

## **Epistemological (im)possibilities and the play of power**

Effects of the fragmentation and weak institutionalization of Communication Studies in Europe

Phillips, Louise Jane

*Published in:*  
International Journal of Communication

*Publication date:*  
2016

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Phillips, L. J. (2016). Epistemological (im)possibilities and the play of power: Effects of the fragmentation and weak institutionalization of Communication Studies in Europe. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 689-705. <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/4509/1557>

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [rucforsk@kb.dk](mailto:rucforsk@kb.dk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

## **Epistemological (Im)possibilities and the Play of Power: Effects of the Fragmentation and Weak Institutionalization of Communication Studies in Europe**

LOUISE PHILLIPS<sup>1</sup>  
Roskilde University, Denmark

This article is about the marginalization of communication studies in the European research and education landscape. The central thesis is that the fragmentation and weak institutionalization of communication studies entail its marginalization in the competition for legitimacy. As a result, they stunt the growth of critical, collaborative approaches to communication theory and practice with the potential to challenge the theoretically thin, instrumental approaches to communication analysis flourishing in the neoliberal knowledge economy. The article takes its starting point in the debate about the fragmentation of media and communication studies, and then discusses the fragmentation of communication studies in Europe, considers the consequences for critical communication scholarship in the neoliberal knowledge regime, and sketches out some ideas for dealing with those consequences.

*Keywords: communication theory, dialogue, European communication studies, fragmentation, instrumental approaches, media and communication studies, neoliberal knowledge regime, power*

About two years ago, I attended a meeting at my university held by a representative of the Danish Research Council for the Humanities about the possibilities for research funding. The council representative listed the different research fields covered by the council. On the list was media research. I asked, "What about 'communication research'?" And the council representative added quickly, "Yes, media and communication research." The initial omission, I contend, is symptomatic of the marginalized position of communication research in relation to media and communication research in Europe. Communication comes and goes; now you see it, now you don't!

This article is about the marginalization of communication studies in the European research and higher education landscape. I consider marginalization to be a function of its fragmentation and weak institutionalization and suggest that we can fruitfully understand the effects of the current fragmentation and weak institutionalization in relation to current neoliberalized conditions in which competition for legitimacy as research fields and corresponding financial and institutional support is encouraged and knowledge production is instrumentalized in the service of the knowledge economy. My central thesis is

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank my research group on dialogic communication at Roskilde University and the anonymous reviewers for their comments on drafts of this article.

that the fragmentation and weak institutionalization of communication studies in Europe entail its marginalization in the competition for legitimacy and, as a result, stunt the growth of critical, collaborative approaches to communication theory and practice with the potential to challenge the theoretically thin, narrowly strategic, instrumental approaches to communication analysis flourishing in the neoliberal knowledge economy. In particular, the marginalization of communication studies makes it difficult to gain institutional and economic support for critical, collaborative communicative research initiatives *in spe* that could combat the instrumentalization of communication analysis and stimulate the development of communication theory through dialogue across metatheoretical, theoretical, and methodological differences.

Of course, fragmentation, weak institutionalization, the resulting marginalization, and the existence of theoretically thin, instrumental approaches, are not new; they are not caused by neoliberalism; and they are not unique to European communication research. In recurrent critical commentary, the historically rooted fragmentation of the wider field of “media and communication studies” internationally has been widely recognized and discussed (e.g., Craig, 1999; Putnam, 2001; Rosengren, 1993; Stanfill, 2012; Swanson, 1993; Wiemann, Hawkin, & Pingree, 1988). Moreover, the historically and currently weaker institutional position of media and communication studies vis-à-vis traditional academic disciplines is well known (e.g., Gray & Lotz, 2013; M. Griffin, 2011; Heinderyckx, 2007).<sup>2</sup> What I am claiming is that “communication studies” is especially fragmented and weakly institutionalized in Europe, compared with “media and communication studies” in Europe and with both “media and communication studies” and “communication studies” in the United States, and that that fragmentation has detrimental consequences for critical scholarship in the neoliberal knowledge regime in Europe. Although the focus of this article is European research, I invoke the United States for purposes of comparison and I also discuss the international field of media and communication studies in general terms—a field that historically has been, and still is, dominated by North American and European research. I apologize for the lack of reference to areas outside Europe and the United States, which is due to my limited knowledge of those areas; a wider international scope would have enhanced the quality and relevance of the analysis and would have struck a chord with the de-westernization movement in communication studies (see, e.g., Waisbord & Mellado, 2014). At the same time, I hope that, since fragmentation, a relatively weak institutional position, and neoliberalized conditions of knowledge production affect the fields of media and communication studies in many countries to at least some extent, the points made in this article may be of general relevance and interest.

I first briefly outline the long-standing, periodically recurring debate about the fragmentation of media and communication studies internationally, a debate in which North American and European scholars have been the most vocal. Following this, I discuss the fragmentation of communication studies in Europe. Then, I unfold my thesis about the effects of the fragmentation of communication studies in

---

<sup>2</sup> For instance, M. Griffin (2011) notes that, in the United States, communication and media studies have traditionally not been seen as a part of “an essential core liberal arts curriculum” (p. 1829) and still are not, in spite of growing recognition of the relevance of communication studies in light of the mediatization of the social world.

