

Introduction



During my formative years as a scholar in Russia, I was interested in how different verbal and nonverbal signs play a role in interactions between people(s). That subject, labeled *obchenie* and derived from the word *obchii* (“common”), was explored by philology, linguistics, psychology, semiotics, culturology, translation studies, and so on—not by something that would be called “communication study” or “communication studies.” Later, when I became a faculty member in the Department of Communication Studies in the United States, I discovered that I had been studying communication most of my academic life—like Molière’s Monsieur Jourdain, who had been speaking prose all his life and didn’t even know it.

Today, *kommunikatsiya*—another word meaning “common”—is a widespread label in Russian academia, found in the names of departments, curricula offerings, problematics of scientific conferences, areas of research, and ever-growing publications. Influenced to a large degree by how communication is theorized, researched, and taught in western, especially English-speaking countries, the area of “communication study” or “communication studies” in Russia—often, but not always, called *kommunikativistika*—has also inherited the debates about its place among other disciplines, such as philology, linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics, pragmatics, semiotics, rhetoric, and so on. Thus, I try to draw on both cultural traditions of my academic background to address the question what defines communication scholarship. While I am not one of those “communication scholars” who may “spend sleepless nights pondering ontological matters” (Waisbord 2019: 122), I have given this question much thought, the results of which are presented in this book.

The present book continues my previous research into the nature of communication and its study (Klyukanov 2010b, 2013a, 2013b, 2017, 2019;

Klyukanov and Holba 2015; Klyukanov and Leontovich 2017; Klyukanov and Sinekopova 2019) and especially the ideas expressed in my book *A Communication Universe: Manifestations of Meaning, Stagings of Significance* (2010a). Although the two books go hand-in-hand, that book focused on the former; this one, in its turn, focuses on the latter. The present book addresses both ontological and epistemological views on communication, beginning with the notorious identity and legitimacy crises of communication study. I argue that this is the main reason the study of communication is usually presented in metaphoric terms—Schramm’s metaphor of “a great crossroads” (1959) being, perhaps, the most famous. I try to go beyond metaphoric views in order to understand what communication is, not what it is like. To that end, the focus of this book is on the scientific study of communication (i.e., its systematic examination). Looking at how communication scholarship is presented, we notice that when it is viewed as a field of study or studies, the bounds of communication scholarship are not clearly defined; when it is viewed as a discipline, it is found “undisciplined”; and when it is as a science, it is found “insecure.” Thus, the first chapter gives an overview of the study of communication as a hundred flowers blossoming, setting out to explore both the nature of communication and how it is scientifically investigated. To determine the status of communication study in this light may seem an exercise in utter futility, and yet . . .

The second chapter looks at the nature of communication in the literal sense (i.e., conceptualized from the perspectives of natural science in terms of processes and interactions of matter and energy). Special attention is paid to the body and the brain as its most complex organ. Both spatial and temporal aspects of communication as a natural object are discussed. It is argued that any research into the physiological, physical, chemical, biological, and neurological aspects of communication, regardless of its publication outlet and “ownership,” should be considered legitimate if it is focused on the empirical study of communication as connection growing out of the factuality of sensorium bringing together humans and nonhumans—everyone and everything not just in the world but of the world. Further, the chapter shows how such entanglements of different kinds of beings result in the emergence of organized structures. It is shown how such naturally occurring communication can be explained best through Conversation Analysis. While this view of communication may appear simple and devoid of depth, its importance is emphasized, for it deals with the most direct and immediate forms of establishing connection.

Chapter 3 covers more familiar ground: communication as a social phenomenon. A quick overview of its conceptualization is given, from Plato and Aristotle to Comte and Mead, who put communication in the social-scientific spotlight. It is shown how the study of communication can be considered a social science due to a number of unifying themes, such as the fo-

cus on the links between individual action and social relations, importance of rules and norms, and action that lies at the basis of communication as a social process. It is noted that while modeling their approach on natural science, social scientists still seek to develop their own methodology; in this light, “the problem of the method” is specially addressed. In a similar vein, tensions between self and society, inherent in social communication, are viewed as parallel to tensions between the micro-level and macro-level manifestations of social communication. It is emphasized that such tensions cannot be resolved once and for all since they keep social communication going. Finally, it is noted that although the social study of communication is often treated as a “human science” (*Geisteswissenschaften*), there is more to what it means to be human.

In chapter 4, the study of communication is discussed from the perspective of humanities, focusing on the manifestations of the human spirit. To distinguish it from the social science perspective that studies social actions and institutions, the humanities study of communication is treated as cultural science that is aimed at understanding what makes us human by investigating all products created by humans through various stages of history. In other words, the study of communication as cultural science investigates the process and result of cultivation—of the human, by the human. It is shown how the search for the meaning of the human spirit is carried out by investigating various expressive means of keeping it alive (rhetoric), sign processes involved in the creation of meaning (semiotics), and the overall nature of interpretation and understanding (hermeneutics). Finally, communication is presented as a process of correspondence through significant expressions; in this light, humanity remains one integral whole as long as people correspond with/to themselves as being human.

