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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 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.

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—

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,[1] 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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[1] 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).

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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
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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 deplores 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 ventriloqual 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 ventriloqual 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 ventriloqual 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 ventriloqual 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 ventriloqual thesis as a form of pragmatism.

Pragmatism: A ventriloqual 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 ventriloqual 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 pragmati*sm* here, and not about pragmati*cs*. 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 ventriloqual 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 ventriloqual 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 designs 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[2] 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 artifactual (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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[2] 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 ventriloqual 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 *re*production, 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 ventriloqual 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 ventriloqual 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 refection 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 designs 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	Ventriloqual view of pragmatism
Rhetoric	"Every situation *prescribes* its fitting responses" (Bitzer, 1968)	If a situation prescribes its fitting response, it is *also* because we make it prescribe something, i.e., we ventriloquize it
Semiotics	The world that we experience *speaks or communicates to us* 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
Phenomenology	The world is not silent or mute. It is intelligible or accountable. It always speaks *to* and *through* 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.
Cybernetics (autopoiesis)	Systems *produce themselves* 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.
Psychosociology	Analyzing how people identify 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	A situation always expresses or ventriloquizes itself through what comes to *matter* 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.
Sociocultural Theory	Social order is reproduced through the values, norms and habits we *cultivate* 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
Critical Theory	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 ventriloqual view of pragmatism in dialogue with the seven traditions

Prolonging the Dialogue

What I now propose to show is how a ventriloqual 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 (ventriloqual) 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 ventriloqual 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[3].

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, preoccu-pies (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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[3] 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 ventriloqual view of pragmatism also engages in a dialogue with the practical discourse of everyday life. A ventriloqual 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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Planetary pragmatism? A response to François Cooren

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Abstract. In my discussion of Cooren's piece, I set out to accomplish three things. First, I situate Cooren within a broader horizon of pragmatist thought to discuss how his work aligns with pragmatism. Second, I examine how Cooren deploys pragmatism to constitute a scholarly field of communication theory, a project seeking to transcend the current configuration of the field by systematizing discourse around a "metamodel". Third, I ask what else Cooren's pragmatism might do. Pragmatism, according to Cooren, offers us an agentive conception of the world.

Keywords: Anthropocene; communication theory; pragmatism, Robert Craig

François Cooren's inventive way of developing a pragmatist perspective has much to teach us. In "Pragmatism as ventriloquism: Creating a dialogue among seven traditions in the study of communication," Cooren's (2014) "ventriloqual view on pragmatism" is elaborated for a specific task: to constitute a field of communication theory as Robert Craig imagined it many years ago. It is a brave effort given the complexity of Craig's (1999) original proposal, the requirement to engage eight traditions, and the impoverished state of critical discourse with respect to Craig's work. Cooren's challenge is also notable for its "agential" conception of the world, a position that requires communication theory to abandon the centrality of humans in its informing assumptions. What does it mean for communication theory to configure worlds—and perhaps even the planet—in terms of agency? What kind of pragmatism is Cooren proposing here?

In my discussion, I set out to accomplish three things.

First, I situate Cooren within a broader historical field to discuss how his work shifts the intellectual horizon for appraising pragmatism. While many scholars have sought to develop a "constitutive theory of communication" from pragmatism, Cooren (2014) sharpens a

distinction between dialogue and situation to adapt pragmatism to communication theory by engaging a wider body of materialist theory than is usual.

Second, I examine how Cooren deploys pragmatism to constitute a scholarly field of communication theory, a project seeking to transcend the current configuration of the field by systematizing discourse around a "metamodel".

Third, I ask *what else* Cooren's pragmatism might do. Pragmatism, according to Cooren, offers an agential conception of the world and he encourages us to understand the constitution of communicative situations from this vantage point. The widely distributed sense of agency his project entails sounds odd, especially if contrasted to the way pragmatism is usually deployed. It helps attune us to the problem of the planetary, however, and brings new concerns within the ambit of pragmatism and communication theory.

The broader horizon of pragmatism

Pragmatism, as a philosophical tradition, can be divided into its classical and revival periods. Classical pragmatism addressed the implications of evolutionary theory and scientific inquiry for human life. The revival of pragmatism, as led by Richard Bernstein, Jürgen Habermas, and Richard Rorty in the late 1970s, recovered this philosophical tradition by advancing dialogic and conversational conceptions of communication in place of psychology, religion, evolution, and science.

The revival of pragmatism is diverse, yet often assimilated to the practical turn in discourse and language theories, which focused on speech in use, linguistic performativity, and language as implicated in particular forms of life. The main difference between classical and revivalist era pragmatists is that the emphasis on communication (about which classical pragmatists said very little) displaced the centrality of inquiry (about which classical pragmatists wrote incessantly). Second-generation revivalist pragmatists (like Craig and Cooren) have sought to bridge the classical pragmatist emphasis on inquiry with the brilliant forays into communication theory facilitated by Bernstein, Habermas, Rorty, James Carey, and others. The significance of their efforts is difficult to assess, however, given the resolutely synchronic approach of Craig and Cooren. A diachronic perspective can aid a proper appraisal.

Pragmatism originated with Charles Peirce but was brought to life by William James. Speaking broadly, James initiated pragmatism with his "objective biological approach" to psychology, which John Dewey (1930) counted as James' greatest contribution. James's (1890) *Principles of Psychology* connected mind to the exigencies of practical life and challenged the conceptions of consciousness, body, and experience held by philosophers and psychologists by confronting them with the results of nineteenth-century physiological experimentation. In a famous essay, "The Reflex Arc in Psychology," Dewey (1896) extended James' work and grounded the physiologically oriented psychology in a holistic notion of action coordination. The psychology of sensation, as well as the experimental contrivance of stimulus-response, was embedded within a broader conception of situated action. By 1898, James condensed the consequences of this approach into a philosophical principle, "the principle of pragmatism," which he derived from Peirce's work.

Pragmatism, for Peirce, was a corollary of Alexander Bain's definition of belief. Beliefs were not a state of mind, a quality of consciousness, or subjective ideas, but a disposition to

act, a philosophical position on which Peirce, James, Dewey, and George Herbert Mead were in agreement. Unlike Bain, however, and unlike the other classical pragmatists, Peirce's training involved earth science, particularly geodesy, in addition to mathematics and logic. While James grounded cognition in our embodied engagement with the world, a trajectory pursued relentlessly by Dewey and Mead in their writings on functional psychology, Peirce grounded pragmatism in a stricter conception of scientific inquiry that incorporated his experiences in mapping and measuring the planet. While I agree with Cooren that there is overlap in Peirce, James, and Dewey's approach to inquiry, these different horizons for their thought are important to recognize. Cooren, in some respects, is closest to Peirce, and this may account for his emphasis on worldly agency (over against the interest of James and Dewey in subjective and biological-shaped experience). *I will return to this distinction between biological and planetary horizons to discuss the implications it has for pragmatist views of situated action.*

Pragmatism, as Cooren notes, has long helped theorists negotiate the dialectic of objectivism and relativism (see Bernstein, 1983). The practical orientation of pragmatism encouraged scholars to situate ideas, utterances, and statements as actions in the world and to avoid what Cooren calls realism or subjectivism in the assessment of the effects of these linguistic actions. Statements, like beliefs or ideas in classical pragmatism, are ways of acting in the world, yet also caught up in broader material networks. These "broader material networks", as I've called them, are typically conceived in conversational or dialogic terms by revival era pragmatists, and assessed with respect to human interests and values. Rorty, for instance, felt that all the distinctions and problems facing humans were language-dependent and thus embedded within contingent vocabularies. These vocabularies were mutable human constructions that should be evaluated as tools that advance (or fail to advance) particular purposes. While Rorty's work contrasted sharply with Habermas' formal pragmatics on this point, as the latter theorist sought to ground a democratic conception of communication in a philosophical anthropology developed from Mead, there is surprising overlap in their basic assumption: Language is a distinctly human affair, whether it was a collection of mutable vocabularies creatively adjusted by culture-bound people (Rorty) or a biological inheritance that locked in during hominization (Habermas).

The revival era pragmatism of Rorty, Habermas, and others departed markedly from the classical tradition on this point. The conception of inquiry found in classical pragmatism presumed that surprising disruptions to our "broader material networks" involved more than human language. It was this "more than human language" assumption that discomforted many revivalists. Whether it was a suspicion that metaphysical assumptions were smuggled into classical pragmatist notions of experience (which are notoriously opaque in James, Dewey, and Peirce) or anxiety about the growing scope, complexity, and political importance of scientific practice, the revivalists were determined to ground theoretical discussion in the priority of hermeneutic and interpretive activity—a pre-theoretical commitment that always fit better with the history of continental philosophy leading to Heidegger than with classical pragmatism.

Classical pragmatism acknowledges that cognition is an active admixture of feeling, interest, value, sign, and culture—and it was not difficult for revivalists to conceptualize language in similar terms. Intelligence is distributed within the world, and the world is active

in both constituting and disturbing how our practical activities (which always involve some measure of cognition) and surrounding environment (constituted, in part, by practical activities that are partly laden with cognition) are interconnected and interdependent. The tangle of epistemological and ontological questions these sorts of general statements provoke were encompassed by the various accounts of inquiry found in pragmatism, and most of the intramural disputes in pragmatism involved how best to describe the relationship of inquiry to humans situated in a resistant world. Whether it is Peirce's reflections on the distributed aspects of scientific communities, Dewey's notion of problematic situation, or James' world of impure experience, it is clear that the resistant nature of the world disrupts our experience and leads pragmatists to connect fallibility to inquiry (as a means of dealing with failed/doubted belief). The fields capturing the interest of classical pragmatists tended to suggest a self-correcting fallibility for meeting inevitable failures posed by the uncertainty, contingency, and resistance of the world—it was why evolutionary dynamics and scientific experimentation were prized so highly.

We can now address more clearly the significance of Cooren's contrast of dialogue and situation. Pragmatism, for Cooren (2014), is a philosophy that prioritizes what "a situation requires, demands or requests" (p. 1). Situations both exceed dialogue and constitute dialogic contexts, and this broad conception of situation is Cooren's way of figuring the world in agential terms. The world, in brief, "should also be deemed as acting upon us by calling into question our beliefs or, on the contrary, by confirming them" (p. 9).

> "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" (p. 9).

Cooren's remarks amend the linguistic turn inflation of conversation and dialogue in pragmatist theory by incorporating an agential conception of the world. Conversational analysis, on Cooren's approach, must integrate the forcing of the world through a notion of situation. Communication theory as a broader field, Cooren argues, should do the same. It must integrate what Charles Peirce once called the brute force of secondness. Inquiry provoked by the world puts us in a communicative relation with our surroundings: "a world that tells us things…"

Pragmatism is certainly a useful philosophy for registering how the world kicks back, as Karen Barad once put it. Contemporary theory tends to incorporate this insight by refreshing vitalist notions of matter and materialism, such that the ongoing effort to challenge the asymmetry of human and nonhuman involves collapsing and distributing agency across matter. It is almost impossible to avoid a certain vitalism in expressing this position and so it is not surprising that William James and John Dewey have figured significantly among the main proponents of this materialist turn, as evidenced by the work of William Connolly, Bruno Latour, and Jane Bennett, for example.

Cooren's call to have communication theory embrace this branching of pragmatism is timely and important. The vitalism of these materialist efforts reminds initially of the pan psychic difficulties that trapped many of James' writings on radical empiricism. Yet, as the notion of ventriloquism deftly suggests, there is no psychism in this panpsychism, and Cooren's nomination is overt in its goal to purge communication of any residual mentalism

or psychologism. By developing analytical techniques to illustrate how the world demands actions of us, and by pointing us to a conception of language and communication built on a materialism inspired by something other than the interests, agency, and practices of embodied humans, Cooren shifts the usual horizon for understanding pragmatism.

There remains the puzzle of Cooren's emphasis on "situation". It is, as William James (1904) once observed, "Dewey's favorite word," and it was used by Dewey to almost completely overturn the way theory, fact, truth, and other terminology implicated in epistemological endeavours was understood. Dewey's epistemology understands knowledge as generated and remade through the problematic situations that the resistance of the world (or the grain of things, as James put it) forces upon us. The notions of problem and problematic situation have been rehabilitated in communication theory (Russill, 2007, 2008), new materialism (Bennett, 2010), and science studies alike, yet Cooren directs us to a curious place in elaborating his meaning: the work of Peirce scholar, Cheryl Misak. Dewey, of course, is one of the few to grasp and extend Peirce's work on inquiry in significant ways, as both Misak and Mats Bergman have recognized in their brilliant work. Yet, Misak (2013) finds that Dewey introduced many awkward and unnecessarily convoluted notions in adapting Peirce, and she suggests the infelicity in Dewey's expression was generated largely by Dewey's broad and unrestrained notion of situation. Bertrand Russell, as Misak (2013) notes, would mock Dewey for a conception of situation that seemed to compass nothing "less than the whole universe" in its ambit (Misak, 2013, 122).

We risk sinking into the weeds of intramural pragmatist debates at this point and it must seem churlish to raise these matters in detail given the broader aspirations of Cooren's work. Yet, as I have indicated above, there is a tension generated by Dewey's biologically organized sense of situation and Peirce's sensitivity to cosmological phenomenon of a different temporal order, a tension we might usefully retain in seeking to register the planetary in communication theory.

The field of communication theory

Cooren seeks to prove the analytical value of his ventriloqual view—and the flat ontology it extends—by joining efforts to reimagine the field of communication theory using pragmatism, a set of debates that include Craig, Mats Bergman, Peter Simonson, Leonarda García-Jiménez, and myself, among others.

Communication theory, Craig (1999) argues, is a type of discourse abstracted from communicative practices that interest us. It is these communicative practices that underpin the field's historical emergence and give it meaning and relevance. A field of communication theory, as opposed to the aggregation of perspectives, requires scholars to recognize the diverse theories seeking to explain the world and to engage them on these terms (that is, as active in the constitution and shaping of social life).

Craig's proposal involves several kinds of abstraction. Theories are relative to traditions in Craig's account, much like the way statements are partial expressions of vocabularies in Rorty's account. One must understand theories not as a representation of reality but as expressions of a theoretical tradition organized by certain ontological assumptions about the nature of communication. In addition, Craig abstracts from the way theories gain meaning and relevance in the world in order to generate a theoretical model. Craig (1999) calls this

construct the "metamodel" and uses it to systematize how inter-theoretical engagement unfolds. The purpose of the "metamodel" is to generate a field of communication theory by constituting a public among scholars interested in the practical implications of different approaches to communication. Instead of identifying weaknesses among competitors as a prelude to advocating one's preferred theory, scholars should instead engage broader theoretical traditions in a collaborative, reflexive, and critical way.

Cooren distinguishes his approach by noting that Craig's metamodel is informed by Dewey's writing on democracy and a desire to encourage public dialogue. While this is true, we should observe that Craig's model is more an alloy than a pure expression of Dewey's pragmatism. Gregory Bateson's theory of logical types is at least as crucial as Dewey, and the influence of Richard McKeon is palpable (particularly his schematic method of organizing philosophical traditions). In addition, Craig's proposal—as I read it—also acknowledges a distinction between dialogue and problematic situation, and is part of the effort to recover Dewey's notion of inquiry from those John Peters (1999) once called, "dialogians" (p. 34). Pending a fuller discussion of "situation", there are better ways to distinguish Cooren's work from Craig.

The differences, I believe, reduce to Cooren's commitment of communication theory to a flat ontology, one setting aside the distinction of subject and object, but also the distinction of human and non-human. Instead of addressing the problem of incommensurable traditions, as Bernstein (1983) did in critiquing the dialectic of objectivism and relativism, and as Russill and Craig (2007) did in elaborating the metamodel, the ventriloqual view forces scholars to address an agential conception of the world. Regardless of Craig's commitment to a dialogic conception of communication theory, this is the central difference.

Cooren's effort to simulate a cross-tradition dialogue between pragmatism and the other seven traditions of communication develops in these terms even as it seeks accordance with Craig's 'principles' for constituting a field. The results are mixed, in my opinion, even as I find the account of pragmatism compelling. Why mixed? First, there is the ironic consequence of the pragmatist metamodel. Pragmatism, a philosophy best known for its practical orientation, inspires a fiendishly abstract discussion, as a debate over different models of meta-theoretical debate is far removed from the initial abstractions of a first-order theory: theories are organized by a conception of tradition, which are differentiated by a conception of inter-theoretical debate across traditions, as different models of organizing that inter-theoretical debate are debated by Craig and Cooren (2012, 2014). Second, the critiques of Craig's original proposal will recur. Cooren demonstrates how the different traditions of theory identified by Craig might incorporate an agential view of the world. Yet, if this is a central insight afforded by pragmatism, it is not surprising that Cooren uses it to develop a dialogue between pragmatism and other traditions. My feeling is that those scholars accusing Craig of naively or cynically 'stacking the deck' in favour of pragmatism will say the same thing to Cooren, as a pragmatist orientation has led Cooren to organize communication theory in terms of a pragmatic metamodel. It is a lazy argument, to be sure, but one flung at Craig with some frequency. Third, it isn't yet clear why figuring the world in agentive terms is especially pressing for communication scholars, especially given that their authority and relevance tends to rest on elucidating the more immediate societal implications of communication.

