

From the consideration of communication as a field to the consideration of communication as a transdisciplinary concept: history, theory and objects of knowledge

*De la comunicación como campo
a la comunicación como concepto
transdisciplinar: historia, teoría y objetos
de conocimiento*

CARLOS VIDALES GONZÁLES¹

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8847-9321>

The present work focuses its attention on the role history has had in the construction of the field of communication, the research practice and in the possibilities of moving from the consideration of communication as an academic field to the consideration of communication as a transdisciplinary concept. The article pays special attention to the history, theory and to the objects of knowledge.

KEYWORDS: History of communication, communication field, objects of knowledge, transdisciplinarity, cybersemiotics.

El trabajo centra su atención en el papel que la historia ha tenido en la construcción del campo y la investigación de la comunicación, así como en las posibilidades de pasar de la consideración de la comunicación como campo académico a la consideración de la comunicación como un concepto transdisciplinar. Se pone especial énfasis en la historia, la teoría y los objetos de conocimiento.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Historia de la comunicación, campo de la comunicación, objetos de conocimiento, transdisciplina, cibersemiótica.

¹ Universidad de Guadalajara, México.
E-mail: morocoi@yahoo.com
Submitted: 31/05/17. Accepted: 10/07/17.

PRESENTATION

Previous work about the history of communication as a particular field of knowledge has emphasized certain authors (Abbott, 2005; Rogers, 1994; Simonson, 2008), and highlighted particular social contexts (Dennis & Wartella, 1996; Glander, 2000; Marques de Melo, 2009). However, something that has not been considered enough is the role that history has had in the construction of the field of communication and in the development of communication as a particular research practice, mainly because the work done so far has focused on the history of media (technology) or the history of theory specifically related to media; thus, it has failed to see communication as a particular phenomenon that is not limited to just the history of communication as a scientific endeavor (Park & Pooley, 2008). Therefore, I am not interested in writing a new history of communication, telling a new historic tale or debating on how the new historiography of the field of communication must be (Löblich & Scheu, 2011), but to underline the role history and theory have had in the construction of communication as a field, in the development of communication as research practice, and to explain through this discussion how it is possible to go from the consideration of communication as a field to the consideration of communication as a transdisciplinary concept.

The main issue is that the history so far developed has produced three problems. Firstly, it has established a discourse about a particular past, a particular present and a possible future (Hardt, 2008), ideas that have produced a general agreement in which it is assumed that the history of the academic field of communication in the international context is equivalent to the history of the field in the American context (Averbeck, 2008; Rogers, 1994) and, therefore, that the present and possible future of the field greatly depend on whatever happens therein. And in some sense, we could say that when it comes to conceptual understandings –and in spite of the efforts that other contexts have made in telling a different story (Marques de Melo, 2004, 2009; Martín-Barbero, 2002; Martino, 2016; Moragas, 2011; Portugal, 2000; Vizer & Vidales, 2016), it is true and it will continue to be.

Secondly, and perhaps the least evident problem, is the role history has had in the construction of the academic field of communication. Not only has a particular historical narrative been accepted, under a general agreement, but this historical discourse has also established the disciplinary knowledge about communication, i.e., the means by which the disciplinary ways of thinking become predetermined frameworks for academic research. According to Zelizer (2008), there are times when the established disciplinary perspective becomes so rigid that we forget the amount of academic knowledge that we possess and that is produced without having a clear correspondence to how it is that we arrived to it; this is because the historical discourse has omitted both the procedures and the transformations of communication phenomena in the social world. What-we-know and how-we-know-it, is a pending relationship between history and communication. Therefore, “disciplinary knowledge produces its own set of strengths and weaknesses” (p. 3).

But, why the interest in the history of the field of communication and on its knowledge construction processes? How does these relate to the disciplinary core of the field of communication? Where will these considerations take us? The main point here is that disciplines are in fact interpretive communities, which tend to create knowledge, to make questions and to study reality from certain points of view that are grounded on an implicit agreement of what their specificity as a field of study is; consequently, this particular situation becomes a problem in our field of knowledge. What is the specificity of communication research? What makes a research communicative? Is it the affiliation of the researcher to an Institution, the object of study, the conceptual framework or a particular point of view? Are communication phenomena being studied or is the social world being thought from a communicative perspective? Is it still relevant to ask ourselves these questions after seven decades of its emergence as an academic field? Communication research is still an open field, one with exceptionally heterodox methods, conceptual approaches and subjects of study, which makes it almost impossible to clearly define what makes it a particular academic field. And at times, it also makes it an irrelevant task, despite the most positive views that catalogued the state of the field as a “productive fragmentation” some decades ago (Craig, 1999).

And thirdly, the history of the field of communication has created a problem related not to the conceptual frameworks but to the knowledge producers. Characterized by their content and methodology, disciplines are both what they study and how they study it; an instance closely related to the ways we generate, produce and reproduce knowledge. The problem is that in the end, these processes pay more attention to those who produce knowledge than to the knowledge itself, hence, the power and political dimensions of the field become more important than the intellectual and cognitive dimensions.

