

**COMMUNITY AND COMMUNICATION**

Communitas

ISSN 1023-0556

2004 9: 47 - 62

**D.F.M. Strauss\***

---

**ABSTRACT**

*Amongst several other characteristic features human beings are known to live in communities and to have the ability to communicate with each other. But although this statement may receive almost universal consent, the ways soon divide when a closer account is sought of the nature of community and of communication. We commence our discussion by first developing a brief perspective on the nature of communication in its relation to the uniqueness of human language, and then proceed with an analysis of the interconnections between communicative actions and the complexity of human societal endeavours - also taking into account the nature of traditional African societies. The analysis is concluded with a brief sketch of the correlation of co-ordinational and communal relationships within society and with an indication of the mediating role of communication media within a differentiated society.*

---

\*D.F.M. Strauss is Professor in the Dean's office, Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein.

## THE UNIQUENESS OF HUMAN LINGUAL ABILITY

One may say that language positions itself in between the grasp of the hand and the purview of the eye - the eye as the organ of *making-something-immediately-present*. Thus, in various respects, the hand and the eye in human language become *dispensable* (cf. Hofer 1972:203). If imagination is viewed as the ability to *recollect* what is no longer *present to the senses*, the following idea of Condillac, explained by Derrida, is understandable: "The sign is born at the same time as imagination and memory, at the moment when it is demanded by the absence of the object for present perception" (Derrida 1982:314).

Surely, this phenomenon of a mediation though objects (signs) making the *eye* and the *hand* dispensable is particularly remarkable, since, within the domain of human sensitivity, the sense of *seeing* and the sense of *touching* dominate that of *smelling* (cf. Haeffner 1982:16).

Precisely by means of the *mediated immediacy* of language, human beings possess an awareness of the past and the future - an awareness taking the limited life-span of human beings into consideration. This explains the uniquely human awareness of *death* as well as the possibility to commit *suicide*.

Jaspers claims that communication is actually a truly *human* phenomenon because he did not enter into an analysis of the basic concepts involved in an understanding of the meaning of the *lingual dimension* of reality. At most he concedes that one merely refers to other (non-human) instances of communication ("alle andere Kommunikation") by way of comparison ("gleichnisweise ausgesagt werden") (Jaspers 1957:784).

What is peculiar about animal communication, however, is that it does not refer to the *past* or to the *future*. It is concerned with the vital *here* and *now*. For this reason animal signs strictly have *one* "meaning" only.

All human utterances, by contrast, can signify a number of different things, depending on the context, intention, or even, in the case of written language, the punctuation. Compare this with the *famous dance of the bees* which always indicates by means of the (i) *tempo*, (ii) *direction* and (iii) *angle* of the figure eight executed, the (i) *distance*, (ii) *location*, and (iii) *direction* of the detected source.

Ever since Descartes it was believed that the uniqueness of the human *brain* is responsible for *human language*. The result was that anatomists insisted that anthropoids also have the "machinery" available to articulate speech. The order of *primates* - including humans, according to the prevalent classification - is nevertheless, of course with the exception of human beings, unable to vocalize. The ability to reproduce human speech sounds as it is found in birds is totally absent in the *mammals*. The vocal potential of the gorilla and orangutan is exceptionally poor. The chimpanzee is somewhat better off, and the gibbon can produce sounds covering almost an octave. All these anthropoids, however, completely lack the playful sounds produced by the human suckling. The unprecedented possibilities of human sound production transcend that of the anthropoids by far. In addition this sound production displays an exceptionally rich *modifiability* (Overhage 1972:242). Post mortem studies of the upper

respiratory tract in mammals as well as cineradiographic studies have shown that the position of the larynx is crucial in determining the way in which an individual breathes, swallows and vocalizes. This implies that there are certain anatomical peculiarities which go hand in hand with the contribution of brain functioning to the production of human speech, in particular the gradual descent of the larynx after the post-natal period (cf. Portmann 1973:423).

