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Damián Fernández Pedemonte & Ana Inés Jorge Artigau

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Thinking pencils: a merging foundation between Gregory Bateson and Eliseo Verón

Damián Fernández Pedemonte and Ana Inés Jorge Artigau

Department of Communication, Universidad Austral, Pilar, Argentina

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to present the contributions that Eliseo Verón has made to the field of communication. The originality of the paper lies in making reference to Gregory Bateson as the intellectual influence behind Verón's academic legacy. This is not the conventional synthesis made when analyzing his work. The paper will be divided in three different parts: Ideas, Moments and Interpretant in accordance to the triadic line of thought that characterized Charles Peirce. The conclusions drawn from this analysis will allow us to appreciate the complexity of the ideas we are faced with when thinking about the future of our field.

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1. Introduction

The objective of the present paper is to develop the main contributions made by Eliseo Verón's work to the field of communication. Verón left us with a strong foundation to build on the future from a more complex perspective. The key lies in understanding communication through the history of evolution which makes it part of our very essence. One cannot understand one without the other. This is an invitation to expand the perspective of our field to the beginning of times in order to really appreciate its complexity. Traversa (2015) defined this outlook as a broader theoretical horizon that goes beyond the short history of the *Homo sapiens*.

Verón was known for being a forward thinker capable of staying away from mainstream ideas. He had the privilege of working side by side with Claude Lévi-Strauss who exposed him to the ideas that defined the structuralist paradigm. This experience would later inspire him to move back to France for a significant amount of years though his work would drift far from the binary paradigm that he was first introduced to. He was the recipient of several awards such as a CONICET grant and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship. He has worked in prestigious academic institutions such as the University of Paris VIII, Instituto Di Tella, Universidad de San Andrés, Universidad Nacional de Rosario; amongst others. The years prior to his death were devoted to shape *Semiosis Social 2* that resumes and resignifies the work he has done throughout his life.

Carlos Scolari (2008) summarizes five main paradigms that form the field of communication. Firstly, there is the informational paradigm presented by Shannon and Weaver that promote a lineal understanding between the transmitter and receiver. Secondly, the critical paradigm aligned with the Frankfurt School of thought that promotes reflections on the cultural industry presented by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Thirdly, he mentions the empirical-analytical paradigm where the key is the research of mass communication through its effects and its empirical-quantitative method. Fourthly, the interpretative and cultural paradigm defines mass communication as a social construction where processes, such as newsmaking, play a central role. Qualitative methods

are used to analyze social discourses. Lastly, there is the paradigm of semiotic discourse that originated in the works of Saussure and Peirce. This paradigm is characterized by a multi disciplinary approach that includes linguistics, sociology, psychology and cognitive sciences. Propellers of this paradigm include Barthes, Metz and Eco. It is in this last paradigm where most of Verón's can be located.

Eliseo Verón's legacy lives on primarily in Europe and South America though it is barely known in the Anglo-Saxon sphere. This goes beyond the logics of a globalized world. For us, Latin American researchers, it seems hard to introduce a man who has been at the center of everything we know in our field. Though Verón did work in collaboration with the School of Palo Alto in 1961, the experience was not enough to make an impact in the region. Unlike other theorists, like Umberto Eco and Michel Foucault, his work did not transcend to the local field which was more enthused by the biases of mass media. Regardless, as this paper will suggest, this academic experience would be relevant in a more personal manner that would allow Verón to develop his own view of the theory of communication.

Verón had to deal with the Anglo perspective in his own region. During the decade of the 60s, two antagonistic forces divided social sciences in Latin America (Efendy Maldonado, 2009, p. 25). On the one hand, the Marxists rooted for a more philosophical and political outtake of the field. On the other hand, empirical research was under the rule of law of the North American tradition where functionalism, empiricism and systems theory was front and center. According to Del Villar de Muñoz (2014, p. 124), Verón was able to close the rift within the social sciences by arguing that one could not exist without the other. Theory paved the way to understand how to conduct empirical work and, vice versa, the insight that resulted from fieldwork led to new theoretical conquests.

In addition, in his first book; Verón (1972) makes reference to the American mathematician Claude Shannon. This particular allusion is his starting to argue against a lineal conception of communication. This will be a position he will share with the Cybernetic approach in which the concept of feedback plays a central role. According to Verón (p. 11) the evolution of semiotics implies the realization that we cannot infer how people recognize something from the conditions of productions. The concept of non-linearity will be the basis for his own model known as Social Semiosis.

