

## Pragmatism as ventriloquism: Creating a dialogue among seven traditions in the study of communication

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**Abstract.** In this article, I propose to respond to Craig's (1999) call for a dialogue between what he identified as the seven traditions in the study of communication, as well as Russill's (2005) positioning of pragmatism as a meta-perspective on the seven others. I show that a way to respond to Craig and Russill consists of considering communication as an activity of ventriloquism, a thesis that is, as I demonstrate, congruent with the pragmatist meta-tradition. Communicating and experiencing the world, according to the pragmatist view, indeed amounts to responding or reacting to what one considers a situation requires, demands or requests, which is precisely what a ventriloquial view tries to analyze and unveil. I then introduce a dialogue between this ventriloquial view of pragmatism and the seven traditions that Craig identified.

**Keywords:** communication theory, ventriloquism, autopoiesis, conversation analysis, critical theory, cybernetics, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, pragmatism, rhetoric, semiotics, sociocultural theory, sociopsychology

Communication has been studied through the lenses of several distinct intellectual traditions. Robert T. Craig (1999) listed seven such traditions: rhetoric, semiotics, phenomenology, cybernetics, sociopsychology, sociocultural theory and critical theory. It is important to identify and distinguish these traditions, but doing so in itself does not move us forward. For that, we have to interconnect these traditions, or as Craig put it, create a dialogue between them. My project here is to create such a dialogue based on a perspective on communication I have developed elsewhere (Cooren, 2010, 2012) that I refer to as *ventriloquism*.

By ventriloquism, I mean that people who communicate are implicitly or explicitly mobilizing *figures*—the name ventriloquists sometimes use to speak about their dummies—

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that are *made to say things* when interactions take place. These figures can take, among others, the form of *facts* or *situations* that are presented as ‘speaking for themselves’ in a discussion, of *groups* or *collectives* whose views some people are supposed to convey (for instance, when a spokesperson presents the position of a government or ethnic community), of *values* or *principles* when individuals position themselves as speaking on their behalf. This list is not exhaustive as anything or anyone that we *speak for* can be considered a figure.

If this ventriloqual perspective on communication allows me, I believe, to create the conditions of a dialogue between the seven traditions identified by Craig (1999), I will also show that this approach is congruent with an eighth tradition, *pragmatism*, which Russill (2004)—and Craig (2007) himself—identify as a sort of meta-perspective on the seven others. The ventriloqual view on pragmatism I propose thus allows us to prolong the dialogue between the seven traditions and demonstrate the analytical payoff ventriloquism has to offer to the study of communication.

I will thus demonstrate that this ventriloqual view on pragmatism, in its fight against objectivism and subjectivism, has a lot to say about how communication works. In conclusion, I will therefore show (1) why a dialogue between traditions is possible and (2) that we should take seriously and pay attention to the way people talk about communication, since it denotes or expresses ways through which the world—in several of its instantiations—figuratively and literally talks to us. If it talks to us, it is both because we make it speak to us, and also because it makes us speak, hence the idea of ventriloquism.

To do that, I briefly present Craig’s (1999) call for a dialogue between what he identified as the seven traditions in the study of communication, as well as his positioning of pragmatism as a meta-perspective on the seven others. I then show that a way to respond to Craig’s call consists of considering communication as an activity of ventriloquism, a thesis that is, as I demonstrate, congruent with the pragmatist meta-tradition. Communicating and experiencing the world, according to the pragmatist view, indeed amounts to responding or reacting to what one considers a situation requires, demands or requests, which is precisely what a ventriloqual view tries to analyze and unveil. I then introduce a dialogue between this ventriloqual view of pragmatism and the seven traditions that Craig identified.

### **Robert T. Craig’s call for a dialogue between traditions**

In his landmark essay, “Communication theory as a field”, Craig (1999) identified seven traditions or perspectives—rhetoric, semiotics, phenomenology, cybernetics, sociopsychology, sociocultural theory and critical theory—that for him are representative of the field of communication. Craig called for a dialogue between these traditions, a dialogue that would be based on two principles, which he presents as (1) the constitutive model of communication as meta-model and (2) communication theory as metadiscourse. While the first principle enjoins scholars to provide a communicational perspective on the world, the second recommends that we “reconstruct communication theory as a theoretical metadiscourse engaged in dialogue with the practical discourse of everyday life” (p. 129).

In other words, Craig claimed that we should think communicatively about the world that surrounds us (*first principle*), but that this kind of reflection needs to take seriously how people talk about and conceive of communication itself (*second principle*). While Craig (2007) later deplored the lack of scholarly discussion that followed the publication of his essay, he

also engaged in an interesting conversation with the response that Russill (2004, 2005) made to his model. According to Russill, Craig neglected an eighth tradition—pragmatism—that should, in fact, be identified with the meta-model of communication itself.

As Russill (2004) pointed out,

Craig’s radical pragmatic turn ... is to evaluate theories with regard to the practical implications and actual consequences to result from envisioning communication in various forms” (p. 28, quoted in Craig, 2007, p. 133).

Pragmatism, which Russill identified with Dewey’s (1927) theory of the public and James’s (1912/1996) radical empiricism, thus paves the way to a form of cooperation or dialogue between traditions in spite of their differences, which indeed corresponds with what Craig had in mind with his 1999 essay.

Although Craig (2007) acknowledged the debt his model still owes to the seven traditions, he recognized that his own constitutive meta-model is, in many respects, a pragmatist model. As he pointed out,

Russill’s argument suggests that the project of communication theory under a constitutive metamodel, as a pragmatist enterprise, entails a political program broadly aligned with Dewey’s pragmatist democratic ideal to promote social conditions in which progressively more inclusive, participative, critically reflexive communication practices can flourish (p. 143).

In other words, Dewey’s pragmatic model of democracy and inquiry could help us develop the dialogue Craig envisioned between the seven traditions. This is what I now propose to do.

### **Communication as ventriloquism**

My response to Craig’s call takes the form of a *ventriloqual view of communication*. With this metaphor of ventriloquism, I try to show that when people communicate, they constantly mobilize or stage entities—also called *figures* (the name ventriloquists sometimes use to speak about their dummies)—that are made to say things, adding their voices to the voice of the people who ventriloquize them. In other words, human beings are ventriloquists to the extent that they speak *in the name of* or *for* figures to which they feel attached. Such figures may be situations, principles, values, procedures, organizations, etc. Conversely, and because of these attachments, human beings can also be considered *ventriloquized* in that they can be considered themselves animated, moved, motivated or enthused by what they stage in their dialogues.

To illustrate this perspective, let’s use the following example, which was invented for the benefit of the demonstration,<sup>1</sup> but corresponds to a classical case studied in conversation analysis, i.e., declining an invitation (see, for instance, Heritage, 1984; Levinson, 1983):

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<sup>1</sup> I am using an invented dialogue for ease and clarity of exposition. However, the points I am using this conversation to illustrate have been demonstrated on the material of real conversations in multiple studies in the past (see Cooren, 2010; Heritage, 1984; Levinson, 1983).

- 1 Kathy: Would you like to join us for dinner tonight?  
2 (1.0)  
3 Joseph: Uh, I'm sorry but I really have too much work. I cannot come.  
4 Kathy: Are you sure?  
5 Joseph: Yeah. (0.5) Just look what's on my desk ((showing her a stack  
6 of papers on his desk)). I have all these papers to evaluate  
7 and the grades are due tomorrow.  
8 Kathy: That's too bad. We'll miss you  
9 Joseph: I'll certainly miss you too

A conversation-analytic study of such an interaction could have observed that Kathy issues an invitation on line 1 (“Would you like to join us for dinner tonight?”), a turn at talk followed by a response from Joseph, who declines the invitation on line 3 (“Oh, I’m sorry but I really have too much work”). As noticed by conversation analysts, declining an invitation is a dispreferred response, a dispreference characterized by (1) *a delay*—the one-second pause on line 2, supposed to mark a form of embarrassment on Joseph’s part; (2) *prefaces*—“Uh” and “I’m sorry”, which announce the dispreferred response that is about to be produced; (3) an account, which explains why Joseph has to decline this invitation (“but I really have too much work”); and (4) the declining component itself (“I cannot come”) (see Heritage, 1984; Levinson, 1983).