I find none of these concerns especially serious. Still, these are obvious obstacles to a fuller use of the metamodel among communication scholars as Craig and Cooren imagine it.

Planetary pragmatism?

Cooren's pragmatism is characterized by an extraordinarily wide sense of distributed agency. Things, our worlds, perhaps even the planet are agential in Cooren's approach. What motivates him to appropriate pragmatism in this way? Is it simply the desire for a coherent field of communication theory? What is it that requires a theoretical innovation of this sort?

Cooren's pragmatism reflects his engagements with Latour and new materialism but it is the sort of thing we can expect in trying to take seriously the crises disclosed by the earth sciences. The earth sciences are typically discussed in the humanities and social sciences with respect to the term, "anthropocene", which suggests a new geological condition for humanity, as the geophysical composition of the planet loses its character as a stable or slowly shifting background for human affairs. Ecologies, of course, are delicate webs of life prone to dynamic transitions, yet these geophysical concerns are something different, as the possibility of ecological inhabitation requires planetary scale dynamics that have been disrupted and rendered problematic in ways not previously registered.

Dipesh Chakrabarty and Bruno Latour, in the two most sustained efforts to develop the consequences of this understanding of the earth sciences, address this problem by expanding our usual conceptions of agency to encompass it. Latour asks us to conceive the earth in terms of agency and to refigure humanity as the "earthbound", whereas Chakrabarty asks how the earth sciences accord "geological agency" to humans. As Chakrabarty (2009) states, humans "become geological agents only historically and collectively, that is, when we have reached numbers and invented technologies that are on a scale large enough to have an impact on the planet itself" (206–207). The planet, in short, registers our collective agency as a species in geological terms, which forces us to rethink species as both biological (living) and planetary (geophysical) achievements.

Cooren's provocation to communication theory might better attune us to this situation and it is why I am fascinated by his interest in Peirce. I am not at all certain that our vitalist and biologically organized conceptions of matter are sufficient to register the significance of our situation. Dewey, in particular, is valuable for attuning us to how humans shape their collective situations in a continuously tangled and dynamic ecology, yet it isn't clear whether his account can characterize how we are situated by the broader planetary parameters within which all life on earth has evolved, Bertrand Russell's snarky comments notwithstanding. We might expect to muddle through, of course, yet I believe Chakrabarty is right, and that the planetary creates rather more difficult and severe rifts in our thinking than we anticipate. As Chakrabarty points out, it is precisely not a matter of conceiving our reliance on the planet in ecological terms or of scaling up an embodied or ecological agency to the global scale, but of attuning to the situation disclosed by a planetary science that is indifferent to the uniqueness of the earth. Peirce, the pragmatist whose day job was planetary measurement, might push us past subjective (James), biological (Dewey), and socially (Mead) inflected pragmatism in interesting ways.

Agency is not a quality of embodied humans, for Cooren, but of communicative relations developed between humans, things, and the situations they inhabit. The methodological

question involves how to register the world animating the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Cooren's agential conception of the world, as I have called it, examines communication in excess of the intentions and interests of actants, and I'm fascinated by how it might develop more systematically in light of the problem posed by Chakrabarty.

Of course, if there is not yet a conception of agency that has incorporated how our situatedness in bodies and environments is dependent on planetary systems, I doubt communication scholars will find this especially troubling, as earthly processes are still understood as too broad and too slowly changing to have noticeable or significant effects on human culture. We retain that assumption at significant peril. If Cooren's work can help us access the planetary in this respect, the ventriloqual account of communication needs a wider hearing, even if the hoped for field of communication theory fails to materialize.

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Questioning ventriloquism

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Abstract. Cooren (2014) argues that a ventriloquism metaphor for communication can provide a unified perspective on seven traditions in the study of communication. This Discussion Note does not argue for or against the idea that a suitably deployed and motivated ventriloquism metaphor can do this. Instead, the Note expresses some concerns about whether Cooren does suitably deploy, motivate, and support ventriloquism as a metaphor for communication. The concerns are about whether ventriloquism as opposed to a simpler personification-based view should be used, and whether two different notions of ventriloquism are being adequately considered. I also point to a complication that should be embraced in how one should analyse back-ventriloquism, i.e., people being ventriloquized by their own dummies, as suggested by Cooren. None of the concerns are fatal to Cooren's enterprise, but rather point to the need for a more refined untangling of issues.

Keywords: fiction-based models, language pragmatics, metaphor, ventriloquism

This discussion note responds to a particular aspect of the thought-provoking paper by Cooren (2014). Cooren responds to "Craig's (1999) call for a dialogue between what he identified as the seven traditions in the study of communication" (Cooren 2014: 1). Cooren's response is to propose that communication be viewed as involving "ventriloquism", using this term in a metaphorical sense. The ventriloqual view is claimed to help us to analyze what a communicative situation "requires, demands or requests". (Following Cooren, we should note the metaphorically used speech-describing notions of "demanding" and "requesting" here.) Cooren discusses how his ventriloqual view explicates in a unified way the seven traditions that Craig (1999) identified.

I will not be discussing whether or not a suitably deployed and motivated ventriloquism metaphor for communication can provide a unified way of addressing those seven traditions.

Rather, I have some concerns about whether Cooren does, in fact, suitably deploy and motivate ventriloquism as a metaphor for communication.

My first worry is whether Cooren leaps too readily to ventriloquism as a metaphor, as opposed to considering other metaphors that might be used. The ventriloquism metaphor may be too rich and special for many normal purposes. Consider the situation that Cooren discusses of Joseph referring to his student-paper marking workload as a reason for not joining Kathy and others for dinner. Cooren suggests that we can [metaphorically] describe this as Joseph *making the workload say* that he should decline the invitation. Cooren uses this and other cases to motivate the ventriloquism metaphor. I will assume that the real-world ventriloquism scenario that Cooren has in mind throughout his paper is of a ventriloquist doing a stage performance with a dummy (or "figure") that looks a bit like a person, and the ventriloquist is making it look and sound as though speech is coming out of the dummy's mouth. Thus, in viewing Joseph's reference to his marking workload as ventriloquism, we are to imagine a metaphorical source scenario in which Joseph is a ventriloquist, the workload is the ventriloquist's dummy, and the ventriloquist is making it look as though the dummy is telling Joseph to decline the invitation.[1] In this scenario, Kathy is, I take it, a member of the audience watching the stage performance. Now, at first sight we may seem to have metaphorically captured, in an appealing and vivid way, Joseph's communication to Kathy. To unpack the intended metaphor a little, I presume that we are to consider it to be analysed in something like the following way. The influence of the workload on Joseph is metaphorically cast as the spoken command uttered by the dummy. But, at the same time, the fact that the influence is not really created by the workload itself, but is rather a product of Joseph's own attitude to the workload, is metaphorically cast as Joseph *causing* the dummy to speak: the dummy is not speaking through its own independent agency. And Joseph is causing the dummy to speak because he wishes the audience to hear what it "says". That is, in the target scenario, Joseph wishes to draw attention to the influence of the workload through his communicative action.

The problem is that we are in danger of sliding over a crucial distinction here in the notion of speaking (between genuinely speaking and merely uttering speech sounds), and missing the actual point of a ventriloquism stage performance. The ventriloquist does not cause the dummy to *speak* but only *causes it to merely appear to speak*, in such a way that the audience knows very well that the dummy is not actually speaking (i.e., the dummy is not a sentient being forming utterances through its own cognitive powers, and is not even a sentient forming utterances because of being forced to do so by the ventriloquist). In other words, the ventriloquist deliberately causes a *transparent pretence* or *transparent fiction* that the dummy is speaking: the ventriloquist is just pretending that the dummy is speaking, the audience realizes that he/she is pretending, and the ventriloquist wants them to realize this. When the dummy appears to command the ventriloquist to do something, there is in fact, and crucially, no such command (the command is only inside the pretence/fiction), there is therefore no causing of the dummy to genuinely utter any command, and the audience knows all this. Thus, ventriloquist-making-dummy-speak is neither something that actually happens

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[1] I use the term *target scenario* for a situation that is actually being metaphorically described—in our example the actual communication Joseph is engaging in. The target scenario is metaphorically cast as being a *metaphorical source scenario*—in our example a ventriloquism situation.

in the performance outside the fiction (because in reality the ventriloquist is merely making the dummy appear to speak) *nor* something that happens within the fiction created in the performance (because no-one is making the dummy do anything at all, within that fiction; all we have within the fiction is two people talking to each other).

So, if we really were to try, as supposed above, to view the marking workload as having an influence on Joseph (though with Joseph himself being the cause of that influence) as the dummy commanding Joseph to do something (though with Joseph himself causing that command) we must fail. In the metaphorical source scenario there is no command or causing-to-command to work with. There is only a command within the fiction that is created by the ventriloquist (this creation being part of the metaphorical source scenario), and there is no causing-to-command at any level.

There is a communicative situation that would actually be better thought of as being described by our metaphorical source scenario than the straightforward one of someone using a marking workload as a sincere reason to decline an invitation. The alternative situation is where Joseph is transparently pretending that the marking workload influences him to decline the invitation (when in fact it doesn't), i.e. pretending it with the intention that Kathy realizes that he is so pretending. I would submit that even if people sometimes act this way, it is a special circumstance, and is sharply distinct from the straightforward situation mentioned of using the workload as a sincere reason.

A better metaphorical analysis for the straightforward situation might simply be an exercise in personification metaphor, where the workload is metaphorically cast as a person who is verbally commanding Joseph (or whomever) to decline the invitation. We then metaphorically cast Joseph's reference to the workload as his drawing attention to the fact that he is being verbally commanded by that person (and *not* by a dummy). This metaphorical analysis does not yet capture the idea that it is Joseph himself who somehow causes the influence the workload has on him. But this extra element could be added by supposing that Joseph has somehow caused or led the workload-person to make the command. After all, in real life people have ways of leading other real people into saying things.

Cooren might alternatively claim that the Joseph communication scenario is not being metaphorically viewed in terms of the ventriloquism scenario itself, but rather in terms of the fiction mentioned above that the latter scenario includes, namely the fiction that the dummy is issuing a command to Joseph. But now it is not clear why one needs the ventriloquism scenario at all: one might as well have used that fictional situation as the metaphorical source scenario, bypassing the ventriloquism wrapping entirely. This would be tantamount to the personification-based analysis in the previous paragraph. Or, if one wanted to preserve the idea that Joseph is himself creating the fiction, this can be achieved merely by casting Joseph as a story-teller of some sort. There is no need to propose a ventriloquism scenario particularly—it is needlessly special and rich for the purpose of portraying a communicative situation like our straightforward one above, and there are simpler speech-based metaphors available. The ventriloquism metaphor would only be needed for communicative situations of special sorts.

The above discussion has been purely about how we as theorists might metaphorically view Joseph's communication to Kathy. It has not of itself mentioned or implied any particular metaphorical view that Joseph or Kathy themselves might have of the situation. I

suggest if we do bring in discourse-participants' own views we are in danger of getting a misleading strengthening of the impression that ventriloquism is normally the appropriate analysis. It seems reasonable to me to suppose that the following could be the case:

(1)   Joseph is trying to influence Kathy into metaphorically thinking of the marking workload as talking to him, telling him to decline the invitation.

One might easily slip into thinking that the situation described literally by (1) can be described metaphorically as Joseph being a ventriloquist who is trying to make it look to Kathy that the dummy (standing for the marking workload) is telling him to decline the invitation. But, much as before, this purported metaphorical view of situation (1) doesn't really describe *that* situation but instead the following rather special situation:

(2)   Joseph is trying to influence Kathy into metaphorically thinking of him *as transparently pretending that* the marking workload is telling him to decline the invitation.

I have two further concerns. One is that Cooren's paper does not distinguish between two ways the term ventriloquism is used in common parlance. It can refer either to a genuinely misleading phenomenon or to a non-misleading, entertaining phenomenon. The genuinely misleading one is where the ventriloquist makes it sound as though a voice is coming from somewhere else, e.g. the corner of a room, and hearers are really misled into thinking it is coming from there, and thus that there is some sort of sentient agent there. The non-misleading one is the stage-performance case, where the audience realizes that the sound is not really coming from the dummy. Clearly, Cooren tries to deploy the latter. However, the genuinely misleading sense fits better as a metaphorical analysis of at least some situations. We could metaphorically describe, say, Joseph successfully and deceptively blaming a marking workload for his inability to go out to dinner (when in fact it is a choice made for other reasons) as an act of ventriloquizing in the *genuinely misleading* sense. In the metaphorical source scenario Kathy comes to believe that the workload is commanding Joseph not to go. Correspondingly, in the target scenario Kathy comes to believe that the workload is to blame for Joseph's inability.

The other concern is about Cooren's suggestion that people are not only ventriloquists but are also ventriloquized by the dummies that they set up—made to say things *by* marking workloads, impulses to politeness, etc. For instance, on p.6 Cooren says that Joseph and Kathy "are both depicted as ventriloquizing these figures [dummies] and as ventriloquized by them … because these figures are … staged as *animating* Joseph and Kathy, that is, making them say things too" (emphasis is in original). Let me call this *back-ventriloquism*. While it is a thought-provoking idea, analogues of the above concerns extend also to it, of course—in brief, there is often or usually no reason to think that something is creating a *transparent pretence* that Joseph and Kathy are saying what they are saying.

But there is a special but quite straightforward case where the genuinely-misleading sense of ventriloquism would provide an appropriate analysis. Suppose that Joseph is saying something apparently of his own volition, but, unbeknownst to the people he is talking to, he is led to say it by something X (a pile of marking or whatever). This could be

metaphorically cast as X being a genuinely-misleading ventriloquist who is making it look as though Joseph is saying what he is saying.

But, putting such worries aside, let us assume that a back-ventriloquism scenario, where both the back-ventriloquism itself and the ventriloquism by Joseph is of Cooren's non-misleading sort, indeed provides a reasonable metaphorical view in at least some situations. There is then an interesting, necessary technical qualification. Imagine a real, stage ventriloquist, Ventnor, with his dummy, Dumas. Ventnor might, as part of his performance, make it look as though Dumas is making him, Ventnor, talk as if he were a dummy. My observation is that what we have here is a *fiction within a fiction*—a story within a story. The outer, standard fiction is that of Dumas being an ordinary person who is talking to the ordinary person Ventnor. Within that story, we have a story that Dumas is now a ventriloquist and Ventnor is now a dummy. It is not just a matter of adding extra detail to the standard story.

When now the overall scenario about this stage ventriloquist Ventnor is used as a metaphorical source scenario S to describe an act of communication, the fiction-within-a-fiction that has just been explained is itself embedded within S. So there are three levels: S as a whole, containing a ventriloquist Ventnor and a dummy Dumas; nested within that, the standard fiction that Dumas is a person talking to Ventnor; and nested within that; the further fiction that Dumas-the-person is more specially a ventriloquist and Ventnor is his dummy. The back-ventriloquism is not ventriloquism at either of the outer two levels but only by Dumas at that third, innermost, level.

In Barnden (2015) and Barnden (in press), I discuss a theoretical framework and implemented computer program for metaphor processing called ATT-Meta. This framework is pretence/fiction-based and is related to fiction-based approaches to metaphor in philosophy such as by Walton (2004). In ATT-Meta, a metaphorical source scenario is a form of fiction or pretence. So what we have in the case of the back-ventriloquism metaphor is three levels of pretence/fiction: the overall metaphorical source scenario and the fiction-within-a-fiction nested within it.

Such nesting of fictions arises also in ATT-Meta as the way for a hearer to process chained metaphor, or serially compounded or serially mixed metaphor as I prefer to call it. In ATT-Meta, the serial compounding of metaphor is handled by means of the nesting of pretences/fictions, as explained in Barnden (in press), building on Lee & Barnden (2001). Essentially, if A is metaphorically viewed as B and B is metaphorically viewed as C, then there is a fiction in which A is B, and nested within that a fiction that B is C. This is two levels of fiction. Three levels would arise from a further act of metaphorically viewing C as D, giving rise to an innermost fiction in which C is D.

To conclude, I find Cooren's approach stimulating and intriguing, and am prepared to believe that if suitably deployed it could help in the aim of bringing together the various traditions of communication theory that he discusses. However, there are problems of fine-grained metaphor analysis and motivation that need to be addressed. The problems centre on simpler speech-based metaphors being available and being more appropriate than ventriloquism in many (perhaps most) cases, and on the point that even when ventriloquism is the appropriate metaphor, it is often the genuinely-misleading sort of ventriloquism rather than the non-misleading, staged entertainment sort that should arguably be brought in.

