

Constituted and Constituting Exclusions in Communication Studies

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Abstract

Despite their explosive growth during the past decades, the sciences dedicated to communication are largely marginalized in the academic communities worldwide: Typically, their publications are not read, their theories ignored, their curricula not proposed in prestigious universities. The stigma these "fragmented" disciplines suffer from has important and interesting consequences for their development and beyond, for the contemporary understanding of the role of scientific knowledge in society. How does invisibilization affect the identity of our discipline(s) and of the researchers who inhabit it? What does it say about the intervention of social values into supposedly "neutral" scientific fields? The analysis of this partly documented situation relies upon a discursive approach requiring historical resources and, at the same time, a precise attention to heterogenous experiences that do not "fit" in historically situated normative academic frames. The approach shows how constituted and constituting exclusions of communication studies are linked by fundamental questions about where science "is" and what it "does," epistemologically, practically, and politically. Identifying and acknowledging the power of sociocultural categories in structuring scientific practices leads us to put the authority, usefulness, and legitimacy of contemporary science in its proper intellectual, institutional, and sociocultural place.

Resumen

A pesar de su explosivo crecimiento durante las últimas décadas, las ciencias dedicadas a la comunicación están marginadas en las comunidades académicas de todo el mundo: por lo general, sus publicaciones no se leen, sus teorías se ignoran y sus planes de estudio no se proponen en universidades de prestigio. El estigma que sufren estas disciplinas “fragmentadas” tiene importantes e interesantes consecuencias para su desarrollo y, más allá, para la comprensión contemporánea del papel del conocimiento científico en la sociedad. ¿Cómo afecta la invisibilización a la identidad de nuestra(s) disciplina(s) y de los investigadores que la(s) habitan? ¿Qué dice sobre la intervención de los valores sociales en campos científicos supuestamente “neutrales”? El análisis de esta situación parcialmente documentada se basa en un enfoque discursivo que requiere recursos históricos y, al mismo tiempo, una atención precisa a las experiencias heterogéneas que no “encajan” en los marcos académicos normativos históricamente situados. El enfoque muestra cómo las exclusiones constituidas y constituyentes de los estudios de comunicación están vinculadas por cuestiones fundamentales sobre dónde “está” la ciencia y qué “hace”, epistemológica, práctica y políticamente. Identificar y reconocer el poder de las categorías socioculturales en la estructuración de las prácticas científicas nos lleva a situar la autoridad, la utilidad y la legitimidad de la ciencia contemporánea en el lugar intelectual, institucional y sociocultural que le corresponde.

A Deafening Silence: Ignoring the Sciences Dedicated to Communication

"After learning that my PhD is in Communication, a sociologist I know, one of some repute, replied with surprise, 'But I thought you were so sophisticated!' "¹ This anecdote is a textbook case of the kind of exclusion described by Erving Goffman as stigmatization: "While the stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind. . . . He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma."²

The story of Streeter would probably not surprise the reader, as it is common sense among the communities of *sciences dedicated to communication*³ that they are largely and durably kept away from the "conversation of disciplines."⁴ Typically, their publications are not read, their theories and methodologies ignored, their curricula not proposed in prestigious universities, their PhD students not hired in other departments, except sometimes for practical and technical teachings, etc. Indeed, despite their "unstoppable growth . . . at all levels of academic activity" during the past decades,⁵ these disciplines are largely marginalized in the academic communities worldwide.

Such constant unawareness is remarkable, especially if we consider, by contrast, the extent of the work carried out for decades now by researchers in these disciplines, the number of journals and books that support them, the considerable development of curriculums, etc. Therefore, the intensity of the exclusion indicates that we are not facing a coincidence, but a regulated eviction from the "order of discourse."⁶

This situation is only partly documented, for various, intertwined reasons that can be sorted into three general categories. First, because its perception mainly relies upon individual experiences and casual interactions such as the one quoted above, narrated by Thomas Streeter. Second, because it is not pleasant for us to think about it, as it concerns and affects us directly: In this case, we are both researchers and objects of the research. And third, because we lack a coherent analytical and theoretical toolbox to properly analyze this process of exclusion. Indeed, phenomena like silence or silencing, invisibility or invisibilization, and finally, exclusion raise tricky methodological questions, as they are intangible, disorganized, and/or do not fit into the main, dominant, explicit, obvious analytical frameworks. As such, they cannot be accounted for by using standardized methods, and any "demonstration" about them can easily be rejected as not objective, as scientifically suspicious.

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¹ Thomas Streeter, "For the Study of Communication and against the Discipline of Communication," *Communication Theory* 5, no. 2 (May 1995): 117.

² Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 12.

³ I use this generic locution to include all the names given to this field or discipline around the world, as the designation and thematic circumscriptions differ from country to country: media studies, communication studies, communication science, communication and media research, information and communication sciences, etc.: "Few academic units in communication used the same name (e.g., journalism vs. [mass] communication; communication vs. speech), so the lack of a 'common denominator,' within individual countries and internationally, may continue to impede further progress." Juha Koivisto and Peter D. Thomas, *Mapping Communication and Media Research: Conjunctures, Institutions, Challenges* (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2010), 29.

⁴ Robert T. Craig, "Communication in the Conversation of Disciplines," *Russian Journal of Communication* 1, no. 1 (2008): 8.

⁵ Koivisto and Thomas, *Mapping*, 21–22.

⁶ Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language," in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 215–37.

The difficulty of explaining the issue is precisely part of the problem. It further hinders our ability to recognize that the exclusion of sciences dedicated to communication has important and interesting consequences for the development of the discipline, and beyond, for our contemporary conception of the role of scientific knowledge in society. That is why it is relevant to do justice to these omissions by studying them thoroughly, in a situated way, and from an explained positionality.⁷ The present article is dedicated to this program, with the help of discourse analysis.

Peter Simonson suggests: "As one small way of blending the history of media research with ongoing work in the field (be it theoretical, empirical, interpretative, or critical), I would advocate recycling well-known and overlooked phrases from the past ("rhetorical commonplaces of the field") in our discourses today."⁸ One such commonplace is the "too frequent introspection,"⁹ "a periodic existential questioning, too often discussed,"¹⁰ an endless ritornello of the same laments:

The field [of communication studies] has problems relating to its historical *identity*: its *short tradition* as an academic discipline, the external influences coming from the media industry and the state, its legitimacy deficit, its diffuse research topic ("communication"), the *heterogeneous* academic backgrounds of its scholars, and the fact of being "scattered" all over places at universities. In Germany, as well as in America, these characteristics lead within the field to a "lack of consensus" on its subject matters and to difficulties in shaping a self-conception.¹¹

Such self-critical reflections appear, at least latently, in all of the discipline's monumental texts—as, for instance, in the so well known "Ferments in the Field":

In the call for contributions, we noted that "Bernard Berelson's much-cited lament on 'The State of Communication Research' nearly a quarter century ago marked not the 'withering away' but, on the contrary, the emergence of a vital new discipline."¹²

This rhetorical commonplace will not lead here to further regrets or complaints but to analysis. Following Erving Goffman: "The stigmatized individual tends to hold the same beliefs about identity that we [the normal] do; this is a pivotal fact."¹³ It is quite enlightening to consider that the stigma coming from outside the sciences dedicated to communication is also *endorsed* internally. From this perspective, the lack of recognition of the discipline creates a paradoxical and very original "self-constitutive discourse,"¹⁴ because exclusion is both constituted and constituting. In other words, this felt incompleteness, this self-devaluation, is a pivotal component of the "identity" of the discipline, what distinguishes it from all other disciplines.

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⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

⁸ Peter Simonson, "Writing Figures into the Field: William McPhee and the Parts Played by People in Our Histories of Media Research," in *The History of Media and Communication Research: Contested Memories*, ed. David Park and Jefferson Pooley (New York: Peter Lang, 2008): 311.