We then see Kathy trying to make Joseph change his mind by asking him if he is really sure of his decision (“Are you sure? (line 4)), to which Joseph reacts by confirming this is the case (“Yeah” (line 5)), inviting her to look at the stack of papers on his desk (“Just look what’s on my desk (line 5)), an observation he comments on by telling Kathy that all the papers she sees on his table have to be evaluated by the following day (“I have all these papers to evaluate and the grades are due tomorrow” (lines 6–7)). Having failed to convince him, Kathy then marks her disappointment (“That’s too bad” (line 7)) and tells him that his absence will be felt among the people who will be present at the dinner (“We’ll miss you (line 7)). To this friendly remark, Joseph responds by mirroring it (“I will certainly miss you too” (line 8)), which implicitly conveys that he deplors the situation he finds himself in.

A ventriloqual perspective does not question this way of analyzing interaction, but proposes to identify other *voices* that can be implicitly heard and recognized in this conversation. In keeping with Bakhtin’s (1963/1984) notion of polyphony, this perspective indeed notices that Kathy and Joseph are not the only ones who do things in this interaction, but that other beings—what I call figures—can also be identified as participating in this conversation *through* what these two persons are saying. In other words, Kathy and Joseph can be metaphorically seen as ventriloquists to the extent that they *make these beings or figures say things* through their dialogue (Cooren & Sandler, 2014).

For instance, a ventriloqual analysis first notices that Kathy is speaking on behalf of absent persons (“Would you like to join *us* for dinner tonight”) that she designates through the usage of the pronoun “us” on line 1. Although the invitation is definitely coming from her, the fact that Kathy is speaking *on behalf of* these persons can implicitly position the latter as *also* extending this invitation to Joseph. While this type of effect has already been identified by Goffman (1981) and others (Sanders & Bonito, 2010) through the notion of *footing*, ventriloquism proposes to extend this type of analysis to other aspects of the interaction where this polyphony appears, this time more implicitly.

On line 3, we can see, for instance, how Joseph *invokes* the amount of work he has, to decline Kathy's invitation. Invoking, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, indeed consists of "cit[ing] or appeal[ing] to (someone or something) as an authority for an action or in support of an argument". The workload that Joseph has indeed *dictates*, according to him, that he refuse this invitation. Joseph can thus be said to be *ventriloquizing* this workload to the extent that he literally and figuratively *makes it say* that he should decline Kathy's invitation. Literally, because it is really, according to him, what this workload dictates, and figuratively, because this reality expresses itself in the form of a figure—the workload—that Joseph implicitly ventriloquizes.

As we see, it is not by accident that the Oxford English Dictionary speaks of *authority* in its definition of "invoking". Authority indeed comes from the Latin word *auctor*, which also means "to author something". "Cit[ing] or appeal[ing] to (someone or something) as an authority for an action or in support of an argument" thus consists of making this "someone" or "something" the *co-author* of what we are saying or doing. In other words, a ventriloquial analysis consists of noticing that it is not only Joseph who originates declining Kathy's invitation, but also the workload he has to deal with. Having *good reasons* to do something indeed amounts to showing that there are other *authors* that say the same thing you are saying. *Auctor* itself comes from the Latin word *augere*, which means "to augment". Joseph is here augmenting the sources of this declination, which is why the authority of his decision may increase as well.

This does not mean, of course, that what someone ventriloquizes cannot be questioned, which is precisely what Kathy is implicitly doing on line 4. Saying, "Are you sure?" indeed consists of calling Joseph's decision into question. It is, in other words, an invitation, on Kathy's part, to reconsider *what leads him* to this conclusion. Maybe Joseph thinks that his workload dictates this declination, but maybe he is wrong, or maybe other figures could be acknowledged, such as, for example, his strong desire to join them or his need to cheer up a little. Although these last two figures are never made explicit, they could *lead him* to adopt a different course of action, that is, lead him to make another decision, which is what Kathy seems to be counting on.

Incidentally, it is also hard not to hear "Are you sure?" as a way for Kathy to mark her desire or wish that Joseph change his decision. In other words, ventriloquism can also be heard in what Kathy is saying. This insistence implicitly gives a voice to this desire, a desire that is supposed to ventriloquize her too: it could indeed be what leads her to be insistent. As noticed before, ventriloquism goes in both directions: when someone is identified as ventriloquizing a figure, this could also mean that this figure—here, her desire that he joins them for this dinner—is ventriloquizing him or her. Of course, insisting could also be produced *out of politeness*, which means that it is not so much a desire that would express itself through this insistence, as a form of *civility* or of showing *attention* to Joseph.

But we see that Joseph confirms that he stands by his decision (line 5), a decision he justifies by inviting Kathy to look at his desk ("Just look what's on my desk" (line 5)) where a stack of papers is lying. Ventriloquism, as we see here, is not just about communicating verbally to an interlocutor; it can also consist of making (aspects of) the environment speak. By inviting Kathy to look at what is on his desk, Joseph hopes that the situation will *speak for itself*. What will this situation say, according to him? Well, it is supposed to confirm to

Kathy that indeed he has a lot of work. In other words, it is not only he—Joseph—who says that he has a lot of work; the situation he is referring to by showing Kathy what lies on his desk is also supposed to say just that.

This situation is also commented on by Joseph when he adds, “I have all these papers to evaluate and the grades are due tomorrow” (lines 6–7). Adding this information amounts to giving other reasons why he has to decline this invitation. This work cannot indeed be delayed, as he needs to have these papers graded by the following day. As we see through this turn at talk, Joseph thus continues to *make the situation speak for itself*, as this situation (that he is showing and commenting on) is supposed to *show* and *tell* Kathy that he has to remain at home to grade student papers. The situation as he depicts it thus *dictates* that he decline her invitation.

In responding, “That’s too bad” (line 8), Kathy then expresses what we could identify as regrets, a figure that is supposed to not only mark her disappointment, but also confirm, as a mirror, the desire she ventriloquized earlier. As for “We’ll miss you” (line 8), it again consists of positing herself as speaking *in the name of* the group of people she already evoked on line 1. Through her turn at talk, it is therefore *also* these people who are telling Joseph that he will be missed during this dinner.

Finally, “I’ll certainly miss you too” could be analyzed as a way for Joseph to indirectly express his desire to join them. In other words, it is a way for him to confirm that it is indeed *out of duty* that he has to decline this invitation, and not because he does not want to join them. It is, in other words, this duty/obligation/responsibility he has that forces him to remain at home.

As we see through this analysis, a ventriloquial perspective does not consist of questioning what conversation analysts would say about this interaction, it just consists of showing that other figures can be identified as saying or doing things during this interaction. What is noteworthy is that Joseph and Kathy do not disappear from this analysis, since they are both depicted as *ventriloquizing* these figures and as *ventriloquized* by them. Ventriloquizing because they make them say various things, ventriloquized because these figures are *eo ipso* staged as *animating* Joseph and Kathy, that is, making them say things too.

Human interactants thus are constantly ventriloquizing various figures that are supposed to animate, motive or even enthuse them and what they say. In our analysis, we saw that these figures roughly are a group of people, a workload, a deadline and two desires (which are said to be frustrated). These figures are ventriloquized in that they are made to say various things. The group of people (identified by the pronouns “us” and “we”) is first extending an invitation (line 1) and finally telling Joseph that they will miss him (line 8). The workload and deadline Joseph has to deal with are said to dictate that the latter has to remain at home and decline the invitation (lines 3, 5–7). As for the desires that are implicitly staged in this scene, they are supposed to show that Joseph and Kathy (as well as the group she re-presents) would really have loved seeing each other for this dinner (lines 4, 8–9).

