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Introduction

This volume is dedicated to the scholarship of Robert T. Craig. His ideas have shaped the field of communication, as well as the work and life experiences of innumerable scholars and teachers over the past fifty years. Craig has published widely, with multiple outstanding article awards. He is a Fellow and Past President of the International Communication Association, and a Distinguished Scholar of the National Communication Association. Craig taught at Penn State University, the University of Illinois at Chicago, Temple University, and the University of Colorado Boulder, where he is Professor Emeritus.

When I was a graduate student in the late 1980s at Temple University, my fellow graduate students and I were dazzled by Bob Craig's brilliance. He seemed to know everything about all aspects of the field of communication, and every time he gave a mini lecture in class, made a comment in our weekly colloquium, or answered a question in the hallway, we would just look at each other in awe.

I consider myself lucky to have had Craig as a professor for classes at Temple, and what I took away from those classes has impacted the courses I teach today (more than 35 years later), both in terms of the content and the approach I take to teaching undergraduates, which involves attempting to cultivate in them a sense of curiosity and an interest in inquiry.

In the early part of Craig's career, he conducted research in many areas within the discipline including, models of cognition, attitude change, multiple goals in discourse, the assessment of requests as a compliance-gaining approach, and argumentation (see Simonson, this issue). He then turned his attention to the discipline of communication as a whole. Perhaps, he is best known for his award winning 1999 article "Communication Theory as a Field" published in the ICA journal, *Communication Theory*, of which he was the founding editor. This article, referenced by all of the authors in this volume, proposed a vision of the field of communication theory which would better serve the discipline of communication as well as communication practitioners—a vision of communication as a practical discipline, one in which cultivating more reflective communication practice is the goal of theory, a goal that creates the possibility of and reason for productive dialogue between and among communication scholars doing very different kinds of work across the field.

This volume includes articles from five authors, including colleagues, collaborators, and former students-turned-collaborators, all of whom have been influenced deeply by Craig's work and conversations with him.

In "Robert T. Craig's Intellectual Development: Contexts and Vectors, 1960s-1990s," Peter Simonson presents an intellectual biography of Craig that highlights the social and institutional contexts that shaped his intellectual development and led to his foundational works in the late 1980s and 1990s. In tracing Craig's intellectual development, Simonson also attends to the history of communication studies in the U.S. from the time Craig entered the field in the late 1960s.

"Grounded Practical Theory: Its Intellectual and Personal History," by Karen Tracy, describes the intellectual and personal origins of Craig and Tracy's (1995, 2021) Grounded Practical Theory (GPT). Tracy explains that the theory emerged over the course of their ongoing discussions about communication ideas over the years, as a fruitful way to combine their scholarly strengths and ways of approaching the study of communication. Tracy provides an overview of the approach, reviews some of the communicative practices that have been examined using GPT, and discusses three innovations made to it 25 years later to strengthen and enhance the approach.

"In Conversation with the Perspective of Robert T. Craig," by Jessica Robles, focuses on some of the ways that Craig's model has moved the field forward by orienting to communication in the world. She explores his ideas about communication as a practical discipline, the connection between theory and discourse analysis, and theoretical metadiscourse by presenting examples of how they can help us to navigate such a wide variety of communication problems that occur in the world.

In "Framework for Innovation through an Inclusive Communication Theory Conversation," Heidi Muller explores how Craig's metatheoretical approach was used in a graduate communication theory course to generate innovative approaches to communication problems and how practical theorizing has impacted Muller's own scholarship, specifically in the ways it has encouraged innovation. Muller also emphasizes that Craig's approach is inclusive in that it envisions communication theory as a conversation that is open to scholars across disciplines as well as practitioners.

The final piece, "The Constitutive Metamodel's Communication Design Implications for the Field of Communication Theory," by Mark Aakhus, brings to the fore design thinking and principles drawn out of

both Craig's constitutive metamodel and his responses to criticisms of the metamodel that have implications yet to be considered for the institutionalized communication practices that shape the field. In essence, Aakhus offers important ideas for extending Craig's model by applying it to questions about how the field organizes itself. Such an approach could enhance the communication practices within the discipline as well as the institutions and organizations in which the field resides and is enacted.

In the fall of 2024, Bob Craig received the Julia T. Wood Teacher/Scholar Award at the 84th Annual Conference of the Pennsylvania Communication Association (PCA). The award recognizes achievements of a Pennsylvania related teacher/scholar whose outstanding service and contributions are highly visible and influential on students and fellow scholars alike. His remarks at the conference about three remarkable things he has learned about the Communication discipline are included at the end of the volume.

Sheryl Goodman
Ursinus College
2025

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Robert T. Craig's Intellectual Development: Contexts and Vectors, 1960s-1990s

Peter Simonson, University of Colorado Boulder

Others in this special issue will speak more about Robert T. Craig's many contributions and legacies. I focus instead on his origins and intellectual development, situated within the social and institutional contexts that shaped him. I cast his story in generational terms, both personally and academically, and situate it within the field of communication from the time he entered it in the late 1960s. While there have been strong international dimensions to his career, he is also very much the product of U.S. communication studies and some of the things that distinguish it from other national traditions: he entered the field through competitive debate, has been shaped by fault lines and cross-fertilizations between rhetorical studies and communication science, and has had intimate contact with the wide range of subdisciplines that uneasily co-exist on U.S. campuses under the sign of *communication* (Pooley, 2023). Those and other contexts have shaped his signal work in conceptualizing communication as a practical discipline, defining the field of communication theory, and advancing the pragmatist tradition of thinking about it.

The sociologist of knowledge Karl Mannheim (1952) argued that generations endowed "the individuals sharing in them with a common location in the social and historical process," predisposing them to certain "modes of thought, experience, feeling...action, and... self-expression" (p. 291). At the same time, he recognized that generations are internally differentiated through the geographical and cultural locations of their members and their different responses to major historical events. Craig (b. 1947) came of age during the high-water mark of postwar American pluralism and, unlike more left-leaning members of his generation, didn't respond to the social unrest of the late 1960s with activism or critical scholarship, though he absorbed those things. Instead, he embraced a form of democratic liberal pluralism that understood communication theory and research as socially engaged practices that could meaningfully address the felt problems of everyday life. Shaped by a working-class Catholic upbringing in Western New York, participation in competitive debate, and very different sorts of education at the University of Wisconsin and Michigan State, Craig developed the distinctive thought style of his mature work.

This essay aims to illuminate early contexts for Craig's intellectual development and draw out lines of continuity and change that led into his foundational publications of the late 1980s and 1990s—on communication as a practical discipline, grounded practical theory (in collaboration with Karen Tracy), and communication theory as a field. I sketch that development with attention to broader contours of the intellectual and institutional history of communication studies and peculiarities of the U.S. field. In so doing, I draw upon the historiography of communication studies, Craig's published work, unpublished documents from his personal archive, and interviews he has given—including answers to e-mailed questions I sent him while researching this essay. My account has also been guided by my time as a colleague of Craig's at the University of Colorado Boulder (beginning for me in 2006), collaboration with him on a large editorial project (Simonson et al, 2014), and my good fortune in sharing many conversations in the department and over beers during our time together.

Early Years in Western New York

Robert Thomas Craig, Jr. was born in Rochester, New York on Saturday, May 10, 1947. Named for his father (b. 1925), he was the first of five boys carried by his mother, June Harrison Craig (b. 1924), the youngest born the year Bob graduated from high school (1965). His parents had grown up poor in small towns in rural Steuben County, New York and met at the Chat-a-Whyle Diner in Bath, New York during the early stages of World War II. His father, who came from Irish and German Catholic heritage, dropped out of high school to work at 16, and served in Europe during the war. His mother, from a line of English Protestants, was a high school graduate who during the war moved to Rochester with her family and worked as a telephone switchboard operator. They married and lived in a house near the Genesee River in the urban core of Rochester, where Craig walked alone to kindergarten and shepherded his younger brother across busy streets to visit the science museum. In 1955, like other growing U.S. families, they moved to the suburbs—Greece, on the northeast side of the city, “where vast hordes of kids and dogs roamed...and we all ran wild in the woods,” as he remembered (Robert T. Craig, personal communication, 18 April 2024). Craig's father worked multiple jobs and took correspondence courses to learn television and electronics repair, while his mother was mostly a full-time homemaker. He attended parish Catholic elementary schools in Rochester and Greece and then the Aquinas Institute for high school, at the time an all-boys

school run by the Basilian order of priests. The Craigs were observant Catholics when Bob was young, “but less and less over time,” he told me (*ibid*).

The late 1950s and 1960s were a time when the Catholic Church, under the leadership of Pope John XXIII and then Pope Paul VI, increasingly turned toward questions of media and social communication. Vatican II “made communication an object of study” (Sánchez-Camacho, 2024, p. 208), publicly signaled by Pope Paul’s 1963 decree, *Inter Mirifica*, whose title, “among the wonderful” described the Church’s new attitude toward modern communication media. It is hard to say how this might have found its way into Craig’s Catholic world at the time, but intellectuals within the fold were recognizing the importance of communication. Basilian educational institutions were part of this movement, perhaps most notably through the Catholic convert Marshall McLuhan, who had taught in the 1940s at the Basilian Assumption College in Windsor, Ontario and in December 1961, when Craig would have been in ninth grade, published “New Media and the New Education” in *The Basilian Teacher*. Though new media would never be a primary object of study for Craig, in his adult life he was an early adopter of communication and instructional technologies and comfortable in the evolving media ecologies of the times.

Craig’s lower-middle class Catholic upbringing, along with his position as the eldest of five children, laid the foundations for an ethos that powered his professional career. He wouldn’t become a serious student until after high school, but he held down jobs to pay his own high school tuition and watched his parents work hard to support a household of seven. He was the first on either side of his family to attend college, and though he would say “religion per se was not a big influence” in his life by then, he had been socialized into a certain ethic of service to the community (Craig, personal communication, 18 April 2024). Both work and service ethics are deeply evidenced in his academic career, with professional associations and the scholarly community of inquiry supplanting the church of his youth. More impressionistically, I might say that Craig transitioned from Catholic in religious identity to catholic in intellectual style, a broad-minded thinker who engages a variety of intellectual traditions and fields of study. I also think there is a line to be drawn between his capital- and small-c sensibilities. As he confessed to me, “I’m sure that 14 years of Catholic schools probably shaped my brain in some ways, leaving fragments of scholasticism along with antibodies against it” (Craig, personal communication, 18 April 2024).

Among scholasticism's educational legacies were practices of disputation about contestable questions, which in Craig's world played out through Aquinas's highly successful debate program, national champions his senior year. The popularity of debate grew significantly in the early 1960s, and Catholic schools were a mainstay for competitive forensics (Fine, 2001, p. 182). Craig would say that he "incidentally went to school but mainly did debate and forensics" at Aquinas (Craig, personal communication, 18 April 2024). This turned out to be his gateway into the communication field—a common pattern in the U.S. and Japan, but virtually unknown in most of the rest of the world. Entering communication through competitive debate is probably most common among rhetorical scholars but is in no way limited to them. Through coaching and practice, debate makes the power of speech and argumentation evident and offers training in critical analysis, mapping competing positions, and reading both widely and strategically. Craig also took part in oratory at Aquinas (he was selected to give the school's commencement address), and he debated for two years in college and coached for a year too. I believe this experience left a lasting mark, evidenced by a talent for succinctly summarizing and argumentatively engaging with competing theoretical positions while powerfully advancing his own.

Beyond the education it offered, debate also introduced Craig to Donald P. Cushman, whom Craig called, in the acknowledgments for his dissertation, "the dominant intellectual influence on me for over ten years," saying, "I cannot overstate my indebtedness to this man" (Craig, 1976, p. i). Their relationship began in the mid-1960s, when Cushman coached debate at Canisius College in Buffalo, 70 miles west of Rochester. Cushman recruited talented debaters like Craig and his best friend at Aquinas, Thomas B. Farrell. Like others, Farrell, later a leading rhetorical scholar at Northwestern University, remembered being captivated by Cushman's charisma, "combative excitement...[and] intellectual sweep," which he first experienced at a summer debate camp as a high school junior (Cappella et al, p. 382). Craig and Farrell debated a year at Canisius before following Cushman to Wisconsin State University Eau Claire for their sophomore years. The next year, Craig and Farrell again followed Cushman when he entered the doctoral program at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. They were two of the many prominent communication scholars who were either brought into the field by Cushman or significantly shaped by him—a list that also includes Joseph Cappella, Donald Cegala, Gerard Hauser, Robert

McPhee, Peter Monge, M. Scott Poole, Ted Smith, and Craig's PhD advisor Joseph Woelfel (see Cappella et al, 1986).

Cushman was a larger-than-life figure who took an interest in anyone he thought was smart, tossed photocopied articles their way, and brought them into what Craig calls his "informal seminar (which was always in session)" (Craig, personal communication, 18 April 2024). By taking them seriously, Cushman helped them grow into scholars and budding intellectuals. He was also, according to Craig, "somewhat traditionally sexist" (Craig, personal communication, 12 August 2024), and the mostly male circles organized around him were surely constituted in part through homosocial bonding. Women were just beginning to enter doctoral programs in significant numbers in the late 1960s and early '70s, and while they weren't absent from Cushman's orbit, I don't know of any who achieved the success their male counterparts did.

For those young men to whom he granted favor, Cushman made a major difference. In memories shared by others in the social circle, we can also see dimensions of Craig's intellectual biography. As McPhee remembered, "He convinced me that communication was both the central modern phenomenon and the broadest and most lively of disciplines" (Cappella et al, p. 384). In Poole's words, Cushman was "a voracious reader, always open to new ideas and theories," with a particular talent for crystallizing academic debates, stating the heart of competing positions, and "emphasizing multiple perspectives and comparative studies" (ibid, p. 385). As McPhee put it, he "emphasized keeping up with the literature of the field, of all fields, and described people who stopped reading as intellectually dead" (ibid, p. 384). Over his career, Cushman was a polymath, but in the late 1960s and '70s, he was focused on the logic of theory construction and introduced his students to readings in the philosophy of science and communication theory which included Jürgen Habermas's *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971) and Richard McKeon's "Communication, Truth, and Society" (1957), both of which left their mark on Craig.

The University of Wisconsin

Craig spent his last two years of college (1967-69) at the University of Wisconsin and, as he told me, "for the first time in my life became a really serious student" (Craig, personal communication, 18 April 2024). It was a politically charged time, at Madison and beyond. In the fall of 1967, during Craig's first semester, thousands of students demonstrated

in protest of recruitment efforts by the Dow Chemical Company, which manufactured the napalm being spewed onto Vietnam. When city police used riot sticks to remove students from a campus building, the peaceful protest turned violent (the first in the nation to do so), and the injuries and arrests prompted a widespread student strike the next day (“A Turning Point,” nd). Organizing groups decried “the ideology of value free science,” and the campus went to the national forefront of student protests (quoted in Lowe, 2012, p. 137). During Craig’s last semester, in February 1969, thousands took part in protests connected to a two-week long Black Student Strike, which prompted the Governor of Wisconsin to call in National Guard troops (“The Black Student Strike of 1969,” nd). Craig “was certainly aware of what was happening politically” and leaned left in his politics, as he would across his career, but he was “mainly focused on scholarship at school” and supporting himself by working at a warehouse in Rochester during his summers (Craig, personal communication, 18 April 2024). His class position may have created a certain social and ideological distance from the protestors. Political activism would never be his calling.

Craig took his degree in Speech at Wisconsin, where the faculty included six full-time humanist rhetoricians, three social scientific communication researchers, and a dozen or more colleagues in Theater/Drama and Radio/Television/Film (Bitzer, 2007). Within the department, Craig took most of his classes from members of the Communication and the Rhetoric and Public Address groups, but he was exposed to a larger, heterogeneous field that was at once gaining new intellectual energy and straining with internal tensions—in methodology, theory, and disciplinary focus. He was drawn to questions of philosophy and theory, which he also pursued through a political theory course that he benefited from and readings that Cushman recommended. Within the Department of Speech—which in 1970 would rename itself the Department of Communication Arts, the same year that the university’s School of Journalism added “Mass Communication” to its name—Craig reports that courses by Gordon Whiting (Communication Theory) and Lloyd Bitzer (Contemporary Rhetorical Theory) were particularly important for him. They presented different approaches to questions about the nature of theory, its development, and uses.

Whiting’s course was centered in the behavioral sciences and cut across social and cognitive psychology, sociology and political science, persuasion, mass communication and public opinion research, interpersonal and group communication, systems theory, and cybernetics and information theory. “I think it was there that it fully dawned on me

how widespread the interest in communication was across disciplines,” Craig has said (Personal communication, 18 April 2024). This was a lesson that Cushman’s intellectual evangelism for communication both underscored and prepared Craig to take in more deeply. At the time, Cushman was working with Whiting (a 1965 Michigan State PhD) on a general theory of communication as based on consensually agreed upon rules, which they cashed out by showing its implications for conceptions of communication as transaction, co-orientation, symbolic action, and cybernetics (published as Cushman and Whiting, 1972). It was an early object lesson for Craig in developing a communication theory that was at once comprehensive, pluralistic, and developed from within the field of communication itself instead of being imported from other disciplines.

Craig took several courses and an independent study from Bitzer, who was among the leading rhetorical theorists of his generation. He would be a major influence, whom Craig acknowledged in his dissertation as the figure “who taught me the meaning of scholarship and the value of philosophy” (Craig, 1976, p. ii). With Bitzer, Craig read Dewey, McKeon, “a huge amount of [Kenneth] Burke...and a lot of Aristotle” (Craig, personal communication, 18 April 2024). In the spring of 1969, Craig’s last semester at Wisconsin, he enrolled in Bitzer’s doctoral seminar, which he counts as one of the high points of his academic biography. The theme that semester was “Toward a Contemporary Theory of Rhetoric.” The course was anchored in humanistic rhetorical inquiry but included readings from social scientific communication theory and intercultural communication. It also included a unit entitled “Crisis in Social Communication” that addressed the rhetoric of protests and confrontation, which would have occurred as the two-week Black Student Strike was ending. The previous year, Bitzer’s (1968) later-canonical essay, “The Rhetorical Situation,” had been published in the first issue of the new journal, *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, whose founding both reflected and advanced the era’s aspirations to develop philosophically informed theory that drew upon humanist intellectual traditions and emergent thinking in the humanities and social sciences (see Simonson, 2020).

While there were fault lines between humanists and social scientists at Wisconsin and elsewhere, there were also efforts at dialogue and cross-fertilization. In autobiographical reflections, Craig has emphasized how experiences with “the great divide between humanistic and social scientific traditions of speech communication studies” that dated back to his undergraduate years have “essentially defined my career” (Craig, 2006b, p. 9; Craig & Meyen 2012). He points to how

those experiences fed the development of his conceptions of communication as a practical discipline and grounded practical theory on the one hand, and his constitutive metamodel of communication theory and its pluralistic traditions on the other (see Craig, 2020). That is no doubt true.

There is another side of the story, though, that also dates back to Wisconsin and to the broader project of contemporary rhetorical theory in the late 1960s. Bitzer's seminar on Contemporary Rhetorical Theory included a visit from Michigan State's David Berlo, one of the central behaviorist communication scientists of the era, and readings on cybernetics as well as psychological, systems, and information theories of communication.¹ Berlo was originally a part of the conference organized by Bitzer that yielded the landmark volume, *The Prospect of Rhetoric* (Bitzer and Black, 1971), which was at one point titled *Rhetoric: The Theory of Human Communication* and also included communication scientist Samuel L. Becker (Bitzer, 1997; see also Porrovecchio, 2010). The Bitzer seminar included two essays by rhetorician Wayne Brockriede that aimed to develop a comprehensive new theory of rhetoric, inspired by Aristotle, but accounting for contemporary genres and situations like meetings and interpersonal interactions—efforts that Craig would later say he was “obviously much indebted to” in his own “effort to conceive communication as a ‘practical’ discipline...slung across the chasm between science and rhetoric” (1990, p. 313). While there were clearly fault lines between one camp of humanist rhetoric scholars and the mainstream of behaviorist communication scientists, there was also a more centrist position open to dialogue. That position was institutionalized in the 1970 creation of the Rhetorical and Communication Theory division of the newly renamed Speech Communication Association, formerly known as the Speech Association of America (Pearce, 1985). Even as Craig had first-hand experience with the “divide,” he was exposed at Wisconsin to pathways of thought that might blend rhetoric and communication science.

