

## The Genealogy of Communication

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The following article asserts the claim that freedom of thought overrides the current meaning of communication as transmission or that which is said. This freedom introduces the concept that genealogy is a strategy of thought able to liberate us from its current meaning and return to the historical significance of the Latin word *communicatio*. The genealogy brings up various communication practices (both archaic and modern) and leads to obfuscation, modification, and consolidation of meaning. These various communication practices are revealed by the study and reflection on the Latin and Indo-European roots *munus* and *mei*, which form the semantic core of the word *communicatio* (*cum* + *munus*). The increase in technology that regulates the realm of human experience in the world is also analyzed as a fact that warns of the danger of instrumental communication and raises the need for genealogical investigation.

*Keywords: communicatio, communication, munus, mei, technology, enframing*

One of the most creative moments in the history of communication theory stems from authors who consider communication beyond its current meaning as a synonym of “media” (newspapers, radio, telephones, television, Internet, etc.). James Carey certainly stands out among them. In a theoretical field dominated by functionalism, from behavioral theory, primarily from that of Leo Marx (as cited by Carey, 2009), denominated as “the rhetoric of technological sublime” (p. 110), Carey’s definition of “communication” as transmission as well as ritual allows for a new generation of researchers to widen their visions about the phenomena, highlighting the peculiarities of communication that conform to the culture of origin. This more ample viewpoint does not repudiate the dominating theories, but rather gives continuity to the idea of communication as neutral, simple, and universal, adding to its complexity and opening it to investigation by other fields such as politics, history, and anthropology.

Two points are to be considered relevant from Carey’s point of view: The first is the development of the thesis by Harold Innis, who held that the expansion and hegemony of the meaning of communication as transmission was caused by the confrontation between two distinct cultural forms: “the space-binding culture,” present in modern day, obsessed with dominating space; and “the time-binding culture” of our ancestors, who possessed sacred ties that bound them to a place they sought to maintain over time (Innis as cited by Carey, 2009, pp. 122–123). For Carey (2009, pp. 121–122), groups that held onto various beliefs, whether religious, political, or spiritual, still shared a common cultural vision. As such, while acting independently, they promoted the expansion of space-binding culture and perfected transmission technology capable of dominating space (by means of communication or media), at the expense of the communication tools of time-binding cultures.

The second point underscores the historical and anthropological perception that led Carey to develop a theory starting from the etymology of the word *comune*. This perception, which stemmed from the work of John Dewey, evidenced the practice of ritual as an important expression of communication, shifting the analysis of media to gestures that affirm cultural identity:

There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common . . . are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge—a common understanding. . . . Consensus demands communication. (Dewey, as cited in Carey, 2009, p. 18)

Although Carey brilliantly clarified the central theme of communication within modern democratic society, dealing with various common interests, I wonder if the concept of communication he proposed (as transmission as well as ritual) maintains the conditions necessary to include the phenomena in its entirety, or if it is limited to its recent historical performance. Even if the idea of communication as ritual may suggest chronological and cultural distancing with regard to current means of communication through sending and receiving messages, I wonder if this difference is based on communication practices or solely on the current technology in use by this culture for communicating—a sort of juxtaposition between “light and portable” and “heavy and durable” means.

The temptation of “the rhetoric of sublime technology” can push us to theorize that communication is the same as the means of communication. To avoid falling into this trap, I propose the present genealogical investigation into the essence of communication and argue its means (from here on described as technology) and its manifestation over time. From my point of view, Carey’s theory of communication as either transmission or ritual leaves out two important aspects: (1) from a biopolitical viewpoint,<sup>1</sup> neither are differentiated by social control; (2) being determined by same historicity, this proposition negates access to previous practices and is essentially different from communication.

The term “biopolitical” is intended to mean the forms that govern to control the rationale of the population, where a certain technology is used to give limitations to space that is transformed into a common space (a territory, a community, an identity, etc.). Characterizing the rise of Protestantism in the 19th century as a communication phenomenon (expansion of space-binding culture), Carey acknowledged its fundamental traces: controlling the space of human beings. Even though we give little importance to the choice of Foucault’s term, biopolitics, to name this phenomenon, it is certainly true that the history of

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of biopolitics comes from the last seminars conducted by Michel Foucault in the late 1970s and was revisited 10 years later by Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito. For Foucault, biopolitics begins in modern times, although neither Agamben nor Esposito agree and indicate previous historical situations to the period indicated by Foucault. My research, however, does not speak of his date of birth, but only makes the observation that in a biopolitical government like those we are in currently, communication has a defined function: control the population through the delimitation of common space.

communication must examine the event that initiated this type of relation between entities, such as the reasons that lead to such change.

