Rhetorical Criticism in Communication Studies

Rhetorical Criticism in Communication Studies:

Workshop for a Dream

By

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INTRODUCTION

It is the 4th of July, 2014. Last summer, on the same date, it was precisely ten years since I returned to Romania after an American "odyssey" which still dwells on my mind. On that specific day, I felt an impulse towards textualizing part of my American experience. Through sustained effort, that unexpected urge materialized into a book about "my America." I wrote the book outdoors, on the cell phone my brother had given me on my last birthday, while my daughter was playing. I first wrote a memo, then I sent it to myself via e-mail, and eventually I copied everything into MS Word. When I had six pages, I thought that was a good start. So I continued. Step by step, my book *Politics within parentheses: Qualitative research methods in communication studies* got its contours. I finished writing on August 17, 2013. I spent the next three months editing it. From November, 2013, when the European Institute in Iaşi accepted my manuscript for publication, until January 3, 2014, I reedited the book according to the recommendations of the press.

I was very happy when I finally held my own printed book. And I was even happier on the occasion of the book launch, in March, at the offices of the *Horizon* journal in Timişoara. Cornel Ungureanu hosted the event. Among the guests, I counted persons of great intellectual and moral standing, such as Professor Ilie Gyurcsik; Professor Lucian Ionica, the author of the foreword to *Politics within parentheses*; the Dean of the Faculty of Political Science, Philosophy, and Communication Studies at the West University of Timişoara, Professor Gheorghe Clitan; Professor Rodica Superceanu, ex-Dean of the Faculty of Communication Studies of the Polytechnic University of Timişoara; her husband, Tiberiu Superceanu, my dear professor of mathematics; my colleagues, Professor Alexandru Petrescu, Professor Sebastian Petrişor, Professor Ştefana Ciortea-Neamtiu, and others; my younger colleagues, former students whom I am very fond of; lifelong friends; and, of course, my family.

That was the moment when I managed to articulate, before even beginning to understand my own statement, the fact that my sustained effort during the past ten years – which I had spent working for the faculty and primarily focused on the pedagogical act – meant nothing but the materialization of my ongoing project of *cultural mediation*. Through my own discursive experience, I tried to bring the discursive histories of the

communication studies discipline here (Timişoara) and there (the United States of America) to a "common denominator." The idea I formulated back then – the only one, for that matter, concealed in the sheaf of thanks which I welcomed my guests with, even the absent ones who, for one reason or another, did not manage to participate in my event, although they were with me in their hearts and souls – has stayed with me ever since. Later, I spent a lot of time thinking about its implications. Within the limited circle of my discussion sessions in Rhetoric and Negotiation, a class I have been teaching for the past several years in the Master's program called Communication and Mediation in Social Conflicts, which the faculty offers, I discussed that idea extensively. Belatedly, as is my habit, I realized I could, eventually, succeed in coordinating my concrete experience of cultural mediation, a process in which I "spontaneously" engaged almost eleven years ago, with both the extant academic discursive forms and those not yet articulated. In other words, my own choice to offer my fellow colleagues, the M.A. students, Carl R. Burgchardt's *Readings in rhetorical criticism* as a reference point or as the (pre)text for our encounters finally made perfect sense to me. The texts Professor Burgchardt diligently compiled in his book constitute the points of departure for our discussions in class, whose fundamental objective is to familiarize the Romanian academic public with the critical and qualitative practices of research in the discipline of communication studies, with an eye to their finding their own, autochthonous modes in which to articulate the possibilities for "producing" and consolidating cultural meanings.

This book, whose first lines you are now reading, represents the last necessary step in the logic of a process which started a long time ago; a step that ends an old journey, an adventure I commenced fifteen years ago when, as a fresh graduate of the School of Philosophy in Timişoara, I landed in a foreign and distant land, as I aspired to complete my education through a doctorate in another country. It was not an accident that I chose America and not another place. I remain grateful to my colleagues and friends Alina Luca and Ana-Maria Neagoe, who stirred my interest in that cultural space and helped me to get there. Fully aware, I now can say that without "my America" I am nothing: just as, for the four long years I spent over there, I was nothing without the land I carry with me in my heart. This book I am commencing now, with faith that the good Lord will help me again to carry the task on to its end, is "the end of the adventure"; it is the point where I close the display of the possibilities of representation in our culture (which I venture to imagine) via my interpretations of certain notorious texts in the American academic culture. Those texts define the "hard nucleus" of research in the communication studies discipline in the

United States. Their theoretical possibilities must be explored in our culture as soon as possible. The book is based on two fundamental presuppositions: on the one hand, the discursive history of the field which I can offer the Romanian public is reasonably comprehensive and comparable to many "histories" Americans themselves produce, which become more and more accessible to all of us; on the other hand, the same discursive history is fundamentally connected to my subjectivity, to my concrete possibilities for delineating "significant" and "less important;" in other words, as an older argument reads, [1] to my own "politics" of inquiry.

As for this "politics," I can say but one thing. It is a work in progress. As I literally have *no one* around who has benefited from this double cultural experience, with whom I could form a "community," on behalf of which I could legitimately talk, and as I intuit it was not an accident that I was "different" there and have been "different" here since 2004, I am responsible for these differences. I have a duty to articulate them as accurately as I can, so that those who come from behind, including my own child, will not feel the hideous gap between the place where communication studies was born and the country that has adopted it, as I felt it during the past fifteen years and still feel it. In other words, I have a duty to help my co-citizens to set out on this road with an essentialized epistemological luggage as regards the methodological history of communication studies – a luggage I have been carrying myself, for so long a time – so that our texts about our academic culture, about our own possibilities of representation in the discipline of communication studies eventually find their well-deserved place within the universal academic culture.

I dedicate this book to my students in the Master's program in Communication and Mediation in Social Conflicts. Their continuous joy during our encounters prompted me to make the effort of transposing into these pages our understanding of the unlimited heuristic possibilities comprised in the qualitative research method in the discipline of communication studies called *rhetorical criticism*.