Europe on critical communication scholarship in the neoliberal knowledge regime. Finally, I sketch out some tentative ideas for dealing proactively with those consequences.

### **Fragmentation of Media and Communication Studies**

In the debate about the fragmentation of media and communication studies internationally, the question is often raised as to whether it is at all appropriate to call media and communication studies a “discipline” (e.g., Berelson, 1959; Heinderyckx, 2007) or even a “field” (e.g., Corner, 2013; Craig, 1999; Rosengren, 1993). *Fragmentation* refers to segmentation both into discrete research areas relating to particular types and forms of media and communication processes and into discrete theoretical traditions with little or no interaction, let alone cross-fertilization (Craig, 1999; Putnam, 2001; Rosengren, 1993). With respect to research areas, myriad diverse areas proliferate, defined in terms of particular media technologies (e.g., film, television, radio, digital media, social media, news media), forms of communication (e.g., interpersonal, dialogic, intercultural, organizational, political, science, and environmental communication), actors-in-contexts-of-practice (e.g., audience studies, news production studies, prosumption studies), or discipline (e.g., media history, media philosophy, media psychology). With respect to theoretical traditions, Craig (1999) claimed—in his seminal piece on the state of the field of communication theory—that communication theory did not exist as a coherent field owing to the isolationism of discrete specialties:

Books and articles on communication theory seldom mention other works on communication theory except within narrow (inter) disciplinary specialties and schools of thought. Except within these little groups, communication theorists apparently neither agree nor disagree about much of anything. There is no canon of general theory to which they all refer. There are no common goals that unite them, no contentious issues that divide them. For the most part, they simply ignore each other. (pp. 119–120)

In another well-known critique of fragmentation, Rosengren (1993), in a special issue of the *Journal of Communication* entitled “The Disciplinary Status of Communication Research,” painted a picture of communication research as a landscape dotted with “isolated frog ponds—with no friendly croaking between the ponds, very little productive intercourse at all, few cases of successful cross-fertilization” (p. 6).

Of course, discussion has taken place between different traditions—not least, in the paradigmatic battles—sometimes dubbed “ferment in the field”—between “positivist, administrative” and “sociocultural, critical” traditions (Gerbner, 1983). And, self-evidently, there is also cross-fertilization across traditions of communication theory. For instance, the sociocultural tradition of communication theory grew out of cross-fertilization across the semiotic and critical traditions, and many contemporary communication theories combine more than one tradition. For example, discourse analysis, in its various forms, traverses the sociocultural, critical, semiotic, and rhetorical traditions, and dialogic communication theories draw variously on the sociocultural, critical, and phenomenological traditions. In addition, there is a huge amount of research that traverses, and thus works to fuse, research areas, such as audience studies of

film or studies of interpersonal communication in the social media. But, overall, the general picture is of a fragmented and theoretically and empirically highly diverse research landscape.

In 2013, the recurring discussion of fragmentation of the field of media and communication studies surfaced in the Crosscurrents debate section of the journal *Media, Culture & Society* in and across three debate articles (Corner, 2013; Couldry, 2013; Gray & Lotz, 2013). In their article, Gray and Lotz (2013) make the point that the fragmentation of media and communication studies is related to its weak institutionalization and marginal status in the academy in the United States:

We haven't had the time to sink our roots deep into institutional structures to the same extent as have "older" departments such as English, Sociology and History. . . . Many university administrations, funding bodies and helicopter parents are not inclined to support us—indeed we have had bad press, and to some we represent a surrender of the humanities to populism, trash, and the cult of now. (p. 1019)

As a strategy for countering fragmentation, several suggestions for shared research platforms have periodically been made. Recently, for instance, Hjarvard (2012) proposed mediatization as a research agenda that may "help us continue the development of our field into a discipline" (p. 33). In an argument against Hjarvard's suggestion, Corner (2013) suggests that mediatization is likely to exacerbate rather than alleviate fragmentation:

The wider registration of the complex penetration of the media into the practices and institutions of everyday life that the term "mediatization" indicates . . . seems very likely to aid the further divergence of analytic pathways rather than to help firm up some common items for a more coherent ("disciplinary") agenda. (p. 1017)

I would add that mediatization is ill suited as a shared research platform capable of combatting fragmentation in the wider field of media and communication studies given that, in many research areas in communication studies, mediated communication is not a key object of study, despite the mediatization of the social and the saturation of everyday life with different forms of mediated communication. For instance, in dialogic communication research, there are many studies of mediated communication, not least in relation to the social media with their promise of the holy trinity of dialogue, participation, and collaboration; but, at the same time, there are also many studies of dialogic communication that are not about mediated communication—for instance, in relation to organizational communication, public engagement with science, citizen involvement in urban planning, health communication, and collaborative research. Common to this work is an interest in interpersonal communication in specific sociopolitical conjunctures and institutional and organizational contexts. If we distinguish between research on media (both media-centric and non-media-centric forms of research) and research on areas other than media, then it becomes interesting to consider relations—including relations of power—between research on media and research on areas other than media in this field called "media and communication studies." This brings me to the issue of the state and status of communication studies in Europe.

