

COMMUNICATIVE EFFICIENCY AND/OR COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATION: THESES FOR THE TURN

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ABSTRACT. My study contains theses related to the three fundamental models of the communication process: the mathematical, the interactional, and the semiotic model, in order to outline the main directions designated by the restructuring of these models under the influence of the turn signalled by the axiom “one cannot not communicate”. The main objective is to present the conditions of possibility and the opportunities of the hermeneutics of communication resulting from the turn.

Keywords: paradigm, model, axiom, interaction, semiotics, turn, communicative efficiency, comprehensive communication

1. The *philosophy of communication* and *communication sciences* are new and dynamic domains of contemporary philosophical thought and scientific research. The questions which motivated their development – e.g. what is communication? which phenomena belong to the realm of communication? is there a specifically *communicative perspective*? – point to the fact that recent communication phenomena organize themselves into an autonomous and comprehensive experiential domain. Today, the question of the relationship between communication experiences and human experience in general, including the salient *turnabout/reversal* of this relationship, cannot be avoided anymore, neither by philosophical investigation nor by scientific research.

2. If we survey the series of changes within the practice of communication and the changes in perspective within communication research in the period of modernity, certain authoritative presuppositions which sketch out the horizons and directions of further research in communication sciences emerge with reasonable clearness. We must definitely mention three of them:

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2.1. The level and the complexity of communication techniques and technologies, and the novel communication experiences related to their application directly determine the way of thinking about the essence, role, and meaning of communication, and the theoretical and methodological conceptions thus created within a given historical, social, and cultural context.

2.2. The theoretical and methodological constructs used for describing, explaining, and interpreting communication phenomena are not the results of theoretical reflections outside the realm of communication, but products developed within the medium of the communication process, the development of which is directly related, on one hand, to the designing and implementing of communication practices, and on the other hand actively influences their development.

2.3. Both the theoretical and methodological constructs as well as the practical communication procedures are integrated within comprehensive *paradigmatic* conceptions about communication. The promoting or inhibiting effect of the tensions between the dominant paradigm and the novel paradigmatic openings also manifests itself here. Nowadays we can notice the signs of a change in perspective which affects communication *as a whole*. This emerging paradigm shift influences both the theoretical and methodological as well as the applicative and practical components of communication.

3. The theoretical traditions related to the research on communication (the cybernetic, social psychological, semiotic, rhetorical, phenomenological, socio-cultural, socio-critical, etc. tradition) carry two perspectives of *paradigmatic* value: the *empirical and analytical* and the *interpretive and comprehensive* perspective on communication. These two differ with regard to their premises, methods, and conclusion, but are on the whole complementary in the way in which they imagine the essence and meaning of communication.

3.1. The *empirical and analytical* researches are directed at the empirical observation, factual description, explanation, and modelling of communication phenomena. On the theoretical level, these approaches treat communication as the subject of knowing, whose objective and general laws can best be apprehended through constructing descriptive and normative *communication models*, while on the practical level they are aimed at exploring the principles and techniques of *communicative efficiency*. The necessary theoretical framework for this endeavour is supplied by the *epistemology* of communication research, which on its turn projects the dominant epistemological attitudes upon the investigation of communication phenomena. Thus, the answer to the basic question – what is communication, and what are its conditions of possibility? – is associated with ideas related to the

ultimate objective of knowing and to the instrumentalized and mathematized application of analytical and inductive knowing procedures. The *cognitive* productivity of these researches – both on the theoretical and applicative level – also determines their *limits*.

3.2. The question is raised differently within the horizon of the *interpretive and comprehensive* investigations: what happens *to us*, when we communicate? Interpretive investigations are not so much directed at the objective exploration of communication experiences as they are at placing themselves into the experiential process, understanding the events of situatedness and participation as well as the contents of significance and the meaning relationships, thus applying, in other words, the *existential* and *medial* view on communication. The investigative approach captures and explores the specific generality within the individual experience as an encompassing meaning relationship associated with experience. The theoretical and practical framework for this is supplied by the *hermeneutical attitude*, which, however, is also in large measure restrained by the various specific aesthetic, rhetorical, and anthropological horizons that carry it.

