Introducing Communication
John Durham Peters, ”The Problem of Communication,” Speaking into the Air
Lisa Gitelman, “Media as Historical Subjects”, Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture

Peters: “The Problem of Communication”

…. “the philosophically richest thinking about communication, taken as the problem of subjectivity or breakdowns in mutual understanding, is often found in those who make little use of the word.” (p. 7)
The ‘premodern’ meaning of the term imparts the rich history of the concept of communication.

1. Communicare: to **impart**, share or make common (14\textsuperscript{th} and 15\textsuperscript{th} century from the Latin)
2. A **stylistic device** in rhetoric in which one person adopts the role of one’s adversary.
3. Of **Belonging** to a social body
4. The **Connection** or linkage
5. A **Transfer or Transmission** (one way)
6. A **two-way** exchange
7. It is **Symbolic** interaction
8. The **forms** taken by interaction
Durham Peters’ position

“Communication,” in contrast, I take as the project of reconciling self and other. The mistake is to think that communications will solve the problems of communication, that better wiring will eliminate the ghosts.” (p. 9)

Communication is a “zone for inquiry”. (p. 9)

From this purview, history “works not in a solely linear way but by being arranged into various constellations.” (p. 3)
The 1920s until WWII. Five ‘views” on the idea of communication emerge.

1. The dispersion of persuasive symbols (propaganda).
2. A means to create rational social relations (clarity of meaning and elimination of semantic disorder).
3. Communication is an insurmountable barrier and humans are condemned to misunderstanding.
4. Communication is about an ontological open-ness to the otherness of others.
5. Communication can re-establish community and is about partaking in social life.
After WWII two perspectives or paradigms on communication become pre-dominant.

1. **Technical idea of communication.** Akin to the transmission or transportation model of communication. (signals)

2. **The therapeutic model of communication.** Inter-personal relations, healing and a restitution of our common bond. (meaning or significance)
Durham Peters

– In the contemporary period he points out the predominance of 2 great thinkers. Habermas and Levinas.

– Turn to page 29 and 30
– “Communication, in the deeper sense of establishing ways to share one’s hours meaningfully with others is sooner a matter of faith and risk than technique and method.” (p. 30)
Lisa Gitelman:

How can new media be understood as “historical subjects”

(notice her focus is on media, whereas Peters is on communication/s)

Looks at two case studies: sounds recording 1878-1910; WWW (now).
Lisa Gitelman:

1. Pluralize
Media is (not); Media (are). Medium is. They (media) are plural. They are not one. (p. 2).

2. Understand the relationship between past and present. But also understand it with respect to different types of practices and activities: eg. Science and Art. Something from long ago is still “art” today, whereas ‘older theories’ form science are not science today.

“Media muddy the map” (p. 4)

WHY?
Lisa Gitelman:

“Like old art, old media remain meaningful” (p. 4)

Yet like ‘old science’ they seem quite unreal: dated.

- media have a history, they come from the past;
- the convey a sense of ‘pastness’
- not only are technologies developed, so are protocols for their use. (eg we learn to use a telephone; we learn the conventions of email; we learn to text; we learn not only how to ‘use’ twitter, but when).
- protocols from one era my spill over intot he next, even though a technology might change. (new media are not the site of ‘epistemic ruptures; but of negotiated change’, p. 6)
Lisa Gitelman:

Her definition of media:

I define media as **socially realized structures of communication** where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where **communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collection of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged with popular ontologies of representation.**” (p. 7)
Questions:

How is information related to the concept of communication? Discuss with reference to Shannon and Weaver, but as well look back to John Durham Peter’s article from “Speaking in the Air?”

Is cybernetic theory still relevant?: If yes, then explain how? If it is not, then explain why.