### **Fragmentation and Relatively Weak Institutionalization of "Communication Studies" in Europe**

Corner (2013) states in his *Crosscurrents* article that "the two principal established framings for work are, of course, 'communication' or 'communications' (with their rather complicating inclusion of work on areas other than media) and 'media' (which has more richly imprecise indications both of topic and of approach than the older 'mass communication')" (p. 1014). I agree with Corner that the inclusion of work on areas other than media is "rather complicating"! I say this from a standpoint rooted in my own experience: For the first 17 years of my research trajectory, I carried out media research, whereas for the past 10 years, I have engaged in communication research on areas other than media. And from this standpoint, I would add to Corner's point my own point that research on the media historically has had, and currently maintains, a dominant position in relation to communication research in areas other than the media. A reflection of this is the frequent designation of the field by European scholars as "media and communication research" or "media studies", as in the title of Corner's piece.

One element underpinning the subordination of communication studies may be the difficulty of demarcating its boundaries and establishing its identity in the face of overlapping research agendas in anthropology, sociology, psychology, linguistics, management studies, and parts of philosophy. This is tied to the origins and development of communication studies as an interdisciplinary field as opposed to a discipline (e.g., Berelson, 1959; Heinderyckx, 2007; Herbst, 2008; Servaes, 2015). As Herbst (2008) puts it, communication studies has been "stunningly interdisciplinary from the start" (p. 604), and "if you argue that your field is important, unique, and adds particular value to the academy, it cannot simply be 'interdisciplinary'" (p. 605). Several scholars identify interdisciplinarity as, at one and the same time, a positive quality of communication research that ought to be cultivated and a huge disadvantage in efforts to construct a coherent field and gain recognition among established disciplines (e.g., Craig, 1999; Herbst, 2008; Servaes, 2015).

It can be argued that communication research on areas other than media faces even greater challenges in marking out its territory than research on mediated communication: Whereas having the media as its main research object distinguishes media research clearly from other fields, having communication as its research object does not distinguish communication research on areas other than media clearly from those approaches in anthropology, philosophy, politics, social psychology, and sociology that theorize communication in similar ways. The similarities in the ways in which communication research and approaches in other disciplines theorize communication emanate either from the import by communication studies of approaches belonging to a discipline—as in the case of the social psychological tradition of communication theory drawing as it did on the discipline of social psychology—or from the use of an interdisciplinary approach—as in the case of discourse analysis. In the first decades of communication research, the social psychological tradition was dominant, and, consequently, communication was widely theorized, along the lines of cognitivist social psychology, as "interaction and influence" (Craig, 1999); thus, the borders between communication research and social psychology were blurred. Accordingly, in response to Berelson's text on the state of communication research in 1959, Bauer (1959) noted that "it is difficult to tell where 'communications' stop and the general process of personal

interaction begins” and that he “found it extremely difficult to distinguish properly the boundaries between a ‘communications’ problem and basic work done on cognition, remembering, personal influence, and reference groups” (p. 14).

It can be said that, for the above reasons, it may have been, and is, generally easier for media research to gain recognition in the academy than communication research on areas other than media. However, I claim that the dominance of communication research on the media over communication research on areas other than media has historically been, and still is, particularly pronounced in Europe compared with the United States. This, I suggest, is because communication research—encompassing both research on media and research on areas other than media—is much less fragmented as a field, less marginal, and more strongly institutionalized as a separate entity distinct from media studies in the United States. As Corner (2013) puts it, “The United States has continued an identifiably separate trajectory of ‘communications research’ more confidently than any other country” (p. 1014).

The stronger institutionalization of communication studies in the United States is manifested in the establishment in many universities of separate departments of mass communication and journalism, on the one hand, and communication studies, on the other. Whereas the number of universities in the United States with separate departments has decreased as a result of the widespread merging since the beginning of the 1990s of departments of speech, rhetoric, communication studies, mass communication, and journalism (M. Griffin, 2011, p. 1828), many universities still maintain separate departments. In Europe, the vast majority of departments of media and communication studies or media studies engage either exclusively or predominantly in media research and teaching.

Moreover, there are several U.S.-based journals in the field of communication studies that frequently publish research articles on areas other than media as well as research articles on mediated communication; there are no Europe-based journals that do so, with the exception of journals on discourse analysis. In spite of its title, the *European Journal of Communication* only very rarely publishes an article that does not involve some form of analysis of media or mediatized realities. During the 15-year period between 2000 and 2015, it published three articles on areas other than media. In another Europe-based journal, *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research*, just 3% of research articles between 2000 and 2015 were on areas other than media (see Table 1). In contrast, papers on non-media-related topics accounted for 26% of research articles between 2000 and 2015 in the *Journal of Communication* (see Table 2), one of the flagship journals of the International Communication Association and an international but U.S.-based journal with a majority of articles by North American authors and a current editorial board of which 68% of the members are scholars at universities in the United States (63 are from universities in the United States and 29 are from universities outside the United States).