¹Other seminar guests were McKeon, Burke, African American rhetorical scholar Donald H. Smith, and the intercultural rhetoric researcher Robert T. Oliver. While Bitzer assigned social scientific communication theory, it was clear from comments he included on the course syllabus that he had doubts about at least some of it. For instance, about Francis X. Dance's edited *Human Communication Theory* he typed, “Most of the chapters are exceptionally poor.” (Bitzer, 1969)

Michigan State University

At Wisconsin, Craig was a “budding rhetorical theorist who was equally attracted to the social sciences,” but he set off for graduate studies at Michigan State on “a quest for rigor and enrichment” and a desire “to gain a solid grounding in communication theory and empirical research” (Craig, 2006b, p. 10). Berlo, chairman and tireless promoter of the Department of Communication, recruited Craig on his visit to Madison in the spring of 1969, and the 22-year-old entered that fall. He took his MA by exam in the summer of 1970, as he was being drafted for Vietnam. He was in the Army from the fall of 1970 through spring 1972, mostly working in an office in Washington, D.C. and avoiding a deployment to Vietnam thanks to the pull of his MA advisor, Bradley Greenberg, a reserve colonel who did summer service at the Pentagon. Craig returned to work on his PhD from the summer of 1972 until he took a job at Penn State in the fall of 1975, defending his dissertation the following January. Cushman, whom Berlo had recruited as a faculty member and debate coach (Craig assisted him as a first-year graduate student), couldn’t advise students because he hadn’t finished his dissertation, so for a PhD advisor Craig chose Joseph Woelfel, who had also debated for Cushman at Canisius. He spent the spring of 1973 teaching at the American University of Beirut, recommended by Michigan State professor and development communication impresario Everett Rogers, with whom he took several classes. Though he was a member of the interpersonal cluster, Craig “never actually took a course in interpersonal,” which caused some embarrassment when he began applying for jobs (Craig, personal communication, 18 April 2024). The academic year ran four quarters, so graduate students took a lot of courses, which for Craig included organizational and mass communication as well as “a huge array of quantitative methods, even computer science” (ibid). He also continued work in the philosophy of science, which was a featured part of the department’s focus on social scientific theory building.

Michigan State in the 1960s was an ambitious department on the make, brimming with scientific and masculinist self-confidence. It was the first of the U.S. PhD programs in Communication not built from a former Speech or Journalism program and was arguably the center for communication science in the era; it certainly was in the department’s own self-understanding. As Rogers (2001) has detailed, in 1957 Berlo, one of Wilbur Schramm’s last students at the University of Illinois, had

been hired at the age of 29 to be the first chair of the new department. It was a post he would hold until he left the university 14 years later. Two other young Schramm students, Hideya Kumata and Paul Deutschmann, helped Berlo establish the doctoral program. The department was originally housed in the student union, which did nothing to assuage status anxieties for a new unit in an upstart field headed by a young assistant professor. According to Rogers, Berlo addressed those deficits in part by deliberately gaining weight (up to 270 pounds), wearing tailored dark suits, and performing as though he were leading a department in a well-established field of study. Status anxiety was also a context for the department's decision to emphasize quantitative research methods and set itself up as a paragon of communication *science*. It offered no qualitative methods courses, and at least until Rogers left in 1973, it was nearly unheard of to use qualitative methods in a dissertation.²

There were gendered dimensions to the chosen methods and epistemologies, which were not unrelated to the field's efforts to raise its status (Ashcraft and Simonson, 2014). Not coincidentally, women wouldn't join the faculty until the early 1970s. Of the 122 PhDs the department awarded between 1961 and 1971, women earned seven (Rogers, 2001, p. 247 n.13). During the 1960s, as Rogers reported, the all-male faculty "regularly ate lunch together, played golf, pool, and poker, drank at parties in Dave Berlo's basement fallout shelter and in the Boom-Boom Room in the Frandor Shopping Center" (Rogers, 2001, p. 241). When a 25-year-old prospective faculty member arrived for a job interview in 1969, Berlo had arranged for him to be met by "three attractive coeds, all communication majors, in a Thunderbird convertible" (ibid., p. 240). Craig, who was described as a lone wolf by a member of his graduate committee, was less inclined to participate in the rituals of male bonding. The hetero-masculine ethos may also have eased up in the early 1970s, when the department hired a couple of female faculty members, and more women entered the graduate program. Heteromascularity was part of the Michigan State habitus, however, which in turn shaped the broader communication field (Meyen, 2012; Wiedemann & Meyen, 2016). One institutional mechanism for that influence was the newly renamed International Communication

² Of the 66 (!) dissertations that Rogers either directed or served as a committee member for between 1964 and 1973, only one utilized qualitative methods—by the Bolivian Luis Ramiro Beltrán, who would soon become a leading communication scholar in Latin America (Rogers, 2001, 242).

Association (until 1969 the National Society for the Study of Communication [NSSC]). Berlo and his colleagues assumed leadership positions that helped advance both the behavioral science paradigm of communication research and Michigan State hegemony (Atkin & Meyen, 2012; Weaver, 1977). Embracing communication science and research also functioned to distance the association from the more feminized teaching of practical communication skills, which had been the roots of the NSSC (Park, 2020).

In addition to entwined practices of quantitative communication science and male homosociality, Michigan State's Department of Communication also had a strong international dimension. This was generally true of the university, which had aggressively expanded enrollments (from 18,000 in 1956 to some 40,000 when Craig arrived) and become, in Rogers' words, "one of the most international of U.S. research universities, reaching out to the developing nations of Latin America, Africa, and Asia" (2001, p. 239). Modernization-related communication research of the sort conducted by Rogers and Schramm's students aligned with the university's vision and the Cold War funding apparatus. Faculty secured huge grants from the U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. Office of Civil Defense, averaging more than half a million dollars per year in the 1960s—the equivalent of nearly \$5 million today. The money created funding for the scores of graduate students who came through the program in the mid-1960s and early '70s, with 140 in residence in 1969 (Berlo, 1969) and an average of 12 doctoral students graduating each year from 1966 through 1972 (Fields, 2002, p. 82). According to Rogers, around half were international students, and the department staffed research outposts in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. This all shaped the intellectual horizons of graduate education, which "was taught in an international and intercultural context" with propositions about communication "tested for [their] validity in cultures other than the United States" (Rogers, 2001, p. 244). Craig's semester teaching in Beirut was a piece of this larger phenomenon. So were US AID communication workshops he led in 1974 and 1975—highly structured intercultural communication workshops for foreign students visiting the US under US AID auspices "with a lot of after-hours kumbaya," Craig told me. "I cringe now thinking about my own cultural naivete and the latent neocolonialism of the whole business" (Personal communication, 18 April 2024).

One last dimension of Michigan State's graduate program worth noting: its attention to the concept of communication as such and aspirations to develop general theories that would cut across mass,

interpersonal, and organizational and be useful to society. This mission aligned with the conviction that communication was a, if not *the*, central phenomenon of society, which was an article of faith for Schramm and his circle (Peters, 1989). The aspirations are evident in a speech Berlo delivered to the department in the spring of 1969, which was photocopied and shared with Craig's incoming cohort. The department's mission, he observed, was developing "a group of competent communication scientists who would work interdependently to serve society by creating useful knowledge as to the process of human communication" and "socially significant problems" related to it (Berlo, 1969, pp. 2, 4). That objective, he went on, meant reducing emphasis on communication situations, media, or individual behaviors and "rejecting traditional foci such as mass vs. interpersonal, or domestic vs. international," seeking instead a "unified understanding of various communication processes" (pp. 2, 5, 6). "[T]he social justifiability of communication research must be the improvement of the quality of human life," he concluded (p. 18). To those ends, the department reorganized graduate education to create groups of faculty and students pursuing problems tied to systems, processes, and functions of communication and inquiry about it. It also developed a reading list for incoming students, pursued in a team-taught seminar Berlo led. While positivist and behavioral social science texts dominated the list, it also included two essays by the philosopher Richard McKeon (1957, 1969), the political economist Harold Innis's *Bias of Communication* (1951), and the mathematician/computer scientist Norbert Wiener's cybernetic *The Human Use of Human Beings* (1964).

Beginnings as a Communication Theorist

The Michigan State environment shaped Craig's first, semi-published text in communication theory, which offers insight into the contours of mind he both built upon and departed from in subsequent decades. In August 1972, at the end of his third year in graduate school, he wrote a six-page document for inclusion in the mimeographed packet of readings taught to undergraduates in Human Communication I and II. Entitled "Theories of Communication," it is divided into two sections: "The General Methods of Communication: Art and Science," and "Four Kinds of Theory in Communication." The first stakes out ground he would later cultivate in developing his work on communication as a practical discipline and grounded practical theory, while the second has him trying his hand at metatheory, theory about theory, which would eventually lead

to his constitutive metamodel and seven traditions of communication theory.

He opens the paper by observing that, in contrast to physics, biology, or psychology, “Communication has a peculiar status as both art and science” (Craig, 1972, p. 1). He defines art in the classic terms of an Aristotelian *technê* as “any skilled practice which is guided by principles of method” (p. 1). His account of science then, perhaps shaped by his readings of Dewey and Michael Polanyi, acknowledges that science too is an art, reliant like other arts on the native abilities, trained skills (of conceptualization, experimentation, and analysis), and practical experience of scientists. Yet science also differs from other arts—and here the young Craig’s conceptualization veers toward what was probably the dominant understanding at Michigan State: “*rational, empirical inquiry which is guided by principles of scientific method*” that takes as its goal “consensus upon logically and empirically valid theories which explain the phenomena of nature (including humans and human society)” (p. 1, emphasis in original). He stays with the then-dominant understanding by asserting that the art and the science of communication “have radically different ends,” but that the “findings of communication science can be applied to enhance the precision and reliability of the principles of communication art” (p. 2). Theory can be relevant to practice if (a) it is valid, and (b) it is subsequently translated into principles of method that then guide practice. In some ways, this a classic technocratic understanding of science that gives priority to expert theory that comes to guide everyday practice—as Rogers and his fellow modernization researchers brought their (U.S.) expertise to (underdeveloped) peoples in the Global South. Yet Craig’s reading of Aristotle and non-positivist philosophy of science left another door unlocked, which he would later kick open.

The second half of the paper then addresses what I would call pluralism in communication theory. Craig opens by observing, “As of today, there is no single, universally accepted ‘theory of communication,’” holding open the possibility that someday there might be one (Craig, 1972, p. 3). Instead, “scientists and scholars”—a pairing that might index differences between Michigan State and Wisconsin’s humanists—have taken a variety of interesting approaches. He goes on to map “four kinds of viewpoints that can be taken in discussing communication...as an aspect of our social experience”: the experienced, the experiencer, the experiencing or the experienceable” (p. 3). The categories are McKeon’s, as mediated for Craig through Cushman. They are part of McKeon’s pluralistic metaphilosophy for analyzing and

critically engaging competing traditions of inquiry (Buchanan & Garver, 2000; Simonson, 2019).³ In a review included on the required first-year reading list, McKeon had argued that “experience” is an abstract term given concrete meaning through variably attending to what is *experienced* (the position of British empiricism and neo-positivism), the interactive *experiencing* of organism-and-environment (pragmatism), the agential work of the *experiencer* (which he associates with the older sophists and “voluntarists”), or the realm of the possible *experienceable* particularized in the here and now (phenomenology) (McKeon, 1969, pp. 79-80).

Constrained I think by Cushman’s use of the categories and the Michigan State paradigm, instead of following McKeon’s lines of philosophical heterogeneity, Craig bent all four categories to theory building for behavioral communication science. Though he knew his Dewey, his account of experiencing is not the pragmatist one. It’s not clear whether he had been exposed to phenomenology, but there are no signs of it here. At the same time, Craig’s metatheoretical reflection on different approaches to communication theory is noteworthy. On the one hand, as he has recounted in interviews, it was an outgrowth of his puzzling about the nature of theory as he studied both rhetoric and social science at Wisconsin (Craig, 2006b). But I think it was also afforded by Michigan State’s ambitions to conceptualize communication as such, which in turn made McKeon’s “Communication, Truth, and Society” a sensible reading to include on the first-year list. While that essay’s style, and many of its overarching claims, couldn’t be further from the Michigan State project, McKeon is clear that communication lies at the heart of 20th-century society, politics, and thinking across disciplines. It was an important essay for Cushman, who had at least three different classroom lectures on it (Cappella et al, p. 384). Through a blend of Cushman’s charisma and Craig’s own reading, McKeon lodged himself early into Craig’s structure of mind about what it means to talk about communication theory and the possibilities of pluralistic metatheory. For that reason, it’s striking to me that McKeon makes so few appearances in the corpus of Craig’s writings and doesn’t appear, for instance, in his textbook, *Theorizing Communication: Readings Across Traditions* (Craig & Muller, 2007). In my reading, he is an absent presence who helped establish Craig’s thought style.

³ As Craig acknowledged in a footnote, “The distinctions drawn in this essay derive mainly from the thought of Donald P. Cushman, who borrowed the four ‘experience-’ terms from Richard McKeon” (Craig, 1972, p. 6).

Intellectual Flowering Moving Forward

At the risk of offering a cartoonishly simplified map of a rich intellectual trajectory, I turn to drawing out lines of continuity and change from the early period I've sketched through the flowering of Craig's work in the 1980s and '90s. I will treat the 1972 "Theories of Communication" as a baseline that was built on lessons he had internalized and that indexed what "communication theory" meant from the then-dominant, behavioral science vantage point. I will briefly outline key landmarks of Craig's mature thought, with an eye toward broader intellectual contexts he worked in. Craig reinvented himself intellectually after graduate school, turning decidedly away from behaviorist communication science, but there is also a way that the Michigan State habitus shaped his later work, even as he rejected the paradigm.

In his dissertation and first publications, Craig sat firmly within Michigan State communication science. The dissertation, *An Investigation of Communication Effects in Cognitive Space*, was an experimental and quantitative application of Galileo Theory, a model his advisor Woelfel helped develop, which aimed to test "the general hypothesis that cognitive change brought about by messages is spacial in character" (Craig, 1976, p. 1). In the categories of Craig's 1972 map, this is communication theory that focuses on the experienter, emphasizing the "cognitive processes which persuasive messages bring about" (p. 4). For those familiar with Craig's best-known work, the dissertation is unrecognizable. One article came directly out of it (Craig, 1977), written as an assistant professor in his first job, in the Department of Speech Communication at Penn State University. He continued reading contemporary cognitive science and published a review essay that, among other things, probed the place of two methodologies prominent at Michigan State—computer simulation/artificial intelligence and behavioral experimentation (Craig, 1978). His Penn State department was marked by tensions between the dominant camp of humanist rhetoricians and a smaller group of communication scientists, and Craig's earliest publications fell squarely in the latter camp.

He had, however, ingested two antidotes to the bacillus of neo-positivist behavioral science. One was the practice of broad reading, shaped by a combination of natural curiosity, competitive debate, and Cushman's model. The other was the philosophical rhetoric he had learned from Bitzer, inflected by Aristotle and Dewey. Craig found space to develop when he moved, in 1979, from Penn State to the Department

of Communication and Theatre at the University of Illinois at Chicago. There he worked on a blistering critique of Galileo Theory, which was a kind of symbolic slaying of the proverbial father and his aspirations. In the article as published, Craig the former debater animates an authorial voice that systematically refutes the “four lines of argument” upon which his advisor’s theory rests (1983, p. 398). With a few dismissive asides thrown in for good measure, he concludes that Galileo Theory “has little to recommend it as an explanatory theory of human communication” (p. 396).

By now, Craig has incorporated the concept of practices into his theoretical vocabulary along with a deepened sense of communication research as an institution. He has read Alasdair MacIntyre’s (1981) *After Virtue* and further internalized Habermas’s (1971) *Knowledge and Human Interests*, both of which throw critical historical light on the project of “value free” objectivist science that the Wisconsin student protestors had rejected. Those books helped Craig throw off the technocratic understanding of communication science as a body of knowledge to export into everyday arts of communication, which had guided his thinking in the 1972 essay. He now emphasizes differences between practices of communication research and public discourse, conceiving the latter “as an art of rhetoric” (1983, p. 411).

Though Craig remains committed to empirical social science, the center of gravity for that project has shifted to “practical arts of communication,” which carry “their own histories, their own philosophical commitments which are distinct from, though not incompatible with, those of science” (p. 411). Following this line of thinking, the discipline of communication would be neither a pure science nor an applied field serving the utilitarian interests of its clients. Instead, “It would be a *practical* discipline, whose purpose would resemble in broad outline the task of rhetoric as described by Bitzer,” he concludes (pp. 411-12). Here is the textual origin point of both Craig’s influential account of communication as a practical discipline (Craig, 1989, 2006a, 2018) and the grounded practical theory project he developed with Karen Tracy (Craig and Tracy, 1995, 2014).

The concepts of practical discipline and grounded practical theory were aided by what Craig called, in a short 1983 piece, “the move toward discourse” in communication studies (p. 1). *Discourse*, which was not a word he heard at Michigan State, is a concept that has taken on multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings, but Craig embraced it within the nascent interdisciplinary field soon to be called “language and social interaction” (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2010). Temple University, where he

taught from 1981 to 1990, was now the site of intellectual production. There he joined his wife, Tracy, a Wisconsin PhD (1981) and former experimentalist who was also moving toward qualitative discourse analysis. They co-edited a volume on conversational coherence based on the Third Annual Conference on Discourse Analysis, held at Temple in 1982 (Craig & Tracy, 1983) and wrote several pieces together utilizing the discourse concept. “Temple was an intellectually vibrant and supportive environment,” Craig told me, and he and Tracy benefitted from interactions with the conversation analyst Anita Pomerantz and the rhetorician Herbert Simons (Personal communication, 18 April 2024).

These were contexts for incubation of the idea of grounded practical theory (GPT), though Craig and Tracy (1995) wouldn’t publish their programmatic essay on the subject until after they moved to the University of Colorado Boulder. Since they formulated it, GPT has been a valuable theoretical-cum-methodological framework for a wide range of empirical studies (see Craig & Tracy, 2021). While it does not fit neatly within the behaviorist terms of Craig’s fourfold scheme of 1972, it is communication theory from what McKeon had identified as the pragmatist perspective of the *experiencing* relation of organism-and-environment, mediated now through communicative praxis and everyday discourse. As framed in the 1995 article, GPT offers a third way between then-dominant scientific forms of communication theory (focused on explanation, prediction, and control within the empiricist realm of what *is*) and normative philosophical theory (which aimed to guide practice through conceptions of what *ought to be*). It is a project grounded in close interpretive study of real-world communicative praxis, problems encountered within it, and situated ideals intrinsic to the practice providing alternate ways to resolve those problems. In contrast with his old friend Thomas Farrell (1993), who had developed his own version of normative theory grounded in actual rhetorical practice, Craig’s collaboration with Tracy steered clear of critique and Critical Theory. This is reconstructive, meliorist pragmatism, setting out to make the world better.

In 1990, Craig and Tracy had joined the Department of Communication at the University of Colorado Boulder, where they would remain until their retirements in the 2010s. The department’s graduate program, which was suspended in the early 1980s, had been relaunched under the leadership of Phillip Tompkins, who hired several prominent communication researchers along with the rhetorician Gerard Hauser, who had known Craig as part of the Cushman circles at Canisius and Wisconsin. Boulder quickly became one of the top departments in

the field, and Craig's Communication Theory seminar was a required part of the education of more than two decades of graduate students. Though there were interpersonal conflicts among the newly hired faculty, particularly in the 1990s, Boulder provided a conducive environment for Craig to continue developing his rhetorically attuned interpretive theory and socialize successive cohorts of graduate students into thinking about the concept of communication in a way that was at once spacious and grounded in the practical problems and empirical research they were engaged with.

At Temple, Craig had been chosen to be founding editor for the new ICA journal, *Communication Theory*, which he saw through its first three volumes (1991-94). Though he had continued to evolve intellectually, his work at the journal was also shaped by earlier contexts and influences. *Communication Theory* was intended to "define the center of the field," he has said (Boromisza-Habashi, 2013, p. 418), which was the way that Michigan State had understood its own position. Craig's experiences at five different universities, each with a different but characteristically U.S. configuration of communication studies, calibrated his eye for heterogeneity without diminishing his commitment to commonality across the field. As he wrote in his application letter for the editorship, "I endorse not only the emphasis on *theory* without bias as to subdiscipline or methodological approach, but even more so the emphasis on the *development* of communication as a *field* or discipline" (Craig, 1988, p. 1, emphasis in original). He wanted the journal "to further the work of every division and interest group within ICA (including rhetorical theory, which is not yet strongly represented in ICA but potentially has much to contribute)" (ibid). Extending habits of international awareness that dated back to Michigan State, he also emphasized the need for "sensitivity to the differences among national and sub-disciplinary traditions in regard to the standards that are emphasized in judging quality and rigor" (ibid). Finally, in notes he made before his interview with the ICA Publications Board, he estimated that he would spend 20 hours a week or more on the journal, evidence of how he bent his early, class-based work ethic and post-Catholic ethos of service toward the goals of professional academia.

Craig's experience with the journal gave him a different perspective on what he would call, in his most famous piece, "Communication Theory as a Field" (1999). As he has since written, the essay germinated from an uncompleted book about communication as a practical discipline. He had written a lot "about *practical* and *discipline* but notably very little about the concept of *communication*," he says, and

so he began sketching different “traditions” of communication theory (Craig, 2021, p. 194). The 1990s were a period that saw the revival of an “earlier debate over defining communication” that had largely ceased since the early 1970s, which took on “the concept of communication” itself (Craig, 1999, p. 124). He had of course come of age in that earlier moment, but among the later works that were particularly important to him was James Carey’s *Communication as Culture* (1989), which played a role in Craig’s formulation of what he would call the constitutive metamodel of communication.

Twenty-five years later, “Communication Theory as a Field” remains a remarkable essay well worth re-reading. Driven by strong claims, tight argumentation, a clear vision for his project, and engagement with a huge array of literature, it is also marked by what I hear as a generationally specific confidence about communication theory and research. It is not the confidence of the generation that preceded him, which had been fueled by Cold War politics and big government grants and bordered on hubris. Craig after all lived through Vietnam and the social protests that broke up the postwar liberal consensus, and he had taken in the Critical Theory and Cultural Studies of the 1970s and ‘80s, even if he never identified with them.

