

## My VOICE

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### **Abstract:**

The Romanian field of Communication Studies needs to become autonomous. Autonomy means the distinctive character, in substance and form, of everything which relates to the study of the complex phenomenon of communication. The object of inquiry, as defined within the context of the numerous theories, the specific ways to approach it (methods or methodologies), as well as the subject of inquiry, who delineates between "important" and "less important" from a particular perspective radically differ from their correspondents in other disciplines such as social, political, or administrative sciences. The issue is delicate. The Romanian landscape of Communication Studies presently comprises voices whose tradition in research remains tributary to other areas of academic interest, such as persons whose academic origin varies from literature to sociology and from philosophy to ... law. Thus, construing the foundations that reside at the basis of an orientation towards Communication Studies is an imperative which my books define.

**Keywords:** voice, autonomy, Communication Studies

The 4th of July came all over again. Another year passed of the fifteen I spent looking for my way home. In an entirely *symbolic* manner, I chose the 4th of July to be the day I commence new academic projects, after I resolutely left the United States without looking back on a 4th of July. Thus, symbolically, I responsibly reiterate my return home, which I construct daily *within and through discourse*. Throughout my perpetual return, I continue to leave "my America", which gives my departure the new meaning that the return to "my Romania" produces in the hindsight. I adorned myself with all the gifts I received along the passage of time. I feel a Cleopatra on the verge of finding her voice. It is this search for my own voice that I want to write about. Beyond my adornments, which, as you all, I will *not* take with me in my grave, the *fundamental* me exists who is about to tell you the unfinished story of her return *home*.

On the 4th of July, 2003, I descended from the bus that brought me to Timisoara from Budapest in about six hours. As always, I flew in through Germany. My trip began on July 2nd on American territory. I recently searched into my memory and remarked that I flew back and forth over the Atlantic eighteen times total since I first left home, on August 7, 1999 to April 30, 2005. The flight over the Atlantic I just referred to was the fourteenth. At the time, I mistakenly thought it was my last. Still, that particular 4th of July, the National Day of the United States of America, the Independence Day, which I celebrated with my heart full of mixed feelings through my deliberate, self-conscious, and, symbolically, definitive desertion of the foreign country *and* return home will stay with me till my last breath.

I did not have the slightest intention to give up my plane ticket, although I was still waiting for my provisional permit of work in the United States, at the end of my doctoral studies. That permit did not arrive in proper time. I knew, on that July 2nd, that if I used the plane ticket, I was implicitly giving up my student visa (still valid at the time for another year) and lose any legal possibility to return to the States on the basis of extant documentation. I was foremost aware that if I ever return to the United States,

that would happen on the grounds of a *new* legal possibility, which would require new actions on my part. I had to choose between two very different options. I chose to return to Romania. No one made me do it. Therefore, I am the only one responsible for my decision. I could speak of my choice and its implications any number of ways, from metaphorical to legal, but ultimately what matters is *the fact* that I did decide. At the age of twenty-seven, I experienced uncertainty for the first time in my life. I am an extremely calculated person. I like to anticipate my future. I transformed my obsession for *knowledge* into authentic play with certainties. I imagined I could *write* my future, which is to say play *its (de)script(ion)*. Then I would run as fast as I could to catch up with my own words. I thought that way I prove their truth. I always managed to reach my own "limits of the sayable", as Michel Foucault would put it. My doctoral dissertation, *Play(ing) With(in) Parentheses: A Meta-critical analysis of communication and culture*, published by the ProQuest database, in 2003 and by the West University of Timisoara Press in Romania (Gabor, 2004) stands proof for my claims.

During my first six months in Romania, nothing significant happened. I only remember the day when my diploma of Doctor of Philosophy in Communication Studies arrived in the mail. My father found it and gave it to me. I was supposed to get my diploma at the graduation ceremony, scheduled for August 9, 2003. I missed the graduation because I left the States right after I defended my doctoral dissertation. Ironically, my diploma had just a moment of visibility, which I shared with my dad. Since then, it lays on the bottom of a drawer. I only took it out occasionally to photocopy it for whatever miscellaneous file. In Romania, my PhD diploma fails to mean a valuable object which one exposes on their office wall to confess one's professional identity. By the end of my six months adrift, I got a phone call from a former professor. He informed me our Faculty posted a couple of employment opportunities. Would I be interested in any? Would I consider applying? My response came promptly: I said yes. The first in a line which represents way too little of what I wish to do for the place where I grew as a

young intellectual, the West University of Timisoara. So, I had the unique opportunity to return to the Romanian academic system and commence my work *somewhere*. I stopped keeping not only my PhD diploma, but also the energy of my youth "in a drawer".