For Zelizer (2008), even though disciplinary barriers are hard to identify in contemporary science, researchers still exist within those limits and borders of unlinked interpretive communities. Each group determines not only which new members are welcomed, but also what kind of research is worth doing, what questions must be asked and are worth asking, and what counts as true evidence. That is how local and international research agendas are created, which on most occasions respond to a political agenda and not to an intellectual one. “Though scholars residing in disciplines may have well-traveled paths for speaking with each other, through the academic conventions of cross-citation, conferencing and other practices, they tend to make little headway in sharing that knowledge beyond the boundaries of their own disciplinary frames or of those belonging to neighboring disciplines that are regularly frequented. The result is discrete bodies of knowledge, whose supporters largely preach to the converted but do not do enough to create a shared frame of reference about the focal point at hand” (p. 3).

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to reread the history in order to go from the consideration of communication as an academic field to the consideration of communication as a transdisciplinary concept. This will allow us to describe the phenomenon of communication, to delimitate its ontological nature, and to define its epistemological dimension, no matter what domain of reality is studied (non-living systems, living systems, conscious systems). Additionally, it will allow us to start an interdisciplinary dialogue from the specificity of the communicative phenomenon, allowing us to develop new conceptual frameworks to think about complex communicative phenomena of

contemporary life without forgetting the already existing and produced frames. Even though this proposal does not rule out some of the present problems of the field, it does open the possibility for different histories, present states and possible futures—all awaiting its construction—making this kind of discussion academically relevant and socially pertinent. Thus, it is important to mention that what I present here is no more than a draft of one of those “possible” histories, one that goes in hand with cybersemiotics—a transdisciplinary approach of communication, meaning, information and cognition. It is a proposal that aims, through the proposal of objects of knowledge, to put communication as a transdisciplinary concept in the center of discussion; and so, replacing the discussion of communication as an academic field. Almost a century after the emergence of the formal and systemic study of communication, it is time to stop for a second and evaluate all of the occurred, in order to formulate new lines of thought for the future.

AN INITIAL APPROACH TO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HISTORY AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES

In a broader sense, more than theoretical considerations on the role of history in the construction of the academic field of communication, what we have developed are histories about the processes of institutionalization of the field (Delia, 1987; Pietilä, 2008; Sproule, 2008), about mass communication research theory (Park & Pooley, 2008; Zelizer, 2008), about communication theory (Cobley & Schulz, 2013; Ibekwe-San Juan & Dousa, 2014; Pavitt, 2016; Schützeichel, 2015), about the idea of communication (Peters, 1999) and about a particular conceptualization of communication (Schiller, 1999), just to mention some. Nevertheless, further deliberation on the history of communication and its role in the construction, of both the field of communication and in communication research, is in need. Hence, we must start by considering the relationship between two fields of knowledge: communication and history.

One of the contemporary authors that has systematically worked on this topic is John Durham Peters. For Peters (2008), the study of the history of communication is recent, it is posterior to the emergence

of the field and it can be considered one of the latest research areas to develop; it has also had a crucial role in the process of institutionalization of the field and in the processes of conceptual construction and reconstruction –but also in the process of academic and intellectual identity construction–. In this sense, the author is trying to explain the emergence of Philosophy of History and of Communication Theory, hoping to increase our vision of what the history of communication could be, and recognizing the main problems of communication and its importance in the study of history.

For Peters (2008), “Communication scholars have hardly sounded our deep resonances with the task of history-writing. Both fields face the methodological problem of how to interpret under conditions of remoteness and estrangement. They share a strikingly common vocabulary of sources, records, meanings, and transmissions” (p. 20). This way of linking history and historians with the field of communication and with social mediation can be seen through three concrete processes: the historical record, the historical transmission and the process of interpretation. When it comes to the historical record, Peters (2008) says that normally what gets registered is not the most significant, but what fulfills a certain function in a determined moment, thus, by choosing a particular media we are determining the historical record.

In this same sense, it is important to understand historical records as descriptions or specific narratives –with the same specific limits–. One of the main characteristics of descriptions is that they are never thorough, meaning that the potential communication of an event is never complete, i.e., a historic record is never considered to be finished, quite the contrary, there will always be something else to say. The immediate consequence is that the past is emergent and extremely incomplete, since the historical record is itself incomplete. “The past is radically incomplete because the historical record is itself historical” (p. 22). The historian has the same problem as the witness, neither of them know what will the crucial evidence be until after the event happens; the evidence is only evidence post facto, what seems irrelevant today might be very valuable in the future. Thus, the problem is not that history is selective or an incomplete narrative,

since it is its nature, the problem is that it is a product of a particular historical moment –and this is rarely in the center of attention–.