**Table 1. Number of Articles, by Type, Published in Communications:  
The European Journal of Communication Research, 2000–2015.**

Article type	Year							
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Media	14	22	22	20	23	22	22	23
Nonmedia	2	0	0	2	1	1	1	1

  

Article type	Year								Total
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
Media	23	22	21	17	17	19	22	4	313
Nonmedia	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	11
									344

**Table 2. Number of Articles, by Type, Published  
in the Journal of Communication, 2000–2015.**

Article type	Year							
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Media	20	19	36	39	29	39	35	33
Nonmedia	10	11	14	2	10	13	20	5

  

Article type	Year								Total
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
Media	23	24	25	44	44	40	36	23	509
Nonmedia	13	9	10	12	15	16	7	9	176
									685

It has to be granted that the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) is an inclusive organization with not only a range of different sections on aspects of mediated communication but also with a number of sections not primarily about mediated communication. However, by far the largest sections with respect to number of conference papers, audience size and membership are sections on mediated communication: Digital Culture and Communication, Journalism Studies, Communication and Democracy, Audience and Reception Studies, and Political Communication. For instance, at the ECREA Conference in 2014, of the 17 sections and 10 temporary working groups, Digital Culture and Communication had the largest number of papers (94 papers), Journalism Studies had the second largest number (93 papers), Communication and Democracy the third largest number (82 papers), Audience and Reception Studies the fourth largest number (78 papers), and Political Communication the fifth largest (72 papers; see Table 3). Only two of the sections contained 50% or more papers on areas other than media (Organisational and Strategic Communication and Philosophy of Communication). Moreover, only 8% of the papers presented at the ECREA conference in 2014 were on areas other than



media (67 of 832; see Table 3). At ECREA conferences, which I attend regularly with papers on research on areas other than media, I experience a strong sense of being on the periphery and not “where the action is.”

By comparison, at International Communication Association (ICA) annual conferences, at which the majority of papers are by North American scholars, two divisions in which the majority of papers are about non-media-related research—Organizational Communication and Health Communication—are among the largest divisions. For instance, at the ICA Annual Conference in 2013, the Health Communication division had the sixth largest number of papers of the 25 divisions (139 papers), and Organizational Communication had the seventh largest number (114 papers; see Table 4). In addition, two of the other divisions with a majority of papers on areas other than media—Public Relations and Interpersonal Communication—had, respectively, the 11th (79 papers) and 13th largest number of papers (73 papers) of the 25 divisions. Furthermore, 23% of all the papers presented at the conference were on areas other than media (481 of 2,083; see Table 4).

**Table 3. Number of Papers, by Type, Presented at the ECREA Conference 2014.**

Paper type	Section/Temporary Working Group																		Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
Media	77	80	22	39	28	94	29	28	24	17	93	21	16	72	27	18	35	45	765
Nonmedia	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	11	0	24	16	0	0	5	0	4	67
Total	78	82	22	39	29	94	29	28	27	28	93	45	32	72	27	23	35	49	832

*Note.* Sections: 1 = Audience and Reception Studies; 2 = Communication and Democracy; 3 = Communication History; 4 = Communication Law and Policy; 5 = Diaspora, Migration and Media; 6 = Digital Culture and Communication; 7 = Film Studies; 8 = Gender and Communication; 9 = International and Intercultural Communication; 10 = Interpersonal Communication and Social Interaction; 11 = Journalism Studies; 12 = Organisational and Strategic Communication; 13 = Philosophy of Communication; 14 = Political Communication; 15 = Radio Research; 16 = Science and Environment Communication; 17 = Television Studies; 18 = Temporary working groups: Advertising Research; Children, Youth and Media; Communication and the European Public Sphere; Crisis Communication; Digital Games Research; Journalism and Communication Education; Media and the City; Media and Religion; Media Industries and Cultural Production; Mediatization.

**Table 4. Number of Papers, by Type, Presented at the ICA Annual Conference 2013.**

Paper type	Division/Interest Group												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Media	76	181	40	44	50	101	54	89	20	18	28	149	12
Nonmedia	0	0	13	26	18	12	75	0	21	26	43	0	34
Total	76	181	53	70	68	113	139	89	41	44	73	149	46

Paper type	Division/Interest Group												
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	Total
Media	162	29	52	144	117	38	66	50	21	47	7	7	1,602
Nonmedia	0	85	29	15	5	41	1	4	11	0	10	12	481
Total	162	114	81	159	223	79	67	54	33	47	17	19	2,083

*Note.* 1 = Children, Adolescents and the Media; 2 = Communication and Technology; 3 = Communication, Law & Policy; 4 = Ethnicity and Race in Communication; 5 = Feminist Scholarship; 6 = Global Communication and Social Change; 7 = Health Communication; 8 = Information Systems; 9 = Instructional & Development Communication; 10 = Intercultural Communication; 11 = Interpersonal Communication; 12 = Journalism Studies; 13 = Language and Social Interaction; 14 = Mass Communication; 15 = Organizational Communication; 16 = Philosophy, Theory and Critique; 17 = Political Communication; 18 = Popular Communication; 19 = Public Relations; 20 = Visual Communication Studies; 21 = Communication History; 22 = Environmental Communication; 23 = Game Studies; 24 = Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Studies; 25 = Intergroup Communication.

The fragmentation, weak institutionalization, and marginalization of communication research in Europe are mutually reinforcing: Given its weak institutionalization and marginalization in the academy, there is no strong institutional anchoring of, or backing for, communication research that could combat fragmentation by providing an infrastructure and incentives for collaboration across research areas; and given its fragmentation, the basis for collaborative action to challenge marginalization is, to put it mildly, very weak.