The "humanlike" apes (the *anthropoids*, i.e., the orangutan, gorilla, chimpanzee, and gibbon) are, as a result of anatomical shortcomings, born incapable of speech. It is interesting to note that at birth the human larynx is positioned in exactly the same way as that of all other Mammals. One reason for this is that the human infant needs a way for milk to flow which is *separate* from the windpipe. The baby can breathe calmly while drinking. Exactly because of this the human infant is incapable of speech, like all Mammals. Only by means of the gradual removal of this division, caused by the downward movement of larynx - freeing the larger pharynx cavity - is the human person eventually enabled to *speak* and to *communicate*. Only human beings possess an intermediate area in between the nasal cavity and the larynx where air and food channels freely cross. As Laitman (1985: 282) observes:

This high position permits the epiglottis to pass up behind the soft palate to lock the larynx into the nasopharynx, providing a direct air channel from the nose through the nasopharynx, larynx and trachea to the lungs. ... In essence, two separate pathways are created: a respiratory tract from the nose to the lungs, and a digestive tract from the oral cavity to the esophagus. While this basic mammalian pattern - found with variations from dolphins to apes - enables an individual to breathe and swallow simultaneously, it severely limits the array of sounds an animal can. ... While some animals can approximate some human speech sounds, they are anatomically incapable of producing the range of sounds necessary for complete, articulate speech.

Of course one can even employ the term "communication" at the physical level - for example when a magnet communicates its magnetism to a piece of iron. Derrida is therefore justified in pointing out that the word *communication* opens up a "semantic field" and that to the "semantic field of the word *communication* belongs the fact that it also designates nonsemantic movements" (Derrida 1982:308). But by pointing at different, sub-human, usages of the term *communication* the challenge is to account more explicitly for the *typical nature of human communication*.

Without entering into a more penetrating analysis of the distinctness of human language one decisive feature ought to be mentioned - keeping in mind that animal communication knows no ambiguity. Human language and communication, by contrast, presupposes a *freedom of choice* and the concomitant nuancefulness of meaning, not only requiring interpretation but also need the further interpretation of the *addressee* (cf. Nida 1979:203; De Klerk 1978:6). What is therefore *distinct* about human language is that it presupposes the *accountably free activity* of the human being, which entails *responsible choices*. At once this insight reveals the inherent *normativity*

of linguistic acts, for any human being can *fail* or *succeed* to communicate effectively (successfully), depending upon the degree of *clarity* that is achieved. Since these remarks only make sense when the *inter-subjective* nature of language is taken into account, communication cannot be understood merely in terms of the ability we have as human beings to *signify*.

## HUMAN COMMUNICATION: THE SOCIAL DISCLOSURE OF THE SIGN MODE

Wittgenstein remarks: "And sounds which no one else understands but which I 'appear to understand' might be called a 'private language'" (1968:94e, §269). A truly *private language* is limited to one person only, which entails that we have to acknowledge the *communal* character of normal linguistic communication. This fact seems to suggest something ambivalent - for initially one would be inclined to approach the phenomenon of *human language* (as so-called *medium of communication*) through the gateway of the *sign mode* alone.

Normally this aspect is known as the lingual mode or *lingual* aspect of reality. Yet there are important considerations favouring an alternative formulation. The human ability to *express meaning* and to *interpret* it is a response to the normative demand to *assign meaning*, i.e., to *signify*. Within inter-human contexts such an *expressive assignment of meaning or signification* always calls forth the *interpretative response* of another lingual subject. Derrida emphasizes that not only the *addressee* of written language is *absent*, because the *author* is also *absent* (Derrida 1982:313 ff.) Suppose we restrict ourselves to the normative meaning of our (human) calling to *signify*, leaving aside whether or not it is done with the aid of *verbal language*. Then it may be justified to refer to this aspect as the *semiotic* aspect of reality. But other options are also open to us, for we can just as well focus our attention on the *subjective acts of signification*, in which case the *formation of language* (and *linguistic structures*) acquire(s) a prominent place, apparently once again justifying a different designation, namely the *lingual* mode. Finally, if we focus on the objects *intended* by acts of signification in their relation to the meaning of words, we may designate this aspect as the *semantic* mode (consider the discipline of semantics studying the meaning-nuances of words).

Combining these three options - *semiotic*, *lingual* and *semantic* - while at the same time avoiding the relative one-sidedness contained in employing anyone of them exclusively, i.e., in considering each one of them in *isolation* from the others - the entire structure of this aspect of reality may simply be called the *sign mode*. But because the limitations of normal language in some cases may give preference to alternative usages, we occasionally will (and have had to) use the term "lingual" even when the total structure of the sign mode is intended. For example, if we speak about "linguistic communication" we may in fact have the *sign mode* as such in mind (including *non-verbal* communication).