Chapter 5 deals with philosophy of communication. Here, philosophy is conceptualized as a science focused on the whole encounter with the world. It is shown how communication, as a synthetic process of connecting parts into a whole, lends itself to philosophizing, which is viewed as different from communication theorizing. Several possible designations for this science are considered, and “rational science” is chosen as the most appropriate, while keeping in mind its elements of monstrosity, also addressed in the chapter.

Although philosophy may appear to be divorced from life, it is argued that this is not the case, and the main “job duties” of the philosopher of communication are presented, such as critical reflection, formulating postulates that determine possible action, special attention to language, and so on. It is emphasized that, overall, the philosopher keeps vigil for experience to be unfolding in such a way that the unity of the subject (oneself) and the object (everyone/everything else) is established.

In chapter 6, the natural, social, cultural, and rational scientific perspectives on communication are brought together in one unifying framework of the semiotic square, which is a well-known means of mapping out various semantic categories and relationships between them. The chapter looks at a number of important categories addressed to this point, such as intellectual virtues, kinds of reasoning, and forms of communication activity. Each category is presented in the form of the semiotic square and discussed in more detail. It is also shown that the semiotic square is grounded in kinesthetic relationships and should not be viewed as an abstract framework detached from everyday experience. It is emphasized that the semiotic square can be seen in terms of anatomic body planes only up to a point because the fourth dimension is not a place but a realm of consciousness. The importance of this fourth position is specially noted. It is also shown how, conceptualized dynamically, every operation in the semiotic square results in markedness, which is briefly discussed.

Chapter 7 takes as its premise Aristotle's statement about Being "said in many ways." In this light, each of the four sciences is presented as a way of saying something about communication; it is argued that each view exists only insofar as the other three are concealed in the background and can be brought to light. For instance, any study conducted by natural science is a case of social communication, including discursively formed judgments, decisions, and actions; cultural expressions and their interpretation; and philosophical reflection. Thus, it is shown how all four scientific views are interconnected; how easy or difficult it is to establish a connection between the four scientific perspectives on communication depends on the distance between them.

Chapter 8 brings back the question, raised in the first chapter, about what defines communication scholarship. Several key works on that subject over the past five decades are discussed. It is shown that the question whether the study of communication is a science *sui generis* remains open. Hence, it is necessary to see if communication can be viewed as an object in itself (i.e., if communication scholars perceive the same object). Based on the framework of phenomenology of perception, it is discussed how the identity of any object is created by its surrounding objects; as they recede into the periphery, the main object of perception is disclosed. In that sense, it is argued that speaking of communication study as such would be possible only if it could overcome the perspectivism of experience. It is stated that, in reality, we cannot look at communication as separate from other objects and that we always deal with its manifestations, captured in the four scientific perspectives discussed in the book.

CHAPTER 1

Let a Hundred Flowers Blossom



Communication Studies: It's Something Else!

Almost half a century ago, George Gerbner wrote that “if Marx were alive today, his principal work would be entitled *Communications* rather than *Capital*” (Gerbner 1983: 358). Of course, we can only speculate on what Marx would do or write—especially today: maybe he would work for the World Bank and write analytical reviews on macroeconomics for its Boards of Directors. Or, perhaps, he would study philosophy and the history of science, developing the ideas from his third manuscript, where he wrote: “The whole of history is a preparation, a development, for ‘man’ to become the object of sensuous consciousness and for the needs of ‘man as man’ to become [sensuous] needs. History itself is a real part of natural history and of nature’s becoming man. Natural science will, in time, subsume the science of man, just as the science of man will subsume natural science: there will be one science” (Marx 1988: 111). Again, we can only speculate on what Marx meant by “one science” and what his new work would be called; that it would focus on communications (or communication), though, is more than likely. Today, alongside “*homo sapiens*,” “*homo faber*,” “*homo ludens*,” and so on, “the man” is seen as “*homo communicans*,” “*homo communicates*,” or “*homo communicativus*”—these terms share the same root and show very clearly how the human is viewed in the twenty-first century.

There is no lack of scientific attention to communication as the defining characteristic of humans. More and more scholarly journals are devoted to the study of various aspects of communication. More and more academic conferences are held to discuss various issues related to communication.

New and newer interest groups are formed within regional, national, and communication associations. Few colleges and universities can be found without a department of communication offering the whole gamut of courses—a gamut that keeps expanding.

Communication is clearly an important area of study—or studies, referring to a detailed investigation or an activity of gaining knowledge. It is in this sense that Wilbur Schramm talked about the beginnings of communication study in America (1997), or the international history of communication study was presented (Simonson and Park 2016). Today, departments of communication studies are ubiquitous (even though hardly any departments of physics studies or departments of history studies exist).