This paper is organized according to the way Verón thought: in triads following the semiotic perspective of Charles Peirce. Verón, in *Social Semiosis 2* (2013), divides his work in three parts: ideas, moments and interpretants. We will honor this structure in order to explain his work. This will take several steps to accomplish. Firstly, in order to address how Verón thought, we will make reference to the impact Bateson had in his work. Understanding this connection will help us appreciate the complexity of his framework. This section will be titled Ideas. Secondly, Moments, will tackle the fruition of Verón's work. This part will develop the author's perspective with regards to the binary and triadic paradigm, which is an essential part of his framework. Finally, the last part, will explain the impact of Verón's work in the field within the region of Latin America. This will help to recognize the impact his work has in our fields and how his ideas will evolve in the future.

The starting point for this analysis will be the Bateson puzzle. This unanswered enigma states the following question: 'what is the power that connects' (Bateson, 2011)? We need to consider Verón's within a global setting in order to truly acknowledge its value. The relationships we can establish with other relevant figures within the field will allow us to understand the importance of his contribution. To this end, there are three names we consider: Gregory Bateson, Charles S. Peirce and Ferdinand Saussure.

Considering Bateson is important in order to understand the meta-level of Verón thinking. That is to say, considering Bateson brings us closer to understanding the origin of Verón's idea rather than the content itself. Both authors share a broader perspective of the domain that has allowed them to link its development with the evolutionary process of your specie and its cognitive transformation. As a result, to communicate has become an intrinsic aspect of the human being rather than an abstract concept mediated by technology. Having a larger scope to think about our field allows us to become aware of the complexity it implies and the essential place it occupies in our culture. Both Verón and

Bateson invited readers into their thinking processes. In sharing the way they thought, they left not only a map with their discoveries but, mostly, a way to keep on finding our way through new uncharted territory. The real value of Verón's work lies in understanding his framework in order to ensure the survival of his work into the future.

As we said before, the second part of the paper will develop the way Verón implemented the ideas behind the binary and triadic paradigm to his thinking. Two important names come to play: Saussure and Peirce. It is our understanding that we need to consider both authors at the same time in order to fully dimension the power of Verón's work. Semiology vs. semiotics, Europe vs. America ... these have been known to be antagonistic ways to think about Communications. Regardless, they will forever coexist within the framework of social semiosis. Verón has been able to understand both traditions by recognizing not only their differences but also weaving their similarities within the tapestry of his knowledge. The idea of this second part of the paper will be to understand the place Verón's theories occupy within both of these traditions. It is our argument that Bateson can be considered the common denominator of both these schools of thought.

The third, and last, part of the paper will be used to place Verón within the Latin American theories of our field. The importance of this part is to understand the repercussions of his work and the influence he keeps on having to this day. This part of the analysis allows us to comprehend just how much of a forward thinker Verón was. The field is still catching up to originality of his work.

As was mentioned earlier, Bateson is not the conventional route to understanding Verón. Charles Peirce has occupied a more explicit role in his texts. In fact, Verón (1999) explained his quest to find the pencils with which Peirce had designed the triadic paradigm. Up to this point, it might seem that whatever follows in this paper has to be wrong: Peirce should be our guide to understand the way Verón thought. Still, it is important to take a closer look. We need to make a more abstract reflection in order to understand that what Verón values in Peirce goes beyond his ideas. Verón wants to grasp the inner workings of Peirce's mind. This perspective is a clear influence of Gregory Bateson: a meta-cognitive approach to ideas is something Bateson wrote and practiced a lot. It was an attempt to develop ideas at a more abstract level of thought. Understanding this intellectual connection is essential in two ways. Firstly, it allows us to comprehend why Verón thought the way he did. Secondly, and most important, it challenges us to learn how to find thinking pencils of our own that will delineate what is to come for our field.

1.1. First part: ideas at a meta-level

To begin with, it is important to state that the relevance of this paper lies in the proposition of understanding the work of Eliseo Verón through the influence of Gregory Bateson. It is a fact that Bateson's ideas, whether implicitly or explicitly, live in most of the works published by Verón. This has not been the traditional route to analyze his work. Charles S. Peirce has been recognized as the organizing framework behind the development of his ideas (Traversa, 2015). Even when Verón (2013) defined Peirce as the founding father of semiotics, he also recognized in Bateson the ability to articulate the process of communication with the development of complex systems. Keeping this in mind, would it be possible to state that adopting the paradigm developed by Bateson led Verón to implement Peirce into his thinking? This is an aspect that this paper will address.

