The Declining Significance of Disciplinary Memory

The Case of Communication Research

Jefferson Pooley

Muhlenberg College

pooley@muhlenberg.edu

jeffpooley.com

The Declining Significance of Disciplinary Memory: The Case of Communication Research

Jefferson Pooley, Muhlenberg College, pooley@muhlenberg.edu

July 30, 2020

The chapter argues that disciplinary memory claims in US American communication research have become smaller, more parochial, and less potent, as their underlying referent—the discipline—has splintered in the wake of the digital in the mid-1990s. For decades after its institutionalization in the 1950s, US communication research had relied on grand narratives, like Wilbur Schramm's "four founders" myth, to bind together a heterogeneous field. But the would-be discipline's already porous borders have, since the mid-1990s arrival of the World Wide Web, given way to an onrush of interest from scholars housed in neighboring disciplines. The upshot of this new, cross-disciplinary trading zone of digital scholarship, which has only swelled in the twenty-first century, is that very little shared knowledge could be assumed. A half-legitimate postwar newcomer in need of mnemonic glue had, by the turn of the millennium, given way to a poly-disciplinary free-for-all. Memory claims have narrowed as a result, localized to multi-disciplinary subfields in shifting configurations. The old shorthands and storylines—the discipline-spanning type—are no longer legible. An analysis of memory claims in two special issues of the flagship *Journal of Communication*, in 1983 and 2018, supports the chapter's conclusion that disciplinary history has a waning hold on US American communication research.

1. Introduction

As the quintessential "insecure science" in Ian Hacking's (1996, 392) terms, the field of communication research, at least in the USA, has leaned on its memories to an unusual degree. A late arrival, jerrybuilt atop existing vocational programs on the university's professional-school margins—polyglot through and through—communication has arguably needed the glue of history more than its better-established peers. Thus Wilbur Schramm, the English PhD turned academic entrepreneur, self-consciously crafted an origin myth for the aspiring discipline. In a relentless series of talks and publications from the early 1960s through the 1980s, Schramm (e.g., 1963) appointed four putative "founders"—all eminent social scientists, none of them communication scholars—in a transparent legitimation campaign (see Pooley 2018a).

Schramm's origin myth was crafted in a moment—the early 1960s—when the would-be discipline had plenty of bricks but no mortar: Schools of journalism in the US were busily erecting doctoral programs in what had been, until the mid-1950s, a resolutely interdisciplinary constellation of sociologists, political scientists, and social psychologists. By the time the four founders story was first elaborated in print, Schramm and his allies had already established a substantial institutional beachhead in journalism schools. They had the scaffolding in place, in other words: doctoral degrees, faculty lines, and—most importantly—swelling undergraduate enrollments in skills programs. What the field lacked was legitimacy—an intellectual warrant to overlay the solid institutional foundation. In that field-building context, the four-founders myth *mattered*: Schramm's quartet were, in Charles Camic's terms, legitimating predecessors. It's true that Paul Lazarsfeld, Kurt Lewin, Carl Hovland, and Harold Lasswell did not consider themselves communication scholars, let alone the discipline's founders. It's also true that Schramm—in an audacious act of tonal inversion—knicked the four names from Bernard Berelson's (1959) obituary for the field. The fact that, nevertheless, the origin story was embraced by the nascent field was its own proof of resonance.

Consider a second example from US American communication research: Paul Lazarsfeld and colleagues at Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research, at mid-century, narrated a two-stage story of progress with astonishing staying power: Naive and impressionistic interwar researchers, the storyline went, clung to the mistaken view that media are powerful, a position that Columbia's measured empiricism lanced during and after World War II. The first 15 pages of Elihu Katz and Lazarsfeld's *Personal Influence* (1955)—with its powerful-to-limited-effects emplotment—really did set the field's mnemonic agenda for decades to come, even for vociferous critics. The storyline's diffusion and endurance is etched in the bibliographic record, unambiguously sourced from the *Personal Influence* wellspring (see Pooley 2006).

