

Interaction as Context of Communication ¹

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Abstract

The article continues a debate between the author and Ciro Marcondes, regarding their perspectives on *communication*. Reflecting on five angles of interest to both authors (change through communication; *listening* processes; aspects that are a part or not of the communication process; the possibility of treating communication by reference to gradients; and issues of the control of communicational processes), areas of mutual agreement are identified as well as different avenues of approach. In identifying the basis of the differences encountered, it is proposed that it is not a matter of differing points of view regarding the same object – rather, that the two researchers are working on distinct problems, the confrontation with which is constituted by different objects.

Keywords: agonistic, interactional devices, new theory

Paul, said [Lakatos], you have some very strange ideas indeed. Why don't you write them down? I write a response, we publish the lot together, and I promise you -we'll have a fine old time.

Paul Feyerabend, *Against the Method*. Preface (2011: 7).

1. Introduction

On the premise that social interactions are *the place where communication occurs*, I am currently developing a study of multiple cases, with the aim of apprehending some logics of the interaction process. A heuristic hypothesis constructs the object of research and establishes the mode of pursuing its examination. The nucleus of the heuristic is the constitution of what I define as “interactional devices”: certain matrixes elaborated in social practice enable interactional episodes and derive their dynamic from them (see Braga, 2011b). The research itself should make it possible to refine this hypothesis.

In the presentation of some of these reflections on the area, discussed in an article in *Compós* in 2010 and later published in the journal *Matrizes*, I made extensive references to a text by Ciro Marcondes. Sometime later, this article received a response

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from Mr Marcondes, also via *Matrizes*³. For my part, having made the first move which - almost involuntarily - gave rise to controversy, I feel stimulated by the challenges arising from the response I received.

I believe that the results of a controversy should be different from the mere submission of one side to the arguments of the other. Giving greater precision to the process by use of the word *agonistic*, it is a matter of clarifying one's own thought processes, of understanding the differences, of perceiving the possible areas of agreement, and of producing mutual challenges, preventing the stagnation of ideas in the comfort of positions at which one has arrived. It is in this sense that controversy is productive for thought and for the participants – it's not just about decoding and persuading, but about producing meanings.

This article was elaborated on the basis of four reflexive movements. Initially, I attempted to grasp the concordances that Ciro Marcondes and I present in our perspectives with regard to communication – or, at least, correlated angles. I then tried to clarify some propositions outlined in *Neither rare nor absent, tentative* (Braga, 2010) criticized by the author in his discussion - whether on account of the lack of clarity in my article, or due to decodification and inferences that did not correspond with what I actually say. I tried to re-establish, thus, a common space of positions, so as not to squander agonistic effort where differences merely arise from misunderstanding.

I sought also to be clear about differences in my position with respect to propositions of Ciro Marcondes. These differences present themselves ultimately as distinct developments on positions where we agree; but we find, also, differences that constitute differing visions. Having perceived the differences, the task was not complete - because it is not just a matter of propounding my perspectives, contrasting them with those of Ciro Marcondes. It was also necessary to understand the *basis of the differences* - which seems necessary to me for them to be productive and to avoid treating them as mutually exclusive “truths”. It was a case of observing what these different positions *are trying to do*; what is the ambit of validity they are claiming and in the context of which they should be pondered.

³ The initial article is “Neither rare, nor absent, tentative” (Braga, 2010). The text of Ciro Marcondes which I comment on here is “To what extent, in fact, do we communicate” (Paulus, 2004). The response of Marcondes is the article published in *Matrizes* magazine and entitled “Two child diseases of communication: ontological insufficiency and the submission to politics. A discussion with José Luiz Braga (Marcondes Filho, 2011a).

Having gone through these preliminary processes of reflection, I was able, then, to organize the sequence of topics required by the theme. These are: the communication process as a producer of something new; the question of listening; what may or may not be a part of communication; the existence of gradients in communication; and the relationships between knowledge and intervention in the communication process. As a concluding item, I try to understand the basis of the differences between the two positions.

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An important point, to clarify my perspectives, is the perception that academic researchers are not the only ones who take the trouble to understand communication: society also and social participants are intrinsically geared to the phenomenon in a practical relationship. Society, its institutions and individuals not only *communicate among themselves*, but think about communication and organize large parts of their behavior and social processes in accordance with the understanding they have of it.