The broad area in academics of communication study or studies is usually presented as a field “in ferment” (Fuchs and Qiu 2018). In this light, several questions may be posed. First, can a field be in ferment, or it is more accurate to speak about “the field, fermented?” (Pooley 2016a), or, perhaps, going “from field to ferment”—the way beer-makers do? Second, can the fermentation of a field occur by itself, or does it need a specific starter set of cultures; and if so, what might be those cultures? And third, is there any fermentation timeline for the field of communication studies?

In 1983, *Journal of Communication* published a special issue, “Ferment in the Field,” followed by two similar issues in 1993 and 2008. In a manner of speaking, these three issues can be viewed as equivalent to three stages of fermentation—primary, secondary, and tertiary—used in beer brewing. Thirty-five years after the original “Ferment” issue, yet another issue of *Journal of Communication* was published (Fuchs and Qiu 2018) to reflect on the past, present, and future of communication studies: this time, similar to the change from “communication study” to “communication studies,” “ferment” was replaced by “ferments”—probably to emphasize a diversity of activities in the field. This, though, takes the process of fermentation beyond its tertiary stage, and one cannot but wonder when we can see the final product.

“Fermentation” in this case does not refer to the literal phenomenon of the chemical breakdown of a substance by bacteria, yeasts, or other microorganisms; rather, it is used as a metaphor for a slow and steady force for transformation (Katz 2020). A metaphor says that something is something else; there are a number of metaphorical attempts to address the status of communication study—this “muddle of a field” (Waisbord 2019: 121)—and to give it some kind of shape, if only by saying what it is like.

One of the most well-known metaphors for communication research is that of “a great crossroads,” proposed by Schramm (1959). It should be noted that Schramm viewed communication research as a crossroads (cf. the discussion of communication studies at the crossroads [Timcke 2016]).

In other words, it is not the field of communication studies facing a crossroads; rather, the field itself is a crossroads where “many pass but few tarry” (Schramm 1959: 8). Another spatial metaphor, albeit of a constricting nature, is proposed by Jefferson D. Pooley, who laments that communication scholars toil away in obscurity exiled to the margins of the university; as a result, our scholarship is not read because “ideas flow in, but—like the Hotel California—they can never leave” (2016a: 622). Though you can check out any time you like, you remain trapped in what at first appears inviting and tempting. Often, a more dynamic nature of the field of communication studies is highlighted. For instance, Kaarle Nordenstreng likens it to surfing (2007). While this metaphor emphasizes the ease with which researchers glide along the waves of various topics and theories, Nordenstreng sounds a concern about this “surf syndrome” because such an approach to the study of communication runs the risk of becoming superficial and devoid of depth. Once its dynamic nature is highlighted, the question becomes how far one can surf in the field, as it were. Some believe that “communication has been far too bashful and timid in its ambitions” and must boldly go “where others dare not” (Wilson 2013). Others, however, think communication scholars are like a “motley assortment of guerrilla bands that raid other disciplines for tools and texts” (Simonson 2001: 20). The field is even discussed in terms of “academic imperialism” (Waisbord 2016: 872). In the same vein, the International Communication Association (ICA) is sometimes “perceived as a colonizing academic organization that tries to shape communication scholarship around the world” (Wiedemann and Meyen 2016: 1,504).

Many more metaphors of the field of communication study exist, and still many more could be created: our metaphorical vision is limited only by our imagination, and the field could be called many other things. It should be noted, however, that by viewing the field metaphorically, we inevitably acknowledge—explicitly or implicitly—its so-called status: hence we hear about “the so-called communication theories” (Deetz 2010: 41). Without denying its heuristic potential, we should go beyond viewing the field metaphorically and saying what it is like to a less figurative approach and conceptualizing what it is. To that end, the study of communication is often presented not like a crossroads or the Hotel California, but as a discipline.

An Undisciplined Discipline?

It seems that to recognize it as a discipline or branch of knowledge, it is enough to simply state that “communication as a discipline has the . . . responsibility of understanding communication in its entirety” (Hornsey, Gallois, and Duck 2008: 752). Such tautological statements may be true by virtue

of their logical form but shed no light on why communication is a discipline or what kind of discipline it is. Those who try to conceptualize communication along those lines cannot seem to agree on its place as a discipline, seeing it as a part of the humanities (Apel 1972; Emanuel 2007), social sciences (Vroons 2005), or “as a practical discipline insofar as it effectively marshals its available institutional and intellectual resources to address ‘problems of communication’ in society” (Craig 2008: 8).

