

VILÉM FLUSSER

Vários: Fundamentos científicos da comunicação.

This book seems to be a joint undertaking by teachers at the University of Fortaleza, Ceará, and the purpose is far more pretentious, although far less disciplined, than the title "Scientific Foundations of Communication" implies. It is far more pretentious in the following sense: its various parts pretend not only to give to the reader a general outlook on the problem of communication, but on practically the whole field of science. It is far less disciplined in the following sense: what the book offers cannot be strictly called a "scientific" approach to the problems of communication, but a rather circumstantial approach to it from various fields of knowledge. The impression is that the book was misnamed. It should be called something like "Communication as seen by teachers of disciplines that are more or less related to it" In consequence, one has the feeling that each contributor to the book is exposing, more or less successfully, his own discipline, and tries to force some relation between it and the problem of communication. Such deliberate attempt to force communication into a context where it does not belong is a far greater shortcoming of the book than the lack of a chapter dedicated to theory of information, admitted in the preface. This will be seen more clearly, if each chapter is considered.

The first chapter, "biological foundations of communication" is in fact an enormously wide and superficial sketch of a cosmogony, and some rather detailed consideration of the biochemistry of the living cell. It has therefore almost nothing to do with its title. Not only is there no mention at all of the biological aspects of communication, (for instance: the effect of TV on vision, the effect of music on audition and so forth), but not even of biology in the common sense of the term, (plant and animal morphology, physiology, behavior and so forth). One cannot escape the feeling that the author does not know what "communication" means, but also, that he is not writing about biology, but about one specific aspect of it which is unrelated to communication in the usual sense of the term. (Unless we should consider his discussion of the genetic code as obliquely related to codes in general, but the author does not help much even in this aspect.) The chapter is interesting for the layman in cell biochemistry, but has no place in a book on communication.

The second chapter, "anthropological foundations of communication", is equally surprising. No discussion of anthropological aspects of communication which the reader would expect is offered. There is no consideration of for instance the anthropological effect of mass media, no media in primitive cultures are discussed, no comparative theory of communication is attempted. Instead, a short sketch of the origin of the human species is given, and an anatomical comparison between man and apes is offered, apparently to show that apes are anatomically incapable of speech. This author, too, does not seem to know what "communication" means.

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The third chapter, "psychological foundations of communication", is the most naive of all. It gives some rather nebulous psychological concepts, and a sort of "recommendations for the good use of communication". The author does not touch the problem of psychological aspects of communication at all, (alienation, conditioning, conscious and subliminal information and so forth), but he does not even suspect that such problems exist. He seems to be completely unaware of the whole problematic of communication, although he seems to have caught some terms in the daily press that have to do with it.

The fourth chapter, "sociological foundations of communication", is by far the best one. One feels sorry for it not have been concluded, (as the author confesses), and for it to have been included in this book, instead of having been published separately. The essay gives a very dense and intelligent outlook on the social structures of communication.

The fifth chapter, "linguistic foundations of communication", is not at all what the title suggests, but a discussion of some aspects of linguistics and theory of literary criticism. It has some interest, as far as this goes, but the fundamental problems, (like linearity, diachronicity of language and so forth), are not mentioned.

The sixth chapter, "philosophical foundations of communication", is not even worth of a résumé, (in my opinion).

The book illustrates clearly the cultural situation of a university in the Brazilian north-east: a place almost entirely "without communication" with the concrete problems in the advanced centers, but with an enthusiastic drive to keep "up to date" with these problems. It is very characteristic that no chapter for the "foundations of communication by theory of communication" is included, and that its lack is not even felt. There can be no better demonstration for the tragedy of underdeveloped alienation.

As it is, the book should not be published in France in my opinion. But the chapter on "sociological foundations of communication" by E. Diatay Bezerra de Menezes merits, I believe, to be included in your series "Collection Medium".