The grand stories of Schramm and Lazarsfeld had, in the 1960s and after, furnished a shared canopy of memory for a field desperate for intellectual enclosure. Conditions have changed. My claim in this essay is that the more substantial historiography, the kind that has preoccupied the new historians, does not matter much anymore—at least for a profoundly heterogeneous "post-discipline" like communication. Fifty years after Schramm's myth-building, the four-founders story has lost most of its resonance. There is, too, less talk of "hypodermic needles" or "magic bullets" in the Lazarsfeld key. Newer works of disciplinary story-making—books, articles, even presiden-

tial addresses—fail to register with a field that has, since the 1960s, become far more polyphonic. Grand narratives about the discipline's past no longer circulate with any meaningful purchase. The big storylines are still invoked, to be sure. But many recent memory claims have a different character, or at least frame of reference: The claims are smaller and local. Subfields and cross-disciplinary clusters are the imagined audience, not "communication scholars" writ large. The horizon of relevance, in other words, has notably shrunken.

2. The Weakened Hold of Disciplinary Memory

The main source of memory's declining significance is the field's weakened institutional grip on its claimed objects of study. Since the onrush of the digital in the mid-1990s, an already polyglot discipline has become far more fragmented. And it's not just internal diversity: The inescapable prominence of the internet, and everything in its digital wake, has brought at least a dozen other fields into its scholarly orbit. The result is a transformation of the institutional landscape: A half-legitimate postwar newcomer in need of mnemonic glue had, by the turn of the millennium, given way to a poly-disciplinary free-for-all. The legitimacy deficit that had Schramm fretting in the 1960s was, by 2005, almost irrelevant. The academic study of media and communication was no longer bounded—even as a pretense—by disciplinary walls. Now scholars from all over the university are in the business of studying digital life. They are, indeed, in frequent collaboration with those researchers who, as it were, happen to be housed in departments of communication. The result is what I (Pooley 2018b) have called elsewhere a "post-program" era, one with little need for the thick sort of disciplinary memory.

The old storylines still appear, though less often and with deflated stakes. The four founders story, and the powerful-to-limited-effects narrative, have long been delivered to audiences in shorthand form— as capsulized histories-in-a-phrase. That hasn't changed. What *is* new is that the old stories are invoked, when they surface at all, in a detached and free-floating manner, as the stuff of authorless doxa. The context of invocation, moreover, is notably flattened: The historical references are tucked away, doing little work for their authors' arguments. In the field's earlier period, history had been regularly marshaled in big paradigmatic disputes, as justification or opprobrium. But those field-spanning contests around method and mission no longer command scholars' attention. As a result, references to the old stories just don't play the pivotal role they were once assigned. The key point is that both dynamics—the untethering and diminished stakes—reflect the field's accelerated fracture.

So the grand narratives have weakened their grip. But the more interesting development is the new ubiquity of *local* memory claims. Communication scholars, in the post-digital academic scene, are increasingly active in specific, cross-disciplinary subfields. These configurations have their own frames of reference: leading figures, quasi-canonic works, common concepts, and periodic gatherings. These webs of mutual interaction and shared knowledge take shape, notably, beyond and across traditional disciplinary boundaries. Some, like political communication or journalism studies, are relatively stable; others—like algorithm studies—are far more fluid. Either way, these trans-fields develop and reproduce their own epistemic cultures. Crucially, for our purposes, they also generate a stock of shared memory. And this common knowledge is not the thick stuff of disciplinary memory; it is shallower, sometimes gossamer-thin—and subject to faster cycles of forgetting.

Memory is still invoked, powered by originality norms and the conventions of the article literature review. Symposia, the book review, and the occasional stock-taking essay are other sites for memory claims. But these semi-transient subfields are mostly not in the game of foundational teaching, and so the textbook history capsule— perhaps *the* vessel for disciplinary memory—is rarely taken up. More than anything, the subfields' memory claims take the form of local knowledge. The "stories" they tell are bounded by the leaky epistemic communities to whom they are addressed. This means, in practice, accommodating the motley, cross-disciplinary pedigrees of fellow scholars.