It is no surprise that numerous dissenters have emerged, given the lack of agreement on the place of communication study among those who view it as a discipline. Where for some “undisciplined knowledge and hospitality to multiple disciplines sound fine” (Waisbord 2019: 150), for others this is not the case. It is noted that “if communication studies is a discipline, it should periodically discipline itself” (Simonson 2001: 20; Kane 2016). In the same vein, “the undisciplinary nature of the field of communication” (Shepherd 1993: 84) is emphasized. Stuart Hall believes constituting communication as a self-sustaining, disciplinary specialty is an “altogether misguided attempt” (Hall 1989: 43). Davis Swanson echoes this view, stating that “it is not a discipline, at least not in any traditional sense, and it will be helpful to discard the contrary view once and for all” (Swanson 1993: 169). Overall, the case of communication studies is considered particularly remarkable, “even amid the chaos of the disciplines” (Waisbord 2019: 122). Moreover, “as an undisciplined discipline, communication generates disorder in the ‘disciplinary system’ and contributes to the phenomenon of ‘chaos of disciplines’” (Vlăduțescu 2013: 493).

In addition to those who view it as a discipline yet cannot agree on its specific nature, as well as those who do not consider it a discipline in any traditional sense, attempts are made to ensure its legitimacy by simply declaring—in one broad stroke—the disciplinary centrality of communication studies (Morreale et al. 2000; Waisbord 2019; Wang 2011). Over the years, scholars have asserted the interdisciplinary nature of communication studies. Today, we often hear of “the almost systematic advocacy for interdisciplinarity and the consideration of communication studies as a [*sic*] interdisciplinary” (Kane 2016: 89). Some believe the field of communication studies can be viewed as transdisciplinary, while others argue that it should be considered a “post-discipline” (Waisbord 2019). Sometimes, being recognized as a discipline does not seem to be a matter of first importance: “More important is whether it continues to provide a center of scholarly excitement, a gathering place for scholars to talk and work and publish and debate with each other and to piece together their ideas on understanding the nature of communication (Schramm 1983: 17). In this respect, as noted earlier, communication departments, journals, and associations keep proliferating, and numerous conferences provide gathering places for scholars to

talk and share excitement over their understanding of communication. And yet, how tenable are such opinions and beliefs about the (“inter-,” “trans-,” “post-”) disciplinary centrality of communication studies? John Peters’ admission from over thirty years ago that “communication has come to be administratively, not conceptually, defined” (1986: 528) is echoed by James Anderson and Geoffrey Baym, who note that this fractured discipline is “held together not by paradigmatic coherence, but by tenuous administrative arrangements” (2004: 603).

Will the tenuous administrative arrangements, propped up by various prefixes, continue to prove a center for communication studies? Or should we be concerned that a time may come in communication studies when, as vividly described by William Butler Yeats in his poem “The Second Coming,” “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, / . . . The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity”? While we are hopefully not anywhere close to such a rapture, it can hardly be unequivocally stated that nothing is rotten in the state of communication studies; whether as a field or a discipline, we must admit that it is in a state of crisis, which cannot be disguised by simply asserting its centrality or somewhat modifying its designation by adding various prefixes.

A Crisis That Is Always with You

As Umberto Eco has remarked, in some situations “the crisis sells well” (Eco 1986: 126). Indeed, those who cry “crisis” may do so for reasons that promise them personal benefit. They are usually seen as the “detractors—scholars who champion theory-driven studies” (Waisbord 2019: 129). Such scholars can hardly be blamed for self-serving interests; it can be recalled that in the ancient Greece, *theoria* meant transcending one’s particularity and abandoning oneself to something greater (Peters 2005). In this light, those saying that the study of communication is in crisis do not try to cash in on such pronouncements; rather, they call our attention to its condition. To understand the nature of this crisis, let’s consider several cases in which scholars address crises in other sciences.

One of the most well-known is Edmund Husserl’s attempt to highlight “the crisis of European sciences” (1989) by showing how their empiricism, manifest in the form of facts of natural science and mathematical formulas, fell short at providing an adequate epistemology because it was divorced from life. As a way to overcome this crisis, he developed his method of transcendental phenomenology, aimed at returning to the real ground of human experience and penetrating into the essence of the nature of knowledge.

Another case is that of Michele Foucault, who also addressed the crisis in knowledge in modernity, which he set out to resolve in his archeology of the human sciences. From that perspective, the process of humanistic inquiry is based on various discursive formations operating as social technologies in different historical periods. Such technologies are set in motion when individuals question the knowledge previously held unquestionable. An example is Foucault's analysis of the origins, history, and problems of the medical institutions and practice, presented in his lecture "The Crisis of Medicine or the Crisis of Antimedicine?" (2004).

One more scholar who develops his theory as a response to a crisis of modern society is Jürgen Habermas. For him, money and power in advanced capitalist societies colonize the lifeworld and displaced communicative forms of solidarity. He proposes overcoming this crisis by applying evolutionary views to the study of forms of social communication. By establishing a connection between knowledge, language, and action, Habermas aims to recover the capacity of social theory to provide normative foundations for undistorted intersubjective communication.