These figures are also supposed to ventriloquize Joseph and Kathy to the extent that they are implicitly presented as *leading them to say what they say*: It is *because* Kathy is supposed to know that the group of people wants Joseph to be present at this dinner that she can *allow herself* to speak on their behalf. Similarly, it is *because* Joseph is supposed to have a lot of work and a deadline that the latter can dictate or motivate his declining of Kathy’s invitation.

Finally, it is *because* both Joseph and Kathy are supposed to wish or desire to see each other that they can mark their regrets when they acknowledge the fact that this invitation will have to be declined.

As we see, the existence of these figures remains hypothetical in some cases: for instance, the desires indirectly expressed by Kathy and Joseph could have simply been staged out of politeness or civility (for instance, Kathy may feel that she *had* to invite Joseph and that she even *had* to insist, while she did not really wish he would come). Similarly, the deadline evoked by Joseph could just be a way to provide an easy reason to politely decline the invitation, which would then mean that he did not really want to join them for dinner. But we also saw that in some cases, the figures' existence is supposed to go beyond what is (implicitly or explicitly) said of them, as when Joseph literally shows Kathy the stack of papers that lies on his desk.

In other words, what matters in a ventriloquial analysis is to demonstrate how figures are invited to say things in a discussion, which adds, as we saw, to the *authority* of what is put forward by the participants. Whether these figures exist only in what people say or have a mode of existence that goes beyond this staging can, of course, matter (whether for the interactants or for the analysts), but what especially matters is that these figures allow us to *reconnect* what people say to their emotions (desires, fears, angers, etc.), obligations (deadlines, responsibilities, duties, etc.), and beyond, to the *situation* they live and experience, which is made not only of emotions, obligations, but also of whatever might be deemed constituting it: an excessive workload, an invitation, etc.

According to the ventriloquial thesis, people thus remain *actors*, but they are also *passers* to the extent that it is this status of passer that makes their discourse and turns at talk intelligible (Garfinkel (1967, 2002) would have said *accountable*). Many different figures express themselves through what people say. If they manage to pass, it is because they happen to *count* or *matter* to the interactants. They thus express an *attachment*, which can be experienced either positively or negatively. Joseph is supposed to be attached to the work he has to do as Ulysses, in Homer's *Odyssey*, is tied to the mast of his boat. Here, attachment expresses a form of constraint. But Joseph is also supposed to be attached to Kathy and her friends, in which case attachment expresses a form of desire that cannot be fulfilled because of other attachments (deadlines, workloads, duties, etc.).

As passers, interactants thus ventriloquize what they are attached to, which means that any conversation also becomes the way by which certain aspects of a situation express themselves through what people say and do. As I will show, it is precisely this idea of what interactions consist of that allows me to identify the ventriloquial thesis as a form of pragmatism.

### **Pragmatism: A ventriloquial view**

If pragmatism is relevant as a sort of meta-tradition for Craig (2007) and Russill (2004), it is because this perspective appears congruent with the project of dialogue that Craig (1999) envisioned for the seven traditions he identified. In other words, pragmatism appears like a sort of *meta-theory* that provides the conditions under which a dialogue between traditions could take place. In keeping with Russill, Craig (2007) indeed claims that pragmatism

considers that communication should be conceived as the “coordination of practical activities through discourse and reflexive inquiry” (p. 136).

In a pluralistic community made of several academic traditions, scholars thus “need to cooperate despite [their] differences” (Craig, 2007, p. 136). Echoing Dewey’s (1927) reflections on democracy and inquiry, Craig and Russill thus consider that the meta-model of communication they seek is a pragmatic model to the extent that it claims that the dialogue between traditions is possible.

I would like to show, however, that there might be another way to conceive of pragmatism as a meta-model, a way that happens to be compatible with the ventriloquial thesis. Although pragmatics, as a linguistic tradition (Levinson, 1983; Mey, 1993, 1998), has obvious connections with pragmatism as a philosophical movement, it is noteworthy that I will be talking about *pragmatism* here, and not about pragmatics. I indeed believe that the study of communication has something to learn from pragmatism that has not been worked out by pragmatics, as a linguistic tradition.

As we know, pragmatism as a philosophical movement was born around 1870 through conversations that took place between members of the Metaphysical Club whose most famous representatives were William James and Charles Sanders Peirce, then Harvard students. Peirce usually is credited with inventing the term *pragmatism*, which was then mainly conceived of as a theory of inquiry. In one of his most famous articles, published in 1878 (“How to Make Our Ideas Clear”), Peirce put forward what he would later call the pragmatic maxim, which is usually identified as the point of departure of pragmatism as an intellectual movement. This maxim reads as follows:

Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object (p. 293).

One way to translate what this maxim means is to connect it with Peirce’s anti-Cartesian positions. In another article titled “The Fixation of Belief”, published in 1877, Peirce indeed showed that our beliefs need to be evaluated in the light of their practical consequences. Any form of inquiry should be conceived as a way to *fix beliefs* in order to *appease doubt* when surprising facts occur. Knowledge should be considered fallible to the extent that our habits and beliefs can be questioned when what we experience appears to *contradict, disprove* or *refute* what we believe is the case.

Although many differences can be identified between Peirce’s, James’s and Dewey’s positions regarding inquiry (for more details, see Misak, 2013), a certain coherence can be found in their respective writings. Commenting on William James’s theory of truth, Dewey (1916) for instance wrote, “His real doctrine is that a belief is true when it *satisfies* both personal needs and requirements of objective things” (p. 324, my italics), a claim that also parallels Peirce’s (1955) position. Commenting on Dewey’s remarks, Misak (2013) adds:

This lines up nicely, Dewey thinks, with his own position. A belief has to satisfy the inquirer’s needs and *it has to satisfy the situation*. It is bound to the personal or the psychological but it also has *to meet what the situation demands of it*. (p. 112, italics in the original).

A pragmatist position regarding inquiry thus consists of recognizing the *relational character* of our beliefs and doubts vis-à-vis what we experience (Robichaud, 2006). The world, according to a pragmatist position, is therefore not mute, silent or voiceless. It is a world that *tells us things*, by either confirming or contradicting what we believe is the case.

There is therefore no need to determine a point of origin, that is, whether knowledge, doubt or belief originates from the human beings or from the world that surrounds them. In keeping with William James's (1912/1996) radical empiricism, we live in a *relational world* where what we experience is filled with connections that are themselves real and need to be acknowledged. If we do experience the world that surrounds us, this world should also be deemed as *acting upon us* by calling into question our beliefs or, on the contrary, by confirming them. This form of material agency is also acknowledged by George Herbert Mead (1932/1980), a colleague of Dewey's at the University of Chicago, who pointed out that *the world acts on us as much as we act on it*.

As he wrote in a relatively unknown essay titled "The Physical Thing":

It would be a mistake to regard this inner nature of matter as a projection by the organism of its sense of effort into the object. The resistance is in the thing as much as the effort is in the organism, but the resistance is there only over against effort or *the action of other things*" (p. 123–124, my italics).

One way to understand pragmatism as an intellectual movement thus consists in interpreting it as an attempt, on its founders' part, to fight against extreme forms of idealism /subjectivism (the world as a mere projection of our beliefs) and materialism/realism (the world as completely independent of our experiences and conversations about it).

This means that pragmatism not only invites us to acknowledge the conditions of possibility of a dialogue between traditions (Craig's (2007) and Russill's (2004) positions), but also *tells us something quite interesting about how communication itself functions in general*. According to my interpretation of pragmatism, which could be called a ventriloquial interpretation, people who express themselves in an interaction are not only conveying what (they think or believe) a situation is, might be or should be. They also convey *what the situation demands, requests or dictates*, at least according to their own reading. As Misak (2013) points out, the situation has to be *satisfied*.

It is precisely these types of effect that the metaphor of ventriloquism attempts to capture. According to the ventriloquial thesis, we saw that when people communicate, various figures are made to say things, which means that human interactants should not be considered the only ones who express themselves in a given discussion. Speaking in the name of a tradition, an emotion, a procedure, an obligation, a rule or a fact amounts to *making it say something*. Conversely, such invocation presupposes that this tradition, emotion, procedure, obligation, rule or fact *matters or counts* to the person who ventriloquizes it. In other words, the ventriloquist is also ventriloquized in that s/he is supposed to be *animated, moved, preoccupied or interested* by what s/he is voicing.

