can interactions be renewed in an environment of acquiescence?

Based on these viewpoints, our proposal involves testing the heuristic value of the thesis by examining its implications in the perception of certain characteristics of the

communicational phenomenon – be it in the research of specific episodes (single cases) or in the study of interactional devices.

Conclusion

In this article we describe two standpoints that characterize communication as tentative. From the first standpoint, we perceive communicational episodes as probabilistic (“something relatively predictable may occur”). The second standpoint (“communicational processes are approximative – exhibiting greater or lesser precision”) brings to light an aspect of uncertainty, of unpredictability, due to the impossibility of total control over precision. This uncertainty can also be manifested in the encounter of the process itself with other independent causal elements. In a way, Ciro Marcondes’ communicational rarity corresponds to this possibilism over which one has no control – for attempting to control it leads to the inverse disintegration of the process.

The reference to probability does not involve a suggestion of statistical approximation, but simply asserts the existence of the social process of attempts aimed expressly at achieving communication – and the fact that these attempts are realized to a certain extent. The individual attempt is expressed in the concrete expectation, in communicational episodes, of achieving some kind of interaction. The social attempt is manifested in the practical creation of processes and devices to maximize the efficiency of circulation in episodes developed within the sphere of such devices. This means that society consistently tries out different modes of communicational success, of “consonance.” To attempt communication – and to find that it is realized to some extent – corresponds to seeking some predictability and trying to expand the probability of success.

This means not only that communication *may take place* but also that it actually does, at some point between total success and total failure, *as a result of an action*, of a human and social endeavor to produce something that is not entirely a given at the isolated points preceding an interaction. Society’s constant creation of “codes” (rules, standards, norms, devices, “languages,” institutions, systems) attests to this social work to expand the probability – even if it always falls short of predictions and aspirations.

In this world thus contrived (which, historically, means that processes are modified continuously or in leaps), we process our attempts at communication between two extremes. Were it possible, in every circumstance, to obtain total predictability in achieving

communication, everything would flow assuredly, with no disharmony – but, strictly speaking, there would be nothing to flow because everything would be purely code, and interactions would be merely mathematical transpositions.

On the other hand, were there total uncertainty, humans would be helpless in the face of external forces, fortuity or nature. Here, everything would be unpredictably possible – but there would be nothing to expect. In contradiction to this possibility, we assume that our species' biological characteristics have really specialized us as builders of history – which means not only recognizing the past but also seeking to produce a future.

Notwithstanding the bounds of partial uncertainty, we perceive that the human and social attempt at communication determines the practical existence of some measure of predictability – *a space in which we can always produce some consonance, perhaps imprecise, but effective communication.*

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