Notes

[1] Georgina Gabor, *Politics within parentheses: Qualitative research methods in intercultural communication*, The European Institute Press, Iaşi, 2014 (in Romanian).

CHAPTER ONE

AN AMERICAN METHODOLOGICAL HISTORY OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

The class in Communication Theories has been taught at the West University of Timişoara since 2005, when Professor Constantin Grecu, Ph.D., whose name and contribution to the founding, the consolidation, and the wellbeing of the School of Philosophy in Timişoara does not need a presentation, introduced, in response to a ministerial interpellation, a double specialization at the graduate level: Communication and Philosophy. Thus, Professor Constantin Grecu hosted the first classes in Communication Theories.

I recently resumed an older dialogue with Professor Grecu, a dialogue which, to me, represents a great, an inestimable gift I could never pay him back for. After I published *Politics within parentheses*, I confronted an epistemological and even existential impasse. Professor Grecu, with his generosity, tolerance, and the extraordinary thoughtfulness that he always greeted my every confessional outburst with, but also with the modesty that characterizes every action that he engages with, helped me not only to overcome the difficult moment, but also to anticipate its yet unseen part: that component of every crisis which only the act of its concrete surpassing manages to make available to our understanding. In other words, I "got out" of this brief, but intense interaction a different person, prepared to assume responsibility for her future, with the entire effort it entailed, because there was no one, literally, able to do that for me. To paraphrase the famous gatekeeper from Franz Kafka's short story "In front of the law": this gate was made especially for me.

Among the many things I discussed with Professor Grecu, there was our common choice of "fixing" as a reference point for our thematic discussions in the Communication Theories class the book of Professor Em Griffin of Wheaton College in Illinois, *A first look at communication theory*. Professor Grecu told me that, when he discovered Professor Griffin's book and feeling enthusiastic upon reading it, he wrote to Griffin to confess his appreciation. Professor Griffin replied, gratified, in his turn,

that here, at the "end of the world," someone was reading and appreciating him. Indeed, we still live "at the end of the world," while our efforts at self-representation on the academic scene takes into account, way too often, the hugeness of the gap between "us" and "the others." More, I remark with sadness, we represent authentic "mysteries" to each other in the very academic community whose interests we should rather articulate. Leaving aside, though, such bizarre effects of the celebration of individualism in Romania, an American project the Romanian people have taken to perfection over the past twenty-five years, I must record that Professor Grecu's and my common choice, as regards the textbook which we deemed fit as a (pre)text for our encounters in the Communication Theories class, executed a first "political alliance" as regards the symbolic construction which we engaged with – that is, of the discipline of communication studies, in its Timişorean version.

Professor Griffin's book includes, within its first editions, an extremely valuable and welcome methodological "history" of the field, recorded in the chapter called "Talk about communication." In the following, and until a translation – so necessary – of Griffin's fundamental book is published in Romania, I will present a summary of what Griffin conveyed in the chapter that sketches the theoretical and methodological "map" of the communication studies discipline. Starting from the premise that history represents an interpretation of past events, Griffin identifies, at the time of the publication of the third edition of *A first look*, "seven significant historical periods of communication theories, research, and instruction," [1] periods which, as the professor warns us, oftentimes overlap. According to Professor Griffin, those intervals which impinged on the profile of the discipline are the following.

First, we have what Griffin calls "the early years," which bring rhetoric and its renewed possibilities to the fore, to account for a phenomenon which, at that point, drew the attention of the American academic body as having its own, freestanding identity: the years 1900–1950. At the beginning of the last century, as Griffin records, the speech teachers were part of English departments. As they emphasized, in their academic lectures, that cannon of rhetoric which, from Aristotle on, bears the name of "delivery" – in other words, the performative, predominantly oral, act of oratory – those professors were "looked down on " as the "poor cousins" [2] by those who dealt with the research and teaching of (English) literature. Thus, as Griffin, whose exact words I want to record here, writes: "In an attempt to gain respect and to carve out an academic discipline for themselves, a small group of speech teachers broke away from the National Council of Teachers of Englis*h* in 1914, and formed the

National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking." [3] Later, the name of the organization was changed to the Speech Association of America and, although, as Griffin says, there were still a few speech teachers who remained in peripheral positions in English departments, by 1935 "more than 200 American college and university catalogs listed a separate department of speech." [4]

This beginning of communication studies in the United States of America deserves a minimal commentary. It is worth remarking the frankness with which Professor Griffin notes the main objective of the "poor relatives" of the English literature teachers: that is, to emancipate; to exit, thus, the "tutelage" of the latter; and to state their own, autonomous, identity. Instead of maintaining defensive positions, by arguing that they *also* contributed to the wellbeing of American "academia," those heroic professors found – within the "difference" that they represented in relation to the "norm," defined by literates – an occasion to state, rather than deny, their academic identity, while they celebrated it instead of participating in its process of disenfranchisement. "Heroism," within American academic culture, in its portion related to the building of the communication studies discipline, *began in 1914*, an important year to keep in mind, in letter and in spirit, by all those who aspire to acquire firm knowledge of the history of the field.

Another extremely important feature of that historical event, an essential detail, is that none of those heroic professors initiated such a move on their own. On the contrary, they laid the foundations for a governmental organization, under the aegis of which they articulated their credo and their identities. Thus, their affiliation to an alternative institution conferred on them a status, a "voice" in the American academic culture, a privileged position, whose interests gained, automatically, both legitimacy and governmental protection. In other words, institutions may serve not only the vassalage of the individual, according to an older argument of Michel Foucault, but also their empowerment.

Leaving such historical facts aside – but exclaiming as Kenneth Burke did, in a context we will discuss at a later point in our journey: "for God's sake, [if they are available] let us study their implications!" [5] – let us dwell on the possibilities those heroic speech teachers opened, for each of us, those who put our efforts into building communication studies in Romania.