⁹ "Communications and media research has often been on the defensive, and given to perhaps too much and too frequent introspection, resulting in innumerable reconsiderations, reviews, turning points, crossroads, ferments in the field and many other pauses to consider where we are going and why." Peter Golding, Helena Sousa, and Karin Raeymaeckers, introduction to "Future Priorities in European Media and Communication Research," ed. Peter Golding, Helena Sousa, and Karin Raeymaeckers, special issue, *European Journal of Communication* 31, no. 1 (February 2016): 3.

¹⁰ Yves Jeanneret, "La prétention sémiotique dans la communication" [Semiotic pretention in communication studies], *Semen* 23 (2007).

¹¹ Maria Löblich and Andreas M. Scheu, "Writing the History of Communication Studies: A Sociology of Science Approach," *Communication Theory* 21, no. 1 (February 2011): 2 (italics added).

¹² George Gerbner and Marsha Siefert, introduction to "Ferment in the Field," special issue, *Journal of Communication* 33, no. 3 (September 1983): 4–5 (italics added). As soon as 1959, Bernard Berelson wrote that after a creative period, communication research was "withering away." Bernard Berelson, "The State of Communication Research," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1959): 1–6.

¹³ Goffman, *Stigma*, 16.

¹⁴ Dominique Maingueneau, "Analysing Self-Constituting Discourses," *Discourse Studies* 1, no. 2 (May 1999): 175–99.

With adequate theoretical, methodological, and reflexive tools, it is then possible to construct more fruitful questions: How does invisibilization affect the identity of our “fragmented” discipline(s) and of the researchers who inhabit it? What does it say about the intervention of social values into supposedly “neutral” scientific fields? What first-hand knowledge and experience of the effects of exclusion does our peripheral status give us, and how can it be turned into clues for a better understanding of the common underlying patterns of exclusion? This is what I will address in the following pages, with the hope that my proposition can lead to scientific, but also practical and political, discussions about the role of knowledge in promoting more inclusive spaces, especially in the academic fields.

Methodology: Looking for the International Disciplinary Territory of the Sciences Dedicated to Communication

The material I will discuss here has been systematically collected during ten years of inquiries,¹⁵ preceded by personal experiences of this “disciplinary territory.” I first witnessed various exclusions in my own French national context, without giving them special attention. But then, through a continuous collaboration with German colleagues since 2008, I noticed a curious phenomenon: Although our respective disciplines (*Sciences de l’information et de la communication* in France, *Medien-* and *Kommunikationswissenschaft* in Germany) developed in intellectual, institutional, historical, and cultural contexts that are very different in many respects,¹⁶ I heard and then read the same laments about the discipline(s) in France and in Germany,¹⁷ especially about their youth, their lack of legitimacy. The applied nature of the research was considered a problem for *Kommunikationswissenschaft*, while *Medienwissenschaft* was sometimes derided as a bad imitation of philosophy.

In order to understand the role and importance of disciplinary identity in my field, and to see if my experience, localized in two countries, could be extended to the international level, I began collecting “fragments from daily life”¹⁸ through observations, interactions with colleagues, and reading of various documents. As my object of study was still under construction and did not fit within the established theoretical and methodological frames of epistemology or sociology of sciences, Rosalind Gill’s approach was instrumental in inspiring my own method and allowing me to make sense of this blurry configuration. Gill writes:

I begin [the article] from experiences in the Academy—experiences that are often kept secret or silenced, that do not have “proper channels” of communication. My “data” are entirely unscientific, but nevertheless,

¹⁵ Sarah Cordonnier, *La production d’un territoire scientifique international: Les sciences consacrées à la communication à la croisée des circulations rhétoriques, institutionnelles et biographiques* [The production of an international scientific territory: The sciences dedicated to communication at the crossroads of rhetorical, institutional, and biographical circulations] (habilitation thesis, Sorbonne Université, 2018).

¹⁶ Sarah Cordonnier and Hedwig Wagner, “Déployer l’interculturalité: Les étudiants, un vecteur pour la réflexion académique sur l’interculturel; Le cas des sciences consacrées à la communication et aux médias en France et en Allemagne [Deploying interculturality: Students as a vector for academic reflection on interculturality; The case of communication and media sciences in France and Germany], *Interkulturelle Kompetenz in deutsch-französischen Studiengängen* [Key competences for higher education and employability], ed. Gundula Hiller et al. (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2017): 221–34.

¹⁷ They are synthesized in the citation of Löblich & Scheu above. For Germany, see also Nathalie Huber, *Kommunikationswissenschaft als Beruf: Zum Selbstverständnis von Professoren des Faches im deutschsprachigen Raum* [Communication science as a profession: On the self-perception of professors of the discipline in German-speaking countries] (Köln: Herbert von Halem

I contend, they tell us something real and significant about our own workplaces. They consist of conversations and e-mails from friends or colleagues, University memos, letters from journal editors and other “fragments” from daily life.¹⁹

Because of their number and coherence, I would not say that data like Gill’s are “entirely unscientific,” despite their heterogeneous formats and origins. A few years ago, when I read for the first time the “back-handed compliment” I mentioned in the beginning of this text, I strongly related with Streeter’s story.²⁰ I, as many colleagues with whom I had informal discussions, had also experienced this kind of contemptuous evaluation of our scientific skills and purpose, and the ways in which the disciplinary affiliation negatively “contaminates” one’s whole academic identity (reduced forever to the discipline in which the PhD has been done). Streeter encourages fellow media scholars to go beyond merely noting this phenomenon, to interrogate it and to “extend [their reflections] beyond the level of shop talk and academic gossip.”²¹

Toward that end, these fragmented observations are a crucial first step—though it is by no means a simple one. From a practical standpoint, such data are hard to collect. Such remarks are often made in passing, in the elusive interactions of the daily life. And more generally, the (lack of) consideration for the sciences dedicated to communication remains latent. Furthermore, due to the nature of stigma, those who are afflicted with it, no matter the number or consistency of their testimonies, will have a hard time deconstructing it.²² Outside the group, stigma will most frequently be denied. And when “unveiling” it inside the group, it is quite hard to be heard in a dispassionate way, as it can be perceived as a threat to one’s identity, and/or to individual or collective strategies to cope with or to conceal the stigma. For instance, over the years, my research about the specificities of sciences dedicated to communication has many times been seen as complaining too much: “too much . . . self-pity, prone to lead to accusations of being ‘cry-babies’ . . . more irony and humor would be useful,”²³ to cite just one such “Reviewer #2” assessment. It has also been seen as too implicated: “It seems to me that the author identifies herself/himself too closely and passionately with the ‘sciences dedicated to communication.’ ” It is indeed a common problem for research about exclusion of all kinds to be seen as non-objective, by contrast with research about and from “the normal.”²⁴ Ironically, such objections are typically based on normative, ideological assessments rather than scientific ones. Thus, speaking out is a contradictory strategy to the one wanting to maintain a low profile, aiming “to convince the public to use a softer social label for the category in question.”²⁵ (I will come back to the two-faceted

Verlag, 2010), esp. 19–40. For France, see also Robert Boure, “Les sciences de l’information et de la communication au risque de l’expertise? Sur et sous des pratiques scientifiques” [Information and communication sciences at the risk of expertise? On and beneath scientific practices], *Réseaux* 15, no. 82–83 (1997): 233–53.

¹⁸ Rosalind Gill, “Breaking the Silence: The Hidden Injuries of Neo-Liberal Academia,” *Feministische Studien* 34 (2016): 43.

¹⁹ Gill, “Breaking,” 43.

²⁰ Streeter, “For the Study,” 127.

²¹ Streeter, 117.