Whether they speak about the weather, pronounce a speech, argue for or against a specific position, or decline invitations, people are in a position of *responding* to what they consider the situation demands or requests. *Situation* should be considered as broad a term as possible, since it includes everything to which people respond or react, i.e., what their

interlocutors say, what a given context tells them in terms of what they could or should do, what their respective feelings lead them to think or do, etc. In keeping with the pragmatist maxim, we do not fall into idealism/subjectivism or materialism/objectivism, given that we acknowledge both *what makes them say something* and *what is made to say something* through a given turn at talk or conduct.

The question then becomes: If pragmatism indeed is a meta-model, can its ventriloqual interpretation, as proposed here, help us further the dialogue between the seven traditions Craig identified in his 1999 essay? This is what I propose to do in the remaining part of the paper. But before getting to this point, I need to first present the seven traditions as well as the dialogue that has already started between them through the ventriloqual thesis (Cooren, 2012). It is a dialogue, as we will see, that consists of showing how this thesis responds to (at least some aspects of) what appears to *matter* or *count* to each tradition. It is only then that we will explore the extent to which pragmatism, as reinterpreted by this ventriloqual view, indeed deserves the status of meta-model.

### **A dialogue with the seven traditions**

As I already pointed out elsewhere (Cooren, 2012), a way to respect each tradition's specificity while making them engage in dialogue with each other consists of speaking in terms of *design specifications* (or *design specs*). This terminology, borrowed from engineering, amounts to claiming that each tradition has *something to say* about communication, something that *matters* to each of them in the way they conceive of this phenomenon. By design specifications, I thus mean what each tradition requires from a theory of communication in this process of dialogue.

Design specs are therefore indications regarding what any theory of communication should pay attention to and acknowledge, which is supposed to create the conditions of a possible dialogue between them. A form of pluralism is therefore respected (to the extent that what counts or matters to each tradition is, at least partly, acknowledged) but an attempt is made to develop a constitutive model that would respond to each tradition's design specs while helping us think communicatively about the world.

As I shall now argue, conceiving of communication as a form of ventriloquism allows us to address what seems to *matter* to the seven traditions that Craig (1999) initially identified while putting forward a constitutive view of communication. In what follows, I will reintroduce the seven traditions (rhetoric, semiotics, phenomenology, cybernetics, sociopsychology, sociocultural theory and critical theory), while showing to what extent a ventriloqual view on communication has already started to respond to at least some of their respective design specs.

One of the key ideas of constitutive *rhetoric* (Charland, 1987), which is the first tradition, is that what is evoked, convoked or invoked in any discourse or conversation is *eo ipso constituted* by the discourse or conversation that stages it. In other words, constitutive rhetoric highlights that communication actively participates in the definition of a given situation, in terms of who is speaking, to whom, and about what. While rhetoric has traditionally been associated with persuasion, Charland thus shows, following Burke (1950) and McGee (1975), that discourse and communication play a key role in the way interlocutors and what they talk about are identified, defined and positioned.

Regarding the question of design specs, this means that, for this rhetorical tradition, any theory of communication that is worthy of the name ought to expound, implicitly or explicitly, such a constitutive view. The ventriloqual perspective responds to this imperative by showing that any discourse or conversation actively participates in the definition of the various figures implicitly or explicitly invoked, convoked or evoked by the participants.

Going back to our illustration, constitutive rhetoric thus invites us to notice that not only the group of friends (implicitly evoked by Kathy), but also the workload, deadlines and desire (staged by Joseph) are *communicatively constituted* by what these two persons say. For instance, the group of friends exists as a collective through its invocations in various discussions. The workload, deadlines and desires *materialize themselves* not only because they *preoccupy* or *concern* people (in our case, Joseph, for instance), but also because these preoccupations express themselves in conversations, adding to the existence<sup>2</sup> of these three figures.

This does not, of course, mean that their modes of existence should be necessarily reduced to these invocations in a specific conversation, but that these figures can only *matter* or *count* if they are implicitly or explicitly invoked, evoked or convoked in a conversation or discourse. Their invocations, convocations or evocations constitute them in a specific way, which will alter the course of an interaction. Constitutive rhetoric thus reminds us that communication matters in the way various beings are defined and circumscribed, whether these beings are collective (groups, organizations, societies), predispositional (emotions, passions, feelings) or even artificial (a workload, a deadline in a calendar, etc.).

Although **semiotics**—the second tradition Craig (1999) identified—tends to be reduced to a mere theory of signs, we often forget that it implicitly or explicitly amounts to attributing to signs the capacity to do things. In Peircean semiotics, an icon (e.g., a portrait), an index (e.g., a weathervane) and a symbol (e.g., the word “crisis”) *represent* someone or something respectively through a relation of resemblance, causality and convention (Peirce, 1991). For instance, a portrait will *tell* us what a person used to look like; a weathervane will *indicate* the present direction of the wind; the word “crisis” will *evoke* something we are currently experiencing.

Semiotics thus helps us see that the world that surrounds us is not mute or voiceless. In keeping with the relational thesis, it is a world that literally and figuratively speaks to us, *through the way we make it talk and through the way it makes us talk*. One of the key contributions of *semiotics* therefore is that it is not only people who communicate with each other, but also other entities, which semiotics precisely calls *signs*. In terms of design specs, this means that semiotics requires that any theory of communication acknowledge this agency of the signs, what Peirce (1991) used to call *semiosis*.

The ventriloqual thesis responds to this imperative by showing that human beings should indeed not be considered the only ones speaking in a given interaction. Other things—technologies, texts, artifacts, rules, ideologies, values, emotions etc.—manage to speak *to* and *through* human beings not only because these latter make these things speak, but also because

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<sup>2</sup> By “adding to the existence”, I mean, in keeping with Étienne Souriau (2009) and Bruno Latour (2013), that existence is a matter of degree. To the extent that beings invite themselves into our conversations, it means that their existence increases when people talk about them while it decreases when they stop talking about them. Beings acquire more existence when they are invoked, convoked or evoked in our discussions.

these things make human beings speak (hence the idea of ventriloquism). For instance, showing Kathy the stack of papers that lies on his desk is not only a way for Joseph to *signal* the amount of work he has, it is also a way to let this stack of papers speak for itself, and say: “Joseph is very busy”.

If we now turn to **phenomenology**, the third tradition, we can try to summarize its main tenet, at least in its Husserlian version, through the idea of the *givenness of the world*. This givenness is usually associated with 1) the *natural attitude* that people tend to develop vis-à-vis the world they experience, that is, the fact that their experiences are the way they are because the world exists independently of their perceptions (Husserl, 1913/1982); 2) the *phenomenological reduction* or *epoché*, a reduction that not only leads analysts to depart from (and be indifferent to) this natural attitude, but also allows them to study this attitude (Husserl, 1907/1999), and 3) the idea of “going back to ‘things themselves’” (Husserl, 1900–1901/2001, p. 168), that is, going back to how things are given in our experiences, whether as participants or analysts (see Smith, n.d.).

Applied to the study of communication, phenomenology, as reinterpreted, for instance, by Garfinkel (1967) and Schütz (1966), requires of analysts to remain *indifferent* to so called “social structures” that would be traditionally conceived as determining the course of social interactions (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970; Hilbert, 1990). Phenomenologists should analyze and unveil the *methods* people use and develop, through their natural attitude, “for producing recognizable social orders” (Rawls, 2002, p. 6). The “things” that we need to go back to are therefore what people “do to create and recreate the various recognizable social actions or social practices” (Rawls, 2002, p. 6).