In *Efectos de Agenda* (1999, p. 52), Verón explains the connection between Bateson and Peirce in his intellectual development. He explains that he felt torn between the concreteness of the American perspective presented by Peirce and the level of abstraction of the structuralist European perspective presented by Saussure. Verón states that his struggle lied in trying to find a synthesis between both perspectives. What he was after was a more concrete perspective about the articulation between social phenomena and the construction of meaning. The answer came through Bateson and Peirce. Bateson was key, for Verón, in understanding communication at a micro level. This work led to Verón's first book *Conducta, Estructura y Comunicación* (1968). Then came Peirce with his

ability to resume the world in three elements. This dynamic perspective allowed Verón to jump into the macro level of our field.

Verón already makes reference to Bateson in his first work titled *Conducta, Estructura y Comunicación* (1968) that is a compilation of different essays he wrote during the first years of his academic career. Structurally, this work is comparable to Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972) that is also the result of the sum of important academic papers that represent his perspective of the field. It is important to point out that Peirce only appears in this book in the prologue of the third edition, which was written in 1996. This makes our case stronger to defend the idea that by internalizing the way of thinking of Gregory Bateson, Verón was able to fully grasp the power behind the triadic perspective that is Charles S. Peirce. In other words, Verón might be thinking of Peirce from the framework he internalized from Bateson.

But which are the *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972)? The answer is not explicit in the collection of essays published by Gregory Bateson. He introduced his work with a direct application of evolution to the nature of ideas. He was interested in seeing how ideas cohabitate, how some change, how others are discarded. He stated that at first he was not aware of the backbone that united all his theories. That came much later: only by 1969 was he able to unite all of his work under steps (Bateson, 1972). During the process of pursuit, he describes himself as an explorer following folklore. As the explorer he can intuit what lies ahead with no certainty of exactly where to find it.

In fact, the first section of the book is devoted to his thought process alone. The metalogues was the method that Bateson chose to travel towards a destination that would only come to being through his mind. Nora Bateson (2011), Gregory's youngest daughter, made a documentary where she explained the concept. It was an opportunity to let go of the trees in order to focus on the forest that connected one tree to another. It was a way to cut from the shackles imposed by our culture and our every day practices in order to empathize the importance of the context that surrounds us. The metalogues (Bateson, 1972) became the exercise through which Bateson implemented this type of thinking. In essence, metalogues are hypothetical conversations that Bateson had with his daughter. The reason why a child is picked as a counterpart lies in the fact that he or she is not limited in their ways of thinking by an academic education. It is an exercise that allowed him to develop a more holistic perspective that puts forward the relationship between things rather than the thing itself. Nora Bateson considered this the greatest contribution that his father made: a foundation of knowledge from which to build on more relationships through the development of new ideas rather than a rigid framework.

One key aspect that connects Bateson to Verón is the concept of information. Bateson (1972, p. 315) defined information as the difference that makes a difference. This type of definition puts the context before the thing itself since the information is the result of contrast. Nora Bateson (2011) explains that this definition of information is helpful to envision a world made of relationships. This perspective of the world invites us to consider the relationships rather than the objects in itself. Verón considers the concept of information as way to understand the difference between a binary and triadic paradigm. Verón (2013) dedicates a chapter of his last book to explain Bateson's perspectives of mental processes. It is here where he acknowledges the strong influence the ecological perspective has had in his work. According to Verón (p. 53), Bateson's theory is the perfect bridge between the paradigms presented by Peirce and Saussure respectively. In *Social Semiosis 2* (2013, pp. 52–53), Verón emphasized the importance of knowing the difference between a behavior and the message of the behavior itself. This is the starting point in order to unpack exchanges between individuals. It is here where he states that the definition of information formulated by Bateson responds to both a binary and triadic paradigm. Is it a difference that can be formulated between two things or do we need a third thing to register the difference between two other things? An important point to be made here is the fact that Verón, both in the binary and triadic paradigm, puts relationships at the center of his framework. Though this will be developed further in the second part of the paper, it is relevant to point out that his way of thinking connects to the way Bateson developed his ideas.