These three cases represent different attempts to address a crisis that is a result of an anomaly that has not been identified and cannot receive an adequate explanation within the existing theoretical framework. Each of these attempts correlates with the nature of knowledge: in the natural science (Husserl's transcendental phenomenology), in the humanities (Foucault's archeology of knowledge), and in the social science (Habermas' theory of communicative action). These three cases, therefore, are examples of epistemological crises arising when anomalies are encountered that cannot be explained by the accepted paradigm of normal science: once such a crisis has been adequately addressed, a paradigm shift occurs (Kuhn 1962). In other words, "the shift is epistemological because the fundamental change is about what we consider to be the core knowledge of the system" (Stobbs 2011: 104). It is important to emphasize that when normal science is unable to solve a problem, a crisis occurs that results in a revolutionary paradigm shift and "a new normal." It involves a change in how knowledge is structured and developed, but still within a certain scientific field that has a clear designation, such as "natural science" or "social science."

The situation with the so-called communication science is different. For example, it is sometimes characterized as "healthy eclecticism," and yet the concept of eclecticism presupposes choice and gathering, implying not just diversity (for example, various roots of communication study), but also a unification of those roots in some new coherent framework. It is noted "that paradigmatic analysis is pervasive in the field of communication research" (Jensen and Neuman 2013: 232). Indeed, numerous paradigms coexist and continuously evolve. What may appear as a healthy situation, though, can be seen quite differently if we admit that a development of a discipline

takes the form of permanent revolution or a series of constant revolutions; that way, all syntagms are proclaimed innovations while the paradigmatic structures themselves become unstable or never materialize. In this light, “the crisis cannot be disguised by calling the discipline poly-paradigmatic” (Leydesdorff 2002: 129). With that in mind, it is not surprising that some communication scholars get “a distinct impression that the discipline is experiencing a high degree of ‘methodological schizophrenia’” (Hanna 1982: 43), while others acknowledge that “the field increasingly suffers from epistemological erosion” (Donsbach 2006: 444).

Many communication scholars would share the sentiment that, “to establish the centrality of a discipline, we need a dominant paradigm that can effectively guide and frame research” (Wang 2011: 1,463). Read another way, this statement means no such paradigm exists. In the same vein, when speaking on whether, as sociology or political science do, US communication research has one main journal, Jefferson Pooley states, “We have no flagship to sink” (2015: 1,253). It is not clear why we would want to sink it if we had one, or why “we are better off without a flagship” (2015: 1,248); that flagship (if it existed) would, perhaps, be better off without us.

In light of the situation with the so-called “communication science,” briefly outlined above, it is quite understandable that we hear the calls “to face paradigmatic issues” and “to consider a paradigm shift” (Wang 2011: 1463). While it is easy to feel sympathetic toward such calls, it is impossible to simply will a new paradigm into existence.

With its so-called “poly-paradigmatic” character, the study of communication, whether labeled a discipline or a science, may appear highly dynamic to some and shifty to others; yet it is difficult to identify an anomaly that requires a paradigm shift. Additionally, according to Kuhn, a scientific community needs to be present that accepts a certain set of knowledge and methods for solving problems—without it, one cannot speak of any paradigms. In this case, it is difficult to identify the boundaries of such a community since it is difficult to think of a topic that would not relate to communication in one way or another. It is easy to create yet another interest group within a communication association, and the number of presenters at communication conventions is limited, it seems, only by the size of meeting rooms. All this can hardly be considered normal. The crisis of communication study, thus, is not a result of an anomaly that could not be adequately addressed by normal science; rather, it is a result of a lack of what can be considered normal science, in the first place. We may have always been “inter-” or “trans-” or “post-disciplinary,” but we have never been normal.

The disciplinary crisis of communication studies is sometimes explained by the fact that it has “too much geography and too little history” (Peters 2012: 500). Here, the term “geography” is meant to indicate the discipline’s conceptual territory (i.e., trying to cover too much ground). Today, by add-

ing communication theories from various places around the globe, geography takes on its literal—spatial—meaning. While certainly a welcome trend, academic globalization does not make the task of theorizing communication any easier: conceptualizing communication in terms of so much geography—in fact, the entire globe—requires time. And, although contemplating communication has a long history, going back at least to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, it has a short past as a field trying to specify its unique perspective (Schramm 1983) and to establish its disciplinary status (Pooley 2016b).