Because it is indeed possible to create *signs* and *tokens* in an *idiosyncratic* manner - understandable to one person only (like in a "private language") - the sign mode as such is (though *necessary*) not *sufficient* to account for the phenomenon of *human language*.

In order to do that the *social aspect* of reality must be taken into account as well. This entails that the inherent meaning of the sign mode must be *opened* up and *deepened* through the guidance that it receives from the aspect of inter-subjective social intercourse between human beings. For example, when the meaning of the economic mode of reality is not yet deepened or opened up by the fiduciary meaning of trust or confidence, economic intercourse will be restricted to directly observable exchange (an item for an item: "seeing is believing"). But as soon as the meaning of the economic aspect is disclosed under the guidance of the certitudinal facet of reality the phenomenon of economic trust emerges, enabling the possibility of credit ("believing that eventually you will see"). In connection with the universality of faith (Latin: *fides*), Derrida writes: "There is no society without faith, without trust in the other. Even if I abuse this, if I lie or if I commit perjury, if I am violent because of this faith, even on the economic level, there is no society without this faith, this minimal act of faith. What one calls credit in capitalism, in economics, has to do with faith, and the economists know that. But this faith is not and should not be reduced or defined by religion as such" (Derrida 1997:23).

Credit as economic trust therefore demonstrates the (deepened) interconnection between the economic and the certitudinal aspects of our experiential world and it explains why in an exchange economy items are traded one-by-one because there the meaning of the economic function is not yet deepened into economic trust.

Likewise, this perspective may help us to appreciate language as the result of the deepening and disclosure of the meaning of the sign mode - guided by the social aspect. This state of affairs makes it possible to allude to a "linguistic community." But a merely intuitive employment of the term "community" is in need of a further explication in order to account for the socially deepened meaning of language.

### THE COMPLEXITY OF COMMUNICATION

An important feature of the distinction between aspects of reality (such as the sign mode, the social function or the economic facet) and the concrete (natural and social) entities and events found within reality is given in the acknowledgement that every kind of entity functions in every discernable aspect of reality - either as an active subject or merely as a relatively passive object, correlated with the objectifying activities of a subject. Material entities are actively functioning as physical subjects, but within the biotic (organic) aspect of reality they can only appear as an objective means for life. Likewise they are dependent upon the activities of sentient creatures - such as animals and human beings - in order to function as sensory objects, for material things do not have a subject function within the sensitive mode of reality - they can be perceived without being able to perceive themselves. Human beings can analyse material things, can mould them in the formation of cultural artifacts and can designate them in a lingual fashion - and in all these instances material things are objectified in non-physical aspects of reality. Yet every act of objectification itself is always performed by a subject.

In terms of the general idea of objectification we have to realise that the standard model of communication - in terms of a sender, medium and receiver - is too restricted to account for what is here at stake. The reason is that this well-known model merely captures a subject-object-subject relation, whereas actual communication in fact manifests itself in a fourfold relation that reveals itself in a primary and a secondary subject as well as a primary and a secondary object. But this complicated relationship does not exclusively occur within the sign mode as such, since it presupposes the above-mentioned opening-up (disclosure) of the sign mode towards the social mode as it is typically found in human communication.

Communication therefore has to be seen as a disclosure of the meaning of the sign mode in its pointing towards (anticipation to) the social aspect. To be sure, with the exception of numerical relations between numbers (as numerical subjects) all other subject-subject relations are founded in subject-object relations. Just consider human language. The only way (socially deepened) communication can take place is on the basis of subject-object relations within the sign mode. Apart from his peculiar understanding of "concept" and "sound-image", De Saussure (and linguistics) had to recognise the (lingually) objective sign (see De Saussure 1966:66).

Whatever the intentions of a lingual subject may be, they can only be made accessible to another human subject when they are mediated by lingual objects, such as verbal or non-verbal signs, i.e., when the subject-subject relation between different lingual subjects is mediated by lingual subject-object relations. For example, if one person enters into a dialogue with another person about a chair, then the word /chair/ is a secondary sign object (object2) constituted by the lingual activity of subject1 while making patent the latent lingual objectifiability of the chair (as primary object1). Finally, the second person participating in the conversation about the chair acts as subject2. In other words, functioning actively (inter-subjectively) within the sign mode entails a lingual objectification (the activities of subject1 - mostly associated with the expressive nature of language) which calls forth an act of interpretation by another lingual agent (subject2). Defining hermeneutics merely in terms of the perspective of subject2, as Grondin does, is therefore one-sided and too restricted.