We may say retrospectively, from the current point of view, that society always communicated within itself. But the new fact that constitutes our object of reflection only began to make its presence felt from the seventeenth century – gradually, at first, until unleashing in the twentieth century a massive social perception of communication phenomena. This self-awareness changes everything that occurred previously. Communication appeared only indirectly, as a subsidiary of the dynamics that drove it – to the point of scarcely being perceived. Today, the very investigative question is unchained by this condition, basic and widespread, of strong social acuity on communication processes, with their relevance in every social instance and their potentialities. This fact is part of the indeterminate situation that requires our investigation. My objective is to investigate – *in this space of social practices* - what society is doing.

2. CHANGE

One point on which I am attuned with the theory of Ciro Marcondes is his claim that in communication *something new emerges*. The complete phrase is: “I have extended [this thesis] to develop the sense already outlined at that time, of communication being effectively interaction, *from which something truly new emerges*,” (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 171 - emphasis in original). This proposition puts us on common ground also in another respect: it explicitly relates communication and

interaction – a perspective which is at the very heart of my research. Several propositions, in the article, reaffirm the centrality of *change*, to Marcondes. For example: “it is necessary that there should occur within me, as a participant of a communication process, a radical qualitative transformation,” (Ibid.: 176). Or: “That which I am not, can instigate transformation, alter my viewpoint, allow me to change,” (Ibid.: 176). Marcondes does not appreciate my concurrence with *the production of something new* from interaction:

For Braga, meaning is never production, is never something that occurs and arises from the actual communication event. If we consider meaning as *something always given*, that we only need to be able to recognize, we will be condemning communication as something dead, (ibid.: 174, emphasis in original).

This proposition is perhaps inferred from snippets of *Neither rare nor absent, tentative*, in which I deal with recognition of expressed meanings (I will return to this issue). But to observe the effort of understanding does not mean to restrict communication to that nor to reject a new production derived therefrom. In my article, I argue:

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*. (Braga, 2010: 80 - emphasis now).

I underline there, with some force, something that contradicts Marcondes Filho’s inference (2011a) regarding my position. May I reiterate then that we are working on common ground: change through communication processes. Around this agreement, however, I adopt an expanded ambit of instances of communication. In some propositions, Marcondes Filho seems to assume that this change, in order to be taken into consideration, must be strong, deep, immediate, self-perceived. It constitutes “a really different experience,” (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 172). This is shown, also, in the paper presented by Marcondes at the Compós (Marcondes Filho, 2011b) - which narrates an experiment in which students are encouraged to open themselves up to communication, assuming interactions that might change them - and when this happens, they perceive it and give an account of the experience.

This special experience also seems to be unidirectional (or, at least, of unidirectionality emphasized by the form of the argument): someone changes, someone “receives the new,” (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 172), “I need to free my system, to embrace, to open myself up to this

or that person who is telling me something,” (Ibid.: 176). Thus, communication occurs, suddenly, because *someone* is transformed - and realizes that he is being transformed. I have no doubt that such transformations occur, and that they are rare. When they occur, they are in effect, to be valued.

I do not see, however, why we should direct our observation merely to that narrow space. I consider the communication values of change to be more variable, capable of being raised or not. I believe that communication-based transformation is more subtle – it may be self-perceived but, more often than not, we continually impregnate ourselves with small, imperceptible changes, until the moment when, taking a step back, we are able to perceive that something has changed, that something is *in the process of changing* – making it necessary to reflect or investigate in order to perceive the processes and the modifications themselves, their meanings, their slow maturation. A good example are the changes that stem from learning.

I also believe that the changes appear to work best in mutual reverberation. It is not sufficient that, someone having said something, a process/effect occurs *in me*, that changes me, because I was open to this change. To me it seems more interesting to think that, in successive interactions, people reverberate against each other, *they listen mutually to each other* – and, through incremental processes, *they change themselves*, through a multiplicity of intermingled inputs. Just as, historically institutions are modified. Of course there are also extraordinary (rare) changes of the individual, through oceanic feelings, processes of revelation, through *insights*, by definition sudden, the *eureka* moment. Societies and institutions also change, through revolutionary processes, through periods of wide-ranging revisions of ideas, of behaviors and productive relationships. However, even these *rapid* and spectacular transformations are prepared for by incremental transformations at different angles, aspects and sectors which, at the juncture of their entry into mutual relationship, end up triggering the unleashing spark. I can see clearly the communicational impact of the slow sap/silt – much more than in the sudden collapse of levees.