In light of “the perennial fragmentation and hyper-specialization of communication studies” (Waisbord 2019: 8), we hear appeals not only for a diversity of views, but also for their unity. One such appeal, for instance, has an eloquent title: *Finding Birds of a Feather: Multiple Memberships and Diversity without Divisiveness in Communication Research* (Stanfill 2012). Just as birds look for similar ones by their plumage, the author encourages communication scholars to strive for diversity that brings them together. Interestingly, the Russian equivalent of this English proverb—“*Rybak rybaka vidit izdaleka*” (“A fisherman always spots another fisherman from afar”)—captures this idea even better as it emphasizes not the joint activity (“flight”) but the recognition of similar interests by those who nonetheless remain at a distance from one another. The English expression, in its turn, arose to refer to situations where there is some danger, and it is necessary to “flock together.” The field of communication studies, though, does not seem to face any danger from other disciplines, even of a broad nature, such as cybernetics or semiotics; its main problem is internal and consists in the necessity and inability to cope with its own legacy (Shepherd 1993).

The roots of the communication studies crisis can be understood more deeply if we recall the meaning of “separation” found in the ancient Greek word *krisis* (“crisis”). For instance, it is noted that a crisis in philosophy manifests itself in three forms: separation of philosophers with their metareasoning from the general culture, separation of philosophers from one another, and separation of philosophers from philosophy itself (McCumber 2013). We get a rather gloomy picture of complete disunity (i.e., separation of philosophers from everything and all, including themselves). “Separation,” however, can be understood not only in the sense of alienation; “to be separate” means also “to be different from others,” and in English, these two meanings are expressed by the words “to divide,” “to disconnect,” “to set apart,” and “to distinguish.” With this in mind, the crisis of communication studies consists in their inability to distinguish themselves—as a field, a discipline, or a science—from the rest. In this light, the field of communication study can be viewed as a patient unable to understand one’s own boundaries. A series of constant revolutions, mentioned earlier, takes the form of different turns: “a turn toward social epistemology,” “a postmodern turn,” “an interpretative turn,” “a critical turn,” “a cultural turn,” “a reflex-

ive turn,” “a linguistic turn,” “a discursive turn,” “a naturalistic turn,” and so on. If we recall that the word “crisis” goes back through the Latin language to the ancient Greek *kríno*,—which means not only “separation,” but also “a turning point in the course of the disease”—we can view communication study as a patient who is constantly tossing and turning, unable to find a normal state of health and calm down.

All this “brings up old questions about what defines communication scholarship” (Waisbord 2019: 89). Such questions are old because the study of communication is characterized by “long-standing identity issues” (Swanson 1993: 163). Moreover, it is stated that “this identity crisis has been with us for as long as we have existed in academia” (Donsbach 2006: 439). Almost thirty years ago, John Peters stated that “the field has been in a perpetual identity crisis—or rather legitimation crisis” (1994: 133), which is still true today. However, since the latter is caused by the former, this could be rephrased as “the field has been in a perpetual legitimation crisis—or rather identity crisis”; all this in spite of “various attempts to solve the identity problem in communication sciences by providing typologies for this still rather chaotic field” (Kirtiklis 2011: 43).

When we face the question of what defines communication scholarship, we should remember that “to define” means “to specify distinctly,” “to set a limit to something.” In other words, unlike the examples of epistemological crises briefly discussed earlier, the crisis of communication studies is ontological in nature (i.e., the very object of its inquiry needs to be specified and its limits established). Communication scholars may not “spend sleepless nights pondering ontological matters” (Waisbord 2019: 122), but if we acknowledge “the lack of ontological center of communication studies” (Waisbord 2019: 8), we must admit that pondering ontological matters is crucial. In this regard, “one possible starting point is to pose the question if, by ‘communication,’ theoreticians understand the same thing” (Kane 2016: 96).

After all, ontology is “the scaffolding upon which structures of scholarship are crafted” (Anderson and Baym 2004: 603), and many would agree that it is “a unique foundational ontology that grants fields of study their disciplinary status” (Shepherd 1993: 91). If that is lacking, communication studies will continue to experience “methodological schizophrenia” and suffer from “epistemological erosion.”

What’s in a Name?

One can see how the identity crisis of communication studies, due to a lack of ontological center, is manifested in the problem of their designation. It is noted, for instance, that the area of communication theory “had been touched . . . in a thousand different ways long before that label appeared”

(Pooley 2016b: 12). The study of communication has been conducted in many “fellow subject areas” (Cobley 1996: 31), most contributions made by philologists, linguists, psychologists, literary critics, semioticians, culturologists, and philosophers of language. When communication scholarship is compared to “a large collection of Russian dolls of nested fields and sub-fields” (Waisbord 2019: 121), it is difficult to see what makes communication scholarship different from other “dolls” (i.e., other fields or disciplines), testifying to the difficulty and importance of ontologizing and naming it as a distinct subject of study. Indeed, this “long-standing area of academic inquiry” (Waisbord 2019: 88) still “does not have a fully accepted title” (Vlăduțescu 2013: 493).