Getting back to Professor Griffin's account, his next observation refers, not accidentally, to the document *par excellence* which attests to the advent of this new discipline within the academic offer of the American universities, in other words the journal affiliated with the freshly founded

(from an institutional point of view) field of study: the *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking*. The journal stipulated, in its very first issue, a series of exigencies of principle, among which Griffin cites "a sufficiently scientific frame of mind," [6] but also the organizational goal – that is, to facilitate members' access to "scientific investigation to discuss true answers to certain questions." [7] The meaning of those stipulations, as Griffin appreciates, must not be read literally, at this "early" stage of the new discipline, but as a "concern for academic respectability within the university rather than as a drive to discover laws of oral effectiveness." [8] The speech classes constituted simple "practical guides" to those interested in influencing various types of public by means of "public address, oral interpretations of literature, radio announcing, drama, debate, and roundtable discussions." [9] The sources of authority, as regards the type of instruction in what constitutes oratory, were as we expect, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian.

As for scientific research *per se*, Griffin maintains – and his statement enjoys the "community of consensus," in his own terms, as we will demonstrate in the following chapters – that Herbert Wichelns' 1925 study is the one that "establishes rhetorical criticism as *the* appropriate theoretical activity of the field." [10] By delineating, for the very first time, the critical study of literature and the analysis of public discourse, Wichelns specified that the latter, "is not concerned with permanence, nor yet with beauty. It is concerned with effect. It regards a speech as a communication to a specific audience, and holds its business to be the analysis and appreciation of the orator's method of imparting his ideas to his hearers." [11]

Wichelns' article established, according to Griffin, the Aristotelian forms of proof (*logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*) as the modes *par excellence* with which to evaluate public discourse. This practice of research, which Griffin identified as the "neo-Aristotelian method of speech criticism," [12] supplied the norm for academic research within the context of the newly emerged discipline for decades. Rhetoric, as Griffin points out, is an art. The scientific study of public address, which employed quantitative methods, seemed a project whose rationality was hard to grasp by the majority of speech teachers. At the same time, the rhetorical analysis of the various means of mass communication was entirely missing, due to the conviction that media, simple sources of entertainment, were not as important as the political discourse of public debates.

Partially overlapping with the "early years," from the standpoint of the theoretical and methodological history of the communication studies discipline, is the interval 1930–1960, which Griffin briefly characterizes as

the moment when research on communication phenomena, particularly media effects, becomes mainly the prerogative of the social sciences. If, before the Second World War, the effects of mass media could be reasonably – in virtue of some credible arguments – neglected, the war "created an urgent need to find effective ways to inform, influence, and inspire maximum citizen support for the war effort." [13] Thus, remarkable scholars with backgrounds in social sciences set out to discover how mass media messages acted upon various types of public.

Wilbur Schramm, the Director of the Stanford Institute for Communication Research, in his 1963 book, [14] recorded this effort. His publication attested to the importance he conferred on four researchers trained in social sciences at the Institute, and emphasized their contribution to the consolidation of research on communication phenomena, as the new discipline's "founding fathers": politologist Harold Laswell, social psychologist Kurt Lewin, sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld, and experimental psychologist Carl Hovland. The four scholars were preoccupied with various phenomena with significant impact upon communication, in its new post-Second World War identity: Nazi propaganda (Laswell), leadership styles (Lewin), the efficiency of marketing styles in getting government funds (Lazarsfeld), and the effects of motivational documentaries on the morale of the army (Hovland). All four and, more importantly, Wilbur Schramm, who recorded their efforts at institutionalization, remain in the history of communication studies as its founders, despite some older speculations [15] according to which, during those times, research in the communication studies discipline stepped into obscurity. On the contrary. Thanks to Schramm's inestimable effort to "create a 'crossroads discipline' of communication, to complement the five established social sciences of psychology, sociology, political science, economics, and anthropology," [16] the first doctoral program in communication studies emerged, at Iowa University, by the end of the 1960s. At the same time, the Institute for Communication Research consolidated in Stanford. These were heroic steps in strengthening the field of communication studies and increasing its visibility in American academia.

Yet these heroic steps, as Griffin records, were oriented towards the construction of communication studies within *alternative spaces*, in total ignorance of speech teachers' similar effort. Both perspectives claimed the name of "communication" itself as defining for their perspectives. The fundamental fact that marks the history of the domain, since its inception, is that, despite "Schramm's indifference to the broader field," [17] a number of his students joined the speech departments, wherein they obviously introduced both (social) scientific research methods, and their

research agendas. In Griffin's terms, after that move, "the discipline would never be the same." [18]

The next interval which Griffin identifies as a part of the theoretical and methodological history of the discipline is referred to as an "empirical revolution" and took place in the years 1950–1970. Griffin (re)creates, for our understanding, the context that hosted that new "historical movement." After integrating Schramm's former students and their quantitative/statistical research methods, the speech departments lived new experiences, among which Griffin mentions the "testing in a tube" of classical rhetoric's cannons. The new researchers turned their "truth of principle," taken for granted since Aristotle, into a hypothesis to test through empirical means. For instance, as Griffin illustrates, if the Aristotelian *ethos* entailed certain attributes such as intelligence, character, and the orator's benevolence as regards his public, the empirically oriented scholars no longer took such "truth" for granted. They demonstrated that "communicator credibility," [19] a conceptual substitute for the Aristotelian *ethos,* depended, indeed, on factors of competence (intelligence, particularly) and trust in the orator (character). Yet, the empirical scholars found no reason to include the positive intentions of the orator towards his public among attributes of communicator credibility, as they reckoned character logically contained it.

In addition, Griffin notes a foremost important fact: the empirical researchers "adopt[ed] the media-effects term *communication research* to distinguish their work from the historical-critical textual analysis of the rhetoricians." [20] More, in 1950, which is, again, an extremely important year to keep in mind, a group of "researchers" – at this point, the appellative attests to the type of methodological orientation towards communication phenomena which those persons credited and displayed – laid the foundations of the International Communication Association, an alternative professional organization to the Speech Association of America. In other words, the adepts of the empirical approach to human communication acquired institutionalized discursive space within the new discipline. That space retrieved the term "communication" as a label for its identity. Therefore, the empirical scholars, Schramm's former students trained in social sciences who practiced statistical/quantitative research methods, were the first to document their experiences through their appropriation of the term "communication" into the institutional discursive level.

