Communicative approaches to politics and ethics in Europe

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COMMUNICATIVE APPROACHES TO POLITICS AND ETHICS IN EUROPE

THE INTELLECTUAL WORK OF THE 2009 ECREA EUROPEAN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION DOCTORAL SUMMER SCHOOL

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Oscillations between coherence and fragmentation, and between globalisation, glocalisation and translocalisation: The Europeanisation of the Communication and Media Studies discipline

Nico Carpentier[1]

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article I want to have a look at the Europeanisation process of the Communication and Media Studies discipline. What I want to explicitly avoid is the unconditional acceptance of the sometimes celebratory narrations of the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area. My interest lies in the analysis of the Europeanisation of the Communication and Media Studies discipline, and of its conditions of possibility. In order to theorise this evaluation, I will make use of the concept of globalisation (and its counterparts, glocalisation and translocalisation), based on the (theoretical) similarities between globalisation and Europeanisation. At the same time, I will only focus on the European component of the Communication and Media Studies discipline, in the full realisation that other continents have equally valuable academic practices and traditions. My starting point will be a reflection on the nature of the discipline, and the way it has been organised in the diversity of European countries. Only afterwards, I will move to the discussion on the Europeanisation of the discipline.

2. COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES AS A DISCIPLINE

Communication and Media Studies has for some time now been established as a discipline in most European countries. Although the

European – dare I say global – history of Communication and Media Studies still has to be written, the fragmented genealogies that are already available support the conclusion that with the growing attention for communication since the end of the WWII, with the construction of independent university departments from the 1960s onwards, with the institutionalisation of communication study programmes in the 1970s and early 1980s, and with the emancipation from the US and Soviet research traditions (although obviously in different ways), European Communication and Media Studies have become a full-fledged and thriving discipline. It shows that Berelson's harsh critique – published in 1959 – proclaiming the near death of the discipline because of the lack of new ideas, was wrong.

However, Communication and Media Studies remains a young discipline, although Atwood and de Beer (2001) have pointed us to the existence of Tobias Peucer's doctoral dissertation, *De relationibus novellis* ("On news reporting"), which was written in Germany in 1690. Moreover, the discipline of Communication and Media Studies has many ancestors, like Albert Schäffle, Karl Bücher, Max Weber, Karl Jaeger, Gabriel Tarde, Alexis de Tocqueville and many more (listed by Simonson and Peters (2008), see also Jirák and Köpplová (2008); Robinson (1996)); but we are still part of a young discipline.

Despite (or maybe because of) its relative novelty, the discipline remains characterised by its diversity. In his overview of schools in his contribution to the *International Encyclopaedia of Communication* (see also his chapter in this volume), McQuail (2008) points to the existence of different schools in Western Europe, such as the Francophone school, the Scandinavian school, the British school, the 'German-centred' school and the 'Mediterranean' school. He quickly adds that "*Smaller countries were not necessarily backward in developing the field of communication and some, such as Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, and Finland, took leading positions.*" In addition, he also makes the solid argument that research (and education) is context-dependant, and that the diversity of European media systems, media cultures and media uses, combined with a more general diversity at the level of the political, the social, the historical, the economical, the legal and the cultural, also generates a diversity of European academic research traditions. Obviously, the cold war divide is one of the key events that have impacted on the European Communication and Media Studies discipline, keeping the schools and traditions in the East and the West of Europe from communicating with each other. These different historical trajectories have only strengthened the diversity of the discipline, and (however regrettable the East-West divide was) have

added to the richness that characterises the European Communication and Media Studies discipline, rendering it a house with many rooms.

But let me take one step back, and look at the dynamics between coherence and fragmentation, between diversity and unity, between fluidity and sedimentation, that characterise a discipline, a concept that Moran (2002: 2) defines as "*a particular branch of learning or body of knowledge*", immediately adding the second meaning of discipline to his definition, referring to "*the maintenance of order and control amongst subordinated groups …*" Disciplines play a key role in the organisation of knowledge, but also in organising (and sometimes disciplining) its practitioners. Nelson and Parameshwar (1996: 3) explain this disciplining component: "*disciplines police their boundaries, by training their members to internalize them, neutralize them, and then fancy themselves free as birds.*"

Obviously, the order that is provided by a discipline cannot be considered pre-given. As Gaddis (1976: 20) wrote in his novel *JR* on knowledge:

> *Knowledge has to be organized so it can be taught, and it has to be reduced to information so it can be organized. … this leads you to assume that organisation is an inherent property of the knowledge itself, and that disorder and chaos are simply irrelevant forces that threaten it from outside. In fact, it's exactly the opposite.*

Not unlike Claude Lefort's (1988) reflection on the empty place of power in contemporary democracies, we can say that the heart of a discipline is empty, but at the same time filled by a continuous stream of practices at the level of research, pedagogy, representation and (public) intervention. Different paradigms, pedagogical ideologies, individuals and organisations struggle for control of the empty heart of the discipline, in order to position themselves on the discipline's throne of knowledge, only to be dethroned soon after or to have the phantasm disrupted by the presence of other academic discourses or institutions with similar claims. In this sense, the notion of coherence and harmony is a phantasm, never to be realised. But on the other hand, we cannot imply (again using Lefort's metaphor) that there is no heart of the discipline. We simply cannot ignore the establishment of academic hegemonies that generate a combination of stability and exclusion. Less dramatically, and reverting to the Foucouldian notion of the necessary productivity of power, we cannot not ignore the importance of academic nodal points that structure and stabilise the entire field, and that ensure its continued existence. From this sense, the belief in the fragmentation of the field is equally

phantasmagorical, and is built on a naïve understanding of the structure-agency dialectics. An illustration of the presence of both phantasms in this debate can be found in Craig's (2008) summary of the two successive special issues of the *Journal of Communication* on *The future of the field: Between fragmentation and cohesion* (1993). There Craig writes:

> *Some saw the continuing fragmentation of the field as a problem; others celebrated fragmentation as an invaluable source of adaptive strength. Some called urgently for efforts to define the intellectual focus of the discipline; others just as urgently insisted that any such effort to define a theoretical core would be not only useless but counter-productive.*

More fruitful to approach the workings of a discipline is the notion of oscillation, which describes the permanent movement between a discipline and a field, and allows combining the disciplining effects of the discipline and the nomadic opportunities of the field, without ignoring the structuring capacities of the discipline and the vagabond uncertainties of the field. At the same time we should avoid celebrating the phantasms of coherence and of fragmentation. The phantasm of coherence results in a situation where movement is made impossible by the disciplining effects of the discipline, while the phantasm of fragmentation results in the disintegration of the discipline. In short, the discipline moves, whether we like it or not. It is also only through this oscillatory process that we can generate enough openness to enter into multi-, cross-, inter-, and transdisciplinary dialogues, and enough closedness to avoid being incorporated by other disciplines.

3. COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES AS A EUROPEAN DISCIPLINE

But where is the discipline moving to? One dimension where changes (or oscillations) are taking place is at the European level. The process of Europeanisation takes place at the organisational level, at the level of research and at the level of education and exchange. At the organisational level things have rapidly changed. In the (late) 1990s attempts to organise the field had led to the establishment of the European Consortium for Communication Research (ECCR) and the European Communication Association (ECA). The breakthrough came in 2005, at the *First European Communication Conference*. This conference took place from 24 until 26 November 2005 in Amsterdam and already had 550

participants from more than 30 countries. Here, these two organisations merged, to become the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA), an organisation that saw its membership in the years after the conference spectacularly increase, reaching the 1600 members mark in February 2009.

After the merger in November 2005, ECREA continued the tradition of the European Communication Conferences, and organised the *Second European Communication Conference* (the ECC08) in Barcelona (25–28 November 2008), in close collaboration with the Communication Sciences Faculty at the UAB and the Communication Institute (InCom-UAB). Here, about 1000 participants of 40 countries attended the conference with its 2 keynote panels, 4 semi-plenary panels and 119 parallel panels (including the poster panels). ECREA's 15 sections and 2 networks played a crucial role in organising the parallel panels of the ECC08. Obviously, the section and network activities were not limited to the ECC08. Together they organised 10 workshops in 2007, with the Brussels symposium *Equal opportunities and communication rights: Representation, participation, and the European democratic deficit* (11–12 October 2007) as one of the most prominent examples[2]. The sections and networks are now in the process of organising a similar number of workshops (for 2009) and they will again play a key role in the *Third European Communication Conference* (ECC10) which will be held in Hamburg (Germany) on 12–15 October 2010, hosted by the Hans Bredow Institute for Media Research. Finally, ECREA has continued the ECCR book series, and opened it up to the ECREA membership through a yearly call. The *Reclaiming the Media* (2007), *Finding the Right Place on the Map* (2008) and *Press Freedom and Pluralism in Europe* (2009) books, in 2010 to be followed by *Gendered Transformations. Theory and Practices on Gender and Media* (2010) exemplify the success of this book series.