The concept of interpretation varies in inclusiveness as well. If one maintains, for example, that language is always already interpretation, then theory of interpretation becomes general theory of language or knowledge. Yet though language is inalienably tied to interpretation, a historical introduction to hermeneutics such as this cannot hope to offer a general theory of language (though we will be able to treat hermeneutics contribution to language theory). Here, too, it seems necessary for heuristic purposes to employ a narrower concept of interpretation. Accordingly, we will take interpretation as referring to what occurs when a really or apparently unfamiliar meaning is made intelligible (not necessarily made credible, because incredibilities can be understood). Hermeneutic theory concerns itself with just this process of interpretation (Grondin 1994:18).

The scope of our present argumentation precludes a treatment of the view developed by Habermas regarding the difference between instrumental and communicative actions. It will suffice merely to mention that Habermas's own view harbours a basic dualism between instrumental actions and communicative actions, since in his thought this dualism sets apart the domain of subject-object relations (being "instrumental") from that of communicative actions (restricted to subject-subject relations). Habermas subdivides rationality into two domains: from "one perspective the telos inherent in rationality appears to be instrumental mastery, from the other communicative understanding" (Habermas 1984:11).

### **HUMAN COMMUNICATION AND THE CONTROVERSY BETWEEN "INDIVIDUAL" AND "COMMUNITY"**

In a work on small group communication within organisations a description is given that highlights a classical divergence in the assessment of social phenomena. Goodall writes: "Philosophically, if we consider a 'group' as a collection of individuals, all working together to accomplish some task, we are encouraged to view free will and motivation as primary influences on the effectiveness of the group's operation. We could call this view of a 'group' the 'sum of its parts' perspective" (Goodall 1990:12).

According to Goodall - with reference to Phillips and Wood - viewing the group as a "collection" diminishes the importance of "learning how to be effective in the group" because it separates the "concept of a communication process" from "what it means to be a participant in a group" and for "these reasons, viewing a group as a collection of individuals is unsatisfactory" (Goodall *ibid.*).

By contrast another way of "viewing what a 'group' means is to consider it as an entity greater than the sum of its parts" (Goodall 1990:13). In terms of this approach the claim is made that communication effectuates the transformation of a mere collection of individuals into something above and beyond the individuals:

Through the process of communication the group assumes a character above and beyond the individual characters of the group members; the cluster of people now functions as a group, rather than as a collection of individuals (Goodall *ibid.*).

The underlying opposition dividing these conflicting perspectives is well-known throughout the history of reflection on human society - designated either as that between individualism and collectivism (universalism), or as that between atomism and holism. [For a discussion of the social philosophic and (theoretical) sociological implications of this opposition see Strauss 2002 and 2004.] In ancient Greece the polis (city-state) served as the all-encompassing whole of society, destined to accomplish the moral perfection of its citizens (compare the political theories of Plato and Aristotle). During the medieval era the church institute was superimposed on top of the state, viewed as the crowning institution of the *societas perfecta* (perfect society) having as its aim not only a temporal perfection but eternal bliss. In the papal encyclical, *Quadragesimo anno* (15 May 1931), it is still explicitly stated "Surely the church does not only have the task to bring the human person merely to a transient and deficient happiness, for it must carry a person to eternal bliss" (cf. Schnatz 1973:403).

An approach accentuating the interconnectedness of human beings within the web of society is found in the thought of Min-Sun. He addresses basic perspectives regarding the place of the human being within human society and the implications entailed in such orientations for the cultural differentiation found in communication practices in the West and the East.

What is fascinating about his approach is that he places the current mainstream views within the United States against the intellectual and cultural background of the developments within the West since the Renaissance. His general claim is that before 1500 "the dominant worldview in Europe, as well as in most other civilizations, was organic" (Min-Sun 2002:10). He points out that people lived in "small, cohesive communities and experienced nature in terms of organic relationships, characterized by the interdependence of spiritual and material phenomena" (Min-Sun *ibid.*). According to him the medieval orientation, aimed at an understanding of the meaning and significance of things, was replaced during the 16th and 17th centuries by a view of the world as a machine with the aim to predict and control things (Min-Sun 2002:10-11).

In terms of the Newtonian understanding material particles move within an absolute space and time and this mechanistic view then was not only applied to organic phenomena, but also to human society.