One consequence is that memory claims tend toward *recency*: Five- or ten-year timeframes are the norm. There is, too, a lowest-common-denominator character to the storytelling of this localized sort. Since little by way of common knowledge can be assumed, historical assertions are confined to a smaller cabinet of shared reference. Memory shorthands—histories-in-a-phrase—are especially reliant on the presumption of prior exposure. It's that baseline acquaintance, that common stock of intellectual experience, that authors cannot take for granted. As a consequence, the memory claims are smaller, even provincial. Local storytelling, then, has partly displaced the grander, more ambitious narrative—at least for communication studies. When the big stories do appear, they take on a diminished role. There is, in short, an exhaustion of mnemonic energies.

3. Institutional Sources of Intellectual Forgetting

To put the post-disciplinary claim in relief, consider a distinction between two forms of heterogeneity. Communication research in the

US, from its earliest organizational moment, has never been orderly. That is to say, once Schramm and his allies—the so-called "Bleyer children" (Rogers and Chaffee 1994)—got the project of field-building underway in the late 1940s, the organized field was already drafty in intellectual terms. Through to the mid-1990s—through all its madcap growth over the decades—communication research remained poly-valent. The discipline-in-formation was, the whole time, taking in people and ideas from beyond its leaky borders. But the pluralism was, to a large degree, *internal* to the field, over this first, scrappy half-century. All the migrants and imported ideas were welcomed into the field's already cacophonous quarters, so the din grew louder over time. But the disarray was inside the tent, so to speak—as the field kept waving in new concepts and scholars.

The second kind of heterogeneity—picking up in the early 1990s—was *external* to communication research. The internal messiness was still there, of course, in all its ongoing metastatic vigor. But the new prominence of the internet began drawing in scholars from other fields. They weren't, this time around, absorbed into communication departments. The sociologists, psychologists, political economists, STS scholars, information scientists, even economists and engineers—they were conducting their own studies on, and teaching around, digital topics. This, then, is type two heterogeneity, characterized by joint custody—by shared jurisdiction over the post-convergence domain of the digital.

So the story of the field's institutional history, seen through the fragmentation prism, is internal heterogeneity giving way, over the last two decades, to the external sort. This is a simplification in two acts, of the sort that might make historians blush. So let me elaborate, to fill in just enough detail to support the account.

Beginning in the late 1940s, Schramm and his fellow field-builders had a successful run of installing communication doctorates within existing journalism schools.[1] As part of the campaign, they colonized the Association for Education in Journalism (AEJ) and its journal, *Journalism Quarterly*. In intellectual terms this meant lots of social psychology under the then-new "behavioral sciences" banner. The softer scholarship of press history and First Amendment studies that predated the Schramm-led takeover was, at best, diminished. As the doctoral programs spread, the typical U.S. journalism school affixed "and Mass Communication" to its name. The AEJ followed suit in 1982, re-christened the AEJMC—and its journal, too, a decade later. So here, in the second half of the twentieth century, was US "com-munication research": a social science based in journalism schools, underwritten by skills-oriented undergraduates.

[1] This and the next four paragraphs draw on Pooley (2016).

But Schramm's behavioral science was joined, beginning in the 1960s, by three other claimants to the "communication" label. Early in the decade, existing departments of speech and rhetoric—especially those in the Midwest that had absorbed broadcasting into their teaching portfolio—started to rename themselves "communication studies" or "communication arts". These departments, normally housed in their university's arts and sciences division, were organized around instruction in public speaking. In some programs the exegesis of classical rhetoric was the intellectual anchor, while others centered teaching and research on what was, in effect, a social science of interpersonal communication. Either way, scholars in the speech and rhetoric tradition gathered at a professional society, the Speech Association of America (SAA) that, over time, drifted toward "communication": In 1970 the group changed its name to the Speech *Communication* Association, and then, in 1997, dropped "speech" altogether, as the National Communication Association. The society's journals followed suit.