On the other hand, when it comes to historic transmission, Peters (2008) recognizes that both culture and nature shape the transmission of historical records, i.e., he recognizes the importance of the ways or ‘mediums’ used to preserve whatever it is the we want to preserve (culture), and the material on which nature preserves events from the past (nature). And lastly, the final process is interpretation. The operations carried out during this process are the most selective of all; selecting a small ‘sample’ is one of these, otherwise the universe of the interpretable would be infinite, not only because language is generative but because the registry of the universe is potentially infinite, as well.

In addition to the above-mentioned, we can say that the historical record is always about a specific event during a specific context, which implies that it will be biased. Now, historical transmission happens in a specific moment as well, meaning that it will be just as selective of the existent possible mediations. And lastly, the process of interpretation is carried out both during the construction of the record and in its post-reading, which means that the event changes in each process of interpretation, it gets modified, completed, or to simply put it, that there are different ways to interpret it. Why do we naturally assume then that the history of the field of communication is the history of the American field of communication? Like Schiller (1999) assumes, the potential of the study of communication converges directly and in several points with the analysis and critic of the existent societies and their historical development, hence, the need to recover the transit of those ideas of the social world using the useful and already existent historical exchange of communication. In other words, it is about starting with the work that has already been done and contrasting it with the stories from the past to create an extended map of our intellectual topography that would help us review some of the main issues and topics of our time, and specifically, of our contexts.

This implies the need for a conceptual history or a history of the idea of communication, like the one Peters suggested (1999), but from other social contexts, and especially different intellectual contexts, given that the intellectual topography of the field is closely linked to its conceptual

production, and not so much to the study of technological, technical, chronological or biographical development of a particular moment or author. So, in order to understand how is it that communication turned out to be the center of scientific explanation and to be understood as a defining social force, we must study the attempts to unravel the complex commitment to certain subjects, the conceptual differentiation and the analytical synthesis that has structured communication research so far (Schiller, 1999).

Because of the above, what I am interested in is in highlighting the work of historic reconstruction of the intellectual component and of communication theory, and its role in the constitution of the field of communication and communication research. According to Zelizer (2015), who reflects on the relationship between academic association, such as the International Communication Association (ICA), and the field's development through its academic production, such as the *Journal of Communication Theory*; the changes in both the field and association may be useful in rethinking the role of theory in communication. "Although most disciplines share the recognition that theorizing offers an aspired ground on which evidence can be assessed, there is increasing evidence that theory is borne out differently across disciplinary environments. For one, discussions of theory appear to be increasingly bounded by the disciplines in which they surface: the role that theory plays in linguistics, comparative politics, or design is not the same, and that dissimilarity suggests that theorizing needs to be discussed more specifically as an intradisciplinary activity" (p. 412). Theorization has to be discussed as an intradisciplinary activity in order to clearly understand the singularity and particularity of the academic field of communication and how its theory construction processes affected it.

As Zelizer (2015) stated, there are four major points on the field's theorizing that deserve our attention: a) the different relationships that the field maintains with empirical evidence, a condition that must be understood as a precursory element in theory development; b) the need for developing theory alongside the permeable state of knowledge flow, which gives value and characterizes the field, mainly because "such flow has tended to produce claims that communication's knowledge base is

flimsy and tenuous, and that the field is an importer rather than exporter of knowledge. But theory drawn from a porous model of intellectual exchange might help clarify what has been generally seen as the field's theoretical weakness" (p. 413); c) the need for communication theory to duly reflect the relevance of practice, and; d) communication theory needs to adapt to the geographical requirements, which are rarely taken into account. An extreme case of this last consideration is the wake-up call that Kim (2002) makes about the role of culture in the construction of theory in the field of communication, which results in a strong critique to the occidental thinking, and in an alternative proposal: the Asian-centric paradigm of communication theory and research.

It is important to highlight this about the second point: it is necessary to develop contemporary theory that will allow us to keep a dialogue with the scientific development of other fields of knowledge in order to gain a better understanding of communication in specific social, cultural and political contexts, as well as beyond the human realm. So, the next move is to draft that constructed and institutionalized narrative in our field, which has been and continues to be fundamental for the construction of a joint justification of a specialized space of knowledge and an academic identity. In a way, we could say that the institutional history of the field is a particular narrative, which I will talk about in the next paragraphs and which is exactly what we must analyze in a deeper and more structured way.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZED DISCOURSES ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE FIELD OF COMMUNICATION

More than three decades ago, Peters (1986) asked himself: Why has the field of communication failed to define itself, its intellectual focus and its mission in a coherent way? The answer, back then, was striking: the intellectual incoherency is the price we had to pay for the institutional success. What defines the unique identity of the field of communication is also what maintains its conceptual confusion. For Peters (1986), the debates of communication had a specific etiology related to the paradoxical intents of creating a particular institutional entity (an academic field) from a universal intellectual entity (communication).