The world of communication, according to this version of phenomenology, should therefore be understood as a world where participants actively co-construct, negotiate and redefine what situations consist of (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 1997). The ventriloqual thesis responds to these design specs by showing that the constitution of the figures invoked, convoked and evoked in a conversation or discourse is always at the mercy of this processes of co-construction, negotiation and redefinition. Although specific aspects of the context can be ventriloquized or mobilized in a discussion, the weight of their existence also depends on how these effects are *interactively acknowledged*.

In our example, we see, for instance, how the weight or import of Joseph’s workload in the situation is (mildly) challenged by Kathy when she says, “Are you sure?” on line 4. Saying, “Are you sure” implicitly consists of inviting Joseph to reconsider *the weight or import of the figure* (here, the workload) *that is supposed to lead him* to decline her invitation. In other words, other figures could be invoked, that could eventually supersede the one that Joseph mobilized to justify why he cannot join them. As phenomenology reminds us, what counts or matters in a discussion can be a matter of negotiation and discussion.

As for the fourth tradition, the second **cybernetics** of autopoiesis and self-organization (Krippendorff, 1994; Luhmann, 1992; Maturana and Varela, 1987; Taylor, 1995), it seems possible to summarize one of its tenets through the idea of *self-creation* or *self-production*, *that is, the capacity for a given system to reproduce and alter itself* through what this second cybernetics calls its *operational closure*. By operational closure, this tradition thus means what allows a system to maintain and alter the very processes that define its *autonomy*. A system

is therefore characterized by its capacity to produce its own order out of the circumstances in which it evolves (see Brummans et al., 2014).

According to this version of cybernetics, interactions should be conceived of as contributing to the creation of systems, which are characterized by their relative autonomy from the environment in which they emerge and reproduce themselves. This tradition thus invites us to pay attention to *repetition*, *iteration* and *patterns*, but without looking for an overarching structure that would determine these effects from a different level. On the contrary, it is *in the interactions themselves* that we should be able to find what contributes to the systematicity of a system.

The ventriloquial thesis responds to these design specs by showing that such iteration or repetition actually comes from the *figures* that are regularly invoked, convoked and evoked by the participants. The figures that keep being ventriloquized or mobilized in what people say and do should thus be considered as what creates these effects of system and systematicity. In keeping with the autopoietic thesis, these figures do not determine people's interactions from a different level. *They are part of the world they organize* (hence the idea of self-organization and self-creation).

Systems thus do exist, but their systematicity does not come from a sort of harmonizing force that would dictate people's conducts, attitudes and decisions from who knows where (Tarde, 1895/2012). What dictates their conducts, attitudes and decisions are the figures to which they are attached, whether consciously or unconsciously. These figures can be explicitly mentioned in a conversation (a principle or rule that someone cherishes or values, for instance) or they can be rendered explicit through our analyses (e.g., as when we impute to speakers emotions such as anger, jealousy or joy).

In the excerpt we used as an illustration, these figures that we identified could be an excessive workload that calls for discipline and abnegation, a desire that leads Kathy to insist or even beg, or a deadline that occupies Joseph's thoughts and makes him neglect other considerations (having fun, for instance). Should this scene reproduce itself in the future between Kathy and Joseph, we could then notice that the systematicity of this scene—conceived as a system—comes from what retrospectively ends up composing it: Joseph, Kathy, for sure, but especially their respective attachments, which invite themselves into their discussions.

If we now consider the fifth tradition, i.e., **sociopsychology**, its design specs specify that communication should be considered as “mediated by psychological predispositions (attitudes, emotional states, personality traits, unconscious conflicts, social cognitions) as modified by the emergent effects of social interaction” (Craig, 1999, p. 143). According to the sociopsychological tradition, the world of communication is a world of *causes* and *effects*, which, for instance, links these predispositions to specific behaviors. It is also a world whose dynamics should be empirically studied and measured scientifically.

Although the ventriloquist approach does not share the positivist methods and epistemology proper to this tradition, it acknowledges all the predispositions—attitudes, beliefs, traits, concerns, interests, passions, emotions, feelings—that often define people's personality and can be heard and felt in what they say or do. In other words, if the world manages to speak to and through the way interactants communicate with each other, it is also because aspects of this world *matter* or *count* to them in a specific way. These

predispositions participate in what *causally* makes them say what they say and do what they do. Ventriloquism, as we already saw, always implies a form of *attachment*, which, in its various forms (emotions, attitudes, traits), constitutes one of the main topics studied by this tradition.

Joseph is *animated* not only by what he perceives to be his obligations (workload, deadlines, etc.), but also by what sociopsychologists would define as predispositions that define his personality traits: his sense of duty, his general attitude toward work, his propensity to be on time, or even unconscious aspects that would be operative in this situation. As Tarde (1895/2012) and Whitehead (1929/1978) noticed each in his own way, human beings are themselves *societies*, which means that they are literally made of the elements that compose their personalities, predispositions and inclinations. It is also these figures that we can learn to identify by listening to conversations. They make people say things, just as people make them say things.

If we now turn to *sociocultural theory*, the sixth tradition, its design specs require that communication be theorized and analyzed as a process that “produces and reproduces shared sociocultural patterns” (Craig, 1999, p. 144). This tradition is thus haunted, as Craig (1999) points out, by the idea of finding the *right balance* between production and reproduction, that is, between the *eventful* and *iterable* aspects of any interaction. While the representatives of this tradition tend to respond to this question through tensions they establish between human agency and various structures (e.g., Giddens, 1984), the ventriloquial thesis questions this explanation by conceiving of the world as a *plenum of agencies* (Cooren, 2006) or what we could also call a *plenum of figures*.

Tensions thus exist, but they should be studied and conceived of through the many figures to which people feel attached and that are not always compatible (Cooren et al., 2013). According to a ventriloquial perspective, the reproduction of ideologies, conducts or attitudes should thus be understood as the product of what *iteratively* animates participants in their discussions or activities. There is no change of level, no opposition between structures and agency, but the recognition of both the eventful and iterable aspects of any interaction.

What makes the interaction between Kathy and Joseph eventful is what Garfinkel (2002) would have called its haecceity, i.e., its *just-thisness* (cf. p. 99), the fact that it is *unique* in terms of spatiotemporal actualization. It just happened once and should it be repeated another time, it would not be exactly the same. However, this does not prevent this episode from iteratively mobilizing figures that are easily recognizable, not only by Kathy and Joseph, but also by the analysts: for instance, a certain politeness, a certain rectitude and even a certain warmth, which not only define the ideology of this interaction, but also dictate what ought to be said in such circumstances.

For instance, politeness *expresses/ventriloquizes itself* through the way Joseph declines Kathy’s invitation. By marking his declining this invitation as a *dispreferred* response (a dispreference identified, as we saw, by a *delay*, *prefaces*, an account, and the declination component itself), Joseph indeed marks that he wished he did not have to say no to Kathy, which is a way to preserve her face and be polite (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Politeness is therefore a *figure* to the extent that it not only expresses itself in this scene, but also *animates* Joseph in his responses.

Finally, ventriloquism responds to **critical theory**—Craig’s (1999) seventh tradition—by acknowledging the effects of power, domination and asymmetry that take place in communication episodes (Deetz, 1992). Although the ventriloqual thesis does not systematically follow the normative agenda defended by this tradition (an agenda that consists of *denouncing* or *critiquing* forms of power, oppression, dominance, control or inequality that communication contributes to reproducing), it responds to one of its design specs through its reflection on authority and authorship, a reflection that tends to reconcile the analysis of interaction with the analysis of forms of power, whether they are deemed legitimate or illegitimate.

It is precisely because many figures express themselves through what people say and do that effects of authority and power can take place, lending weight to various positions while silencing others. Multiplying the authors (i.e., the figures of authority) of a given discourse or action thus amounts to increasing its clout, power and influence. As long as human interactants are deemed the only ones speaking to each other, critical analyses remain dissociated from the detailed study of interaction. However, recognizing what these participants ventriloquize and what ventriloquizes them allows us to identify the ideologies and forms of subjection that inhabit them and their discourse.