Communication theory doesn’t yet exist as a coherent field, the essay opens, “but it can and should become one” (Craig, 1999, p. 120). The goal is not “some chimerical, unified theory of communication,” as it had been for his teachers’ generation, but rather “diversity, argument, debate,” the constitution of a field as “a conversational community with a tradition of argumentation” (p. 124, quoting John Shotter). When it comes to communication theory, Craig the former debater has supplanted Craig the aspiring neo-positivist scientist: argumentation replaces demonstrations of truth or validity, and the field is held together through communication (dialogic-dialectical coherence) rather than epistemology or methodology. He has extended his account of communication as a practical discipline by bringing it to bear on the field of communication theory itself and given discourse a more central place within it—reflecting both the grounded practical theory project and his reading of Talbot Taylor’s (1992) *Mutual Misunderstanding*. Communication theory is now “an open field of discourse engaged with the problems of communication as a social practice” (p. 129).

Continuing his longstanding attraction to metaphilosophical pluralism of the sort he had found in McKeon, he casts this open field of discourse as “a kind of metadiscourse, a way of talking about talk, that derives much of its plausibility and interest by appealing rhetorically to

commonplaces of everyday practical metadiscourse” (p. 129). The rhetorical vocabulary reveals Craig’s enduring Wisconsin/Bitzer side, while Craig goes places McKeon never did by casting the metadiscourse of communication theory itself in communicative terms, drawing upon the constitutive view of communication developed by Carey and others. In contrast to Carey’s version of pragmatism, however, expressed through humanistic essays that reflected his public-facing journalistic self, Craig’s is more a philosophical pragmatism of expertise, marked by strategic use of technical terms like “the constitutive metamodel,” and defining communication theory “as expert metadiscourse” (Craig & Daros, 2023). That aspect of Michigan State never fully disappeared.

One can also draw a line of continuity from the strong disciplinary identification and cross-national imaginary of Michigan State to the leadership positions Craig took on in the ICA. His editorship at *Communication Theory* was one chapter of this story, but it expanded dramatically when he became ICA President-Elect and Conference Chair (2002-3) and then President (2003-4). Service to the profession and university has been a major focus in his career, with that section of his curriculum vitae running nearly five single-spaced pages. The years in ICA leadership have coincided with the association’s strong internationalizing push, which Craig has helped advance through multiple roles. Among the most visible has been his editorial work for major ICA-sponsored publications: Advisory Editor for the *International Encyclopedia of Communication*, overseeing some 700 articles (2005-2008); Series Editor for the *ICA Handbook Series* (2005-2021); and Co-Editor-in-Chief for the four-volume *International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy* (2011-2016, and currently being updated). There are few communication scholars with Craig’s breadth of knowledge of the field in its sub-disciplinary and cross-national diversity, which, I have suggested, was built upon peculiarities of the institutionalization of the field in the United States and his wide-ranging curiosity and reading.

Then and Now

As I have tried to sketch, Craig’s thinking grew out of a generationally specific matrix of cultural sensibilities, political orientations, intellectual problematics, institutional matrices, and social networks. In the hopeful discipline-building moment of the 1960s and early ‘70s and the paradigm battles that followed it, energies swirled around the larger concept of communication and the shape of the field writ large. Craig came of age

in that moment. In the 1980s and '90s, those battles were partly fought through competing accounts of the history of the field. Craig's seven traditions threw pluralistic light on divergent intellectual histories and the genuine insights each offered. Finally, Craig and Tracy developed their concept of grounded practical theory when normatively hued conceptions of communication as a social ideal were at a high-water mark, energized by Habermas and the growth of deliberative democratic theory. The field is now in a different moment. Sub-disciplinary specialization and fragmentation have supplanted earlier aspirations for disciplinary coherence or a strongly shared sense of a field (Waisbord, 2019). Historically based disciplinary memory claims about the field's past have less purchase than they used to (Pooley, 2023). There are signs that the normatively hued cultural concepts of communication that powered liberal modernity and helped legitimize communication studies are in decline, as Craig himself noted in a recent reflection on his work (Craig & Daros, 2023).

In the current moment, Craig's work and thought style have different but equally important functions. His vision for communication as a practical field is even more relevant in a post-disciplinary era, when orienting to the experienced problems of a world in crisis is more pressing than ever. The same is true as cultural ideals of communication as a normative force for equality, social recognition, and justice are threatened by anti-democratic authoritarianism and advanced capitalist colonization of shared media environments. All of this makes the project of articulating the submerged, sometimes counter-hegemonic ideals found in everyday discourse practices even more pressing—a way of bringing out resources for hope in the dark times before us. Post-disciplinary specialization poses a very different order of problems, but it too would benefit from injections of thinking attuned to broad, competing concepts of communication and how they might differentially inform the narrower phenomena we address. The field as currently structured doesn't encourage the kind of thinking Craig has done. That's precisely why we need it.⁴

⁴ I would like to thank Dave Park and Karen Ashcraft, for insightful comments on an earlier version of this essay, and Bob Craig, for generous assistance in sharing memories and documents from his career and fact checking my account.

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Grounded Practical Theory: Its Intellectual and Personal History

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GPT's Formative Past

Grounded Practical Theory (GPT) is the child of conversations that Bob Craig and I had about how scholars in our field ought to be doing communication research. The conversations occurred at our dinner table, in the living room, and at departmental colloquia. In 1981 Bob and I joined Temple University's Rhetoric and Communication Department, then called the Department of Speech. I was a newly minted PhD; Bob came to Temple bringing a handful of years' experience as a faculty member at Penn State and the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle. After publishing a couple of coauthored papers in which we analyzed requests produced in a variety of situations (Craig, Tracy & Spisak, 1986; Tracy, Craig, Smith & Spisak, 1984), I decided I needed to establish my own independent scholarly reputation—no more publishing with Bob! During the second half of the 1980s our lives were filled with teaching, meetings, and publishing independently. Both of us were tenured and promoted during those years and, on the personal front, our daughter Jill was born.

Bob had been a serious student as an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin; he had taken graduate classes in rhetoric, studying with Lloyd Bitzer (1968), author of "The Rhetorical Situation." Bob liked rhetoric as an area of study but decided he wanted to explore social science for graduate school. For his PhD, he went to Michigan State, an especially strong social science program, to learn how to do communication theory and research. The 1970s and 1980s were years when the field of communication largely split into humanistic rhetorical study and social science quantitative research. At Michigan State Bob mastered how to ask questions about communication processes that derived from existing theories that used sophisticated statistics. His dissertation, to quote a sentence from the abstract article in which it was published, (Craig, 1977, p. 309) tested "the hypothesis that cognitive change resulting from information inputs can be represented as linear motion of concepts in multidimensional space." As he began functioning as a communication faculty member, Bob saw much to admire in his social science research world; he also found aspects of it that were

dissatisfying, not what he had hoped to do as a communication scholar. He began to think about the character of communication as a field and how scholarship might be conducted differently and better in it.

I met Bob in 1978 when he visited the University of Wisconsin where I had begun a PhD program in communication. I had studied speech and language pathology at the undergraduate and masters' levels and worked as a clinician in a hospital for several years. In changing fields at the PhD level, I had decided I was more interested in the problems of ordinary communicators than those with disorders. My dissertation was a series of experiments testing hypotheses about conversational comprehension. It was studies from this project, some new data on workplace criticism, and the request studies Bob and I authored that occupied my pre-tenure publishing.

By the time I achieved tenure I felt that I had learned how to come up with interesting communication questions and then design studies to investigate them. My process for developing researchable ideas involved somewhat of a sleight of hand. I had learned, as doctoral students in communication in those years had learned, that good social science research involved deriving testable hypotheses from a communication theory. The problem was that my questions about communication inevitably arose from engagement with the world and people. So, I became skilled at transforming any communicatively interesting noticings I made about people in the world into hypotheses that could be derived from an existing theory. This meant I had to find a theory I could frame as generating my noticings. An upshot of my way of developing research ideas was that I felt a bit like a fraud. At some point, though, and certainly facilitated by my conversations with Bob, I began to wonder if, perhaps, the problem was not with me but with the way communication research was being conceptualized and taught.

One of the activities that was lively during the years (1981-1990) that Bob and I were at Temple was a weekly colloquium that brought graduate students and faculty together to talk about research ideas that were in different phases of development. People's conduct in this weekly activity was often a topic of hallway conversation. Criticisms would be made of what people said, as well as who spoke or refrained from talking. I thought colloquium was an interesting communication activity, although at the outset I would have had a difficult time saying why it was so interesting to me. I also believed that this kind of speech occasion was an important part of graduate education, albeit not something anyone had thought to theorize. In the late 1980s following my receipt of tenure when I experienced a sense of freedom about what to research next, I

decided to study Temple's colloquium. For a year I audiotaped sessions. In addition, along with Sheryl Goodman who was then a grad student, we interviewed participants of Temple's colloquium about their experiences.

In 1990 Bob and I moved to the University of Colorado. After collecting a bit more data about academic discussions, my graduate students and I began to write about the challenges of academic colloquia (Tracy & Baratz, 1993; Tracy & Carjuzaa; Tracy & Muller, 1994; Tracy & Naughton 1994). In the meantime, Bob was working on how best to conceptualize the discipline of communication. In a volume dedicated to rethinking how the field should define itself, Bob argued that Communication was a practical discipline. Our field's purpose should not be "explanation, prediction, and control," nor should it be "understanding" or even "human emancipation" rather... "our essential purpose is to cultivate communicative *praxis*, or practical art, through critical study" (Craig, 1989, pp. 97-98). This essay was followed with several others explicating further what it meant to be a practical discipline (Craig, 1992, 1995).

One of the delights of Bob's and my life together has been our ability to talk about ideas and be a sounding board for each other's projects about communication. My strong suit as a scholar has always been my ability to make interesting observations about people and the world. What I have found difficult is figuring out how to turn a set of interesting observations into a coherent argument relevant to communication scholarship. Bob's strength as a scholar is his ability to create theoretical frames about communication that are broad and compelling; What is difficult for him is knowing how to anchor a created frame in persuasive, grounded exemplars. Bob and my scholarly strengths complement each other and given all of the talking about communication ideas that we so regularly did, we saw a promising way to combine our thinking. Moreover, by the mid-1990s it no longer felt problematic for us to publish together.

In 1995 Bob and I (Craig & Tracy, 1995) published an article in *Communication Theory* titled "Grounded practical theory: The case of intellectual discussion." The article, as most articles do, went through several rounds of revision before being accepted. One of the revisions we made was to the name. No longer would we be forwarding "grounded normative theory"; instead, we were advocating for "grounded *practical* theory."

GPT: Take 1

Grounded practical theory is an approach to communication research anchored in Aristotle who distinguished theoretical disciplines (*theōria*) from practical ones (*praxis*). Communication is best understood as a practical discipline we argued; as such, it should treat the end goal of research as helping people exercise “*phronēsis* (practical wisdom--the capacity to use good judgment in situations that require deliberation and choice)” (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 251). Drawing on Dewey’s (1938, 1989) philosophical pragmatism that saw inquiry as a process of reflective thinking and Gadamer’s (1981, 1989) philosophical hermeneutics we proposed that: “A practical discipline can be defined as a formal, scholarly enterprise that attempts to extend, facilitate, and inform this reflective cycle of thought and action by engaging in systematic, critical study and theoretical reconstruction of practices in society” (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 252).

We defined a communication practice as any activity in which talk or writing is focal. Examples of communication practices, to name just a few linked to education, include classroom discussion, a parent-teacher conference, teacher feedback on a student presentation, a research brownbag session, and a promotion review committee. GPT offers a roadmap for how to reconstruct a communication practice that is the focus of research. It proposes that a practice be reconstructed at three levels. The entry point is the problem level. The problem level involves identifying the problems and dilemmas that confront each category of participant in a practice.

In academic colloquia, for example, there are different problems that presenters experience versus question-askers. Furthermore, problems will be inflected by whether a person is a graduate student or a faculty member. For instance, in the question-asking role where a presenter is a grad student, the asker’s pursuit of an issue in questioning could display the intellectual depth and sophistication of the asker or it could be taken as a self-aggrandizing intellectual display by the asker. Avoidance of challenging questions could be seen as considerate and supportive or as a display of the question-asker’s intellectual limitations.

From the problem level in a practice, an analyst proceeds both downward (more concretely) and upward (more abstractly). The most concrete level of reconstructing a practice is to describe it at the technical level. The technical level involves specifying the techniques and strategies that are used in a practice to address its problems. Continuing with the academic colloquium example, consider how participants can formulate questions and how different formulations might affect how a question-asker will be seen. Consider three formulations below.

1. Who else has investigated this issue?
2. I was wondering if you have had the opportunity to read Smith yet?
3. Why didn't you address Smith's work?

Formulation Q2 is the least threatening. In prefacing the inquiry with "I was wondering" and labeling the reading of Smith "an opportunity" that the presenter may not have had "yet," the question-asker makes it the most OK to not know the answer. Formulation Q3, in contrast, is especially challenging. It treats the presenter's knowledge of Smith as expected and posits the question as requesting an account for something that was not done. Formulation Q1 is less threatening than Q3 as it does not presume that the presenter should be familiar with a particular author, but it is ambiguous. While it could be a genuine information-querying question, Q1 could also be a "gottcha" question that sets the stage for displaying a presenter's ignorance. Each of these formulations could be reasonable or unreasonable as, for instance, the less threatening question (Q2), if directed to a Masters-level graduate student, might be regarded as reasonable whereas that same formulation directed to a senior scholar with years of expertise could come across as an insult garbed as politeness.

The third level, the philosophical one, reconstructs a practice by "articulat[ing] the *situated ideals* that participants actually orient to as they work out practical solutions to the interactional problems they experience" (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p.259). Situated ideals are often not the ones people offer up when asked explicitly what they think is ideal conduct in a practice. Rather, situated ideals are the ones given attention in practice and are made visible indirectly in how people comment (praise and criticize) on actual occasions of talk. For instance, consider what is implied by the following two comments about a colloquium.

1. It was a lot less interesting and lively than many colloquia have been.
2. There was less barracuda talk than usual.

Comment 1 implies that the colloquium lacked something that good colloquia have—being lively and interesting. Comment 2, in contrast, praises the occasion for avoiding a problem usually seen in the event.

Drawing on comments like the above we reconstructed two situated ideals operating in academic colloquia. The first ideal "dialectic," saw the purpose of academic discussion as "involving critique of ideas, opposition, disagreement." The second ideal saw

intellectual discussion's purpose as "the building upon and shaping of individual community members' ideas in a positive and supportive manner" (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 260).

What do we do with these two situated ideals? In this first GPT study we proposed that these situated ideals should be conceived as horns of an existential dilemma that must be navigated when people participate in intellectual discussion. Both ideals are crucial to good academic discussion. Figuring out how to weigh each of them requires good judgment, attending to all facets of a particular situation.

Dialectic that injures people and relationships rends the social fabric without which intellectual discussion becomes impossible, but if the expression of ideas is dictated primarily by personal and relational needs, dialectic degenerates into therapy or social ritual and renders unlikely the *intellectual* growth that constructive criticism ideally fosters. (italics in original, Craig & Tracy, 1995, pp. 263-264)

GPT: 25+Years Later

In the time since GPT initially appeared, Bob continued to develop his ideas about what it means for communication to be a practical discipline (Craig, 1996, 2018; Barge & Craig, 2018), he and I advocated for the value of GPT (Craig & Tracy, 2014, 2021; Tracy & Craig, 2010), and a good number of researchers used GPT to investigate diverse communication practices. Below I identify 10 practices studied; Craig and Tracy (2021, chapter 5) provide a comprehensive review of 50+ communication practices that have been investigated using GPT as of 2020.

Communication Practices

- 911 Emergency calls (Tracy & S. Tracy, 1998)
- Feminist (alternative post-bureaucratic) organization (Ashcraft, 2001)
- International nongovernmental organization (Dempsey, 2007)
- Psychics in training (Agne, 2010)
- Public meeting planning and conducting (Beck, Littlefield, & Weber, 2012)
- Intellectual discussion in undergraduate seminars (Goodman, Bailey Murphy, & Lindquist D'Andrea, 2012)

- Gift-exchange interactions (Robles, 2012)
- Patient hand-offs between healthcare providers (Koenig, Maguen, Daly, Cohen, & Seal, 2013)
- Nuclear safety oversight status meetings (Barbour and Gill, 2014)
- Rural young adults' community engagement (Wolfe, Black, Munz, & Okamoto;2017)

Theoretical frames are developed in academic contexts to address specific issues. Often specifics of site and focus, as well as features of the larger academic milieu, are built into frames, and a frame's inclusion of specifics only becomes visible as it is applied in new arenas. Such has been the case with GPT. As scholars have used GPT to pursue study of practices and identification of problems that differed from our starting frames, we revised GPT to make it more robust and useful. Among the innovations, three most merit attention (see Craig & Tracy, 2021, chapter 5).

First, GPT's initial conception of "practice" was as a locally situated activity, such as college classroom discussion (Muller, 2014) or school board meetings (Tracy, 2010). However, other kinds of communication practices exist and GPT has been used to investigate them. These include: (1) *dispersed practices*, such as gift-giving (Robles, 2012) or responding to hearably racist talk (Robles, 2015). (2) *Meso-level practices* i.e., mid-level activities between the micro activity of social interaction and the macrostructure level of society, as for example, inspection practices in nuclear facilities (Barbour & Gill, 2017). (3) Finally, there are *resistant practices* that align with the emancipatory goals of critical scholarship. Hughes (2018) showed how critical study and GPT could be combined in her study of autism discourse and the neurodiversity movement. As we note, GPT typically had studied practices worth sustaining and promoting whereas critical studies have tended to focus on practices that a society might want to eliminate. While at first blush these impulses seem contradictory, the two approaches can be fruitfully joined, where GPT focuses on the cultivation of emancipatory practices following a critical study's identification and critique of oppressive practices.

Second, at its inception GPT as a metatheoretical approach was paired with the methodology of discourse analysis. In fact, I (Tracy, 1995, 2008) developed a discourse analytic method—action-implicative discourse analysis (AIDA)—specifically to pursue GPT questions. It soon became apparent, however, that GPT could be used productively

with ethnographic methods (participant observations, interviews) that involved coding of data rather than analysis of discourse. One example is seen in Koenig et al.'s (2013) interview-based study of how healthcare providers in a multidisciplinary clinic pass on patients and their information to a next provider. Providers, they showed, used one of three strategies, each of which gave different weights to the competing values of patient centeredness and clinic efficiency.

Third, while present in a minor way in the first version of GPT, subsequent studies brought home the importance of examining how a practice is designed. Aakhus and Jackson (2005; Jackson & Aakhus, 2014) have argued for the value of adopting a design perspective. As most practices have more than one purpose, the way of structuring a practice will affect what its participants can do. GPT studies have increasingly sought to take practice design seriously, alongside of its long-standing concern to address the best ways to act within the practice. For instance, hearings about same-sex marriage were held in different state legislatures and their committees designed these hearings differently. Each of the hearings put in place meeting rules that specified what categories of people (lay people, experts) could talk, how many of them, how many minutes, in what order, how speakers were to be acknowledged, and whether committee members would ask questions of presenters. How a hearing was designed shaped whether its leaders were seen as for or against marriage equality or trying to make the hearing equally receptive to each position.

GPT is a metatheoretical approach to communication research and it is an analytic method for reconstructing practices and developing normative claims. To help scholars do GPT, we (Craig & Tracy, 2021, chapter 3) identify seven principles. They are as follows:

- (1) In reconstructing a practice, keep in mind one's end goal is cultivation of the practice.
- (2) Problems, communicative techniques, and situated ideals need to be tightly interconnected, and starting a reconstruction with attention to the practice's problems is a particularly good starting point.
- (3) Problems carry blame pointers; the naming of problems needs careful thought.
- (4) Communication techniques may be described at different levels of abstraction using either positive or negative valence.

- (5) Situated ideals are not the same as espoused ideals. Situated ideals often involve taking actions seen as disvalued or avoiding acts seen as desirable by the espoused ideal.
- (6) The development of normative claims needs to give attention to a practice's design as well as how participants conduct themselves within the practice.
- (7) Communicating well is a practical activity in which judgment is always central.

Conclusion

Communication scholars have available to them many valuable theories and useful methodologies. Grounded practical theory is but one. In the conclusion of our GPT book (Craig & Tracy, 2021, p.174) we address the question of why to choose GPT. I end this essay by quoting what we say.

Choose GPT, then, if you want to do all of the following: (1) develop practical theory about real-world communication practices, especially institutional practices from the point of view of people engaged in them who must decide how to act when faced with communication problems in uncertain situations; (2) speak to normative problems—questions of how a practice ought to be conducted—by grounding your normative claims not only in moral intuition, ideology, or philosophical speculation but also in careful qualitative investigations of practical situations; and (3) go beyond the generalized functions, variables, or thematic categories produced by other forms of theory to understand practices at the concrete level of how they are actually done by attending to the practically relevant details of language, discourse, and interaction.

GPT is but one way Bob Craig has sought to develop communication as a practical discipline. He continues to talk about the consequences of framing communication as a practical field with audiences at national (Craig, 2019a) and international conferences (2019b), to put this view in conversation with other traditions (Craig, 2020 Craig & Xiong, 2022), and to identify novel implications of conceptualizing communication as a practice (Craig, 2021, 2022). Put simply, Robert T. Craig's scholarly work has been central to Communication theorizing itself as an academic discipline connected to the world, a discipline committed to helping

people and institutions think about the wisest way to address the problems they face.