As Griffin records, by referring to the notorious contributions of Shannon and Weaver, but also that of textbook author Berlo, [21] all suppliers of the famous "linear model of communication" (source-message-channel-receiver), despite speech teachers' more or less articulated protests,

the empirical orientation had gained more and more space by the 1970s. Although the majority of the concepts they operated with came from other disciplines, particularly from psychology, empirical scholars' methodological unity gained them more and more assets on the newly formed territory of communication studies. Consequently, in 1969, the old Speech Association of America changed its name the Speech Communication Association, which it retains today. The transformation is of the utmost visibility, as it attests to the "tacit evidence that the scientific approach now *dominated the discipline*." [22] Griffin also adds that, at the beginning of the 1960s, there were few speech departments that contained the term "communication" in their title. Yet, by the middle of the following decade, this norm was inverted.

By focusing in on the historical sketch that Professor Griffin provides, we notice that, for decades, the discursive space of the field was, indeed, a real "battlefield." Each of the "parties" involved aimed to acquire, through strictly discursive means – a detail that I cannot emphasize enough – as much terrain as possible on the part of their theoretical and methodological (macro-)orientation. One might reckon that speech teachers' successes in 1914–1915 and 1925 turned into failures for good during the 1960s, when empirical researchers put their efforts into institutionalizing procedures. But things changed again. As Griffin records in the following, the "turbulent" 1960–1970s brought another decisive element to the fore.

As we remember from various sources, the 1960s in the United States represented the moment when cataclysmic changes took place on the political, social, and cultural scenes of the country. Griffin lists the elements of this "mutation": the struggle for civil rights, the urban riots, the Vietnam war, the hippie movement, the sexual revolution, the drug culture, the Beatles, the assassinations whose famous victims were the Kennedy brothers, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. Naturally, these "turbulent years" were reflected in the context of the new communication studies departments, through a "rocky transition from a focus on public address to a concentration on interpersonal communication." [23] If, in the early 1960s, the curricular offer comprised such subjects as public address, oral interpretation, argumentation and debate, persuasion, and (classic) rhetoric, by the end of the decade the departmental profile looked radically different. Through a revealing "mutation," research and teaching in communication studies in the United States changed their focus to other issues of interest, which acquired academic legitimacy during those revolutionary times. Studies focused on nonverbal communication, management of conflicts, the establishment of interpersonal trust, and self-revealing, in response to the urgency of addressing issues of

real public interest. The authentic existential dilemmas of the "man on the street" required the American academic community's immediate attention. Thus, public discourse stepped into obscurity, leaving the stringent interest in interpersonal communication to become the communication studies departments' central and celebrated identifier.

That "mutation," which I just called cataclysmic, had a major impact on the older rivalry between the founders of the communication departments and those who consolidated the discipline via methodological uniformization. Paradoxically or not, the effect of the turbulent 1960s upon departmental dynamics was positive. Griffin records that "behavioral scientists did the research, while humanists wrote the textbooks," [24] to the benefit of the large (academic) public. Neither group payed any attention to public discourse. The dominant preoccupation with interpersonal and mass communication distracted both parties from the older habit of claiming identity based on the utmost separation of "academic objects of interest," which obviously required radically different theoretical means of access. Yet, that beneficial effect on the old methodological struggle within the discipline did not last long. Unexpectedly, a particular discursive event, with major implications for a new moment of flourishing of the humanist orientation, called "new rhetoric," [25] nourished the inherent tension within the field.

The new rhetoric or, rather "new rhetorics," appeared as an unexpected effect of the major intervention of Edwin Black, whose 1965 publication marks a unique turn in the evolution of the discipline of communication studies towards its current identity. Professor Griffin does not fail, in this instance either, to perceive the overwhelming importance of Black's publication (*Rhetorical criticism: A study in method*) to the discipline whose methodological history would have been different in the absence of his intervention.

Black initiated a true "rebellion against traditional rhetorical scholarship by advocating multiple approaches to analyzing speech events." [26] Black's revolutionary action benefited, in terms of implications, from contradictory evaluations. While a part of the community of researchers, including Douglas Ehninger, "proclaim[ed] the demise of rhetorical orthodoxy," [27] another important part interpreted Black's intervention in the sense that he had in mind when he gave neo-Aristotelianism the "quietus." In fact, the methodological history of the discipline must confer on Edwin Black the special place that Griffin gives him in his theoretical textbook. In 1965, professor Black freed the humanistic side of communication inquiry from the unique lenses of access it had carried for

forty years, since Herbert Wichelns. In other words, Black's call got a response.

During 1965–1980, an interval which Griffin records next in this logic of partially overlapping trends which define the historical profile of the discipline, Black's theoretical legacy established terrain and manifested itself in the proliferation of the "new rhetorics," which recovered communication phenomena from other perspectives than the classical, neo-Aristotelian one. If, indeed, "carefully crafted speeches or well reasoned arguments" [28] no longer provided the norm of real social interactions within the cultural space of the United States, Black and, following in his footsteps, an "army" of rhetorical critics, decide that it was time to find rhetorical ways to access real, authentic communication events, even "a raised fist, a shouted obscenity, or the takeover of a public building." [29]

After Black, as rhetoric recuperated, indeed, the ensemble of available means of persuasion, certain rhetorics of a particular type emerged: a "Rhetoric of Black Power," a "Rhetoric of Confrontation," and other similar "rhetorics of …." These supplied the norm of publications titles in the discipline. By directing their attention towards social phenomena of real interest at that time, including television, film, and other "productions" of American popular culture, with the emancipated purpose of discovering the subtle ways through which "the mass media were obviously shaping popular culture," [30] the new rhetorical critics progressively made room within the exciting field where a true "media revolution" [31] unfolded.