Although the interaction we analyzed hardly qualifies, at first sight, as a conversation filled with effects of dominance, control and oppression, it is, as we saw, filled with effects of authority, which allows Kathy and Joseph to *lend weight* to their respective actions and reactions. *Power* is thus at stake in this conversation to the extent that these two interlocutors implicitly or explicitly tell each other what authorizes them to say what they say or do what they do. The question of legitimacy or illegitimacy thus constitutes the intrinsic dimension of all conversations. While some figures can be deemed compulsory, others can be considered optional or even inessential. Power thus has something to do with what or who can define what figures end up being essential, elective or dispensable, that is, what counts or does not count in a situation.

As we see, conceiving communication as a form of ventriloquism thus allows us to respond to some of the exigencies peculiar to each tradition while maintaining a form of theoretical coherence. The ventriloqual thesis does not claim that it is possible or even desirable to reconcile these traditions with each other. It shows, however, that it is possible to respond to some of their *design specs*, that is, to indications regarding what, according to each tradition, any theory of communication should pay attention to and acknowledge. If each of these seven traditions has *something to say* about communication, something that *matters* to each of them in the way they conceive of this phenomenon, the ventriloqual thesis can say that it paid attention to at least some aspects of what counts to them, creating the conditions of a possible dialogue between them.

But can this discussion be prolonged? If indeed pragmatism qualifies as a meta-model, as Craig (2007) and Russill (2004) contend, can this philosophical movement, as reinterpreted by the ventriloqual thesis, help us further this dialogue? In other words, to what extent does pragmatism too respond to the design specs of each tradition? This is what I would like to explore in the final part of this paper.

| Traditions                       | Design Specs: what matters to these traditions   | Ventriloquial view of pragmatism   |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Rhetoric</b>                  | “Every situation <i>prescribes</i> its fitting responses” (Bitzer, 1968)   | If a situation prescribes its fitting response, it is <i>also</i> because we make it prescribe something, i.e., we ventriloquize it  |
| <b>Semiotics</b>                 | The world that we experience <i>speaks or communicates to us</i> whether through icons, indexes or symbols (Peirce, 1955)  | A situation dictates or says something because we are able to identify signs that make it tell us something in a specific way  |
| <b>Phenomenology</b>             | The world is not silent or mute. It is intelligible or accountable. It always speaks <i>to and through</i> people who have different habits, concerns, interests or preoccupations.  | People are both ventriloquists and ventriloquized, but they actively participate—through what they say or what they do—in the definition of what a situation is supposed to say or dictate.  |
| <b>Cybernetics (autopoiesis)</b> | Systems <i>produce themselves</i> because a certain systematicity can be reproduced and maintained, creating the conditions for the identification and the very existence of these systems (Maturana & Varela, 1987).                          | Recognizing what a situation repeatedly dictates leads people to participate in the way this situation reproduces itself, creating the conditions of a system.   |
| <b>Psychosociology</b>           | Analyzing how people identify what a situation says or dictates amounts to recognizing all the forms of <i>attachment</i> —i.e., traits, beliefs, attitudes, feelings and emotions—that come to express themselves through this identification | A situation always expresses or ventriloquizes itself through what comes to <i>matter</i> to the people who interpret its components. These matters of concern or interest will dictate how people define the situation and how this situation will define people’s actions and interventions. |
| <b>Sociocultural Theory</b>      | Social order is reproduced through the values, norms and habits we <i>cultivate</i> in our actions and conversations.  | The values, norms and habits we cultivate are part of the world we inhabit. They are not from a different level, from a different order of existence. Pragmatically speaking, they communicate as much as we communicate   |
| <b>Critical Theory</b>           | The way a situation defines itself is never neutral, value-free or unbiased  | Some concerns, preoccupations or interests can have a stronger voice through the mobilization of physical force, financial resources or other means  |

**Table 1.** The ventriloquial view of pragmatism in dialogue with the seven traditions

## Prolonging the Dialogue

What I now propose to show is how a ventriloquial view of pragmatism does respond to some of the designs specs put forward by Craig’s (1999) seven traditions. If indeed pragmatism qualifies as a meta-model, this meta-tradition should be able to respond to at least some aspects of what *matters or counts* to the other traditions. Otherwise, no dialogue would be possible under the auspices of this model. As I will show, I believe that my (ventriloquial) reading of pragmatism allows this philosophy to function as a sort of middle ground or mediator between the seven traditions. In what follows, I will thus confront the ventriloquial view of pragmatism with what each tradition has to say about what communication is or should be (see Table 1 for a summary).

In order to do this, I will focus on *situations* and conceive of pragmatism as a philosophical movement that invites us to *respond* to what we consider the situation demands or requests. *Situations*, as we already saw, should be conceived as broadly as possible. A situation comprises everything to which we react, that is, not only what an interlocutor puts forward, but also what given circumstances are supposed to tell us to do, what our attitudes or feelings

lead us to think, etc. Following the pragmatist maxim, the idea consists of not falling into either idealism/subjectivism or materialism/realism. We have to acknowledge both passion (*what makes us say something*) and action (*what is made to say something by us*) in any situation we are confronted with.

So let us start again with the first tradition: *rhetoric*. We already saw that this tradition implicitly or explicitly defends a constitutive view of communication (Charland, 1987). However, one of the main contributions of this movement also consists in highlighting the *situational* character of discourse and communication. One of the most famous modern rhetoricians, Lloyd Bitzer (1968), did not hesitate to write that rhetoric is situational because “rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to a situation, in the same sense that an answer comes into existence in response to a question, or a solution in response to a problem” (p. 5). As he also claimed, “One might say metaphorically that every situation *prescribes* its fitting responses: the rhetor may or may not read the prescription accurately” (p. 11, my italics).

Bitzer’s (1968) position was, of course, criticized, especially by Vatz (1973, 2009) who pointed out that rhetoric actually *defines* (or constitutes) a situation and does not respond to it. Interestingly, a ventriloqual reading of pragmatism acknowledges this kind of critique while recognizing the importance of Bitzer’s contribution. Recognizing what a situation dictates—which is what pragmatism encourages us to do, ethically and epistemologically speaking—indeed amounts to *defining what it says*.

We see here that pragmatism allows us not to choose between an objectivist and a subjectivist approach to rhetoric, that is, between Bitzer (1968) and Vatz (1973, 2009). What we need to do is acknowledge the relational/ventriloqual character of our experiences: If a situation prescribes its fitting response, as Bitzer claims it does, it is *also* because we not only *define it in a specific way*, but, once this is done, *make it prescribe something* (Vatz’s position), i.e., we ventriloquize it, as much as it ventriloquizes us. This is why, of course, people can disagree about what a situation might dictate, demand or require.

In our illustration, we saw, for instance, that Joseph implicitly tells Kathy that the situation confronting him prescribes its fitting response, which would be how Bitzer (1968) would analyze it. What is the fitting response, according to Joseph? That he remains at home and declines Kathy’s invitation. But Vatz (1973, 2009) would, of course, point out that it is the way Joseph *defines* or constitutes the situation that matters and that it is only once it is defined and constituted that he can make it prescribe something. The fact that Kathy seems to implicitly question Joseph’s view of the situation shows that there might be alternative ways of making it speak.

However, a ventriloqual view of pragmatism allows us to acknowledge both interpretations (Vatz’s and Bitzer’s). A situation does express itself through Joseph’s turns at talk even if it is Joseph who, as a passer *and* actor, also participates in its definition, making it say that he should decline Kathy’s invitation. Pragmatism thus allows us to avoid falling into an either/or logic. Joseph and Kathy are both ventriloquists and ventriloquized, as we all are in any situation.

If we turn to *semiotics*, the rapprochement with pragmatism seems quite obvious, given that Charles Sanders Peirce (1955) is usually considered the founder not only of pragmatism, but also of modern semiotics. Peircian semiotics defends a relational/ventriloqual position to

the extent that there is no absolute point of origin in the action of the sign, i.e., what Peirce called *semiosis*. In other words, a sign (or *representamen*) makes us say, think of or do something, as much as we make it say or do something. Semioticians thus have no problem conceiving that a situation might say, require or dictate something to the extent that they are interested in the functioning of signs per se, that is, in how the world that surround us *speaks or communicates to us* in one way or another, whether through icons, indexes or symbols (another classification proposed by Peirce).