On the other hand, I understand that a distinction within the word (communication) is justified if it refers to various practices. These differences, as I wish to explore, such as the constituent ambiguity of the Indo-European *mei*, which is the root of modern words such as "commune," "community," and "communication."

To reduce the concept of communication to the hegemonic interpretation of the Latin word *communis* from its conventional and regular use, Carey not only reifies the historic sense of communication but also leaves aside its etymological roots (*mei*) and therefore its complexity and diversity as well as the tension within the meanings and corresponding social practices.

The following genealogy is an attempt to recover this forgotten dimension of communication. As Heidegger turns toward technology as the basis for revealing its constituent ambiguity, I delve into communication to explain how its original semantic tension developed over the last century, consolidating its predominance in practice and significance (the ideas of contract and control) at the expense of other practices and meanings (exchange and change). The Heideggerian premise leads me to a point that was inaccessible to Carey, because it allows one to think of communication as free relations between human beings, unconditioned by identifying interpretation of the common, and therefore as a presumption or condition to the relation.

### **Freeing Communicative Thought and Seeking Its Essence**

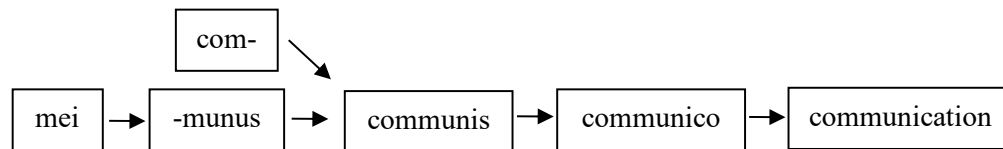
Today, everything functions as if the word "communication" coincided with its instrumental aspect, or is only designed by one kind of human behavior—transmitting information—leaving aside various uses of the word, the sense, and the ancient practices associated with it along with its transformation over time. Nevertheless, in the Heideggerian study of technology, there is the danger of defining human conduct within its limited, immediate experience without considering it within a wider context of the historical forces at play. Such a study is fundamental in its reflection on communication in modern times, not only within the context of the implied danger of this behavior (the loss of the world), but of the necessity of a liberating attitude with relation to the same.

Man is free, said Heidegger (1954/1977), only "insofar as he belongs to the realm of destining and so becomes one who listens and hears [*Hörender*], and not one who is simply constrained to obey [*Höriger*]" (p. 25). Liberating communicative thought signifies paying attention to the destination that pervades current perception, in other words, communication as a synonym to transmission. This relation is free because it liberates communication by "bringing-forth, gathers within itself . . . and rules them throughout" (p. 12), separating it from its simplistic technological definition. Therefore, thought about communication can be elaborated within the space between bringing forth and technology.

On the other hand, accompanying communication is also maintaining the bond with its technological means, a bond that allows one to discover new ways of modern revelation, as evidenced by human "setting in order" and in the way we use ordering to communicate.

This freeing attitude in relation to instrumental thought of communication suggests some problems that must be addressed: etymological distribution of words and their interpretation in different periods, the relationship between etymology and the type of standing reserve humans use to communicate, the historical transformation of these means of “setting in order,” and the dispositives that enter into play for each of these types.

The problems described above seek to observe the transformation of communication from its original potency. In this transformation, communication loses its polysemy and its semantic potential to mean only one thing—transmitting information. Therefore, liberating communicative thought signifies restoring the potency and heterogeneity of this word, as the genealogical method proposes. To the extent that communicative thought frees itself from its current meaning, the opportunity also arises to save communication, that is, to make appearing something genuine of its original potency. Here, we use a Heideggerian definition of saving, “to fetch something home into its essence, in order to bring the essence for the first time into its genuine appearing” (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 28). This contrasts with a more recent conception as “to seize hold of a thing threatened by ruin, in order to secure it in its former continuance” (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 28) so as to encounter the original dimensions where these do not completely coincide with transmissive behavior. This dimension may be found in its Indo-European roots: *mei*, from which the Latin word *munus* originates, along with its derivatives *communico* and *communitas* (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Morphological passage of the word “communication.”**

### **Genealogy and Studies of Its Essence**

The term “genealogy” includes a kind of historical research aimed at deriving origins, or aimed at the knowledge of conditions and circumstances in which something is born and which then becomes developed and modified (Nietzsche, 1887/1992, p. 12). Genealogy does not seek its own origins, but opens itself to the events that consecrate it as the absolute beginning. This beginning, in turn, is thought of not so much as a starting point of history, but effectively as the result of a set of events. For this reason Foucault (1977/1984), while dealing with this topic, prefers the words *Entstehung* (emergence) and *Herkunft* (provenance, ancestry) instead of *Ursprung* (origin).