²² “Certainly, members of our field are well aware that we are not always taken seriously by scholars in other disciplines (DeFleur 1998; Downing 2006; Livingstone, 2009; Rogers 1997; Streeter 1995); as McChesney (1993, 100) colorfully described it, ‘communication is seemingly regarded by the pooh-bahs in history, political science, and sociology as having roughly the same intellectual merit as, say, driver’s education.’ ” Mel Stanfill, “Finding Birds of a Feather: Multiple Memberships and Diversity without Divisiveness in Communication Research,” *Communication Theory* 22, no. 1 (February 2012): 17.

²³ Making jokes is one of the tactics at the disposal for the stigmatized, following Goffman.

²⁴ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99.

²⁵ Goffman, *Stigma*, 36.

problem of personal implication and complaint in the last part of this article, as it is also a common critique addressed to the sciences dedicated to communication in general.)

The collection and analysis of situated cases, even if they are heterogenous, blurry, or fragmentary, brings attention to the phenomenon. For me, they are not a result, but the precursor to a collective discussion. To conduct this exploration in a systematic way, I first gathered a corpus of twenty documents (books and journal issues) containing three hundred texts published over a period of thirty years (1983–2016) and dealing with the sciences dedicated to communication as a discipline at a global level and/or in international comparison.²⁶ I went in search of an international disciplinary discourse that would give me access to the main issues under discussion within the discipline. My approach for locating “rhetorical commonplaces” was genealogical: I started with the most recent publications, and from these identified previous, but still “activated” (quoted), resources. Thus, the corpus is composed mainly of *collective* works (from which at least one contribution is cited in other works) and also of pivotal individual texts that appear frequently. The number of citations for a given work attests to its visibility and importance within the scholarly conversation.²⁷ This corpus is both a (random in a way) coring and a curated sample of texts allowing me to work on the coherence of an “international” disciplinary community through comparison, quantitative analysis, and observation of temporal continuities. I subjected these texts to several types of analysis (thematic, editorial, enunciative, quantitative, contextualization, cross-citation, etc.), but for the purpose of the present text, I will just take some examples and citations from this corpus.

Both sets of collected material—daily observations and corpus texts—granted me access to what Goffman described as “a publication of some kind which gives voice to shared feelings, consolidating and stabilizing for the reader his sense of the realness of ‘his’ [stigmatized] group and his attachment to it. Here the ideology of the members is formulated—their complaints, their aspirations, their politics.”²⁸

In conducting this inquiry, I contributed to other kinds of exclusion. Indeed, by definition, my identification of “the discipline” with its most common international conceptions has led me to ignore (or to be unable to reach, due to language, online accessibility, etc.) marginalized discourses within the discipline.²⁹ That is why the material I share here comes primarily from France (especially the daily observations) and deals almost only with Western countries, whose role is dominant in the current processes of academic globalization. In order to better understand the complex processes of homoge-

²⁶ For a full list of the texts, see Sarah Cordonnier, “Les sciences consacrées à la communication, laboratoire disciplinaire? Analyses exploratoires d’un discours ‘international’” [The sciences dedicated to communication as disciplinary laboratory? Exploratory analysis of an “international” discourse], *Revue française des sciences de l’information et de la communication* 10 (2017).

²⁷ François Heinderyckx, Margaux Hardy, and Marc Vanholsbeeck, “Les revues scientifiques en information-communication: L’ère des mutations?” [Scientific journals in information and communication sciences: An era of change?], *Questions de communication* 21 (2012).

²⁸ Goffman, *Stigma*, 36.

²⁹ I mention this problem in the conclusion of another article: Sarah Cordonnier, “Looking Back Together to Become ‘Contemporaries in Discipline,’” *History of Media Studies* 1 (2021). Author nationalities in my corpus can be found in Cordonnier, “Laboratoire disciplinaire,” Fig. 1, <https://journals.openedition.org/rfsic/docannexe/image/2750/img-1.jpg>; and the countries and regions analyzed in Fig. 2, <https://journals.openedition.org/rfsic/docannexe/image/2750/img-2.jpg>.

nization and heterogenization³⁰ in globalized academia, and in the sciences dedicated to communication at an international level, further studies would be required.

Discipline Matters! But Why, and How?

At this point, some readers probably think that my research could be interesting in a speculative manner but easily fixable in practice, and not of their direct concern. It was indeed suggested many times *not* to consider communication studies as a discipline, because of all the previously mentioned “problems.” The “field or discipline” debate is another rhetorical commonplace.³¹ In our contemporary world, it would be better, and more satisfying, to think of communication as a “post-discipline.”³²

This perspective is rich but does not cover the entire scope of the issue. In this sense, it resembles many other works which are likewise seductive and “modern” but lack a firm conceptual basis about what discipline is. Indeed, “disciplines” have been studied many times as a theoretical object, and just as frequently, they have been disqualified from a practical standpoint as a useless, artificial, restricting framework. Neither epistemology, nor sociology of sciences, nor laboratory anthropology can fully confront this paradoxical object, from which academics repeatedly and unsuccessfully tried to escape. In both cases, scientific and practical, the categories, scales, factors, and focuses of the study are most often very confused or unstable.

Commonplace Impasses in the Study of “Discipline”

In many cases, the works on discipline start from a *normative* ideal of scientific knowledge rather than from the reality of practices—or, on the contrary, remain too close to those practices without putting them into broader historical contexts. That is why, for instance, they often implicitly activate the “invisible college” model,³³ where characteristics of knowledge and characteristics of scientific communities are “glued” together in a (chrono)logical movement: first the idea and a very small group of bright people; then development (“normal science” and groups of rank-and-file collaborators); and finally, specialization, followed by decline.

This narrative which sticks chronological temporality and logical development together is more of a fiction than an analysis. Following Michel Foucault, this is even a mistake:

Their chronology [of thresholds of scientificity], in fact, is neither regular nor homogeneous. The discursive formations do not cross them

³⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

³¹ Kaarle Nordenstreng, “Discipline or Field? Soul-Searching in Communication Research,” *Nordicom Review* 27 (2007): 211–22.

³² Silvio R. Waisbord, *Communication. A Post-Discipline* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019).

³³ Diana Crane, *Invisible Colleges: Diffusion of Knowledge in Scientific Communities* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1975): 172.

at regular intervals, or at the same time, thus dividing up the history of human knowledge (*connaissances*) into different ages. . . . Moreover: each discursive formation does not pass through these different thresholds in turn, as through the natural stages of biological maturation, in which the only variable is the latency period or the length of the intervals. They are, in fact, events whose dispersion is not evolutive: their unique order is one of the characteristics of each discursive formation.³⁴

³⁴ Foucault, *Archaeology*, 206.

Empirically, no discipline follows a (chrono)logical pattern, which was besides conceived by Crane to explain domains of knowledge (intellectual contexts) and not disciplines. Indeed, in their cultural structures, *all* the disciplines lack coherence; all of them bring together heterogenous traditions, theories, methods, objects, etc.³⁵ “Discipline” is a useful category, but its scientific use has to be more accurate.

In his foundational study on the “chaos of disciplines,” Abbott recalls that the claim for interdisciplinarity emerges almost simultaneously with the constitution of disciplines: “indeed, the long history and stability of interdisciplinarity—unsuspected by its current publicists—raise the interesting question for why interdisciplinarity has *not* transformed the intellectual system.”³⁶ He states that academic organization will remain essentially disciplinary for the foreseeable future, no matter how many claims for interdisciplinarity, trans-disciplinarity, or post-disciplinarity are made. The reason for it is that “the disciplines constitute the macrostructure of the *labor market* for faculty. . . . Careers remain within discipline much more than within university”;³⁷ “the credential system [of disciplinary PhDs] dictates the disciplinary labor markets.”³⁸

³⁵ About his discipline, sociology, Abbott writes that it is “the most general of the social sciences, or, to put it less politely, the least defined. . . . There is indeed not one sociology but many. . . . Sociology, in short, is irremediably interstitial.” Andrew Abbott, *Chaos of Disciplines* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3, 4. This topic is widely covered in many other disciplines as well. Of anthropology, for example, Clifford Geertz writes: “The idea of a discipline . . . fits anthropology none too well. At once broad and general, wildly aspiring (‘The Study of Man’), and particular and miscellaneous, strangely obsessive (puberty rites, gift exchange, kin terminology), it has always had, both to itself and to outsiders, a blurry image. Neither method nor subject matter very exactly defines it.” Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995): 96–97.