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In Conversation with the Perspective of Robert T. Craig

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The field moves forward in the way a conversation moves forward, which is not necessarily to say that it's moving toward some defined ideal or endpoint. As new voices come into the conversation, as things are said and are responded to, the conversation develops and accumulates a shared history that becomes a point of reference. (Craig, cited in Boromisza-Habashi, 2013, p. 421)

I do not remember my first encounters with Bob Craig, and my memory of the first thing I ever said in a PhD classroom (which Craig was teaching) was that my comment was embarrassingly irrelevant. I confess I did not know who Craig was before I arrived at the University of Colorado at Boulder to start my PhD and had not read anything he'd written. He was not an obvious choice of advisor and since neither of us seem to be natural-born conversation starters, it is possible we may not have spoken to each other for a long time. There is an alternate universe in which I did not choose him as my advisor, possibly one in which he wasn't even on my doctoral committee, but this possible universe is almost *impossible* for me to imagine because Craig's work is embedded in so much of what I do, not just when I'm citing him in my research; indeed, not just in my research. I believe Craig's work is in fact so foundational to communication research that this is true for many people.

The first work I read by Craig was the infamous 1999 article, "Communication theory as a field." This was my re-introduction to Communication as a discipline (my BA was in Communication, but I had since done an MA in English Language and Linguistics), my introduction to thinking *about* disciplines as a doctoral student, and my introduction to Craig's writing and ideas. It sounds dramatic to say this article changed my academic life, but it did. In the time it took me to read that article, Bob Craig was on my radar: this was someone I needed to know better.

I have been lucky enough to have had the opportunity to tell the story of my relationship to Bob Craig and his research on numerous occasions (e.g., for an ICA panel in his honor, at his retirement party, and in the introduction to a book on the metamodel [Rich & Robles, 2020]). Here I'd like to describe how three key ideas of his have contributed to

our understanding of the field and practice of communication. The following sections will cover 1) communication as a discipline, 2) theory and discourse analysis, and 3) metadiscourse, before ending with some reflections on the value of Bob Craig's work.

Communication as a discipline

In one of my first writing assignments during my PhD, I had to address the “who cares?” question about the relevance of research to the wider world. One could well ask: who cares about Communication as a discipline? The question is even more demanding when one considers the particularly American (and often “so white”: Ng et al., 2020) context of Communication as it developed in the USA and about which Craig primarily writes (see Eadie, 2021). Furthermore, especially in the modern context in which interdisciplinarity is functionally everywhere and instrumentally everything (at least as an ideal), talking about (and justifying) specific disciplines seems rather outdated and navel-gazey. Why does this matter? Shouldn't we all just be getting on with our work?

But the ingeniousness of Craig's 1999 metamodel is that “meta” bit. It's not about a particular framework or content as much as it's about a *conversation*: the questions and discussions and commentary *about* the matters of research and public life that exercise communication research. And while the article is framed as “about” communication as a field to some extent, it also provides evidence that communication is a far greater thing than the field that claims its focus. Drawing on theories from everywhere and raising questions relevant to anyone who cares about the practice of communication, to relegate this article to the confines of an American discipline would do it a disservice—and luckily, many have recognized that fact, as the article has been taken up all over the world (Rich & Robles, 2020). Craig (1999) mentions many times the “productive tension” that emerges from different conversations across traditions of communication research, but the article *itself* is an exercise in productive tension, sparking various critiques and conversations (e.g., Craig, 2001, 2019b; Craig & Xiong, 2022) and more importantly, offering plenty to think about.

Craig (1999) notes that academic and theoretical questions about communication are about communication practice, and therefore relevant to (and potentially informative for) the communication problems that challenge us in our everyday lives. This simple premise took the idea that communication research is relevant to everyday life—something I intuited in my own approach to research and life—and made it explicit,

systematic, and significant. I cannot say how many times I've read that article (I re-read it regularly). But I know I immediately printed out the charts (pp. 133-134) to hang on my wall, and while I don't cite it in everything I write, I have never stopped thinking about it.

Many years ago, Craig once said to me that he felt the metamodel (Craig, 1999) had not been taken up and engaged with as much as he'd hoped. On the face of it, this doesn't sound right. The article has been cited at least 3,000 times. It's been engaged with across fields as diverse as psychology, management studies, critical media, education, accounting, and healthcare. In communication, it's been reviewed and revisited, translated, reflected on (Craig, 2015), and forms the basis of a key communication textbook (Craig & Muller, 2007). What I recall however was that Craig was mostly referring to the specific traditions of communication he'd proposed, and the idea that they might be reconfigured or new traditions suggested—but this, too, has certainly occurred (e.g., Cooren, 2014; Craig & Xiong, 2022; Schwarzenegger et al., 2019; Simonson et al., 2012; Vlăduțescu, 2013). I suspect part of what has happened to Craig (1999) is that it was a little too good for its own good. Similar to something like, let's say, social construction, Craig's assumptions may well have been so thoroughly persuasively propagated that within certain positions, it has become taken for granted, a shared assumption of a particular narrative about how communication configures its world.

But you can see why Craig would raise this—because the whole point of his approach is making things explicit so that we can talk about them, argue about them. In a way, I think more people should be engaging with some aspect of the 1999 article, but just because it's not obvious doesn't mean they aren't already doing so.

I have spent my career (and life) exploring the meaning of morality as a communication problem. Rather than starting with philosophical definitions (fascinating as they are) or pondering trolley problems (fun and frustrating as that may be), I have explored what morality means as an interactional orientation—something people are managing, mangling, and manipulating on-the-fly as they deal with their ordinary lives (Hofstetter & Robles, 2018; Robles, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2022, 2024; Robles & Castor, 2019; Robles et al., 2018; Robles & Joyce, 2023; Robles & Parks, 2019; Robles & Xiong, 2024; Robles, forthcoming).

But my attempts to understand morality in research have always started with my encounters with morality in everyday life. When I recently experienced the moral problem of whether to suddenly fly back

to the USA from the UK to visit my grandmother after believing she could be in her final stage of life, a number of questions plagued me. Why was it so obvious to my partner that I should drop everything and see her now, whereas I was more cautiously inclined to wait and see how things progressed? Was I lacking in some authentic human love for my grandmother because I wanted to wait for a better time? Was there something about my personality or upbringing or relationship to my grandmother that made the decision so difficult? Was it possible I'd misunderstood my grandmother's situation, and simply needed more information?

These questions do not reflect all examples of the problem theorization of different traditions of communication as conceptualized by Craig (1999), but several are indeed covered. When I wonder about the right thing to do, I wonder about it as a communication problem. And when I wonder about communication problems, I wonder about them through Craig's description of communication theory as a field.

Theory and discourse analysis

One of the first things I noticed when I was reading my partner's text responses to my concerns about my grandmother was how many of them began with the word "well." This is a turn-initiation word, thoroughly-attested in conversation analysis research, that indicates some divergence or disagreement with a prior turn or its assumptions (Heritage, 2015). So, while the *content* of my partner's turns was merely providing his own opinions about what he would do, and his regrets about similar events in his own life, the *interactional meaning* (Tracy & Robles, 2013) of those turns was disagreeing with an assumption about something I never said: that I would not visit my grandmother right away. This kind of conversation—where people who know each other very well can draw on many layers of context to assume implicit meanings in what each other is saying—is one of the first things about conversation that made me interested in morality. It seemed to me that there was something about *social judgment* that could be quite slippery, maybe by design. Even when judgments are made overtly, they rely on assumptions that are not (maybe cannot) be spoken aloud. It may well be easy for some people to agree that drug addicts are entirely to blame for their condition, but far harder to admit aloud that it relies on the premise that one see drug addicts as not fully human.

It's not impossible to see the spaces between what is said and what is meant or implied in communication: no psychic powers are

required. There are clues all around us in the way that people talk. Every word, movement, gesture, glance or silence can point to and possibly illuminate this gap. Ambiguity is built into communication (Craig, 1990). It is not a flaw where most of human communication is concerned, but rather a strength. You just have to start by seeing how communication is actually used, and what for, to recognize that simply advocating “more” or “clearer” is not always better.

And yet this is not at all how common ideologies about moral communication (or communication more generally) work. As Craig (2005) points out in his 2004 presidential address to the International Communication Association, people are constantly talking about talking, and generally advocating *more* talking, and suggesting that all this talking is going to offer clarity, purpose, and importantly, will steer people away from danger and toward proper societal values. Craig starts with a number of common examples, including ones about drugs such as “talk to your kids about drugs” and “questions: the antidrug.” Craig notes that the ads that produced these slogans are obsessed with drugs—but they are equally obsessed with communication. He goes on to continue the thread that communication as a discipline is (and ought to be) oriented to communication as a practice in the world, that its theories ought to reflect communication as a social activity and potentially even contribute to improving public discourse. But Craig does not start with a theory for how this should be accomplished. He starts with examples of real communication.

Bob Craig developed Grounded Practical Theory (GPT) with Karen Tracy over a significant period of their careers, drawing together their expertise in communication theory and discourse analysis (1995, 2014, 2020). The foundational idea of this sort of grounded theory is that it is based on analysis of actual examples of communication practice, and that it should also be designed to encourage reflection on improving communication practice. One does not take “a” theory and see whether it works to explain and enhance communication: one starts with what is going on, what people are saying and how they are saying it in their particular situations and contexts, and the task is to reconstruct (theorize) the meaning *for participants*. This approach is meaningful for any research into communication, but especially moral communication: it is almost an ethical imperative to seek improvement, progress, and justice when looking at communication in this way. I may not do all my research formally as GPTs, but it is embedded in everything I write. And as an empiricist, the most important part of that is starting with the discourse itself: the conversations in which people actually engage.

Because that, ultimately, is what we want to get back to, or else what are we even doing this for?

Craig (2005) provides a number of examples of how the presumption of good talk leads to detailed advice about how to talk and what to say—something we could call the *manualization of communication*, the idea that we can turn the practice of communication into trainables and instructions. GPT’s orientation to improving practice has always been careful to avoid such simplifications, instead suggesting the cultivation of the ability to judge situations wisely (*phronesis*); and indeed, good research that is both practical *and empirical* is careful to avoid turning communication suggestions into over-simplified advice (e.g., Stokoe, 2013, 2015). Research that has taken GPT forward has especially adhered to thoughtful reflections on communication practice (see Alpert et al., 2022; Koenig et al., 2013; Muller, 2014; Okoruwa & Ridley-Merriweather, 2023; Winchatz et al., 2023; Wolfe & Champine, 2023). Importantly, these examples of research start with how people really communicate, and that is where Craig’s theorizing starts, too. Theory and practice, or theory and analysis—and analysis of actual discourse in particular—are fundamentally interrelated.

Consider two adjacent turns in a conversation:

No
OK.

This is a real piece of data: real recorded turns by two communicative agents. But it is strange data. We can see its strangeness right away. “No” is not, by design, a first turn in any typical back-and-forth. “No” is a response. So we can imagine that something is missing here. Having the “OK” follow makes sense as a confirmation of the “no” (as of some rejection)—but to what is that “no” responding?

In conversation analysis, we would at least attempt to treat this as a (probably incomplete) sequence. We know that rejections tend to be done in response to certain kinds of action, for example, invitations (no, I can’t come tonight) or information requests (no, the package hasn’t arrived yet) (Schegloff, 2007). And with that small foundation, we can build candidate interpretations of how this interaction came to be, drawing on other forms of social and practical knowledge. We know for example that you can say “no” to stop a dog from misbehaving, but dogs do not say “OK.”

We also know that we usually have a record of where some snippet of data came from, to be able to assert something like “this is a

real piece of data,” as I said. In this case, I can tell you the data are transcribed from a snapshot on a mobile telephone, in which the bottom of the screen looked like this (fig. 1):



Now, we can also know a bit more of the context for these two turns. With the contextual knowledge about how this mobile phone operates, we can confirm that the swirling symbol at the bottom of the screen indicates that the mobile phone’s voice-activated service is “listening” for something that might come next. We know the “OK.” in blue is a response to a command from whoever used that command with the phone (let’s call them the commander), in this case recorded as “no >.” And with a bit more contextual knowledge, we can reconstruct that the “no” must have been in response to a prior turn from the phone. Because we also know phones do not initiate sequences without (ostensibly) being summoned to do so (yet), we can extrapolate at least one turn back that must have involved the command having summoned the service (what’s called a “wake word”) and initiated an action that started the whole thing off (see Albert & Hamann, 2021; Lah & Lee, 2023; Reeves et al., 2018).

So although we don’t know anything about the content of that initial action, we can reconstruct a plausible structure (simple analysis of recorded actions in parentheses, speculative candidate descriptions of plausible but unrecorded prior actions in brackets):

[wake word + initiating action from commander]

[turn, perhaps a question from the service, inserting a sequence to understand the initial action]

No (commander's response)

OK. (service accepts this and closes the conversation, but is attentive to possible next command)

Is this a conversation? And if so, in service of what would we make it “better”?

The first question is definitional, or ontological. For some people—and some communication traditions—a conversation can only occur between humans of a certain level of consciousness. We can certainly talk about human-computer communication, animal communication, infant-mother communication, and so forth, but *conversation* tends to be treated as something rather special, and especially human. Interestingly, but perhaps because it was presumed, this human element is not a major part of historical definitions of conversation—which are as varied as the obsolete “place where one lives or dwells,” to sexual intercourse—but modern conceptualizations are (largely) consistent with an “informal interchange of thoughts and sentiments by spoken [sic] words” (etymonline.com) and tend to emphasize a back and forth exchange (c.f., Davey, 2021). This is a position that is methodically deployed in conversation analysis in its sequential approach to social actions (Schegloff, 2007; Schiffrin, 1990) and which constitutes a common basic communication frame in public discourse (Craig, 2019) and media theory (Leudar & Nekvapil, 2022).

It may seem silly to treat an apparently-accidental exchange with a device, in which the human did not know it was conversing and the device knew nothing at all, as a conversation *per se*. Humans sometimes seem to say things at each other with no particular relevance and no repair (progressivity for the sake of progressivity), but we would say that is still accomplishing complex actions such as “being together” and “mutual sociality” because that is something humans are presumed to do (Schegloff, 2015; Stivers & Robinson, 2006). On the other hand, it is not at all impossible to theorize conversants as nonhuman agents and communication theory as a ventriloquizing project (see work by Cooren, eg. 2014). To take a more epistemological approach to the question of whether this is a conversation, we might ask whether we learn something about this (possible) conversation *by treating it as such*.

I would say that we can (though I cannot promise, in the space I have remaining in this essay, that we will). I think it helps to go back to Craig's work and the problem theorization column of the matrix in the 1999 article in particular. Some questions we might ask include

1. How can we engage in meaningful, critical conversations in public life if we rely on technology? (rhetorical)
2. Where can we bridge the gap between human actions and technology use if there is no subjectivity to connect with? (semiotic)
3. Why would we interact with technology as if in genuine conversation if there is no authentic self there? (phenomenological)
4. How can we design communication with technology to resolve interaction errors? (cybernetic)
5. How might we adjust human behavior to become better at interacting positively with technology? (sociopsychological)
6. How can we resolve misaligned actions if there is no mechanism for repair and no trajectory of social action? (sociocultural)
7. Why would we engage with technology when it is built to subvert our humanity to capitalistic aims? (critical)

The second question about the possible conversation example (in service of what would we attempt to make this apparent conversation better?) is already visible in the problem-orientation of the questions above. Not all communication is necessarily "moral communication," but all communication is moral—it involves rights and obligations, asymmetries and judgements, commitments to and expectations of others (Bergmann, 1998; Garfinkel, 1964; Goffman, 1956, 1959; Robles, 2017; Stivers et al., 2011). The turns "no" and "OK." certainly have some moral interpretability to them: Burke (1952; Murray, 1998) for example proposed the roots of the moral imperative as arising from the "linguistic negative"; and "OK." does at least one of the basic interactionally-attentive jobs of confirming receipt of the prior turn, accepting a rejection, and/or closing an unwanted conversation (Beach, 2013; Betz et al., 2021; Couper-Kuhlen, 2021). On top of this we can consider whether we want our speech to be "hearable" to our devices, to what extent we wish to engage with technology through a conversational format, and under what conditions we need such technologies at all.

If we think about conversation as one way of understanding *what the communication problem is* in relation to moral and ethical

dimensions of a topic like human-technology interaction/chatbots and AI, we can productively orient our work to contributing to a theoretical metadiscourse to “illuminate and inform public metadiscourse—how we talk about how we talk—in the public interest” (Craig, 2005, p. 666).

Metadiscourse and conversation

Public discourse is always rife with metadiscourse, a constant commentary *on* discourse that is so pervasive that online it has become definite-articled and thus people on social media refer to “the discourse” (about something in particular) (and then generally decry it). At the moment, a lot of “the discourse” is about AI (artificial intelligence), particularly related to chatbots (Adamopoulou & Moussiade, 2020). This has generated a lot of subsequent discourse about the ethics of chatbots, including their contribution to misinformation and deception, their impact on the environment, their reproduction of racism and other discriminations, and their use by companies to advance capitalistic aims (Song, 2023). But this has also generated a significant *metadiscourse* about what these things know (what is “intelligence?”), how realistic they are (what is “artificial?”), how truly “conversational” these things are—and perhaps why we need to engage with them through the medium of conversation in the first place (Laaksoharju et al., 2023). In other words, chatbots are a modern *communication problem*, and thus present us with a pressing social moment for which communication research is both appropriate and necessary. This also provides an opportunity for communication researchers to 1) rethink communication theories (c.f., Guzman & Lewis, 2020) and 2) offer important contributions to reflecting on communication practice (Craig, 2018).

In his 1999 article on metadiscourse, theory, and practice, Craig proposes that researchers of language and social interaction are especially suited to considering questions of actual communicative practice, and thus drawing on this to contribute to a theoretical metadiscourse that might then inform ordinary metatalk. This is part of Craig’s stance that “this field of communication theory is not a repository of absolute truth. It claims no more than to be useful (Craig, 1999b, p. 154).”

The current metadiscourse about chatbots and AI crosses communication traditions (Craig, 1999), but is overwhelmingly arraying itself into recognizable camps, such as those who work on such technologies (overwhelmingly cybernetic with a bit of semiotics thrown in), tech optimists (definitely leaning sociopsychological), and tech

pessimists and critics (generally critical and phenomenological). Perhaps perspectives from other traditions (including those not in the original 1999 article) could be highlighted to challenge some of these camps—what would rhetorical and sociocultural approaches say about these AI technologies, and furthermore (since this research is absolutely going on, c.f. Jena, 2024; Natale & Ballatore, 2020), how do we get these perspectives into the public discourse?

I typed “it’s not a conversation” and “chatbots” into Google and was returned a list of several articles, including academic and popular press articles, in which this exact phrase was used. Overwhelmingly, if “conversation” is claimed as what’s going on, it is paired with the word “simulation.” Chatbots may be described in many places as conversational agents, but that’s rarely put forward as an example of “real conversation” even in the basic interactional sense, let alone in the sense of a genuine dialogue (see So et al., 2023). However, simulated conversations are not demonized in public discourse; indeed, they have their proponents in examples such as advice about mock interviewing for jobs, or—to come back to an earlier point—the use of role-play in many institutional forms of communication training.

But that brings us to yet another problem with the simulation of conversation (Stokoe, 2013), though I would suggest that foregrounding the empirical in our theories and development of practice is not fundamentally about authenticity; rather, it is about asking the question: *what is this technology for?* If we can orient the conversation about conversational agents—the metadiscourse of AI and chatbots as they relate to conversation models—to *practice*, we can start to get a handle on why *all* traditions of communication interrogation are relevant. I would also argue that conversational language is useful because conversation is a common and recognizable frame with dual orientations (speaker-listener and process of participation) and aspects that can orient not just to common transmissional assumptions but also to social constructionist ones, such that conversations are often proposed as a way to “‘come up’ with something” (Craig, 2019a, p. 21). When we talk about the ethics or intelligibility of technologized “conversations,” we can use terminology referring to how we *summon* devices or how they summon us, how chatbots *recipient design* responses for a particular interlocutor, what *candidate meanings* are possible in what was said, and what *conversational projects* are implicated in particular turns. This conversational orientation (and vocabulary such as the conversation analytic terms just used: Schegloff, 2007) emphasizes the consequentiality of conversation—that it is oriented to trajectories of

action—and so “is this a conversation?” is a reasonable way of also asking “what is this technology for?” The question is not about the ontological status of conversation or its participants. It is about what happens once we start talking, and whether that is traveling in the direction we want it to go.

Reflections

Craig (2016) explains that in metacommunication, “every message implicitly defines the relationship between communicators (p. 1).” This brings us back to the incredible weight that communication is designed to carry in its ability to convey far, far more than the bare sum of its literal words. Craig’s ideas—from the 1999 article to his recent introduction to deliberative play (2023), and beyond—offer the gift of generativity in a rich and deeply considered way, something that is more needed than ever in an era increasingly characterized by metadiscourse about topics such as “generative AI” and the various promises and warnings about it. The “meta” dimension of metacommunication or metadiscourse or the metamodel encourages us to pay attention and think about communication, and who we are to each other when we do it—a practice that will be necessary for as long as there is communication, whoever or whatever is doing it, in whatever forms it will eventually take.