For genealogy, remaining in the origin is remaining in the means—in the means of forces in a heterogeneous zone of events. In this way, the problem posed by genealogical work is not to reveal history in its unique narrative sense that sews together facts in succession, in a hierarchy of events, but rather to evidence the moment when they lose their founding strength—when the tensions, conflicts, and dissonance cease in the name of that unicity. Such unicity should never be considered as insignificant, but understanding its origin must be verified apart from it, through a struggle between internal and external forces, without

which it would be impossible to know those conditions and circumstances that Nietzsche spoke of, which are maintained as the dominant force (or sense).

This signifies that the genealogical view, when applied to past events, looks to these predominating forces that organize dispersion, that join with and push into the present, wherein the limits beyond which our technology would cease to function.<sup>2</sup> If the type of "setting in order" of a certain act constitutes the structure that unites the past and present of an event, genealogy alters its vision from the observer to the structural limit and that beginning that presented itself as absolute origin, thus becoming dense with contingency and mystery.

At this point, the study of genealogy comes closer to the essential question, starting from Heidegger's question about technology as ambiguity. Technology stems from the Greek word *techne* and means "to reveal." However, in this study, Heidegger (1954/1977) underscores not only the sending, the ordering that endures (*Wesen*) in this revelation, that which orients human action to explore, create tools, and technology (*Gestell*), but also to "grant" (*Gewähren*) that this action allows one to reply to *Gestell* and go beyond revealing. It is "the granting that lets man endure—as yet unexperienced, but perhaps more experienced in the future" (p. 33).

The German word *Gestell* takes on various forms in the languages that attempt to translate Heidegger's concept: in English, "enframing" (William Lovitt); in Spanish, *estructura di emplazamento* (Eustaquio Barjau); in Italian, *imposizione* (Gianni Vattimo); in Portuguese, *com-posição* (Emmanuel Carneiro Leão); and in French, *arraisonnement* (André Préau) or *dispositif* (François Fédier). It should be noted that all of these translations emphasize the idea of a historical appeal of collectivity, a call to impersonal nature, which in a certain historical period animates human behavior toward a determined end:<sup>3</sup> In the context of modernity, *Gestell* (or enframing) gives technology an extractive and accumulative finality by means of revealing the world through human action.

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<sup>2</sup> The limit can also be thought of as the coexistence of modes of action, or distinct orders that share the same space—this is the case of poiesis, which, according to Heidegger (1954/1977), was also known as *techne* in the fine arts. In communication, we have a similar instance with the word *communico*, which is divided between a negative meaning (*mei*) and the positive one (*meith*) of exchange.

<sup>3</sup> As the English translators affirm, "The translation 'Enframing' for Ge-stell is intended to suggest, through the use of the prefix 'en-' something of the active meaning that Heidegger here gives to the German word. While following the discussion that now ensues, in which Enframing assumes a central role, the reader should be careful not to interpret the word as though it simply meant a framework of some sort. Instead he should constantly remember that Enframing is fundamentally a calling-forth. It is a 'challenging claim' a demanding summons, that 'gathers' so as to reveal. This claim 'enframes' in that it assembles and orders. It puts into a framework or configuration everything that it summons forth, through an ordering for use that it is forever restructuring anew" (Lovitt, 1977, p. 19).

For this reason, Giorgio Agamben (2006) paired *Gestell* to Foucault's concept of the dispositive,<sup>4</sup> the latter being present in both religious texts (*oikonomia*) and philosophical ones (e.g., Hegel's concept of positive) before Heidegger, to reiterate one type of impersonal and cloaked control that not only represses but also does so by producing active bodies, efficient and dedicated to certain ends.