³⁶ Abbott, *Chaos*, 134.

³⁷ Abbott, *Chaos*, 126 (italics added).

³⁸ Abbott, 141.

³⁹ Waisbord, *Communication*, 124.

A Communicational Perspective on Discipline Effectiveness

Extending the consideration of disciplines to their organizational consequences, it is then no surprise that “the field [of communication] has successfully addressed institutional challenges despite intellectual nebulosity and astounding diversity.”³⁹ The discipline is not a stable norm to which local practices can easily be attached. It is not equivalent to “science” or “theory”; it is not focused only on intellectual dimensions. The usual exegetes of the disciplines are led to “not see” what the erroneous (chrono)logical model hinders, in terms of understanding as well as in terms of normative dominations and exclusions.

The discipline operates forms of belonging, constraint, and scientific creativity which depend on different local, national, and international situations, and on their interpretation by various actors, having various positions, representations, and knowledge. It is adjusted to

the internal expectations of the activity and to the collectives that take charge of it. But it also concerns the legitimacy and the visibility of the people and their productions in and outside the scientific worlds.

It is then especially relevant to consider the “rhetorical resources for constructing and legitimizing disciplines,” as articulated by Robert T. Craig. Craig divides these into three different contexts: intellectual, institutional, and sociocultural. The latter, which has “a primary role,” consists of “ordinary concepts and practices more or less deeply ingrained in the cultural belief systems and habits of the general society.”⁴⁰ Sociocultural contexts are not supposed to be rational, objective, nor scientific. But this does not at all mean that academic environments themselves are preserved from commonsense conceptions: Sociocultural contexts are just as manifest there. Disciplinary intellectual and institutional contexts in particular come under, and carry on, “ordinary concepts” and “cultural belief systems,” establishing what Goffman calls “the normal” without allowing for its explication by analytical tools. So, while blurred and disqualifying representations of the sciences dedicated to communication have their deeper roots in sociocultural contexts, they are more often reflected in the more frequently observed institutional and, this latter especially, intellectual contexts, as we will see now with the support of examples from my corpus.

⁴⁰ Craig, “Communication in the Conversation,” 8–9.

Making Sense of a Stigmatized Identity

Intellectual Contexts: There are None so Deaf as Those Who Will Not Hear

The “intellectual context” is the more obvious in commonsense conceptions of the discipline. It consists in “classic and current texts, theories, problems, methods, and modes of analysis,”⁴¹ or, in the words of Abbott, in “research practices, evidentiary conventions, rhetorical strategies, genres, canonical works, and the like.”⁴²

⁴¹ Craig, “Communication in the Conversation,” 8.

⁴² Abbott, *Chaos*, 140.

In the case of the sciences dedicated to communication, this intellectual context does not seem to be clear at all: There are literally countless internal debates about the theoretical and methodological coherence of our discipline (or field). This situation partly results from a defective conception of what “discipline” is. Internationally, within the scope of my inquiry, administrative recognition of the discipline came “first,” or, at least, without an intellectual context that would be considered, internally and externally, as coherent. This “unique order” is conceived as a paradox—as we can see in the following citation, whose interest does not reside in its singularity, but in its similarity with many others:

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We argue that the “field” is defined on a social and institutional level, not at the level of “basic concepts” or disciplinarily, and not even in terms of a supposed common object of study. These perspectives more often than not are less reflective of any real intellectual coordinates than they are expressions of particular institutional and historical conditions, hypostasized into institutional forms, which then react back upon the organisation of ongoing study and research. We agree with Peters when he argues that “‘Communication’ has come to be administratively, not conceptually defined” (Peters 1986, p. 528).⁴³

⁴³ Koivisto and Thomas, *Mapping*, 40–41.

The intellectual discomfort resulting from this specific history, and the associated difficulty in endorsing it as such, do not at all prevent the productivity of the discipline. But they contribute to hiding another important characteristic of this intellectual context: the almost complete ignorance, on the part of those *outside* the discipline, of the research produced within it.

Today, this lack of recognition can be felt, for instance, when we repeatedly read books or articles published in other disciplines, where what we consider to be basic knowledge about a topic widely covered in our discipline is lacking. Such silence is hard to analyze systematically, but bibliometric studies can allow us to approach it in a quantitative way. James R. Beniger, for instance, argues that “bibliometric studies over the past fifteen years depict the field of communication as an intellectual ghetto, one that rarely cites outside itself and is even more rarely cited by other disciplines.”⁴⁴ But that quantitative approach remains hard, too, because the sciences dedicated to communication are also rarely included in comparative or interdisciplinary studies, whether in history or in sociology of sciences:

[A number of factors] give rise to persistent prestige gaps between communication studies and its neighbors. Hard data are hard to come by—ironically because communication research is typically excluded from reputation studies and was only recently recognized as a doctoral field by the US National Research Council. In the single study that has included communication,⁴⁵ the US academic deans surveyed judged communication to have the *lowest* prestige among the twenty-five disciplines named.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ James R. Beniger, “Communication: Embrace the Subject, not the Field,” *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 3 (1993): 19, quoted in Streeter, “For the Study,” 122–3.

In an even more structural way, many journals relevant for the discipline are absent from reference citation databases.⁴⁷

The ability to quantify, in this way, the extent to which the discipline is or is not present within these databases and discourses offers interesting clues about exclusion, which can be supplemented by the numerous, even if scattered, testimonies about adjacent scholarship’s relative neglect of the discipline’s contributions with regard to a given object of study:

⁴⁵ D. J. Downey et al., “The Status of Sociology within the Academy: Where We are, Why We’re There, and How to Change It,” *The American Sociologist* 39, no. 2 (2008).

⁴⁶ Jefferson D. Pooley, *James W. Carey and Communication Research: Reputation at the University’s Margins* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016), xvii.

⁴⁷ “In contrast to other disciplines, such as political science, sociology, or psychology, important national journals are missing outside the US. ISI should consider including other major national or regional journals—for instance, the *Asian Journal of Communication*, *Communications*, *Keio*, *Nordicom*, or *Publizistik*. Such an adjustment of the ISI journal sample would improve the average national diversity of all communication journals.” Edmund Lauf, “National Diversity of Major International Journals in the Field of Communication,” *Journal of Communication* 55, no. 1 (March 2005): 148.



Figure 1: Katy Pearce (@katypearce), "I just skimmed a 2021 article from sociologists on a social media topic," Twitter, February 9, 2022, 3:25 p.m., <https://twitter.com/katypearce/status/1491508668478607360>.



Figure 2: Jessica L. Beyer (@jlbeyer), "I see this in political science too," Twitter, February 10, 2022, 5:14 a.m., <https://twitter.com/jlbeyer/status/1491626631005294597>.



Figure 3: Emily Ryalls (@ProfRyalls), "@ProfJillian and I had this convo a few years ago!" Twitter, February 10, 2022, 6:49 a.m., <https://twitter.com/ProfRyalls/status/1491650489892564997>.