Until the late 1970s, the American scholars in communication studies totally ignored "European thinking on the connection between communication and culture" [32] which pays tribute, within nearly all European academic cultural contexts, to the Marxist model of "analysis of the media's role in shaping of social values." [33] That changed after the new rhetorical critics adopted the major theoretical premises of the European "critical theorists," philosophers and sociologists who were extremely skeptical as regards the "objectivist" impetus of the empirical researchers beyond the Atlantic. The first American adepts of the European critical theories became aware of the subtle ways through which (so-called) "scientific" research "ended up serving those who held political and economic power." [34] They capitalized on the innovative possibilities of the "new rhetorics," in their attempt to demystify the conditions in which social, political, and cultural domination occurred, through mediatic means. Thus, they armed themselves with "fresh ammunition for periodic clashes with social scientists" [35] on the research stage within the discipline.

A period of alert search for a "universal model" [36] of scientific research in relation to communication phenomena comes next in Professor Em Griffin's theoretical and methodological journey through the history of the discipline. Between 1970 and 1980, rhetoric was entering a process of diversification, while empirical inquiry aspired to consolidation. Obviously, both orientations accomplished their objectives through exclusively "inner" means. The "object of inquiry," seemingly the same for both orientations, manifested an unprecedented fragmentation: each orientation paid attention solely to some isolated aspect of the communicative act while ignoring, with nonchalance, all others, as well as the persons who were academically interested in articulating such alternatives. As Griffin summarizes, during these times the discipline displayed an unprecedented lack of unity and "discipline." [37]

As a consequence of Thomas Kuhn's *The structure of scientific revolutions* [38] exerting authentic pressure on scientific communities everywhere, empirical scholars developed an interest in a "universal model" or "universal paradigm," able to give an account of the entirety of research in the discipline of communication studies. The paradigm was supposed to demonstrate the discipline's status as a "mature science." By the end of the period, though, the (empirical, particularly) scholars' sustained effort to identify such a unifying (macro-)theory, able to legitimize their object of inquiry, failed. Their intention to acquire "academic respectability among their colleagues in departments of psychology or physics" [39] failed to bear fruit. In the first instance, neither orientation questioned the legitimacy of their search for such a "universal paradigm" able to give an account of all inquiry within the discipline.

On the contrary. Everyone struggled to "define the central research focus of the discipline" [40] – at one point, it was "spoken symbolic interaction" [41] – while the textbook authors made immeasurable efforts to map, as sketchily as possible, the "factors that affect message creation and interpretation." [42] Yet, as Griffin records, the different "models of communication," each more curious than the previous, failed to "*generate a consensus* as *the* paradigm of the communication process." [43] Eventually, as Griffin reveals, the alert search for a "universal model" of research lost its acuity.

The period between 1980 and the "present" comes next in Griffin's chapter on the theoretical and methodological history of the discipline. Obviously, Griffin's "present" is the year 1997, when the third edition of *A first look* was published. He identifies the "decisive moment" of the interval under scrutiny, an event around which, as in each of the cases he has previously discussed, he organizes his argument, symbolically

constructing the dependence of the entire manifestation affiliated with the period under discussion on that particular event with its role of an ordering nucleus. This time, Griffin mentions the 1983 special issue of the *Journal of Communication*, which focused on "taking stock" [44] as regards the identity of the discipline. The thirty-five articles in this issue debated the "state of health" of the field and estimated it from the various perspectives that it displayed, whose unity, still, reflected "the mix of creative energy and stressful agitation" [45] of the moment. The innovative term "ferment" sprang from all corners, in an attempt to articulate the tensions which communication specialists lived and felt alike. Griffin reckoned the term still described the field's dynamics at the time of his writing this book chapter. What was that "ferment" within the discipline about?

On the one hand, the "fermentation" process that the diagnosticians of the discipline identified was reflected in the unprecedented growth in the number of communication departments in American universities. At the time Em Griffin was writing, two thousand such departments were already active. The number of graduates of the schools of communication studies grew dramatically, from 11,000 in 1970, to over 50,000 in 1990. On the other hand, though, the "ferment" referred to the major directions of research which the tensions specific to the 1980s generated. Griffin identifies five such orientations.

First, there was a progressive interest in interpretive research, through contributions that belonged to cultural studies, but also to feminist orientations that set out to "unmask and redress power imbalances." [46] Second, Griffin refers to the ascension of ethnographic methods – in other words, of qualitative research methods based on participative observation of various cultural contexts. Third, there were "attempts to penetrate the 'black box' of the mind by modeling the mental structures and cognitive processes that guide communication behavior." [47] Fourth, interpersonal communication gained more and more terrain in the general agenda of research, through studies that focused on family, friendship, and romance. Fifth, the 1980s–1990s saw an unprecedented pluralism of "interests and research agendas" [48] on the part of the communication studies experts. If, initially, such a tendency seemed of good auspices, the extreme divergence in "interests" in inquiry constituted, eventually, rather a deficiency, a weakness of the field. Its fragmentary character became, during the 1990s, its label in interdisciplinary interactions.

Consequently, as Griffin remarks, people "outside" the discipline found it more and more difficult to understand the nature of research within the communication studies departments. That endangered, obviously, "the place within the American academic community" that such

departments did and could occupy. Griffin records that, at the time of writing his book chapter, communication studies scholars often voiced laments such as: "No one knows who we are." Yet, he expressed the view that people should rather ask: "Do we know who we are?" However, at the end of the twentieth century, the theoretical and methodological history of the discipline resulted in two types of approach – interpretive or humanistic, on the one hand, paying tribute to qualitative research methods (rhetorical criticism, particularly, but also the new ethnographic orientations) and the social-scientific, empirical perspective on the other hand, based on quantitative, statistical research methods – owning (quasi-)equal portions of discursive space within the field. Therefore, the tension between these two radically different types of approach grew deeper, while the entrance into the new millennium took place under the sign of this itchy dynamics, "the chief cause for ferment and fragmentation in the field." [49]

Em Griffin ends his historical journey on the verge of the third millennium, concerned with questions such as: If the frontiers of the discipline are so changing and resilient that we can hardly think of anything that *cannot* represent an object of inquiry in communication studies, is there any human act that could be excluded from the objects of academic interest in the discipline? What are the events that each of us (and those who followed Professor Griffin in his description of the theoretical and methodological history of the discipline) appreciate as of foremost importance, from the perspective of the configuration of *this* "historical profile" of the discipline, and not any other? And last, but not least, how do we position ourselves, at this trivium, marked by the dichotomies of humanistic/social-scientific or qualitative/quantitative?