A second aspect that connects both thinkers is the notion that Bateson had of the mind. According to him, the mind and process of thought cannot be reduced to consciousness but rather a broader sense of being that is present all around us (Charlton, 2008). This particular viewpoint is essential to understand the dangers that consciousness can imply for our understanding of the world. Nora Bateson's documentary warned us about this. In the film she stressed the danger of believing that life works in lineal systems (Bateson, 2011). The truth of the matter is that Bateson's theory makes us understand that the world works in unpredictable ways much like non-linear systems. But what is a non-linear system exactly? Verón (2013) defined it as a phenomenon that occurs when the initial conditions cannot predict the end result. That is to say, the occurrence can lead to both A or B. The initial conditions cannot predict which of the two results will be the one that finally takes place. What is important to bear in mind is that whichever result it ends up being is just a matter of context and chance.

Verón (1993) first presented the notion of non-linearity through his model of social semiosis. Analyzing a corpus or discourse is always hard for it entails a complex formation of sentences that conform the paragraphs and, ultimately, the whole novel or script. Bearing this in mind, a structural perspective of language is not enough to study these aspects in depth since its scope is only limited to the range of a sentence. Instead, Eliseo Verón (1993) created the theory of Social Semiotics in order to be able to study a text in a complex and detailed way. The underlying assumption of this framework is that the study of semiotics is the analysis of social phenomena as a process that produces meaning. We must first consider that a text is infinite as an object of study. The person who analyses needs to select a particular scope in order to study it. When we analyze a corpus we need to understand that it's submerged in both conditions of production and of recognition. The former are grammatical restrictions that apply to the corpus itself. It is related to the experience that is writing for it entails the conditions that have paved the way for the end result. The latter, is the social phenomena that includes what people recognize in the text. This second aspect is related to the experience of the individual readers that identify different aspects of the text according to their knowledge and experience. It is important to consider the gap that exists between the conditions of production and recognition. The balance between the two elements is broken for while there is only one condition of production, there are multiple conditions of recognition. This asymmetry helps to explain the non-linear characteristic of communication (Verón, 1993). When a system is non-linear the initial conditions of a process are not enough to explain the end result. It would be the opposite of a cooking a cheesecake recipe where, given the necessary ingredients, you would always get the desired cake. Recognizing this characteristic of communication is important to avoid making superficial or erroneous conclusions when analyzing a text. This framework proposes that the person who analyses a text needs to select either to study the conditions of production or the conditions of recognition separately for each one entails a different method of study.

A third aspect that connects Bateson and Verón is the theory of double bind. Bateson applied this concept as way to understand the occurrence of Schizophrenia (Bateson, 1972). The double bind helps us to conceive that the pathology is not something you could identify in one individual but rather in the relationship among them. Specialist should therefore adopt a broader perspective of the context in order to address the matter. But, it is important to point out that this phenomenon is not only limited to Schizophrenia. It is finding oneself in a situation where there seems to be a lack of interpretation of the scenario. In the words of Bateson: 'schizophrenia had something to do with metaphor – not knowing that metaphors are metaphors, or taking literal things and handling them as if they were metaphors, or something screwy in that region' (Bateson & Bateson, 1987, p. 125). There seems to be no form of escape of the paradigm of thought the person has adopted. Still this is not necessarily representative of reality. Bateson teaches us that we need to perceive our context of learning in order to change it. The answer to the problem sometimes appears by adopting a more abstract train of thought that would position us at a meta-level. For example, the person can find the solution to the problem at hand by forgetting about the ideas that put him in a rut and, instead, focusing on changing his paradigm of thought directly. According to Nora

Bateson (2011) this was Gregory's creative imperative that solves the problem of thinking lineally a world that is round. In order to get past these types of situations, it is imperative to change the way we think. The key to do this lies in our capacity to access higher levels of abstraction in our thinking process in order to move forward. This implies accessing our meta-level of thought where we unpack why we think the way we do. The context of learning also becomes essential in order to achieve this. Learning is defined as the capacity to change.

Verón (1972, p. 105) has also written about double bind with the intention of understanding communication at an interpersonal level. His intention was to extend the insight gained on the matter from the field of social psychiatry to the field of communication. In fact, Bateson was asked about the application of this paper specifically during an interview published in the book on Cybernetics (Birdwhistell, 1994, p. 307). His reply showed approval of the perspective taken by Verón and Sluzki on the matter. According to him, the double bind could be found beyond the scope of schizophrenia.

In addition, Verón (1993) is a clear example of overcoming his own double bind towards the binary paradigm. Just as Nora Bateson (2011) explained to become trapped in our thinking can lead to a double bind situation. In the case of Verón, the study of language was insufficient in order to go beyond the phrase level. By embracing a triadic model, Verón was able to develop a more complex perspective that could theorize a proper discourse. He would always mention Christian Metz as an example of someone who unsuccessfully tried to study cinema under the imposition marked by the study of language (Verón, 2013). In the end it was impossible for him to find the linguistic code within the study of cinema.