Thus, if in the sending, perseverance gives enframing to the destiny of technology—it may also create the danger of blocking human beings into behavior that is solely extractive, explorative of nature—it is “the granting” that liberates, that allows us to alter our viewpoint against that unicity that dominates conspiracy, attempting to fix it on the horizon of the current sense. According to Heidegger, the granting gives man the ability to extract and exploit nature, but in doing so, man also discovers something about himself that helps him to overcome this behavior, which is the experience that saves him “let the man to see and enter into the highest dignity of his essence. A dignity that lies in keeping watch over the unconcealment—and with it, from the first, the concealment—of all coming to presence on this earth” (1954/1977, p. 32).

Therefore, “granting” divides the human revealing into continuous becoming— destiny—the intensification of technological, scientific, productive, and reproductive work—and the experience of liberty in listening to the origin and resisting (*Hörender*). But because this resistance does not entirely coincide with instrumental work and the field of sense that unites, organizes, and gives them structure, it appears as contingent and mysterious. The Heideggerian discovery of *poiesis* in the disappearance of the original *techne* is the conservation of resistance and of liberty, not because it simply ceases this “setting in order” (explorative, extractive), but because *poiesis* lets us orient the concepts to what they are in the contingency of openness. Salvation coexists with what threatens it: “But where danger is, grows the saving power also” (Hölderlin, as cited in Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 34).

In the genealogy of communication, the pathway toward its original dimension constitutes a gesture of resistance capable of revealing, contemporaneously with the communicative action, the force that unites and sets in order human behavior as a means to an end (information): the freedom to exchange and change the present meanings in the etymological root, *mei*.

“Setting in order” frees the exchange and change that allows a man to be “more experienced in the future” (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 33). Therefore, the present genealogy attempts to evidence the focal

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<sup>4</sup> The word “dispositive” is used in this text as suggested by Foucault (1977), referring to a set of heterogeneous and reticular elements (whether material, linguistic or not) that order human conduct through the availability toward a determined action. Because of its heterogeneous and reticular nature, the dispositive does not point to a subject (of the dispositive), but to an event that interrupts a set of social practices and meanings. Because of its normative character, the dispositive assumes a transformation (subjectivization) of a social entity through which the individual separates from a previous disordered environment. In some translations of Agamben, the term “dispositive” is translated as “apparatus.” However, the author suggests choosing the word “dispositive” because it remains faithful to the original lexical context from which he developed his philosophical reflections.

point of the danger that brings about transmissive action: block human beings in relation mode, which maintains the world picture as a modality that assumes itself to be unique.

### **The Danger of Communication**

What does the world picture mean? And moreover, what sense is there in communicating in this world?

To adequately understand these questions, it is important to clarify two observations stemming from Heidegger's thoughts about modernity: the first is about changing human relations (as beings) with the world and other beings; the second is the orientation of communication in this modern form of relation.

According to Heidegger, the basis of modernity is the conception of human beings as subjects, or beings that, starting from the self, join with other beings to create a whole. The word "subject" comes from the Latin *subjectum*, a translation from the Greek *hypokeimenon*, and delineates the fundamental (*Vorliegendes*), which, being such, unites the whole within itself: "That means: Man becomes that Being upon which all that is, is grounded as regards the manner of its Being and its truth. Man becomes the relational center of that which is as such" (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 128). The notion of scientific object (*ob-jectum*) comes from the same context and delineates the beings standing reserve in front of the subject.

Heidegger affirms that modern science relates subject and object by means of representation or transformation of the world picture. The representing (*Vor-stellen*) indicates a willingness to stand before (*Stellen; Vor*)—more specifically, "bringing each particular Being before it in such a way that man who calculates can be sure, and that means be certain, of that Being" (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 127). So, "we first arrive at science as research when and only when truth has been transformed into the certainty of representation" (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 127):

The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture. The word "picture" [*Bild*] now means the structured image [*Gebild*] that is the creature of man's producing which represents and sets before. In such producing, man contends for the position in which he can be that particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is. (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 134)

A double determination is implicit in this idea: (a) it affects the being, taking away its becoming (once it orientates to form a standing reserve or representation): "to set whatever is, itself, in place before oneself just in the way that it stands with it, and to have it fixedly before oneself as set up in this way" (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 129); and (b) it embraces the entirety of the beings, standing reserve in an articulated and decisive manner: "that the world is transformed into picture and man into *subjectum*—throws light at the same time on the grounding event of modern history" (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 133).