It is time for me to attempt a personal response to Professor Griffin's interpellation. If, in another context, [50] I confessed, without hesitation, my "political" affiliation – in the sense of the "political" I operate with, which has a profusely epistemological and academic character – it is time for my articulation of the discursive history of that very choice. In other words, it is time I displayed my own theoretical and methodological history, on the basis of which I have chosen qualitative research methods (rhetorical criticism, particularly) to define my identity at this crossroads. In the following pages, I will attempt a personal interpretation of the texts that document my own academic experience throughout a journey I commenced fifteen years ago on the territory of communication studies. Necessarily, those texts carry the cultural determination of the context that hosted me, the American academic culture. Thus, I respond simultaneously to the three questions that Professor Griffin leaves with us

at the end of his chapter. I choose the events I deem significant in the theoretical and methodological history of the discipline, events that identify the "legitimate objects of inquiry" that I include in my interpretations of cultural meanings; at the same time, my choices, in terms of the documents which give an account of the events which I refer to, confess of the theoretical and methodological (macro-)orientation to which I can and will attest.

Notes

[1] Em Griffin, *A first look at communication theory*, 3rd ed., McGraw-Hill, New York, 1997, p. 20.
[2] *Ibidem*.
[3] *Ibidem*.
[4] *Ibidem*.
[5] Kenneth Burke, "The rhetoric of Hitler's "battle'," 1941, in Carl R. Burgchardt (ed.), *Readings in rhetorical criticism*, Strata Publishing Company, State College, PA, 1995, p. 209.
[6] James Albert Winnans, *Public speaking, principles and practice*, The Sewell Publishing Company, Ithaca, NY, 1915, and Griffin, *A first look*, p. 20.
[7] James O'Neill, "The National Association," *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking*, Vol. 1, 1915, pp. 56–57, and Griffin, *A first look*, p. 20.
[8] Griffin, *A first look*, p. 21.
[9] *Ibidem*.
[10] *Ibidem*; underlined in text – G. G.
[11] Herbert Wichelns, "The literary criticism of oratory,," 1925, in Burgchardt (ed.), *Readings in rhetorical criticism*, pp. 3–28, and Griffin, *A first look*, p. 21.
[12] Griffin, *A first look*, p. 21.
[13] *Ibidem*.
[14] Wilbur Schramm (ed.), *The science of human communication*, Basic Books, New York, 1963.
[15] Bernard Berelson, "The state of communication research,," 1959, in John Durham Peters and Peter Simonson (eds.), *Mass communication and American social thought: Key texts, 1919–1968*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2004, and Griffin, *A first look*, p. 22.
[16] Griffin, *A first look*, p. 22.
[17] *Ibidem*, p. 23.
[18] *Ibidem*.
[19] *Ibidem*.
[20] *Ibidem*; underlined in text – G. G.
[21] David K. Berlo, *The process of communication*, Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, New York, 1960.
[22] Griffin, *A first look*, pp. 23–24; my italics – G. G.
[23] *Ibidem*, p. 23.
[24] *Ibidem*.

[25] *Ibidem*, p. 25.
[26] *Ibidem*.
[27] *Ibidem*.
[28] *Ibidem*.
[29] *Ibidem*, p. 26.
[30] *Ibidem*.
[31] *Ibidem*.
[32] *Ibidem*.
[33] *Ibidem*.
[34] *Ibidem*.
[35] *Ibidem*.
[36] *Ibidem*.
[37] *Ibidem*.
[38] Thomas Kuhn, *The structure of scientific revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962.
[39] *Ibidem*, p. 27.
[40] *Ibidem*.
[41] *Ibidem*.
[42] *Ibidem*.
[43] *Ibidem*; my italics – G. G.
[44] *Ibidem*, p. 28.
[45] *Ibidem*.
[46] *Ibidem*.
[47] *Ibidem*.
[48] *Ibidem*.
[49] *Ibidem*, p. 30.
[50] Georgina Gabor, *Play(ing) with(in) parentheses: A meta-critical analysis of communication and culture(s)*, West University of Timişoara Press, Timişoara, 2004.

CHAPTER TWO

AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY OF QUALITATIVE AND CRITICAL APPROACHES TO COMMUNICATION

Around the end of 2013, I was discussing with Professor González from Bowling Green State University, Ohio, former chair of my doctoral committee, some issues related to the best articulation of the current ways to legitimize humanistic, interpretive, or, in methodological terms, qualitative and critical orientations within the larger context of inquiry in the field of communication studies. At that date, I very much needed, as in all crucial moments of my "bumpy" journey through this epistemological labyrinth of the field in question, his advice in that respect, as I was scheduled to make a public presentation, with a "preamble" role to the imminent publication of the *Politics within Parentheses*, [1] in the context of the monthly conferences hosted by the Institute for Social and Political Research. Professor Ioan Biriş created this institute under the aegis of the Faculty of Political Science, Philosophy, and Communication Studies in 2005, but it has "produced" only since 2013, when Professor Florin Lobont become its director. Dr. González was extremely receptive to my request and sent me an email with a summary of the "hard arguments" that any representative of qualitative approaches to communication phenomena carries around, fresh in their minds, like so many "aces in the sleeve," just in case, who knows, someone in some corner of the world still wonders: "Why use qualitative and critical methods in the study of communication?"

As an aside, those arguments reached my ears countless times, to saturation, during the four years I spent in the United States at the beginning of the third millennium. Every time I met some "communication studies scholar" – and there were many – the way in which they "identified" themselves, professionally speaking, referred precisely to the theoretical-methodological option that framed both their research and their teaching approaches. In one of the first courses that I took, in the fall of 1999, Professor Lynda Dixon hosted, one or two at a time in each of our weekly classes, the representatives of the entire academic community working for

the School of Communication Studies that we all attended, whether we were "international" students or Americans. These meetings, which took place in the context of the Introduction to Communication Studies class, offered us, the newcomers, the School's Master's or doctoral students, a first sense of the dynamics of the field of study of which we had engaged ourselves. Invariably, the professors from Bowling Green State University identified themselves through their methodological orientation, just as in social interactions, some gays and lesbians first – and, often, last – refer to their sexual identity as a *prima facie* attribute of their "total" identity.