“In the crunch between institution and intellect, the latter historically has lost. ‘Communication’ has come to be administratively, not conceptually, defined” (p. 528). Consequently, what are the intellectual consequences of the lack of good reasons for the existence of the field? From his point of view, the field of communication, at that time, suffered from: a) historic anachronism on its self-image, particularly the image of the “founding fathers”; b) irredentism, i.e., the dream of an expanding empire; c) incoherence and lack of philosophical foundation and; d) a limited acknowledgment of the rest of the intellectual and academic fields (nations). He also considered these problems (the lack of intellectual richness in the field) to be the result of three main factors: the institutionalization access of the field, the use of the mathematical theory of communication, and the self-reflection as institutional apologetics. But what is the most recent history of the field? What would a contemporary balance be? Why have the rest of the sociocultural contexts assumed this history and these problems as their own?

In a more recent work, Robert T. Craig (2008) summarizes what can be considered the commonly accepted American discourse on the intellectual history of the field of communication. From his point of view, the study of media and communication started more or less independent from other sources, so the formation of the field of communication was a result of the partial convergence of several disciplines and research lines that intertwine in a complex way, all related in one way or another to the communication phenomenon, but that have never been integrated into a coherent body of knowledge. Thus, the existing diversity of communication research is not a recent development but something that has depicted the field through all its history.

At this point, there are two debates that call for attention. The first is the global growth of the field, the emergence of the cultural topics of communication and the need to produce local knowledge, which face the supremacy of the American and European production of knowledge in communication. The second is the history of the debate of communication as a discipline, a matter that has been discussed since the eighties. The “Ferment in the Field”, a special issue of the *Journal of Communication* in 1983, mainly focused on the emergence of the Critical Cultural Studies and the Political Economy of Communication,

as two fronts that stood against the established tradition of the mass communication functionalism. The special issue, its main topic and its implied contents, even though they were not accepted with the same enthusiasm by all participants, had unity in its diversity: “The dissidents were now ‘in’ the field. The field would be a netting nest for inclusion” (Craig, 2008, p. 684). On the other hand, the spirit of inclusion was in tension with a second matter, also present in “Fermet in the Field”, and it implied the search for unity in diversity, a discussion that portended the elements of the scientific model of communication that described the discipline under “five salient features”:

... (1) Its historical origins in the mid-twentieth-century interdisciplinary communication research movement; (2) its rapid institutional growth and consolidation in the last decades of that century; (3) its core identity as an empirical social science; (4) its proper place as a “variable” discipline spanning different “levels of analysis” in the scheme of academic disciplines (Paisley, 1984); and (5) its urgent need to rejoin the “split” between interpersonal and mass communication that constituted the most serious barrier to the development of a cross-level theoretical core in the discipline (Craig, 2008, p. 685).

Later on, Craig (2008) states that the *Journal of Communication* reviewed the problem of the disciplinary status of communication again in 1993 with two special issues titled “The Future of the Field”, nevertheless, the forty-eight articles failed to reveal any sort of consensus. Several studies casually talked about ‘the field’ as if there was no questioning around its identity or its disciplinary status, whilst, others alleged that the field of communication was not a discipline, though their attitude varied around what to do about it. After the 1993 issue, the *Journal of Communication* did not publish any more special issues on this topic, and what we see today, at the beginning of the XXI century, is that none of these visions dominate the field. Nowadays, the lack of connection between mass communication and interpersonal communication is still considered a problem, as well as the non-stopping institutional growth of the field without an established disciplinary core. The Mexican Association of Communication Researchers (Asociación

Mexicana de Investigadores de la Comunicación, AMIC) devoted an entire congress to this debate in 2015, where several analyses of the present state of the field appeared, but only a few ideas on what the field could become in the future (Padilla & Herrera-Aguilar, 2016). In a nutshell, for Craig (2008), the plural vision of the “paradigm dialogue” continues, as well as the attempts to outline a theoretical disciplinary core that can fit the pluralism of the field. But what originates these pessimistic these pessimistic, unpromising and critical diagnoses about the field, the theory and communication research? I will do a brief review on this topic.

A PARTICULAR HISTORICAL NARRATIVE ABOUT COMMUNICATION

On its historical reconstruction of the idea of communication, Peters (1999) sustains that communication theory emerges in the forties, rooted in the American context of World War II. And it is during this war context that communication is molded in relation to phenomena like industrialization, urbanization, rational development of society, psychological research and modern communication instruments. But it is not until the end of the forties, with the appearance of Claude Shannon’s mathematical Theory of Communication, that the conceptual sphere is reorganized and transformed forever. The theory talked about “something” that was familiar to what happened in the war, to the actions the government took during this war, and to the common life phenomena that arose during this period. This “something” was summarized under the concept of information; a concept that rapidly spread from mathematics to biology and physics, and from relationships to international politics. Information rapidly became a core concept, one closely related to communication.

“Information” became a substantive and communication theory became an account of meaning as well as of channel capacity. Indeed, the theory may have seemed so exciting because it made something already quite familiar in war, bureaucracy, and every day life into a concept of science and technology. Information was no longer raw data, military logistics, or phone numbers; it was the principle of the universe’s intelligibility (Peters, 1999, p. 23).