3. LISTENING

Another point of harmony between our perspectives concerns the emphasis on

what we might call the *ambit of receiving*. Marcondes Filho, in his text, presents some propositions in which it is established:

communication [...] *presupposes my availability to receive* this new thing, an encounter with the otherness of another (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 172 - emphasis added);

For information to become communication it must occur within me, as a participant of a communication process, a radical qualitative transformation: I need to free my system, *to embrace, to open myself up to this or that person who is telling me something* (ibid.: 176 - emphasis added).

I appreciate, in effect, such propositions as relevant. Unlike more traditional perspectives, that emphasize the message and its sender, I adopt the formula that *communication is in the listening*. Scholars of ‘reception’ have studied very productively this angle of the issue of communication. In another article (Braga, 2011a), I reflect on the role of media observers - considering that as a group they are engaged in a collaborative task of sounding out certain social processes. I seek to value the sense of listening in the understanding of symbolic circulation:

Given listening, given the importance of “tuning” into the reception, given the delicate nature of the directional adjustments (never exact, always dispersed and tentative), there is something which acts retroactively, “modifying” the production on the basis of the expectations of its reception and of the repercussion of these expectations on the configuration of the utterances (Braga, 2011a: 50).

This proposition, furthermore, reveals itself to be one of the aspects of what I state in the introduction to this article: communication processes present themselves, in social practice, consciously, through a diffuse perception of their relevance. It becomes inevitable to think about them when we engage in daily interactions. Society *knows* that *communication is in the listening*, and endeavors to function (even though it does so in an awkward or tendentious manner) in accordance with this logic. This changes our entire relationship with the idea of communication. This listening is not limited to the reception of information and to the work of interpretation, processes which Marcondes, quite rightly, does not wish to confuse with the communicational. In the article *Circuitos versus Campos Sociais (Circuits versus Social Fields)* I propose that:

the *media product* is not the starting point in the flow. It might well be seen as a point of arrival, as a consequence of a series of processes, of expectations, of interests and of actions that result in its composition as “an object for circulation” – and that, in turn, replenishes the circulation flow (Braga, 2012: 41 - emphasis in original).

This means that the *utterance position* already in itself constitutes a relationship

of attention for a (possible) listening, which, in this way, becomes productive. The idea of a *counterflow*, from reception to production, is a counterpoint to the risk of confusing communication with *information flow*, since this is always unidirectional. In communication, the production itself is the result of a listening. I understand, therefore, that it is from the mutual reverberation between listenings and utterances, on both sides, that the interactional processes in their production of meaning are nourished.

What we do not imagine is that the listening may be treated as a key with only two positions, yes or no, acceptance or refusal. We may be prepared to modify ourselves in the presence of otherness – but we do not always, in effect, succeed in accurately tuning in to the propositions. We do and we don't understand. We embrace and we resist. If we look around, to take a simple overview of social practices, it is inevitable to note that there are degrees of listening, complex variations in availability and in reception.

4. ABOUT WHAT *DOES CONSTITUTE* COMMUNICATION

Some aspects under debate may be assembled as an observation about what we take *to be or not to be a part* of the communication processes. Ciro defends the need not to confuse communication with information or with signals. In effect, thinking about communication sometimes became snarled in this tangled web up until the 1980s. Consequently, we cannot assume communication to be some *thing* that passes from one person to another. Considering these distinctions to be established, the subsequent question is: how does communication relate to these different processes and different things, such as information signals, interpretation, understanding, messages, products?

Marcondes Filho (2011a) proffers simplifying inferences about what Braga (2010) develops with respect to these processes. Marcondes infers that:

Braga believes that communication is something tentative. The attempt of the participant is, for him, something relevant to his thesis (Braga, 2010: 72). It is the fact that the receiver seeks an interpretation of the message in a manner coherent with the starting point, in the emission (Ibid.: 174).