The fragmentation and weak institutionalization of communication studies in Europe, I argue, have huge implications given current conditions for academic knowledge production which are saturated by neoliberal discourse, encouraging competition in the name of the needs of the knowledge economy: competition between individual academics within research fields and departments, competition between fields and departments, competition between universities nationwide, and competition between national research consortia in the European and global knowledge economy. These conditions have consequences for marginalization and fragmentation. As Corner (2013) puts it in his *Crosscurrents* piece, fragmentation is likely to continue because "the production of contemporary academic knowledge is defined as much by

competition as it is by cooperation" (p. 1016). And, as Stanfill (2012) notes, "many academic turf wars may actually be resource wars, in which to the victors go the funding" (p. 18). Neoliberalized conditions individualize knowledge production at the same time as collaboration is celebrated rhetorically. Neoliberal competition for academic legitimacy, institutional status and support, and research funding works against collaboration across different areas of media and communication research. It means, for instance, that members of funding bodies are under pressure to support the disciplines to which they belong and represent while, at the same time, asserting that they support interdisciplinary collaboration. Moreover, the competition for legitimacy promotes collaboration across only a restricted set of theories and research areas. According to Putnam (2001), "the concern for legitimacy" has led to the building of "bridges that seem comfortable or safe, for instance, studies of the Internet that draw from organization communication, technology, and mass communication, or research on images of gender in popular culture and mass media" (p. 42). This furthers fragmentation within the field (Putman, 2001) and is anathema to the ideal of producing new knowledge dialogically across different metatheoretical positions, theories, and methodologies on the basis of a pluralist, collaborative approach.

Owing to fragmentation and weak institutionalization, communication research in Europe is in a very weak position in the neoliberal competition for legitimacy and institutional and financial support. The weak position of communication research, I would argue from my epistemological, theoretical, and political perspective, is a serious problem because of the spread of theoretically thin, strategic, instrumental approaches to communication practices both outside and inside higher education internationally. Above I cite Gray and Lotz (2013) who state, in relation to media and communication studies, that "to some we represent a surrender of the humanities to populism, trash, and the cult of now" (p. 1019). Unfortunately, that critique sometimes, in some cases, is right! Theoretically thin, strategic, instrumental approaches to communication research thrive in the absence of a fully legitimate, recognized, and institutionalized field of solid communication theories, concepts, and methodologies.

The weak position of communication research in the battle for legitimacy, then, is not across the board. Theoretically thin, narrowly strategic, instrumental communication approaches are doing very well within and outside the academy as they fit the terms of neoliberal discourse; research is constructed as a commodity and its usefulness is judged in terms of its success in generating innovations that strengthen the market position of the researcher or research team, research institution, and organization under study. Moreover, these approaches appear to be based on common sense rather than "theory" that is constructed as discrete from, and sometimes even in opposition to, "practice."

Theoretically thin, instrumental approaches define problems as failures of communication and offer easily understood, quick-fix solutions in the form of strategic communication initiatives. For instance, in relation to the policy of rehabilitation in care for older people in Denmark, a survey carried out by municipal authorities showed that older people were highly critical of the policy of rehabilitation whereby individual responsibility is ascribed to the citizen for her or his own care through the "help to self-help" of rehabilitation programs. The survey results can be interpreted in the light of mediated public discourse about the removal, reduction, or denial of care resources in cases in which the client appears to be too incapacitated for rehabilitation to be a realistic outcome of "help to self-help." In media discourse, such cases are invoked in critique of the economic and individualistic rationales underpinning rehabilitation

policy, and calls are made for an increase in public spending on care for older people within the (more) collectivist terms of welfare discourse. In the case of the survey, the municipal health authorities identified communication as the cause of people's dissatisfaction: For instance, terms such as *rehabilitation*, the authorities claimed, have negative connotations. The solution they accordingly came up with was better communication to clients, including the introduction of untainted terminology.

In theoretically thin, instrumental approaches, fragments of dialogic communication theory are quite often incorporated into the discourse of the social psychological tradition so that "dialogue" and "collaboration" are presented as means to achieve attitude and practice change according to pre-set strategic goals (Phillips, 2011). For instance, in the case of rehabilitation for older people, care staff in the municipality in question were sent on courses in dialogue-based, patient-centered communication in which communication processes were defined as the problem and solution, heedless of the constraints on meaning-making and action set by organizational orders and, more generally, the sociopolitical conjuncture.