At that time, the Philosophy department joined Political Science and became a Faculty with a new name. Miraculously, when I returned to Romania, I joined the Faculty of Political Science, Philosophy, *and Communication Studies*. Journalism brought its resources to the newly created Faculty, which later produced Advertising and Science of Information and Documentation. My first semester as a simple instructor was long and difficult. I was unsuccessfully trying to follow some "lesson plan". I reckoned it would be wise to lecture less and dialogue more. I proposed "unorthodox" readings: intersections I could track between the two complex fields of Philosophy and Communication. That way I undertook an alternative approach to pedagogy, whose limits I feverishly tested ever since. Since January 2005, when I became an assistant professor, I became free from the chore of desperately searching for the possible connections between Philosophy and Communication. I put my entire effort into the edification and consolidation of the new field of Communication Studies in Romania. I stepped into the classroom fully aware that, given my expertise in Communication Studies, I was the right person in the right place.

The thing I really care for is the reading process itself. I let my students know it was more honest on their parts to miss a class than show up with their readings undone. The only ground and the unique legitimacy of our meetings resides in our prior to class encounter with the texts. I prompt my students to see those encounters as personal events, to identify their personal reactions to the readings, and to share them with others. Once they accept the terms of "our pedagogical game", my students understand that their voices represent an essential part in the discursive construction of knowledge. More importantly, they see freedom in expressing themselves comes with the

correspondent responsibility to themselves, to others, and to the texts. Our pedagogical game slowly changes Romanian academic culture.

Transforming every lack, deficit, shortcoming, or absence into an advantage, an excess, or a plus was and remains my destiny, which transcends the spatio-temporal limits of my own history. I spoke at large of my "orientation" or "inscription into the world" in every book I wrote. My practical ability to re-symbolize my personal events by referring to some ideal point out of any crisis opened countless doors, especially those to my own heart and mind. I place an explicit emphasis on the importance of research methods in Communication Studies. Instructing my students as concerns the "touch stone" of scientific work is my challenge, my *credo*, and my educational goal. I speak of research methods every time I step into a classroom. I use texts that facilitate students' direct experience of qualitative research methods in Communication Studies. Spreading the word on qualitative and critical research methods in Communication Studies among the students I worked with constitutes a long-time effort, which not rarely had no echo whatsoever beyond my classroom's walls. In other words, few people choose to use qualitative and critical research methods in their senior theses. The majority blindly believe in quantitative research methods.

Thus, nothing helped my students more than my books on qualitative research methods in Communication Studies (Gabor, 2014) and on rhetorical criticism (Gabor, 2015). For the first time, I could step into the classroom with my head up and got rid of my old defensive stand: I know the language barrier, but trust me and I will prove it to you that *these* American texts, not others are the best you could possibly read on the issues of interest in Communication Studies. Believe me, if there was anything just as good in Romanian, I would have found it. To help someone who simply could not read in English, I would peer them with colleagues who could facilitate their access to the meanings of the texts. However, the rate of "abandonment" as regards the reading process *per se* was still high, so I often felt compelled to lecture more than my principles

on the democratic character of the discursive space prescribed. My books help me and my students in our *Intercultural communication*, *Rhetoric*, and *Rhetoric in negotiations* classes. The alternative of reading in Romanian represents a welcome choice among my students. They feel ready to share their views as regards the readings, to the benefit of everyone else. Therefore, my books changed my/our lives indeed.

In the end, what is left for me is to continue my journey forward on the way of discourse. I will continue to write books which contribute to the edification and consolidation of the new discipline of Communication Studies in my home country. Since 2004-2005 when we may talk of Communication Studies here in Timisoara to 2018 it is not as if a century passed... which our fellow American colleagues may say about the history of *their* field. Yet, the Romanian field of Communication Studies still needs to become *autonomous*. Autonomy means the distinctive character, in *substance and form*, of everything which relates to the study of the complex phenomenon of communication. The *object of inquiry*, as defined within the context of the numerous *theories*, the specific ways to approach it (*methods* or *methodologies*), as well as the *subject of inquiry* who delineates between "important" and "less important" from a *particular* perspective radically differ from their correspondents in other disciplines such as *social, political, or administrative sciences*. The issue is delicate. The Romanian landscape of Communication Studies presently comprises voices whose tradition in research remains tributary to other areas of academic interest, such as persons whose academic origin varies from literature to sociology and from philosophy to ... law. Thus, construing the *foundations that reside at the basis of an orientation towards Communication Studies* is an imperative which my books define... and resolve?

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