Issues relating to the media are today being studied in many different disciplines, independent of what has been done, or is being done, by researchers in media and communication.⁴⁸

In the same way, researchers who are considered to be prominent within the discipline are often unknown outside it:

Carey was a giant figure within communication research, and his name is still getting regularly invoked. Perhaps more surprising is his invisibility outside the field. Even scholars working in cognate areas like film studies or the sociology of culture are ignorant of Carey and his work. Bring him up, and you are likely to get blank stares or puzzled allusions to comedic acting.⁴⁹

The accumulation of indices contributes to a better understanding of how “in topographic terms, communication studies sits in a depression, surrounded—if not by peaks—then by the foothills of the social sciences and humanities. The metaphor, overwrought as it is, helps to vivify the effects of prestige on the circulation of ideas.”⁵⁰

To make sense of this problematic (absence of) recognition, colleagues sometimes give the argument of the “poor quality” of research, of the “intellectual poverty”⁵¹ of this yet already institutionalized discipline. This self-disqualifying assessment is of an intellectual nature, which corresponds to what we usually consider as the “normal level” for such reflection. And yet, this cannot be the explanation for such silence because our research is neither criticized nor even discussed. To make this argument would imply that the work is at least consulted and reported on; to the contrary, it is completely overlooked, even by researchers working on “our” research objects. I consider this to be a fundamental characteristic of the intellectual context of the sciences dedicated to communication, which corresponds quite well to what Goffman describes:

We [the normals] may try to act as if he [the stigmatized] were a “non-person” and not present at all as someone of whom ritual notice is to be taken. He, in turn, is likely to go along with these strategies, at least initially.⁵²

How does the stereotypical and stigmatized identity of the sciences dedicated to communication turn them into “non-disciplines”? I will examine that through the following citation, which comes from a text otherwise dedicated to a subtle analysis of what disciplines operate in social sciences. It contains one of the few explicit mentions of the sciences dedicated to communication that I have found outside the discipline, and it condenses a lot of those latent positions about them.

Aborted disciplines and disciplines that are linked to social practices rather than bodies of knowledge are excellent topics for reflection: The

⁴⁸ Ulla Carlsson, “Has Media and Communication Research Become Invisible? Some Reflections from a Scandinavian Horizon,” *Gazette* (Leiden, Netherlands) 67, no. 6 (December 2005): 545.

⁴⁹ Pooley, *James W. Carey*, xi.

⁵⁰ Pooley, xii.

⁵¹ John Durham Peters, “Institutional Sources of Intellectual Poverty in Communication Research,” *Communication Research* 13, no. 4 (October 1986): 527–59.

⁵² Goffman, *Stigma*, 29.

communication sciences, for example, are defined by the existence of diverse and evolving forms of technologies that allow the transmission and reception of messages but do not result in the coupling of an object, a method and a community. They offer the example of an institutionalization independent of the emergence of a disciplinary matrix, even in the weakest sense of the notion developed by Thomas Kuhn.⁵³

For Fabiani (and undoubtedly for others, beginning with the editors of the text), a banal and imprecise link with ancillary technical objects is enough to give an account of what the sciences dedicated to communication are—that is:

1. mere social practices, which would not be mediated by “bodies of knowledge”; and
2. a counter-example that reinforces other researchers in the certainty that their own discipline is not “linked to social practices”—which is quite surprising: What is the mission of social sciences, if not to pay attention to “social practices” which are necessarily diverse and evolving?

Just a few pages above this extract, Fabiani writes that “the notion of discipline [is] a convenient descriptor of the composite practices inscribed under the name of science”;⁵⁴ but “to the naked eye, it is the diversity [of sociology] that strikes, or even the cacophony, or at least the low degree of paradigmatic integration”;⁵⁵ etc. And yet, when it comes to communication sciences, the “absence of a disciplinary matrix,”⁵⁶ rather than being a richness and/or a commonplace feature shared by all social sciences, becomes a problem. The rich analytical frameworks developed by Fabiani are valid for other disciplines but would be impossible to apply here. For Fabiani, it would be due to the “independent” institutionalization of the sciences dedicated to communication. But only the differential in *sociocultural* acknowledgment can analytically explain this distortion of the analytical tools themselves depending on the discipline under consideration.

Instead of enduring the exclusion, and taking on the stigma piece-meal, this analysis should lead us to change our perspective. *Internally and practically*, why would we have to prove the coherence of our discipline, and the quality of all the works produced within it, when others do not? Why would it be important to be heard, and recognized, as widely as possible in the academic community? And, *externally and theoretically*, what does this silence say about the sociocultural power of categories (like “discipline”) within contemporary academia, and about the differentiated intellectual legitimacy of scientific knowledge?

⁵³ Jean-Louis Fabiani, “À quoi sert la notion de discipline?” [What is the purpose of the concept of discipline?], in *Qu'est-ce qu'une discipline?*, ed. Jean Boutier, Jean-Claude Passeron, and Jacques Revel (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2006), 34 (my translation).

⁵⁴ Fabiani, “À quoi sert,” 15.

⁵⁵ Fabiani, 23.

⁵⁶ Fabiani, 34.

Institutional Contexts: Successes Hidden by Evictions

The *academic settlement*⁵⁷ of a discipline is fundamental for the perpetuation and development of a domain of knowledge. Indeed, as one of its most paradoxical characteristics, the discipline is at the same time a framework to produce new knowledge, and “an operation of stabilization of communicational and pedagogical devices allowing the reproduction of a state of knowledge.”⁵⁸ Institutional contexts allow the pedagogical and administrative identification of a discipline by various immediate and distant audiences (from future students and their families, media, university administration, etc. to, as we have seen before, the academic labor market). These contexts are tangible, visible, and yet generally neglected in works about discipline—maybe because they seem too trivial or even a bit contemptible: the realm of academic policies rather than a topic for “pure” researchers.

Sciences dedicated to communication have widely achieved their installation in institutional contexts, in such a fast and exponential way that Koivisto and Thomas call it an “international enigma”:

The growth of communications and media research in the post-war period may constitute an “international enigma.” Countries and traditions quite distant from and sometimes resistant to the dominant Anglophone models, such as France, or those with strong traditional academic structures and traditions that are often resistant to change, such as Germany, display similar features of unstoppable growth of communications research and study, at all levels of academic activity.⁵⁹

If we look closer, this undeniable institutional presence does not come with an unequivocal recognition, as the departments of communication are often relegated to the campus peripheries—whether it be the physical outer edges of given campus or the fringes on a national or symbolic scale. I have observed the sciences’ exclusion from prestigious places in academia in France, the US,⁶⁰ Great Britain,⁶¹ and Germany. And it has surely happened elsewhere, though I am unable to confirm this due to the scope of my investigation (see “Methodology”). The situation in the US is well described in the following citation:

On the campus periphery: Though some speech-oriented communication departments are housed within their universities’ arts and sciences faculties, most US communication programs exist as stand-alone schools or colleges. In practice this means that most programs are segregated from the other social science and humanities disciplines in both administrative and physical terms. The arts and sciences faculties, especially for their constituent scholars, remain the symbolic (and often geographic) center of the US university, committed (in theory at least) to

⁵⁷ Abbott, *Chaos*, 136ff.

⁵⁸ Fabiani, “À quoi sert,” 15.

⁵⁹ Koivisto and Thomas, *Mapping*, 20–21.

⁶⁰ “Everybody is always asking what communication is and why they don’t have communication departments at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale.” Michael Meyen, “Fifty-Seven Interviews with ICA Fellows: Byron Reeves,” *International Journal of Communication* 6 (2012): 1781. “As a discipline, we continue to struggle not to be seen as only a service department handling a lot of undergraduates and not necessarily as belonging at the table with all the other major players on campus. We have no presence at the Ivy League schools. That’s where many people get their models of who ‘belongs’ in academia.” Judee Burgoon, cited in Michael Meyen, “International Communication Association Fellows: A Collective Biography,” *International Journal of Communication* 6 (2012): 2384.

the academy's traditional truth-seeking mission. By contrast, professional units like communication—but also education, business, and architecture—are often viewed as questionably academic impostors that threaten to corrode the university tradition. Stand-alone communication programs, housed in their own buildings on the edge of campus, act as a brick-and-mortar drag on the discipline's legitimacy.