A fourth aspect that unites both thinkers has to do with the difference between complementary and symmetrical relations in Bateson's work. As was mentioned earlier, the Ecology of Mind invites us to study the relationship rather than the object in itself. One way to do this is through the concept of schismogenesis that implies the creation of division (Bateson, 1972). There are two different types of relationships to consider. On the one hand, symmetrical relations are those in which the individual responds to another by replicating the initial behavior. For example, someone can smile back at the person who smiled first. On the other hand, complementary relations are those in which the resulting behavior is different from the initial one yet there is a direct relationship between both actions. For example, one could consider examples of dominance and dependency in this case.

This has been a categorization that Verón (1993) used to address the construction of the person in the process of semiosis. It is a way to put man back in center stage by understanding the signifying body that had been displaced by language. Traversa (2015) has written a paper explaining how Verón developed this concept in his work. He provides the example of *Corpo Significante* (1976) and compares it to *El cuerpo reencontrado* published in 1987. The difference between the two papers lies in the fact that in the first one there is no mention of social semiosis and the argumentation for choosing the triadic paradigm over the binary one is weak. The development of Peirce's work into his framework is still in the works. In contrast, he does apply Bateson's categories to argument his position. One could argue that this example helps to show how the implementation of his ideas within the ecology of mind paved the way to the implementation of Peirce's school of thought.

The last part that unites Verón to Bateson is their evolutionary perspective of the field. Bateson was heavily influenced by his father, William, who was the first biologist to use the concept of genetics as a way of understanding heritage. According to Gregory Bateson (1972), the importance of evolution lies in the fact that it compels us to understand the mind instead of considering it a finished product. According to Verón (2013), Bateson wanted to extent the idea of Ecology of Mind into a general perspective of our specie. That is to say, that what he was able to study in small scale would be applicable as an evolutionary explanation of how our mind works. There is a rift between both authors as to whether this is possible or not. Regardless, Verón also develops an evolutionary perspective in his last work titled *Semiosis Social 2* (2013). He builds this connection through the concept of mediatization. According to him, this type of phenomena occurs when there is exteriorization of cognitive processes. For example: when someone writes a book, his or her ideas are printed on the page. As a result

of its materiality, the work is persistent throughout time and autonomous from the person who wrote it. Verón finds the first mediatization process back in the Stone Age. Human's capacity to build tools is a clear example of exteriorization of cognitive processes. Therefore in order to study the history of mediatization there is a need to unpack the evolutionary story of our species. This is why Verón's framework is a comprehensive insight to our human nature.

Throughout this part of the paper we have analyzed the relationship between Eliseo Verón and Gregory Bateson. Understanding this connection allows us to unveil a metacognitive level of Verón's mind. This brings us closer to understanding why he thought the way he did. The first step was to comprehend what was meant by ecology of mind. This understanding allowed us to draw connecting concepts between the two thinkers: information, mind, non-linearity, double bind, schismogenesis and an evolutionary perspective. Now that we have a better grasp of how Verón thought, we will analyze what was the content of his ideas.

1.2. Second part: moments of his works

Every year Eliseo Verón would teach Introduction to Communications at the University. In order to explain the birth of the field to his students, he would identify four different schools of thought:

- (1) A linguistic approach represented by Ferdinand Saussure which defined the sign in a binary logic
- (2) A semiotic approach that saw the sign in a triadic dynamic represented by Charles S. Peirce
- (3) A cybernetic perspective, that was born after the Second World War, which focused on control and flow of information
- (4) A pragmatic perspective on language represented by Austin.

The first two schools of thought put the sign center stage. They will be the focus for this part of the paper. Verón (2002) always stressed the importance of the relationship established by meaning in order to understand the phenomenon that occurs in our field. It implies the study of relationships, which is aligned with what Gregory Bateson preached. Communications lies within the social sciences where the relationships of representation are the ones that stand out. It is in this context that Saussure and Peirce become vital to understand these issues.

