I. Administrivia

A. I’ll return the first reading essays after class. Everyone is still on track to receive a 4.0 for the class, but some of you may want to revise your papers. Talk with me if you decide to do that.

B. I won’t be here next week but will check in from afar via Zoom. I will need help from someone on this end for that. You can use the Toolbox computer to make the link work.

II. Ideas from the reading journals

A. Shannon

1. What should we make of Shannon’s “bold, philosophical definition of communication because it is not backed by any reasons or counterarguments or rebuttals”? (Bethany)

2. In what sense is this a mathematical theory? “Aren’t all theories philosophical?” (Bethany)

3. Can’t the sender or receiver be the source of noise, systematically distorting the message? This doesn’t seem sanctioned by the figure. (Youjin)

B. Piso et al.

1. How do we manage ignorance so that it is helpful and not harmful? (Bethany)

2. What is “open communication” and how can that be cultivated throughout the life of the project? (Ayanna)

3. Could we stay committed to the possibility of epistemic equivalence (p. 649) and accommodate the kind of variability we seem to need situatedness for? (Jessica)

4. What should communication look like in the context of interdisciplinary activity to manage or prevent ignorance? How should it work? Dialogue seems promising, but what of conversation more generally? (Youjin)
C. **Krippendorff**

1. The act of making distinctions presupposes a paradigm that frames it. (Ayanna)

2. What is the relation between *knowledge* and *understanding* in cybernetic epistemology? Are they the same? (Ayanna)

D. **Zollman**

1. One might apply the semantics/pragmatics distinction to suggest that Zollman is supplying the semantics of group communication – the structure of it, that can be inflected in various ways in context. (Jared)

2. There are many costs not suggested by Zollman that might be difficult to accommodate in his account (e.g., emotional labor). As a result, concerns about epistemic oppression might arise in the context of some of these models. (Suzanne)

3. Can we discuss safe spaces and networks of learning in terms of costs and optimization? (Suzanne)

4. "To what extent can an *unfair* model be considered ‘optimal’?” (Youjin)

5. Can’t highly unequal distribution of communication links negatively affect knowledge production/distribution? (Youjin)

III. **Thoughts on the readings**

A. **Notions of communication in play**

1. Shannon: “The fundamental problem of communication is that of reproducing at one point either exactly or approximately a message selected at another point” (1)

2. Zollman: Not explicitly defined, but he embraces a transactional conception of communication where it is more or less direct depending on how many nodes the information must pass through to get to the receiver

3. Piso et al.: They embrace a hybrid view of communication that involves informational/transactional aspects and relational/affective aspects; “open communication” involves freedom of meaning to travel along both of these “channels”

4. Krippendorff: “communication is that observer-created relational construction which explains what makes a system defy its decomposition (without loss of understanding) into independent parts” (29)
a. This seems to depend on a conception of communication as information exchange among elements in a system – a systems theory/cybernetics assumption

b. Communication is “the dynamics of interaction and dependency” (30)

c. Communication is required to explain the “dynamic dependency between the behavior of a communicator … and the behavior of a supposed receiver” (30)

d. It is circular and self-referential in systems that include their observer among the elements observed (32)

B. The argument in Piso et al.

1. Main conclusion: “… while interdisciplinary research can help remediate damaging ignorance about complex problems, it also creates conditions in which … damaging forms of ignorance can arise” (643).

2. A version of the argument:

P1. Complex problems exhibit multiple facets that cannot all be addressed by one discipline

P2. Addressing a single facet of a complex problem generates damaging ignorance about it

P3. If you respond to a complex problem in a way that addresses multiple facets, you help remediate damaging ignorance (supported by P1 and P2)

P4. Interdisciplinary research (IDR) addresses multiple facets of complex problems

5. IDR can help remediate damaging ignorance (P3, P4)

P6. IDR involves multiple perspectives that must be integrated to be interdisciplinary (as opposed to multidisciplinary)

P7. Integration of disciplinary facets in a collaborative setting requires open communication among collaborators about their different perspectives

8. IDR requires open communication among collaborators about their different perspectives. (P6, P7)

P9. Collaborators will communicate in a way that reflects their situatedness, which could threaten open communication
P10. The collaborative group will also be situated in a way that inflects communication, which could threaten open communication

11. Unless the situated character of individual collaborators and the groups they constitute is managed, open communication can be threatened (P9, P10)

P12. If open communication is threatened in an IDR context, damaging forms of ignorance can arise

13. IDR creates the conditions in which damaging forms of ignorance can arise (8, 11, P12)

C. While interdisciplinary research can help remediate damaging ignorance about complex problems, it also creates conditions in which … damaging forms of ignorance can arise (5, 13)

C. Krippendorff and Grice

1. “…the epistemological unity – the unity of drawing distinctions and creating relations within an observer’s domain of experiences – characterizes knowledge as a process, includes a circular (interactive) concept of communication, and is capable of characterizing the self-referential nature of social systems that involve their own observers” (35)
   a. Communication derives from this epistemic position
   b. The epistemic position is embedded in the notion of the observer
   c. Systems that include their own observers converge to stable realities, these need not be any good – cf. Zollman 2010 on this point

2. In this account, observers are “co-creators of facts” – observation as a dialogue process involving elements that alternate between observer/observed and engage in distinction drawing and relation formation

3. There is quite a bit of similarity between K’s account of communication, relying on circularity and self-referentiality, and Grice’s account of meaning