The first two statements express the relevance which I do indeed attach to the aspect of *tentative* in communication. But the inference that I restrict *the tentative* to interpreting the message *in a manner coherent with the starting point, in the emission* is not consistent with my propositions, and does not stand up to a careful reading of Braga (2010). I do not deny, of course, that persons and groups interacting exert an effort of understanding in an attempt to see

what others are saying or implying. I believe, moreover, that this is quite in tune with the proposal of Marcondes, already quoted [“I need to free my system, to embrace, to open myself up to this or that person who is telling me something,” Marcondes Filho (2011a: 176)] – since it is clear that I can only embrace in good conscience and autonomy, that which I at the very least understand. However, not a single proposition in the article authorizes the interpretation that I make a biunivocal alignment between *communication* and *understanding*, and that that should be to the exclusion of other processes.

This corresponds, then, *to a part* of what I characterize, in Braga (2010), as the *participant’s attempts*. Which are certainly not restricted to this specific effort - the participants also attempt (and perhaps more often) to convince, to counter, to select, to inflect, to defend themselves, to act together, etc. In addition to not restricting the participant’s attempts to *understand*, it seems quite clear to me that the most relevant aspect of my reflexive contribution, in the article, *does not refer to the participant’s attempts, but rather to the “attempts of the 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 *communication 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*. (Braga, 2010: 72 - emphasis in original).

I see such attempts as a possible basis for true *social inventions*. Nothing is restricted, therefore, to decoding messages. Moreover, another very clear aspect in Braga (2010) is to claim that, alongside codes - rules, paracodes - that characterize every interaction, one should take into account another equally essential component: the inferential processes. And furthermore, the codes themselves are seen *as a production resulting from the interactions*.⁴ Marcondes also claims that the search for interpretation according to the starting point in the emission “says nothing of communication but merely *of its prior condition of realization*,” (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 175 - emphasis added). Precisely: Given this relationship, of being a *prior condition*, understanding is one of the aspects that requires attention when we reflect on interactional processes or when we participate in them.

⁴ These propositions of Braga (2010) were later developed in Braga (2011b). See also my interview with Mohazir Salomão Bruck and Eduardo de Jesus on the theme, in the magazine *Dispositiva* (2012).

Ciro Marcondes argues against taking communication as the passing on of something, like an *exchange* (of information and signals). Here he quite rightly criticizes Shannon's perspectives. But there is no basis to assume that I would have positions similar to those criticized. In fact, the area, in general, has no trace of this vision that confuses communication with the message; much less *interpretation congruent*, in the reception, with that which came out of the emission - because that is what characterizes "communication as passing on."⁵ The issue is actually more complex. Rejecting, as Marcondes, this simplifying *passing on* (since there is always transformation, of one kind or another), one cannot, however, abandon reflection on the role of the messages – *of that thing* – in the *process* that is communication. In the case of media processes, we must think about the implications of the products (things) in the processes of mediated communication. Reciprocally, we understand that the processes, in various ways, direct the products. Moreover, we do not merely need to observe live interactions and mass mediarization. Along the way, we also think about polemics⁶-interactions from which we always hope something new may emerge – mediated by the written text: a thing (articles) should stimulate processes and facilitate the development of reflection. Of course, the *article thing* does not correspond to the vehicle, paper and ink, but rather to the ideas and to the actions that are articulated there in the form of message. However, quite rightly, *to convey messages, to circulate products, to exchange ideas* (that appear in the form of utterances) - seem also, to be necessary conditions, although certainly not sufficient to *produce communication*. For this reason, in the article "Circuits versus social fields" I suggest that

strictly speaking, it is not "the product" that circulates - but it finds a circulation system in which it makes itself viable and which it feeds. The product, however, is a particularly auspicious moment in the circulation - [...] by its permanence and also because it shapes itself at the same time as it seeks to shape the environments in which it starts to circulate, it becomes a special object of observation for inferences on the more general processes in which it inscribes itself (Braga, 2012: 41).

We may say now, with more clarity (stimulated by our debate): the product is not only

⁵ The understanding of *communication as process* seems to me already established in communication. The PPG on Communication at Unisinos has as an area of focus "Media Processes". Since 1998 it has been emphasizing processes as its priority focus, and not the messages, the media or its products.