For instance, the presence of smoke (representamen) indexically *tells us* that there must be a fire (*object*) somewhere because (we learned/know that) fire produces smoke (*interpretant*). Although the presence of smoke might mean different things to different people (e.g., it could also be a coded signal that is supposed to warn us about something), what matters in our reasoning is that Peircian semiotics consists of recognizing *what signs are doing* and *how they do what they do*, depending on their connections with the object they are supposed to represent and express.

A situation dictates or says something because we are able to identify signs that represent it and make it tell us something in a specific way. This is, as we saw, what Joseph is doing by showing Kathy the stack of papers that lies on his desk. This stack of papers (*representamen*) is supposed to *signal* Kathy that he has a lot of work (*object*), given that stacks of paper on a desk are traditionally indexed or associated with extreme workload (*interpretant*). This situation thus communicates through signs, whether these signs are icons, indexes or symbols.

**Phenomenologically** speaking, this idea of making a situation say or dictate something seems also compatible with Garfinkel's (1967) key notions of accountability, reflexivity and indexicality, at least in their spirit. As noticed by Heritage (1984), people normatively orient to their lifeworld because this world is precisely accountable/intelligible/assessable. It is this accountability/intelligibility/assessability that the ventriloqual perspective tries to capture by highlighting the hybrid and relational character of people's experience. The world indeed speaks and dictates specific actions (it is not silent or mute; it is intelligible or accountable), but it speaks *to* and *through* people who have different habits, concerns, interests or preoccupations, which are voiced in what they say or do.

People are not judgmental dopes (Garfinkel, 1967) because they reflexively make situations and their actions accountable. They actively participate in the definition of the *whatness* of these situations and actions in their indexicality or haecceity. Social phenomenology, whether through the work of Alfred Schütz (1966, 1973) or Harold Garfinkel (1967, 2002), thus invites us to take into consideration that people constitute *obligatory passage points* in the ventriloqual game. They are the ones through whom sanctions will be expressed, breaches will be evaluated and situations will be defined. In other words, people are both ventriloquists and ventriloquized, but they actively participate—through what they say or do—in the definition/expression/translation of what a situation is supposed to say or dictate.

In our illustration, we see how Joseph and Kathy are reflexively contributing to the definition of a situation. If they are passers, they are also actors. For instance, Kathy did not say “Would you like to join *me* for dinner tonight” or “That's too bad. *I'll* miss you”, which would have amounted to leaving out the group of friends from the situation, at least explicitly. Similarly, Joseph ultimately chose not to accept Kathy's invitation, while he could have given in and decided to join her after she insisted. Accepting her invitation could have

then been a way for him to imply that the work that he has does not finally matter that much in this situation. As conversation analysts like to point out, many things can happen in a conversation, which is a way to preserve the haecceity of any event, for another next first time.

Although the link between pragmatism and autopoiesis—the *second cybernetics*—could appear, at first sight, far from obvious, one could point out that if systems do *produce themselves*, it is only because a certain systematicity/iterability/repeatability can be reproduced and maintained, creating the conditions not only for the identification, but also for the very existence of these systems (Maturana & Varela, 1987). If situations say or dictate something, it is often because people know how to read them, i.e., they know/learned the procedures, rules, methods or protocols that allow them to respond adequately to them (that is what Peirce (1955) would call “habits” (see also Lorino, 2014)). And if they do not know how to read them, devices (signs, architectural elements, technologies) will be installed to produce these effects of systematicity, explaining, for another next first time, what the situation dictates or requires (see Caronia and Cooren, 2014).

A ventriloqual view of pragmatism invites us to recognize how people interpret the procedures, rules and protocols, whether when they read, communicate or apply them for another next first time. Interpreting something (a rule, a musical score, a painting, etc.) is indeed a way to *make this thing express itself* through what we say or do. Effects of systematicity thus come from these procedures, rules, protocols, technologies, devices that repeatedly express themselves when they are invoked, mobilized, ventriloquized, expressed, translated in what people say and do. There is self-production to the extent that the system that can be identified is produced *from within*, i.e., from the procedural and human agents that contribute to its enactment. Recognizing what the situation repeatedly dictates thus leads people to participate in the way this situation reproduces itself, creating the conditions of a system.

In our illustration, this systematicity expresses itself through the *methods* Joseph and Kathy implicitly ventriloquize to interact with each other. Beyond the haecceity of this event, we can recognize a typical situation. We can indeed acknowledge a standard way to invite someone, formulated through a question about Joseph’s willingness to join Kathy and her friends (“Would you like to join us for dinner tonight?”). Similarly, we saw how Joseph’s response goes through four distinct phases that have already been identified by conversation analysts as the usual way people tend to decline invitations (delay, prefaces, account, and the declination itself). A typical way to decline invitations thus ventriloquizes itself through Joseph’s responses.

A *system* is therefore reproduced through this situation, but it is a self-organizing system, that is, a system that is *endogenously* produced by the participants (Cooren, 2009; Heritage, 1984; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). These standard/typical ways of inviting people and declining invitations can exist and be reproduced only through their reincarnation or re-embodiment, for another next first time, in people’s interaction. They are therefore both autonomous *and* heteronomous. Autonomous because they have their own mode of

existence, logic, requirements; heteronomous, because their reproduction and existence also depend on their enactment, for another next first time, by human participants<sup>3</sup>.

A ventriloqual interpretation of pragmatism thus highlights this auto-heteronomy or hetero-autonomy. As analysts, we can acknowledge that self-organization, self-creation and self-production do take place, but only because we decide to focus on the contribution of a specific figure. However, as soon as we start to look at what ventriloquizes this figure or what this figure ventriloquizes, we then discover that this autonomy always feeds on heteronomy (and reversely). It is what Derrida (1994) would have called a logic of *exappropriation*. The law of my own conduct is never completely mine, it also has to be, in order for it to exist, others’.

In *psychosociological* terms, analyzing how people identify, translate or express what a situation says or dictates amounts to recognizing all the forms of *attachment*—i.e., traits, beliefs, attitudes, feelings and emotions—that come to express themselves through this identification/translation/expression. A situation always expresses or ventriloquizes itself through what comes to *count* or *matter* to the people who interpret its components. These matters of concern or interest will therefore dictate not only how people talk about and define the situation, but also how this situation will define people’s actions and interventions.

The notions of *matters of interest* and *matters of concern* thus allows us to think pragmatically about situations to the extent that these matters are, by definition, both objective and subjective, i.e., relational. Objective because they can be materially identified, subjective because these matters preoccupy or interest us, dictating specific actions and interventions. A situation, *as a preoccupation*, is both something that, by definition, preoccupies (or even sometimes haunts) our mind AND something that can be shown and described. We could point at it and say, “This is what worries me”. If pragmatism reminds us that *matter matters*, it also reminds us that matter must matter *to someone*, expressing a matter of concern or interest. It is precisely this mechanism that ventriloquism attempts to capture.

A specific situation is ventriloquized by Joseph through the expression of specific matters of concern, i.e., preoccupations that he communicates to Kathy by talking about them and even showing them. These preoccupations are relational because they are both material (the stack of papers lying on his desk) and predispositional (what could be identified, for instance, as Joseph’s sense of duty or rectitude, which also expresses itself through this interaction). The situation that expresses itself through his turns at talk is therefore not only made of matters, but also of concerns, which express personality traits, attitudes and emotions.