Communication is considered an essential figure of modernity not only because it spreads and intensifies the circulation of pictures but because it transforms that determination to control and maintain the world picture and naturalize it as a social norm. It is as though in modern times we have lost the capacity to directly relate with the world (and other beings), we can no longer live without images, without

enunciating. The absence of either is considered odd. Deleuze commented on how Western society of the 20th century effectively deals with this issue, or how we are ordered today:

Repressive forces don't stop people expressing themselves but rather force them to express themselves. We sometimes go on as though people can't express themselves. In fact they're always expressing themselves. The sorriest couples are those where the woman can't be preoccupied or tired without the man saying "What's wrong? Say something." (Deleuze, 1990/1995, p. 129)

Expression here constitutes behavior of communication in the modern era: Shared pictures can reach every corner of the world. An appeal resounds—to use the historiography of communication as proposed by Carey (2009)—“the desire to escape the boundaries of Europe, to create a new life, to found new communities, to carve a New Jerusalem out of the woods of Massachusetts” (p. 15), as the positivism project to elevate man to his highest potential. This calling, on the one hand, is limited by human experience in the world as a free and undetermined trajectory, but, on the other hand, binds us once again to a world with various interpretations and a sense of saturation of communication.

The most profound questions about communication are those that demand us to go beyond the representing. Luhmann (1996/2000), for example, defines communication as the central element of a social system, yet “the function of the mass media lies after all that in the directing of self-observation of the social system” (p. 97). Given that the whole system is closed, any relation that is established is already information. It is already an observed relation, represented, internalized by the system.

Baudrillard (1981), elaborating on the problem of “simulation”—the producing of a reality where the difference between the model and the fact is always less perceivable—shifts the question from the world picture to the nucleus of the communication system (newspapers, radio, television, cinema, etc.). According to Baudrillard, at any moment in history, the model becomes emancipated from its corresponding fact, and this autonomy allows it to become a fact for another model, in infinite succession.

It is irrelevant whether or not the model is true in relation to the fact from which it was derived, because it is always only a world picture. One may think how this model of determination has produced a surprising quantity of information over the past several years and how it has shifted human relations from an immediate and free exchange between beings to relations mediated by images. The possibility of novelty, of exchange and change, occurs through this environment—the world picture—in the figure of transmission, that which best defines this new form of relationship: information comes and goes and is continuously modified, while the being is not.

Here, a form of solicitation of relation is missing that interrupts the obsession of revealing the world picture, with the beings in its entirety. Originally, communication defined the relation, coexistence, and dynamic establishing with the other as a whole. This meaning is present in its root *com*, which gives origin



to the words *com-municare* and *com-municatio*. As far as *relatio*<sup>5</sup> is concerned, communication is an obsequious and reciprocal appropriation, a renewed coming and going to the other, like a writer's pen that empties itself in the act of writing to be refilled at the ink pot. In *relatio*, the being opens itself toward the coming and going of the world to reciprocal exchange, to travel to the other side and back—in other words, in the other's world, who comes to interpret this new foreigner as itself and vice versa.

This experience is similar to that of the "great age of the Greeks," as described by Heidegger in the form of human relationships with the self and others. If in modernity, the human being determines and unites the self with the whole to bring into being the entirety, in this,

rather, man is the one who is looked upon by that which is . . . . He is the one who is—in company with itself—gathered toward presencing, by that which opens itself. To be beheld by what is, to be included and maintained within its openness and in that way to be borne along by it, to be driven about by its oppositions and marked by its discord—that is the essence of man in the great age of the Greeks. (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 131)

The danger of communication, in fact, lies in this closure that distances the human being from the world but also transforms the experience of the being in the world picture that surrounds it. Being such, on the horizon of modern communication we investigate the seat of this passive and contemplative condition of man: Has this kind of attitude completely exhausted itself in modern times, or, by verifying it, is it possible to save?

If, as Hölderlin (as cited in Heidegger, 1954/1977) says—"where danger is, grows the saving power also" (p. 34)—this modality of human relation still exists, it must be searched for where its power grows the most, in the so-called *medias*.

Through the genealogical method, we suggest that such research may give birth to investigations into the reason for the emergence of this dominating form of communication. A sense through which control (managing people and territories) as characteristic of modernity, as noted by Foucault, Agamben, and even Esposito. Perhaps it is not mere chance that the ancient practices and meanings of communication have been forgotten as necessary and expository forms (these practices could have put the management of biopolitics at risk). That said, the current reigning means of communication as transmission of information is equally rich in pretense.