Bob Craig’s influence on and value to research in communication is beyond estimation and certainly beyond my ability to present in a few thousand words. His body of research and his way of embodying it provide a model of “good communication” that is not predefined but negotiated in communication itself. As displayed in his response about attaining coherence in his interview for *Communication Theory* (Boromisza-Habashi, 2013), Craig describes the communication field itself in conversational terms:

There are matters that are of current concern and there is a background of what people have said about those matters. You move the conversation forward by responding to that, by saying something that adds to that. (p. 422)

Craig refuses to say exactly what “forward” means; he does something much more valuable: he gives us the language and the model for how to do it.

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Framework for Innovation through an Inclusive Communication Theory Conversation

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When I was a senior in high school, I asked my civics teacher to write a college recommendation. He asked me, “What do you want to be?” I said that if I could, I would be a baseball player. He essentially told me that if that was my goal, I should pursue it. I explained that such was not a realistic endeavor, in that at my height and general physical constitution, I was not the person to break that particular barrier. He kind of smiled, seemed satisfied and proceeded to ask me some other questions about my college choices. Could the world of baseball be an inclusive one where the possibility existed for anyone who had the interest and commitment to participate to their very best potential do so as a primary life activity? Where everyone who chose to work in collaboration with others could bring what they had to offer, and the game would accommodate and adjust and learn from each of these participants as they learned who they were and what they could do as ball players?

How does this story relate to the scholarship and impact of Robert T. Craig? For me, the connection is that Bob Craig’s practical theorizing framework is a wholly inclusive approach to communication theory and research. His work has provided the discipline with a framework for constructive, collaborative conversation about communication theory, communication practices and the reflexive loops that informatively link them. In the introduction chapter of *Theorizing Communication: Readings Across Traditions*, I wrote that communication theory is an ongoing conversation. It is a conversation that is open to those who are well-versed in one of the many languages that are spoken within the communication discipline, and it is open to those who speak any of the languages that exist in the world of communication practitioners. There does exist a barrier to entry, however, and that barrier is an interest in and commitment to reflexive thinking and dialectical dialogic engagement with anyone who chooses to participate in the conversation. Within Craig’s practical theorizing/practical discipline (1989; 2018) framework, the shared communicative endeavor of every participant is practically informed and useful conversation about communication.

A short example of how this approach is generative of such conversation is found in my work on the instructional communication

practice of I-FCCD or instructor-facilitated collegiate classroom discussion (Muller, 2014). Because I present this scholarship based on data in specific classrooms which variably resonate with members of the audience, one question I am often asked is, “What do I need to do to make discussion work in my classroom?” Since this scholarship uses grounded practical theory, I have a ready set of follow-up questions to ask: 1) What do you experience as problematic in discussions in your classroom(s)? 2) What kind of discussion do you want to have? 3) Does the kind of discussion you want to have help you address what you find challenging in discussion in your classroom? 4) How are the talk choices you make in the classroom informed by the kind of discussion you want to have? 5) How do the talk choices you make address what you find challenging in the discussion? Sometimes we only get to #2, for the answer to #1 is “they don’t talk,” and the answer for #2 is often “one where students talk.” To which I can reply, “Well, then you’ll never get there.”

However, if you want to address the communication practice in which you want people to engage, there is an approach that can assist. That approach is grounded practical theory. Addressing these questions through conversations with your fellow practitioners, including when it works for you – your students, will get you on the way to co-constructing the communication practice you would like to have in your classroom (Peters and Muller, 2023). For to work toward improving the quality of I-FCCD in one’s classroom is not the application of knowledge generated elsewhere. It is rather engaging in the practical theorizing conversation with one’s fellow practitioners in ways that grows one’s knowledge, ability to articulate, and facility with one’s awareness of the experienced “issues” of teaching in this way, what one hopes to accomplish through teaching in this way, and usefulness of the variety of possible communication techniques in accomplishing teaching in this way. Growing in one’s capacity to practically theorize this communication practice that is important to you is what I advocate in bringing about a change.

Moving beyond that example, I offer my perspective on how the key constructs of Craig’s metatheoretical approach, including the seven traditions of communication theorizing, are generative of an inclusive communication theory conversation. I highlight innovation through sharing projects undertaken by students in a master’s level communication theory course where the reader based on the metamodel is the primary text, and I show how innovation in my own scholarship has been informed by Craig’s work. In the discussion, I offer some

reflections on the overall significance of Craig's work for professional and everyday communication theorists.

Key Construct and Inclusive Conversation

When I reference Craig's practical theorizing framework, I may be referencing the whole of the approach, or I may be referencing a specific construct. One key construct is the reflexive theory practice loop, where theory and theoretical discourse — how we think about (and talk about how we think about) communication — and practice and practical discourse — how we talk (and talk about how we talk) reflexively inform each other. Grounded practical theory provides a second key construct which is the experienced communication problem. Significantly, both these constructs, the theory-practice reflexive loop and experienced communication problems, are rooted in our ways of thinking. We do tend to think about something when we run into some kind of experiential roadblock, because we need to then think about what to do next. GPT also adds the idea of the "normative," which is that we have ideals for how communication should go, not just expectations about how it will go (Craig and Tracy 1995; 2014; 2021). In GPT, what we are reconstructing are social communication practices. These practices are forms of communication in which people participate and for which they would recognize communication that could be judged as better or worse. (Craig, 2006). A fifth construct is the metamodel and the seven traditions of communication theorizing (Craig, 1999; Craig and Muller, 2007).

The two final constructs have already been referenced: dialectical dialogue and communication as a practical discipline. Each theorizing tradition is its own discourse, which necessitates that practical theorists learn to talk across them. The metadiscursive orientation to do this is dialectical dialogue, where coming from different perspectives is not a barrier to communication but rather a driver of metadiscourse. As practical theorists working from the perspective of communication as a practical discipline, the scope of this metadiscourse extends to the entirety of the field of communication practitioners as anyone who is engaged in working through experienced communication problems. In that GPT and the reflexive theory-practice loop are rooted in ways we think as everyday communicators, as practical theorists the tools we use to do our work are not exclusive to those trained in communication theory. As practical theorists our endeavor is to have conversations and do scholarship in a way that is inclusive to anyone who chooses to engage in the work of practical theorizing, meaning we may find

ourselves working to inform any and all communication practitioners and having the work we do informed by any and all communication practitioners. In that all of these constructs are either related to how we think or how we do communication in our everyday lives, or stated another way, that since this approach to communication scholarship has internal coherence and is rooted in discourse, everyone can participate in the ongoing communication theory conversation, and they can do so in ways that are practically relevant in every aspect of life that involves communication. This is the inclusive nature of the ongoing communication theory conversation. The most compelling aspect of taking this approach may be the ever-present possibility of innovation in communication theory and practice.

Innovation in Student Projects

One area where I have seen engagement with Craig's framework generate the capacity for innovative approaches to communication practices is in student projects. COMM 603, Communication Theory, is a master's level course where the primary text is *Theorizing Communication: Readings Across Traditions*. The central student project is a paper modeled after Tracy and Muller (2001), where students implement different theoretical lenses to diagnose experienced, real-world communication problems. Students have addressed a wide range of communication problems including: hostile fan (primarily parent) interactions at youth hockey games, managing a restaurant within an ownership-generated dysfunctional work environment, facilitating integration of Somali immigrants into the local community, protocols for police engaging with neurodivergent members of the public, productive HOA meetings, working through misinformation as part of implementing the Affordable Care Act, managing toxicity in online gaming communication, managing gossip in the workplace, institutional messaging follow-up when students of Asian heritage felt they were being targeted after the Covid-19 outbreak, updating training for new police recruits who were coming in with a noticeably different orientation than that held by many currently on the force, talking with family members encountering escalating gang violence, procedures to mitigate excessive student emails around class policies, emergency messaging (especially around natural disasters) in multicultural environments, working to communicate authentically in more open chosen life environments and a more closed home family environment, developing a shared approach to talking through difficulty between two

partners from very different backgrounds, talking with one's tween and teen children about cell phone use, and working through grief in an Italian-American family.

What has been fascinating in these projects are the many ways emerging communication theorists engage theory and practice. The variety in the array of how students are informed by the theorizing traditions in general or specific details of individual theorists, as well as, when they attempt to make changes in existing communication practices how they can at times derive communication techniques almost directly from the theories and at others become uniquely creative in what they propose, strikes me as indicating how closely this approach to communication theorizing gets at what we human communicators do, and how much better we can do it when we attend to what it is we are doing. The kinds of practical innovation I have seen are highlighted in two student projects which resulted in conference presentations, talking with an artistic son about his future and admissions counselor interaction with prospective first-generation college students and their families (McCauley, 2020; Alexander, 2020).

In the father-son interaction, the experienced problem was termed "son's failure to launch" (McCauley, 2020). Despite having spent hundreds of hours developing talent, completing in-depth training and courses related to design, perspective, and application of talent, and having been successful in mentorships with professional artists, Nate remained hyper-critical of his own ability resulting in conflict in the household, working in low-wage entry level service jobs, friction with parents who were supportive yet unsure of why that was not enough, and all around concerns for the future. Applying the socio-cultural lens provided a diagnosis of what had taken place thus far in terms of the parents' efforts and Nate's mentality. Utilizing the notion in Mead's statement "Consciousness both of him-self and of other individuals is equally important for his own self-development and for the development of the organized society or social group to which he belongs" (Mead, 1934, p. 137) as a lens, the dad came to a realization. What the parents had been doing was trying to provide motivation through relying on examples of others, including peers and a generalized other, using cultural symbols they thought reflected social norms. However, through their efforts to help, it seemed like what was happening for Nate was that his parents had created a social role in which he was not comfortable. In not being able to enact this role, Nate developed harsh self-criticism and became self-critical of his progress in his art and life. This delayed his actual progress toward independence and personal achievement.

Continuing with the diagnosis and staying within the social-cultural tradition, incorporating Poster's (1994) notion of postmodernity based on the influence of modern technology on modern social institutions and structures, a social-cultural disconnect came into focus. The parents were basing their social symbols on what their generation considered fixed roles. However, Nate's generation being influenced by electronically mediated communication, as Poster states "clears the way to seeing the self as multiple, changeable, fragmented in short as making a project of its own constitution." (p. 390) How could this cultural disconnect be resolved?

Moving from the diagnosis of what has been happening to a "prescription" of what could be done to change things, the dad as communication theorist turned to invitational rhetoric as a lens that could possibly guide a different way of talking with his son. Working off the purpose, "a definition and explication of rhetoric built on the principles of equality, immanent value, and self-determination" (Foss and Griffin, 1995, p.145), why might this approach work? Possibly because these are the exact qualities the dad wished to have in his communication with his son. However, after following this guidance and being committed to doing his best to avoid being persuasive while working to invite transformation through creating external conditions which promoted the offering of perspectives, his approach still failed to bring about a change. The dad found the key to why this approach was not working in Foss and Griffin's statement, "Ultimately, its purpose is to provide the basis for creation and maintenance of relationships of equality" (p. 152). For this father and this son, this kind of relationship was unable to be built at this time, possibly because the parent-child relationship created a power structure that was too difficult to overcome, especially when three people, two parents and one child, were involved in the communication.

Turning to another lens, phenomenology – specifically Rogers' (1992) approach and working out of the realization that reality is socially constructed through micro level interaction processes provided another set of guidance for possible change. The reasons why taking this approach could work were: 1) Nate's parents were in a psychological relationship with him 2) there was a state of incongruence between the actual and the ideal self where Nate's artwork created feelings of vulnerability and anxiousness 3) there was integration in the relationships between members of this tight-knit family 4) the parents wanted what was best for their children and to this end were committed to unconditional positive regard. However, once again, after following guidance based on Rogers' lens, there still was no change. The dad's

conclusion this time was that “the new approach” was not very different from what the parents had already been doing, and so the factors that could have brought about a change were the same factors that were producing the current situation.

Sticking with the project meant turning to yet another lens. Staying within the phenomenological tradition, this time the choice was Buber’s being the other where communication is the “expression of a gesture of the physical attitude of the one to the other” (Buber, 2002, p. 226). When dialogue as the spoken and wordless exchange between people is perceived, within that interaction there can be the transformation of opinions and the factual. When the communication theorist, Dad, examined the three forms of dialogue: genuine dialogue, both verbal and nonverbal, where people establish “a living mutual relation” (p.229), technical dialogue, “which is prompted solely by the need of objective understanding” (p.229), and monologue disguised as dialogue, communication in which people “speak at each other” (p.229), his conclusion was that he and his wife were not engaged in genuine or even technical dialogue with their son, rather the parents and son were talking “at each other” monologically. Once the shift was made to genuine dialogue, what the parents saw from Nate’s perspective was that their son saw that he was contributing to the household, that he was making progress, and that he did have goals, but he did not want shortcuts. Taking this communicative path, there was a change, and the change resulted in tangible outcomes. Nate began marketing some of his artwork online with a t-shirt shop, with some success, his parents overtly and explicitly showed their appreciation for his assistance in maintaining the household, and at the time of the presentation Nate was completing his portfolio with plans to attend art school in Seattle, Washington.

Did the dad as communication theorist fully understand these communication theories, and did he accurately implement them? Was the parents’ interaction with their son truly genuine dialogue? These are not the questions asked when practically theorizing. Did something change in the communication practice that had previously been associated with an experienced problem? That is the question to ask, and the answer in this emerging communication theorist’s case, was most definitely yes.

The second student project was a workplace case where an admissions counselor as communication theorist was concerned with her sense that first-generation students and their parents left for home without feeling a sense of connection with university even after attending an information session, taking the campus tour, and meeting with an admissions counselor (Alexander, 2020). In diagnosing the problem,

semiotics, especially Saussure (1959), provided insight. Words are not just signs that have an isolated meaning, rather signs highlight social structure. The word “college” carries with it a certain gravitas. What can we do to combat that? How do we find out what “college” means to first-generation students and their families? What are the meanings that are associated with that word?

Using a cybernetic lens, specifically Lang (2000) provided both additional diagnosis and some ideas for “prescription.” The notion of “load” became central. Adding to the social “load” of the sign as social structure referent was the cognitive load of data storage and retrieval for first generation students and parents who may be learning a whole new language as well as way of thinking. How can the admissions counselor combat these loads? A possibility lies within the counselor’s interaction in the meeting with the first-generation student and parents. What if the counselor took detailed notes during the meeting, highlighting key parts, and did this visibly so the students and family members could see her doing this. Then, as the meeting neared the end, the counselor could show the notes and the simple statement at the bottom, underscoring it several times while stating, “There is one key piece of information to remember – you can contact me. You can contact me.” Additionally, the counselor could reach out after the interview, begin the conversation guided by her notes, and respond based on the feedback provided by the student and parents in the follow-up. Doing this could serve to highlight that the place of the admissions counselor in the social structure of “college” is to be there for you, to assist in bearing the load and being a partner in making sense of everything.

Turning back to the initial problem of trying to learn what “college” meant to a particular first-generation student and his parents, Deetz (1992) in the critical tradition and the idea of discursive closure provided guidance. This guidance was for ways the counselor could talk to increase the likelihood that the first-generation students and their parents would feel like they were genuinely being asked to talk rather than the talk of the counselor making them feel like they were being shut down. The counselor should not enact disqualification through saying something like, “I know exactly what you’re going through.” Rather she should say something like “I’ve had a similar experience. Can you talk a little more about your experience?” Also, the counselor should be aware of topical avoidance and the possibility that some things feel “off the table” or that students may be purposefully avoiding a topic. The counselor could say something like, “I know I encountered a bunch of challenges when I went to college, can you think of anything we should

talk about that might feel potentially rough for you?” This kind of talk would keep the conversational floor open in a democratic fashion, maintaining the experience as the admission counselor valuing what the student and family have to say.

For this admissions counselor/communication theorist the outcome of this project felt highly practical. What she was able to generate in her words was “simply a broader view of interacting with prospective students and their families which created a better understanding of how to meet them where they are at.” The “simple” feeling of this outcome again strikes me as how “in-tune” this approach is to the nature of communicative life. To generate usable and readily explainable communication techniques to navigate the challenges of real-world communication practice shows how taking the approach of being informed by theory and by practice and by the connection to them is not only practically useful but also, in a word, inspiring. By distinguishing the theorizing traditions, the capacity to talk across them increases. Once one accepts the opportunity to become even an emerging communication theorist, one finds oneself able to move deftly between traditions because each tradition articulates a practically meaningful aspect to communication. The theories essentially “make sense” even when reading the original works of the theorists. They make sense because when we allow them to inform the communication in which we take part each day, we come to see things in new lights, and we can come up with ways of talking that change what we see as possible in the communication.

In a communication theory panel at the 2024 Western States Communication Association Conference with panelists including myself, two former students who had taken the theory class from me, and two colleagues of one those students who used the *Theorizing Communication* reader in their graduate program, the presentations were on the following topics: semiotics, EV trucks, and male identity, Cyberpunk 2077, AI, and the gamification of phenomenological encounters, socio-cultural theorizing and why aren’t more people worried about the virtual world Panopticon? and using cybernetics to reduce communication anxiety in large lecture classes. (Berry, McCauley, Woods, Liu and Muller 2024). One of the presenters who I had never previously met in person was just thrilled to present. The metamodel engages our imagination in a way that makes us want to theorize and makes us not only want to but makes us able to impact the world around us in ways we could not before we engaged in practically theorizing communication.

Innovation in My Scholarship – Inversion Theories

As I have discussed elsewhere, some innovation in my scholarship has been generated through the practical theorizing conversations in COMM 603 and other classes I have taught including COMM 461, Communication and Trauma (Muller, 2021). It has also come from doing my best to analyze social imagery from a practical theorizing perspective in order to participate in a conference valuable to several colleagues, including graduate students. Some of the papers resulting from that conference will be referenced in this section. Both of these sources of innovation speak to the cross-discourse potential of practical theorizing.

Rooted in theorizing the classroom discussions that took place around the different theorizing traditions, the idea of an inversion theory emerged (Muller, 2021). The terminology of this kind of theory comes from weather patterns in Colorado where storms can take a more or less “standard” trajectory or there can be an “inversion” storm where the pattern of snow accumulation is distinctly different. In terms of the theorizing traditions, what an inversion theory accomplishes is bringing a perspective into the tradition that changes the patterns of conversation within the tradition. In my communication theory course, the primary inversion theory has been Invitational Rhetoric (Foss and Griffin, 1995). We would be talking about the rhetorical tradition in one way and then students would read this theory and the entire nature of the classroom discussion would change. Eventually it became obvious that sometimes talking about this theory changed the nature of discussion in the classroom generally. In some classes, we would end up talking about Langer’s presentational form (1953, 1979) as a variant in the semiotic tradition and/or Lipari’s attunement (2014) as a variant in the cybernetic tradition. Also, Invitational Rhetoric often became part of the classroom discourse not always for what it offered in and of itself, but when students would address what seemed to be a potential variant perspective of their own.

In my own scholarship, I began approaching the seven theorizing traditions through the lens of inversion theories. Discussions in my Trauma class, the semester we read Lipari’s *Listening, Thinking, Being: Toward an Ethics of Attunement* and theorizing for a conference theme Images of the Rebel (Muller, 2015) led me to propose support communities and co-systems as a potential inversion theory in the critical tradition. Much like Invitational Rhetoric offers invitation and transformation as an alternative to persuasion as central in rhetoric, co-

systems offer the ever-present nature of trauma as an alternative to the ever-present nature of power within theorizing in the critical tradition. An inversion theory in the socio-cultural tradition, I offer here.

In exploring inversion in the socio-cultural theorizing tradition, we'll return to the opening of this article as well as Mead's (1934) notion of the generalized other which in Mitchell and Taylor (Summer 2024) is discussed both in terms of family but also playing second base. Our different selves arise in relationship to a specific or a generalized other (our self in our family of origin, our self who plays second base.) There are two ways we can act, habitually or self-consciously. It is only when we take the perspective of the generalized other (the family, the team on which we are playing) that we act self-consciously, meaning there is a reflective aspect involved where the self is both watching and doing, forming through relating to the other players and the rules of the game. Acting out of this self-conscious awareness brings about the capacity to act uniquely to THIS situation, making this play on this ground ball. For Mead, the self that can act creatively in the situation is both social and cognitive in nature and is developed through our capacity to anticipate the responses of others to our linguistic actions. In the second base example, we can play ball with others because we can put ourselves into the roles being played by others and play our role in a way that interacts with those roles. As we do this, we develop our baseball mind through reflexively engaging our experiences of playing through speaking and hearing within the complex language community of our teammates.

Yet, when we are playing, we are also moving in space and time with our teammates. As I would argue, we are navigating our individual rhythms of movement with the rhythms of our fellow players in developing a rhythm of the whole (Muller, 2013). In that each player has their own rhythm, this is a complicated negotiation. It may be such on a given team that one player's rhythm tends to be the rhythm to which we all adapt in creating the rhythm of the whole. However, just as the self-conscious player can act creatively in each situation, so too can the team's rhythm be uniquely created as any given play unfolds, with every player actively navigating the interplay between individual and the collective rhythm throughout the play.

There is always, though, habit and non-self-conscious action resulting in play that is not creative but rather is routinized. The same can be said of rhythm, where there is an acting out of a familiar rhythm that may or may not work with those of the others on the team. Such action results in disjointed play. The capacity to act in the development of one's baseball mind and in negotiation of collective rhythm always exists, but

it is not a given that those things will be taking place in any specific game or on any specific team.