According to Saussure (1964, p. 128) the sign is the result of the combination of a concept and an acoustic image. On the one hand, the latter is not the sound or the thing itself but rather the psychic footprint that is accessed by our senses. On the other hand, the former is of a more abstract nature. Therefore, according to this paradigm, the sign is the result of the combination between the concept (signified) and the acoustic-image (signifier) which are both psychological rather than material. In contrast, the paradigm presented by Peirce also has an abstract nature. Verón (2002) proposes two different questions in order to understand this perspective. The first one is to ask what is a sign. According to Peirce (1974, p. 156) a sign is a thing (first) that acts in the place of another (second) for someone (third) from a determined viewpoint. The second question proposed by Verón is to ask how many signs are there. The dynamic of the model lies in the fact that each of the elements that make sign are also a sign themselves (Peirce, 1974). This process is called infinite semiosis.

At first one could point out that the main difference between both models lies in the amount of components the sign. This would be incorrect. It is not a matter of quantity but rather a difference in essence that is at stake (Verón, 2002). In the first model both components are of the same nature and dependent of one another. In the second model, however, the nature of each element is different. The other important difference lies in the applicability of each paradigm. Verón (2002) stressed that in the triadic model, language is just one of the many systems through which the sign can be studied. This is a radical difference that separates one school of thought from the other. In fact during a big part of the twentieth century there has been an attempt to transfer the success of the language model to other social phenomena. But these attempts have been trumped with the

necessity to address discourse that exceeds the logic of the phrase. Verón's texts go deep on this matter. His need to understand a discourse as complex as a text, for example, has led him to find new grounds on where to stand. This paved the way for a stronger preference to consider the ideas of Charles Peirce as the compass for his work.

What we argue is that in order to understand the value of Verón's ideas, it is important to consider both paradigms. As we stated at the beginning of this paper, Verón's first educational experience abroad was working with Claude Lévi-Strauss who was also a Structuralist. Therefore, his initial academic experience was within this paradigm. Nonetheless, he became aware of the limits of this paradigm early on. He was convinced that in order to understand communication, a type of social phenomenon, it was insufficient to consider the intention of the actors involved (Verón, 1972). This is where the non-linearity of his model comes into play. His complex perspective of the field is represented in the gap between the conditions of production and recognition. The theories of language put the subject on center stage. There is a need, therefore, to consider a theory that can be free from the sender-decoder logic.

The paradigm presented by Charles Peirce allows Verón (2013) to consider the process of communication beyond the limits imposed by a linguistic perspective and, instead, consider the sign as the starting point. In addition, this perspective conceptualizes the degree of indeterminacy that exist between the different components of the sign. There is no clear-cut answer with regards to the relationship between them but rather an ongoing process of semiosis. Both of these advantages are relatable to what was described earlier about Bateson. In *Ecology of Mind* (1972) Bateson spoke of relationships rather than objects. All relationships were essential to him no matter the size. The small relationships allowed us to understand the big ones and vice versa. Peirce's paradigm offers a framework complex enough to understand this world of relationships. According to Verón (2013) this was something that Bateson was not able to do, which is why he takes the *Ecology of Mind* as the basis to understand communication at a micro level. One could argue that in order to fulfill Bateson's comprehensive perspective, Verón has to find that logic elsewhere in the triadic paradigm. This strengthens our perspective that Verón first internalized the paradigm proposed by Bateson and put into practice his perspective through the discovery of the triadic model. This finally allowed him to materialize a theory called Social Semiosis that puts forward the complexity and non-linearity of our field.

To conclude, it is important to point out that what makes Verón's contributions rare is his capacity to make both paradigms converse. In the fourth chapter of his last book (Verón, 2013, p. 78), titled *Binarismo y Triadismo*, he uses the example of the work done by anthropologist Lévi-Strauss to show the possibility of working on both paradigms at the same time. According to the semiologist, the anthropologic tradition clearly favors the binary tradition. Nonetheless, when considering the application of the 'iconic sign', one could argue that there is an implicit reference to Peirce's work. This example serves to understand the value of Verón's work. Finding the connecting beams between two traditions, not only what separates them, allows for more comprehensive perspective of the field on which to build on.

1.3. Third part: interpretant of his language

To put Verón's work within the Latin American context is to acknowledge the originality of his work. One could argue that Verón's connection to Bateson's work is disruptive in the Latin American tradition. The ecological perspective of mind is the connecting beam that unites his first work all the way to his last. It started as a collaborative work with the psychologist Carlos Slutsky about how the double bind extended beyond the pathology of schizophrenia (Verón, 1972). Still the reference to Bateson's work extend beyond. Both thinkers are united by: metacommunication, the difference between complementary and symmetrical relations, their perspective of information based on difference, different types of double bind that extend pathologies and, above all, an evolutionary

perspective to the field of communication. This systemic complex perspective occupies a predominant role in Verón's last work. These points were explored at the beginning of the paper.