For authors like Martín Serrano (1990), the mathematical theory of communication served as foundation for the emergence of an epistemology of communication, not communication theory because it involved new knowledge, not just a sum or integration of previous ideas from other sciences or scientific disciplines, it aimed for a specific new frame: “different organisms and organizations have one thing in common: they transform themselves and their surroundings, without losing the organization that they are known for. The thing that guarantees the permanence of each one of them is information. Communication sciences are the result of the development of this paradigm” (Martín Serrano, 1990, p. 66).

While, later on information became a fundamental concept in the development of the first synthetic approach to a communication science, in reality, what Martín Serrano was referring to was the funding proposal of cybernetics, which also puts information in its core, though its construction and implications are somehow different. Although, the mathematical informational theory and cybernetics have been acknowledged in the history of theory and epistemology of communication, they are not the most frequent, neither in the theoretical construction processes nor in the empirical studies (Anderson, 1996; Bryant & Miron, 2004). Why are they not part of these, even when both are recognized as epistemological fundamentals in communication studies? The answer to this question lies in the same history that Peters (1999) develops, where even if both perspectives set forth the word communication on the scientific map, other perspectives set forth both method and the theoretical approach in their empirical research process.

Another institutionalized historical narrative about the intellectual dimension in the field are the so-called paradigms, historical sources, schools of thought or traditions. Thus, for example, Craig (1999) recognizes seven traditions as starter points for the organization of the metadiscourse dimension of the field of communication theory: a) the rhetoric tradition that understands communication as a practical art of discourse; b) the semiotic tradition that conceptualizes communication as intersubjective mediation by signs; c) the phenomenological tradition that sees communication as the experience of otherness; d) the cybernetics tradition that understands communication

as information processing; e) the socio-psychological tradition that sees communication as expression, interaction and influence; f) the sociocultural tradition that conceptualizes communication as a (re) production of social order; and g) the critical tradition that views communication as a discursive consideration. This proposal has been one of the most important when it comes to the conceptual organization of communication and its importance lays not on its influence in the construction of knowledge but on the construction of the institutional identity of the field and on the teaching process of communication theory (Craig, 2016), and it is this same proposal the one that has been the most reproduced in Communication Theory scholarly texts (Eadie, 2009; Griffin, 1991/2009; Littlejohn & Foss, 2008; West & Turner, 2010); a proposal that we should analyze in detail.

In previous work (Vidales, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017a) I have already retrieved the different authors and forms of reproduction of this conceptual organization, however, what I want to highlight now is that, from my point of view, there is no way to overcome this historical discourse on the history of the field without being trapped into reproducing what one criticizes. It may appear then, that there is no other way of telling the intellectual history of the field because no matter the steps we follow to name the theories, or how narrow or wide we choose to make our recounts, or which temporality we choose, the recounts tend to be very similar. The proposal is, therefore, to completely change the reconstructive logic by putting objects of knowledge in the center. This vision has two immediate consequences. Firstly, it opens up the conceptual views, becoming a transdisciplinary antechamber. And secondly, it means by de facto, a new way of knowledge construction. I will make a brief review on this.

THE PROPOSAL OF COMMUNICATION AS A TRANSDISCIPLINARY CONCEPT

A proposal that I have underlined in previous works (Vidales, 2015, 2017a, 2017b) is the need to go from the consideration of communication as an academic field to the consideration of communication as a transdisciplinary concept. It assumes the inclusion

of a new and particular vision about objects of knowledge, about the construction process of knowledge, and about the possibility of different historical narratives. In the first case, objects of knowledge allude to transdisciplinary concepts, i.e., “concepts which serve to unify knowledge by being applicable in areas which cut across the trenches which mark traditional academic boundaries” (Checkland in François, 2004, p. 632). Objects of knowledge have an abstract configuration that is not particular to any theory or field of knowledge, instead, they are conceptual constructs objectivized in a particular theory and field but that can be extended beyond one particular area of knowledge. We can find some examples in contemporary science in the concepts of signification, communication, cognition, information, and power, among many others. According to the *International Encyclopedia of Systems and Cybernetics* (François, 2004), transdisciplinarity implies, first, the existence of a metalevel of models and concepts, leading to an integrated understanding by every part-taker of the system under study; and second, it implies the existence of a common metalanguage based on isomorphism, which finds itself very useful to convey generalized concepts and metamodels.

Thus, objects of knowledge are logical derivatives of metalanguages, and therefore, of transdisciplinary perspectives, which demand a particular way of dealing with knowledge construction processes, as well as a global perception of the connections between disciplines: “not only science but all human activities represent a unitary whole, part and parcel of the unity of the universe. Unity and diversity do not appear as opposite concepts, but as complementary perspectives” (Rodríguez in François, 2004, p. 632). Transdisciplinarity is a characteristic of cybernetic and systemic concepts, of methods and models that give specialists a metalanguage for the cooperative study of complex situations in systems, e.g., the creation of a metamodel of the possibilities for controlling and/or regulating any type of complex system might lead specialists to a better understanding of systems studied by other disciplines, to collaborate in a useful way to global projects, and in some cases, to develop new perspectives in their own discipline by not losing time in rediscovering preexisting concepts and models.