Following Newtonian physics, Locke developed an atomistic view of society, describing it in terms of its basic building block: the human being. When Locke applied this theory of human nature to social phenomena, he was guided by the belief that there were laws of nature governing human society, similar to those governing the physical universe. As the atoms in gas would establish a balanced state, so would human individuals settle down in a society in a "state of nature" (Min-Sun 2002:11).

The argument unfolded by Min-Sun is that via Jefferson John Locke influenced the north American ethos to such an extent that an atomistic pre-occupation manifested itself in the ideas of "individualism, property rights, and the free market" and that these ideas "include social contracts, rational profit making, and the actions of a free market made up of individual players" (Min-Sun *ibid.*).

Min-Sun believes that this development resulted in an appreciation of the individual excluding the diverse social roles in which such individuals may participate - "these roles were no longer considered part of a person's essence" (Min-Sun 2002:12). He characterizes the dominant "mentality of contemporary Western culture" as one in which the "self is equated with the autonomous or self-sufficient individual" and then refers to Gates who called this individualistic view "America's civil religion" (Min-Sun *ibid.*).

Min-Sun concludes that it is within this "independent view of the self, ..., that theories of human communication have historically been constructed" (Min-Sun 2002:13).



Against this background he now proceeds to articulate alternative, "equally powerful", but "strikingly different cultural notions about the self and its relation to the collective". Within Eastern cultures, for example, there "developed a philosophy of an inherent relatedness among individuals and the necessity of social relationship for the establishment of identity". In these cultures the self is "defined predominantly in terms of relationships and group memberships," which means that the "self is inherently social - and an integral part of the collective" (Min-Sun *ibid.*). This position is perhaps not far removed from what Charles Taylor says with particular reference to the constitutive role of language for personhood. "To study persons is to study beings who only exist in, or are partly constituted by, a certain language" (Taylor 2000:34-35).

Min-Sun concedes that not all people who are part of "an individualistic culture possess primarily independent self-construals, nor do all those who are part of a collectivist culture possess primarily interdependent self-construals" (Min-Sun 2002:18). But his investigations aim at highlighting the fact that "being a person requires incorporating and becoming attuned to a set of cultural understandings and patterns ... culture-specific understandings of human nature and communication behavior" (Min-Sun 2002:20). In a schematic form the "distinctive characteristics of independent and interdependent self-construals that seem to have consequences for various communication behaviors" are specified (Min-Sun 2002:20, 19).

The focus encompasses oppositions like "rationality versus relationality", "personality versus status", context-independent versus context dependent", and "control of other versus receptivity toward others". An independent self-construal in respect of the opposition "rationality versus relationality" is described as: "A person is an autonomous entity defined by a somewhat distinctive set of attributes, qualities, or processes" (Min-Sun 2002:19). In terms of interdependent self-construals it is qualified as: "A person is an interdependent entity who is part of the encompassing social relationships" (Min-Sun *ibid.*). Min-Sun says that the Japanese are said to see babies as overly individualistic and in need of training to become connected; in the United States, babies are seen as too connected and in need of training to become individuals (Min-Sun 2002:11-12). In African cultures a child, through the acquisition of a name, is also envisioned as an extension of the family tree. The name will reflect the membership of the child "and it is expected that the name so given will guide and control the child by being a constant reminder to him/her of his/her membership of the family and the circumstance of his/her birth. The process of socialisation begins right from birth. The mother constantly communicates with the baby by tracing the family tree from the beginning reminding him/her of the nobility of his/her birth and the uniqueness of the family".

Unfortunately the completely justified sketch of the genesis of an individualistic ideology in the West and in North America lacks any awareness of the entire 19th and early 20th centuries - a period in which a serious reaction against the rationalistic atomism of Enlightenment took shape in the form of what is known as the freedom-idealism of post-Kantian thinkers such as Schelling, Fichte and Hegel. In this process the ideology of a community emerged - up to its eventual disastrous influence upon the

thought and the world-war-causing practices of the National Socialist ideology of Hitler.

Already in 1766 Jacob Bülow alludes to the spirit of a people (*Volksgeist*) as the summary of the particular properties distinguishing one people from another. In the early romantic naturalism of Herder a people (*Volk*) and family are viewed as natural plants (in the second part of his "*Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*" that appeared in 1785). The individual is transformed into an indivisible part of the supra-individual "organic people" - where the latter is conceived of as being a law-unto-itself only - i.e., unique and not subject to a general yardstick encompassing different peoples. Thus the initial rationalistic atomism was transformed into an *irrationalistic holism*.