During this first phase of his work, Verón draws from Bateson two definitions that will serve as a foundation for his work (Efendy Maldonado, 2009). The first definition is to understand metacommunication as a synonym of style of speech. That is to say there is a choice in the way a message is delivered beyond the content itself. The second aspect has to do with the realization that people communicate their subjectivity regardless of the message itself. You can tell where that person comes from through the act of communication. In addition, he is also very incisive towards the real function of the message beyond their apparent significance, which is very common in the capitalist mass-communicating world we live in.

It is arguable that from his first publication, Verón's work was deemed original. To establish a connection between communication and neurosis was unheard of in the academic region. Efendy Maldonado (2009) stated the rarity of his methodological perspective in his dissertation. According to him, Verón's perspective was odd and stood out in a region that was very homogenous and lacked a critical perspective.

Torrigo Villanueva (2015) conducted a research that analysed the most widespread manuals in the universities of communications in Latin America. The objective was to determine the importance given to European and American traditions. He cites the manual of the Spaniard Blanca Muñoz to illustrate two things. Firstly, he makes reference to the validity of the model presented by Laswell as the main methodological reference. Secondly, he recognizes two main paradigm of research: the American model (centered in effects) and the European model (centered in ideology). The only Latin American that appears in this manual is Eliseo Verón. Torrigo Villanueva also cites Eric Maigret who is known for his application of social sciences to the field of communications. Maigret also draws his work from Verón.

In addition, Verón stood out for favoring an empirical outtake to his work. His work was inserted amongst a sea of papers that centered round the positivist paradigm that followed the trends set by *Communication Research*. Efendy Maldonado (2009) explained that any form of empiricism was frowned upon. From 1940 to 1960, theoretical speculation was favored to the concreteness of real live events. In this context, he recognized that the importance of Verón's work was to find common ground between theory and practice in order to do his research.

In a recent interview, conducted by academics Scolari and Bertetti (2007), Verón recognized not only the influence of Cybernetics but also of the binary and triadic paradigm. He explains that his first relation with the binary paradigm was the result of working with Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes (Verón, 2013). On the one hand, Lévi-Strauss was a mentor to him inspiring him to explore uncharted territory. The resource of having direct access to him made it plausible to translate *Antropología Estructural*. On the other hand, Barthes was his direct access to the tradition led by Saussure. As we mentioned earlier, he later departed from this school of thought. Upon his return to Argentina, he found himself quickly teaching the structuralist tradition to his sociology students. In the interview he explains that this paradigm was only familiar in teaching of linguistics and anthropology. Instead, in the field of Communications, it was a rarity to teach this method of analysis.

Chronologically speaking, the binary and triadic tradition developed at different times. In the interview led by Scolari and Bertetti (2007), Verón explains that semiology was embraced in France somewhere between the decades of the 60s and 70s. The names associated with its development were Greimas, Metz, Eco and Fabbri. In comparison, the semiotic tradition was spread quickly in the region of Latin America through the analysis of imagery made by Barthes, Eco, Durand, amongst others. An example of this, as is explained in the interview, is the birth of the magazine *Languages in Argentina*. The names that led this movement were Indart, Steimberg, Traversa and Verón. The semiologist explains that semiotics in Argentina was born as 'sociosemiotics'.

According to Ravera (2000) what made Verón stand out was his capacity to elaborate a framework of systems of knowledge that found middle ground between theory and its practical counterpart. As

was mentioned earlier, a more ideological perspective was always favored. It was rare to find a person with the capacity to shift from theory to practice with such ease.

O better yet, according to Paz (1990) poetry can be both the central voice and the eccentric outsider of tradition. This perspective could easily be applied to the work of Verón within the Latin American context. It is central in the sense that people have often cited his ideas in their work. He is also responsible for introducing European traditions within the local academic discussions even when the traditions had not been developed. However, as we mentioned at the beginning, he was also eccentric in the sense that he was able to depart from the traditional perspectives of the field that the region pursued.