Benjamin suggests certain paths in this direction by observing the expansion of newspaper activities (which coincides with the end of narrative culture), the end of immediate collective experience, and the birth of a type of communication where control of the intensity of events becomes fundamental:

If it were the intention of the press to have the reader assimilate the information it supplies as part of his own experience, it would not achieve its purpose. But its intention is just

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<sup>5</sup> The reciprocal sense of coming and going, of returning and emptying, are notable here: "action de porter à nouveau: de porter à tout instant la plume dans l'encrier" [the action of bringing to the new: to bring the feather to the inkwell all the time]; see Gaffiot (2016, p. 1141).

the opposite, and it is achieved: to isolate what happens from the realm in which it could affect the experience of the reader. The principles of journalistic information (freshness of the news, brevity, comprehensibility, and above all, lack of connection between the individual news items) contribute as much to this as does the make-up of the pages and the paper's style. (Benjamin, 1955/1969, pp. 158–159)

Through information, newspapers separate beings from the world, canceling the differences that are theirs alone, uniting them around themes or categories considered relevant (or useful) to social reproduction. According to Anderson (1991), newspapers were shown to be of great importance throughout the 18th century by redefining the limits of the political system, and ever since then, they have been consolidated as a source of modern experience along with other dispositives such as advertising, cinema, television, and, more recently, the Internet and digital social media.

As long as we are captured by the dynamics of the dispositives, human beings may think of themselves as free to spontaneously express themselves. The strength that unites these dispositives, that blocks human beings in this productive and presumably libertarian logic, is one of the most important subjects of genealogical work.

### **Communicatio < Munus < Mei**

If, from a metaphysical viewpoint, the passage from one era to another corresponds to the transformation of a certain interpretation of the beings in its entirety, as Heidegger affirms, the relationship established between them marks a different conception of communication in this passage. This means that the history of a society could be thought of as the history of communication, or of the transformation of ways of relating to one another. Etymological studies of words are important in perceiving such transformations because they indicate the changes in the way of human beings' "setting in order" to communication and the set of dispositives that regulate relationships and exchange between them by the semantic variations of the terms.

In French, the words "communicate" and "communication" (*communiquer* and *communication*) appeared in the 14th century with a general sense of relation, of staying together.<sup>6</sup> Derived from the Latin *communicare*, "communicate" and "communication" maintained, up to the late 16th century, a similar meaning to the ancient terms (from the 10th through 12th centuries), such as *communier* (in common) and *communion* (communion) (Winkin, 1984/1998, p. 22). This is because starting from that time, both words began to be incorporated in the sense of transmission: for example, communicate pain; "the magnate communicates his ironclad virtue" (*Dictionnaire de Furetière*, 1690, p. 591, as cited in Winkin, 1984/1998, p. 22); or again in the 19th century, the definition of "communication" as "communicating vessels" (Winkin, 1984/1998, p. 22).

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<sup>6</sup> See Rey (2011, p. 3075) "Il a été introduit en français avec le sens général de 'manière d'être ensemble' et envisagé dès l'ancien français comme un mode privilégié de relations sociales" [It was introduced in French with the general meaning of 'way of being together' and considered from ancient French as a privileged mode of social relations].

This semantic passage is similar in English. Stemming from ancient French until the 15th century, "communication" signified the action of sharing and to be common to many. However, according to Williams (1985, p. 72), after the 16th century, the word began to refer to the object communicated (the communication) and from the late 18th century, to means of communication (lines of communication), concerning roadways, canals, and railways, which were being developed in that period. Only since the second half of the 20th century, first in the U.S. then later in the UK, was the term used to define, in particular, *medias*, the so-called communication industry, such as newspapers and radio:

The global uses meaning "to share" progressively faded into the shadows to leave room for the uses that revolved around "transmission." From the circle, one shifts to the segment. Trains, telephones, and media outlets are herein called "means of communication," or means of passage from A to B. (Winkin, 1984/1998, p. 22)

In this short step, the appearance of the word in daily vocabulary and its transformation in history, or its distancing from archaic meanings and practices, are due to the appropriation of the word by the church, economy, and science.