That fact intrigued me, at that time, to such extent that, very early, I tried to "escape scot-free," as much as possible, from that trivium. But I did not take a stand right away. I did, well-behaved, my homework, especially throughout my first year, when I was accumulating credits for my Master of Arts degree, a necessary step in the procurement of the doctorate. In other words, I frequented specialized courses on both types of approach which, like any self-respecting university, Bowling Green State University impartially offered to the future experts in the field of communication studies: Qualitative Research Methods, but also Quantitative Research Methods (for which, in the curriculum, a mandatory class in Statistics was a prerequisite). Later, the (macro-)orientations became more diverse, such that I could and did opt for subsequent classes within the frame of one or the other perspective. For instance, the class in Rhetorical Criticism – a separate course in the curricular offer that I chose without hesitation in the spring of 2000, once I got that "first sense" of the dispute with historical tradition, defining for the field in the study of which I had engaged myself – constituted, to me personally, the moment when, for the first time since I had begun studying in the States, I had the feeling that I was "on the right track" in my search for my own epistemological and methodological identity.

Coming back to the legitimizing arguments for qualitative and critical orientations, especially as regards research in the area of interculturality – an academic area where Dr. González holds a totally privileged status, as he has contributed through inestimable efforts to the delineation of a profile of the discipline of an exemplary representativity as regards the appropriation of the discursive space by a multitude of "voices," extant in a perfect, democratic harmony – Dr. González, thus, let me know at the moment of our conversation at the end of 2013 that, ten years after I had left the United States, the humanistic and social-scientific approaches to the study of communication had declared an armistice! They reached this armistice on the basis of the common-sense observation that a dynamic and vigorous field is more valuable than one that is fragmentary, divided

by sterile polemics, all tributary to one type of theoretical and methodological dogmatism or another.

Al González was reflecting, extremely trenchantly, on the margins of that issue, stating clearly and upfront that anyone who reckoned that human symbolic interaction could be studied on the basis of a single research paradigm had stopped reflecting on the authentic meaning of inquiry. To believe, González understood, that qualitative and critical approaches rely to a larger extent on the subjective judgment of the researcher than on quantitative perspectives is as false as regarding the latter as free from the "burden" of rhetorical, persuasive argumentation. In fact, Al González confessed, things were way more complex. The most thorny problem, the most burning issue of the era we live in, the problem of (inter)cultural difference, requires an arsenal of methodologies as complete as possible, through the help of which we may gain, gradually and not without difficulties, access to its understanding. Only by bringing together the contributions that emerge from the various types of theoretical and methodological approaches may we hope, González believed, to understand the complex world that we live in. Alternative voices raise in support of this statement, Dr. González added, while drawing my attention to the fact that, at that date, academic publications such as that of Judith Martin and Tom Nakayama's [2] might be brought up that offered "dialectical models" of inquiry, by corroborating the results of qualitative, critical, and quantitative approaches, to balanced extents. Instead of continuing the old "struggle for legitimation," these models could draw together, in constructive ways, the objectives that the various methodological approaches to the complex phenomenon of communication seek to achieve.

Most certainly, a hero of the ascension of qualitative and critical orientations in intercultural communication inquiry, Dr. González did not hesitate to remind me of only a few of the qualities of the orientation that he has given body and soul to throughout his career: he referred to the ethical-moral mandate that completes the portrait of those who aspire to an analysis of an interpretive type of human communication. Of course, González appreciated, social-scientific researchers identify themselves as well in relation to certain ethical structures, but these present a limitation to the scope of research that the scientist can imagine and construct. The primary values, within such contexts, are predictability, control, and detachment, and not at all ethical-moral values, which must, necessarily, be part of secondary importance. Therefore, Dr. González argued, qualitative and critical methods are premised on social participation and involvement, as they promote and make themselves the ambassadors of a certain "relational praxis," according to which the researcher talks *with a*

certain community/culture, while giving up the old practice, with scientific claims, of the discourse *about that community or culture*.

Ultimately, Al González prompted me to be alert to and discourage any type of "weird reactions" of my audience at the Institute's conference by saying, simply, that in the United States of America, the two antagonist types of approach to the complex phenomenon of communication could coexist and do, in fact, coexist, something that, for him, constituted the supreme argument – understandably, as all theoretical and methodological histories of the field attest to this. Fortunately, my public at that time was neither hostile, nor urgently pressed to seek a precipitous resolution of the issue. On the contrary. The questions that ended the presentation helped me to explain why a privileged place should be conferred on qualitative research methods, next to the quantitative, in the research economy of communication studies, and why that position should be reflected, as soon as possible, in the Romanian curriculum, the script *par excellence* with the help of which we legitimize and document, here as elsewhere, our didactic experiences: in other words, the documents with the role of a theoretical and methodological map – of the caliber of any theoretical and methodological history – of the field we serve throughout our academic efforts. Until Dr. González's ultimate argument acquires, in our Romanian academic culture, the *prima facie* understanding that the one who forwarded it credits it with, let us commence, together, this theoretical and methodological alternative journey through what constitutes the spinney of the documents that attest to my own *academic experience* on communication studies territory, contextualized, in its initial moment, by the American culture. My working premise is that the "beginning" is everywhere, that every text that has personally interpellated me, ever, is "just as good a beginning" for this trip as any other. Therefore, let us start right here.