This now concludes the promotional component of my chapter.

We do find a similar process of Europeanisation at the level of research. In its attempts to superimpose the European level (and identity), the EU has also impacted on the European academic research landscape. The Framework Programmes and the driving concept of the European Research Area (ERA) has strengthened existing transnational collaborations, and generated new ones. To again use McQuail's (2008) words:

> ...the impulses stemming from the European Union, with its educational, cultural, and technological policies ... There have been numerous teaching and research programs promoted and financed by bodies such as the EU, the

Council of Europe, and the European Science Foundation. The result has been extensive cooperation, networking, and sharing of paradigms and ideas.

The ERA concept was endorsed at the Lisbon European Council in 2000, and (according to the European Commission's 2007 Green Paper) consisted of the following key aspects: "*a European 'internal market' for research, where researchers technology and knowledge freely circulate; effective European-level coordination of national and regional research activities, programmes and policies; and initiatives implemented and funded at European level.*" (CEC, 2007: 2). The 2007 Green Paper adds that "*there is still much further to go to build ERA, particularly to overcome the fragmentation of research activities, programmes and policies across Europe.*" (CEC, 2007: 2) The main instruments for realising the ERA were the Framework Programmes, (amongst other outcomes) resulting in the creation of Networks of Excellence (NoEs) and Integrated Projects (IP's), the development of e-Infrastructures like GÉANT, EGEE and DEISA, the launch of the Gender Action Plan, the Regions of Knowledge initiative, the ERA-NET (European Research Area Network [3]), EURAXESS (European Services Network [4]), the EUREC (European Network of Research Ethics Committees [5]) and the ERC (European Research Council[6]). A number of key documents like *The European Charter for Researchers* and *The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* (EC, 2005) supported the process of the Europeanisation of research.

This also impacted on the Communication and Media Studies discipline. A number of large-scale Framework Programmes were funded, like the FP5 *The transformation of political communication and mobilisation in European public spheres*[7] (EUROPUB.COM – 1 million euro), the FP6 Networks of Excellence *The future of identity in the information society* [8] (FIDIS – 6.1 million euro) and *The democracy network* [9] (DEMO_NET – 6 million euro), the FP6 Integrated Project *Diversity and the European public sphere: Towards a citizens' Europe*[10] (EUROSPHERE – 4.1 million euro), and the FP7 Network of Excellence *Integrating research in interactive storytelling* (IRIS – 2.42 million euro). Apart from these large projects, there were also a number of smaller projects funded like the FP6 Coordination Action *International radio research network*[11] (IREN – 350.000 euro), and the FP6 STREPs *Adequate information management in Europe*[12] (AIM – 0.8 million euro) and *Media and ethics of a European public sphere*[13] (EMEDIATE – 0.8 million euro).

A search in the Cordis FP7 database [14] resulted in 42 (sometimes vaguely) related research projects financed by the recent Framework Programmes. Although many of these projects are to a very high degree

focussed on communication technologies, at least a number of these projects include scholars that operate within the discipline of Communication and Media Studies. Without wanting to claim that there have been no transnational collaborations before the European Framework Programmes, these projects (and their specific nature) are indications of the Europeanisation of research. Also in the COST Actions we can find traces of European (or at least transnational) collaborations. For instance in the Individuals, Societies, Cultures and Health (ISCH) domain of the COST Actions, we can find 5 Actions with links to Communication and Media Studies discipline. Moreover, 49 Cost Actions are mentioned in the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) domain, including these 2 Actions: 269 *User Aspects of ICTs* (end date: April 2004) and 298 *Participation in the Broadband Society* (end date: January 2010). The European Science Foundation (ESF), which manages the COST (still financed through the Framework Programme), also funds research (directly or indirectly) through other channels, such as the Exploratory Workshops and the Eurocores projects. Moreover, the ESF is also the driving force behind the European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH) project, which has been indexing European academic journals (and has not been very kind to our discipline).