What Min-Sun designates as the *organic* and *interdependent* view of the East therefore actually dominated a large part of the history of Western Europe during the past two centuries! But Europe gave shelter to both individualistic (atomistic) and universalistic (holistic) orientations. With reference to the approach of Jaspers one reads for example that Jaspers and Husserl proceeded from the sovereignty of the Self: "Also Husserl starts with the sovereignty of an I, which in a proper sense can never be viewed as a part of the world" " (Kaufmann 1957:208-209). Yet, the connotation attached by Jaspers to the notion of "Ganzheit" derives from the *holistic* tradition. Where Knaus discusses the third mode of the Encompassing (*das Umgreifende*) in the thought of Jaspers, he mentions that according to Jaspers "ideas are meaning-totalities, instances of wholeness (*Sinntotalitäten, Ganzheiten*), which serve as the foundation for a context of understanding" (see Schilpp 1957:142). Given Jaspers's negative appreciation of causality as derived from the "world" (of nature), it is striking that he does not realise that the notion of wholeness (totality/*Ganzheit*) also stems from a natural aspect of reality, namely space! The pessimistic consequences of the dualism between nature and freedom present in the thought of Jaspers (1948:871) is best seen in his final assessment of freedom: "Since freedom is only through and against nature, as freedom or being-there it must fail. Freedom is only when nature is."

A full account of the way out of the dilemma of an atomistic and a holistic view of society and of human relationships will exceed the confines of the present reasoning. However, we will close our discussion with a brief hint about the way out of it (see the mentioned preliminary analyses found in Strauss 2002 and 2004). The crucial point is to realise that the human person can never be exhausted either by conceiving her as an *abstract individual* or as being a member of some or other *societal collectivity* absorbing the human existence in all its functions. The mere recognition of the *social function* as a given aspect of reality, encompassing all kinds of (natural and social) entities, already precludes the Enlightenment contract-views in which the human being appears as an *autonomous* and *abstract individual* (in the classical sense of the term: *indivisible unit*). Yet the opposite is the case, for from the outset, by virtue of the concrete functions a person has in all aspects of reality, such a person is taken up in diverse social relationships.

It is noticeable that African (social) philosophy struggled with this very issue and even attempted to arrive at a kind of synthesis between the extremes of an individualistic and a holistic (socialistic) approach. Shutte (1993:110) writes:

The various attempts in post-colonial Africa to embody elements such as these in one or other form of "African socialism" are well known. By some African thinkers, Mammadou Dia for instance, this is seen explicitly as an attempt to effect "a synthesis between individualistic and socialistic values" (Apostel 1981: 388). Apostel (ibid.) quotes Dia: "This synthesis of a true socialism and a true humanism, which will rest on African reality and African values while not rejecting the enriching contributions of other cultures, will be genuinely African, but at the same time have universal importance". Over the years there has developed a characteristic African ideology. Apostel describes this in the following terms: "an egalitarian, co-operative, collectivistic welfare state in which however, simultaneously, the autonomy and dignity of man (the *muntu*) is maximalised" (1981:386).

Gyeke develops a sketch of communitarianism in African social thought with reference to Senghor and Kenyatta and then mentions Mbiti's assessment of the person in African culture: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (1998:318). According to him African culture assigns an "ontological primacy" to the "community" by highlighting the "natural sociality of the human person, the organic character of the relations between individual persons, and the all-importance of the community for the total well-being or complete realisation of the nature of the individual person" (1998:322).

But even in the case of the less differentiated structure of these traditional African societies one nonetheless has to concede that there was always room left for a relatively independent functioning of the individual human being (see Gyeke 1998:331, 334).

That this flows from the very nature of human sociation and societal structuring may best be argued by looking at a possible classification of societal relationships. Such a classification first of all has to distinguish between coordinated (co-ordinational) relationships on the one hand and communal relationships on the other - while holding on to the insight that they are just two sides of the same coin and that the full existence of the human personality is never exhausted by any one of these two kinds of relationships.

The durable organisation of any societal form of life receives its maximum specification when it shares in both the following two characteristics: (i) a solidary unitary character, and (ii) a permanent authority structure. The German term denoting this form of social interaction is *Verband*. Unfortunately the English language has no suitable translational equivalent for this word. Perhaps the simplest option is to speak about social collectivities when *Verbände* are intended.