Midwestern state universities: For some of the same reasons, most early programs were established in large Midwestern land-grant universities, like Illinois, Iowa and Michigan State. [...] With only a pair of exceptions, the elite private universities on the Eastern seaboard have shunned the discipline altogether.⁶²

The partial exclusion of sciences dedicated to communication from institutional contexts takes various forms, depending on national academic histories. But everywhere and overall, it contributes to concealing the fact that these disciplines have mainly achieved their academic installation. Instead of eliciting satisfaction or even pride, this institutional accomplishment seems to reinforce suspicion or even rejection of the discipline from the outside. And internally, it raises endless existential questions about its identity: "Despite this success—or rather, perhaps precisely due to it—this area of scholarly activity lacks any clear scientific identity."⁶³

With some rare exceptions,⁶⁴ the continuous evocation of this "problem of identity" lacks a focus on institutional contexts (except when the institutional achievement is taken as an argument to diminish the discipline). It mainly consists either in mentioning the "immaturity" or "backwardness" of the sciences dedicated to communication by (often approximate) comparison with more established disciplines; or in lamenting its "fragmentation," the absence of founding fathers or proximity with professional or practical knowledge. In the latter case, this is done without comparison to other disciplines, which nevertheless present the same characteristics (see "Discipline Matters").

Once again, our analysis should lead us to change this cumbersome narrative, and even turn it into a productive understanding of the contemporary academia. First, instead of letting the stigma get in the way, the successful academic settlement of the sciences dedicated to communication should be strongly emphasized and taken as what it is: an interesting singularity. Indeed, the creation of a new discipline is very uncommon after the first settlement of disciplines at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century:

Recalling my earlier argument about institutionalization . . . we can see that there is one central social structure signifying full disciplinarity. That is reciprocity in acceptance of PhD faculty. Border fields often employ faculty of diverse disciplines. We can think of them as having become true disciplines in the social structural sense once they hire

⁶¹ "The division of British universities according to their age is important for the reason that a university's reputation and prestige are often defined by its historical status, and the quality of its teaching and research is often seen as correlating with its age and traditions. This has serious implications in the discipline of communication and media studies, since these subjects have not often been favoured in the traditional universities in the past. Recent developments, however, such as the establishment of media research institutes at such prestigious universities as the London School of Economics and Oxford University in the past five years, suggest that this tendency may be changing, as communication and media studies moves from the institutional 'periphery' to the 'centre.'" Koivisto and Thomas, *Mapping*, 86.

⁶² Pooley, *James W. Carey*, xv–xvi.

⁶³ Koivisto and Thomas, *Mapping*, 194.

⁶⁴ Wolfgang Donsbach, "The Identity of Communication Research," *Journal of Communication* 56, no. 3 (2006): 437–48. François Heinderyckx, "The Academic Identity Crisis of the European Communication Researcher," in *Media Technologies and Democracy in an Enlarged Europe*, ed. Nico Carpentier et al., 357–62 (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2007). Leonarda García-Jiménez and Susana Martínez Guillem, "Does Communication Studies Have an Identity? Setting the Bases for Contemporary Research," *Catalan Journal of Communication & Cultural Studies* 1, no. 1 (August 2009): 15–27.

mainly PhDs in their own field. Communication is an excellent example, reaching disciplinary status, in this sense, only very recently. (American studies is still trying.)⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Abbott, *Chaos*, 139 (italics added).

And second, the singularity of the sciences dedicated to communication leads toward a precise conceptualization of the discipline as a historically-situated intellectual and institutional frame. The unquestioned, reproduced (chrono)logical model of disciplines, going from discovery to institutionalization through intellectual coherence, is normative and even ideological, while its rhetorical strength is nonetheless producing effects. In this sense, we can look at discipline as an *apparatus*. For Foucault, an apparatus consists in a system of relations between heterogenous elements, resulting in “a sort of . . . formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function.”⁶⁶ The disciplinary system⁶⁷ emerging between the middle of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century responded to such an urgent need of organization, classification, and autonomy of sciences during the constitution of the Western modern academia, which is parallel to the constitution of the modern nation-state.⁶⁸ This particular urgent need no longer exists, and contexts have strongly changed since—but the disciplinary apparatus remains.

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980): 195 (italics in the original).

⁶⁷ Abbott, *Chaos*, 122ff.

⁶⁸ See esp. Johan Heilbron, “The Social Sciences as an Emerging Global Field,” *Current Sociology* 62, no. 5 (September 2014).

Sciences dedicated to communication thrived after WWII in an already constituted disciplinary landscape. It was no longer possible to back scientific practice with the “purity” and the authority of science understood as the production of a knowledge independent of contingencies (the famous ivory tower)—notably because older disciplines knew all too well how to make their own practical and vocational origins disappear.⁶⁹ Intellectual and institutional territories had already been claimed by other disciplines, which understandably wished to preserve them from any encroachment.

⁶⁹ See esp. Abbott, *Chaos*, 145.

For instance, even today in France, communication studies researchers cannot make their career at the prestigious Center for National Scientific Research (CNRS), despite the center’s creation of a Communication Studies department in 2008. During a committee meeting which took place in 2011, it was said that “according to the members of the national committee, the level of the candidates is lower in the Communication department than in the other Social Sciences departments.”⁷⁰ No one on the committee objected to this assumption, even as it would have been quite difficult for any of them (none of whom represented the sciences dedicated to communication) to compare “levels” in such a general manner, especially with respect to applicants, not hired researchers. Despite its lack of coherence, rationality, or logic, this opinion, of a *sociocultural* nature,

⁷⁰ “Compte-rendu des élus du Conseil scientifique du CNRS des 14 & 15 novembre 2011,” retrieved May 20, 2021 (my translation). The report of this meeting is still partly available here: <https://snscs.fr/2011/11/21/compte-rendu-des-elus-du-conseil-scientifique-du-cnrs-des-14-15-novembre-2011/>.

had consequences at an institutional level: It was one of the reasons given to the suppression of the department after only four years of existence (2008–2012). The intellectual definition of the discipline (existing in French universities since the middle of the 1970s⁷¹) has been carefully kept silent during the discussion, but the “cultural beliefs” constituting the sociocultural context were pregnant—and all the stronger since the negative opinions given without further precaution were confused by the stakeholders with an informed reflexive evaluation, without any (cognitive) price to pay in this well-tuned assembly.

The symbolic, intellectual, and institutional resources available for the sciences dedicated to communication to build a “disciplinary identity” and a disciplinary culture are, by definition, not the same as those of older disciplines. They mostly developed at the peripheries, from vocational demand in new fields, and in strong relation with public and private commissioning of surveys. The disciplinary apparatus still applies to them and constrains them, but it is also amended by their emergence in a more open, transnational, technological society, and in a more massified, standardized, and professionalized academic system. Their late foundation allows a greater lability in the theoretical and methodological constructions, a more reflective and distanced attention towards the norms that are imposed on the scientific production and the categories that circumscribe it, a better acceptance of the heterogeneity of knowledge formats, and a more horizontal way of interacting with the so-called “society of knowledge.” The constitutive intellectual-institutional exclusions with which the sciences dedicated to communication are confronted tend to mask these rather positive aspects.

From Exclusion to Questioning the “Normal”

Sciences dedicated to communication present huge national differences in both intellectual and institutional contexts.⁷² And yet, from a *sociocultural* perspective, they seem to suffer from a fairly homogeneous (lack of) consideration throughout the world, or, at least, in the Western countries (where I found my examples, and which are the main source of the “international disciplinary discourse” identified in my corpus). In this regard, the observation of exclusions provides a better understanding of academic globalization in general. Academic globalization is not primarily a unifying process in the production and circulation of knowledge, but rather a complex movement combining “cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization” with “fundamental disjunctures”⁷³ between intellectual, institutional, and sociocultural contexts—or, to say it differently, between “four

⁷¹ Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz, Fabien Bonnet, Sarah Cordonnier, and Carsten Wilhelm, “Communication Studies in France: Looking for a ‘Terre du milieu’?” *Publizistik* (2019): 1–18.