Also at the third level, education and exchange, we can also see the process of Europeanisation at work. In a rather triumphant press release entitled *Where would European higher education be without the Erasmus programme?* (European Commission, 2009), Ján Figel, the European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, is quoted saying: "*The Erasmus programme has been the grandfather of some of the biggest reform initiatives in higher education in Europe today.*" The press release points to a 2008 study that evaluated the Erasmus programme since its inception in 1987 (European Commission, 2008), claiming that the Erasmus programme has played "*a leading role in the internationalisation of national, European and international higher education*" and that it "*has also triggered the modernisation and internationalisation of university curricula as well as the transparency and transferability of qualifications.*" (European Commission, 2009) There are arguments that support the triumphant tone of these statements. In the 2008 study itself, the achievements of the Erasmus programme are inventoried:

> *Since its start the programme has enabled over 1.9 million students and 140,000 members of university staff to be mobile within Europe. At present the ERASMUS programme enables around 200,000 students annually to study and work abroad. In addition, it supports close co-operation between*

> *higher education institutions across Europe. Around 90% of European higher education institutions (more than 3,100) take part in ERASMUS covering 31 European countries.* (European Commission, 2008: 18)

The Erasmus programme can be seen as an important part of the Bologna process and the construction of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The 1999 Bologna Declaration (European Council, 1999) builds on the 1998 Sorbonne Declaration by four ministers (of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom), who called for the harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system. Both documents refer to the need for an "*Europe of Knowledge*", which should be supported by "*an open European area for higher learning*" (Allegre et al., 1998: 1), where "*national identities and common interests can interact and strengthen each other for the benefit of Europe, of its students, and more generally of its citizens.*" (Allegre et al., 1998: 3) Through this harmonisation, at the level of quality assurance, the two-level degree structure, the promotion of mobility, the establishment of a credits system, and the recognition of degrees, the Europeanisation of all disciplines, including the Communication and Media Studies discipline, is again increased. Especially the Erasmus system, which allows for the exchange of students and staff, has to be seen as a key component of this process of Europeanisation.

4. PROBLEMS WITH THE EUROPEANISATION OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES

One can wonder whether the above triumphant narration of increased and intensified Europeanisation should be uncritically accepted. Arguably, we can use a globalisation perspective to theoretically ground the critiques that need to be launched against this celebrative approach. In (the critical approaches towards) this Europeanisation *cum* globalisation perspective we can find a strong concern that we find ourselves situated in a "*context where the dominant discourse proclaims that there is no alternative to the current neo-liberal form of globalization*" (Mouffe, 2005: 70). In these critical approaches, there is a concern that this will result in the homogenisation and unification of social and cultural processes, combined with the worry that globalisation will facilitate the circulation of neo-liberal ideologies and eventually will contribute to the establishment (or continuation) of their hegemony.

In the case of Europeanisation, we can see a number of similarities that legitimise the parallelism between globalisation and Europeanisation. We can see a number of homogenising processes, for instance in the ideoscape/ideascape and the etnoscape (Appadurai, 1990), where the EU harmonisation policies are built on the strong ideological – dare I say neo-liberal – premises. Although the EU discourses do emphasise the importance of diversity (remember the EU's motto 'unity in diversity'), they simultaneously contain homogenising forces that claim to bring modernisation and prosperity. If we look at discourse analyses of the European identity project, we can see that there is still a strong claim of Europeaness. To quote Ifversen (2007: 182): "*Although this soul [of Europe] is ambiguous because it also contains a reference to 'diversity', it still singles out a particularly European essence.*" This claim of common European values is then in turn used to legitimise specific policy objectives that are grounded in specific ideologies.

And this detour brings us back to our discipline. Articulating the Communication and Media Studies discipline as an oscillating field also implies that it can become an object of struggle, impacted upon by forces strange to it. As mentioned before, we should avoid celebrating the phantasms of coherence and of fragmentation, but we should also be wary of forces that aim to implement their coherence to our discipline, forces that aim reduces our fragmentation by cutting off a series of options, and forces that aim to discipline our discipline.

We should not remain blind for the colonising forces that lie hidden within the Europeanisation/globalisation discourses, and that call for responsabilisation, rationalisation, and modernisation, as if we are not responsible, not rational and not modern. We should not remain blind for a number of problems that are part of the package deal of the Europeanisation/globalisation that is now being offered to us.