Thus narrowly strategic, instrumental approaches, including those that instrumentalize processes of dialogue and collaboration, individualize problems and divert attention from sociopolitical and organizational constraints. In this way, they work to reproduce neoliberal, managerialist discourse as a strong component of the sociopolitical conjuncture and organizational orders. In contrast, critical, collaborative approaches to communication research define problems as products of collective meaning-making practices taking place in, and co-constituting, organizational contexts. They also give priority to democratic processes of collaborative decision-making based on principles of equality, mutuality, and community responsibility. In so doing, critical, collaborative approaches can contribute to destabilizing neoliberal, managerialist discourse and promote democratic, inclusive decision making. *Collaboration* is meant as not just collaboration across different academic traditions and researchers in those different traditions, but also collaboration between researchers and actors in the field of practice under study (e.g., medical and nursing staff, social workers, clients/patients, and relatives in cases of collaborative research on communication in health and social care). The aim is to generate knowledge across differences, including those of theoretical perspective, professional competences, organizational position, gender, and ethnicity. On a cautionary note, there is a risk here that collaboration is romanticized as a panacea for curing social ills, and insufficient attention is paid to the tensions emanating from the inexorable play of power/knowledge in collaboration whereby certain voices, articulating particular forms of knowledge and subjectivities, are privileged over others. Therefore, I support efforts to further develop critical, collaborative approaches that direct a critical gaze at the tensions in collaboration in the field under study and in the collaborative research process itself (e.g., Arieli, Friedman, & Agbaria, 2009; Ospina et al., 2004; Phillips, 2011; Phillips, Kristiansen, Vehvilainen, & Gunnarsson, 2013).

### **Epistemological (Im)possibilities and the Play of Power: What to Do?**

How can we, under these conditions, pursue and further develop critical, collaborative communication research committed to analysis of power/knowledge in play in the co-constitution of communication processes and the sociopolitical order whereby certain ways of knowing dominate and others are subjugated? Is it at all possible to compete within the terms of the neoliberal, managerialist regime of strategic planning, measurement, and the monitoring of performance in order to secure academic legitimacy and funding (Olssen & Peters, 2005) while still insisting on critical, collaborative modes of research that have the potential to combat fragmentation and the spread of uncritical, instrumental approaches? To adopt a proactive rather than submissive approach to dealing with the consequences of the fragmentation and weak institutionalization of communication studies in the neoliberalized knowledge regime in Europe, I suggest two starting points.

The first starting point I suggest for a proactive approach is critical-reflexive discussion of the uneven discursive playing fields of communication studies and media and communication studies in Europe whereby some forms of knowledge and research areas dominate and others are marginalized. Such discussion would benefit from a more systematic exploration than I have presented in this article of relations between media research and research on areas other than media in Europe. This could fruitfully include a mapping of (a) the extent to which, and in which European countries and universities, communication studies is institutionalized departmentally; (b) the extent to which, and in which European countries and universities, degree programs and courses on communication studies cover both media research and research on areas other than media; (c) the extent to which, and in which European countries and universities, communication research on areas other than media is carried out; (d) the extent to which, and in which European universities and countries, communication research on areas other than media receives funding from university-funding bodies and national research councils; (e) the extent to which pan-European research councils and initiatives such as those of the European Commission (e.g., the Framework Programs and the Cost Actions) have funded research on media and research on areas other than media; (f) the extent to which, and in which European countries and universities, researchers in the wider field of media and communication studies identify primarily as "communication researchers" or as "media researchers," and/or as "media and communication researchers"; and (g) the journals in which European communication research on areas other than media is published and the conferences in which European communication researchers who carry out research on areas other than media participate.

The second starting point or direction to take is to cultivate a sense of a "whole" of communication studies, not a "unified," stable entity but a polyphonic, unstable whole that can be developed as a theory-rich body of work through dialogue across difference. Here, we can build on existing platforms for invoking and cultivating communication theory as an unstable whole and encouraging dialogue across the main divisions that fracture the field. The most well-known and widely employed platform is the "constitutive metamodel of communication theory" formulated by Robert T. Craig (1999) as "a heuristic device for thinking about the field as a whole" (Craig, 2015, p. 357). Craig's constitutive metamodel constructs a "field" of theoretical traditions, each with a distinctive conceptualization of communication that constitutes "communication" and "communication problems" symbolically in distinctive ways for distinctive purposes. By highlighting how different traditions have

different conceptions of communication that determine how researchers go about tackling and analyzing communication practices and problems, the metamodel creates a conceptual space for dialogue across different traditions and their different ways of conceptualizing communication that can contribute to developing communication theory as a field:

The main implication for our disciplinary practice is that we communication theorists all now have something very important to argue about—the social practice of communication—so we should stop ignoring each other and start addressing our work to the field of communication theory. As a result of our doing so, there will be a field of communication theory. (Craig, 1999, pp. 152–153)

As Craig (2015) himself notes in a review of the 16 years since the publication in 1999 of the first account of the metamodel, the metamodel seems to have fulfilled its purpose as a launching pad for dialogue toward the construction of communication theory as a coherent field: Periodically over the past 16 years, it has stimulated reflexive discussion about communication theory as an unstable whole based on critique of the premises of the metamodel (e.g., Bergman, 2012; Myers, 2001), suggestions for additional traditions (e.g., Russill, 2005, 2008), and proposals for alternative representations of “the field” (e.g., Cooren, 2012; Stanfill, 2012). Moreover, its aim for communication theory to become a coherent field has been furthered through application of the metamodel to delineate a field in numerous textbooks (e.g., E. Griffin, 2000, and more recent editions) and degree courses.