3.3. The hermeneutical approach which is applied with respect to the communication experience does not merely draw a novel, open, and encompassing horizon of the *hermeneutics of communication* and *comprehensive communication*, but it can also effectively develop itself while moving within this horizon. Yet, from the perspective of the empirical and analytical approach – as far as it takes the hermeneutic perspective at all into consideration as its own complementary otherness – all this seems a mere effort at promoting consensus and understanding, or an *utopic* idea directed at emphasizing the values contained within them and an effort at the renewal of society.

4. The paradigmatic approaches to communication and the communication theories determined by them apply three basic *models* of communication:

4.1. The *mathematical and cybernetic model* of communication – the starting point for which is offered by the Shannon–Weaver model (1949) –, based on the “mediator” theory of communication: communication is basically *mediation*, or *transfer*. Similarly to transportation, where we overcome spatial and physical distance, communication is directed at overcoming the distance between the source and the user of information, i.e. at information transfer.

4.1.1. This model reflects the *linear* view on the communication process: information is transmitted from the source to the receiver through a channel in the form of a coded message. The content of the message is the news, or the *information*, which is transmitted as the component of a certain knowledge. The

communication process does not have any specific medium. The transfer between the two endpoints of communication is always accomplished by the medium – the *channel* – through which the message is transmitted. The channel is an *empty* medium between the passing of two messages.

4.1.2. The communication process thus conceived has an *instrumental* character. Its basic, but extrinsic determinants are the communication instruments – mechanical, electrical, and electronic instruments (telephone, telegraph, radio) as well as presentational (books, pictures, buildings) and representational instruments (face, voice, movements) –, or, more widely, communication technique and technology.

4.1.3. This model carries within it three problem levels: a) questions related to technical features and operability arise on the level of communication *technique and technology*, since the reliability (faultlessness) and speed of the message's transfer, or transmission, is dependent upon these; b) the integrity and accuracy with which it is possible to transfer information of a specific quantity and content is also a question at the level of the *message*; c) at the level of the *user*, the question relates to the extent of the effect and change produced by the information which is used, i.e. the *efficiency* of the communication process.

4.1.4. The issues related to the operability of the communication technology, channel noise, coding procedures, regulatory and controlling functions (*feedback*) which can be integrated within communication become apparent on these problem levels. The insufficiencies of the linear model are also revealed in the horizon of these problems.

4.1.5. The functions of coding, regulating, and controlling, as well as the requirement of communicative efficiency impose the necessity of constructing also a *vertical* structure upon the horizontal structure of the linear model (Gerbner's model, 1956). On one hand, this model represents the communication process, hitherto seen as running into infinity and unbounded, as moving out from a starting point, or more exactly organized around a central point, i.e. the *communicator*. On the other hand, this model also presupposes a *meta-level*, on which the specific components of the communication process are being related to the whole of the process. Thus, this model represents the structural organization of a seemingly linear communication.

4.1.6. *Communicator-centredness* can be viewed as a kind of reflection of the subject-centredness characteristic for the epistemological outlook of modernity. The communicator is the dominant subject of communication. Communication is initiated by the communicator, who uses various instruments, communication techniques, and technologies for its implementation, a process during which he/she follows certain communicative intentions and efficiency criteria. Thus, the communication

process becomes limited, not only horizontally but also vertically: due to the privileged position of the communicator, the perception and reflection of communication is built *vertically* upon the linear flow of the process. Consequently, the horizontal effect relationship directed at communication efficiency also functions as the mechanism of *power formation* within the vertical structure of subordination and superordination. The exploration of the structural organization of linearly conceived communication reveals most clearly that the technique and technology of effective communication is at the same the technique and technology of *power formation*.