The reproduction of social order, which tends to be the main object of *sociocultural theory*, can thus be reinterpreted through what is literally and figuratively *cultivated* in people’s actions and conversations. In the repetitions of what situations keep dictating, we, as analysts, should also be able to recognize the repetitions of what keeps *counting* or *mattering* to people, reproducing specific ways of talking, as well as specific ways of conducting or positioning themselves. Insofar as reproduction of social order exists, it is

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<sup>3</sup> The same thing could be said of language in general. A given language (English, French, Russian, etc.) can exist and be reproduced only through its reincarnation or re-embodiment in various speeches, writings and recordings. A language thus is an autonomous system to the extent that it is governed by its own laws and requirements. It is, however, heteronomous to the extent that its reproduction and existence also depend on its actualization in what we say and write. As Brummans (2011) nicely points out, any incarnation presupposes a form of transcension and vice versa.

always through all the figures that appear to be matters of interest or concern, whether these figures are values, principles, norms, or habits, which all constitute situations.

However, and *contra* traditional ways of addressing the question of reproduction, these very figures should *not* be understood as structures determining people's actions top down. On the contrary, if they express themselves in these actions, it is because these figures are made to dictate, require or demand that specific actions or positions be taken. In other words, if people cultivate them in their discourse and conducts, it is also because *these figures are part of the world humans inhabit*, that is they are part of their actions, of their thoughts, of their decisions. They are not from a different level, from a different order of existence. Pragmatically speaking, these figures, which are constitutive of a situation, communicate as much as we communicate.

For instance, we already saw that a certain politeness *requires* that Joseph react as he does when he declines Kathy's invitation. This figure—politeness—is, as any figure, both ventriloquized and ventriloquizing. It is *animated*, for another next first time, by Joseph when he mobilizes the four phases we previously identified to decline this invitation (this is why we can recognize politeness in what he says), and it is *animating* him, also for another next first time, in this same act of declining the invitation, since he knows/has learned how to be polite in such circumstances. Politeness is thus, as any figure, both constructed/fabricated/made and real/tangible/material. It is part of people's action, but it has, of course, specific features, specific forms that make them recognizable and accountable.

In pragmatic terms, politeness is part of the situation because this figure has its requirements, requirements that Joseph obviously knows how to follow. Learning/knowing how to live in a specific sociocultural order thus consists of learning/knowing that specific figures have to be ventriloquized, that is, produced and re-produced for another next first time. We are supposed to know/learn what situations require and how to satisfy them. Having said that, this does not, of course, mean that this process is always seamless and uneventful, as we all know of situations where people realize that they obviously did not do what the situation required because of the way other people reacted.

If these figures are both made and real, it is because they are *cultivated*, that is nurtured, maintained and sustained in a given speech community. If we do not learn and know them, we have no way of ventriloquizing and being ventriloquized by them. It is in and through communication that this learning, knowing and cultivation take place.

Finally, and in keeping with *critical theory*, we could note that the way a situation defines itself is not neutral, value-free or unbiased. When a situation is made to dictate, demand or require something, it is also the weight, value or clout of its representatives that is tested and evaluated. Pragmatism, as Hilary Putnam (2002) reminds us, rejects the fact-value dichotomy, as advocated, for instance, by David Hume (see also Pihlström, 2009, as well as Brummans, 2006), a rejection that is precisely conveyed through the metaphor of ventriloquism. As long as human beings were deemed the only ones speaking to each other, we could have, on one side, the conversational world with its values, norms and principles, and on the other side, the conversational context with its facts, situations and circumstances. A pragmatist/ventriloqual approach leaves no room (and no need) for this bifurcation.

In the interaction we studied, a situation—Joseph's work overload—ends up defining what Joseph will do that night. It is a situation that has, according to Joseph, its own requirements

and entailed obligations, which he decides to listen to. Through Kathy's insistence, the idea of another situation could have made a difference: a group of friends having fun over dinner. In other circumstances, its attractiveness could have diverted Joseph from the course he finally followed.

With ventriloquism and pragmatism, we have a world of facts, situations and circumstances that not only tell us things, but also dictate, require or demand that some actions or positions be taken. "What is" thus tells us "what ought to be." The factual world is a world of concerns, preoccupations and interests, which is why it is also a world of values. If it speaks to us, it is, as we saw, because it concerns and interests us, valuing specific actions to the detriment of others. When pragmatism enters a dialogue with critical theory, the question then becomes which concerns, preoccupations or interest end up having the strongest voice, whether through the mobilization of physical force, financial resources or other means.

## Conclusion

As already mentioned, a dialogue between the seven traditions in the study of communication should be, according to Craig (1999), based on two principles: (1) the constitutive model of communication as a meta-model and (2) communication theory as a metadiscourse. I would like to conclude this paper by showing that a ventriloqual view of pragmatism not only provides a constitutive view of communication (*first principle*), but also allows us to engage in a dialogue with the practical discourse of everyday life (*second principle*). If we should think communicatively about the world that surrounds us (*first principle*), this kind of reflection indeed needs to take seriously how people talk about and conceive of communication itself (*second principle*).

In order to show how this view conforms to the first principle, let me summarize how it addresses what appears to matter to the seven traditions. We saw that in communicating, we respond to what situations require, dictate or demand (rhetoric). If it is so, it is because these situations speak or communicate to us through specific figures that represent it and are made to say things (semiotics). A given situation is therefore intelligible, assessable or accountable, even if, of course, we can disagree about what it dictates (phenomenology). Systems thus self-produce from situations that keep ventriloquizing themselves through our conducts and discourses, creating—from the bottom up—effects of repetition and iteration (cybernetics).

If situations keep dictating specific actions, it is also because some of their aspects *matter* or *count*, animating us through specific traits, beliefs, attitudes, feelings and emotions that can also be heard and recognized in what we say or do (psychosociology). Social order can thus be identified through the cultivation of what keeps counting or mattering to us, reproducing specific ways of talking, conducting or positioning ourselves (sociocultural theory). Voicing what a situation dictates thus consists of ventriloquizing specific matters of concern or interest, an activity that is never neutral or value free and can be questioned (critical theory).

The ventriloqual view of pragmatism thus is a constitutive model to the extent that communication is here seen as an *explanans*, i.e., it explains how our world is what it is and how it functions (Latour, 2002). As pragmatism and ventriloquism call on us to recognize, advocating a communicative constitution of reality thus consists of identifying all these matters of concern or interest that get communicated when we communicate with each other,

dictating specific actions to the detriment of others. It is through these matters that we end up responding to what situations require or dictate (“what is” thus tells us “what ought to be”). Ventriloquism is what relates us to our world, but it is also what makes this world relate to itself, enacting its self-production and self-transformation.

If we now turn to the second principle (communication theory as metadiscourse), we can see how this ventriloquial view of pragmatism also engages in a dialogue with the practical discourse of everyday life. A ventriloquial analysis of interaction indeed consists of taking seriously what people say, especially when they appear to speak figuratively. For instance, expressions such as “experience speaks for itself” or “jealousy struck again”, situations where people appear to let the facts speak for themselves, speak in the name of a principle, act on behalf of an organization, talk as a representative of a specific ethnic group or argue about what the law says should be understood *both figuratively and literally*.

*Figuratively* because they consist of ventriloquizing *figures* that express themselves in these situations (experience, jealousy, a fact, a principle, an organization, an ethnic group, the law) and *literally* because these figures should be considered as plainly speaking in these circumstances. In other words, we need to learn to listen carefully to what people say, write or do in order to unfold all the voices that they embody and express (Craig, 2013; Cooren & Sandler, 2014). These voices are not only human voices. They also are emotional, dispositional, factual, normative, collective, textual, etc. This is why a constitutive view of communication is possible. These emotions, dispositions, facts, principles, texts and collectives do express themselves in our interactions. *Communication is constitutive of their mode of existence* even if, of course, it does not exhaust it.

The first and second principles thus imply each other. Communication is constitutive of our world because *this world speaks or communicates to us*, something that becomes progressively obvious when we learn to listen carefully to what people say in their conversations and discourses. It is intelligible/accountable/assessable, which is what both semiotics and phenomenology teach us. If it makes us say things, we also make it say things, creating an oscillation/vacillation, which is typical of ventriloquism (Goldblatt, 2006). If ventriloquism shows us how to identify these polyphonic effects, pragmatism helps us understand this relational mode of existence and this is why it indeed qualifies as a meta-model.

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