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Ventriloquism as communicative music

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Abstract. This essay explicates connections between communication theory and François Cooren's discussion of ventriloquism. Cooren provides a theoretical and practical exposition of a situated and contextually shaped communicative agent. Ventriloquism offers a practical depiction of the limits of individualism, or unrestrained individual autonomy. Ventriloquism suggests that we live within sounds and voices that continually affect a communicator; one cannot confuse the influence of random and, at times, orchestrated sounds and voices with ownership grounded within a single communicative agent. Ventriloquism explicates everyday life as orchestrated by ongoing communicative music of sounds and voices.

Keywords: communication theory, ventriloquism, pragmatism, signification, metadiscourse

François Cooren (2014) grounds his work in the insights of Robert Craig's important 1999 essay concerning communication theory. Craig outlines seven traditions: rhetoric, semiotics, phenomenology, cybernetics, sociopsychology, sociocultural theory, and critical theory. Craig's task was not simply to differentiate the approaches, but to invite dialogue between and among them. Cooren enters this conversation with an emphasis on ventriloquism. He explicates Craig's work, which understands communication theory as a field, not as a discipline. Craig points to the importance of metadiscourse in which the first principle is to think communicatively about the world, with the second principle focused on communication itself. The significance of Craig's two principles is that he grounds communication within an ongoing commitment to content, with the first principle being discourse *about*.

A pragmatic addition

The response to Craig by Russill in 2004 and 2005 indicated that a tradition was absent in Craig's work—that of pragmatism. Specifically, Russill's discussion centered on whether or not Dewey's pragmatic model of democracy actually encourages dialogue between and among traditions. Cooren enters the conversation with a linking of the ventriloquism perspective to pragmatism. The ventriloquism standpoint assumes that communicative actors, in the words of Cooren, are also "passers" in that they take turns in the engagement of intelligible talk (p. 7). Ventriloquism is a thesis that frames a metatheory of pragmatism that permits us to understand how dialogues between and among different communities and traditions are possible. Of course, Cooren not only emphasizes the work of John Dewey but also that of William James and Charles Sanders Peirce. James considered Peirce the founder of pragmatism, indicating that Peirce coined the term.

Pragmatism understood as a metatheory or a metamodel permits Cooren to ask if it is possible for the ventriloquist perspective to illuminate how this dialogue transpires. How does one, from a perspective of ventriloquism, invite dialogue from the seven approaches detailed by Craig? Cooren wonders how we can bring together pragmatism and constitutive rhetoric that conveys matters of significance. The ventriloquism perspective assumes that constitutive activity is essential in meaning-making. In semiotics, the ventriloquism viewpoint presupposes that human beings are not the only speaking voices. Phenomenology permits insight into the things themselves, whether empirical or not. Ventriloquism lends clarity to such a willingness to understand as real that which one cannot necessarily kick, bite, or chew. Cybernetics responds to design and systems, and a ventriloquist thesis assumes that organizations provoke and propel participants. A sociopsychological perspective of ventriloquism recognizes the importance of attachment. Social cultural theory links well with ventriloquism's emphasis of expression. Finally, a critical theory of ventriloquism presupposes that there are multiple traditions that speak and they cannot be assimilated into one theory.

A ventriloquist view of pragmatism takes both an objective and subjective approach to rhetoric into account, uniting the conversations of Lloyd Bitzer and Richard E. Vatz. The ventriloquism orientation is a pragmatism that attempts to explain how the world works, reliant upon many of the insights of Bruno Latour (Cooren 2014, pp. 11, 22). Ventriloquism recognizes the constitutive nature of the human world not in the manner in which I constitute it, but rather in the mode through which it constitutes a social world. Ventriloquism presupposes that speaking is happening all around us, not just by people but also by semantic implications.

Situating ventriloquism

Cooren's essay provides a thorough chart of the way in which he translates these seven traditions within the framework of ventriloquism (p. 16). The chart is worth reiterating and responding to. In it, he explicates clearly the connections between and among each of the seven traditions and his understanding of ventriloquism. Rhetoric involves "every situation [that] *prescribes* a fitting response" (p. 16). Ventriloquism is attentive to situations in that it must provide a fitting response, and as we prescribe something, we ventriloquize it. In

semiotics, we experience the world as speaking through icons, indexes, and symbols. A ventriloqual perspective again assumes that situations speak and dictate. Phenomenology takes us to the thing itself, to a world that is never silent or mute. From a ventriloqual perspective, all situations address us. Systems provide a systematic framework for understanding situations. Ventriloquism assumes that situations often reproduce themselves within systems. Psychosociology analyzes attachments. Ventriloquism indicates that situations define the significance of attachments. In sociocultural theory, situations reproduce through norms and habits that we cultivate. From a ventriloquist perspective, these values, norms, and habits communicate and participate in the shaping of what we are and do. A critical perspective indicates that no situation is value-free. From a ventriloquist outlook, interests emerge in all discourses.

If one attends carefully to the linguistic recurrence of Cooren's analysis, the term that is repetitively used is situation. Ventriloquism is responsive to situations that are shaped by sources far beyond the communicative agents themselves. The significance of this work resides, perhaps, in the reversal of whom we might consider the dummy in which ventriloquism displays itself. In typical terms, we would find the dummy held by a communicative agent in which the words are being placed in the mouth of this object by a human being who has practiced the skill of speaking with limited lip movement. Ventriloquism turns this scenario upon its head and frames the dummy as the communicative agent who thinks he or she is in total control.

Ventriloquism makes us, you and me, dummies in that we speak a constitutive rhetoric about icons, signs, and symbols that matter and that require us to be attentive to a fundamental reality—the world is greater than my voice, and the environment is never silent. Ventriloquism assumes the power of systems as they speak and reproduce themselves. The psychsociological attachments literally put words in our mouths, as do norms and values that tell us how to speak. Critical theory operates routinely in the background with the mantra that ventriloquism pragmatically and naturally assumes that all is biased. From rhetoric to semiotics to phenomenological, cybernetic, psychosocial, sociocultural, and critical traditions, we, like human dummies, speak with the assumption that we are in control. We are partially in control, and perhaps more so when we recognize that ventriloquism is a pragmatic reality of how human beings function in their everyday lives.

Echoes of everyday signification

To illustrate the profundity and simple elegance of ventriloquism, I ask the reader to consider the following story that asks basic questions. At what stage in your life do you look in a mirror and see a mother or father who is now you? At what stage do you see yourself articulating a position only to hear your own voice? When my son was quite young, he asked me an odd question—would I always be his friend. My response came quickly, as if somehow I had not reflected upon it. I uttered the following response to my son: "Absolutely—until any moment in your life when I must give up your friendship to be your dad and to do what is necessary and helpful for you. At that moment, I am not your friend. I am forever your dad. I am responsible for you. I cannot promise as a dad that I will always be right, but I can promise as a dad that I will always give you the best I have to offer and, if possible, a little more." I walked away from that conversation right before my son was to go to sleep, and I

asked myself one repetitive question during the remainder of the evening. From where did that response come? It was not something I had thought of in advance, and right before I turned off the lights for the ending of my evening, the obvious came to me. Ventriloquism—yes. I was speaking the words of my father, and now those words emerged from me for my son.

Much of what we assume is situated uniquely in our own agency is a form of ventriloquism that propels us into communicative action in a given moment. My final comments are on theory. I understand communication theories as stories that give us insight into the human condition. I do not frame communication theories as modernist universal principles of truth that will curtail the voice of any theory that has come before or will come after. Therefore, my reaction to ventriloquism is one of interest and intellectual excitement. Where will it take us? I have no need to disagree with it nor do I have the impulse to argue that ventriloquism is the end of theory in communication. The implications of this story remind us that others speak, that the future speaks, that the past has a voice as do the places and objects around us. Such a conceptual account sounds quite powerful in a postmodern context, where we have decentered the communicative agent. Ventriloquism has the power of a director of an orchestra. The director has influence, but without the parts, there is no music. Ventriloquism reminds us of the communicative music that surrounds us.

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Ventriloquism's methodological scope

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Abstract. In this response to Cooren (2014), I question whether a theory tied to a scholarly tradition with strong epistemological and methodological commitments can in fact be a response to Craig's (1999) call for dialogue between communication traditions. Ventriloquism originated in the Montréal School of the Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO), a field of study that understands organizations and organizing to be the result of interaction. Because of this epistemology, CCO scholars use conversation analysis (CA) as their primary method. Although Cooren has presented ventriloquism as a means to unify the field, it seems difficult to imagine other research methodologies being adopted into such a vision.

Keywords: ventriloquism, methodology, epistemology, communicative constitution of organizations

By presenting ventriloquism as a pragmatic metadiscourse to study communication and create a conversation between communication traditions, Cooren (2014) has responded to ongoing debates about the nature of communication as a field (Craig, 1999; Russill, 2007). In doing this, Cooren has taken on a difficult task to which almost no scholars have responded (Craig, 2007). However, Cooren's response highlights specific aspects of each communication tradition so they align with the ontological and epistemological commitments of ventriloquism, resulting in a more unified than dialogic metamodel (Craig, 2015). This metamodel contrasts with Craig's (1999) understanding that communication traditions should be connected by dialogue about the nature of communication, rather than epistemological unity.

In this note, I extend Craig's (2015) critique to address practical problems of methodology as an indication of the impossibility of epistemological or ontological coherence across the

field of communication. My primary concern with Cooren's proposal of a pragmatic understanding of ventriloquism as communication metadiscourse is how to reconcile the variety of epistemologies and resulting methodologies that exist within communication scholarship. Although Cooren admits some of these difficulties, I question how effective ventriloquism might be for uniting communication theory as a field when it is tied to a tradition that has been fairly rigid in its scope and acceptable methodologies.

Ventriloquism, CCO, and methodology

Ventriloquism (as way of understanding communication) originated in the Montréal School of the Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO). The Montréal School is one approach to the thesis that communication constitutes organizations (Brummans et al., 2014). The Montréal School has specific epistemological and resulting methodological commitments that make ventriloquism a surprising choice as a metadiscourse that can create dialogue between all traditions of communication. Scholarship in this tradition understands organizations as the product of text (the words and phrases from which speech is built) and conversation (the shared interaction through language of the people who compose an organization) (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). To do this, Montréal School scholars use conversation analysis (CA) to examine how organizations are actually made present in actual interactions (e.g., Cooren, Brummans, & Charrieras, 2008; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004; Vásquez & Cooren, 2013). Ontologically, Montréal School CCO is committed to interaction as the basis of organizing. Epistemologically, this results in an understanding that knowledge about organizations and organizing comes primarily from studying interactions (although in some cases, organizations can be studied from the top down, starting with the organization as a whole) (Brummans et al., 2014). CCO takes seriously that words do things (Austin, 1962) and as a result, the study of organizational communication needs to look at the words themselves and what they do (Taylor & Van Every, 2000), resulting in CA as CCO's method of choice.

In proposing ventriloquism as a way to create dialogue between the seven traditions then, these origins and commitments are not far away. Although Cooren (2014) presented ventriloquism as a broader theory than elsewhere, particularly by expanding it beyond organizational contexts (e.g., Cooren, 2010), it remains a theory with specific commitments about knowledge, and therefore methods. Cooren (2012, 2014) has acknowledged this problem of methodology to a certain extent when it comes to the fifth of the traditions he discusses following Craig (1999), sociopsychology, a tradition with vastly different understandings of method from ventriloquism. Cooren deals with the issue by having sociopsychology focus on "what *seems* to *matter* to its representatives in terms of communicative constitutiveness" (Cooren, 2012, p. 9). Cooren then tries to reconcile ventriloquism and sociopsychology by reframing causes and effects as issues of animation and agency, recognizing that "a plethora of agencies can be recognized as active in a given conversation, whether through a specific attitude that expresses itself at some point or through an emotion that appears to animate the discussion" (Cooren, 2012, p. 10).

However, such a reinterpretation of sociopsychology seems unlikely to be adopted by scholars in this tradition, particularly for experimental researchers who work with the explicit goal of isolating variables to explain and predict communication phenomena. By choosing the epistemological and ontological aspects of each tradition that best fit into the

ventriloquial metamodel (Craig, 2015), Cooren has overlooked some of the practical implications for scholarship of such an approach. Although the sociopsychological tradition *can* be made to align with ventriloquism, when one turns to methods as a reflection of a tradition's epistemological commitments, it becomes more difficult to see each tradition aligning with Cooren's understanding of ventriloquism as a metadiscourse. It is unlikely that sociopsychological scholars will conduct experiments or surveys to identify agencies in a given interaction.

Beyond sociopsychology (the tradition that likely has the clearest methodological-epistemological differences from ventriloquism and its CCO home), other traditions have similar conflicts. Rhetoric, for instance, does have a strong concern for language. However, rhetorical analysis also takes the art, strategy, and emotion of communication into account. Not all rhetoricians take the rather instrumental approach to language that CA requires and this difference is reflected in rhetorical methods. Similarly, the critical tradition recognizes that no language is value-free. Studying communication is never a matter of simply looking at how certain agents are made present in language because the language itself has already been imbued with power, something that critical methodologies take into account.

This lack of possibility for multiple epistemologies and methodologies within Cooren's approach is problematic following Craig's (1999) model. Craig (1999) proposed two conditions for a dialogue between fields. The first in particular requires more openness than ventriloquism provides. Craig (1999) wrote that a constitutive model of communication is a metamodel, or a space that allows different theoretical traditions to interact and "pictures models of communication as different ways of constituting the communication process symbolically for particular purposes" (p. 127). A metamodel then cannot have assumptions or restrictions built into it, if it is to provide an open space of coexistence. As I have described, ventriloquism does not seem to meet this criterion. Although Cooren (2014) has shown what a ventriloquial view of pragmatism can highlight in each tradition, it does not truly open dialogue between the traditions.

Towards methodological diversity for ventriloquism

The difficulty of solving this problem is that there can never be a neutral metamodel (Craig, 2007; 2015). Any metadiscourse or metamodel will always bring certain commitments to the discussion. However, given the "paradox of pluralism," the very nature of a metamodel means that it acknowledges its position as only one of many possible models of communication (Craig, 2007). The commitments that a metamodel brings should then be the starting point for discussion and dialogue, not a forced ontological-epistemological unity. Although Cooren (2012) has suggested that this coherence is important, it does take away from the dialogical goals of a communication metamodel (Craig, 1999; 2015). And, as I have noted here, it seems difficult to address practical issues like varied methodologies within such a vision of the field

Still, a solution has begun to develop. Despite the seeming lack of epistemological and therefore methodological openness in Cooren's (2012; 2014) metamodel, there is an emerging body of research that has started dialogue across the field from the other direction. Several scholars (not directly affiliated with the Montréal School) doing CCO research with ventriloquism or related concepts, have begun to produce empirical scholarship with

methods other than CA (e.g., Blaschke, Schoeneborn, & Seidl, 2012; Jahn, in press; Koschmann & McDonald, 2015; Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015). Where Cooren (2012; 2014) has reinterpreted each tradition in light of ventriloquism, these scholars have reinterpreted ventriloquism (or related theories) in light of their tradition and its accompanying epistemological and methodological commitments. Koschmann and McDonald (2015), for instance, used interviews and observations to demonstrate how organizational rituals make power present. They justified this approach by arguing that they "do not *demonstrate* communicative constitution, but rather *presuppose* it as a theoretical foundation," thereby using and building upon CCO concepts without analyzing actual communication interactions through a method like CA (p. 251).

Such a response demonstrates the possibilities for dialogue around ventriloquism, but does not seem to align with either the ventriloquial metamodel as Cooren (2012; 2014) has proposed it or practical enactment of ventriloquism and related CCO theories. As a scholar using CCO and ventriloquism as guiding theories, but methods other than CA, I can speak to the challenges of the review process and the number of times I have had reviewers take issue with the fact that I used CCO theories with methods other than CA, claiming that showing how organizing takes place through interaction is essential for CCO research. To truly answer Craig's (1999) call, the scholars who have a stake in these theories need to be open to dialogue about other ways of understanding and applying ventriloquism. The above studies demonstrate that this is possible, but it entails understanding ventriloquism not as an absolute theory to unify the field, but as an invitation to dialogue that also allows each tradition to reinterpret ventriloquism.

To conclude, I do acknowledge that ventriloquism (and its pragmatic interpretation) have the potential to create dialogue in the field of communication as demonstrated by recent studies that have re-interpreted ventriloquism and related theories through different methodologies and theories. However, Cooren's (2012; 2014) current deployment of ventriloquism as a metadiscourse tries to force an epistemological-ontological coherence between traditions rather than opening dialogue (Craig, 2015). I suggest that it will be through research beginning in each tradition with different methods using ventriloquism and its interpretation of pragmatism as a constitutive metamodel that dialogue will truly emerge and ventriloquism's epistemological and methodological origins will be decentered.

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Ventriloquism as a matter for discourse analysis

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Abstract. As a discourse analyst, I take François Cooren's compelling reconstruction of communication theory as ventriloquism as a universe in which the world speaks through us and by our speaking of it, as an invitation to new noticings, new conversations, new questions for analysis (of discourse; interaction; communication). In this discussion note, I stage an inter-action between Cooren's *ventriloqual* universe and the concepts of *affect*, *orders of indexicality* and *polycentricity* that animate the work of discourse scholars Rick Iedema and Jan Blommaert. In doing so, I consider how these concepts and the noticings they invite may enhance a ventriloqual view and (perhaps selfishly), how they matter to me as I continue to develop my thinking and doing in discourse studies.