4.1.7. The cybernetic-mathematical model of communication approaches the issue of communication from the perspective of *knowing*, on the basis of the *epistemological* orientation, while it views communication as accessory to knowing. Thus, the terminological, methodological, and practical separateness/distinction between communication and knowing, communication and action (and thus knowing and action) is characteristic of this model. These characteristics are also reflected in the relationship of communication to its environment, in the exogeneity of the context. Communication happens *within* the world, but it does not have a world of its own, and thus it is not situational (although it is structured); its juxtaposed, subordinated, and superordinated components do not organize themselves into an encompassing meaning relationship.

4.2. The *interactional model* of communication is built upon the social psychological concept of interaction (G. H. Mead, 1934) and upon the later extension of the concept of social interaction (T. Parsons, 1949) to the communication process (Newcomb's model, 1956). Thus, this model is developed under the influence of social psychological, sociological, and anthropological approaches, and as far as the essence of communication is concerned, it presupposes a *transition* from transfer to *relationship*.

4.2.1. The communicative *interaction* is built upon the *relationships* between the components of the communication process. Communication itself is an act, action, and influence exertion; the communication acts involved in the interaction are acts of influence which go against each other and alternate, functioning – as it looks from the outside – according to the mechanism of action and reaction, influence and response. Within this model, one can see the multiplying extension of linearity according to the alternating directions of mutual influencing. The communicators are now promoted to the status of *partners* who establish a relationship with each other through communication. Communication is not an instrument of the relationships which are established; rather, it is an *exchange relationship* which is realized as the exchange of information, influences, and roles.

Consequently, the act of communication is *shared* between the communicators. The *other* party, at whom the message is directed, also gets to play his/her role, as he/she not only receives, but also responds to the message.

4.2.2. Thus, the communication of the message and the establishment of the relationship go hand-in-hand. On one hand, the transfer of the message presupposes the relationship, and, on the other hand, the relationship is established through this transfer. The relationship which is formed in the “between”, the “inter” of the partners, represents the *human* medium of communication. In fact, the interaction model is built upon the basic formula of *direct human communication*. Although it is far from perfect and effective communication, it serves as a benchmark for every man-made communication technology. The other manifestations of interaction can also be thought of and described by analogy with speaking and linguistic communication.

4.2.3. The first, elementary version of the interaction model is still based on the mathematical and cybernetic models. This is even more possible since interaction also has an elementary information level: it also involves information exchange and bidirectional (multidirectional) information transfer. Thus, the more sophisticated interaction models still contain the mechanisms of mathematical-cybernetic models in such a way that they organize themselves according to the directions and effects of the (inter)actions and fulfil subordinate and subsystemic functions. Thereby, communication technique and technology are also integrated into the human medium of the interaction model.

4.2.4. According to the interaction model, communicators are active participants. This presupposes *presence*, temporal actuality at a certain location. Due to their participation, communication becomes *situational*: objectual and personal dimensions, basic and meta-levels are developed, and the basis for communication is offered by objectual and personal *mediation*. In this more complex structure, *meaning* is also associated with the communication objective and intention, since communication does not take place mechanically; rather, it is *lived and experienced* practice. As such, communication cannot be limited to the transferring technologies, but *can be understood* as a process which takes place between and among humans and also involves practices of group and community building as well as institutional dynamics.

4.2.5. In the interaction model, one cannot make abstraction anymore from the presence and participation of the *other*. The role reversal – the mutual, but alternating sending and receiving of messages – supports the equalization of the communicator roles. However, this does by far not mean that roles are effectively equalized. Verticality is also integrated within the structure of the interactions and manifests itself, associated with the practices of unilateral influence and acceptance, as

the shift of the interaction's centre of gravity toward one communicator or the other. The techniques of influencing the interactional balance lead, also in this case, to the establishment of dominance, power formation, and manipulation.

4.3. The *semiotic model* of the communication process prioritises the messages as well as their contents and carriers. From this perspective, communication can be seen as the process of production and use of signs and codes (U. Eco, 1976). The semiotic model emphasizes neither the transferred content nor the relationship; rather, it highlights the *sign*, the sign system, and the code through which communication is realized, respectively text and culture, which can be conceived of as sign systems and processes.