How is this notion of rhythm an inversion within social-cultural communication theorizing? The difference here is in what is being developed or negotiated. Self-consciousness is rooted in the development of mind in society. The notion of rhythm is rooted in movement in space and time. Symbols and mind are organic aspects of communication, but so too is space and time or pacing and place. Our communicative actions, just as our ballplaying, are generated through a combination of these organic aspects. The words we use and their meaning in the social surround matter, but so too do spatial time and physical place. Take these two examples, communication while hiking a mountain or when sitting at the seaside. What are the physical demands of communicating in these two places? What pacing is possible? What pacing is optimal? How do we differently navigate the pacing of our communication at these two different physical places? And then how does that navigation change in early morning fog or as the sun starts to set?

The construct I offer to name the interwoven nature of space and time in communication is *geoyinz*, or the culturally shared movement that is inherently rooted in geographic place. Life at sea level and life at 9000 feet of elevation is different. Non-human life is different, but so too is human life; and it is different because there are ways of moving, there are rhythms that are intrinsically sustainable in any geographic/geologic place. The movement of sea fauna is different from those who live on the mountains. The life cycles of the flora are different. As humans live in that place over extended time, ways of moving individually and collectively develop as the humans interact with the geophysical rhythms of the place. The inversion in the socio-cultural theorizing tradition is that from the rhythm perspective, there are ways of moving linked to geophysical place that are just as impactful in communication as are the socially constructed, linguistically based meaning and actions.

Geoyinz provides practical communication theorists with another lens within the socio-cultural theorizing tradition. Similar to Taylor and VanEvery's (2000) adding a lens through the construct of co-orientation within the tradition, and as shown in the student projects, each lens provides different foci for diagnosis of communication practices and adds related but different perspectives into the intra-tradition conversation. The *geoyinz* lens orients theorists to culture as human activity in a not wholly human context and the interplay that exists there. Where our communication occurs in space and time does impact our communication, and that impact is through variation in linguistically

based societies as well as through variation in cultural activities that emerge from a geophysical place and the natural rhythms of life there.

Discussion

At this beginning of this piece, I focused on inclusion because for me that has been central in what Bob's approach has offered me along with the fellow theorists and practitioners. As I end this piece, the focus has become innovation, for that is what I have experienced as the outcome of working with Bob's framework. As a communication theorist, one's scholarship is never just research and writing nor is it that plus teaching. It is everything you do in service like advising, committee work, being in social gatherings. For me, it involves always figuring out what I have to offer in every situation. Bob's approach is so deeply rooted in how we do communication and how communication scholarship has been done that it offers those who choose to work with it an opportunity to be inclusive in ways that can lead to innovation.

As communication professionals, we all know how what we have to offer is often undervalued or overlooked as people communicate all around us. What I have found, though, as a practical theorizing professional, is that what I can always do is bring my fortitude in knowing that we can always get better at dialectical dialogic engagement. If this time the audience member grows frustrated when I can't provide a "fix" for getting students more engaged in discussion in their classroom, I can talk in ways that I know have the best potential to keep the conversation open and ongoing. In my undergraduate introduction course, I incorporate the idea that from a practical perspective, there is no perfect way to communicate, there is only doing our best in the situation. I also talk about a communication perspective on life. This idea of ongoing conversation around the reflexive theory-practice loop is what I work to enact as that communication perspective on life. Having the tools at my disposal to do that is inextricably tied to having had the opportunity to work with Craig's framework.

In closing, what may be most exciting about Craig's practical theorizing approach, as addressed in Peters and Muller (2023), is that this approach is not limited to communication scholars. It can be incorporated by scholars in other disciplines, and it can be incorporated by professional practitioners. It can also be a way for scholars to engage across disciplines, and for disciplinary scholars and professional practitioners to engage each other. Due to its discursive inclusivity and its roots in how we think as we move through our communicative lives,

there are an infinite variety of implementations, all of which have the potential for innovation and, if pursued to these ends, have the ability to bring about change. Running throughout this change will be a communication theory conversation open to anyone, ongoing growth in knowing ourselves, knowing others, grasping what is possible through communication, and working to together in theorizing communication practices that are empowering and practically realistic.

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The Constitutive Metamodel's communication design implications for the field of communication theory

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Abstract

Craig's constitutive metamodel offers significant insights for engaging the institutionalized communication that shapes the field of communication theory. However, these insights are overlooked in the ongoing debate about the metamodel's merits. Critics have mainly concentrated on evaluating the descriptive adequacy of the metamodel. This attention has so far neglected a pertinent discussion on how the academic field organizes itself through its institutionalized communication practices, such as those within higher education and professional academic settings. This essay addresses this gap by reconstructing the communication design theory inherent in Craig's constitutive metamodel and, from his responses to the critics, three plausible design principles are articulated about handling truth, constitutivity, and intervention. By highlighting the design thinking and principles suggested by the metamodel, the essay opens pertinent themes for critical, constructive reflection about the (re)design of institutionalized communicative practices within the field of communication theory that are consequential for the trajectory of communication theory.

Keywords: communication practice, communication theory, communication design, design principles, institution, argumentation, truth, constitutivity, intervention, communication science, biological approaches to communication

Robert Craig (1999, 2015) proposed the possibility of a coherent field of communication theory in which unique, disciplined approaches to theorizing communication also engage in a broader inquiry to advance understanding of communication. His constitutive metamodel calls for a focus on communication practices and their cultivation in society as the grounds for such engagement. Craig's proposal is counter-intuitive to many because he is not proposing that unique approaches to theorizing need to agree or achieve consensus. Instead, as argued here, Craig is proposing a pathway toward better, more productive disagreement among unique approaches to theorizing communication. What he envisioned responds to the profound criticism (e.g., Durham-Peters, 1986; 1988) that the field has traded intellectual fruitfulness (i.e., a kind of research focused on theoretical growth) for institutional vitality (i.e., an academic specialty concerned with survival). This tradeoff, the criticism goes, has resulted in the communication field becoming more institutionally vibrant but at the cost of becoming fragmented at best and intellectually confused and impoverished at worst.

What is argued here is that Craig's proposal is capable of a more complete response to this criticism of the field. While Craig has focused on how communication theorists can cultivate their communicative practices for theoretical engagement across traditions of communication theorizing, the constitutive metamodel has not been extended to cultivating the communicative practices of academic practitioners in their institutional roles and the institutional routines and rituals they conduct. These also shape the field of communication theory and, as will be argued here, the constitutive metamodel can be articulated to address the interplay of the institutional and the intellectual in achieving a coherent field of communication theory.

Craig's strategy involves first achieving a *productive fragmentation* among traditions of theorizing from which a coherent field can emerge that matches the cultural potency of the term *communication*. He posits a constitutive metamodel as a key starting point for embracing an inclusive and expanding inquiry into communication practices in society. The model identifies seven traditions of theorizing communication, each with differing conceptualizations of communication and approaches to cultivating communication practices (i.e., rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, sociopsychological, sociocultural, and critical). Craig's vision promotes an engaged pluralism in the field of communication theory despite the profound practical challenges of enabling communication about communication when differing presumptions, theoretical commitments,

methodological practices, and academic identities create seemingly insurmountable boundaries, fissures, and edifices.

Craig's proposal has come in for some criticism. While critics have appreciated Craig's analysis, they have primarily taken issue with the descriptive adequacy of the metamodel's characterization of an ostensible field with some attention to its prospects for spurring cross-tradition engagements (e.g., Myers, 2001; Cooren, 2012, 2014; Cappella, 2020). These criticisms make points worthy of discussion, yet these critiques also largely miss the crucial thrust of Craig's argument. These criticisms miss the direct points Craig makes about cultivating the communication practices of academic practitioners in their theoretical engagements and the extension of Craig's points developed here concerning academic practitioners in their institutional roles.

To advance critical appreciation of Craig's contribution to communication theory, I propose that we look at his ideas as an intervention that seeks to turn a dis-preferred communicative situation for theorizing communication into a preferable one. The constitutive metamodel is thus taken to be part of a broader yet latent design proposal – that is, a proposal about designing scholarly communication to realize a field of communication theory. One can question whether it is essential or desirable for differing traditions of theorizing communication even to be engaged or whether the effort for such engagement is worth any contribution it might yield to the growth of knowledge about communication. A critical appreciation of Craig's ideas as a design proposal for a theoretical field's communication about communication can address such concerns. This requires teasing out the design proposal latent in Craig's metamodel more fully by articulating what is present and what calls for development in what he proposed. With such attention, the constitutive metamodel's importance, desirability, and efficacy for building the field of communication theory can be considered anew. The aim here is to begin this engagement.

In the following discussion, the communication design theory within Craig's constitutive metamodel is reconstructed. The design thinking and principles it suggests for communication within the field of communication theory are articulated. A notable gap is identified: the metamodel focuses on reimagining the direct engagement of theorists across traditions but is silent about the institutionalized practices for communication across the field, such as found in the routine and ritualized ways members of academic units and professional associations manage interactions among their academic practitioners that are

consequential for theorizing.¹ This silence is explored here. It is argued that latent in Craig's theorizing about the field and his responses to critics of the metamodel are plausible (re)design principles for the routines and rituals of institutionalized communication practices of organizations within the field of communication theory.²

This essay makes a key contribution to understanding Craig's constitutive metamodel. Craig's proposal responds to a profound contention by Durham-Peters (1986, 1988) that the field has traded intellectual fruitfulness for institutional vitality and thus ended up confused and fragmented. Yet, the interplay of theoretical fruitfulness

¹ What "institution" and "institutional" refer to can become complicated and twisted around differing colloquial, administrative, and various technical uses of these terms. It is a point of conceptual debate. Many of the authors referenced throughout use these terms in ways synonymous with an organizational entity like a university, professional association, or field. However, some of those uses of "institution" and "institutional" by those referenced also seem to mean what would be taken to be a *neo-institutional* theoretical view that defines institutions as neither identical with social systems or with organizations but as complexes of expectations that become stabilized as governing principles (see Ishyama & Breuning, 2014). I will take the neo-institutional definition to be the most basic while recognizing the other uses and endeavoring to keep straight when stabilized complexes of expectations about communication among academic practitioners are meant as distinguished but related to the organizational entities through which strategies for organizing interaction are meant. So, at times, my uses of "institution" and "institutional" will fit the more colloquial use and, at other times, the more technical use with the hope the context of use keeps that clear enough. My take on Craig is that he primarily addresses the complexes of expectations underpinning communicative practices in the field of communication theory with specific advice for how these practices can be reoriented and thus realize in practice new complexes of expectations for communicative practices of participants in the field. And so, the main point here is to extend the communicative design principles of Craig's constitutive metamodel to the organizational entities and their members that maintain particular complexes of expectations for communication. Doing so offers a critical appreciation of the constitutive metamodel and opens it up to new critical engagement yet to be explored by critics.

² As is no doubt apparent in this introduction, the discussion that follows must navigate the layers and inversions of meta perspectives – that is, communication (talk about theories) about communication (theories) about communication (practices in society) in the practices for organizing the field, such as those found in higher education organizations and professional associations. Simply keeping this straight is no small task for the writer and the reader.

and institutional vitality is a crucial area for reflection and innovation within the field. So, the design thinking and design principles implicit in the constitutive metamodel are elaborated here with two aims. First, to stimulate further consideration of the communication design implications of Craig's theory for the field of communication theory. Second, to foster reflection on the (re)design of the routines and rituals promulgated in the communication practices of professional academic communication in the field of communication theory.

A communication design theory for the field of communication theory

Craig's constitutive metamodel is understood here as part of a broader communication design proposal about how a more *dialogical-dialectical forum* can be achieved among the traditions he enumerates (and ones yet to develop). A fundamental question in any design for communication is: *what disagreement(s) to have (if any)* (Aakhus, 2011; Lewiński & Aakhus, 2023)? Craig's design proposal answers this question by posing that, for a field of communication theory, the productive disagreements – those worth having – will revolve around how, or whether, our ideas about communication matter for communication practice (Craig, 1999; see also Craig, 1983, p. 408-412). He is recognizing that communication can be theorized from many different perspectives and so treats the field of communication theory as a forum for *theoretical metadiscourse* – that is, a field in which discussion of the relative merits of alternative theories of communication takes place (Craig, 1999, p. 130). Moreover, when differences are debated, the field “constitutes itself as a dialogical-dialectical field” (Craig, 1999, p. 132) in which there are intersecting levels of communication about communication about communication – that is, communication (theoretical dialogue-dialectic) about communication (theoretical metadiscourse or communication theories) about communication (practices in society).

The crucial object of intervention in Craig's proposal are the disagreements and the argumentation over theories about communication. Toward this end, Craig delineates a framework of stock issues that those in different traditions of theorizing communication (could) address in making claims about communication practices. This framework in turn illustrates how those in differing traditions are likely to or could take issue with the claims of those in other traditions, which thus sets out starting points and pathways for productive disagreement in theoretical dialogue-dialectic. This framework for fostering an idealized

dialogical-dialectical forum is key to Craig's communication design thinking as it sketches a *technology of communication* for "producing subject matters, devices for determining problems, and methods for directing and relating knowledge, action, and production" (Lewinski & Aakhus, 2023, p. 207; see McKeon, 1971/1987, p. 11-13; 1973).

Craig's idea of a dialogical-dialectal forum for theoretical engagement is what I refer to as a speculative design theory for communication. Such design theory "challenges status quo practice with designs for disagreement management that may not have immediate applicability but that serve to reimagine how argumentative practice could be conducted" (Lewinski & Aakhus, 2023, p. 228). For communication, this is comparable to architects and product designers who, for instance, offer models of housing and other products or services that cannot yet be built but that could possibly be built to jolt the imagination of others and to inspire design language and concepts for rethinking what is designable, how, and why (Dunne & Raby, 2013). Speculative design is a way to pose questions and raise issues with the state of affairs while providing direction for new, more instrumental design aimed at defining and resolving particular problems. In Craig's case, that is a forum for communication theorizing, with the constitutive metamodel serving as its blueprint.

Craig's communication design thinking

Critical to Craig's communication design thinking is his method for reconstructing traditions of communication theory. The method involves (a) articulating how theorists from a tradition characteristically define communication and any associated definitions of what counts as a communication problem, (b) describing the vocabulary (metadiscourse) used to talk about communication and problems, (c) identifying the taken-for-granted commonplaces (commonly held beliefs or presumptions about communication) that ground theory in a tradition, and (d) identifying the commonplaces about communication practice a tradition reinterprets or challenges (Craig, 1999, p. 132). The key next step is the articulation of relevant critical objections theorists from different traditions *could make* about the ways theorists from other traditions analyze communication practices in their work and products (Craig, 1999, p. 132).

What is significant from the vantage point of communication design is that this method of reconstruction translates into a proposal about how those theorizing communication from current or emerging

traditions could, and probably should, engage each other. It outlines elements of an intervention into the making of theoretical arguments and counterarguments when conducting and disseminating research. Of the seven features of interaction significant for the design of communication identified by Aakhus and Jackson (2005, p. 427-430), Craig's design proposal focuses on speech actions (assertions about communication practice), turns (making and responding to claims about communication practice), and identity (understanding unique traditions) for constituting a forum for theoretical communication about communication.³ The communication design thinking evident in Craig's overall proposal and method of reconstruction can be summarized as follows (see Aakhus & Harrison, 2016).⁴

The *exigency* Craig formulates is that theories about communication are so fragmented that they lack enough coherence to constitute a field of communication theory. This holds back the development of theoretical and everyday thinking about communication and acting on its practice.

The lack of quality theoretical argumentation across traditions is a critical *communicative problem* driving the exigency. This stems from insufficient means to bridge approaches to theorizing communication that are too often assumed to be incommensurable or, at best, indifferent to the other.

The *communicative solution* is to reorient argumentation in theorizing communication to a superordinate aim of cultivating communication practice, hence Craig's conceptualization of communication as a practical discipline. The communicative cornerstone of a dialogical-dialectical forum is the making and defending of claims about communication practice. As Craig characterizes it, this stands in contrast to the more conventional starting points for cross-tradition

³ Aakhus and Jackson (2005, p. 427-430) reimagine research on language and social interaction as identifying features of interaction for the possible design of communication: turn-taking, identity and face concerns, speech as action, expandability of sequences and activities, methods of coordination and repair, community and culturally bound assumptions about communication, and the emergent and dynamic outcomes of communication's design

⁴ Aakhus & Harrison (2016) spell out the exigency-problem-solution-rationale framework for design thinking about communication. A framework that draws heavily on Craig and Tracy's (1995) *grounded practical theory* but attuned to issues of *poesis* (i.e., concern with making) and *techne* (i.e., craft of making) for communication emphasized in *communication as design* (Aakhus, 2007; Aakhus & Jackson, 2004; Jackson and Aakhus, 2014).

argumentation that are focused on a communication theory's disciplinary origins and pedigrees, levels of organization, types of explanation, or underlying epistemology. Craig's approach is to deliberately subordinate such issues, even though sometimes significant, to claims about communication practice. The crucial objective is to elevate ideas about communication to the starting point in theorizing and for theoretical argumentation about communication and the cultivation of its practice – both across and within traditions.

The *rationale* is that coherence can be achieved by first showing how otherwise fragmented traditions can productively engage each other in theoretical argumentation. The intervention is itself a pragmatic recognition that in a pluralistic world, ways must be developed to engage with others about handling the practical matters of living together and, in so doing, recognize and navigate the differing frameworks about what communication is and how it is supposed to work. The bet is that facilitating the possibility of such engagement will yield coherence when talking about a field and its various contributions while stimulating discovery, invention, and new traditions attuned to communication as practiced in an ever-evolving society.

Craig's concern is with how individuals' participation in the envisioned forum of theory *interacts* the field into existence through disagreement and argumentation. This calls for the thoughtful, practical doing of theorizing (i.e., *praxis*) with deliberation about doing theorizing well to achieve practical wisdom about doing so (i.e., *phronesis*). As a communication design proposal, Craig's stance reveals a concern with making (i.e., *poiesis*) and the craft of making (i.e., *techne*) a field of communication theory. As such, the seven traditions are neither the beginning nor the end of an ostensible field but quite simply, and significantly, a proof-of-concept statement that demonstrates the plausibility of his method of reconstructing traditions and its translation as an intervention into the practices of communication theorists for argumentation that would be generative of a coherent field of communication theory.

Whatever one might think of Craig's reconstructed traditions, it must be acknowledged how insightful the tables and their subsequent elaboration are in outlining a matrix for recognizing the potential for productive fragmentation that could yield coherence in the field of communication theory, especially the second table in which Craig (1999, p. 132) sketches the basis on which differing traditions could productively clash. This is a herculean step. For sure it is regarding the outlining of seven traditions, but especially in formulating guidance

about cultivating a field's communicative practices for its own fruitfulness and vitality.

The communicative metamodel's institutional relevance

Craig uniquely inserts himself into ongoing debates about communication as a field (e.g., Dervin, 1989; Durham-Peters, 1986, 1988). His intervention responds to Durham-Peters' (1986, p. 537) devastating but instrumental analysis of the field of communication in which he argues how the Berelson-Schramm debate marks a historical "transformation of communication research from an intellectual to an institutional entity -- that is, from a certain kind of research to an academic specialty" or to put it even more directly a shift from an interest in "theoretical fruitfulness to institutional vitality." The result, Durham-Peters (1986, p. 541) asserts, is that we now live with *communication* as "a word used to cover an incoherent collection of ideas, institutions, technologies, and interests." Durham-Peters (1988, p. 316) subsequently argues that the field is not "intellectually stagnant; it is confused," like many fields, and thus uses institutional criteria for describing and explaining itself. He continues that to accept that communication is whatever people in the field of communication study, including social problems, enables institutional vitality but avoids the issue of intellectual coherence around the investigation of *the communicative* as found in the world (Peters, 1988, p. 316).

Nearly four decades on, the pressure for research to be applied, socially relevant, and involving communities likely exacerbates the concern articulated by Peters while the digital transformations of the media for scholarly communications and technologies for research conduct disrupt institutional conventions. Even now, following Peters, it is critical not to confuse the intellectual and the institutional, but it is important to interrogate how they relate. The dialogical-dialectical forum Craig (1999, p. 123) envisions is a proposal for turning Peters' analysis of the communication field toward a story of negotiating productive fragmentation and constructing coherence in the field of communication theory.

Craig's proposal addresses concerns about intellectual confusion by posing communication practices – *the communicative* – in society as a focal point for organizing fragmented theorizing into a productive engagement. This remains a provocative point but one that is rather silent about what Peter's refers to as the institutional. Might Craig's speculative communication design thinking provide a way to address the

relationship between the institutional and the intellectual – the promise of theoretical fruitfulness and institutional vitality?

Re-design of communicative institutions for a field of communication theory

Foregrounding the idealized dialogical-dialectical forum from a design stance clarifies how Craig's remedy for theoretical fragmentation outlines a demanding practice of communication for participants in the field. It is a communicative practice that calls for academic practitioners to find ways to make the field itself reflective about their practices when developing new theoretical approaches, when teaching, and even when focused on their specialties (Craig, 1999, p. 152-154). Doing so entails a communicative competence that he subsequently calls *theoretical cosmopolitanism*, which is "a willingness and ability to participate in more than one theoretical conversation" (Craig, 2001, p. 236).

