

## Memories of João Claudio Todorov

*Memórias de João Cláudio Todorov*

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The breadth and depth of João Claudio Todorov's contributions to science, his university, his students, and his country will be recounted for many years and in many venues. I confine remarks here to what I witnessed as Todorov's seminal contributions to a new subfield that is now identified as culturo-behavior science (<https://www.abainternational.org/vcs/directory.aspx>).

I met Todorov in 2003 at the annual meeting of the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) when a very tall and distinguished looking man<sup>1</sup> began a conversation about metacontingencies. He spoke very fast and enthusiastically and with a strong Portuguese accent. He said he was planning a “think tank” to discuss the metacontingency concept, and in the meantime would I go to Brazil for a conference in Londrina? It took a while to realize this was Todorov – the Todorov spoken of so fondly by Fred Keller and Murray Sidman. How was it that this Brazilian experimentalist, who had been among the founders of behavior analysis in Brazil, was interested in metacontingencies?

In 2004, Todorov's plan for a think tank came to fruition in Campinas, where behaviorists from several countries gathered to discuss the relation of behavior principles to cultural phenomena.<sup>2</sup> Later dubbed “Think Tank 1”, it was a model for the six succeeding think tanks held in three countries with the latest one held online in June 2021. They were the root from which many branches of research and collaboration grew and Todorov remained a guiding force throughout, both at the meetings and in the periods between meetings.<sup>3</sup>

Todorov continued for the rest of his life to nurse what he had planted. Through his relations with think tank members, he arranged opportunities for students to spend time abroad with researchers who were working in this new area. As always in such arrangements, everybody benefitted from the exchange of ideas and research traditions. In this case, they also contributed to a developing cross-national conceptual framework for understanding, analyzing, and intervening in socio-behavioral phenomena; and they established a tradition of ongoing collaboration that includes cross-generational and cross-national researchers (e.g., Albuquerque, Houmanfar & Freitas-Lemos, & Vasconcelos, 2021; Borba, Tourinho & Glenn, 2014; Ortu, Becker, Woelz & Glenn, 2012; Sandaker, Couto & de Carvalho, 2019).

Closer to home, and even long after formal retirement, Todorov inspired and mentored many academic generations of students to analyze and intervene in socio-behavioral phenomena. They designed and conducted laboratory experiments on human social behavior (e.g., Vasconcelos & Todorov, 2015). They developed and carried out projects that solved important real-world social problems, such as reducing pedestrian fatalities in a major city (Machado & Todorov, 2013). They analyzed the effects of public policy on the socially important behavior of sub-populations (e.g. Freitas-Lemos & Todorov, 2020). We can hope that, as a result of his extensive mentoring, Todorov's repertoire will be represented and extended in the scientific behavior of his former students for many decades to come.

Much of Todorov's published work is inaccessible to me because it is in Portuguese. But tucked amid a dizzying array of multilingual and multi-topic papers are those in English on matters of particular interest to me. His distinction of transformative and conservative metacontingencies (Todorov, 2013) adds a cultural-level dimension to the earlier distinction of ceremonial and technological operant contingencies. It offers a framework for understanding

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<sup>1</sup> My husband Bob called Todorov “The Count” because, as an actor/director, Bob would have cast him as such.

<sup>2</sup> The think tank was arranged by Todorov and Maria Malott to occur in conjunction with the 2004 joint conference of the Brazilian Association of Psychology and Behavioral Medicine (ABPMC) and the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI).

<sup>3</sup> For more complete history of think tanks, see Vasconcelos et al. (2022).

problems that can occur when ceremonial operant contingencies are embedded in technological metacontingencies, and vice-versa. Todorov's distinction provides a way to determine the level at which interventions could be most effective. In another brief paper Todorov makes the case for the usefulness of non-experimental data in understanding and addressing social issues (Todorov, 2009). The take-home message for me is that he reveals the creative opportunities that can arise from non-doctrinaire thinking.

Todorov was widely recognized in Brazil as a scientist with a deep interest in the public good. He generously shared his knowledge, with scientists and policy makers alike, of the usefulness of behavioral and culturo-behavioral principles to addressing important social issues. Here he made creative use of those principles in analyzing the contingencies underlying public policy (e.g. Todorov & Freitas-Lemos). In this work, so important to the future of his country (and others), he forged a path for developing alliances between culturo-behavior scientists and policy makers.

Todorov was an inspiring colleague and a generous friend. His enthusiasm for behavior science, culturo-behavior science, and life in general was boundless. His openness to new methods and concepts together with his deep commitment to behavior science gave a balance to his work in culturo-behavior science. Always firm in his own opinion, he listened closely to differing opinions. Always generous, always kind, always supportive, he was loved, honored, and admired by friends and colleagues around the world. To me, Joao Claudio Todorov exemplified the best of what *H. sapiens* has to offer. He will be profoundly missed by all whose lives he touched.<sup>4</sup>

### **Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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<sup>4</sup> As I was completing this comment, an article was published online in which Todorov and colleagues offer a more detailed account of the matters I touched on here (see Todorov, Baia, Freitas-Lemos , Borba, de Melo, & Sampaio, 2021).

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Invited paper

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