⁷² Peter Simonson and David W. Park, eds., *The International History of Communication Study* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016). Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz, ed., *Kommunikationswissenschaft im internationalen Vergleich: Transnationale Perspektiven* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2017).

⁷³ Appadurai, *Modernity*, 32ff.

dimensions: the subject of study, the body of evidence, analytical frameworks, and academic cultures.”⁷⁴

The development of disciplines dedicated to communication both resulted from and contributes to transformations of the academic field. Goffman notes that the stigmatized individual “can come to re-assess the limitations of normals.”⁷⁵ If not addressed directly, the stigmatized identity of the sciences dedicated to communication is a weakness, for the discipline and for its members. But if the causes and consequences of exclusion are better understood, disadvantages can also be turned into a strength: analytical tools to shed light on these rampant, sometimes sclerosing, homogenization processes.

Indeed, my material shows that instead of spreading scientific knowledge in all its cultural and local diversity, the globalization of academia mainly happens through:

1. circulating frames (or apparatus) that are detached from their original conditions of production, whether that be disciplines or, as we will now examine, the professional practices of research in academia;
2. broadcasting sociocultural beliefs like competition and international hierarchies at all levels and, as we will also examine, the place of scientific knowledge in contemporary globalized societies.

Institutional Contexts: Promoting More Inclusive Professional Practices in the Academic Fields

The imaginary in scholarly life is characterized by “a liberal dream of personal, autonomous epic, which has aroused generations of enthusiasm for scientific research and shaped countless vocations.”⁷⁶ Abbott gives a useful description of what he calls “professional purity” in the university:

In general, professionals who are doing what the public imagines to be the most basic professional functions are of relatively low status in the eyes of professionals themselves. It is the “professionals’ professionals” who are of high status. The same process happens in academic life, *perhaps so obviously that we never think to comment on it*. Professors give highest prestige to people who in fact do as little teaching as possible. Such people emphasize research, a purely professional activity. . . . In short, *academics like other professionals are subject to a “regression” into professional purity*. The intellectual consequences of academic regression of this kind are considerable. First, regression explains why to academics themselves the chief intellectual structures of disciplines are not applied disciplinary practices (like teaching writing), but rather the research practices and rhetorical strategies.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Silvio R. Waisbord and Claudia Mel-lado, “De-westernizing Communication Studies: A Reassessment,” *Communication Theory* 24 (2014): 363.

⁷⁵ Goffman, *Stigma*, 21.

⁷⁶ Judith Schlanger, *La vocation* [The calling], (Paris: Seuil, 1997): 226.

⁷⁷ Abbott, *Chaos*, 146 (italics added).

This type of narrative is paradoxical: “Being hard-working, self-motivating and enterprising subjects is what constitutes academics as so perfectly emblematic of this neoliberal moment” of academia;⁷⁸ but it also corresponds less and less to actual professional practices in a university context characterized by an increasing scarcity of material, organizational, and symbolic resources (especially positions, time, etc.). The pursuit of prestige or “dominant” positions—described at length by Pierre Bourdieu and since become common sense—may still drive some (aspiring) researchers. But their daily tasks go far beyond this single point. For a vast majority of academics, especially without a tenure position, the “pure production of knowledge” is only one activity among many others: teaching, of course, but also reviewing, auditing, assessing, communicating, organizing events, attending meetings, filling out forms, answering emails, etc. These activities require interactions with a wide variety of collaborators: students, academics, administrative staff, professionals from other sectors, etc. And the meaning of these activities profoundly evolves, as “academics work in universities that no longer envision their primary objective as the production and dissemination of knowledge for its *intrinsic* use value. Instead, we work in institutions that conceptualize knowledge production as necessarily part of the production of exchange values.”⁷⁹

The disjunction between the idealized and actual profession, and the resulting contradictory injunctions⁸⁰ with which researchers are confronted, are growing into “inter-academic power struggles exacerbated by the constant squeeze from neoliberal institutions, such as universities that behave increasingly like corporations.”⁸¹ For the academics, it creates isolation, endless competition at all levels, and poor working conditions, to the great detriment of all.⁸² It also hinders the production and social dissemination of scientific knowledge: Can the exhausted precarious worker invest the time necessary for a quality and meaningful investigation? Can the elite researcher achieving “professional purity,” in Abbott’s words, be in tune with the social phenomena he claims to report on?

In the long run, giving “highest prestige to people who in fact do as little teaching as possible” is deleterious. Even if legitimacy seems to reside solely in the intellectual contexts, art for art’s sake, science for science’s sake, cannot be a viable stand. On the contrary, this artificial separation, within the international context of “excellence” academic policies, contributes to more and more rigidity in the disciplinary norms—that is, in the ways we define, produce, and circulate “scientific knowledge.” When disciplinary apparatus was put in place, the missions and strategic choices of academics went beyond that and intervened in a different historical context.

⁷⁸ Gill, “Breaking,” 51.

⁷⁹ Lawrence D. Berg, Edward H. Huijbens, and Henrik Gutzon Larsen, “Producing Anxiety in the Neoliberal University,” *The Canadian Geographer* 60, no. 2 (2016): 178.

⁸⁰ Dominique Vinck, “L’activité de recherche en situation d’injonctions contradictoires” [Research activity in a situation of contradictory injunctions], in *Les études de sciences: Pour une réflexivité institutionnelle*, ed. Joëlle Le Marec (Paris: Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2010), 65–80.

⁸¹ Christian Fuchs and Jack Linchuan Qiu, “Ferments in the Field: Introductory Reflections on the Past, Present and Future of Communication Studies,” *Journal of Communication* 68, no. 2 (April 2018): 222.

⁸² See, for instance, Gill, “Breaking.”

Rather than being individually subjected to the impossible and alienating injunction to distinguish the scientific from the other aspects of the profession, the constituted and constituting exclusions of the sciences dedicated to communication require us to rethink and reverse the relations between all these aspects, not as contingent but as necessary and meaningful in our collective organizations. Attending to professional practices in the sciences dedicated to communication could allow us to amend the narrative of “professional purity,” as described by Andrew Abbott.

By choosing the sciences dedicated to communication, a discipline that is so often despised and/or ignored, and so anchored in practical teaching and applied research, researchers would likely encounter a problem of personal positioning in academia: They would have “played the game wrong” from the outset, as the overall situation provides very little room for a classical valorizing narrative based on individual talent, prestige, or “professional purity.”

In our “recent” discipline, a lot of now prominent scholars have had to take on a large number of very trivial tasks besides “pure production of knowledge,” and to do that very strategically to establish and defend their department, laboratory, journal, curriculum, and/or professional network.

As the material should show, the difference in status between the world-leading communication researchers and an unknown professor from far away didn’t play any role at all. ICA Fellows are by no means an “ultra-elite,” such as Nobel laureates in science (Zuckerman, 1972). In fact, quite the opposite is true. Courtesy, curiosity, and the appeal of doing something completely new are part of the fellows’ habitus. Most of the interviewees seemed to be glad to get the possibility to talk about themselves and their work.⁸³

The discipline’s global sociocultural contexts have probably left their mark on its professional culture and ethos through informal transmissions. That is why we are now well placed to defend the idea—so crucial today but expressed repeatedly during the past decades—that “occasional critical reflection on the pressures and limits within which we think and work is an intellectual, not just practical, necessity, and should be integrated with the specifics of our work.”⁸⁴ We are well placed to rethink the historically situated tasks, roles, and practical activities of academics in contemporary academic frames. Students’ demographics and needs, regional economic activities, practical knowledge, and local administrative matters are equally important, and thus worthy of academic consideration and reflexivity.⁸⁵

From our “excluded” position, we could then be able to explicitly reintegrate a variety of heterogeneous, living, informal, caring, rela-

⁸³ Meyen, “Fifty-Seven Interviews,” 1456.