To qualify for a specific designation, certain features or characteristics of an object need to be identified, making it possible to refer to that object. As mentioned earlier, the study of communication is characterized as an “inter-,” “trans-,” or “post-discipline.” Similarly, it is defined as “an integrative science” or “a synoptic science” (Donsbach 2006). Such broad designations, however, are deemed ontologically problematic (Kane 2016). Academic departments focusing on communication also exhibit a variety of names. An NCA analysis of 790 communication departments found a total of 116 individual department names, including Communication, Communications, Communication Studies, Communication Arts, Communication Arts and Sciences, Communicology, and more (NCA C-Briefs 2011). This list will become even longer if cognate names are added from other cultural traditions, such as the German *Zeitungswissenschaft* (Pooley 2016) or the Russian “kommunikativistika.”

Of course, one can find in such a variety of names a “remarkable intellectual diversity” (Waisbord 2019: 11). As a result, it becomes tempting to dismiss the necessity of having one clear and accepted designation. For instance, a Russian scholar notes that while naming the field of communication inquiry is worth discussing, the debate about its title should not obscure the key issue: that the Higher Attestation Commission (a national government agency that oversees awarding of advanced academic degrees) must recognize the existence of this science and provide the opportunity to defend dissertations in this area (Dzyaloshinsky 2017). This way, a call is made to solve the legitimacy crisis by officially recognizing this area of inquiry first, and letting it figure out its name and thus solve its identity crisis second. Meanwhile, the relationship between cause and effect should be reverse: this area will be recognized and legitimized (including by the Higher Attestation Commission) only after it identifies the essential features of its object and has a distinct and fully accepted designation.

The problem with naming the field cannot be disregarded: the erosion of a designation links directly to the epistemological erosion noted earlier. In-

stead, a designation is needed, and it needs “to provide rigor, flexibility and robustness” (Vladutescu 2013: 498). The importance of this cannot be overstated because if something is designated a certain way, the eidetic moment of the name appears (i.e., an outline of its meaning drawn) (Losev 1993: 93). Once something is denoted in such a meaningful way, we can find the object of this designation; for example, knowing what “a tour guide” means, we can find such a person in a crowd (Stepanov 2004).

Unfortunately, the area of communication inquiry cannot be found as easily as we find a tour guide in a crowd, and the more names that are used to denote “communication inquiry,” the more difficult it becomes to recognize it “in a crowded field of disciplines, fields, and post-disciplines” (Waisbord 2019: 132). At the same time, calling this area of inquiry simply “communication (studies)” does not solve the problem either, as the essential characteristics of its object still need to be specified. Stating that the study of communication focuses on the inquiry into processes of human communication does not reveal the essence of either. Any designation is a balance between how an object is signified and how it is designated; this way, one can see not only what the object is, but also its indication by the scholar as a subject. Thus, the object of physics is not physics but rather matter and general forms of its motion; the object of biology is not biology but instead living things and their interaction with the environment, and so on. In the case of communication study, the line between designation and signification is blurred, and so limiting this area (defining it) becomes problematic. On the one hand, the name for this area of inquiry is not a proper name, and so this area cannot be easily referred to without any signification. On the other hand, too many names for this area do not make it easy to signify it by limiting the class of included objects; when Schramm says, “the doors from communication open on almost every corner of human life” (1983: 16), one wonders what the corners devoid of communication might be. Thus, the name for the study of communication is not something desirable but essential: it is a *sine qua non* for this area, be it a field, a discipline, or a science.

“An Insecure Science”

So, the field of communication study is “sometimes qualified as a discipline, sometimes as an interdiscipline, sometimes as studies, sometimes as a science” (Kane 2016: 95). Qualified as a field, the study of communication enjoys a lot of freedom; after all, a “field” by definition is a broad and open expanse of land. In this light, the edges marking communication (study, studies, theory, etc.) as a field are usually difficult to determine. Once it is conceptualized as a discipline, the study of communication is expected to meet more

specific criteria, such as forming a branch of knowledge with a set of certain methods and patterns of inquiry into a defined object of study. When attempts are made to conceptualize the study of communication as a science, the stakes are higher because the classification presupposes a systematically organized body of knowledge in a given area with a distinct identity. Hence, the critical question: “What is communication science?” (Berger, Roloff, and Roskos-Ewoldsen 2010). Although numerous attempts have been made to provide answers to this question, it is admitted that “communication research . . . is the quintessential ‘insecure science’” (Pooley 2016a: 623).

For the study of communication to be conceptualized as a science, rather than a field or a discipline, communication research needs to secure its place among all other sciences. When Schramm writes about the doors from communication opening on almost every corner of human life, he notes that “communication researchers can go through any of these doors” and “can make themselves at home with scientists and social scientists from a dozen other fields and disciplines” (Schramm 1983: 16)—something, undoubtedly, to be lauded. In the first place, though, communication researchers should make themselves at home with themselves. And for that to happen, the (identity and legitimization) crisis of communication studies needs to be adequately addressed.