So journalism and speech had, by the 1960s, both laid claim to the "communication" label. In the same decade, a third culture began to coalesce around newly founded schools and departments of communication—programs that had no ancestry in journalism nor in speech. These *indigenous* programs, typified by the Annenberg Schools at the University of Pennsylvania (founded in 1958) and the University of Southern California (1971), tended to cast a wide, though broadly social scientific, intellectual net. Scholars from these born-communication programs have made their professional home, since its 1968 founding, at the International Communication Association (ICA).[2] The group's *Journal of Communication* has served a more ecumenical role as a de facto flagship, with regular contributions from scholars housed in journalism programs too.

And then there was film: The seventh art attracted its own academics, mostly humanists housed within traditional liberal arts departments. Though the Society for Cinematologists was established in 1959, the real growth in film studies came at the end of the 1960s, on the crest of cinema-appreciation culture. Its aesthetic orientation, and preoccupation with medium-specific theory, made the field safe for the liberal arts, even at elite institutions—in contrast to its grubby, half-vocational counterparts in "communication." The Society for Cinema Studies (as it was renamed in 1963) added "& Media" to its title in 2004, with its flagship journal recently following suit.

So the US "discipline" of communication was already polyphonic, even Balkanized, by the 1970s. The four distinct cultures—speech-derived, journalism-derived, born-communication, and film studies—claimed the same mediated turf, without any meaningful cross-talk

[2] As David W. Park (2020) has shown, the original impetus for the founding of ICA's predecessor organization was itself rooted in speech education.

(with the partial exception of the journalism-rooted and indigenous research traditions). There were, in each case, distinctive canonic works, textbooks, and—significantly, for our purposes—origin stories. Scholars housed in journalism schools, for example, have leaned on Schramm's "four founders" account, paired with the story of the field's successful, Schramm-led institutionalization. The born-communication programs, to judge by the leading textbooks, have placed the accent on the mid-century sociologists of Columbia's Bureau of Applied Social Research. Speech and rhetoric scholars trace the field back to Ancient Greece, while cinema studies has a distinctive film-theory tradition that starts with early twentieth-century European reflection.

The point is that US communication research, a four-headed Hydra, has always been fragmented. Its aspirations for coherence, all the way back to the 1960s, were mugged by the reality on the campus. When three or four academic units all claim the "communication" moniker *at the same university*—the norm at Midwestern public institutions—there's no prospect for a unitary discipline. Still, the heterogeneity was homegrown, internal to the field. As each of the four cultures expanded in the 1970s and '80s, they maintained shared jurisdiction over "communication." It was, unquestionably, an awkward cohabitation, but it was *their* house.

The World Wide Web, and the digital bank-bursting in its wake, introduced a new type of fragmentation, from the outside. This was heterogeneity type two. The digital mediation of everyday life, already apparent by the early 1990s, attracted the attention of the mainline social sciences. Media technologies and institutions were, of course, at the center of this digital permeation, even as the old "mass communication" label lost much of its purchase. For some disciplines, like sociology and social psychology, the study of digital life represented a revival of an old preoccupation—one largely ceded to the communication-research upstart decades earlier. For others, like political science, the digital realm rechanneled an already robust interest in the institutions of mass media. Anthropologists, with only a minor legacy of media study, took a conspicuous liking for digital topics, in line with the discipline's broader turn to contemporary Western societies. Newer cross-disciplinary fields, notably science & technology studies (STS), applied its conceptual toolkit to digital life—as did the cognate professional field of library and information science (LIS), with its claim on bits and data.