⁸⁴ Streeter, “For the Study,” 118.

⁸⁵ “For all the interest in reflexivity in recent decades, the experiences of academics have somehow largely escaped critical attention. It is as if the parameters for reflexivity are bounded by the individual study, leaving the institutional context in which academic knowledge is produced simply as a taken for granted backdrop.” Gill, “Breaking,” 40.

tional, subaltern practices in our job description, rather than letting them to the more dominated members of the field.

Intellectual Contexts: Reassessing Relations between Scientific Knowledge and Common Sense in Contemporary Societies

Unveiling the discrepancies between actual daily practices and academic prestige has to do with an issue which is both epistemological and practical: the complex relations between scholarly knowledge and common sense, which are the underlying thread of this text.

The researchers' *exteriority* to their object for study is the basis of the scientific posture, both from a cognitive point of view and for the social legitimization of sciences. It is crucial because it is linked to the very status of the produced knowledge. This topic is treated continuously in the epistemology and methodology of the social sciences since the emergence of disciplines at the end of the 19th century, through frequent comparisons with the natural sciences. It constitutes a rhetorical commonplace today. But in the social sciences, exteriority appears to be difficult to maintain, due to logical, methodological and social reasons. Indeed, "the thought objects constructed by the social scientists refer to and are founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thought of man living his everyday life among his fellowmen."⁸⁶ Science does not intervene in a knowledge void. And especially now, in "modern societies," scientific knowledge is also part of daily, "lay," life: "notions coined in the metalanguages of the social sciences routinely reenter the universe of actions they were initially formulated to describe or account for. [...] *Sociological knowledge spirals in and out of the universe of social life, reconstructing both itself and that universe as an integral part of that process.*"⁸⁷

From their beginning, the sciences dedicated to communication have been in close contact with practices of everyday life and "commonsense thought" (through reception studies, etc.), as well as with different professional fields that are themselves particularly nourished by scholarly knowledge (media, culture and digital sectors, organizational communication, etc.). In this context, it is particularly interesting to come back to one of the fiercest, most hostile accusations leveled at the sciences dedicated to communication (along with their having a "diffuse research topic"⁸⁸ and no defined method): the fact that they are "linked to social practices rather than bodies of knowledge."⁸⁹ In other words, they are too receptive to "external influences coming from the media industry and the state,"⁹⁰ "too close" or over-indulgent to the professional fields, suspiciously involved in the objects of their study (see Reviewer #2 above).

⁸⁶ Alfred Schütz, "Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 14, no. 1 (1953): 3.

⁸⁷ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 15–16 (italics in the original).

⁸⁸ Löblich and Scheu, "Writing," 2.

⁸⁹ Fabiani, "À quoi sert," 34.

⁹⁰ Löblich and Scheu, "Writing," 2.

Such reactions are visceral rather than argued. The relationship between common sense and scientific knowledge is not questioned, but reified and normalized. We can see where this logic breaks down if we try to apply them to another (less stigmatized) discipline, or if we consider what those reactions call for: To be valid, must knowledge be produced from the “ivory tower” and/or have no social relevance? Should researchers have no interest in the topics they are studying? Could mere contact with social objects, or an appreciation of the specific knowledges of people under study, taint the “purity” of the scientific knowledge?

The problem of the (absence of) separation between scientific and everyday knowledge goes both ways: Scientific knowledge is involved in society, and the daily practices of academics are also fed by imaginaries, rhetorical commonplaces, “cultural belief systems and habits of the general society.”⁹¹

From their specific history and positionality, the sciences dedicated to communication are well placed to question in new terms the contemporary relevance of the separation between science and other knowledge as it was established more than a century ago. Some very creative propositions have emerged in this space, such as Robert T. Craig’s argument that the sciences dedicated to communication be considered as a practical discipline: “A practical discipline cultivates a practice by engaging critically and constructively with the normative metadiscourse that constitutes and regulates the practice in society. Practical inquiry itself is a metadiscursive practice that emerges from, reconstructs, and potentially influences ordinary metadiscourse.”⁹²

The sciences dedicated to communication contribute in their own way to showing how the impartiality of scientific knowledge is a social construct, drawing attention to practices that are neglected in everyday social science discourse and giving importance to the material, technical, social, and symbolic mediations at work in the scientific construction of an empirical object. “Contrary to what one might think, this particularity has in fact a double advantage: it forces the researcher to construct his or her research object, and it offers him or her a completely unique relationship with the field. On the condition, obviously, that one takes the measure of this particularity.”⁹³

The resistance it has faced from “the normal” has led, by now, to the discipline’s stigmatization rather than to acceptance by other disciplines or even shifts in their research practices. But if we manage to get out of a defensive and justificatory posture, we can begin to demand that knowledges of all kinds (scientific, practical, professional, or otherwise) be respected and included, rather than excluded, invisibilized or delegitimized. Rather than diminishing the value of

⁹¹ Craig, “Communication in the Conversation,” 9.

⁹² Robert T. Craig, “For a Practical Discipline,” *Journal of Communication*, 68, no. 2 (April 2018): 291.

⁹³ Jean Davallon, “Objet concret, objet scientifique, objet de recherche” [Concrete object, scientific object, research object], *Hermès* 38 (2004): 32 (my translation).

scientific knowledge, such a shift would place the authority, usefulness, and legitimacy of science in its proper situated, intellectual, symbolic, and sociocultural place: among others, at their service—not “above” them, with an undue rhetorical authority.

Conclusion

Individually, we do not have to endorse the disciplinary (intellectual) identity all the time, let alone champion it in every situation. We are entitled to stay “within” or to go “outside” its intellectual bounds—if a boundary can be identified at all! If stigmatized, we can use the variety of tactics that Goffman described to protect ourselves. And fortunately, despite negative representations of the discipline in sociocultural contexts, many colleagues from other disciplines are willing to work with us. Misunderstandings, the impression that one is being instrumentalized, and other misadventures of the sort, are part of the usual difficulties of interdisciplinarity and must be dealt with on a project by project basis. None of this requires us to have a clear idea of what the discipline “is.” At the intellectual level, “discipline” is a diffuse but powerful category, especially as it is often neglected and confused in common parlance and in epistemology. The main constraint of the discipline is institutional and is manifest at rare but crucial moments, notably in the labor market. That is why it is almost impossible for applicants—and consequently, concerned supervisors—to escape it, except by leaving the academy. At this level, the exclusion of the sciences dedicated to communication by other disciplines is at its highest; however, knowledge provided by our disciplines can also intervene, at this same level, in a different way—occasioning deeper reflection on the processes of exclusion in our work environments.

My analysis aimed to better situate the sciences dedicated to communication in their different contexts, to better identify the exclusions we suffer from, and ideally, to avoid reproducing these exclusions where we would have the latitude to do so. My discursive approach also required epistemological, methodological, and historical resources, and at the same time, a precise attention to tenuous things: heterogenous experiences, practices, and ideas that do not “fit” in classical, normative frames. Together with other analyses, my study contributes to the collective reflection about “what we are”—not by seeking a clear definition, but by identifying and acknowledging together the power of sociocultural categories in structuring scientific practices, in society but also in academia. Constituted and constituting exclusions of the sciences dedicated to communication are linked by fundamental questions about where science “is” and what

it “does,” epistemologically, practically, and politically. In the normal circumstances of everyday academic life, as long as no problem is encountered, we do not pay attention to the differences between internal and external constraints, as informed by intellectual, institutional, and sociocultural factors. But a better understanding of those differences can lead us toward an individual and collective solution to these academic challenges. Namely, by strategically playing with the fluidity of disciplinary identity, we may be able to respond to the “urgent needs” of today with new, richer, and more considered “rhetorical commonplaces.” Thus, the discipline—not despite its “impurity” but as a result of it—constitutes a space of rules, and at the same time, of densification, evolution, and freedom.

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