No one can deny that “it is challenging to think about communication as a science” (Hartley and Potts 2016: 632). This challenge is usually met by drawing on the traditionally accepted distinction between science and art. In this sense, for example, the study of communication is viewed as drifting “away from science and into the humanities” (Hartley and Potts 2016: 629). For example, it is discussed alongside rhetoric and cultural studies—the areas implicitly deemed outside of its scope. The study of communication is often labeled “social scientific study of communication” (Berger, Roloff, and Roskos-Ewoldsen 2010: 7). That it is modeled on natural science is clear: “For communication scientists, the problem to be solved is one of identifying and then explaining regularities by constructing and testing theories” (Berger, Roloff, and Roskos-Ewoldsen 2010: 7). At the same time, the scope of communication study is very broad; for instance, it is noted that “communication theory has most typically drawn upon the humanities and the social sciences, with occasional forays into the natural sciences” (Peters 2003: 398). When the question is posed where one turns “for the resources with which to get a fresh perspective on communication” (Carey 1989: 23), the answer should be to itself.

“Scientific” is usually understood as something “empirically based, experimentally testable, and theoretically formalizable” and “assumed to be . . . exact” (Witzany 2018: 91). It is in this light that “communication science” is usually understood. However, such understanding is restrictive: for exam-

ple, “there is nothing in its etymology to compel us to restrict . . . ‘science’ to the fields where the greatest exactitude is attainable” (Andreski 1984: 24). The term “science” goes back to both Latin and Greek words for “science,” derived from the Proto-Indo-European root **skei*, meaning “to cut, split.” The essence of science, therefore, is in the idea of separating, and while it is usually distinguished from art or philosophy, science needs to be viewed first as something “cut” (different) from life. Any close inspection requires discipline, stepping away from just going about one’s life, as it were, and taking the time to examine it scientifically. One can examine something thoroughly and grasp it intellectually only if one is apart from it—the etymology of “discipline” going back to *dis* (“apart”) and *capere* (“take hold of”).

This is articulated most famously by Plato in *Apology*: “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Science searches for true ideas so that life is illuminated by the light of that knowledge. Plato, of course, focused on the importance of philosophical examination in one’s own life, caring about—and even craving for—virtue; hence, his phrase is sometimes translated as “The unchallenged life is the one that’s not worthy of us.” However, the old Greek verb in the statement is *etazo*, meaning “to inspect closely, to test,” and this applies not only to examining one’s motivation in order to live authentically, but also any scrutiny. Anything examined, be it oneself, the natural world, and so on, sheds light on life and makes it worth living. Plato’s name perhaps is not the first one that comes to mind when thinking “science”; yet he carried out a number of fundamental “splits” (see also his “Divided Line”) that underlie science as “examination of life”: the world of the world of ideas from the world of physical objects, knowledge from opinion, dialectics from rhetoric, oral speech from writing, the subject from the object. Although his sympathies are clear (the first part of each pair is unmarked), “all metaphysics, including its opponent, positivism, speaks in the language of Plato” (Heidegger 1972: 67). Thus, when speaking of “communication science,” it should be kept in mind that “what is peculiarly and technically termed Sciences, will by no means be confined . . . to the domain of such Sciences as deal with the material world, nor even to the whole range of Sciences now existing On the subject of human speculation, . . . all the cases whether inert matter or living bodies, whether permanent relations or successive occurrences, be the subject of our attention” (Whewell 1967: 3).

Often, when communication scholars argue over various problems, “their very arguments over communication rely upon communication used unproblematically” (Tuckett 2014: 481). Hence, to get a fresh perspective, we need to look more critically at communication and its scientific examination, problematizing both. More specifically, just as, for example, Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology addressed the crisis by going “back to things themselves” (i.e., the life-world of subjective experiences of people

from which scientific knowledge grows), the study of communication needs to identify what constitutes the true scientific foundation of conceptualizing communication. In other words, “finding common intellectual ground is . . . necessary to remind ourselves and tell others why communication studies matters” (Waisbord 2019: 153). Earlier, the importance of ontology as the scaffolding for communication scholarship was noted; however, the concept of scaffolding is somewhat mechanistic, and so such common intellectual ground can be better conceptualized in more organic terms as soil—something favorable to growth.

Finally, it should be remembered that “crisis” is an alarming time rather than a fortunate combination of circumstances, which presents a certain opportunity that should be welcomed. “Crisis,” as noted earlier, is a critical moment in the course of the disease, and its outcome may be unfavorable; that is why such moments call for careful judgment. The identity crisis that has been with the study of communication for as long as we have existed in academia is quite a lingering moment, and a judgment may be past due. A hundred flowers can blossom year after year only if their soil does not lose its quality as a breeding ground. Otherwise, they become faded and wither away.