Social collectivities then refer to all those forms of social interaction which exhibit both features (i) and (ii). Examples of social collectivities are the state, the church, the firm, the school, the university, the (nuclear) family, the art association, the sports

association, the cultural association and the language association. The state possesses a durable relation of super- and sub-ordination between *office-bearers* (government) and subjects (i.e., it displays a permanent authority structure), while the *unity* and *identity* of a state is not abolished through the exchange of its citizens (either office-bearers or subjects).

When societal life forms possess one of these characteristics only, the term *communities* may serve as an appropriate designation. A nation and the extended family possess a solidary unitary character (that is why there may be continuity between a nation of a hundred years ago and of today), but no permanent authority structure can be indicated. The marriage community does possess a permanent authority structure, although a solidary unitary character is absent. In terms of these distinctions neither a state, nor a province, nor a rural town strictly speaking is a *community*. With reference to the state-side of the given facts, we are working with (higher or lower) forms of governmental authority - and therefore with relations of super-ordination and sub-ordination which are absent from a community as we have described it. In reality a city and a town exhibit an interweaving of diverse societal collectivities, communities and what we have called co-ordinational relationships.

The expression *co-ordinational relationships* intends to reflect what is meant by the Dutch term "maatschap". This Dutch term "maatschap" does not have a suitable English equivalent either. The intended kind of relationship surely does not have a permanent authority structure, nor does it possess a solidary unitary character. It concerns social interaction normally related to phenomena of friendship, partnership, fellowship, mate, pal, peer, and the option that we have to associate mutually with an accountable freedom of choice. For the lack of a better alternative, the proposed designation *co-ordinational* is chosen with the intention to include those connotations shared by the phenomena referred to in the previous sentence - which are all instances of co-ordinational relationships.

However, co-ordinational relationships do not only concern the inter-relations between *individuals*, since they also intend to record those relations on an equal footing prevailing between different *communities* and social *collectivities*.

Specified in this way, the distinction between *co-ordinational*, *communal* and *collective* forms of social interaction remains confined to the universal structure of the social aspect as such. These three forms of social interaction are therefore to be viewed as functional (modal) *totality concepts*, i.e., complex basic concepts built up on the basis of an account of the elementary basic concepts of sociology as a discipline - such as the elementary concepts of social order; social distance (co-ordinated and regarding social relationships of super- and sub-ordination); social constancy and dynamics; social differentiation and integration; social sensitivity, consciousness and awareness; social consensus and conflict; social power, control and mastery; and social expression and interpretation.

What is of importance for communicative actions within human society is the fact that all three these kinds of social interaction are at once co-conditioning human social

functioning - thus making it *meaningless* to oppose them. No single human being is involved merely in co-ordinational relationships without at once being taken up in multiple societal collectivities, and vice versa there is no single societal collectivity embracing the existence of human beings so completely that they are not still at once functioning in numerous co-ordinational relationships.

At this point a vast domain of empirical research comes into view, focused upon the *typical specification* which human communicative actions acquire within the diverse co-ordinational, communal and collective forms of interaction operative in every human society. An acknowledgment of the typical structure and the boundaries of the spheres of competence embodied in the forms of social life will not only guide strategies for practical modes of communication into just channels, but will also make a contribution to keeping the different powers of society within their confines.

Since, as we have seen, co-ordinational relationships concern social interaction normally related to phenomena of friendship, partnership, fellowship, mate, pal, peer, and the freedom we have to associate with an accountable freedom of choice, the nature of communicative actions within this sphere of societal interaction take place in the absence of any relations of super- and sub-ordination. It implies that communicative strategies should always observe the requirement that for any kind of critical communication to be effective one should first of all build a relation of *solidarity*, for only then will it be possible to attain the trust to be taken seriously. Such a sense of *critical solidarity* also plays a role within communal societal collectivities where a relation of super- and sub-ordination is intrinsic to the social entity concerned. In the latter case the required solidarity is actually by definition built into the structure of the societal life-form per se. This means that sometimes collective actions are required that convey the exercise of authority even to the extent of coercive actions - such as in the case of the state where the maintenance of law and order may even require enforcement.

The other side of the coin is given in the intimate connections between the role of mass media within a differentiated society on the one hand and the domain of public opinion on the other. By its nature as a public legal institution the state guarantees a sphere where the "public" can exercise its freedom of expression - closely related to those public legal freedoms of citizens embraced by constitutional law, such as the right to political gatherings, the right to organise freely, to express political opinions, the right to establish public media, the right to criticise, the right to protest and, of course, the capstone of democratic public freedoms: the active and passive right to vote and to be elected (see Emery, Ault, and Agee 1975:16 ff., 29 ff.).