Yet, Craig (1999, p. 370) suggests that this will happen only in "'moments' of dialogue sparked by thinking across traditions on problems" and not as some constant interchange by communication theorists across their traditions. While Craig (1999, p. 370) admits that "the metamodel has not achieved paradigmatic status and has not been widely adopted as the official model of the field for bureaucratic purposes," he concedes that this is "a limitation for which we all can be thankful." Maybe we can be thankful for that, but then one might also ask, "Is that it for the proposed intervention?" Is the idea of a dialogical-dialectical forum mostly fiction or limited to individual theorists disseminating their scholarship in unique panels at professional association conferences, special issues of journals, or in reviewer correspondence with editors? What about theoretical cosmopolitanism in the face of the gauntlet Peters (1986; 1988) threw down about the administrative states of the field abandoning theoretical fruitfulness for institutional vitality?

Craig may be right that the moments of dialogue he has in mind are infrequent. However, that may not be the key limiting factor. The dialogical-dialectical forum is a background that foregrounds individual theorists and draws attention to their competence in participating in more than one theoretical conversation at a time. The communicative intervention focuses on a scheme that promotes how to make and defend claims about communication relative to theories from other traditions and, thus, how to learn to participate in more than one theoretical conversation. There are many opportunities beyond this focus that

demand theoretical cosmopolitanism. A critical appreciation of the constitutive metamodel should extrapolate more possibilities for its presumptive communication design theory. Could Craig's design proposal inspire critical-reflective engagement with the institutionalizing of the field's communication practices, such as those in higher education and professional associations? Possibly, if attention shifts to what has been backgrounded. From a design stance, at least two critical matters stand out concerning the conditions and infrastructure for a field of communication theory envisioned by Craig.

First, the dialogical-dialectical forum could refer to more than just one kind of argumentative dialogue and the prospect of recognizing a variety serving different purposes in an evolving network of more and less institutionalized interactions that constitute the field in practice.

Consider regular academic life. For those who have participated on research teams or in interdisciplinary collaborations, theoretical metadiscourse is implicated in devising basic ways for a team or collaboration to work. For those who have participated in defining a department's search for new faculty, mentoring, promotion and tenure decisions, curriculum choices, syllabi construction and course approval, choices about outfitting labs and classrooms with technology, decisions about departmental or cross-departmental initiatives, and the like, the course of theoretical metadiscourse and metadiscursive practices are palpable if not explicit. For those on the receiving side of calls for proposals by funding agencies, participants in convenings by government or civil society organizations, or subject to governance decisions of professional academic societies, there is often a gnawing feeling, if not outright puzzlement, about the theoretical metadiscourse implicated in those activities. Moreover, those in academic and professional society leadership roles influence how the field is talked about in decisions about steering higher education organizations and professional societies.

The idealized dialogical-dialectical forum remains quite an abstract backdrop that leaves the point of arguing and the uses of argumentation open for further attention. Even if communication practice is the focal point, would the point of arguing among participants in the field be the resolution of which theory is better? To negotiate a collaborative plan for an interdisciplinary or trans-tradition project? Or, as a therapeutic adventure seeking to clarify the fence lines between traditions and to distinguish theoretical identities? All and more are possible. Craig's scheme for making and responding to arguments is useful, but the argumentative practices for the variety of theory-laden activities experienced in academic life certainly call for the elaboration

of the communication technology only initially sketched in the constitutive metamodel.⁵ Recognizing institutional routines and rituals as practices for designing communication for critique and cultivation to achieve productive disagreements in theoretical metadiscourse would contribute to the overarching project of the field of communication theory.

While these administrative-service moments do not emulate the purer form of theoretical metadiscourse speculated by Craig, these moments do involve participants in building processes, procedures, vocabularies, and structures for how institutional discourse about communication will proceed. These are moments when designing communication (field) about communication (theories) about communication (practices in society) are actuated or critically reflected upon and re-designed. In these design deliberations, institutional arrangements and institutional forms of communication about communication become all too real for faculties, academic leaders, and others who take some stake in shaping conditions for a field of communication theory. These deliberative practices problematize and define how the academic world distributes resources and access to legitimation. As such, the communication practices of institutional academic life are certainly an interesting matter of reflection. These communicative practices are directly involved in constructing the conditions for metatheoretical competence and the prospects for advancing theoretical metadiscourse and metadiscursive practices. Can these practices navigate the relationship between the institutional and the intellectual to foster theoretical fruitfulness?

Second, the forum Craig idealizes could refer to theorists as researchers and teachers while also considering the service and administrative aspects of academic life that carry different kinds of argumentative obligations and opportunities in ongoing field construction.

As noted in the preceding point, there is the academic business of constructing many kinds of forums consequential to the academic life of practicing theorists, researchers, and teachers. In academic life, many also take on various other roles in service of the institution – that is, in

⁵ Just to repeat that here a *technology of communication* refers to the means for “producing subject matters, devices for determining problems, and methods for directing and relating knowledge, action, and production” (Lewinski & Aakhus, 2023, p. 207; see McKeon, 1971/1987, p. 11-13; 1973).

higher education organizations and professional associations. That work can range from relatively informal to very formal roles. Across that range, those in such roles are faced with taking a meta-perspective about the conduct of communication in everyday academic practice and devising affordances and constraints that steer that conduct by articulating the pertinent differences and disagreements to manage. How could a research team be assembled? How should colloquia be arranged? What should the review committee's charge and agenda be? Should seed funding go to one team or multiple teams with differing, possibly competing ideas? And so on.

In these roles, profound practical challenges become apparent about the prospects for enabling theoretical metadiscourse and metadiscursive practices. It gets real when presumptions, theoretical commitments, methodological practices, and academic identities come into contact. Differences abound, and disagreements are likely. The communication design question remains: What disagreement(s) should we have (if any)?

When participating in any of the variety of service and administrative roles, it is typical that one must step back from participating in the making and defending of claims about a theory or theories, among others, to facilitate a way forward for others to achieve something together or to mediate differences so that others can co-exist and possibly thrive. In these roles, one is typically a third party to the implicit or explicit theoretical metadiscourse in play.

While Craig's proposal does not explicitly address such work, his role in making his proposal is illustrative of the demands of being a third party. As a third party, it is not always possible or advisable to take a position on the ontological and epistemological commitments of participants, but it is almost always required to take a position on how participants could and should communicate with each other to conduct their theorizing, researching, and teaching (Aakhus, 2001; 2011; Jacobs, 2002; Jacobs & Aakhus, 2002a, 2002b). Craig articulates a position about the kind of intellectual dialogue needed without advocating for a particular position to be taken within the intellectual dialogue. There is a pragmatism that shines through Craig's design proposal. The intervention values the maximization of inclusiveness of perspectives to address a communication practice that channels John Dewey and a forum for handling conflict between ideas to achieve the highest interests of the most participants while maintaining pluralism of perspectives, which channels William James.

Of course, Craig's constitutive metamodel could be interpreted as having a certain narrowness of focus that could preclude considerations about the institutions academics inhabit but, indeed, it is not necessarily limited in this way. The idealized dialogical-dialectical forum and its theoretical cosmopolitanism are one surface of a complex, emerging space for communication and argumentation about communication. Others include the varieties of facilitating and mediating activities involved in the administrative and service work related to communication and argumentation about communication. This is a crucial point at the intersection of theoretical fruitfulness and institutional vitality to be taken up in the next section.

Designerly considerations from the criticism of the constitutive metamodel

Craig's responses to criticism of the metamodel offer insights about elaborating the communication design proposal suggested by the constitutive metamodel. This involves exploring further the translation of the method of reconstruction and ideas about intervention for realizing a field of communication theory. Doing so also avoids the risk that focusing on the seven traditions ultimately reifies those traditions, which may or may not be desirable. Three lines of criticism will be considered, and design principles will be extrapolated from Craig's response to those criticisms.

Handling the truth: A designerly response to Myers's criticism

Myers (2001) agrees with Craig (1999) that there are many competing isolated theories in the field of communication and that it is desirable to facilitate communication and argumentation among them. However, Myers disagrees with Craig that the proposed metamodel of communication theories is a viable approach to achieve these goals. Myers's basic complaint is that Craig's approach trades truth for usefulness. Myers contends that Craig's metamodel is no more meta than any other first-order theory Craig outlines as traditions that make up the field of communication theory. The consequence, according to Myers, is that this will subsume all communication theory into a constructivist framework focused on communication practice. Myers bristles at the prospect. He admits that submitting to such a constructivist framework might draw the work within the various traditions into a common field. However, he argues that this will not foster the argument and debate

needed to select better theory from worse theory, let alone facilitate the achievement of the primary goal of theory in locating the fundamentals of communication (Myers, 2001, p. 223; 225).

In response, Craig (2001) points out that there is inevitably slippage between first-order talk and second-order talk at differing meta-levels about communication practice and theory. Such slippage is as true for theoretical discourse as it is for everyday conversation. This results in logical *paradoxes of reflexivity* that require a practical way forward, which the constitutive metamodel offers (Craig, 2001, p. 232-233). It projects an attitude of *theoretical cosmopolitanism* and the activity of developing *cosmopolitan language* to facilitate discourse across traditions for engaging over “practical issues while acknowledging paradigmatic differences” (Craig, 2001, p. 236). Translating Craig’s response to Myers’s criticism is an important task that is especially pertinent to those who find themselves in various third-party roles with the opportunity to construct conditions and infrastructure for mediating and facilitating theoretical metadiscourse.

Myers’s view suggests, in contrast to Craig’s design proposal, that communication and argumentation across traditions are best organized around the empirical verification of theory. The difficulty for Meyer’s view of truth is that communication practices, while empirically attestable, do not reduce to empirical indicators. (It should also be acknowledged that communicative practices do not reduce to the specific demands of a particular set of normative criteria.) So, while Myers has a point, the approach conveyed carries two significant risks of retreat from theoretical metadiscourse: indifference and incommensurability.

First, the approach advocated by Myers falls prey to the limits of a foundationalist view of method. Following Jackson’s (1989, p. 3; 1992) analysis, this is the idea that whatever methods are used, the point is to establish criteria that identify “the ‘best’ unit of analysis for interaction coding, the ‘best’ measure of communication competence, or the ‘best’ method for representing communication process.” A tradition on this account would presumably provide such methodological criteria. Myers’s position would be that only some traditions could achieve this. Even so, there is a problem. When “competing claims rest on competing ideas about verification (say, on experimental outcomes versus direct observation of naturally occurring events), it becomes apparent that the methods of verification are themselves in need of justification, and that that justification has nothing to do with facts” (Jackson, 1989, p. 3).

Second, there is a risk that the constitutive metamodel is understood to name the traditions to guard methodological conventions

and monitor their implementation. As Jackson (1989, p. 3) explains, a “conventionalist view of method takes methodology to be the establishment of rules for acceptance or rejection of empirical claims.” Those who follow the rules are taken to be doing research the right way, and their results are essentially justified by how well the study followed the rules of its methodological commitments. This would be an unfortunate but plausible development of the constitutive metamodel as it perpetuates an assumption of incommensurability among traditions that Craig is most certainly seeking to overturn.

Jackson (1989) argues that the conventionalist view of method dodges disagreement between what Craig subsequently called traditions while adding that the foundationalist view, such as Myers’s, treats any claims without a “scientific” basis as unworthy of response. For instance, the proposers of the *Science Court* in the early 1970s United States sought a design for communication to settle scientific controversies in policymaking. They struggled with the foundationalist-conventionalist dilemma, and many saw it like Myers (see Aakhus, 1999). The problem is that a design, like Science Court, that seeks to isolate the empirical disagreement through either foundationalism or conventionalism leads to argumentation that digresses from issues of policy and matters of practice without much progress regarding the empirical claims. A key aim of the constitutive metamodel is achieving a broader sense of argumentation about theory and practice in which *useful* is key to judging theory and practice and where *useful* appropriately includes normative, aesthetic, and best practice considerations (Craig, 2001, p. 237). The pragmatism is apparent. Useful is not about personal desire fulfillment nor a reduction of correspondence to testing the match between claim, observation, and analytic propositions but the expansion of correspondence to how “a solution answers the requirements of a problem” (Dewey, 1941, p. 178). Achieving such *warranted assertability* of claims depends on continuous, self-correcting processes of collective inquiry (Dewey, 1941).

The communication design implications for the field of communication theory can be expressed in the following principle: *avoid the retreat to indifference and incommensurability by designing forums that foster compelling collaboration or productive competition grounded in argumentation about communication*. Such a principle is extraordinarily consistent with Craig’s initial proposal, but it draws attention to the work of those who are responsible for creating forums where multiple traditions come into contact. The practice corollary to this design principle is to foster communication designs that organize the

management of disagreement essential to collaborative and competitive activities around the burden of proof for actual claims about communication practice. Jackson's (1989, 1992) *argumentative view of method* spells this out. In the context of empirical research, Jackson defines the investigator's task as building an empirical claim's case and then defending that claim against rival views in the design, reporting, and response to criticism. This means that the methods used are not separate from the empirical claim but understood as part of the claim-making where the science is grounded in the opportunity to make substantive challenges and the obligation to respond (see also Delia & O'Keefe, 1992). The substantive developments for theory and practice emerge in disagreement management organized by the burden of proof for claims about communication.

Jackson's proposal resonates deeply with Craig's advocacy that inter-tradition argumentation starts with the claims being made about communication practice. Where Craig suggests how to formulate claims and criticisms, Jackson outlines a general procedure for seeking resolution or for articulating the issues that guide subsequent investigations and argumentation. While Jackson addresses empirical research, the argumentative view can both include and develop normative criteria, aesthetic values, and knowledge of best practices. Moreover, the argumentative view can positively include practitioners and members of the public, who may also disagree with scientific experts, in the substantive argumentation by marshaling their doubts and disagreements to advance a case-building enterprise for theory and practice (e.g., Jackson, 2023). These design elements improve the potential for including participants in discovery, framing problems, and developing answers.

A key test of the constitutive metamodel is whether these implications for communication design in a field of communication theory can be built and sustained. This can be investigated and can draw on insights from various traditions. What are the communication design practices in the field for advancing theory about communication? For instance, if we looked, would we find design practices like those Campbell (1984, p. 19-21) advised for funding research to promote productive argumentation: "deliberately funding competitors," supporting areas where investigators have the "means for changing each other's beliefs" over the "importance of the social problem," to "never let a single laboratory have the sole funding," and to split investigations into two or more independent investigations each with their own ways but with mutual access to the details of those approaches along with

funding for mutual criticism. Of course, there are numerous other institutionalized practices to consider. No doubt, there are some compelling practices out there and others to be invented that could address the productive interplay of theoretical fruitfulness and institutional vitality.

Handling constitutivity: A designerly response to Cooren's criticism

Cooren (2012, 2014) also recognizes the fragmentation of communication theory and the desirability of bringing coherence to the field via a constitutive perspective. In contrast to Craig, however, Cooren pursues what Myers accuses Craig of doing by proposing a way to render all the traditions of communication theory in constitutive terms. By *constitutive*, Cooren (2012, p. 5) means “the effects by which people in interaction manage to act and speak *for* or *in the name* of specific beings to which they feel (consciously or unconsciously) attached, whether these beings be principles, values, beliefs, attitudes, ideas, ideologies, interests, organizations, etc.” From this vantage point, he identifies what is essential to a theoretical tradition by what it says about constitutivity as he defines it and what is required from a tradition to produce further constitutive theorizing about communication. Taking Cooren's approach as an intervention into the technology of communication for a field of communication theory reveals two key differences with Craig for communication design.

First, Craig (2015) recognizes Cooren's approach as a first-order theory about communication while emphasizing, as in response to Myers, that the constitutive metamodel does not and should not subsume other ways of theorizing. It can be added in light of the previous section that Cooren's approach expresses a form of conventionalism about subject matters by setting out the criteria for what counts as good theory and theory-making. This might serve the building of a particular coherent tradition, but this differs from the field-level coherence Craig seeks. Cooren's approach to the practical organization of the field of communication valorizes its own first-order positionality (i.e., that constitutivity is the subject matter) as its second-order perspective about the field.

These contrasting senses about coherence in the field of communication theory make apparent a communication design principle that follows from Craig's approach: *embrace the field as a pluralistic whole on the unique terms of its participants in a project of constructing degrees of coherence out of differences among existing and emerging*

traditions. This invites reflection and invention of the mediating and facilitating practices and technologies of communication for the field of communication theory. By contrast, an immediate consequence of Cooren's approach to such concerns is to invest its positionality into the other kinds of theorizing in the field, which, as a field-level intervention, invites the risk of predetermining the coherence of the field. A risk Craig's metamodel does not invite.

Second, the constitutive subsumption proposed by Cooren is vague about how it engages and cultivates communication practice in society. Cooren's emphasis is on making various traditions speak for or in the name of constitutivity, yet where, when, and how such theoretical metadiscourse would take place is not a focal point. This could happen at the interface of practice and theory, as Craig idealizes, but Cooren (2012, p. 13; 2014, p. 23) is rather silent about this save for promises near the end of each article about the provision of conceptual resources for reflecting on real-world problems. The focus is instead on making theory and making a particular constitutive theory by following the strictures of that emerging tradition in light of its assumptions about constitutivity.

This engagement with Cooren highlights Craig's embrace of the paradoxes of pluralism as a focal, practical challenge that is generative of the theoretical argumentation necessary for making a field of communication theory coherent. The common ground for such argumentation is communication practice, not constitutivity. As a subject matter, communication practice offers a practical way to focus case-building for claims from a variety of traditions and a way to integrate claims from differing traditions into practical advice for cultivating practice. Doing so, however, is not without problems. It requires addressing the paradoxes of pluralism and admitting to the significant challenges in managing the relationship between institutional vitality and theoretical fruitfulness. With this, the warning from Peters's (1986, 1988) reconstruction of the Berelson-Schramm debate rings clear for designing communication in the field: institutions thrive on making boundaries while theoretical fruitfulness thrives on problems and puzzles that motivate inquiry and might also ignore boundaries.

Positioning communication practice as fundamental grounds for embracing the field as a pluralistic whole invites deeper reflection. For instance, the identified traditions take communication practice as something given in human experience without much attention to deep time orientations about why humans communicate as we do. This invites thinking about matters like biology and evolution that are not part of the traditions Craig identifies and whether such attention to communication

practices would be relevant in coordinating subject matters for the field. Can communication practice provide a viable grounding for embracing pluralism that stretches the extant boundaries of the field as defined in the seven traditions or enable useful boundary permeability?

Consider Tomasello's (2008, 2019) work on the phylogeny and ontogeny of communication that posits a *pragmatic infrastructure* for communication made up of cognitive skills and motivations of shared intentionality (cooperative motives, common ground, joint attention, recursive inferencing) that has co-evolved with human sociality and the emergence of language use. Tomasello's account provides a baseline from which to explain the cooperative bases for the emergence of communication practices. At the same time, Reboul (2017) offers a differing phylogenetic account of the emergence of human linguistic communication and consensual democratic decision-making. She posits that linguistic communication arose to externalize thought in an evolutionary process that co-opted human capabilities for perception and thinking while linguistic communication introduced the potential for deception. Humans thus developed a *mildly Machiavellian* orientation and capability for dealing with the advantages of linguistic communication and the risks of deception it introduces. This suggests in contrast to Tomasello that communication practices, such as those for democratic decision-making, result from external demands and opportunities of context, not from the elaboration of inherent cooperative motives. In another account, Mercier and Sperber (2017) reinterpret a vast range of social-psychological research on confirmation bias, suggesting that the bias is not a problem but instead a feature of individual cognition for participating in communication. They say that individuals possess a module of the mind that produces intuitive inferences about reasons to be expressed or that others express in communication. This module evolved relative to human social interaction for epistemic vigilance in communication that involves practices of making arguments to justify one's position or to criticize another's. Their point is that reason is for communication.

Indeed, it should be no surprise there is an opportunity for argumentation about communication beyond the field's boundaries and that such argumentation could incorporate both evolutionary and biological perspectives and communication practice. The constitutive metamodel does not preclude such an expansion but actually invites it. The key expectation is that claims about communication are attentive to practice. Each account briefly alluded to above explains in its own way why human communication practices exist and emerge as they do and

suggests how deep time perspectives can bear on understanding contemporary communication practice. As such, and even though these accounts do not spring from institutionalized areas of the communication field, they offer unique insight for developing subject matters about communication and the prospects of cultivating communication practice pertinent to theoretical fruitfulness.

Many investigators who investigate and theorize communication practice are not institutionally located in departments and schools of communication or affiliated with the main professional organizations. A key test for the constitutive metamodel's design thinking for the field of communication theory is how those in third-party roles for making forums can include participants and perspectives at the edge of institutional boundaries or beyond with the aim of advancing the field of communication theory. Craig's design thinking suggests how with regard to first-order theories while raising the question of whether the field's institutional practices are up to the rest of the task. Neressian's (2022) investigations offer insights for design thinking that bridge disciplines. Her research compares the cognitive-cultural systems built up in laboratory practices for doing research in the unique disciplinary fields of biomedical engineering and computational systems biology. The upshot of Neressian's deep ethnographies is found in her discoveries about the new epistemic norms and warrant building necessary at the boundaries of different fields for establishing the claims made when experimentalists and computational modelers work together. This has led to award-winning practical advice for structuring education that bridges these adjacent but disparate fields so that new investigators can master the lessons about norm and warrant building needed to advance inquiry across two different research areas. The design implications of the constitutive metamodel call for a parallel inquiry into and development of such field-level practices for communication theory.⁶ This is one key way to meet the demand for theoretical cosmopolitanism envisioned with the constitutive metamodel, and it is suggestive for finding ways to cope

⁶ Even within the institutionally defined areas of the communication field, these boundary matters arise: Specializations emerge, innovations in methods appropriate and respond to technological change, outlets for communicating scholarship proliferate, and expectations for engaged scholarship recast what could count as scholarly products. Neressian's insights warrant consideration for advanced education that specializes but does so by navigating the crossing of crucial boundaries.

with the burdens academic units have in adequately building and evaluating scholarship that crosses boundaries within the discipline.