4.3.1. The contribution of this third model lies in the fact that the semiotisation of communication substitutes the two-factor model with the *tripartite* sign relationship: the *interpretant* belonging to the relationship between the reference and the representamen opens up the sign relationship's *dimension of meaning* (Ch. S. Peirce). According to this model, communication about something presupposes, creates, and carries a meaning relationship, while the communication medium is developed as the *network of meaning relationships*. The elements of reality at which communication is directed relate to each other according to these networks, upon which the *multi-level* structural complexity and *multi-directional* open dynamics of communication is also based.

4.3.2. Communication is an act, both as sending and understanding, or reception, which is also realized as *interpretation* and *understanding*. This places at the forefront the joint emergence of participants and functions, structure and process within communication. According to this premise, the model of linguistic communication (Jakobson) presents communication as a linguistic process which organizes itself structurally and in which all communication factors are involved as the performers of interacting communicative functions.

4.3.3. In later semiotic approaches, the experiential model of communication is represented by writing, the symbol, and the text. The textual medium of communication, in which the *code*, respectively the operations of coding and decoding are brought to the forefront. The *world-like character* of communication is emphasized within the medium of *textuality* and then *intertextuality* (Kristeva). The text has its world, or more exactly involves a certain world, and the elements of the experience of reality and the meaning formations of the text's world organize themselves into the same communicative unit within the textual world. The world of communication opens up and extends in the directions of the *fictional*, the

imaginary, and the *virtual*. Nevertheless, new forms of institutional power formation also develop in the medium of textuality, based and maintained by the techniques of discourse construction.

5. When the representatives of the Palo Alto School, the triad of Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson put forth as the first axiom of communication, “one cannot *not* communicate”, it seems that scientific and speculative thinking about communication was not yet aware of the real importance of the *turn* marked by this axiom.

5.1. In their wording and explanation of the axiom, the authors themselves have been primarily concerned with the *pragmatics of communication* and in fact identified the universality expressed in the axiom with the extension of the all-encompassing and comprehensive character of behaviour, held to be evident, to communication. According to them, “behaviour has no opposite”, i.e. “one cannot *not* behave”, and there is no such thing as “non-behaviour”, “non-conduct”. In other words, behaviour is something that contains its own opposite *as its self*: “non-behaviour” is also behaviour.

5.2. The statement of the axiom contains a hidden fallacy: the authors switch from behaviour to communication with the aid of an unproven or seemingly self-proven hypothesis, equating behaviour and communication: “If we accept that every behaviour has message value in an interpersonal situation”, then “every behaviour is communication”. According to the suggestion of the hypothesis, there is behaviour which is possible also outside interpersonal situations, which accordingly does not have any message value, or more exactly is message neutral. Thus, the hypothesis gives the impression that message value is not a necessary component of behaviour but somehow extrinsically attached to it, i.e. it belongs to *some* behaviours. Nonetheless, the existential quantifier is exchanged with the universal quantifier – *every* behaviour. The seeming illogic of this argument can have only one explanation: the linear logic of the argument falls prey to the *necessity of conversion* that lies hidden in putting the issue this way; in fact, behaviour does not acquire message value due to interpersonal situations, but it is behaviour that creates interpersonal situation in every case. That is to say, message value is integral to behaviour, since behaviour itself is primarily and essentially *message* and the *communication* of message, in the process of which behaviour is developed and transmitted as message.

5.3. Consequently, we can understand the unavoidability of communication from the universality of behaviour, but it is the universality of communication which leads to the necessity of behaviour. Thus, that which seemed to lead from behaviour to communication – the fact that “one cannot *not* behave” –, appears, in fact,

as a result of the assessment of behaviour's message value from the perspective of communication. Every communication is behaviour-like, i.e. any communicative manifestation and every instance of communication presupposes behaviour and is realised through behaviour. The necessary character of behaviour does not logically lead to the universality of communication; however, the unavoidability of behaviour necessarily goes together with the universality of communication.