⁶ As we engage in the present polemic, activating an interactive device of an agonistic order, I observe that I have gained, additionally, the possibility of making participating observations.

something that circulates, it is a result (variable) of the interactions. The codes and inferences, as I perceive them in the interactional devices, are procedural elements. We need, then, to understand how, in the interactional devices, things work (messages and products) and their passing on (circulation) – in order to understand in them what are the logics that favor communication and what are the elements that, in the passing on, restrict change, the *production of the new*. Aware, nevertheless, that however much one advances in this knowledge, the process will always be tentative and the result, incidental. I can then conclude the present item with two propositions:

(a) I agree that things such as processes and information, signals, interpretation, understanding, messages and products are not conceptualizing elements of communication. They are not part of *the concept*.

(b) However, they are processes and things in the context of which, or through the actioning of which, communication takes place and can exist, in social practices. For this same reason, *without confusing them* with communication, without pretending that they *define* it, I assume it is relevant within the ambit of attention. They are part of the processes as interactional context in which communication takes place.

5. GRADIENTS

In this item, we should note a specific difference of vision - on the possibility or not of variations of degree in the communication process. It is a point that deserves reflection, when we ponder the positions under examination, casting aside interpretations that simplify the debate, restricting it to the level of mere misunderstanding. I want to seize upon, *case by case*, a variety of social attempts, of values produced and their social meanings. It is not my intention, certainly, to measure such variations. What matters, on this point, is to avoid restricting the communication phenomenon to something that we should categorize as being of *high* human or social value - by any criteria one cares to adopt; and that simply happens or does not happen. In deciding on this constraint, we would need to establish criteria that would ensure we are confronting just this phenomenon, explaining just how to recognize it and discarding everything that does not meet the criterion of excellence. Thus, I argue in my article:

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*. (my emphasis now).

[...]

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. (Braga, 2010: 71).

For Marcondes, however, “communication is not a gradient. [...]. It exists or it does not, and this is a radical criterion. Either it is total success or it is total failure; either it occurs or it does not,” (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 177). In the discussion related to this position, Marcondes states that it is a matter of “qualitative phenomena, never reducible to the logic of proportionality or fragmentality, as Braga suggests,” (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 172 - emphasis added). He develops his argument as if I was attempting to classify measurable dimensions of communication:

There are, according to [Braga], *lesser forms* that should not be disdained. Therefore, we would have communications of greater, medium or lesser importance, the criteria for the measurement of which, however, are not explained very clearly (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 172 - emphasis in original).

My proposal of the existence of variations is taken as though it implied the proposition of *measurement criteria*. I am absolutely not interested in a “categorization of communication in mathematical values,” as Marcondes Filho, (2011a: 172) suggests. I do not suggest *fragmenting* communication or propose *quantitative* treatment. I deal with variations of value - which is a quality and not a size. It seems reasonable to me to assume that qualities vary...qualitatively. I find it really difficult (if not impossible) to establish *a priori* criteria, as a rule to distinguish different qualities. That does not stop me from realizing that in the social space - in which interactions occur generating modifications in every imaginable variety of quality, value, intensity or human significance - communications are, rather than *good* or *bad*, very often clumsy. They all interest me - not driven by the search for essences, I see that experience is always variable. The investigation to enable us to get closer to this diversity will be undertaken through the study of multiple cases. It is not a case of debating the *generic* appropriateness of speaking in terms of gradients, arguing about whether or not it is possible to observe variations in a consensual object, but rather of noting that some types of objects of reflection may be constituted with an indifference to variations, and that others types of object require, on the contrary, some thinking about their internal variety. This difference, of being interested or not in gradients, reveals that we are dealing with different objects. We will return to this issue in the concluding item of the article.

6. PROBABILITY, CONTROL, INTERVENTION

We have here three correlated issues, which concern the attitudes of researchers (and social participants) with communication and their knowledge. A minor issue refers to the *probability*, upon which, strictly speaking, there are no major differences between us, except misunderstanding. The use of this word in Braga (2010) - since its presentation in the Compós, in 2010 - generated among some colleagues, the impression that I would be proposing statistical studies, the calculation of probabilities, measurements. Actually, I merely consider that, in society's communication processes, there is no certainty of results. However much the *social participants* have intentions, goals, and *strive to produce predictability*, communication is not controllable. For this reason, I emphasize the word "tentative". It seems to me undeniable that social participants are always attempting something through their interactions (including communicating with each other).