Handling intervention: A designerly response to Cappella's criticism

Cappella (2020) recognizes Craig's metamodel as a principled way to characterize the field in terms of communication practice but criticizes its omission of biological approaches. This is not because Craig's metamodel excludes "predictions and explanations for communication behavior using biologically based concepts and operational techniques," Cappella (2020, p. 11) explains, but because biological approaches are considered "inappropriate descriptions of communication practice itself." Cappella (2020) argues that biological approaches make a unique contribution to communication theory that differs from cultural and social approaches and that should not be equated with the social-psychological traditions of the field. Craig (1999) had previously assessed biological approaches as not offering a unique theorization of communication practice relative to the semiotic, sociopsychological, and cybernetic traditions. Subsequently, Craig (2015) recognized the approach as a candidate tradition but had yet to see the metamodel extended in this direction. As suggested in the previous section, this is a possible and potentially desirable development. What is at issue between Craig and Cappella is the idea of *practical theory* with differing conceptualizations of *intervention* serving as a wedge that opens their contrasting perspectives about the relationship between theory and practice.

Cappella's view of practical theory conceptualizes how interventions should be made, especially what should not be left out when devising and making an intervention. Cappella's (2020, p. 11) concern is how "biologically-based variables (e.g., deactivation of occipital cortex) and approaches (e.g., inclusive fitness) [can] be integrated into the domains of communicative practice." Cappella puts Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and Daniel Dennett's *The Intentional Stance* into dialogue to situate his view of practical theory. Drawing on Pirsig, he frames intervention as addressing the operation of (biological) mechanisms while maintaining a holistic view of behavioral experience. Drawing on Dennett, he defines intervention as choosing the appropriate interventional stance for the circumstance. This could involve addressing functional operations, physical conditions of operation, or behaviors based on assumptions of intentionality. Cappella (2020, p. 14) thus elevates attention to the "bio-

behavioral antecedents and consequences” of communication behavior (i.e., physical conditions of operation) as an appropriate stance for “interventions to modify communicative practices.” His position is that this will result in a more robust, intervention oriented practical theory than that offered by Craig.

Cappella is advocating for biological approaches as a particular kind of communication theorizing of the first order. At the same time, his characterization of intervention challenges Craig’s conceptualization of practical theory. Cappella’s (2020, p. 14) key claim is that “[i]ntervention in communicative practice will necessarily involve more than just communication qua communication but will require data from and about the bodies enacting communication.” And so, for Cappella, practical theory means:

When intervention and modification are primary ends – the very definition of practical theory – then the unearthing and verification of causal processes are the *sine qua non* of theory and, I would argue, the bio-behavioral antecedents and consequences are significant elements of a full understanding of communicative expressions and effects (Cappella, 2020, p. 11).

This challenge is not without problems. It seems reasonable with regard to intervention that causal reasoning and the implementation of technologies to make changes would have a place in practical theory. Cappella’s more targeted claim is that the biological and behavioral have such a place.

Yet, what kind of practical theorizing would be involved when valorizing biophysical-material causation and the role of lower-order phenomena (e.g., genes, hormones) in changing higher-order phenomena such as behaviors and especially communication practices? There is little doubt that knowledge of bio-behavioral antecedents and consequences could inform intervention and be part of a practical theory, but how? Just consider that, for instance, looking for proximal causes in gene-behavior links as grounds for intervention into practice would be highly speculative empirically since epigenetic, behavioral, and cultural inheritance systems play a role in addition to genetic evolution (e.g., Jablonka, 2014). Moreover, behaviors are embedded within practices that uniquely intersect physical, biological, mental, and cultural domains with likely profound normative issues at stake. Attention to the proximal causes Cappella highlights would indeed beg many questions about how such linkages are part of theorizing communication practice and making

interventions. Such matters are not, however, outside the constitutive metamodel or its view of practical theory (e.g., Craig, 1983; 1996). Seeking “just the facts,” so to speak, for interventions would risk the same fate as the attempt to establish a Science Court (discussed above) for isolating and resolving factual questions in policy debates.

Advocating that biological approaches should stand alongside more prominent cultural and social approaches to the study of communication has merit but is, at best, only a partial step in understanding intervention on communicative practices. It is noteworthy that Cappella does not take up Craig’s invitation to make a connection between communication practices and the kind of empirical work inspired by biological sciences or technological interventions and their translations, such as those already found in pharmaceuticals or genetic engineering. Cappella appears to be advocating for a branch of communication research and practical theory to become applied biology and genetics, but it remains hard to see how that would lead to a more robust view of practical theory let alone intervention, such as hinted at by Cappella’s overtures to elevate the bio-physical in order to put that stance in play with functional and intentional stances.

There is more to be explored in the Cappella-Craig debate. Still, the differences over practical theory are sufficiently highlighted so far to locate intervention as an important issue in advancing practical theory for the field of communication theory. With this in mind, the considerable interest within the field and across society for communication research being applied to, engaged with, and translated into practice for the benefit of some constituency comes into focus. This concern with societal relevance is certainly bound up in justifying the practices of the field to those outside the field and, when successful, lends to institutional vitality by attracting reputational, financial, structural, and authority resources. However, whether the pursuit of societal relevance leads to theoretical fruitfulness remains an important issue for the field’s institutions to take up. Durham-Peters (1986, 1988) criticism echoes loudly across the decades.

There is a relevant communication design principle for the field to be elaborated from the constitutive metamodel: *Treat intervention as a way of knowing that builds knowledge linking theory and practice.* Whether intervention leads to knowledge is a key consideration for practical theory and the interest in societal relevance. This involves seeing what Craig (1996, p. 465) calls the theory-practice spectrum and admitting that while “practices are ‘theorized’ to varying degrees ... many practices are only minimally, which is to say hardly at all,

theorized.” It matters that the field of communication theory is one with many views that are more and less articulate about what counts as communication and why that matters for communication practices. For instance, an unexamined core of the Cappella-Craig debate is how bio-behavioral features figure in the description of a communication practice. Cappella’s attention to the method of intervention and the proper form of theory does not address the fundamental issue raised by Craig (1999, 2015) and implied by the design principle just stated: How (or whether) intervention leads to knowledge involves addressing ontological pluralism across the field of communication theory not just methodological pluralism.

And so, two considerations from a communication design perspective about theorizing communication practices follow concerning the role of intervention in linking theory and practice for the growth of knowledge about communication and for facilitating the move from productive fragmentation to a coherent field of communication theory. Neither of these call for or require that researchers use the same definition of communication, but both presume the value of clarity about what is being said about what counts as communication and why that matters for practice.

First, intervention requires a commitment to understanding what is designable about a communication practice that is consequential for a communication practice. While the constitutive metamodel places communication practice as the focal point of theorizing, its broader engagement has largely been about what counts as a communication theory. However, this glosses over the critical question for building knowledge through intervention: what counts as a communication practice, and what makes up that practice? Intervention brings this question into relief because at stake in intervention is a communication practice, or some aspect, to be made or remade to give shape or to transform the practice.

Very generally, practices can be understood as wholes made up of parts such that the synergy of the parts realizes the whole while the whole influences the synergy of the parts. The knowledge about communication derived from interventions will depend on conceptualizing and tinkering with these part-whole relationships to shape a practice toward some end. This may be what Cappella was driving at by putting Pirsig and Dennett into dialogue. Yet, as Barge and Craig (2009) have pointed out, interventional interests like Cappella’s are a specific kind of practical theory that grounds intervention in means of

mapping reality to inform practice, which differs considerably from *reflective* or *transformational* approaches to intervention.

Intervention calls for a subtle but significant shift in thinking about commonplace beliefs about communication that serve as points for comparing and contrasting theories as theories. Relative to intervention, the constitutive metamodel can be taken as inviting design thinking and design argumentation “about theories in terms of what they consider to be designable in communication and about the value of any particular theory as a source of design ideas” (Jackson & Aakhus, 2014, p. 126; Aakhus & Jackson, 2005). For instance, Aakhus and Jackson (2007) draw from research on language and social interaction to specify seven key features any designer should know when intervening with information technology to make a particular kind of communication rather than another (e.g., turning a quarrel into a negotiation). Lewinski and Aakhus (2023) specify eleven more drawn from sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and organizational theory for designing an argumentative polylogue (e.g., turning a community’s conflict into a deliberation). The challenge of intervention for communication theory is to consider, and even expand, conceptualizations of what counts as, or to include in, when considering part-whole/whole-part relationships that make up a communicative practice.

As theories in our field develop, our sense of what is designable can too. Increasingly, physical, biological, and technological matters are intentionally implicated in communication in ways that had not previously been possible or even considered – hence the panics about social media, artificial intelligence, gene editing, and enhancements through pharmaceuticals and computation. This calls for considering a shift from a purely vernacular orientation to communication to include built environments and infrastructure for communication and the way we use language and communicate in constructing these built environments around us (e.g. Aakhus, 2007; 2017; Jackson, 2015). Along these lines, we could take Cappella’s appeal to go beyond “communication qua communication” to biological interventions as a call to consider what is designable to change the communication experienced. Moreover, along these lines, Cooren’s appeal to understand how the non-human is put into communication with the human further extends how the communicative is conceived and the possibilities for communicative intervention.

Intervention links theory and practice by its inventions for communication practice and consequences for the qualities of communication realized. These inventions are knowledge products about communication that can take many forms, such as types of messages,

formats of interaction, or enabling structures (Aakhus, 2007; Jackson & Aakhus, 2014; Harrison, 2014). Obviously, these go well beyond conventions for what counts as a knowledge product, such as journal articles, books, and policy reports.

Second, intervention requires understanding the interplay of what is taken to be descriptively true and normatively right assumptions about a communication practice. As Craig (1996; 1999; Craig & Tracy 1995) points out, any theory must do so because communicative practice involves both. However, intervention involves design thinking and design argumentation that considers what *is* and *should be* but must also hypothesize and realize *what could be* for some communication practice (Aakhus, 2007; Aakhus & Jackson, 2004). Communication design, as Barge and Craig (2009) argue, is a mode of practical theory that is both reflective and transformative in its engagement with communication practice.

Practical theory differs from describing or evaluating practice because it is, in part, about inventing. Thus, design is not merely applying theory to practice, but it is a way of knowing that can be a disciplined approach to invention and discovery (Aakhus, 2007; Aakhus & Jackson, 2004; Jackson and Aakhus, 2014). Intervention involves causal reasoning in a sense that is broader than what was emphasized by Cappella and Myers and not readily apparent in Cooren. For perspective, we can draw on Aristotle's four causes – material, formal, efficient, and final – to understand intervention on communication practices (e.g., Buchanan, 2022; Hennig & Rauterberg, 2022). It is not enough to consider what a practice is composed of (i.e., its material cause) or the purpose of the practice (i.e., its final cause). It is necessary to consider how the elements of practice are arranged (i.e., its form or formal cause) and the making of the practice (i.e., its efficient cause). In these terms, the design brings formal and efficient causes into an explicit discussion about practice. A design stance calls for the development of knowledge about communication regarding the less explored formal and efficient causes of communication practices and the role of design thinking and design argumentation in linking theory and practice through intervention.

A key test for elaborating the design proposal evident in the constitutive metamodel is advancing the means for recognizing how intervention links theory and practice and the knowledge it develops about making and what is made. Jackson and Aakhus (2014, p.126) observe that “communication practitioners and scholars are doing a lot of designing,” which is evident in their “practical interests in campaigns, organizational change, conflict management, and technology

development.” Design is a way of knowing that can be a disciplined approach to invention and discovery. What are the institutionalized means for recognizing and developing the knowledge gained from the design thinking and design argumentation necessary for intervention, what is made through intervention as a key outcome, and what knowledge is developed about making a practice work better or differently when addressing authentic problems?

There are many institutional designs to be explored when design is positioned as a way of knowing that goes beyond the mere application of theory or valorization of direct, proximate cause and effect. This might include rethinking what is reported in the results sections of research studies so that methods of creating an intervention are included as findings (Jackson & Aakhus, 2014). It can include broadening the sense of scholarly products when evaluating cases for tenure and promotion or reconsidering the structures for supporting engaged scholarship (e.g., chemistry researchers require proper labs, what is the parallel for engaged scholarship?) (Aakhus & Allred, 2023). The extension of the constitutive metamodel explored here asks for a better understanding of the institutional practices within the field that offer principled consideration of the knowledge that derives from what is made through intervention in communication practices and from the activities of making through intervention.

Conclusion

We should deeply appreciate what Craig has achieved by articulating the constitutive metamodel because it offers a way to think seriously about the communicative practices of the field of communication theory and how these can be cultivated for the sake of communication as practiced in society. Recognizing the constitutive metamodel as a communication design proposal for communication about theory in the field makes it possible to open up the underexplored implications of this perspective for addressing the relationship between the field’s institutions and the field’s theoretical fruitfulness. Keeping in mind Craig’s relief that the constitutive metamodel has not been taken up in various bureaucratic dimensions of the field, it is worth considering the implications of the model for cultivating the communication practices of the field.

The design principles described here simply scratch the surface for cultivating the myriad practices in the field of communication theory that construct the field as we know it:

- Handling truth: Avoid the retreat to indifference and incommensurability by designing forums that foster compelling collaboration or productive competition grounded in argumentation about communication.
- Handling constitutivity: Embrace the field as a pluralistic whole on the unique terms of its participants in a project of constructing degrees of coherence out of differences among existing and emerging traditions.
- Handling intervention: Treat intervention as a way of knowing that builds knowledge linking theory and practice.

Future work should go further in articulating the constitutive metamodel in directions that take account of the service and leadership work in the field's institutions as suggested here to further test, refine, or redirect the constitutive metamodel and its implications for communicative practices across the field of communication theory. Such work should be motivated by a deep commitment to designing the disagreements we ought to be having about communication that will, in turn, advance understanding of *the communicative* and its practices as a fundamental obligation of participants in the field. The constitutive metamodel offers a coherent, principled and defeasible way forward.

I deeply appreciate Bob as a scholar and a colleague. His capacity for critical appreciation of multiple perspectives and his capability to locate the crucial issues to be addressed are unsurpassed. I greatly admire his theoretical cosmopolitanism, especially as expressed in his successful efforts in building institutions for communication about communication for the field of communication theory. His well-developed program of research and scholarship has been personally important to my own. Ever since I first heard an early version of his work with Karen Tracy on grounded practical theory at the 42nd annual conference of the International Communication Association in Miami in 1993 when I was a first-year doctoral student, I was hooked by the puzzle and promise of addressing the relationship between theory and practice in communication. Thanks, Bob.

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Remarks at PCA 2024

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The following remarks were published on the blog of Robert T. Craig, *{meta} discourses*, in a post titled "Remarks to the Pennsylvania Communication Association" on October 25, 2024. They can be found at <https://www.metadiscourses.com/2024/10/remarks-to-pennsylvania-communication.html>

(Following are my revised notes for a speech presented to the 84th Annual Convention of the Pennsylvania Communication Association, held at Penn State University-Schuylkill Campus, Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania, September 27, 2024.)

Thank you, it's great to be here, and it's great to see all of you here and that the PCA is thriving as a professional home for communication scholars in this region. It's especially great to see so many students in attendance. Since you represent the future of communication studies, while I mostly represent the past, we're a good group to engage the conference theme of "Pondering Our Past, Forging Our Future."

I was invited here this year to accept the Julia T. Wood Teacher-Scholar Award, and of course I'm very honored and grateful for that recognition.

Remarks

When Professor Schrader wrote to me about the Julia T. Wood award, she asked if I would be willing to share some remarks at the conference. I said yes, of course. But then, of course, I immediately started worrying about what I was going to say and soon realized that I wasn't really sure what constitutes sharing remarks. In an email exchange, Valerie and I agreed that it would be something like a short after-dinner speech. But I got interested in the question anyway. What kind of communication is sharing remarks? To begin with, what are remarks?

I vaguely remembered a famous quote, something about "remarks are not ____" but I couldn't remember who said it or what the "not" was. So I googled "remarks are not" and at the top of the results

was a helpful AI snippet reminded me that the quote came from Gertrude Stein, an early 20th century modernist writer, who once remarked that "remarks are not literature" — which I take to be a bit of a putdown of remarks. Also in the top Google results was a snarky tweet pointing out that Gertrude Stein is well known for her quirky remarks but nobody reads her literary writings anymore, which I think is basically true. Then it occurred to me that Twitter or X is a medium that consists almost entirely of remarks. It's a platform for remarks, and a lot of them are negative.

However, another helpful AI snippet informed me that remarks are not always negative. They express opinions that can be positive or negative, so that was a relief. Then I thought, when you make a remark about something, whether positive or negative, you are saying that the thing is somehow remarkable. And that thought became the inspiration for my talk tonight on what to me are some especially remarkable things about our discipline of communication studies.

Three Remarks

A lot of my scholarly work has been about the communication discipline, its fundamental purpose and how our work as scholars and teachers can contribute to that purpose. So the theme of this conference, "Pondering Our Past, Forging Our Future," is something I have thought about quite a bit over the years, and I'd like to share three remarks about that — that is, I'd like to point out three remarkable things about the communication discipline that I've learned over time.

1. We're both very practical and very theoretical. I got this insight from my communication theory students in an exercise where I asked them how their communication courses differed from courses in other subjects, and they often said that communication courses tend to be both more practical but also more theoretical as compared to courses like biology or psychology where you learn a lot of "facts". In communication courses you tend to practice communication and learn theories. Theories can help us think critically about practical problems, so maybe sometimes theories are more practical than facts. But how does that actually work, being both very practical and very theoretical? That brings me to my second remark.

2. We're very meta. Not Facebook or Instagram! Not that kind of Meta! I'm referring to metacommunication or meta-discourse — in short, much

of our work as communication scholars is talking or writing about communication, often developing new and carefully thought out ways of talking about communication, which is what I think of as communication theory. Communication theory consists of metadiscourse, that is, well-thought-out ways of talking about how we talk.

My little detour into the concept of "remarks" illustrates this way of going meta, taking a practical concept and reflecting on it, asking what it means. This is how our minds work as communication scholars: We go meta.

In a way, talking about communication is not remarkable in itself, because in modern societies everybody talks about communication. As the sociolinguist Deborah Cameron has pointed out, we live in a communication culture that produces a lot of metadiscourse, people talking about communication problems like loneliness, bullying, polarization, misinformation.

As I see it, our discipline's main role in society is to participate in that metadiscourse and to cultivate it.

We often contribute to the metadiscourse by saying, in effect, "here's another way of talking about that problem" and referring to some communication theory.

For example, at this afternoon's panel on communication challenges, we heard that students often say that talking about controversial issues is useless, that it's painful, hearing my deep beliefs contradicted hurts me, and so on, and our job as communication teachers is to suggest other, theory-based, potentially more productive ways of talking about dialogue and deliberation on controversial issues. And, in doing so, we can draw from a rich body of relevant theories, which leads to my third remark.

3. Our theory is amazingly diverse. There's no one theory of communication. There are hundreds of theories. Communication theory provides us with a great diversity of perspectives for thinking about communication problems. Many of those theories originated in other disciplines ranging from philosophy to linguistics, psychology, and so on, but we've made them our own by systematically developing these different intellectual traditions as ways of talking about communication.

I became aware of this theoretical diversity decades ago as an undergraduate student, as I was struck by how communication was a topic in so many courses that I took in other disciplines around the university. Many of those same ideas were brought together in my first communication theory course, where I studied them as different

perspectives on communication (psychological, sociological, and so on). It made for a fascinating but not a very coherent subject.

Many years later I came back to this problem. The field continues to be rich with ideas but the ideas are scattered and come from such different intellectual traditions -- literature, humanities, philosophy, psychology, linguistics, etc. -- that it's hard to see them as part of the same field.

Probably my most widely cited and influential work stems from an article I wrote in 1999, "Communication Theory as a Field," where I presented a metamodel of communication theory that included seven theoretical traditions--rhetorical, semiotic, cybernetic, phenomenological, sociopsychological, sociocultural, and critical.

Most communication theory textbooks include a chapter or section about the metamodel. For those of you who are undergrads and have studied one of those textbooks in a communication theory course, that's where you may have seen my name before. (Craig, Craig, heard that name somewhere...) So, yeah, I'm the "Seven Traditions" guy, and I'd like to apologize for giving you yet another list of seven things to memorize!

But honestly, I didn't write the article as an instrument for torturing students, I wrote it to develop a way of understanding how communication theory can be coherent and useful by contributing to the metadiscourse in society. Most of those hundreds of communication theories are based on a small number of fundamentally different conceptions of communication, each of which is practically relevant because it intersects with concepts and issues in everyday talk about communication.

Without going into details, the gist of the metamodel is that we can think of communication theory as a kind of conversation about models of communication and how they address practical problems. Rather than one unified theory of communication, we have several traditions of theory that give us different perspectives for thinking about problems. The idea wasn't to have a list of traditions but more like a dialogue or debate among the traditions that all of us can join in on.

So, as we ponder our past and forge our future, let's keep in mind these three remarkable things about our discipline: we're both very practical and very theoretical, we're very meta, and our theory is amazingly diverse. Those are my remarks and thank you for listening!