

# Communication: the science of the twenty-first century

## Comunicação: a ciência do século XXI

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SODRÉ, Muniz.

*A ciência do comum: notas para o método comunicacional*  
(*The science of common: notes for the communicational method*)

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### ABSTRACT

This paper shows the theoretical and reflexive movement performed by the author in order to define the epistemological place of communication, arguing that as scientific knowledge communication is a complex reflection able to provide the comprehensive/explanatory key to think about the twenty-first century.

**Keywords:** Common, communication, epistemology, method

### RESUMO

Procura-se mostrar o movimento teórico e reflexivo realizado pelo autor no sentido de definir o lugar epistemológico da comunicação, argumentando que como um saber científico a comunicação se constitui como reflexão capaz de fornecer a chave compreensiva/explícata para se pensar o século XXI.

**Palavras-chave:** Comum, comunicação, epistemologia, método

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SINCE, AT LEAST, the last two decades of the twentieth century, communication scholars who finally tried to define the object of study of the area have led to important discussions which almost always found the uncertainty of the real meaning of communication. These epistemological discussions have intensified since the 1990's and occurred simultaneously with the first expansion of graduate courses in the area in the country. In the same period of time, several researchers tried to clarify the epistemological foundations of communication, sometimes trying to justify its qualification as science, sometimes making diagnoses which put the scientific production of the area in the place of an "interdisciplinary subject"<sup>1</sup>.

1. About this debate cf. Lopes (2003), Martino, L.C. (2001, 2003, 2005 e 2006), França, V. (2001), Rüdiger (2007) and Braga (2011), among others.

Although the focus of Muniz Sodré's last book, *Ciência do Comum*, rests on the construction of the reflection on the scientific statute of communication – as science of a time qualified as postmodern by many – the discussions presented by the author, of great conceptual richness, historicize the movement in which lived (and live) the human sciences or humanities since the mid-twentieth century. Moreover, the historiographical bias of the work is remarkable and shows us that the uncertainties which we found then to be exclusive of communication and that resulted, many times, in the unsystematic growth of researches on a pleiad of objects, belonged not only to an area of knowledge that declared itself as new and, consequently, full of conceptual immaturity.

The humanities were in the same dilemma related to the break of conceptual certainties which ruled the theoretical traditions of complex societies until the 1960's. And it was just when the epistemological paradigm in the theory of knowledge shifted that communication started building its theoretical reflexive parameters more intensely.

The emergence of the postmodern behavior meant, on one hand, a sharp criticism to the occidental metaphysical humanism which led to what many authors call *man's death*, understood as subject and privileged object in the knowledge processes and, on the other hand, it has built the uncertainties of social sciences, while science. If the privileged focus of its analyses were dead and buried, how could we assign global universal value to its knowledge production?

When the certainties of the past went into crisis (with the world watching the end of European colonialism and the beginning of the centrality of means of communication, decisive parameter to produce the techno-financial planetary unification worldwide), a postmodern attitude emerged as a generalized criticism of the metaphysical occidental humanism. The affirmation of *man's death*, understood as a subject and, at the same time, privileged object in the knowledge processes, would be the center of the new epistemological paradigm.

In a world ruled by communication, in which, as emphasized by Sodré (2011: 245), the “sociocultural practices called communicational or mediatic have established themselves as a social action field related to a new form of life” (*mediatic bios*); in which the technological direction of the world brings the communicational thought as the one of a time ; wouldn’t communication be the place of synthesis of the scientific knowledge of humanities, where under the aegis of communicational, dispersed knowledge would be condensed? Wouldn’t communication be, in this sense, the science of the twenty-first century?

Muniz Sodré’s book came to answer this question, putting an end to the uncertainties when defining with authority and conceptual richness with which communication studies usually do, after all. Most importantly, when defining the scientific dimension of communication.

Divided into three parts, being the first about the historical ancestry of communication studies, clashing it with the classical paradigms of the sociological school that has intensively influenced the researches on the area, concluding with the pertinent diagnosis of the informational paradigm insufficiency. It is also about the European branches, mainly, those resulted from the structuralism and, lastly, it makes a diagnosis of the cognitive dispersion of the communicational studies in Brazil.

In the second part, the book outlines the fundamental bases for the definition of communication “as a science redescriptive in the interior” (p. 113) of what the author conceptualizes as *virtual bios*. According to Sodré, communication would be the science of the twenty-first century, also capable of regrouping reflections in the light of the “modernity ethical crisis” (p. 113). Mapping the theoretical branches of “post-humanism”, the author concludes that “the hermeneutic horizon of humanity to come is not only in the universality of the species studied by anthropology anymore, nor in the social relation defended by sociology” but in a “system of intelligibility able to make emerge what is humanly implicit in the world of the life of a planet ruled by instantaneous and global connections, as much as by cultural strategies, mainly sensitive: *solidarity and cooperation* – not only among men, but equally among men and things” (p. 186).

Thus, Sodré states that it is in the direction of diversity, meeting and historicity (possibility of human action on society) that is constituted a science of human communication. From the bond of common until the relations organized by the cotemporaneous world technologies (p. 187).

In the third and last part of the book called *the organization of common*, deep philosophical discussions appear intensively. Sodré improves the definition of communication as a science that deals with the human common, which

broadens the range of its approaches from the intersubjective bond inherent in the communitarian cohesion until the social relations ruled by the media. Finally, he demonstrates that the communicational method points out the problem of common and, afterwards, the “specificities of the distinctive form of intelligibility in the process of production of meaning and social discourses” (p. 293). Thus, the methodological tactic given by the author unfolds operatively in the three levels, already focused in his *Antropológica do espelho* (2011): relational, binding and critical-cognitive or metacritical (p. 293).

A *Ciência do Comum* can be considered the third volume of a trilogy, starting with *Antropológica do Espelho* (2002) and continuing with *As Estratégias Sensíveis* (2006), in which Sodré seeks to define communication methodologically, considering methodology as a dimension that uncovers complex epistemological issues and not merely as a tool to facilitate the empirical research.

The author's work clearly does not only approach the media study and its mediatic processes, it defines the field from the perspective of the perception of the centrality of communication, epistemologically, as a sharing process of a common lived, key to the comprehension and explanation of the twenty-first century. The contemporary dimension of human action is a communicational dimension.

Because of this, Sodré's book is inserted in the present towards the future. Decisive work for the area, it will last in time. To conclude this brief appreciation of the book *A Ciência do Comum*, an image is left.

On a given day in 2014 in the courtyard in front of the Academic Palace (Palácio Universitário) of the College of Communication (Faculdade de Comunicação) at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro), Muniz Sodré briefly told me about the book he was writing. In his own words it was the best theoretical book that he had ever written. His diagnosis was correct. *A Ciência do Comum* is a definitive book. M

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