According to François (2004), these general concepts or models are identical representations obtained from specific situations, interrelationships or processes. Each discipline studies its problems on its own terms; nevertheless, there are some common features that underlay apparent dissimilar situations or configurations. And that is what the construction of general frameworks and transdisciplinary concepts consist of, and which, from my perspective, represents objects of knowledge by itself. If we consider communication as a transdisciplinary concept, the next step would be to explore the different models that were generated for its explanation, not just from within the field of communication or other particular fields of knowledge like social sciences or humanities, but from other fields too, like biology, engineering or physics. Even though, all these areas have built communication concepts, the problem is that all of them are located beyond our conceptual horizons, particularly because they are outside our historical reconstructions, which not only challenges the genuine dialogue between other disciplines or knowledge construction processes in contemporary science, but it also traps us inside a disciplinary vision that has been incapable of defining its conceptual core and that considers theoretical production as an unimportant topic.

The immediate consequence of considering communication as an object of knowledge and as a transdisciplinary concept is that it becomes just one of the many paths we could take. We could follow at least two paths from there. One of them will entail connecting emergent objects of knowledge to recognized intellectual traditions in order to build from this relation, not only new historical perspectives but above all, new theoretical frameworks. This reconstruction could open the academic field of communication to other academic areas and would also enable us to think in new and emerging interdisciplinary dialogues. Transdisciplinarity requires of interdisciplinarity. Objects of knowledge, thought from a transdisciplinary approach, open new horizons for the knowledge construction processes, but do not solve the main problem of the conceptual core of communication and its academic identity, and that is because, from this framework, these questions lose importance, i.e., they are not a problem anymore.

A second path is to take those concepts that are transdisciplinary already and that have already been used by other fields of knowledge, and integrate them in a general conceptual frame. This is the path chosen by cybersemiotics, an intellectual project that aims to build a transdisciplinary theory of communication, cognition, signification and information. Cybersemiotics presents itself as a new non-reductionist vision of cognition and communication that tries to solve the dualistic paradox of natural sciences, exact sciences and humanities by starting from a halfway point between semiotics cognition and communication as basic sources of reality, where all of our knowledge is created, and thus, suggests that knowledge is produced within four aspects of human reality:

Our surrounding nature described by the physical and chemical natural sciences, our corporality described by the life sciences such as biology and medicine, our inner world of subjective experience described by phenomenologically based investigations and our social world described by social sciences (Brier, 2013, p. 220).

From the standpoint of cybersemiotics, there are four different types of historical explanation: the nomological, the biological evolutionary, the social-historical, and the personal-subjective, i.e., four areas of scientific knowledge that attempt to explain reality from their own perspective. Therefore, the challenge is to produce a new paradigmatic base that allows the integration of knowledge produced inside of each one of these forms of explanation, in other words, a foundation that will allow the integration of knowledge from the study of the embodied conscience produced by exact sciences, life sciences, social sciences and humanities without reducing the result to only one view, avoiding as much as possible any type of reductionism, from scientific to radical constructivist reductionism (Brier, 2013). Thus, Brier considers that “cybersemiotics constitutes a realistic foundation for a comprehensive understanding of the natural, life and social sciences as well as humanities and that it can provide a deeper understanding of the differences in the knowledge types they produce and show why each and every one is necessary” (p. 223).

By setting as its main objective to become an integral science of information, cognition and communication, cybersemiotics also sets itself as a transdisciplinary view that integrates different metatheoretical frameworks that give birth to a different vision, not just of life and cognitive processes, but of both communication and its epistemological construction. In a nutshell, cybersemiotics represents a project that studies the biological, cognitive and social routes of the human need for meaning and auto-organization within the processes of observation, understanding and explanation of the world (Brier, 2008). By setting its foundation in phenomenology, semiotics, first and second order cybernetics, systems theory and biosemiotics, cybersemiotics seeks to become a step forward in the integration of sciences and in the study and comprehension of complex phenomena, like every living organism in all its different forms.

For Cobley (2010), cybersemiotics is transdisciplinary not just because its situated between science and humanities and because it evokes knowledge from both, but specifically, because it explores concepts that operate both in nature and culture; some of these concepts are: meaning, communication, cognition, message, code, and information, among others. These concepts can be located at the most fundamental levels of life, like molecules and cells, as well as in the most complex social configurations like language and symbolic social dimensions. Thus, each one of these concepts can be developed in a general transdisciplinary theory, including communication. According to Brier (2013):

The proposed framework offers an integrative multi and transdisciplinary approach, which uses meaning as the overarching principle for grasping the complex area of cybernetic information science for nature and machines and the semiotics of all living system's cognition, communication, and culture. Cybersemiotics is an integrated transdisciplinary philosophy of science allowing us to perform our multidisciplinary research, since it is concerned not only with cybernetics and Peircean semiotics, but also with informational, biological, psychological and social sciences. In order to incorporate the sociological disciplines and contributions from multiple areas of applied research cybersemiotics draws extensively on Luhmann's theories (p. 222).