All of this was registered at the mundane level of departments, journals, scholarly societies, and professorial titles.[3] One index was the library school's rebranding as the "iSchool" in the early 2000s. A handful of library programs formed an "I-Schools" coalition in 2003,

[3] This and the next five paragraphs draw on Pooley (2018b).

and some of these units—Syracuse and Berkeley included—began using the digital shorthand in their own promotional materials. The iSchools "movement," as it came to be called, was a response to the new prominence of the digital. The technological—and indeed conceptual—collapse of the distinction between information and media led, along similar lines, to a cross-pollination in the scholarly literature of both fields. That partial convergence was reflected in the hiring market too, as LIS doctorates were invited into communication departments, and vice versa, with increasing regularity since 2010.

So established disciplines and fields—from sociology to LIS to anthropology—took new interest in digital life around the turn of the millennium. This upsurge of cross-disciplinary attention helped produce an institutional overlay—one with no fealty, or even traceable roots, to any particular disciplinary tradition. The Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), for example, was founded in 1999 by a field-spanning group of 60 scholars, with disciplinary agnosticism the new group's main tenet (Witmer 1999, 368). Indeed, the founders proclaimed a kind of "interdiscipline"—Internet studies—with enough momentum to merit a *Chronicle of Higher Education* trend piece two years later.

At around the same time, and with the internet's prominence in explicit relief, a number of US law schools established centers devoted to the internet's study. Starting with UC Berkely's Center for Law and Technology (founded in 1995), and quickly followed by Yale's Information Society Project (1997) and Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet & Society (1997), a new institutional form took hold. These centers quickly expanded their intellectual remit beyond legal questions, and came to host scholars—as visiting fellows, as speakers—from across what had become, by the mid-2000s, an internet-studies diaspora. The internet and society centers were, notably, founded at the same elite universities that had long shunned the organized discipline of communication research. The centers tended, instead, to exist outside the department system, and to host communities of itinerant scholars with established posts elsewhere. Harvard's Berkman Center is the paradigmatic example, but the form has spread across the country and throughout the world.

Other formations, some predating the internet but repurposed in its wake, have also contributed to the cross-field uptake of internet studies. Media labs, most famously at MIT, have employed humanists and social scientists alongside their traditional roster of engineers and designers. Corporate research shops, notably Microsoft Research's Social Media Collective, have also incubated social scientists of many disciplinary stripes. And, finally, new public-facing research centers, like Data & Society, have joined a handful of es-

tablished journalism-studies institutes that, given the profession's vertiginous state, have taken up internet and democracy topics with renewed vigor.

The point is that, by the early 2000s, an interdisciplinary infrastructure—a thin layer of centers, scholarly societies, listservs—had emerged to support idea exchange among a strikingly disparate array of fields and traditions. This was a trading zone in Peter Galison's (1997, Chapter 9) sense, one erected atop the traditional department system from which its participants, nevertheless, largely hailed. The result was an institutionalized interdiscipline: a cross-cutting discourse around digital topics, sustained by scholars from a dozen-plus disciplines. The paired rise of smartphones and social media at the end of the decade accelerated an intellectual convergence already underway. Sociologists, psychology, legal scholars, digital humanists, information scientists, and—yes—communication scholars were, in the new millennium, all preoccupied with the same social phenomenon: the low-viscous overspread of digital technology into the crevices of everyday life. The sheer rate of change, keen interest from foundations and other funders, and the brute fact of digital ubiquity—"deep mediatization," in one influential framing (Couldry and Hepp 2018, Chapter 3)—helped to usher in a post-program era. This academic crossroads, where many pass but many tarry, is centered on the sociology of digital life.

For our purposes, the relevant takeaway is that communication research lost whatever partial monopoly the field once held on the domain of media and communication. The new, cross-disciplinary pluralism was registered, for example, in the submission profile the US field's flagship, the *Journal of Communication*: More than half of lead authors, over the last decade, have hailed from departments and schools outside the organized communication discipline (Waisbord 2019, 18–19). Media and communication no longer designated a loosely defined discipline, but instead a jointly occupied domain of study. If communication research was *already* heterogeneous, along the four-fold internal lines discussed above, the post-digital landscape left the field *still more* dispersed. This was, crucially, dispersal of a different kind: type two heterogeneity, introduced from the outside.