Keywords: ventriloquism, discourse analysis, indexicality, polycentricity

François Cooren's essay is both an invitation and a chance. In his reconstruction of a dialogue among traditions for communication theory, Cooren compels us to take communication seriously, by taking seriously the practices by which speakers materialize (the world in) communication. Cooren's metapragmatic move brings renewed focus to communication as the very matter in question, engaging us in an empirical interrogation of how the ventriloqual oscillations between world and speakers are consequential to both. For if we attend to the ways in which the "world speaks to us, through the way we make it talk and through the way it makes us talk" (Cooren, 2014, p. 11), our speaking indexes a relational ontology (Cooren, 2015) where we both take a position and, reflexively, are positioned. As a result, the mostly undertheorized idea that communication "constitutes" (organizations, reality, social life, and so on) opens up to empirical examination. The dichotomies of micro-macro, subjective-objective, "textual reduction and contextual segregation" (Iedema, 2011, p. 1167) and material-immaterial are pronounced theoretical dead-ends. To follow Cooren's lead is to

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allow ventriloquism to push us toward new noticings, new conversations, new questions for analysis (of discourse; interaction; communication).

In this response, I take up some of these noticings. I explore how Cooren's ideas might connect with current work in discourse studies and offer new analytical opportunities and questions for Communication. To do so, I stage an inter-action between Cooren's *ventriloqual* universe and the concepts of *affect*, *orders of indexicality* and *polycentricity* that animate the work of discourse scholars Rick Iedema and Jan Blommaert. In doing so, I consider how these concepts and the noticings they invite may enhance a ventriloqual view and (perhaps selfishly), how they matter to me as I continue to develop my thinking and doing in discourse studies.

The papers and the invitation

I begin with a small noticing, something that I found odd in the exchange between Kathy and Joseph (Cooren, 2014, p.4). The matter in questions is a moment in lines 5-8, when Joseph shows the stack of papers to Kathy. This showing and speaking is followed by Kathy's (as per my reading) phatic utterance "That's too bad. We'll miss you" on line 8. Cooren's analysis is of course on the mark, both in noting that Joseph makes the stack of papers speak, and that they do not speak for themselves. Indeed, Joseph offers an unsolicited account to speak on the papers' behalf and counter the invitation.

He tells Kathy that the papers (a) require his evaluation (line 6; that is, he is someone whose evaluation counts in a larger scheme of things) and (b) the papers require grades (again, an institutional mandate, and never mind that he might have left this to the last minute), (c) by tomorrow. Yet the curious thing that struck me (and I am not sure if Cooren is "with me" on this) is that the stack of papers on Joseph's desk could have been any papers at all. They could have been on his desk for months, not been students' work, but still act as *evidence* to decline the invitation. Kathy's contribution in line 8 therefore requires a sort of cooperation (if we are to go with Grice) or collusion, in authorizing Joseph's interpretation of the papers as urgent work, and therefore of Joseph himself as someone in a position to speak for work that needs doing *now*, work that Kathy, who may very well have the same work and papers on her desk to evaluate, does not appear to have the same urgency about. She is, in fact, going to dinner.

I also notice how Kathy's initial formulation ("would you like") displays a high degree of negative politeness, indicating that the dinner invitation might not, in fact, be one between friends. This, in addition to the late notice with which Kathy is asking (which alone would make it easy for Joseph to refuse), renders the extra weight afforded by her pronominal choice perhaps more of a matter of obligation than sincerity. In brief, there are curious tensions in the exchange, which suggest to me that there is more at stake than papers in the ways both Joseph and Kathy claim and disclaim which world is allowed to speak. But how to make the case for "something more"? And what might this something be?

Affect

One way to get to *it* might be Iedema's (2011) notion of *affect*. If Cooren speaks of figures, passion, and animation, and in fact takes emotions quite seriously in constructing ventriloquism, he would find an ally in Iedema. Unlike traditional analyses of discourse, affect

takes into account all that cannot be empirically shown, but is "felt" (and therefore a contentious matter for conversation analysts, I dare say). Iedema speaks of "forces—visceral forces...—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 1, in Iedema, 2011, p. 1170). Indeed, Iedema's contention (provocation?) is that affect—emotions that flow across bodies—is a way to counteract the shortcomings of discourse analysis (and, I am certain, my own work so far among it) and its favoring of "analytical routines and frameworks" over "unfolding processes...vitalities, energies and continuities... whose logic underwrites discourse" (p. 1171). In looking to capture what moves us, what acts within us and makes us act, Iedema, much like Cooren, is onto something, though I am still not sure how to make the case for it as of yet, other than to employ a vocabulary of emotion and tentativeness in making analytical claims that something is *there*. Certainly, ventriloquism makes the case of speaking in the name of emotions and how emotions animate our speaking, but it appears to me that affect pushes for more.

As far as Joseph and Kathy go, all we have is a transcript with not much notation (and certainly not the kind of notation that a conversational analyst would find sufficient for data to speak), and yet I do sense the presence of affect, of energy passing through bodies as Joseph, to use a bodily metaphor, *goes out of his way* to mark the (im)propriety of invitation, of Kathy herself offering something only perfunctorily, and of the two of them colluding in the authorization of the papers as work as a way out of something that, perhaps, mattered to neither of them as something that should "come off," but mattered to Joseph quite a bit to (as Iedema would have it) underwrite with energy.

Perhaps, a case for affect can be made for a note that I found on my windshield last summer:

Please
try parking
better
   next time.

THANKS.

In order to leave it, the author was moved to rip an envelope already in her or his possession so as to find a clean writing space, find a pen and a surface to write on (my car?) and yet conceal this emotional labor of the body by inscribing emotional labor in the text's interdiscursive, tensional qualities: "please," "thanks," "try," "better," "next time."

I kept this note because of the many ways it allows us to approach discourse as "movement, change, and action" (Iedema, 2011, p. 1171):[1] affect. In the emotion of the writer seeing my car, the impulse and the sound of tearing paper, the choice to vacate the scene and instead leave the note as a textual agent for me to find, remove from under the wipers, hold, read. And: the writer's implicit mobilization of an absent and silent public that my parking presently and already troubled and could, in the future, inconvenience. All this emotion mobilized in the name of what matters and in order to mobilize shame in the name of defied civic duty, and, at the same time, managing to position the writer as not a shaming individual, but as a reasonable citizen, willing to give me another chance to redress the infraction, to make an effort, to try to park better. Like Joseph, whose urgent stack of papers (whatever papers they may be) indexes his priorities to meet deadlines over Kathy's priorities to join others for dinner, the note writer is also speaking not just to me, but on behalf of a greater matter of concern (Latour, 2004) and for the benefit of a civically minded society. If our affect, our ventriloqual dynamics are about bodies and speaking, they are also very much about imagining our listeners, immediate and beyond. This is something that discourse analysis perhaps does not notice enough, and that ventriloquism definitely moves us closer to considering.

Orders of indexicality and polycentricity

The projected listener is to Bakhtin (1986) a superaddressee, an influential third party to whom we project our speech. The superaddressee is a normative center of appropriate social and cultural practices that supersedes our immediate addressee, allowing us to speak to a more encompassing body or evaluating authority (Blommaert, 2007. Calling this normative center an indexical order, or the dialectic between speaker, speech, and the semiotic universe continuously called into being, Michael Silverstein (2003) reminds us that in a polyphony, voices may be multiple but not equal. Instead, voices are organized, ordered and the indexical order is enmeshed in relations of authority. Going back to Joseph and Kathy, we see that Joseph speaks in academic register: in the name of due dates, evaluation, responsibility to students, academic work, work duties, sacrifice. If we want to go further, we might even say that he indexes, or enregisters, a version of the Protestant ethic that dictates work should come before rewards, or taking breaks. But what is Kathy's center? There is an "us," suggesting conviviality, community, the importance of sharing meals. The speech act of her invitation indexes the very cultural importance of the invitation ritual—declining—insistence (in the name of good manners)—acceptance—phatic regrets.[2] But what Joseph is indexing (or staging), from his position behind the desk of a faculty office, moves the evaluative center in his favor, devaluing Kathy's invitation as speech indexing values of a lesser order.

Making worlds speak

Finally, I leave my badly parked car and the ill-fated invitation behind for a different setting altogether. I take Cooren's brilliant insight to heart and examine "how the world

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[1] Notice the similarity in Cooren's wording "predispositions—attitudes, beliefs, traits, concerns, interests, passions, emotions, feelings—that… can be heard and felt in what [people] say or do (2014, p. 13).

[2] See Fitch (1991) for a great paper on this subject matter.

literally and figuratively speaks to us, through the way we make it talk and through the way it makes us talk (p. 11, italics in original)". I employ two extracts from a session of family therapy between therapist Linda Brown (T), a mother (M) and a father (F) to discuss sixteen year old Mike's (C) depression (Bartesaghi, 2005). It might help the reader to know that the goal of family therapy (and this is a general goal, though the adaptations of family therapy through the years are many) is to (re)frame or re-contextualize the problem or diagnosis of an identified patient, in this case, Mike, as part of a family dynamic.

Excerpt 1[3]

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 1  T: How do you see your depression, how do you make sense of it, what do you think
 2     it's about?
              (.5)
 3  C: Sometimes I don't know (.) it just hits me.
 4  T: Yeah, but if you think about it now, do you think it's about anything, I mean, if
 5     you try and make sense of it? I know when you're in the moment, sometimes it
 6     seems as if you're just standing there, the tide was low and all of a sudden this
 7     wave rushes over you though I'm wondering if [now you
 8  C:                                             [I don't know=
 9  T: = It's still a wave. How about some other times when it doesn't just rush over
10     you?
11  C: What, when I know it's coming?
12  T: Yeah, can you figure it out (.) I mean do you have any idea of what it's about
13     then?
14  C: If I'm thinking about something then I know it's because of that.
15  T: Uh huh.
16  C: It's just sometimes certain things I think about and then I know it's coming but
17     most of the time it just hits me and I don't know what hit me.
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If the world speaks to us, this exchange invites us to consider that we make it talk in several ways, and each way indexes or mobilizes an entirely different order for the world to materialize. Extending Silverstein's (2003) notion of orders of indexicality, Blommaert speaks of polycentricity, (2007) or the existence of a superdiverse semiotic habitat that allows us to speak in many voices, registers, adopting several identities projected to various evaluative centers. In this exchange between Mike and the therapist there are two versions of depression, each speaking for and within a different world, a different center, and a different version of what makes us clients, therapists, people listening to (or making sense, thinking, see lines 1–2) the world. The therapist's uptake of Mike "it just hits me" (line 3) shows that she is conversant in both, for therapy (as a discourse) is multilingual,[4] and allows for code-switching. In this case, Brown is partial to one. On the one hand, depression is a matter of functioning; on the other, it is a natural phenomenon. In Brown's version (lines 1, 5, 6, depression is something that Mike can "figure out," separate from and "see" and therefore

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[3] I transcribe here at a minimum level of detail:

Underline	emphasis on a word
=	utterances are latched, meaning there is no audible pause between different speakers' contributions
[	overlapping speech, a speaker's turn overlaps that of the previous speaker
(.)	an audible pause, like taking a breath
(.1), (.2)	pauses timed in fractions of a second

[4] The history of therapy, from Freud on, allows for therapists to speak to various centers, and with ease. They may speak of natural forces, mechanisms, systems, communication, brains, and chemical pathways, all in the same breath.

"make sense of." In short, explain.) But Mike prefers (and notice his frustration on line 8) to speak for depression as a different kind of figure, toward a different center (lines 2 and 10): depression is a wave. It is an unstoppable, it is the sea, it is nature taking Mike with a force that he cannot predict. Both worlds could co-exist and speak. They are in fact, two possible metapragmatic orderings or centers in a polycentric universe of matters. The therapist can orient to depression as low tide and "rushing over" Mike (lines 6–7), but, for her to speak in therapeutic register, this orientation must be relegated to a "seeming," for the world she is asking to speak and matter through Mike is a rational world. A world that speaks of etiology, family structure, where depression is the outcome, and has a cause. Mike's answer in 14 merits attention: "If I'm thinking about something then I know it's because of that." Logically unpacked, this produces the prima facie tautology:

(1)   I think this because I am depressed

(2)   I am depressed because I think this

Whereby the relationship between (1) and (2) is one of endpoint/starting point or cause/outcome circularity, that is, depression is measured by thoughts of depression. There are no more worlds for therapy to speak, maybe too many centers for Brown to secure a footing, so she moves to include the parents' voices for another possible world in the extract below.

Excerpt 2

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18 T: One of the things that I was thinking about was that even though you and your
19    dad have a very nice relationship, and you have a nice relationship with your
20    mom, and you were able to tell your dad some stuff recently (.1) ((to Mother))
21    what is it that you think got in the way of Mike being able to tell you his secret?
22 M: The secret that he was carrying around (.) what particular secret are you talking
23    about?
24 T: The secret I was referring to was that he was depressed (.2) and I'm wondering
25    if you have any thoughts about why that may be?
26 M: Afraid that maybe he'll let us [down
27 F:                                [Well, I don't even know that he even realized
28    he was depressed to tell you the truth, I think he might have felt down but he
29    didn't realize that =
30 T: =Right, what do you think, Mike, did you know that you were depressed?
31 C: I dunno.
32 T: Yeah, kind of hard to go back, so maybe that's not the important thing.
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Is there a secret in this exchange? And who can speak for it if there is? If depression is Mike's secret (line 24, then depression ventriloquizes a world of psychoanalytic repression, where not telling a secret is the *cause* of depression (and telling the secret may prove to be the key to alleviating depression). If, however, as Brown also suggests as a possibility, depression is *not* telling a secret (line 21), then, as family therapy would have it, depression is the *outcome* of family dynamic. Another option, suggested by mother (line 26), is that Mike's keeping of the secret of depression had something to do with the fear of letting his parents down. While this theory is, in principle, coherent with the model Brown is operating within, what it creates is a world that therapy cannot speak for or into:

(3) fear of telling = a family problem = depression = fear of telling

Where depression is at once language as symptom—that is, a sign of depression—as well as its agent and marker. To add to this polycentric matter, are: the mother's frustration as to what event is, in fact, the "secret" (lines 22–23); the father's use of the everyday register "having felt down" as a way to ironicize, or, literally, un-realize the diagnosis "depression" in line (28) and, Mike's insufficient knowledge of or disaffiliation with the therapist's speaking in the name of depression as knowable (lines 31–32). Since following the path of a patient's ignorance of his own depression may not be an available narrative for this session, Brown finds herself unable to speak for the world that is at stake. The only way to proceed is out (line 32).

What to make of this conversation and possible worlds of depression that it materializes? For the sake of the argument, let us assume there are two options. The first, is that, as psychiatry would have it, inner world language is referential. That is, it need not be spoken for. It simply mirrors, in the sense criticized by Rorty a world already there. In this case, the problem becomes selecting between competing worlds that speak in an indexical order, where depression speaks through us as:

natural phenomenon (wave)	vs.	operating system (that can be figured out)
secret	vs.	act of keeping a secret
knowing when one is depressed	vs.	not knowing when one is depressed
a cause	vs. a process	vs. an endpoint

The second option necessitates a ventriloqual view, for it is a matter of who can speak in the name of depression as a human condition, or an array of feelings, a process of life events, and, finally, a diagnosis. That is, it asks us to consider how depression is a figure authorized in a relational ontology of the therapeutic. In the exchange between Brown and the family, this means appreciating how the therapist's line of questioning and conversational (re)directions support the logic of insight (i.e. "figuring out"), and hermeneutics of hiddenness coherent with therapeutic actions. The account of depression—or the very affect and figures mobilized by the term itself—does not belong to a world that speaks to the therapy client or psychiatric patient. It is not a world that moves him, a world that hears him and can speak back, and that he can authorize and speak for. The way for the client to feel and act *as a depressed person* will require a shift to the therapeutic center, to therapeutic affect, to speaking for and in the name of therapy.

A note about noticings

(And by no means a final note – for as always an utterance calls for a response.)

In considering how a ventriloqual analysis asks us (me) to consider the ways in which communication materializes worlds by signifying them into being, Cooren's vision is invaluable to discourse studies. In this note, I also suggested that Cooren's brilliant ideas

might be engaged in an interesting dialogue with other current work of interdisciplinary scholars such as Iedema and Blommaert. My own analysis questions the ability of speakers to make the world that matters to them talk; that is, it may also be important to ask if what matters to communicators who are asymmetrically ordered in their speaking is sufficient to become what matters to (or materializes in) the world that speaks.[5]

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Ventriloquism and accountability

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Abstract. François Cooren's ventriloquist pragmatism aims to do justice to the richness and complexity of communication and is informed by a wide range of communication theories. While I share Cooren's pragmatist intuitions, I am less certain about his ventriloquist pragmatism (or pragmatist ventriloquism). I therefore ask, first, what we gain from the ventriloquism metaphor; and, second, how pragmatism serves as a meta-perspective and how ventriloquism facilitates a dialogue *between* the seven traditions of communication theory he identifies. Finally, I consider a Habermasian theory of communicative action as a possibly preferable alternative.