6. It is the *reversal* of the relationship between communication and experience which manifests itself within the *inversion* of the relationship between communication and behaviour. With this turn, the experience of communication not only widens toward universality, but it is also filled with *new content*.

6.1. Communicative experience in its traditional sense is situational. In other words, it is not continuous and does not extend to the whole of experience. Communicative acts are intermittent, depend upon situations and contexts, and function as *instruments/occasions* of message transmission, the establishment of contact, and the exchange of views. Their success and efficiency is largely dependent upon the communication technology and strategy that is used, and from the quality of the relationship system and transmission medium. In this context, a certain manifestation (e.g. behaviour) and its message value separate. The manifestation does not have message value in itself; it only acquires such value when it enters into communication or becomes a carrier of communication. In a wider sense, experience in itself is not communicative in its character, but is consolidated through repetition, i.e. it is *repetitive* and *cumulative*. It only becomes *communicative* – and acquires message value – when some element of experience deviates from the order of repetitions and acquires *special individuality* through this “deviation”. It is not the experiential content itself, but its specialness which acquires an indicative and thus communicative value.

6.2. The reversal of the communicative relationship is based upon the *reversal of experience*. It is only the new experience which carries a message in the communicative sense. Where experiencing means acquiring new experience against repetition, this is where the communicative dimension associated with experience opens up. Communication becomes the comprehensive ground and medium of any possible experiencing. In the sense of “one cannot *not* communicate”, any possible experience can be understood as an experience developed within communication and in the form of communication, i.e. as *communicative experience* according to its essence.

6.3. As the result of the turn, communication becomes a comprehensive experience from an accidental dimension of experience. This means that all that to which communication has been hitherto extrinsically added is now integrated in

communication and actualized as something belonging to communication. Accordingly, the perspective of communication research also changes. Until communication phenomena were studied within the complex of social and cultural phenomena, the communication aspect has been considered accidental also to research itself. Thus, no characteristically communicative view has been developed within communication research. The turn, however, leads to a *change in perspective*. A *communicative perspective* is opened up also within research, concentrating on the communication phenomenon as founded on itself and extending upon phenomena hitherto considered to lie outside communication.

7. As opposed to the one-sided *cognitivism*, *relationism*, and *semiotism* of traditional communication theories, this turn leads to a *communication-centredness* through which all these are brought within the horizon of an *integrated* communication experience, which needs continuous communicative *presence* and *participation*. The turn reorganizes the understanding of communication of all three traditional models of communication theory, also reorganizing along with them our practical attitudes toward communication:

7.1. Communication turns into information *production* from information transfer, and the event which evolves within the medium of communication becomes a carrier of information. Only the information produced within communication will have authentic news value, and an event will be able to become integrated into the field of experience only as a communicative event. *Contextualisation* and the *network-like* development of communicative relationships also plays an important role in this transformation. The news value of communicative events is ensured not so much by information provided from outside, but rather by the information which is formed through the effect relationships specific to the communicative relations. In the network of juxtaposed and loosely interconnected structural elements the communication process develops as the divergent and convergent, always continuing, and dynamic play of individualizing and contextualizing elements. If seen from the perspective of technology, the turn manifests itself in the fact that, from instruments of communication, communication technique and technology become its *medium*. Communication *media* encompass and enmesh the entire world of experience. It is not just that the technical and technological dependence of communication is even more amplified in the context of “new media”, but that human experience itself is in an increasingly broader sense formed within the context of communication and thus exposed to the effect relationships of communication technique and technology.