There are several reasons that pave the way to his unconventional ways. Firstly, he dared to tinker with paradigms that were yet to be explored like Cybernetics. The focus he developed concentrated on micro relations in communications instead of the macro aspect of it. This made him seem ahead of his time in a way. Secondly, he was able to adapt and incorporate these new paradigms to his investigation becoming an expert at it. He was able to apply this in both a theoretical and a practical way. This was the basis to construct his own theoretical perspective on the field, which allowed him to understand communication from his own unique perspective. Thirdly, the fact that he lived in France for 20 years, made it easier to stay aside from the context of the region that inspired certain research perspectives instead of others. He came back to Argentina in the year 1985. During his absence, Verón did not consider the local concerns as subject for his investigation. He did focus on a more institutional perspective of communication that concentrated on the relations sustained by organizations such as the State, science and education of Latin America.

In a way, Verón's distinctive interest, differ both in space and in time with regards to the mean of the region. With regards to the spatial axis, his experiences both in the US and in Europe, positioned him in a perspective of the field that was very different from the local tendencies. In fact, his case studies were done in France. With regards to the temporal axis, his topics of study were usually ahead with regards to what was being done in the region at the time. Actually, the fact that he decided to name his last manuscript *La Semiosis Social 2* (2013) could be an indicative that he needed more time to process and develop the ideas he had set out to write when he first finished *La Semiosis Social* (1993). In between these two texts, he devoted his time to write essays and columns that had a more down to earth tone to it. This aspect of his work can also be related to Bateson. Before his death, Gregory was able to make a concluding lecture (Charlton, 2008). He chose to cite Elliot to convey that it is part of human nature to never stop exploring (Bateson, 1991). The objective was not to get to the finish line but rather to get to where it all started: and to acknowledge it for the first time. I think this makes sense of the development of Verón's work. His ideas evolved through a feedback process that allowed the ideas to build on what was already written. It's evolution takes form in an ascending spiral which includes a broader and more critical perspectives of the topics that had inspired him in the beginning.

2. Conclusion

The initial objective of this paper was to unpack the contributions made by Eliseo Verón to the field of communication. Our hypothesis was that Gregory Bateson was an important figure in order to understand how this man thought. In the first part of the paper we were able to draw some of the similarities between them: a metacognitive perspective, an eclectic interest in diverse topics that were presented in their first books which led to a more complex perspective of the field, their disconformity with lineal ways of thinking, a relational perspective to the topics of study, an evolutionary approach of the field and; the interest for information as a difference than makes a difference and the phenomenon of the double bind. Understanding how Verón thought was an important step in order to understand his ideas and the impact he has had in the field.

The second part of the paper was devoted to the important Moments of his work. The emphasis was put on the way he was able to synthesize the binary and triadic paradigm through his framework.

In drawing the differences, he also delineated the similarities between both schools of thought. The result is a more complex and dynamic perspective of the field. Language implies a big system of possibilities. When you select a particular message, you are also making reference to the other alternatives that were left out of the message (Benveniste, 1971). Therefore, it is our belief, that Verón navigation towards the triadic paradigm has to be understood in conjunction to the structuralist movement. It is in considering both of these frameworks together where we are able to fully dimension the importance of the ideas Verón has left us.

This was our entryway to the third part of the paper where we were able to discuss the new language, Interpretant, which Verón taught us. He was able to break away with the homogenous pattern that the field had taken at the time. He installed new conversations that paved they way to new thinking grounds. His last work is a legacy of framework that puts the spotlight on us. It compels us to get inspired and take the ideas to the next level.

Maybe, what we need to learn from these two thinkers is to stop conceiving our field as something that has to be tied to the linearity of time: past, present and future. What might actually happen is that we will allow our ideas to ferment in order to understand what has been in front of us all along: communication is an essential aspect of who we are regardless of the time. Understanding how we communicate brings us closer to understanding who we are regardless of the moment of time we find ourselves in. We now have a framework that will allow us to harness the complexity that his entails. Let's pick up the pencils from these important thinkers and make their ideas evolve.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Professor Damián Fernández Pedemonte is the Director of the Masters Program of Communication in the University and the Masters in Content Management. He holds a Phd in Linguistics and has completed postgraduate experiences in both Ohio and Milan. For ten years he was the Dean of the School of Communications. He has authored 7 books and dozens of scientific papers. He does research for the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET) and is part of think tank called CECAP.

Ana Ines Jorge Artigau is a PhD candidate in the University. She also holds a Master in Cognitive Studies from the University of Columbia with a specialization in Creativity. She has studied under and worked for Eliseo Verón for several years. She was his teaching assistant in the classes of Communication and History of Mediatization. Currently, she is working on her thesis with the objective of determining the creative contribution that Verón has made to the field of Communication.

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