2.1. Alberto González: *The guide*

In the introduction to the fourth edition of *Our voices: Essays in culture, ethnicity, and communication*, Dr. González explains why this publication, unique in the American academic culture, sustains the breach of qualitative and critical research in the field of communication studies, to the detriment, of course, of other options. To Al González, whose theoretical and methodological legacy I have benefited from and which I ventured, very early in my career, to transform into a "vision" of my own, communication means "an ongoing process of reconstructing the meanings of the symbols through social interaction." [3] Thus, as González appreciates, by citing Carbaugh, "[I]f one wants to understand the action persons do, from their point of view, one should *listen to the terms* they use to discuss it." [4] By gaining access to the symbols that people use in their social interactions, we get both the privileged key, and the access route towards the meanings that human beings share with their fellows, in the context of certain communities, to the configuration to which those symbols themselves contribute.

In an attempt to offer "an alternative for those interested in learning something about culture, ethnicity, and communication," [5] by way of *listening* to the various perspectives that "ethnic scholars" – a term that designates the non-dominant (from a social-cultural point of view) communities within the United States – manage to articulate, in the context that *Our voices* offers, on the basis, exclusively, of their own cultural experiences and in the unique terms in which they describe and interpret those experiences themselves, the three editors commence from the premise that the very complex process of communication may be accessed, from an epistemological standpoint, on the basis of those individual descriptions and interpretations of culture, while the individual becomes the point of access towards an understanding of the cultural community, in its whole, which those individuals represent and whose epistemological contour they articulate, thus, through their own "voices."

The purposes that *Our voices* serves are meant to legitimize these presuppositions of inquiry. By registering the "communication styles and practices of cultural groups, from these writers' points of view," [6] *Our voices* intends to explore the complex relation between communication and culture, through a welcome balancing of the weight of "voices" within the academic space, such that the dominant voice, articulated in "privileged form[s] of scientific inquiry" [7] and which conveys, rather the unfamiliarity of the scholars who articulate it "with the specific practices that lend significance to the general cultural categories or dimensions that

are created," [8] stops supplying the unique perspective which can legitimize academic inquiry in general. Thus, the editors attest that another objective that *Our voices* pursues is to invite *human experience* onto the stage of inquiry, while legitimizing it as such, as a foundation and an access point in understanding and studying (cultural) communication. Consequently, a third objective is being implicitly attained: as long as (academic) research recuperates human experience as its foundation, the *ongoing interest* in the complex phenomenon of communication becomes a necessary effect in this new "logic of inquiry," while the concept itself of "scientific/academic inquiry" gains access to new locations within the discursive space, as it changes its meaning so as to integrate, rather than silence, exclude, or make such expressions illegitimate. Ultimately, the book sets out to illustrate, as concretely as possible, the vast variety of perspectives from which, at the beginning of the third millennium whose gates we are chosen to open with our own steps, the phenomenon – of an overwhelming complexity – of human communication can and must be regarded.

Al González is among those scholars in communication studies who have a true "gift" concerning the synchronizing of their own agendas – in this case, coordinating theory and practice. Moreover, oftentimes, as in a veritable *mise-en-abyme* of meanings, his writings leave the impression that the two levels coincide, while (self-)referring to one another, a phenomenon whose explanation resides in that "relational praxis" that he talked about, as I noted at the beginning of this essay, and which means nothing but a practical-theoretical outcome of those exposed in a theoretical-practical manner in the introduction to *Our voices.* To illustrate the above, I chose to refer to a publication of Dr. González from the very book he and his two colleagues, Marsha Houston and Victoria Chen, edited. My purpose, in the following analysis, is to propose a first meaning for the concept of *cultural mediation*, a meaning which Dr. González himself indulges in his study. Then, according to an older habit, I balance the respective meaning with my own definition of cultural mediation, which is specific, in particular, to academic culture everywhere, while attempting, in this way to delineate the profile of a cultural practice whose confessor I portray myself to be, by self-textualizing my own discursive experience on communication studies' territory. This is a field whose flexible and relaxed borders, as Professor Griffin [9] characterized them at the end of his incursion through its theoretical and methodological history, *may be thought over, on the basis of their symbolic character*, according to the exigencies and interests of those who wish to find shelter and legitimation within their context. I am the first to believe that such project

is of major desirability. Moreover, without holding "expert knowledge" in this respect, I intuit that my pages speak on behalf of a community that, even if it does not yet exist, will acquire a profile and an identity because of my effort of *(re)construction of the symbolic borders of communication studies* beyond (or on this side of?) the academic cultural space of the United States. Here is, therefore, the reason that I am selecting, out of the numerous texts that might document my academic experience, those which interpellated me not necessarily from the perspective of the knowledge they offer as regards the American profile of communication studies, but, more importantly, in their quality as "cultural guides" with a major heuristic value in my own searches for identity through the labyrinths of all kinds of texts (academic, in particular).

To me, one such "cultural guide" has been and still is the *tejana* singer Selena Quintanilla-Pérez, who lived between 1971 and 1995 and whose existential journey and cultural memory have been appropriated, from an academic perspective as well, by contributions such as that of Dr. González, to which I will refer in the following. The article "Remembering Selena," [10] published in the fourth edition of *Our voices*, the edition I work with, is written in collaboration with Jennifer L. Willis-Rivera from Southern Illinois State University. The study begins with a 'Prelude/Postlude,' which we should understand by looking at the etymological history of the terms, as an anticipating engagement with a ludic episode, but which, paradoxically, may be also conceived as a final moment of a game with/of cultural meanings. Let us see what kind of play or game the two researchers talk about and via what symbolic means they choose to describe and interpret it. In other words, in the terms that the editor of *Our voices* himself used, in the introduction, let us step into the "academic game" the two scholars propose, in order to gain access to the cultural meanings that only this choice can lead us to. Throughout this journey, let us *carefully listen* to the unique terms, the words that the authors use to document their own cultural experiences. Thus, we will get a sense of the community, *as a whole*, on behalf of which the authors speak and whose symbolic borders they articulate, while defining them in the very process of this articulation and, of course, while inviting the readers to identification.

The Prelude/Postlude invites us on the stage of the Convention Center Arena in San Antonio, Texas, where, on the night of March 2, 1991, the winners and the nominees of the eleventh edition of the Annual Tejano Music Awards, which took place the previous evening, perform to raise funds for a noble cause. Al González and Jennifer Willis-Rivera are there, as they let us know through the personal story whereby they invite us