A point of access starting from an understanding of the transformation of communication as relation to being is in the alteration of the sense of the word *munus* from one dispositive pressed in favor of another, to the idea of a definitive property. To explain this event, we return to Esposito's reflection on modernity as a period of intensification of defensive technology versus external elements capable of influencing individual and groups. *Munus* is the root that creates the Latin word *communis* and gives origin to *communicatio*, *communicare*, *communico* *communicavi*, *communicatum*, as well as *communitas* (community). To Esposito, *munus* designs a series of meanings that range from obligation to donation, public office to spectacle. If we pay attention to its historical development, the transformation of its original meaning of mandatory donation muted into its current sense of collective identity, its semantic alteration reveals a mutation in relations between beings:

All of the *munus* is projected onto the transitive act of giving. It doesn't by any means imply the stability of a possession and even less the acquisitive dynamic of something earned, but loss, subtraction, transfer. It is a "pledge" or a "tribute" that one pays in an obligatory form. The *munus* is the obligation that is contracted with respect to the other and that invites a suitable release from the obligation. The gratitude that demands new donations. (Esposito, 1998/2010, p. 5)

The transformation of the meaning community—which should refer to a group of people, which is not united by identity, property, or substances, but by an obligation or debt (in an albeit negative sense)—is situated in the same immune context where "communicate" and "communication" lose their semantic strength of exposure (to give, to offer, etc.) that is present in the word *communico*, to make one autonomous through ownership, and finally as transmission and of what is said. At the nucleus of this change, there is the transformation of the relation between the being with itself, as well as the emergence of a network of dispositives that render communication the sphere of circulation of representation. Beings and dispositives act together in the concealment of the meaning of obligatory donation (to someone else), which, notwithstanding its original sense, puts any possibility of governing it at risk.

Overall, beyond transmission, *communico* also means “to measure, unite and deal out,” the exposure of a being to “share something with another” (Torrinha, 1937, p. 169). The *munus* contained within this Latin word still conserves its negative connotation of cession, to subtract, give something of oneself to another, like in the phrase “*vobiscum hostium spolia communicavit . . . communicabo te sempre mensa mea*” [with the spoils of the enemy communicated . . . you can always communicate at my table] (Gaffiot, 2016, p. 349). In the set of modern communicative practices, this negative sense is concealed in virtue of its positive meaning. Now the donation (*munus*) no longer consists in a loss, but, to the contrary, in the affirmation of the subject (who expresses)—like, for example, in the phrase “communicate or share news.”

For genealogy, the semantic ambiguity of *communico*, that which internally divides the communication in its affirmation and transmission (in a positive sense) and donates and unites (in a negative sense) is the decisive point of origin that sparks investigation. For this, genealogy does not necessarily signify the study of support materials for transmission (“medias”). Although the content transmitted and its strategic position in the management of human experience in the world offers subsidies to the understanding of the distancing between beings, these supports are the manifestation of communication in a specific period: modern times. The observation of the centrality of *munus* in the etymological constitution of communication and the various forms of relations between beings constructs an important pathway for the genealogy of communication. In every period that is considered according to this type of investigation, the analysis of the control exercised by the government (in this case, not necessarily nation states) is fundamental to the circulatory effect of *munus*.

In this passage, the etymological research of Bernard Darras (1996) is of great relevance because it identifies the fundamental tension in *munus*, and therefore the coexistence of incompatible meanings within it: change and control.

The route undertaken by Darras through the Latin world to the Indo-European root word *mei*, which he considered the “genealogical starting point” of communication, where he identifies four original semantic fields: exchange, change, reciprocal alternating, and divergence (referring to the failure of an exchange). *Mei* gives origin to *munus* in the Latin language, but branches out to words throughout the Proto-Aryan universe, Sanskrit, German, and ancient Slavic languages. The study of different languages where this root was planted allowed Darras to identify an economy of change and exchange, referring to the first two semantic fields, but also extending to the word *meith*, with its development primarily in Iranian, revealing a sense of control over the economy, underlining how it figures in contracts:

The articulation among four semantic spaces may be established around an economy of exchange. This is what the Latin word, *mutare*, expresses “changing places,” but also *meare*, “to pass,” “circulate” and still *migrare*, “to leave a place.” To this interpretation of passage in space, change of form can be added, such that *mutare* brought us the word, *muder*, “to change” and *muter* “to mutate.” In turn, the Greek word, *ameiben*, “change,” came to Latin much later in the 19th century and became *amiba*, and then “amoeba.” (Darras, 1996, p. 50)

Per Darras, *mei* (exchange and change) and *meith* (alternation and divergence) constitute the semantic structure of communication and together, compose what he calls economy of exchange. From semantic and morphological viewpoints, *meith* is the negation of *mei*.