When Marcondes states that "communication is something that rarely occurs," (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 176), and justifies it, among other reasons, because "when I make my opinion public *it is probable* that the other person will ignore it," (ibid. - emphasis added) he infers rarity on the basis of the low probability of listening. It would not occur to me to assume that the use of the words "rarely" and "probable" correspond to how a statistician would understand and would react to such terms. I understand them in their context of origin. When I say "the communicational episodes are probabilistic - meaning that something *relatively predictable* may happen," (Braga, 2010: 70 - my emphasis), I am merely affirming this to be so: that perhaps it may not be so probable that the other person ignores it or does not understand; but also that there is no certainty, neither of success nor of meanings. Anyway, if it is necessary to be quite explicit: I'm not interested in measurements and would not even know what to measure in what I see as tentative. My methodological reflections are rather focused on case studies - which are the antithesis of quantitative studies. Thus, some inferences drawn from this supposed anxiety to measure and calculate must equally be re-examined. One of these is the issue of control. Ciro proposes:

When Braga says that this is the result of an action, of a human and social effort to produce something, he gives the impression that humans in some way govern the process, (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 177).

The inference that I assume that “humans in some way are in control of the process,” would need to be argued – because I did not say this (not even implicitly). Quite the opposite, I say very clearly that people strive to produce probability (inventing codes), but that the codes do not exhaust the process. The abductive inferential element (by definition unregulated) is essential for interaction. In both cases I emphasize the tentative aspect. I suggest, therefore, that communication is developed within variable margins of trial and error. Now, whoever uses the term “trial and error” does not claim that the process is regulated, much less that “men govern the process.” However, Marcondes also disagrees with the term “trial and error”. He proposed, variously, that the statement “does not depend on us, it depends on itself.” And later, on the same page:

this is not the result of *an action*, it is a blind product, a derivation of multiple interventions, of reverberations of interest that the agents have in their repercussions. It is in the collective, in the multiple and indeterminate product that they become a total social event. No-one is responsible for this; no-one provokes it at will. (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 177 - emphasis in original).

This statement, incidentally, corroborates my perspective, in item 2 of this article, on *reverberation* in successive interactions. I note that frequently we attempt it (which assumes wanting it), and we do not succeed when we want to. This is the same logic as the tentative, trial and error of clumsy procedures. But I assume that, when it occurs, it is in effect, the result (uncontrolled, tentative) of a human action⁷. When Ciro proposes that “communication is a extremely rare process because it involves a qualitative relationship with the world, that presupposes *my disposition* to receive the new,” (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 172 - emphasis added) and that “I need to free my system, to embrace, to open myself up to this or that person who is telling me something,” (Ibid.: 176) - I think we can understand that it is a case of human actions focused on enabling communications, even though they cannot control it.

Finally, the inference that “men govern the process” (which, I repeat, does not correspond with my perspective), Marcondes extrapolates the consequence that “Braga is talking about communication thinking of its utilization, of its operation as social

⁷To understand the sense that I give to this action, we can refer to the *maladresse* perceived by Lévinas (2007: 14): “*Les plus simples de nos gestes comportent tous une maladresse inévitable*” (The most simple of our gestures contains each and everyone an inevitable clumsiness). Even more so, complex gestures such as those of interaction – which I consider, precisely, as awkward and tentative.

intervention,” (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 178). However, to seek in the interactional devices generated by society a “perception of their processes for the *production of predictability*,” (Braga, 2010: 79) does not mean, as inferred by Ciro, that I locate myself in a “technocratic paradigm,” that I propose to think of “communication as a project that can be administered,” (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 175).

There is a big difference between trying to understand what orientations and interventions *social participants* (individuals, groups, institutions) try to imprint on their interactions (which I am in effect interested in observing); and proposing – from a political perspective – to direct, or administer this process. Or even to suggest that I would seek to give advice on ways to control (encode) such processes - which would evidently be in stark contrast to my own thesis regarding codes and inferences.

Another aspect, still, on the issue of intervention, is that Marcondes assumes a synonymy between “political proposal” and my expression “praxeological action.” They are not the same thing. I am interested in *understanding what occurs* in the interactions that society and its participants produce and in which they engage. This is an objective of *knowledge*. But I do not think of knowledge as something contemplative, but rather as something that can be used for our well-being and act in society, in the pursuit of better understanding between humans. A praxeological action related to knowledge is not a *politics of intervention* - but certainly the hope (and related gestures) that this knowledge, shared, may prove beneficial to life.