In these conditions, very little shared disciplinary stock can be assumed. Silvio Waisbord (2019, 60–61), in his recent treatment of communication's "post-disciplinary" status, developed the claim from another direction. He observed that the embers of the field's paradigmatic disputes had, in recent decades, gone cold. The "old epistemological and normative *casus belli*," he wrote, no longer draw scholars to the intellectual barricades "as they did in the post." The

explanation for the drop-off, for Waisbord, is the field's recent wave
of fragmentation. The "halt to skirmishes," in other words, reflects
the new pluralism—the "varying degrees of institutionalization of in-
tellectual diversity"—more than "any settlement of old differences."
The passions, in Waisbord's account, have been quelled by the (plu-
ral) interests.

4. Ferments in the Field

One way to test this fragmentation thesis is to compare moments of
disciplinary talk—discourse, in other words, where the state of the
field is the explicit topic. Disciplinary talk can surface in any number
of venues: a presidential address, for example, or in orienting courses
for graduate students. My focus, here, is on one especially rich site
for this discourse: those organized symposia where leading scholars
assemble to debate the past, present, and future of the discipline.
Each of the social sciences produces collections of this kind from time
to time, in part since these disciplines resist paradigmatic closure.
Such symposia are sites, by definition, of reflexivity. The question,
or my question, is how and whether history is marshaled at such
moments.

For US communication studies, the archetypical collection of this
sort is the 1983 "Ferment in the Field" special issue of the *Journal
of Communication*. The "Ferment" issue was rife with paradigmatic
conflict, some of it waged with memory claims. More to the point,
the *Journal of Communication* marked the "Ferment" anniversary with
a follow-up 35 years later, in 2018. My strategy was to mine this pair
of compilations for their disciplinary storytelling. The idea was to
gauge the shifts—if any—that the special issues reveal when read in
temporal sequence.

The original *Ferment in the Field* collection was a product of the un-
usual editorship of an unusual dean, the Annenberg School's George
Gerbner. Thanks to Gerbner's careful maneuvering and a financial
crisis at the *Journal of Communication*'s owner, the ICA, the Annenberg
School assumed control of the "flagship" title in 1973—a period of
stewardship that only ended in the late 1980s (Ruddock 2018, 85–87).
Gerbner was a half-closeted radical working for a right-wing patron,
Walter Annenberg. Together with managing editor Marsha Siefert,
Gerbner engineered a sharp turn to an ecumenical, public-facing,
and sometimes Marxist editorial mix. The 1983 special issue arrived
in the wake of communication studies' own version of the 1970s
Methodensreit and reckoning with political radicalism, with the New
World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) debates a
live issue in the field. The instructions for invited authors made no

mention of history, but the 35 contributions were nevertheless awash in disciplinary memory claims.

The 2018 special issue, fittingly pluralized to "Ferments in the Field," appeared under the editorship of Silvio Waisbord—like Gerbner, an editor committed to ventilating the journal's scope beyond the quantitative mainstream. The collection was guest-edited by a pair of Marxists, who openly linked their issue to the critical spirit of the 1983 original (Fuchs and Qui 2018, 219). As in 1983, the contributors spanned the discipline's political spectrum, though with heightened sensitivity to geographic and other lines of difference. The editors' call for contributions, like the guidance issued for the original, solicited field-wide reflection—though only the sequel invited explicit reflection on the field's past (Fuchs and Qui 2016; Introduction 1983). So the pair of special issues, separated by more than three decades, are comparable registers of the story-telling prevalent in their respective disciplinary moments.