Keywords: ventriloquism, communicative action, intersubjectivity, accountability

François Cooren's (2014) insightful conception of communication aims to do justice to communication's richness and complexity and is informed by a wide range of communication theories. Cooren shows great sensitivity to the plethora of considerations interlocutors need to take into account: They draw on their environments and their particular situations and contexts in communicating with one another; they not only express their own intentions when they speak, but sometimes also speak for others; at the same time, their intentions (as well as their beliefs and desires) are shaped by their individual as well as collective and socio-cultural histories and experiences; they are accountable for the claims they make in speaking and draw on these histories, environments, and situations to make good on their claims. The meaning of what interlocutors say is thus not solely up to them, but shaped by their relations to the world. It is not easy to combine all of these elements in a unified and coherent theory, and I agree with Cooren that pragmatism provides the right kind of theoretical framework. I

am much less certain, however, that the kind of ventriloquist pragmatism (or pragmatist ventriloquism) Cooren proposes is required. In what follows, I raise two questions and conclude by briefly adumbrating an alternative to ventriloquism: First, what do we gain from the ventriloquism metaphor? Second, why is pragmatism the preferred stance for a meta-perspective and how does Cooren's pragmatism facilitate a dialogue *between* the seven traditions of communication theory that he identifies? And finally, might a Habermasian theory of communicative action present a better alternative to ventriloquism?

1. The ventriloquism metaphor

The basic idea of ventriloquism is that a speaker makes other figures speak and is made to speak by them. By ventriloquism, Cooren means "that people who communicate are implicitly or explicitly mobilizing figures—the name ventriloquists sometimes use to speak about their dummies—that are *made to say* things when interactions take place" (pp. 1–2). A figure is very broadly construed and may include "anything or anyone that we *speak for*" from other people to inanimate objects, concepts, or ideologies (p. 2). But ventriloquism is not a one-way street. Cooren holds that "the world … figuratively and literally talks to us … because we make it speak to us, and also because it makes us speak" (p. 2). That is, we ventriloquize figures, but are also ventriloquized by them (p. 6).

It is not entirely clear, however, what is gained by this broad-brush linguistification and whether the "analytical payoff" of ventriloquism is worth the price. Ventriloquism, Cooren acknowledges, is a metaphor (p. 9). Setting aside the worry that treating everything involved in discourse as a figure or being (p. 4) may lead to undue reification, what are the advantages of the metaphor, of the view that *everything* speaks or can speak? Why opt for ventriloqual pragmatism as opposed to pragmatism *tout court*? What drawbacks might there be? Might the metaphor be stretched too far?

Referring to the example of a conversation between Kathy and Joseph, in which Joseph declines Kathy's dinner invitation, Cooren writes that Joseph "*invokes* the amount of work he has" and "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… By inviting Kathy to look at what is on his desk, Joseph hopes that the situation will *speak for itself*" (p. 5). But in what way does Joseph make the workload *literally* say anything? Is saying that the situation speaks for itself not simply another metaphor? After all, if it *did* speak for itself, it would not need to be ventriloquized. Why is it not sufficient—and more accurate—merely to say that Joseph cites his workload *as a reason* to decline? (This would fit with Cooren's references to Garfinkel and accountability, to which I will return.) I take no issue with the insight that we both draw on and are animated by a wide range of factors that we may call figures in our speech, that we are, in Cooren's terms, both "actors" and "passers". But I don't see why this needs to be cast in terms of interlocutors both ventriloquizing and being ventriloquized by such figures, making them say things and being made to say things by them (p. 6). Moreover, to claim that Joseph and Kathy "are both depicted as *ventriloquizing* these figures and as *ventriloquized* by them" (p. 6) is to equivocate between two quite different kinds of relationship and agency. We can distinguish between speaking for someone or something and making her or it say something. When I speak or sign a form for or on behalf of my child, for example, it is because legally, he *cannot* speak for himself. He cannot be held legally

responsible or accountable; I am accountable on his behalf. Because the accountability rests with me, however, it's not clear whether I make my child say anything, much less whether he makes me speak. Joseph's workload cannot be held responsible for, say, keeping Joseph from the dinner either. Unlike my son, who can offer plenty of justifications or rationalizations for what he says and does outside the legal context, Joseph's workload cannot justify itself. For it cannot (literally) speak. The sense in which the workload makes Joseph speak and the sense in which he makes it speak, in other words, are quite different.

A ventriloquist's dummy also cannot literally speak. Even whether the ventriloquist *literally* makes the dummy say things, however, is open to debate.[1] Arguably, she instead *makes it appear as if* the dummy is speaking. This context of pretense and illusion complicates the question of what it makes sense to say is *literally* the case. In contrast, when Joseph invokes his workload or points at his stack of papers, he is not thereby *making* these things *say* anything nor making it appear as if they speak. In fact, to say that Joseph is making it appear as if the workload is keeping him from joining Kathy is to attribute an altogether different intention to him. Unfortunately, Cooren addresses neither the fact that the ventriloquist creates an illusion nor the possible implications of using a metaphor of illusion to conceptualise communication. Yet these seem to point to important limitations of the metaphor.

A similar issue arises in Cooren's reading of pragmatism and semiotics. He writes, "The world, according to a pragmatist position, is ... not mute, silent, or voiceless. It is a world that *tells us things,* by either confirming or contradicting what we believe is the case" (p. 9). Referring to James and Mead, he rightly emphasizes that "the world acts on us as much as we act on it" and that we in turn respond to the situations in which we find ourselves (p. 9). Because semiotics attributes to signs the capacity to do things (to represent, to indicate, to evoke, or to tell), it, too, "helps us see that the world that surrounds us is not mute or voiceless" (p. 11). Undeniably the world has many kinds of effects on us. Yet why conceive of the agency of the world and of signs as a form of speaking? Speaking and telling imply intentionality: When I speak, I intend to communicate with my interlocutor(s), to reach a mutual understanding with them, or to have an effect on my audience. Surely, we would be mistaken to attribute intentionality[2] in this sense to a pile of papers, signs, or the world in general. I am neither defending an intentionalist theory of meaning à la Grice (i.e. one that analyzes meaning in terms of speaker intentions), nor am I denying that there are a plethora of different factors that move us to speak or that we invoke in speaking. We may not even be (fully) aware of all of them. But in communication, interlocutors have a distinct status, which ventriloquism seems to undermine by putting interlocutors on a par with everything else as figures. The linguistification of the agency of signs and of the world thus obscures the different ways in which different constituents of our world may affect us (causally, inferentially, emotionally, etc.). Joseph's workload functions as a *reason* for him to decline Kathy's invitation; Kathy herself is not a *reason* but an *interlocutor* who can be engaged in dialogue and can provide reasons for what she says. Ventriloquism thus downplays the

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[1] Austin's (1962) distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts may be of some help here.

[2] One might argue that even *agency* implies intentionality. Consider the distinction between action (i.e. intentional) and (mere) behavior.

intersubjectivity of communication and assimilates non-intentional causes or reasons to intentional agents. This becomes particularly clear if we consider the notion of accountability. Joseph, as an intentional agent, is accountable for his actions. Suppose, for example, that the pile of papers on his desk is not a stack of papers he has to grade, but old papers he is taking out for recycling. The papers are surely not accountable for his declining Kathy's invitation by prevarication, but he no doubt is. On the one hand, Cooren recognizes the multitude of ways we are affected, but, on the other, he elides them by saying that everything and anything can be a figure that speaks. Here the ventriloquism metaphor appears to be stretched beyond its limits and makes relationships that are quite different from each other look the same.

2. Metaperspective

Cooren understands ventriloquism as a form of pragmatism that offers a way of mediating among other traditions of studying communication, namely, rhetoric, semiotics, phenomenology, cybernetics, sociopsychology, sociocultural theory, and critical theory (p. 1). Pragmatism offers this metaperspective because it is able to address their various key concerns or points of emphasis (what he calls their "design specs"). In this regard, Cooren's is a comprehensive and systematic project. Yet "[t]he 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" (p. 15). I am sympathetic to Cooren's thesis, but would have liked to see a more explicit argument for why pragmatism—rather than any of the other theories—is in this privileged position.

There is noteworthy overlap and continuity between the design specs of the various traditions as Cooren characterizes them. Rhetoric, for instance, is concerned with the constitutive nature of communication (p. 10); phenomenology examines how interlocutors co-construct situations (p. 12). Cybernetics focuses on how systems (re)produce themselves (p. 12), and sociocultural theory on how social order is (re)produced (p. 14). Semiotics as well as phenomenology are described as committed to the view that the world is not silent or mute but intelligible and accountable (pp. 16, 18). Although Cooren at times seems to want to reduce the design specs of each tradition to a single point, his own discussion shows that the different traditions have rich design specs and more often than not pay attention to manifold aspects of communication. Furthermore, different thinkers within a given tradition are likely to have different points of emphasis or, for that matter, may draw on other traditions. Now, if the design specs of both semiotics and phenomenology, for instance, include that the world is not silent, but speaks (Table 1, p. 16), why do they need pragmatism to mediate or to foster dialogue between them? Even if the point is that pragmatism shares concerns not only with one or two traditions but with *all* of them, can it facilitate a dialogue between perspectives that do not already share concerns?

Cooren presents at least two instances in which dialogue with pragmatism makes it possible to address difficulties and defuse tensions arising *within* one of the traditions. First, the design specs of rhetoric emphasize the constitutive as well as situational nature of discourse and communication (p. 17). The ventriloqual pragmatist perspective allows Cooren

to mediate between rhetoricians who view constitution as a subjective process and those who view it as an objective one because pragmatism recognizes—in ways in which neither of these camps does—that while speakers may define and thus constitute situations by what they say, they are also responding to the demands of situations (p. 17). Second, cybernetics emphasizes the autopoeisis, the independent self-generation, of systems. To the extent that systems (re)produce themselves and have their own logic, they are autonomous. But this makes it difficult to see any room for individual agency. Pragmatism, Cooren points out, recognizes not only that agents are part of self-organizing systems, but that these systems must be enacted by participants and, to that extent, are *also* heteronomous. Systems are thus characterized by "hetero-autonomy" or "auto-heteronomy" (p. 20). In both cases, pragmatism thus overcomes a dichotomy that leads to a theoretical impasse within a tradition. Are there examples where this happens *between* traditions?

Finally, if the perspectives cannot be reconciled, what does it mean to say that pragmatism is a metaperspective? Does Cooren understand pragmatism to be a unified perspective? Is its advantage over other traditions its non-foundationalist and anti-reductionist pluralism, allowing it not to privilege some design specs over others? If it is not a unified theory, how does ventriloqual pragmatism address its internal pluralism and any inconsistencies that may come with it?

3. Critical Pragmatism without ventriloquism

The focus on pragmatism and the inclusion of critical theory as one of the seven perspectives brings to mind the critical theorist Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action and formal pragmatics, which may serve as a foil to ventriloquism. Habermas draws on phenomenology, sociocultural theory, pragmatism (Peirce, Dewey, Mead), hermeneutics, systems theory, and, of course, critical theory, aiming to integrate them into a unified theory of society, often by using one of the traditions to address shortcomings in another, though not claiming that his critical social theory constitutes a metaperspective *per se*. In "Toward a Critique of the Theory of Meaning", for example, he argues that intentionalist semantics, formal semantics, and use-theories of meaning all prioritize on one aspect of communication (speaker intentions, truth conditions, and contexts of interaction respectively) to the exclusion of the others, but that his formal pragmatics can capture them all (Habermas 1998). This seems to be just what Cooren requires of a metaperspective.[3] Yet the theory of communicative action avoids ventriloquism's sweeping linguistification and thus the difficulties noted above. Instead, it differentiates among a variety of relationships between speakers and the world and, most importantly, emphasizes the intersubjective nature of communication.

Habermas distinguishes between communicative action, oriented toward reaching understanding, and strategic action, oriented toward success (i.e. actors aiming to realize their individual goals). Language can be used strategically as well as communicatively, but Habermas insists that the communicative use is primary and that strategic or other (e.g. fictional) uses are parasitic on it. Although some have challenged the distinction as

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[3] There are other passages suggesting that Habermas thinks of critical theory as a metaperspective in Cooren's sense (if I understand Cooren correctly) (e.g. Habermas 1987, 375). For a more pluralist conception of critical theory, see Bohman (2001).

problematic, it is important in juxtaposition with Cooren because it emphasizes the intersubjectivity and dialogical nature of communication in a way that ventriloquism does not.

In communicative language use, speakers aim to reach mutual understanding with one another about the world by implicitly or explicitly raising three types of validity claims: claims to truth, normative rightness, and sincerity (Habermas 1998; Fultner 2011). Thus interlocutors can represent the world, establish interpersonal relationships with one another, and express their subjective, internal states. To understand an utterance is to know its conditions of acceptability, to know the kinds of reasons that could be marshaled to justify it, that is, to be able to make good on the validity claims that are raised. When we communicate, we not only make claims, but we also take on the warrant to make good on them. That is, we are *accountable* for what we say. This is part of what makes communication an inherently *intersubjective* practice. Claims to truth can be made good on with reference to the objective world of objects and facts; claims to normative rightness with reference to the social (or intersubjective) world of norms and values; claims to sincerity, refer to the subjective world of beliefs, desires, and other mental states and are redeemed not discursively but through one's actions. Cooren mentions Garfinkel's (1967) notion of accountability and connects it with intelligibility (pp. 7, 18), but for Habermas, this connection is central. Redeeming claims, I submit, is an explicit form of what Cooren calls "mobilizing figures", but without raising the intentionality issues mentioned above. When John refers to his stack of papers to be graded, he is making good on his previous claim that he cannot join Kathy by referring to a state of affairs in the objective world. What John does not explicitly thematize is a norm belonging to the social world, namely, his obligation to do his work. This norm remains in the "background" of the lifeworld against which utterances are intelligible.[4] We might say that in any given speech situation, some figures, to use Cooren's (2014) term, remain in the background yet nonetheless contribute to the intelligibility of what is said and stand ready, as it were, to be mobilized. That is, they contribute to making an utterance intelligible and, though not thematized, are thematizable; they may be drawn upon if the situation requires it. In short, the theory of communicative action foregrounds the intersubjectivity of communication; and, by differentiating between different kinds of validity claims, formal pragmatics differentiates between different *kinds* of reasons interlocutors may offer (moral, ethics, personal, factual, etc.), and hence different ways in which they are affected and effect change themselves. The Habermasian account I have adumbrated no doubt requires further unpacking and modification, as formal pragmatics has not been immune to criticism. Nonetheless, it offers a non-ventriloquist and, I suggest, more variegated account of communication.[5]

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[4] For discussion of Habermas' conception of the lifeworld as a background of intelligibility as well as its relationship to the objective, social, and subjective worlds, see Fultner (2001).

[5] Thanks to Jonathan Maskit and an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments.

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Pragmatism as ventriloquism: A reply to comments

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Abstract. In this article, I reply to each of the discussion notes written in response to one of my essays, titled "Pragmatism as ventriloquism: Creating a dialogue among seven traditions in the study of communication," which was published in the second volume of *Language Under Discussion*. In this reply to Ronald Arnett's, John Barnden's, Mariaelena Bartesaghi's, Barbara Fultner's, Chris Russil's, and Elizabeth Wilhoit's notes, I point out that ventriloquism is not only about intersubjectivity, but also about interobjectivity, that is a matter of making the world say things about itself. I also point out that the ventriloquial thesis is a relational thesis that defends the possibility to move toward a form of objectivity and truth.

Keywords: ventriloquism, pragmatism, relational thesis, metaphors, methodology

> "Facts are ventriloquist's dummies. Sitting on a wise man's knee they may be made to utter words of wisdom; elsewhere, they say nothing, or talk nonsense, or indulge in sheer diabolism"
>
> Aldous Huxley, *Time must have a stop*,
> Chatto & Windus, 1945, p. 301

Ventriloquism is about making one speak (*faire parler*, as we say in French), a factitive[1] expression that conveys not only what leads us to say what we say, but also what beings are made to say things when we talk, write, or more generally, communicate. In this chain of

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[1] The adjective "factitive" is used to qualify grammatical constructions that refer to a form of "causing to do." Typical factitive constructions are "I made him do it" or "She made me think of this book that I had read two years ago." For more details, see Greimas and Courtés (1982) as well as Lyons (1977).

agency (Castor and Cooren, 2006; Cooren, 2010; Cooren et al., 2006) with no absolute beginning and end, human beings can thus metaphorically be identified or positioned as ventriloquists and ventriloquized. Ventriloquist because humans make things say or do things (as when one invokes a protocol that is supposed to remind one's interlocutor about what has to be done). Ventriloquized because humans are made to say or do things by various things (facts, emotions, words they pronounce, various sources of attachment, etc., as when what one person is saying makes him or her come across as overcritical while it was not necessarily this person's intention to be so). The equivocal character of the word "thing" is purposefully mobilized here to highlight the multiplicity and varieties of elements and beings that people can ventriloquize or that can ventriloquize them when they communicate.