5. EUROPEANISATION, GLOCALISATION AND TRANSLOCALISATION

As mentioned before, the Europeanisation of academia can be approached from a globalisation perspective (without wanting to push the argument too far and ignore all differences). The advantage of using this globalisation perspective is that we can take on board some of the traditional critiques on globalisation, but also that we can use some of the aligned concepts that have been developed along the road, namely the glocal (Robertson, 1995) and the translocal (Appadurai, 1995). The

glocal is a well-know concept that aims to theorise the ever-local adaptations and contextualisations of the global. The translocal is less well-known concept that implies an inverse approach, allowing taking the local as the point of departure, and adding the global as a second component. In this way, translocalisation acts as glocalisation's mirror image. It allows us to retain the focus on the dynamics of the local and the global, but uses the local as a starting point, rendering it more active.

Without discrediting the advantages of the globalisation of the Communication and Media Studies discipline (or in this case, its Europeanisation), we should not remain blind for the problems that the economies of scale (sometimes to be taken literally) bring about. The glocalisation and translocalisation approaches allow us to introduce a different perspective which (in addition to the globalisation approach) might be more respectful for the oscillatory nature of the Communication and Media Studies discipline, and for the academic struggles that lie at the heart of the discipline, with its many paradigms, pedagogical ideologies, individuals and organisations.

At the level of academic practices and institutions, the translocalisation of the discipline refers to the ways that always-specific, contextualised and situated knowledge and practices can transcend local boundaries and enter into intellectual interactions without losing their contextual affinities and situatedness. The same argument can be applied to our objects of study, the social-communicative processes, the structures, the organisations, the people, ... that are context-specific as well, and that cannot always be studied through an Europeanised perspective. I do think that special care should be taken not to forget the ultra-local, the hidden, the belly, the downtrodden, the stigmatised, the forgotten, and the microscopic. These are places where processes of social change and of social stability can be observed in their earliest manifestations, and their analysis remains of crucial importance to our discipline. Although I do not want to exclude the possibility of analysing the hyper-contextualised on an Europeanised level, I think we have to be pleased if we can even bring the hyper-contextualised on a translocal level. But this is still no excuse to ignore it.

In contrast, the glocalisation of the discipline refers to the translations of more globalised (or Europeanised) academic practices into other research contexts. Again, as our discipline is based on oscillations, one crucial flow of knowledge is based on the translation and incorporation of global academic practices at the more local levels, making this knowledge again more specific and modifying them on the basis of local contexts. We should not allow the Europeanised components of our

discipline to spin off into thin air, never ever to be brought back into the discipline at the more localised levels.

6. A SHORT CONCLUSION

The process of Europeanisation is a crucial challenge for the Communication and Media Studies discipline. It would bear witness of a severe case of myopia if I would ignore the intellectual and academic possibilities that this process is generating. But at the same time, there are many reasons for being only hesitantly optimistic. Academic disciplines hide complex power struggles and oscillations between coherence and fragmentation. Disruptions of this oscillatory process, where specific components like instrumental research and managerial cultures become over-privileged and hegemonic, which can seriously disrupt the balance of our un-balance.

We very much need to protect the multi-level nature of the Communication and Media Studies discipline, where the local, the national, the European and the global all become and remain relevant categories. At the same time we should maximise the intersections and interactions between these different levels. That is where the combination of the translocalised, the globalised/Europeanised and the glocalised come into play. This first of all implies that we need to be conscious about where the process of Europeanisation is taking us, what options becomes excluded, and how we can avoid these exclusions that disrupt the oscillatory nature of the discipline. Then, and only then, we can become truly European academics.

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NOTES

1 A longer version of this text was presented as a keynote at the fifth SOPCOM Conference at Lusofona University, Lisbon, Portugal (April 14–17 2009), and will also appear in the conference proceedings. My special thanks to Claudia Alvares for stimulating me to write this text. I also want to thank Kaarle Nordenstreng for his appreciated comments on an earlier version of this text. Of course, the author still assumes the full responsibility for the article.

2 A number of presentations of this seminar are to be published in Garcia-Blanco et al. (2009).

3 http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp6/index_en.cfm?p=9_eranet.

4 http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index_en.cfm.

5 http://www.eurecnet.org/index.html.

6 http://erc.europa.eu/.

7 http://europub.wzb.eu/.

8 http://www.fidis.net/.

9 http://www.demo-net.org/.

10 http://www.eurosphere.uib.no/.

11 http://www.iren-info.org/.

12 http://www.aim-project.net/.

13 http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/activities/289/.

14 The search was performed on 20 February 2009; the used keywords were media, public, audience, journalism and film. Smaller grants like Marie Curie grants were not included. The amount mentioned is the project funding.