As seen, this approach sets forth a completely different conceptual path from the one that we have followed in communication studies so far, thus, it entitles the need for other forms of historical reconstruction and of knowledge construction in contemporary communication research. What we cannot deny is that this approach represents a formidable challenge, since we still have to go through the critique of the foundations in our own historical narrative, and specially, to start the dialogue with other fields of knowledge in the same level of our conceptual production. Correspondingly, and since theoretical discourse per se represents a problem for historical reconstruction, there still lays the need to show empirical evidence of the range and use of a proposal like this. However, it is also about recognizing that the conceptual space of communication exploited in richness and depth in the second decade of the XXI century. Communication actively works in border sciences, in contemporary science, and in explanations of life, society, cognition and meaning. It might be the first time in history that it reaches its current state as central element of life, which means that we must take a chance and stop reading history to start being part of its construction.

SOME FINAL REMARKS

The history of communication has taught us several valuable things about the construction process of our field and about the problems and future scenarios that we face, but it has also provided us with new conceptual tools to do this. Thus, we are facing a very important moment in our field, since, for the first time, we not only have the possibility to rewrite the intellectual history of the field from our own sociocultural context, but we can also go from being spectators to protagonists in these historical recounts. The invitation is made through this article, an invitation to rethink the history, theory and research of communication in the last seven decades. To think of new routes and conceptual paths, the transdisciplinary path being one to choose from, but it is not the only one, the same way as cybersemiotics is not the only one nor the best one. They are just alternative proposals to participate and intervene differently in the construction of our field of study, of communication theory, and specifically, of communication research.

This is the proposal, but it is also the major challenge that we, as the new generation, have ahead.

Bibliographic references

- Abbott, A. (2005). *The historicality of individuals*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Anderson, J. A. (1996). *Communication Theory. Epistemological foundations*. Nueva York: The Guilford Press.
- Averbeck, S. (2008). Comparative history of communication studies: France and Germany. *The Open Communication Journal*, 2, 1-13. Doi: 10.2174/1874916X00802010001
- Brier, S. (2008). *Cybersemiotics. Why information is not enough*. Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press.
- Brier, S. (2013). Cybersemiotics: A New Foundation for Transdisciplinary Theory of Information, Cognition, Meaningful Communication and the Interaction Between Nature and Culture. *Integral Review*, 9 (2), 220-263.
- Bryant, J. & Miron, D. (2004). Theory and Research in Mass Communication. *Journal of Communication*, 54 (4), 662-704. Doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2004.tb02650.x
- Cobley, P. (2010). Cybersemiotics and human modelling. *Entropy*, 12, 2045-2066. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/e12092045>
- Cobley, P. & Schulz, P. J. (Eds.). (2013). *Theories and models of communication*. Volume 1. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Craig, R. T. (1999). Communication theory as a field. *Communication Theory*, 9 (2), 116-161. Doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2885.1999.tb00355.x
- Craig, R. T. (2008). Communication as a Field and Discipline. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, Volume II (pp. 675-688) United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing.
- Craig, R. T. (2016). El metamodelo constitutivo: una revisión a dieciséis años. In E. Vizer & C. Vidales (Coords.), *Comunicación, Campo(s), teorías y problemas. Una perspectiva internacional* (pp. 307-336). Sevilla: Comunicación social.
- Delia, J. G. (1987). Communication research: A history. In C. Berger & S. Chaffee (Eds.), *Handbook of communication science* (pp. 20-98). London: Sage.

- Dennis, E. E. & Wartella, E. (1996). *American communication research: The remembered history*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Eadie, W. F. (Ed.). (2009). *21st Century. Communication. A reference Handbook*. Volume 1. Los Angeles/New Delhi/Singapore: Sage
- François, C. (Ed.). (2004). *International Encyclopedia of Systems and Cybernetics*. Munich: K. G. Saur GmbH.
- Glander, T. (2000). *Origins of mass communications research during the American Cold War. Educational effects and contemporary implications*. Mahwah/London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Griffn, E. (2009). *A first look at communication theory* (Seventh edition). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Hardt, H. (1992). *Critical Communication Studies. Communications, history & theory in America*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Hardt, H. (2008). Foreword. In D. Park & J. Pooley (Eds.), *The history of media and communication research. Contested Memories* (pp. XI-XVII). New York/Baltimore/Berlin/Bruselas/Viena/Oxford: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Ibekwe-San Juan, F. & Dousa, T. M. (Eds.). (2014). *Theories of information, communication and knowledge. A multidisciplinary approach*. New York: Springer.
- Kim, M. S. (2002). *Non-Western perspectives on human communication. Implications for theory and practice*. California: Sage.
- Littlejohn, S. W. & Foss, K. A. (2008). *Theories of human communication* (Ninth edition). Belmont: Thompson Wadsworth.
- Löblich, M. & Scheu, A. (2011). Writing the History of communication studies: a sociology of science approach. *Communication Theory*, 21, 1-22. Doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2010.01373.x
- Marques de Melo, J. (2004). Paradigmas comunicacionales que brotaron tempranamente en las Américas. *Quórum Académico*, 1 (1), 25-44. Retrieved from <http://produccioncienti caluz.org/index.php/quorum/articulo/view/17354>
- Marques de Melo, J. (2009). *Pensamiento comunicacional latinoamericano. Entre el saber y el poder*. Sevilla: Comunicación Social.
- Martín-Barbero, J. (2002). *Ocio de cartógrafo. Travesías latinoamericanas de la comunicación en la cultura*. Chile: FCE.
- Martín-Serrano, M. (1990). La epistemología de la comunicación a los cuarenta años de su nacimiento. *Telos, Cuadernos de comunicación*,