On the introductory bachelor-level course on communication theory that I co-teach, we use Craig’s metamodel to map out the landscape of communication studies as a research field and university subject. Fragmentation poses specific challenges for teaching, as Craig (1999) points out: “Those of us who teach communication theory face unique challenges. Undergraduates . . . come for something comprehensible and we offer them fragments of a subject no one can comprehend up to 249 theories and still counting” (p. 153). Craig (1999) delineates seven traditions of communication theory: the social psychological, cybernetic, rhetorical, semiotic, critical, sociocultural, and phenomenological. Obviously, Craig’s mapping of the field in terms of these particular traditions, rather than other traditions, can, and has been, questioned (e.g., Russill, 2005, 2008). Craig (2007) himself has recognized pragmatics as a separate tradition of communication theory in response to Russill’s (2005) argument.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, divisions in terms of theoretical traditions and along the lines of a constitutive view of communication entail the exclusion of alternative ways of conceptualizing and dividing up the “field” (e.g., Cooren, 2012; Stanfill, 2012). Craig’s formation of a matrix of seven or eight traditions based on a metamodel that construes communication as constitutive of practice is, then, a political act in which power/knowledge is in play through the privileging of particular voices and marginalization of alternative voices (see Myers, 2001, for a critique of the metamodel’s social constructionist bias).

---

<sup>3</sup> Craig (2007, 2015) acknowledges that, in his first account of the metamodel (1999), he failed both to identify pragmatism as a tradition in its own right and to recognize that the metamodel itself was informed by pragmatist thinking, based as it was on Craig’s desire for the field of communication theory to engage with communication problems and practices.

At the same time, Craig's metamodel is designed to cultivate transient, incomplete closure and continual contestation by drawing internal and external boundaries that are highly malleable. Craig (2015) points out the following:

Traditions as conceived in the constitutive metamodel are not discrete, inert containers; they do not compose a fixed system of classification such that each theory can be placed in one and only one tradition. This container view forgets the essential historicity and interpretive openness of traditions. (p. 359)

The matrix should not be understood as a "literal map of the field" but as a heuristic that opens up a conceptual space for dialogue across the field "by using semi-arbitrary reference points (i.e., the traditions)" (Craig, 2015, p. 369). This conceptual space can form a base for critical reflexivity in making theoretical and methodological choices and in contributing to developing "the field" as a whole. According to a theorization of dialogue based on Bakhtin's (1984, 1986) theory, meaning-making in dialogue is the product of an interplay between centripetal forces toward unity and centrifugal forces toward difference. Craig's metamodel allows us to embrace "both unity and diversity" (Putnam, 2001, p. 44) and can give students (and scholars) a sense of the "whole" of communication theory as, at one and the same time, delimited and circumscribed and heterogeneous, interdisciplinary, and unstable.

On our course, we use the metaphor of communication theory as a mountain range where the individual mountains represent individual traditions, and dialogue across the traditions can be understood as paths between the mountains. We try to show how to work across the traditions with the use of approaches that straddle several traditions including British cultural studies, discourse analysis, and dialogic communication theory. We use Craig's map to combat the fragmentation of communication studies, to give a sense of communication studies as a heterogeneous, plural, interdisciplinary "whole"—a tensional product of the interplay between moves toward unity and difference. And, absolutely crucially, we use Craig to give a sense of the theoretical foundations of communication studies, its roots within and across traditions of communication theory. As Craig notes in a recent interview,

[t]he practical applicability of communication theory is actually not that hard to establish. What's hard to grasp is the theoretical part of it. . . . What you have to accomplish in order to successfully teach communication theory is to get people to think conceptually, to make links, to make arguments, and to see the differences between different theoretical stances. (Boromisza-Habashi, 2013, p. 429)

In addition, one of the central points of Craig's (1999) constitutive metamodel is that the different ways of conceptualizing communication in the different traditions ("theoretical metadiscourse") are both shaped by and shape everyday ways of talking about communication that are intrinsic to communication practice ("practical metadiscourse"). Craig argues that we should discuss how the different theoretical traditions engage with and address everyday communication problems and practices in distinctive ways as a function of their distinctive ways of conceptualizing those problems and practices. This discussion, I suggest, can be used to counter the unreflexive use of narrowly strategic, instrumental approaches to communication, first, by identifying their resonance with everyday practical metadiscourse

that allows them to appear as “common sense”, and, second, by reflexively attending to the tensions that arise when different communication theories (such as social psychological theory and dialogic communication theory) are combined.

To sum up and finish off, I have attempted in this article to discuss the marginalization of communication studies in Europe as a function of its fragmentation and weak institutionalization in the neoliberal university, and I have proposed two ways of combatting the marginalization and stemming the spread of theory-thin, instrumental, and uncritical approaches to communication research and practice that thrive in the absence of a fully legitimate, recognized, and institutionalized field of solid communication theories, concepts, and methodologies. One way is to open up for critical-reflexive discussion of relations between media research and research on areas other than media in the competition for legitimacy, institutional position, and research funding. Another way is, in our teaching on university courses, to cultivate a sense of communication studies as a theory-rich, polyphonic, and delimited “whole”.