Considering the pedagogical concerns of Ciro Marcondes (2011b), as well as the bold energies he dedicates to a controversy such as the present one, the distinction is clear - for both the pedagogical effort and the human task of agonistics clearly fall within the ambit of praxeological actions. And I do not suspect that his reflection subscribes to a technocratic paradigm. We are both praxeological.

7. IN CONCLUSION: THE BASIS OF THE DIFFERENCES

Popper proposes that “to understand a theory means [...] to understand it *as an attempt to resolve a particular problem*,” (2009: 252 - emphasis in original). This leads to the question: what is the problem each of us is trying to confront? The goal of Ciro

Marcondes in his New Theory of Communication is very clear: to provide a conceptualization of the phenomenon, overcoming the ontological insufficiency of the area. “How can I defend a thesis that communication does or does not occur if I do not make clearly explicit, before anything else, what I mean by communication?” (Marcondes Filho, 2011a: 170).

Ciro’s search requires an effort of abstraction – in order to *seize hold* of “communication” with ontological rigor, it is necessary to brush aside neighboring concepts, throwing into relief the object of attention in its conceptual clarity. This step is assumed as a necessary preliminary to any other approach. When this approach is compared with the problems I am trying to work on, it becomes possible to see, beyond the differences, its bases. We are not just saying different things about the same subject, but rather elaborating different objects, in the search for approaches *to the problems that we wish to confront*. In fact, there is ontological insufficiency – we are dealing, in the area, with a phenomenon of which there is very little grasp. However, this insufficiency does not impede the research⁸. We know that there is something that runs through all social processes in a relevant manner. My starting point is that society (whether in practical terms or common sense) *knows that communication developed this importance*. I assume, in addition to this, a fairly commonly held position that relates *communication* and *interaction*. The interactions involve a whole variety of social processes, which in effect “blend” those things and processes which *Ciro’s vision insists on abstracting*. But I consider that the interactions are *the place of occurrence* of communication. If we do not know exactly what is the phenomenon, we know, nevertheless, that it is there - without which, we would not even be thinking about it.

In my vision, the preliminary step is to conceptualize the phenomenon, *then*, move on to the reality in order to separate instances and practices that correspond to the concept; but certainly going to the reality, to observe the practices that the participants themselves relate as being *communication*, and then immediately, on the basis of this practical diversity, refine a delineation of the phenomenon, by progressive

⁸ I work particularly on this question in the article I presented in the PROCAD Unisinos/UFJF/UFG (unpublished – sent to a journal in the field, awaiting decision).

approximation⁹. My problem then is another, different from the quest for prior conceptualization. It concerns investigating this object - *interactions* - to grasp their logic and processes in social practice, taking as a guiding principle a preoccupation with the communicational phenomenon which I believe exerts here a major dynamic. Unlike abstraction, this tactic is geared to a process of *cutting to the very heart* of the communicational, which I have argued in some articles.

For this object and this specific search for knowledge, it is not possible to separate communication *a priori* from its interactional context. The two-directional relationship between this context and this phenomenon is such that the process would not survive the separation. One must *infer the phenomenon*, not immediately apparent, on the evidence of clues and indications found in the social environment of its occurrence. It is what makes me emphasize a circumstantial approach to researching the communicational¹⁰. What does it mean, in short, this differentiation between the two positions? We are interested in two different objects. One cannot argue that one of these objects is valid or true - and that the other is invalid or false. For my part, I have no intention of disqualifying the object constituted by Marcondes. I merely consider that each object requires specific treatments, and not others; lends itself to specific discoveries - and not others. I believe, therefore, that with relatively similar concerns - the relevance of the communicational, the specificity of this knowledge - we are backing different courses of action, both with regard to the construction of objects of reflection, and in the chosen research approach.

If the two visions were re-examined on the basis of this perception of what they are trying to do in different ways, I believe it should be possible to grasp them in a way that transcends mere mutual defense, enabling an enhancement of the value of the agonistic process for what it has to offer most in terms of communication.

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⁹ On this type of approach, see Paul Feyerabend, 2011, chapter 16, items 2 to 9, p. 243 to 254.

¹⁰ In 2007 I presented in the GT of Epistemology of Communication an article on that question, also published subsequently in *Matrizes* (Braga, 2008).

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