It will come as no surprise that I consider the discussion this article takes part in as a form of ventriloquism. Ronald Arnett (2014), John Barnden (2014), Mariaelena Bartesaghi (2014), Barbara Fultner (2014), Chris Russill (2014), and Elizabeth Wilhoit (2014) have done me the honor of writing notes in response to my focus article (Cooren 2014), notes for which I thank them wholeheartedly. In their remarks and critiques, they often made me say things that I acknowledge as indeed saying, while, in other parts, I did not always recognize myself (but that might be my bad faith speaking right now, who knows…). Whether we agree or not about what I actually said (or what my focus article actually said), we also sometimes disagree about the validity of some of my positions, that is, the degree to which these positions faithfully ventriloquize or express the way communication and language are supposed to work in general. It is precisely in this ventriloquial game that we find the essence of a discussion, debate or conversation. In the case of this discussion, it is indeed not enough to make each other say things; we must also agree that these things were indeed said and that they help us understand language and communication.

In what follows, I propose to reply to each note, by following the alphabetic order of their authors. It is my hope that these authors will at least recognize themselves in my responses. For the rest, I can only wish that our disagreements and agreements generate further discussions and dialogues, hoping that our understanding of language and communication comes out stronger from them. Echoing Huxley's aphorism, I sincerely believe we are all wise ventriloquists in this conversation (no nonsense, no indulgence and especially, no diabolism).

Ronald Arnett

In his beautiful note titled "Ventriloquism as communicative music," Ronald Arnett (2014) asks, at one point, "At what stage in your life do you look in a mirror and see a mother or father who is now you? At what stage do you see yourself articulating a position only to hear your own voice?" (p. 43). To address these two questions, which illustrate, for him, what he calls "the profundity and simple elegance of ventriloquism" (p. 43), he recounts an anecdote where his then young son asked him one day, "Will you always be my friend?" To this surprising question, he heard himself answering what follows:

> Absolutely—until any moment in your life when I must give up your friendship to be your dad and to do what is necessary and helpful for you. At that moment, I am not your friend. I am forever your dad. I am responsible for you. I cannot promise as a dad that I will always be

right, but I can promise as a dad that I will always give you the best I have to offer and, if possible, a little more. (p. 43)

While meditating on the origin of his response, he then realized that he was, in fact, speaking his own father's words, that is, ventriloquizing what the latter had himself told him when he was a child. As he points out, "I was speaking the words of my father, and now those words emerged from me for my son" (Arnett, 2014, p. 44).

This is indeed a nice case of ventriloquism and for many reasons. First, we note the vacillation/oscillation, which is typical of this phenomenon: Speaking his father's words means that Arnett made him speak, even if he did not explicitly stage his dad in what he said to his son. In other words, some form of ventriloquism remains more implicit, while others can, on the contrary, be quite overt. For instance, he could have said, "As my father used to say, …," which would have staged his father in this ventriloquial act. But speaking the words of his father also means—and this is something that Arnett also realizes retrospectively—that his father, to some extent, made him say what he said to his son.

What does it mean? Simply that Arnett was not only the ventriloquist in this episode, but also, to some extent, his father's puppet, figure, or mouthpiece. It is only after the fact that he realized he had spoken his father's words, which means that he was not conscious of what or who was being channeled when he was speaking to his son. Of course, the father did not mean to make him say what he said, but his words were apparently memorable or remarkable enough to produce this effect. As we also see in this compelling illustration, the phenomenon of ventriloquism is not necessarily the result of intentional acts. Arnett's father did not intend him to say what he said to his son and Arnett himself did not mean to repeat his father's words when he spoke to his child. However, this is still what apparently happened.

What is crucial in this analysis is to avoid the trap of reductionism. Arnett is not only his father's puppet or mouthpiece, he is also the ventriloquist, that is, he is reacting to a specific situation he is confronted with: that is, responding to his son, hopefully meaningfully. It is therefore possible to acknowledge that we are, *to some extent*, dummies, without reducing us to this identity. We are ventriloquists, too, that is, when we speak, it is also *our* voice that we hear, as Arnett elegantly points out.