- tecnología y sociedad*, 22, 65-75. Retrieved from <http://eprints.ucm.es/13238/>
- Martino, L. (2016). Significación de la teoría en un campo diversificado. In E. Vizer & C. Vidales (Coords.), *Comunicación, campo(s), teorías y problemas. Una perspectiva internacional* (pp. 69-100). Salamanca: Comunicación Social.
- Moragas, M. de (2011). *Interpretar la comunicación. Estudios sobre medios en América y Europa*. Barcelona: Gedisa.
- Padilla, M. R. & Herrera-Aguilar, M. (Coords.). (2016). *Historia y aportes sociales de la investigación de la comunicación en México. Acuerdos y discusiones sobre su núcleo disciplinar*. Querétaro: Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro.
- Park, D. W. & Pooley, J. (Eds.). (2008). *The history of media and communication research. Contested memories*. Nueva York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Pavitt, C. (2016). *A Survey of scientific communication theory*. Nueva York. Peter Lang.
- Peters, J. D. (1986). Institutional sources of intellectual Poverty in communication research. *Communication Research*, 13 (4), 527-559. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365086013004002>
- Peters, J. D. (1999). *Speaking into the air. A history of the idea of communication*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Peters, J. D. (2008). History as a communication problem. In B. Zelizer (Ed.), *Explorations in communication and history* (pp. 19-34). London/Nueva York: Routledge.
- Pietilä, V. (2008). How does a discipline become institutionalized? In D. W. Park & J. Pooley (Eds.), *The history of media and communication research: Contested memories* (pp. 205-224). Nueva York: Peter Lang.
- Portugal, F. (Ed.). (2000). *La investigación en Comunicación Social en América Latina 1970-2000*. Lima: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos Fondo Editorial/Academia Peruana de Comunicación Organizacional.
- Rogers, E. (1994). *A history of Communication Studies. A biographical approach*. New York: The Free Press.

- Schiller, D. (1999). *Theorizing communication. A history*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schützeichel, R. (2015). *Teorías sociológicas de la comunicación*. México: Universidad Iberoamericana.
- Simonson, P. (2008). Writing figures into the field: William McPhee and the parts played by people in our histories of media research. In D. W. Park & J. Pooley (Eds.), *The history of media and communication research* (pp. 291-320). New York: Peter Lang.
- Sproule, M. J. (2008). Communication: From concept to field to discipline. In D. W. Park & J. Pooley (Eds.), *The history of media and communication research* (163-178). New York: Peter Lang.
- Vidales, C. (2013). *Comunicación, semiosis y sentido. El relativismo teórico en la investigación de la comunicación*. Sevilla: Comunicación Social.
- Vidales, C. (2015). Historia, teoría e investigación de la comunicación. *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 23, 11-43. Retrieved from <http://www.comunicacionsociedad.cucsh.udg.mx/index.php/comsoc/article/view/60>
- Vidales, C. (2016). Una mirada epistemológica al estudio de la comunicación. En M. R. Padilla & M. Herrera-Aguilar (Coords.), *Historia y aportes sociales de la investigación de la comunicación en México. Acuerdos y discusiones sobre su núcleo disciplinar* (pp. 45-70). Querétaro: Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro.
- Vidales, C. (2017a). Building communication theory from cybersemiotics. *Cybernetics and Human Knowing*, 24 (1), 9-32.
- Vidales, C. (2017b). Construyendo teoría de la comunicación desde la cibersemiótica: una ruta hacia la transdisciplina. *Revista Iberoamericana de Comunicación*, 33, 35-64.
- Vizer, E. & Vidales, C. (Coords.). (2016). *Comunicación, Campo(s), teorías y problemas. Una perspectiva internacional*. Sevilla: Comunicación social.
- West, R. & Turner, L. H. (2010). *Introducing communication theory. Analysis and Application* (Fourth edition). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Zelizer, B. (2008). *Explorations in communication and history*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Zelizer, B. (2015). Making communication matter. *Communication Theory*, 24, 410-415. Doi: 10.1111/comt.12075