This negative connotation is developed in Latin as well with the word *munus*, and more evidently in the linguistic branching of Sanskrit—which maintains a double potential of exchange, due to its meaning of finding either a friend or an enemy—or in most Northern European languages, where the word became various prefixes that give a negative sense to a word, for example, in High German *missi*; or Gothic *missa* and *maidjan*, which mean “exchange” or “falsify”; or Norwegian, English, and Dutch *mis*-. Introduced by the French to the Gallic-Roman languages in the form of *mes*, this prefix expanded into Southern Europe in the form of *mé* and *mes* in French, *menos* in Spanish and Portuguese, and *minis* in Italian.

Indicative of failure of exchange, as Darras observed, are the German word *meiden* (escape, avoid) and the English word *to miss* (lose or fail). In other languages the pejorative significance is equally maintained—for example, in French: *mésaventure* (an accident), *méprise* (incomprehension, disdain), *mésalliance* (an unfortunate alliance); in German: *missgeschick* (adversity), *misserfolg* (failure), and in English: *mistake* (error, incomprehension), *mislead* (induce to error).

The examples above show variations of the negative connotation of *meith* in some languages that have kept *meith* in their linguistic basis. Probably this negative connotation came from problems intrinsic to the processes of exchange and transformation that required some control or regulation. In the study of *Avesta* and *Rigveda*, Darras identifies this requirement in the words *Miθra* and *Mitra* that derive from *meith*, for both mean contract.

*Mitra* is the word deduced from the analysis of the *Rigveda*, a sacred text of Indian tradition, and the *Avesta*, from the Iranian tradition and the Zoroastrian religion. The contextual and comparative study of these texts—respectively, accessing both mythology and the Vedic god *Mitra*, as well as the ancient Iranian god *Miθra*—permitted Darras to reconstruct the Proto-Aryan semantic universe of communication. In both traditions, *Mitra* refers to a divinity who regulates exchange, a contractual principle personified: inasmuch as in the Vedic universe, he is omniscient, benevolent, and pacific. In the Indo-Iranian tradition, beyond the god of contracts, he is also the god of war who punishes the unjust:

The word, *Mitra*, is composed of the roots *mi* and the suffix *-tra*. The root, *mi* is the abbreviated form of the Indo-European root word, *mei*. As far as the suffix, *tra*, is concerned, it is generally used in this form to construct terms and instruments relative to ways of doing things (for example, *mantra*, “way of thinking”). So, in Vedic texts, *mitra* is considered a “means of exchange,” the instrument of exchange, a contract. (Darras, 1996, pp. 54–55)

Although Darras was not specifically interested in the topic of the genealogy of communication, his etymological research starting from the word *mei* is an important intuition in that direction, revealing an original structure divided between exchange and divergence. It is as if the perception of an original imbalance in communication defined it—in every historic period, a contract, an economy of exchange. If the ancients knew the fortune of experiencing the truth, the contemplation and uniting of beings for that which

opens, modernity will assist in its ruin in the impoverishment of experience in the recession without precedence in the economy of exchange. Far from the world and its past, the subject is seen only, in the words of Benjamin (1933/2003): "It forces him to start from scratch; to make a new start; to make a little go a long way; to begin with a little and build up further, looking neither left nor right" (p. 732).

It is solely because they take on the original ambiguity—the dispositive of exchange and contract, the dispositive of change, but also control—that means of communication and information come into play (in the quality of dispositives) in the present genealogy.

### Conclusion

In this text, I have presented a problem and the foundation of my research program. From the possibility of thinking of communication in a freer way, beyond its modern use, genealogy allows the interpretation of communication, starting from an event that consecrates it as such, that unites beings and dispositives in a way that acts (circulation of images), determines, and therefore is the absolute origin of the word.

Liberating communication from its technological, transmissive, and constructive current significance is an urgent task because this meaning, reflected in a collection of practices, leads to the closure of human beings in the world picture—a world that encounters in its work scattered with subjects, lost on the horizon of its own immanence, the decadence of the economy of exchange.

Finally, beyond its modern expression, communication reemerges as a transforming force (implicit in the first semantic fields of *mei*: exchange and change), through etymological work that is derived from its root meanings (*com* and *munus*), the traces of *relatio*.

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