John Barnden

In his discussion note titled "Questioning ventriloquism," John Barnden (2014) adopts a more critical posture vis-à-vis ventriloquism as a metaphor for communication. His first worry concerns the illustration I use in the focus article, which I will reproduce here for the sake of clarity:

```
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
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Commenting on his interpretation of my analysis of this interaction, Barnden (2014) then writes,

> [I]n viewing Joseph's reference to his marking workload as ventriloquism, we are to imagine a metaphorical source scenario in which Joseph is a ventriloquist, the workload is the ventriloquist's dummy, and the ventriloquist is making it look as though the dummy is telling Joseph to decline the invitation. In this scenario, Kathy is, I take it, a member of the audience watching the stage performance. Now, at first sight we may seem to have metaphorically captured, in an appealing and vivid way, Joseph's communication to Kathy. To unpack the intended metaphor a little, I presume that we are to consider it to be analysed in something like the following way. The influence of the workload on Joseph is metaphorically cast as the spoken command uttered by the dummy. But, at the same time, the fact that the influence is not really created by the workload itself, but is rather a product of Joseph's own attitude to the workload, is metaphorically cast as Joseph *causing* the dummy to speak: the dummy is not speaking through its own independent agency. And Joseph is causing the dummy to speak because he wishes the audience to hear what it "says". That is, in the target scenario, Joseph wishes to draw attention to the influence of the workload through his communicative action (p. 36)

Note here how Barnden's reconstruction of my analysis just consists of positioning Joseph as the ventriloquist, while the original analysis in the focus article did not operate such a reduction. Joseph is indeed both the ventriloquist and the dummy in this episode. Why the ventriloquist? Because he tells Kathy, in line 5, "Just look what's on my desk" to show her a stack of papers, which could typically look like papers to be graded. If we think a minute about the reason why Joseph is doing that, I think we would be hard pressed not to acknowledge that he intends the presence of this stack of papers to *tell* Kathy something, that is, that he has a lot of work. But because of the vacillation/oscillation I highlighted previously, Joseph can also be seen, to some extent, as the dummy. Why the dummy? Because it is apparently these papers he has to grade that *lead him to say* what he is saying to Kathy. This is alluded to by Barnden (2014) when he writes, "and the ventriloquist is making it look as though the dummy is telling Joseph to decline the invitation" (p. 36). However, note that this is not exactly what I am saying here (and this is not what I was saying in the focus article either). Joseph is not really making it look as though this stack of papers is telling him to decline the invitation. He is showing this stack of papers *to* Kathy, which means that she is the one who is supposed to realize what this stack of papers is supposed to tell her about the situation.

Another aspect of Barnden's (2014) analysis can also be considered problematic when he writes. "The influence of the workload on Joseph is metaphorically cast as the spoken command uttered by the dummy. But, at the same time, the influence is not really created by the workload itself, but is rather a product of Joseph's own attitude to the workload" (p. 36). Note here how this way of seeing the situation amounts to ignoring the difference the workload is making in this situation. For Barnden, the workload does not really lead Joseph to say what he is saying; it is, in fact, Joseph's *attitude* that Barnden presents as only making a difference. My point is not to deny that this attitude indeed makes a difference, but to highlight that you need *both* this attitude and the workload in order to understand what is happening (for more on attitudes, see Van Vuuren and Cooren, 2010). Having an attitude in

this case precisely consists of considering that this workload *matters* and that it should be dealt with before thinking of going out. *If it matters, it means, by definition, that it has some bearing on the situation that is at stake.*

This point is absolutely crucial as it is precisely what pragmatism and semiotics invite us to realize: We do not live in a world where *only* our attitudes matter and make a difference. *We live in a world to which we also react and respond.* So when Barnden writes that, "the dummy is not speaking through its own independent agency" (Barnden, 2014, p. 34), I actually beg to differ. The workload speaks to the extent that it manages to tell both Kathy and Joseph that this invitation should be declined (and I will presently explain what I mean here by "speaking" and "telling"). If Barnden then retorts that this act depends on Kathy's and Joseph's understanding, I completely agree with him, but this is precisely the essence of ventriloquism: *understanding the situation is about what this situation tells us*, a claim that conveys the very spirit of a pragmatist/semiotic/relational position.

But, of course, we have to agree about what speaking and telling mean here. Barnden (2014) writes in this regard:

> The problem is that we are in danger of sliding over a crucial distinction here in the notion of speaking (between genuinely speaking and merely uttering speech sounds), and missing the actual point of a ventriloquism stage performance. The ventriloquist does not cause the dummy to *speak* but only *causes it to merely appear to speak*, in such a way that the audience knows very well that the dummy is not actually speaking (i.e., the dummy is not a sentient being forming utterances through its own cognitive powers, and is not even a sentient forming utterances because of being forced to do so by the ventriloquist). In other words, the ventriloquist deliberately causes a *transparent pretence* or *transparent fiction* that the dummy is speaking: the ventriloquist is just pretending that the dummy is speaking, the audience realizes that he/she is pretending, and the ventriloquist wants them to realize this. (p. 36)

In response to this critique, I would first point out that the metaphor of ventriloquism has, *like all metaphors*, its own limitations. I used it from 2007 because I thought that it would help readers quickly visualize the phenomenon of *making one speak*, but it is clear that Joseph is not *throwing his voice*, as the ventriloquists like to say, to make the stack of papers *explicitly* say that he is too busy to join his friends for dinner. I therefore find this critique unfair, as I never claimed that this interaction could be completely identified with a situation where, say, Joseph would hold this stack of paper on his lap and make it utter something (who, in fact, could be seriously thinking that this is the thesis I am trying to defend?).

However, I also disagree with Barnden (2014) when he points out at the end of this quote that "the ventriloquist deliberately causes a *transparent pretence* or *transparent fiction* that the dummy is speaking: the ventriloquist is just pretending that the dummy is speaking, the audience realizes that he/she is pretending, and the ventriloquist wants them to realize this" (p. 36). Although I, of course, agree that the metaphor of ventriloquism has its own limitations (limitations that I just explained), I would not go as far as saying that the dummy is not really speaking, saying or telling anything. It is *speaking, saying or telling* something to the extent that both Kathy and Joseph can *interpret what it means*. Interpreting anything—a painting, a text, what someone says, a situation—consists, by definition, in making it say something. By "say," I do not mean, of course, that the painting, text or situation starts to utter words in and

by itself, I mean that it *can be identified as an active participant in a communicative act*. In other words, it *makes a difference* in a way similar to a stop sign that indicates where drivers or bikers should stop at an intersection. Saying or telling something amounts to acknowledging the intelligibility/comprehensibility/understandability of what we are confronted with, which is a position that, as pointed out in the focus article, essentially comes from semiotics and phenomenology.

I thought I would not have to defend the limitations of the ventriloquial metaphor (which should be obvious, I think, to anyone), but it is essential for me to highlight this intelligibility by which the world manages to metaphorically *speak to us*, that is, *tells us things about itself*. When Barnden (2014) writes a little later,

> When the dummy appears to command the ventriloquist to do something, there is in fact, and crucially, no such command (the command is only inside the pretence/fiction), there is therefore no causing of the dummy to genuinely utter any command, and the audience knows all this. Thus, ventriloquist-making-dummy-speak is neither something that actually happens in the performance outside the fiction (because in reality the ventriloquist is merely making the dummy appear to speak) *nor* something that happens within the fiction created in the performance (because no-one is making the dummy do anything at all, within that fiction; all we have within the fiction is two people talking to each other). (pp. 36–37)

To imply that the expression "what the situation commands" should be understood as fiction is, I think, inaccurate, as we are not speaking of a fictional world here (even if I, of course, acknowledge that I did invent this case for the sake of the demonstration, a piece of information that is mentioned in the focus article). We are speaking of Joseph *showing* Kathy the stack of papers and *saying*, "Just look what's on my desk." *For Joseph*, this situation apparently commands or dictates that he decline Kathy's invitation. The "for Joseph" is here crucial, as it shows the *relational* character of this act of ventriloquism. It is *also* because Joseph has certain attitudes vis-à-vis work—a certain work ethics, some would maybe say (Bartesaghi (2014) even identifies this rectitude as a version of what Max Weber would have called a protestant ethics)—that the presence of this stack of papers *enjoins* him to decline this invitation. With someone else, this stack of papers might not have mattered or counted as much (or might have even not counted at all), which means that the situation would have been completely different. It also means that *the presence of this stack of papers would have told nothing to this person or at least it would have told something else*.

My understanding of Barnden's (2014) position (and I realize that I might be putting words in his mouth at this point) is that he wants to be able to identify an absolute source to explain what is happening in this situation, a position that contradicts the relational/pragmatist stance I defend with the metaphor of ventriloquism. This appears quite clear when he writes,

> So, if we really were to try, as supposed above, to view the marking workload as having an influence on Joseph (though with Joseph himself being the cause of that influence) as the dummy commanding Joseph to do something (though with Joseph himself causing that command) we must fail. In the metaphorical source scenario there is no command or causing-to-command to work with. There is only a command within the fiction that is created by the

ventriloquist (this creation being part of the metaphorical source scenario), and there is no causing-to-command at any level. (p. 37)

As we see, for Barnden (2014), it is always Joseph who is the absolute source of the influence and never the workload that he is showing to Kathy (he writes elsewhere that "it is Joseph himself who somehow causes the influence the workload has on him" (p. 37)). This is precisely this human-centered vision of communication that the ventriloquial thesis tries to fight against. As pointed out before, it is not enough to acknowledge attitudes or what interactants do. We also have to acknowledge not only *what* these attitudes are about, but also to what extent this *what* matters in the situation, i.e., does something.

Mariaelena Bartesaghi

In her discussion note, titled "Ventriloquism as a matter for discourse analysis," Mariaelena Bartesaghi (2014) adopts a constructive view on the ventriloquial thesis by creating the conditions of a dialogue with current work in discourse studies, especially in connection with Rick Iedema's work on affect and Jan Blommaert's concepts on orders of indexicality and polycentricity. Starting with Iedema, she notes that, "ventriloquism makes the case of speaking in the name of emotions and how emotions animate our speaking, but it appears to me that affect pushes for more" (p. 52). Affects are, as she points out, "emotions that flow across bodies" (p. 52), emotions that can only be felt, which make their identification difficult to conversation analysts.

To illustrate her point, Bartesaghi (2014) uses the example of a note that she found once on her car windshield. The note read, "Please try parking better next time. THANKS." Commenting on this note, she then writes,

> I kept this note because of the many ways it allows us to approach discourse as "movement, change, and action" (Iedema, 2011, p. 1171): affect. In the emotion of the writer seeing my car, the impulse and the sound of tearing paper, the choice to vacate the scene and instead leave the note as a textual agent for me to find, remove from under the wipers, hold, read. And: the writer's implicit mobilization of an absent and silent public that my parking presently and already troubled and could, in the future, inconvenience. All this emotion mobilized in the name of what matters and in order to mobilize shame in the name of defied civic duty, and, at the same time, managing to position the writer as not a shaming individual, but as a reasonable citizen, willing to give me another chance to redress the infraction, to make an effort, to try to park better. Like Joseph, whose urgent stack of papers (whatever papers they may be) indexes his priorities to meet deadlines over Kathy's priorities to join others for dinner, the note writer is also speaking not just to me, but on behalf of a greater matter of concern (Latour, 2004) and for the benefit of a civically minded society. If our affect, our ventriloqual dynamics are about bodies and speaking, they are also very much about imagining our listeners, immediate and beyond. This is something that discourse analysis perhaps does not notice enough, and that ventriloquism definitely moves us closer to considering. (p. 53)

This anecdote is indeed revealing because it invites us to imagine or reconstruct what led the person to write what she wrote. As Bartesaghi points out, taking the time and energy to tear a piece of paper, find a pen, write a note, and put it on the car's windshield, which is

what the author of this note obviously did in this case, shows that this person was moved, driven or animated by something strong enough to produce such an effect on him or her.

But what is this "something"? Probably—but we will, of course, never know for sure—some form of frustration/irritation/annoyance/anger at the way Bartesaghi parked her car, which is the affect Bartesaghi and Iedema refer to. But where do these emotions come from? First we could note that emotions or affects can only be triggered because specific things *matter* to people. In this case, we can imagine that parking spaces matter to this person and that she cannot stand people who, according to her or him, park badly and consequently encroach upon other people's parking spots. As we see, the idea of parking badly means that for this person, there is a *right way* to park, which is the norm/standard/rule he or she seems *attached* to. This is, as Barnden might point out, his or her general *attitude* vis-à-vis parking.

By transgressing this norm, standard or rule, Bartesaghi thus unintentionally brought this person's wrath down onto her (even if this wrath was politely conveyed, as she rightfully noticed). For the author of the note, this situation—Bartesaghi's alleged bad parking—is presumably intolerable/unacceptable and dictates/commands an intervention, which takes the form of the writing of a note placed on a windshield. This person's attitude certainly makes a difference in this affect—in other words, this is *also* what ventriloquizes itself in this note—but it would be a mistake (in a not-that-implicit response to Barnden) not to take into account another element of the situation in the equation, that is, the way Bartesaghi's car was parked, a way that was, for this person, unacceptable enough to trigger this course of action.

Again, we find here the essence of the ventriloquial/pragmatist/relational approach I defend in the focus article: people respond/react to what (they consider that) situations require/command/indicate/require and this is why affects/emotions/motivations have indeed to be taken into account in our analyses.

Bartesaghi (2014) also establishes a nice parallel between ventriloquism and Blommaert's (2007) notions of polycentricity and orders of indexicality. As she insightfully notes, "the note writer is also speaking not just to me, but on behalf of a greater matter of concern ... and for the benefit of a civically minded society" (p. 53). In other words, other things appear to matter to this person, which means that these things implicitly materialize themselves in this note through different voices—duty, rectitude, correctness, or civility—which can also be *felt* and *recognized* in the content of the note. Whether she is aware of it or not, the author of this message also implicitly claims to speak in the name of what is just or acceptable, which means that we could go as far as saying that it is even society itself that also allegedly speaks through this note. In other words, Bartesaghi could interpret—and this is explicitly mentioned in her comments—this note as demonstrating what members of the society she is involved in think of her parking in general. There is therefore polycentricity because of the multiplicity of the addressees/interlocutors, but also because of the multiplicity of the addressers/authors, a form of polyphony that ventriloquism also helps us understand.

This is what Bartesaghi nicely illustrates in the family therapy excerpts she analyzes later. Analyzing a conversation from a ventriloquial perspective amounts to highlighting how various elements of the world we live in manage or not to express themselves through a given interaction. For a teenager suffering from depression, it is, for instance, how this depression manages to express itself in a dialogue with, say, a therapist, when he says that

the depression *hits him like a wave.* For a family therapist, it is, as Bartesaghi shows, what kind of family dynamic might express itself *through* this depression. Can these two worlds— the world where depressions are waves and the world where depressions are products of family dynamic—speak to each other? Apparently not that easily, at least in the case Bartesaghi analyzes.

As she points out,

> The account of depression—or the very affect and figures mobilized by the term itself—does not belong to a world that speaks to the therapy client or psychiatric patient. It is not a world that moves him, a world that hears him and can speak back, and that he can authorize and speak for. The way for the client to feel and act *as a depressed person* will require a shift to the therapeutic center, to therapeutic affect, to speaking for and in the name of therapy.

In other words, we see how the metaphor of ventriloquism invites us to take seriously— or at least pay attention or listen to—the various worlds that express themselves in any discussion or exchange. There is no cut that separates these worlds from the world of conversation as all these worlds communicate with each other. Being a therapist thus also amounts to welcoming the world that her patient expresses, a world that might not fit with what matters to this therapist, but that could matter to him.

Barbara Fultner

In her discussion note titled "Ventriloquism and accountability," Barbara Fultner (2014) critically investigates the ventriloquial metaphor by questioning the way I analyze the interaction between Kathy and Joseph. As she writes:

> Referring to the example of a conversation between Kathy and Joseph, in which Joseph declines Kathy's dinner invitation, Cooren writes that Joseph "*invokes* the amount of work he has" and "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… By inviting Kathy to look at what is on his desk, Joseph hopes that the situation will *speak for itself*" ([Cooren, 2014,] p. 5). But in what way does Joseph make the workload *literally* say anything? Is saying that the situation speaks for itself not simply another metaphor? After all, if it *did* speak for itself, it would not need to be ventriloquized. Why is it not sufficient—and more accurate— merely to say that Joseph cites his workload *as a reason* to decline? (Fultner, 2014, p. 59)

As I tried to show in the focus article, ventriloquizing consists of making various figures speak, figures that, by oscillation/vacillation can also be said to make us say things. When I said that Joseph hoped that the situation would speak for itself, I alluded to the way we often proceed when we *show* something to someone in an interaction. In order to illustrate my point, just imagine another situation: The doorbell rings. I open the front door and see my friend, Daniel, on the porch. He tells me, "So what happened?" to which I reply, "It's a real disaster. Look at that!", showing him what happened to our house. Daniel then responds, "Wow, that's a big mess indeed!" Saying, "Look at that" here consists of showing Daniel something that is supposed, in my opinion, to *speak for itself* (the fact, for instance, that we had a flood in our house). Interestingly—and it is, I think, the beauty of ventriloquism—this

self-effacement is, of course, partial on my part, as I am also obviously *making* this situation speak for itself (precisely by saying, "Look at that!").

So when Fultner writes, "After all, if it *did* speak for itself, it would not need to be ventriloquized," I beg to differ. Human beings are actually quite good at *making figures speak for themselves.* In other words, speaking for itself *always* is, by definition, an act of ventriloquism. It is not only the person who said, "Look at that" who makes the situation speak (for itself), but it is, of course, also the interlocutor—Daniel—who participates in this phenomenon by *acknowledging the obviousness of what this situation indeed tells of itself.* In other words, speaking for itself means here that *this situation does not need any explanation or comment on my part*: there was a flood and our house is a big mess. The same logic applies in the Kathy-Joseph interaction as Joseph hopes that showing a stack of papers on his desk will not require any additional comment or explanation on his part: He obviously has a lot of work, judging by the pile of papers lying on his desk.

When Fultner then writes, "Why is it not sufficient—and more accurate—merely to say that Joseph cites his workload *as a reason* to decline?" I would respond that I have no problem speaking in terms of reasons (and I actually use this terminology in the focus article; see also Cooren, 2010). However, I think that *just* speaking in terms of reasons is precisely the kind of reduction that the ventriloquial thesis is fighting against. A reason is, by definition, always a way to make something speak *for* or *to* something else. The workload is indeed a reason that Joseph invokes to decline Kathy's invitation, but *invoking a reason precisely amounts to invoking a figure that is supposed to say something about the situation.* In this case, this workload he is talking about and showing to Kathy is supposed to *tell* her that indeed his declining her invitation is understandable/acceptable.

In other words, *reasons always are figures that we invoke, figures that are supposed to say the same thing we are saying.* So why shouldn't we just speak in terms of reasons? Precisely because insisting on using these terms exclusively participates in the bifurcation/cut/ separation that the ventriloquial thesis calls into question. Just speaking in terms of reasons is reassuring as it allows us to quietly reproduce the Cartesian divide between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, something that pragmatism helps us reject (see Peirce, 1877). *Reasons are one of the ways by which figures speak to and through us.*

A little later, Fultner (2014) then writes,

> Moreover, to claim that Joseph and Kathy "are both depicted as *ventriloquizing* these figures and as *ventriloquized* by them" ([Cooren, 2014,] p. 6) is to equivocate between two quite different kinds of relationship and agency. We can distinguish between speaking for someone or something and making her or it say something. When I speak or sign a form for or on behalf of my child, for example, it is because legally, he *cannot* speak for himself. He cannot be held legally responsible or accountable; I am accountable on his behalf. Because the accountability rests with me, however, it's not clear whether I make my child say anything, much less whether he makes me speak. Joseph's workload cannot be held responsible for, say, keeping Joseph from the dinner either. Unlike my son, who can offer plenty of justifications or rationalizations for what he says and does outside the legal context, Joseph's workload cannot justify itself. For it cannot (literally) speak. The sense in which the workload makes Joseph speak and the sense in which he makes it speak, in other words, are quite different. (pp. 59-60)

This detour through legal issues is interesting and it is something I have also worked on (Cooren, 2015b), given the key role *making one speak* plays when judges, lawyers and prosecutors make articles of the law, precedents and facts say things (see also Baynahm, 1996; Pang 2005; Pascual, 2014; Pascual et al., 2013; Sullivan 2006, 2009, 2016). Fultner says that when she speaks or signs a form *for* or *on behalf of* her child, it is because he cannot legally speak for himself. I, of course, totally agree with that claim (and note incidentally that this can happen precisely because there is a law that says so and that people can ventriloquize it). However, when she then says, "it's not clear whether I make my child say anything, much less whether he makes me speak," I would then retort that speaking or signing *on his behalf* or *for him* precisely means that he is participating in this act (otherwise, I don't know what "for" or "on behalf" means anymore).

For instance, let's say that Barbara Fultner is signing a passport application on her son's behalf. What does it mean to do that? It means that she can indeed be held accountable for what is declared in this application and not her son. No problem at all. But I think that everybody would agree that *it is her son's application, not hers.* In other words, signing a passport application on her son's behalf consists of making him declare things about himself, with the caveat that indeed he cannot be held responsible for these declarations about himself. Furthermore, her son can be said to make her say things to the extent that he is the one who needs a passport. She cares for him, which means that she has his interest in mind. To have his interest in mind precisely means that what leads her to do what she is doing— filling in and signing this application—also are *his* interests. In this sense, her son can be said to be not only the figure—the one who is made to say things—but also the ventriloquist—the one who indirectly makes her say and do things (through his interests, as recognized and translated by Fultner). This vacillation/oscillation is crucial, otherwise we remain in a divided world where the figures that are made to say things have no bearing on what is happening in the conversation or action.

When Fultner writes that, "Joseph's workload cannot be held responsible for, say, keeping Joseph from the dinner," she seems to equate action with responsibility, something that the example she just gave helps to deconstruct. For me, responsibility is not automatically/ systematically/inevitably related to ventriloquism, precisely because acting is not automatically/systematically/inevitably related to responsibility. When a two-year-old breaks a vase, he is definitely doing something, but he cannot (normally) be held legally responsible for what he did. The same logic applies to workload: it *shows* that Joseph is indeed busy, but it cannot be held responsible for keeping Joseph from joining his friends for dinner. Taking responsibility, as I show in another article (Cooren, 2016), should be understood as a *decision*, an *action*, which means that Joseph should, of course, be held responsible for his decision. Ventriloquism, as I also show elsewhere (Cooren, 2010), is precisely a way to better understand this crucial aspect of responsibility, as it shows that it is a matter of decision that it always consists of *making ours* what others might have also done, a logic of *exappropriation* that Jacques Derrida (1994) had perfectly understood.

Fultner (2014) then writes,

> Undeniably the world has many kinds of effects on us. Yet why conceive of the agency of the
> world and of signs as a form of speaking? Speaking and telling imply intentionality: When I