Particularly by exploring the domain of civil legal freedom - an area of co-ordinational law in differentiated societies - (mass) communication media bear the tremendous responsibility to mediate between the public domain of the state and the private domain of distinct non-state communities. In doing that they also have to contribute to the cultivation of an appreciation of the role of individual human beings within specific private communities while at the same time opening up the equally important respect for individual freedom and the public legal rights of citizens.

**CONCLUDING REMARK**

Within the web of inter-human relationships evinced within a differentiated society, the uniquely human ability to employ language and to engage in communicative actions manifests itself through a social deepening and disclosure of the basic lingual capacity of human beings. Within such a differentiated society the media of communication explores the domain of the public opinion and in doing that it has the challenge to mediate between co-ordinational relationships and their correlate: communal relationships. Thus the media are called to make an essential contribution to the fundamental societal freedoms that we ought to enjoy within society and its various distinct communities.

## REFERENCES

- Apostel, L. 1981. *African philosophy: Myth or reality*. Gent: E. Story-Scientia.
- De Klerk, W.J. 1978. *Inleiding tot die semantiek*. Durban: Butterworth.
- De Saussure, F. 1966. *Course in general linguistics*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Derrida, J. 1982. *Margins of philosophy*. (Translated, with additional notes, by Alan Bass.) Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Derrida, J. 1997. *Deconstruction in a nutshell. A conversation with Derrida*. (Edited with a commentary by John D. Caputo.) New York: Fordham University Press.
- Emery, E., Ault, P.H. & Agee, W.K. 1975. *Introduction to mass communications*. Fourth edition. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company.
- Goodall, H.L. 1990. *Small group communication in organizations*. Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown Publishers.
- Grondin, J. 1994. *Introduction to philosophical hermeneutics*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Gyeke, K. 1998. Person and community in African thought. In Roux 1998.
- Haefner, G. 1982. *Philosophische antropologie*. Stuttgart.
- Habermas, J. 1984. *The theory of communicative action: Reason and the rationalization of society. Volume 1*. Boston: Beacon.
- Habermas, J. 1984a. *The theory of communicative action: Reason and the rationalization of society. A critique of functionalist reason. Volume 2*. Boston: Beacon.
- Hofer, H. & Altner, G. 1972. *Die sonderstellung des menschen*. Stuttgart: Gustav Fischer Verlag.
- Jaspers, K. 1948. *Philosophie*. Berlin: Springer Verlag.
- Jaspers, K. 1957. Antwort. In Schilpp 1957.
- Kaufmann, F. 1957. Karl Jaspers und die philosophie der kommunikation. In Schilpp 1957.
- Laitman, J.T. 1985. Evolution of the upper respiratory tract: The fossil evidence. In Tobias 1985.
- Min-Sun, K. 2002. *Non-Western perspectives on human communication. Implications for theory and practice*. London: Sage.
- Nida, E.A. 1979. *Componential analysis of meaning*. New York: Sage.
- Overhage, P. 1972. *Der Affe in dir*. Frankfurt am Main: Josef Knecht.
- Portmann, A. 1973. Der weg zum wort. In *ERANOS*. Volume 39.
- Roux, A.P.J. Ed. 1998. *Philosophy from Africa. A text with readings*. Johannesburg: Thomson Publishing.
- Schilpp, P.A. 1957. Ed. *Karl Jaspers*. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag.
- Schnatz, H. 1973. Ed. *Päpstliche Verlautbarungen zu Staat und Gesellschaft, originaldokumente mit deutscher Uebersetzung*, Darmstadt.

- Shutte, A. 1993. *Philosophy for Africa*. Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Strauss, D.F.M. 2002. Is it meaningful to juxtapose "individual" and "society"? In *Society in Transition*. Volume 33 (1): 96-115.
- Strauss, D.F.M. 2004. Transcending the impasse of individualism and universalism in sociological theory. In *Society in Transition*. Volume 35 (1): 165-182.
- Taylor, C. 2000. *Sources of the self. The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Tobias, P.V. Ed. 1985. *Hominid evolution*. New York: Liss.
- Wittgenstein, L. 1968. *Philosophische untersuchungen*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.