7.2. The interaction model is affected by the turn primarily in that, as it enters the communication medium, interaction is realized as a communicative *effect relationship*. This means that the partners do not build a relationship with each other “through” communication, but communication itself turns from an instrument of relationship to its medium, becoming thus a relationship builder. The communicators, who thus far have entered into communication from the outside and stood at the endpoints of the communication relationship, now enter into communication as a medium and become communicators as participants within this medium. Now, it is not communication that is a product of the subject, but the subject is produced by communication. The effect itself exerts a shaping and defining influence on the partners whom it affects. At the same time, this effect impacts communication as a whole, since in this case the meta-level of communication is not attached to the basic level “from above”, but rather *belongs to* communication about something as the inherent communication about communication.

7.3. The turn affects the traditional semiotic model of communication in the sense that communication conceived of as an effect relationship is revealed at the same time as a meaning relationship. The communicative act is not drawn in anymore from the outside into the meaning relationship, rather it is posited as belonging to the meaning relationship, and it is developed within the communication medium/process itself. Communication is not merely the production of empirical facts, it is essentially productive also with regard to the formation of meaning. This is the way in which the truly world-like character of communication manifests itself. Communication does not only take place in a surrounding world, but the *world* itself is constructed within the medium of communication. The communicative situation is organized in a *world-like manner*, and its participants find themselves always already standing in this relationship. We do not have an actual relationship to the world outside communication. That which apparently or actually is excluded from communication *also* attains and retains its reality in respect of communication. The limitation of experience through communication and its communicative openness can be simultaneously apprehended in this fact. *Real experience* turns out to be experience which is formed within the medium of communication, i.e. communicative experience. In this context, the belonging of action to communication and its communicative mediatedness also becomes apparent: communication is *action*. Nevertheless, communication is not merely the series of discrete moments of action, but an event-like process: an event of affectedness and also a meaning event.

8. Three main directions can be traced from this turn with respect to the restructuring of the theoretical approaches to contemporary communicative processes and experiences, and to the practical attitudes related to them:

8.1. The *mediatisation* of communication and the *virtualisation* of communicative experiences within the event process generated by new media and multimediality, in which communication extends even beyond the conditions of possibility indicated in McLuhan's axiom "the medium is the message". Virtual communicative presence develops as a message – a *message of reality* – within the medium of communication which communicates itself

8.2. The *depersonalisation* and *massification* of communication within a process dominated by mass communication, in whose practice the solely defining modality is the dissemination and diffusion of messages. In this respect, the new cultural industry which continuously "produces" and the *new consumer society* which realizes the *consumption* of communicative goods become the defining framework and ground for human life. However – as the opposite of the new communicative experiences –, communication also becomes an *ethical problem* in this same context: the generating factor for a novel ethical consciousness which can become an inspiration for an authentic *communicative ethics*.

8.3. The *hermeneutisation* of communication through becoming the receiving participant of communication, respectively – in a wider sense – through understanding and undergoing the communicative experience as a hermeneutical experience. The communication-orientedness of hermeneutics and the hermeneutical openness of communication can meet each other in a very welcome, complementary, and productive way in this possibility.

8.3.1. This possibility can prove itself to be productive even more because, in its overstretched form in which it meets its own boundaries, instead of/under the pretence of actualizing communicative existence, communicative efficiency actualizes, in fact, its own paradoxical nature through the heightened mediatisation and massification of communication. The instrumental, (multi)medial effect relationships, which are meant to actualize communicative efficiency, also actualize communicative *dissemination*, *derealisation*, and *uncommunicability* as related to communicative efficiency. *Paradoxically*, the more effective communication becomes, the more uncommunicability it produces. In the horizon of the fulfilment of this paradox, communication realizes itself simultaneously as a self-grounding and self-building as well as self-annihilating and self-destructing process. In other words, the structure holding together effect relations and meaning relations, i.e. the *structure of belonging* is decomposed within the medium of communicative experience, and thus effect and meaning separate again.

8.3.2. This is the perspective in which it becomes evident that *comprehensive communication* can become an actual possibility which is grounded upon the validation of the interdependency between the structure of belonging, the effect relationships developed within communicative experience, and meaning relationships. For the *authentic turn* is carried by the communicative efficiency fulfilled within/as understanding. Communication which is authentically effective cannot be anything else than *comprehensive communication*.