speak, I intend to communicate with my interlocutor(s), to reach a mutual understanding with them, or to have an effect on my audience. Surely, we would be mistaken to attribute intentionality in this sense to a pile of papers, signs, or the world in general. I am neither defending an intentionalist theory of meaning à la Grice (i.e. one that analyzes meaning in terms of speaker intentions), nor am I denying that there are a plethora of different factors that move us to speak or that we invoke in speaking. We may not even be (fully) aware of all of them. But in communication, interlocutors have a distinct status, which ventriloquism seems to undermine by putting interlocutors on a par with everything else as figures. The linguistification of the agency of signs and of the world thus obscures the different ways in which different constituents of our world may affect us (causally, inferentially, emotionally, etc.). (p. 60)

It would probably take me too much space here to fully respond to Fultner, but let me try to briefly address some of the points she is making. First about intentionality. She writes that "speaking and telling imply intentionality. When I speak, I intend to communicate with my interlocutor(s), to reach a mutual understanding with them, or to have an effect on my audience" (Fultner, 2014, p. 60). For sure, speaking often implies a form of intentionality: If I am asking for the salt, it is usually because I want to get the salt. No problem with that. But why should we be forced to reduce telling something to an intentional act? For instance, when someone blushes, does not it *tell* his interlocutors something about a form of embarrassment that this person is experiencing? Of course, telling here does not mean producing articulated sounds, but it means communicating something, which is what this person is doing unintentionally.[2]

No need to linguistify anything, as I never claimed that the verbs "telling" or "saying" had to be understood linguistically. It is actually Fultner and Barnden who keep invoking this reduction to call the ventriloquial view into question. Using the words "telling," "speaking" or "saying something" does not obscure "the different ways in which different constituents of our world may affect us (causally, inferentially, emotionally, etc.)" (Fultner, 2014, p. 60). On the contrary, it highlights the ventriloquial aspect of our relationship to the world in general, marking not only its intelligibility/comprehensibility, but also its agency, i.e., the fact that it makes a difference.

When Fultner (2014) writes:

Joseph's workload functions as a *reason* for him to decline Kathy's invitation; Kathy herself is not a *reason* but an *interlocutor* who can be engaged in dialogue and can provide reasons for what she says. Ventriloquism thus downplays the intersubjectivity of communication and assimilates non-intentional causes or reasons to intentional agents. (pp. 60-61)

I cannot but respond that even human agents are not always intentional agents when they communicate (the case of blushing is, I think, rather clear). Where did I deny Kathy the status of interlocutor? I am still looking for the answer in my focus article. At no point does

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[2] In any case, even when one utters words, these words may be telling something that the person did not intend to convey. For instance, I could congratulate a colleague on having worked in the same institution for thirty years to then realize that he understood what I said as being ironical and even insulting. For him, staying thirty years in the same institution was actually a mark of failure, as it proved that he had not been marketable enough to other institutions (for more examples, see Cooren, 2010).

the ventriloquial metaphor deny the intersubjective/dialogical nature of communication and at no point does it deny to human beings any form of intentionality (see Cooren, 2010).

This is why I do not understand why Habermas's view on dialogue and communication should be considered more powerful than the ventriloquial thesis. Habermas's world is a mute world, a world where only people speak to each other, trying to "reach mutual understanding with one another about the world by implicitly or explicitly raising three types of validity claims: claims to truth, normative rightness, and sincerity" (Fultner, 2016, p. 63). In the world I live in, interactants might indeed be doing just that, but then (1) claims to truth should be reinterpreted as claims that facts express themselves when one speaks, (2) claims to normative rightness as claims that fairness, justice or legality speaks when one speaks, and (3) claims to sincerity as claims that one's beliefs/attitudes/opinions express themselves when one speaks. In other words, the ventriloquial thesis allows reinterpreting Habermas's theory while truly acknowledging its pragmatist roots, something that Habermas neglects to do. To further elaborate on this latter point, let us now consider the discussion note by Chris Russill.

Chris Russill

In his discussion note titled "Planetary pragmatism? A response to François Cooren," Chris Russill (2014) precisely explores these pragmatist roots by showing to what extent the ventriloquial thesis aligns with pragmatism. As he rightfully notes, two philosophical traditions can be identified when we speak about this intellectual movement: classical pragmatism, which has historically focused on scientific inquiry and experience (Peirce, James, Dewey) and what Russill calls the "revival of pragmatism," which, from the 1980s, essentially focused on language use and communication. Russill accurately notes that my work, as well as Craig's, is an attempt to "bridge the classical pragmatist emphasis on inquiry with the brilliant forays into communication theory facilitated by Bernstein, Habermas, Rorty, Carey and others" (p. 28).

By reminding us that William James's (1890) Principles of Psychology "connected mind to the *exigencies* of practical life" (Russill, 2014, p. 28, my italics), Russill precisely highlights the relational ontology that was implicitly defended by pragmatism from its outset. Charles Sanders Peirce's (1877) article titled "The Fixation of Belief" famously showed that our beliefs, opinions, or attitudes are constantly evaluated in the light of their practical consequences. This means that any inquiry should be understood as an attempt to fix beliefs and appease doubt when surprising facts occur. As a fallibilist, Peirce believed—and he was, of course, right to do so—that our habits, attitudes and beliefs can be questioned when what we believe is the case is *contradicted*, *disproven* or *refuted* by our experiences.

Both pragmatism and semiotics—two intellectual movements initiated by Peirce himself—thus invite us to acknowledge that the world is not a passive receptacle of our actions, but that it strikes or kicks back, so to speak, telling us things about itself (in this regard, see also Barad, 2005, an author Russill (2014) mentions in his note, who explicitly defends a relational ontology). Russill is therefore right when he notes that representatives of the revival of pragmatism—mainly Richard Rorty and Jürgen Habermas—unfortunately lost this key connection with the world by positioning language as a "distinctly human affair, whether it was a collection of mutable vocabularies creatively adjusted by culture-bound people (Rorty) or a biological inheritance that locked in during hominization (Habermas)" (p. 29). For Rorty

and Habermas, there is therefore a "priority of hermeneutic and interpretive activity" (p. 29), which we also (regrettably) find in *pragmatics*, a linguistic movement traditionally associated with questions of language use and communication (see Levinson, 1983; Huang, 2015). It can also be found, I would say, in Barnden's and Fultner's discussion notes.

Although I agree that John Dewey's notion of situation sometimes tends to look too "broad and unstrained" as Russill points out, I interpret this broadness and unstrainedness as a way to highlight the eventful dimension of *any* situation. In other words, the term "situation" should, to some extent, be understood the same way as linguists, sociologists and anthropologists conceive of contexts, *except that contexts and situations should be assumed as materializing themselves in our dialogues and conversations.* Bertrand Russell (1939) was therefore right when he famously noted that Dewey's notion of situation seems to encompass nothing "less than the whole universe" (Russell, 1939, p. 147). However, while Bertrand Russell meant that as a critique, we should, on the contrary, reinterpret this extensiveness as a *positive* feature of situations. Anything or anyone can indeed potentially invite itself/himself/herself in an interaction, whether we are talking of emotions, facts, collectives, persons, texts, ideologies, principles, predispositions, etc. What we have to do as analysts is precisely spot, discern or detect all the beings that manage to express/ventriloquize/materialize themselves when interactions take place. It should therefore come as no surprise that situations are potentially indeterminate, since their identification is precisely dependent on their eventfulness or haecceity.

On another note, Chris Russill also highlights three concerns that scholars might have vis-à-vis the cross-tradition dialogue that the ventriloquial thesis, following Craig (1999), is trying to stimulate. First, he points out that "pragmatism, a philosophy best known for its practical orientation, inspires a fiendishly abstract discussion, as a debate over different models of meta-theoretical debate is far removed from the initial abstractions of a first-order theory" (Russill, 2014, p. 32). Second, he mentions that scholars might accuse the ventriloquial version of this dialogue of "stacking the deck" to the advantage of its own theses, which indeed is the case. Third, he notes that "it isn't clear why figuring the world in agentive terms is especially pressing for communication scholars, especially given that their authority and relevance tends to rest on elucidating the more immediate societal implications of communication" (p. 32).

To these concerns that Russill himself does not find especially serious, I would respond as follows. Regarding the first concern, it goes without saying that this dialogue is indeed abstract and that this could be considered a paradox, given the practical implications pragmatism claims to have in the "real world." However, I would then note that the ventriloquial thesis has, over the years, been empirically illustrated through several analyses, something that, unfortunately, cannot always be said of my fellow pragmatists' work. What I mean is that the ventriloquial approach to communication is not only a theory about how communication works, it is also a way to *analyze* communication, especially naturally occurring interactions (but not only that, I insist). So if I acknowledged that there is indeed a form of abstractness in the dialogue that Robert T. Craig initiated, I would contend that the positions I defend are all empirically illustrated by numerous fieldwork-based studies. These studies were completed, for instance, in various missions led by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) throughout the world (Cooren, 2010, 2015c; Cooren and Bencherki, 2010; Cooren and

Matte, 2010; Cooren and Sandler, 2014; Cooren et al., 2007, 2008, 2013), in the daily routines of a real estate agent in Manhattan (Cooren et al., 2005, 2012; Cooren and Fairhurst, 2009), in the judgment written by a judge from the Superior Court of Quebec (Cooren, 2015b), in the brainstorming sessions and discourse of a group of people involved in a creativity process (Cooren, 2015a; Martine et al., 2016), or even in the positioning of the infamous Nazi Adolf Eichmann in his 1961 trial in Jerusalem (Cooren, 2010, 2016).

Regarding the accusation of stacking the deck (the second concern ventriloquized by Russill), I, of course, recognize that this cross-tradition dialogue is reconstructed to the advantage of my own positions, as I strongly believe that the ventriloquial thesis allows us to address *what matters* to the seven traditions associated with the communication field. As I also point out in my response to Elizabeth Wilhoit (and to Robert T. Craig himself), I do not believe in a form of blissfully happy ecumenism where all the traditions would be right and where none of their respective tenets could be called into question (in other words, I do not believe in incommensurability, which might sound odd for a pragmatist, but I would contend, not odd at all to a Peircian pragmatist). What I propose is my way to ventriloquize them, which consists in recognizing, for each of them, some merits, while neglecting other aspects that I find problematic. I would encourage other scholars to take Craig's (1999) call seriously and try to engage in this dialogue, something that relatively few of them actually did, unfortunately.

As for the third concern (i.e., why figuring the world in agentive terms is especially pressing for communication scholars?), I would respond the same way Russill does at the end of his beautiful note, i.e., by talking, echoing Latour's (2013) work, about *planetary pragmatism*. In these times of ecological disaster, which now have a name, the *anthropocene*, it might be relevant to theoretically and analytically reconnect our conversations to the world we inhabit and evolve in. In other words, we have to stop to sanctimoniously speak about "social construction of reality" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) as if we were still in the 1960s, both theoretically and empirically (Endreß and Nicolae, 2016). No, we are in the 2010s and if Berger and Luckmann could *look* right with their constructive positions 50 years ago, the illusion cannot hold on anymore today. Human beings are not alone on the construction site!

Elizabeth Wilhoit (and Robert Craig)

With her discussion note titled "Ventriloquism's methodological scope," Elizabeth Wilhoit (2014) ends this deferred dialogue by questioning whether ventriloquism, as a theory tied to a scholarly tradition, can be considered an apt response to Robert T. Craig's (1999) call for a cross-tradition dialogue. Echoing the critique Craig (2015) himself addresses to ventriloquism, she points out "the impossibility of epistemological or ontological coherence across the field of communication" (Wilhoit, 2014, p. 45–46). In other words, she sides with Craig when he notes that

> [A] unified theory of communication is not only unlikely in practice but would be undesirable from a practical standpoint (because it would sacrifice the heuristic potential of diverse communication models offering diverse perspectives on problems), [...] a constitutive metamodel of communication must acknowledge the "reflexive paradox": that no one constitutive model of communication can be exclusively true in principle. Cooren has not responded to those arguments (Craig, 2015, p. 46)

Although I never claimed that the ventriloquial thesis could be considered a unified theory of communication (that would be quite pretentious on my part!), I indeed claim that this thesis was at least trying to maintain "a certain ontological and epistemological *coherence*" (Cooren, 2012, p. 12), something that both Wilhoit and Craig noticed. For me, the condition of a cross-tradition dialogue is that we acknowledge and even respect the various perspectives each tradition represents *while trying to explore if they have anything to say to each other.* In other words, if the exercise just consists of acknowledging our differences, this might be a step in the right direction, but I do not think it is enough (and this is indeed where Wilhoit/Craig's position and mine go their separate ways).

Having things to say to each other means that we try to explore if some compatibilities or passage points can be found between the various traditions, which is precisely what the ventriloquial thesis not only explores but also *claims to create.* Are we condemned to a dialogue of the deaf where we simply recognize that we agree to disagree on what communication consists of? I do not think we should be and I precisely think that the ventriloquial reinterpretation of pragmatism offers the condition of such a constructive dialogue. In response to Craig (2015)—and I presume in response to Wilhoit too—I would then reply that such a dialogue would *not* "sacrifice the heuristic potential of diverse communication models offering diverse perspectives on problems" (Wilhoit, 2014, p. 46).

My intention was never to replace the seven traditions with a unified theory called the ventriloquial thesis (see also Cooren 2012), but to demonstrate, through this thesis, that a dialogue was possible, a dialogue where a certain coherence between traditions can indeed be explored. To give up on this aspect would be like stopping the exploration of a potential coherence between, say, Bohr's quantum mechanics and Einstein's general relativity. If these two main ways to understand physics are really incompatible, it means that one of them is—or both are—wrong or incomplete, which is why they need to enter a dialogue with each other through various experiments or theoretical constructions (as they keep doing up to the present days).

As for the reflexive paradox (that no one constitutive model of communication can be exclusively true in principle), I definitely agree with this position and it is precisely for this reason that I took Craig's call seriously. None of the seven traditions can be exclusively true in principle, since *they each focus on specific aspects of communication that matter to them.* In other words, I believe that what they say, each in its own specific way, can be true about aspects of communication that interests them. However, I also believe—and this is why they, I think, need to be in dialogue with each other—that their compatibility has to be explored. Otherwise this would amount to falling into a bad form of relativism: you have your truth, I have mine, we respect each other, but we have nothing to say to each other.

The ventriloquial thesis has, of course, its own limitations and it does not claim to be a "theory of everything" like the one Pickering (1995) dared to curiously propose. *It is a theory of communication that claims to be true about specific aspects of communication it focuses on. And it is also a theory that appears to respond to some designs specs that each tradition could address to anyone claiming to propose such a theory.*

In her note, Wilhoit (2014) also points out that given the specific epistemological/ methodological commitments ventriloquism represents, it is unlikely that some traditions

recognize themselves in the way I portray them. Speaking of the sociopsychology paradigm, she writes,

> Cooren … tries to reconcile ventriloquism and sociopsychology by reframing causes and effects as issues of animation and agency, recognizing that "a plethora of agencies can be recognized as active in a given conversation, whether through a specific attitude that expresses itself at some point or through an emotion that appears to animate the discussion" (Cooren, 2012, p. 10). However, such a reinterpretation of sociopsychology seems unlikely to be adopted by scholars in this tradition, particularly for experimental researchers who work with the explicit goal of isolating variables to explain and predict communication phenomena. By choosing the epistemological and ontological aspects of each tradition that best fit into the ventriloquial metamodel (Craig, 2015), Cooren has overlooked some of the practical implications for scholarship of such an approach. Although the sociopsychological tradition *can* be made to align with ventriloquism, when one turns to methods as a reflection of a tradition's epistemological commitments, it becomes more difficult to see each tradition aligning with Cooren's understanding of ventriloquism as a metadiscourse. It is unlikely that sociopsychological scholars will conduct experiments or surveys to identify agencies in a given interaction. (pp. 46–47)

Two issues can be mentioned regarding what Wilhoit claims in this passage. First, I would point out that only the future will tell whether this reinterpretation of sociopsychology will be adopted by its representatives, as I clearly see no incompatibility, *in principle*, between the concept of animation and the ones of causality, variables and even statistical prediction. We are all animated/driven/moved by specific predispositions, which can be associated with cultural, personality or even genetic traits. Even if the methodologies mobilized to identify these sources of animation are different (conversation analysis vs. experiments/surveys), I do not see why this difference makes these two theories incompatible. As Wilhoit (2014) herself points out, "the sociopsychological tradition *can* be made to align with ventriloquism" (p. 46) and this is what matters to me at this point.

Second, when Wilhoit writes that, "it is unlikely that sociopsychological scholars will conduct experiments or surveys to identify agencies in a given interaction," I would retort that they are already doing so, although they do not, of course, use the terminology I am mobilizing. As I repeatedly pointed out in my 2010 book on ventriloquism (cf. pp. 67, 173, 186), Milgram's (1974) experiments on obedience are, for instance, absolutely compatible with the ventriloquial thesis I defend and Milgram himself uses a vocabulary—the one of *agentic shift,* for example—that appears attuned with my own positions on agency and animation.

Going beyond the question of compatibility with sociopsychology, Wilhoit (2014) also writes,

> Rhetoric, for instance, does have a strong concern for language. However, rhetorical analysis also takes the art, strategy, and emotion of communication into account. Not all rhetoricians take the rather instrumental approach to language that CA [conversation analysis] requires and this difference is reflected in rhetorical methods. Similarly, the critical tradition recognizes that no language is value-free. Studying communication is never a matter of simply looking at how certain agents are made present in language because the language

itself has already been imbued with power, something that critical methodologies take into account. (p. 47)

While Wilhoit identifies the ventriloquial thesis with conversation analysis, I would point out that these two approaches differ from each other, and precisely with respect to the points Wilhoit is raising to criticize ventriloquism. Although the thesis I defend acknowledges important contributions that ethnomethodology and conversation analysis definitely made to the detailed study of interaction (reflexivity, indexicality, and accountability certainly being some of them), it also departs from these two approaches in the *decentering* of participants it operates. While conversation analysts and ethnomethodologists tend to be exclusively interested in what interactants do and how they do what they do in interaction (see Pomerantz and Fehr, 2011), the ventriloquial approach precisely acknowledges other forms of agency that indirectly participate in the constitution of a given situation.

This is why rhetoric, with its focus on "the art, strategy and emotion of communication" (Wilhoit, 2014, p. 47) does nicely complement what conversation analysis has to offer, precisely because this tradition is not caught in the same *stricture* conversation analysis tends to lock itself into. The ventriloquial thesis acknowledges this contribution by highlighting *everything that tends to make a difference in a given situation*, which includes, of course, the emotions and skills that ventriloquize themselves when people speak to each other (see Cooren, 2010, 2015c for several illustrations). What conversation analysis and ethnomethodology offer to rhetoric, in response, is a form of sensitiveness to interactivity and naturally occurring conversations, something that rhetoric does not tend to develop, unfortunately.

If we turn to critical theory, I would contend that the ventriloquial thesis is, to some extent, compatible with this tradition in that it does acknowledge that "language itself [is] imbued with power" (Wilhoit, 2014, p. 47). Studying how certain agents are *made present* in language is precisely a way to unveil this imbuement. If there is indeed power in language—a position I, of course, completely agree with—it means, by definition, that the sources of this power must be *identifiable* in one way or another (in the form of repertoires, ideologies, registers, Discourses (with a big D), sources of authority, etc.). This is, incidentally, where critical theorists and conversation analysts/ethnomethodologists tend to depart from each other (see the famous debate between Emanuel Schegloff (1997) and Margeret Wetherell (1998)) and this is why ventriloquism is useful in this improbable dialogue between these two traditions.

Ventriloquism listens to critical theorists by acknowledging the differences these repertoires, registers, Discourses, ideologies, and other sources of authority concretely make in communication. However, it departs from these same theorists when this form of agency is associated with an almighty structure that comes from who knows where. In keeping with Latour's (1986) positions, the ventriloquial thesis contends that *power is a matter of association*, that is, that we, as analysts, must be able to detect the other forms of agency—a specific Discourse or ideology, for instance—that ventriloquize/express/materialize themselves when people interact with each other. Power is a matter of association because power is about *making other agents speak* when we speak. This is the essence of ventriloquism and I think this is what makes it compatible with *what matters* to critical theorists.

A little later, Wilhoit (2014) writes,

A metamodel then cannot have assumptions or restrictions built into it, if it is to provide an open space of coexistence. As I have described, ventriloquism does not seem to meet this criterion. Although Cooren (2014) has shown what a ventriloquial view of pragmatism can highlight in each tradition, it does not truly open dialogue between the traditions. (p. 47)

To this, I would respond that assumptions or restrictions should be collectively examined and worked out. A dialogue between traditions is precisely a way to show, for instance, what conversation analysis can learn from rhetoric and what critical theory can learn from conversation analysis. Again, if the reaction is "I respect you, you respect me (which, by the way, often does not even happen!), but we have, in fact, nothing to really say to each other because our respective views are, anyway, incompatible," I think it is unfortunately wrong to embark upon this line of thinking. It is wrong precisely because beyond what matters to each tradition, incompatibilities have to be examined and possibly—yes, I would go as far as saying this—*resolved* (a form of meliorism that certainly echoes John Dewey's and William James's philosophy). Otherwise, this would amount to giving up our commitment to the progression of knowledge in all its forms (humanistic, philosophical, scientific).

A truly open dialogue is precisely a dialogue where we can say to the other parties, "I think you are wrong regarding this question, and here is why," something that Habermas would certainly categorize as an ideal speech situation, except that explaining "why" would, for me, amount to ventriloquizing aspects of communication that would precisely *show* why I might be right and why you might be wrong (see my response to Fultner regarding what reasons consist of from a ventriloquial viewpoint). There must be openness in principle, but this openness must not become a sort of "free for all" where everybody can be right even if their positions contradict each other.

In response to Wilhoit, I am thus in favor of diversity regarding the different ways ventriloquism could be explored, especially at the methodological level. At the end of her note, she highlights how the ventriloquial thesis has been productively reinterpreted and mobilized by scholars such as Jahn (2016), Koschmann and McDonald (2015) or even herself (Wilhoit and Kisselburgh, 2015). I know the quality of this work and there is no doubt in my mind that ventriloquism should not be exclusively explored through the detailed study of interaction (see, for instance, Cooren, 2015b). I definitely side with Wilhoit on this point, which is why I do not understand why she seems to imply that I would be as dogmatic as some conversation analysts, for whom there is no salvation outside the detailed study of interaction. As a scholar who repeatedly tried to reconcile *dissemination* with *dialogue*, as Peters (1999) would say, I think I cannot really be accused of this sin (see, for instance, Cooren, 2009, where I try to create the conditions of an improbable dialogue between Derrida and Garfinkel).

Conclusion (hoping that it will not be one...)

Beyond its intersubjective nature, ventriloquism is also about interobjectivity, as Latour (1996) would put it, that is, it claims that communicating with each other is also a matter of *making the world say things about itself*. In the case of this deferred exchange, this world was the world of language and communication, a world where ventriloquism itself plays, I

contend, a central role. This is, I think, the beauty of this thesis, as it allows speaking about its own claims in ventriloquial terms. In other words, it seems to pass the test of *performative contradiction*, which sometimes plagues various theories, especially the ones that have a relativist/relational tone.

The ventroloquial thesis is a *relational* thesis and the relativity it defends should, as I tried to show, be understood as the condition of its veridiction, i.e., its capacity to tell the truth and express the factuality of our world. Far from siding with the revivalists of pragmatism (Rorty and Habermas, to go quickly), it generally aligns with Karen Barad, Bruno Latour and others whose work continues to show that thinking in terms of relations is not incompatible with the meliorist dream of objectivity and truth. I hope that this dialogue was at least a step in that direction and I want to thank all the respondents for their generous contributions.

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