### References

- Arieli, D., Friedman, V., & Agbaria, K. (2009). The paradox of participation in action research. *Action Research, 7*(3), 263–290. doi:10.1177/1476750309336718
- Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. Carly Emerson (Ed. and Trans.). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bauer, R. (1959). Comments on “The State of Communication Research.” *Public Opinion Quarterly, 23*(1), 14–17. doi:10.1093/poq/23.1.14
- Berelson, B. (1959). The state of communication research. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 23*(1), 1–9. doi:10.1086/266840
- Bergman, M. (2012). Pragmatism as a communication-theoretical tradition: An assessment of Craig’s proposal. *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy, 4*(1), 208–221. Retrieved from <http://inx.journalofpragmatism.eu/?p=571>
- Boromisza-Habashi, D. (2013). Which way is forward in communication theorizing? An interview with Robert T. Craig. *Communication Theory, 23*(4), 417–432. doi:10.1111/comt.12025
- Cooren, F. (2012). Communication theory at the center: Ventriloquism and the communicative constitution of reality. *Journal of Communication, 62*(1), 1–20. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01622



- Corner, J. (2013). Is there a "field" of media research? The "fragmentation" issue revisited. *Media, Culture & Society*, 35(8), 1011–1018. doi:10.1177/0163443713508702
- Couldry, N. (2013). If not a single field, then what? *Media, Culture & Society*, 35(8), 1023–1026. doi:10.1177/0163443713508704
- Craig, R. T. (1999). Communication theory as a field. *Communication Theory*, 9(2), 119–161. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.1999.tb00355.x
- Craig, R. T. (2007). Pragmatism in the field of communication theory. *Communication Theory*, 17(2), 125–145. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2007.00292.x
- Craig, R. T. (2015). The constitutive metamodel: A 16 year review. *Communication Theory*, 25(4), 356–374. doi:10.1111/comt.12076
- Gerbner, G. (Ed.). (1983). Ferment in the field [Special issue]. *Journal of Communication*. 33(3). Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.molly.ruc.dk/doi/10.1111/jcom.1983.33.issue-3/issuetoc>
- Gray, J., & Lotz, A. (2013). A robust and dynamic field. *Media, Culture & Society*, 35(8), 1019–1022. doi:10.1177/0163443713508703
- Griffin, E. (2000). *A first look at communication theory* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Griffin, M. (2011). The uneasy institutional position of communication and media studies and its impact on academic labor in large universities versus small colleges. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 1827–1836. Retrieved from <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1323/659>
- Heinderyckx, F. (2007). The academic identity crisis of the European communication researcher. In N. Carpentier, P. Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, K. Nordenstreng, M. Hartmann, P. Vihalemm, B. Cammaerts, & H. Nieminen (Eds.), *Media technologies and democracy in an enlarged Europe* (pp. 357–362). Tartu, Estonia: University of Tartu Press.
- Herbst, S. (2008). Disciplines, intersections, and the future of communication research. *Journal of Communication*, 58(4), 603–614. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00402.x
- Hjarvard, S. (2012). Doing the right thing: Media and communication studies in a mediatized world. *Nordicom Review*, 33(1, Suppl.), 27–34.
- Myers, D. (2001). A pox on all compromises: Reply to Craig (1999). *Communication Theory*, 11(2), 231–240. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2001.tb00240.x

- Olssen, M., & Peters, M. (2005). Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: From the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy, 20*(3), 313–345. doi:10.1080/02680930500108718
- Ospina, S., Dodge, J., Godsoe, B., Minieri, J., Reza, S., & Schall, E. (2004). From consent to mutual inquiry: Balancing democracy and authority in action research. *Action Research, 2*(1), 47–69. doi:10.1177/1476750304040494
- Phillips, L. (2011). *The promise of dialogue: The dialogic turn in the production and communication of knowledge*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Phillips, L., Kristiansen, M., Vehvilainen, M., & Gunnarsson, E. (Eds.). (2013). *Knowledge and power in collaborative research: A reflexive approach*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Putnam, L. (2001). Shifting voices, oppositional discourse, and new visions for communication studies. *Journal of Communication, 51*(1), 38–51. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2001.tb02871.x
- Rosengren, K. E. (1993). From field to frog ponds. *Journal of Communication, 43*(3), 6–17. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01271
- Russill, C. (2005). The road not taken: William James's radical empiricism and communication theory. *Communication Review, 8*(3), 277–305. doi:10.1080/10714420500240474
- Russill, C. (2008). Through a public darkly: Reconstructing pragmatist perspectives in communication theory. *Communication Theory, 18*(4), 478–504. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2008.00331.x
- Servaes, J. (2015). ECREA, quo vadis? *Communications. The European Journal of Communication Research, 40*(1), 1–20. doi:10.1515/commun-2014-0033
- Stanfill, M. (2012). Finding birds of a feather: Multiple memberships and diversity without divisiveness in communication research. *Communication Theory, 22*(1), 1–24. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2011.01395.x
- Swanson, D. (1993). Fragmentation, the field, and the future. *Journal of Communication, 43*(4), 163–172. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01317.x
- Waisbord, S., & Mellado, C. (2014). De-westernizing communication studies: A reassessment. *Communication Theory, 24*(4), 361–372. doi:10.1111/comt.12044
- Wiemann, J. M., Hawkins, R. P., & Pingree, S. (1988). Fragmentation in the field—and the movement toward integration in communication science. *Human Communication Research, 15*(2), 304–310. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1988.tb00186.x