Based on close readings of the fifty-plus essays, I classified each contribution according to the depth and scope of its historical claim-making. The coding scheme was designed to measure any patterned change. I determined, first, the *extent* of historical engagement: Were there any claims at all? If so, were references merely brief, more substantial, or indeed the primary focus of the article? The second measure targeted the *scope* of the historical pronouncements: Was the main referent to a sub-disciplinary formation, to the field as a whole, or both? My expectation, of course, was that the earlier collection would include a higher proportion of essays oriented to history through and through—and that their frame of reference would tend to encompass the whole field.

Based on the first round of coding, I identified a number of *mnemonic tropes*: claims about the field's past that appear frequently in one or both special issues. By "tropes" I mean appeals to history that, through repetition, acquire a shorthand familiarity. These are—or are assumed to be—shared referents. Their typical form is narrative simplicity, often captured in slogan-like phrases such as "the Four Founders." The tropes, many of them, are dichotomous, pitting one "school" against another, or emplotted in a small number of stages. In just a handful of words—"magic bullet theory," for example—an entire history gets invoked, with the reader (a fellow member of the field) expected to make the metonymic inference. Occasionally the tropes center on a particular work—a well-known book or article— that, when mentioned, evokes a shared point of historical reference. So my strategy, in a second round of close reading, was to record the specific occurrence, essay by essay, of those tropes identified in the first round. Together with the assessments of scope and extent, the

measure of tropic citation was designed to ferret out continuity or change across the special issues' 35 years.

The analysis provided strong support—startlingly so—for the thesis that much has changed. Indeed, the two issues express entirely different relationships to disciplinary memory. There is much less history invoked in 2018, and the claims that *are* made lean hard toward the sub-disciplinary. The 1983 special issue is marinated in memory: the essays have a totemic character, with rival approaches laid out in manifesto-like salvos studded with martial rhetoric. The 2018 issue, by contrast, is a collection of sub-disciplinary pods, each siloed from the others. This shows up in the subdued, even hushed, mode of engaging disciplinary history. By 2018, there were few cross-field enlistments of the past; the call to mnemonic tropes was vanishingly rare, set against the bustle of 1983.

Consider the measure of *extent*—the depth of engagement with the field's memory. In the 1983 issue, over a third of the essays (12 of 35) were full-fledged histories; they were, in other words, primarily focused on the discussion of the field's past. Another 19 essays—over half the total—were "substantially" engaged, with just four classified as briefly mentioning historical claims. In 2018, by contrast, only three contributions, among the 21 essays, were historical through and through (Chakravartty et al. 2018; Slichal and Mance 2018; Walter et al. 2018). More telling, perhaps, is their mode of analysis: All three are large-scale, quantitative studies of thousands of journal articles, mined for topical spread, citation patterns, and the like. The narrative mode—the storytelling around intellectual or institutional developments—is hallowed out, even in their sections devoted to interpretive reflection. The many narrative histories of the 1983 issue have no counterpart—not a single example—among the 2018 cohort.

About a quarter of the 2018 essays (5 of 21) are "substantially" engaged with the field's history, with over half of the remainder making brief mentions. (A single 2018 paper (Cooren 2018) made no historical claims whatsoever.) There is, then, a significant change registered by this first measure: Almost 90 percent (31 of 35) of the 1983 contributions are substantially or primarily oriented to the disciplinary past. By 2018 the combined total had dropped to just over a third (8 of 21 essays). There was, in short, an unmistakable flattening around the appeals to memory.

The contrast was, if anything, still starker around the question of *scope*. Nearly every contribution from the 1983 "Ferment" issue directed its historical claims to the field at large. Just one essay— Herbert Gans' (1983) reflection on the study of journalism—was oriented to the history of a subfield. By 2018, only half the contributions made field-wide historical claims, while three-fifths contained

references to sub-disciplinary history. In the 1983 original, essay after essay hailed the discipline as a whole: This was the shared mode of address. The 2018 collection was, in that respect, far more parochial, with a large proportion of contributions turned inward, oriented to subfield peers.

In 1983 the field's historical intersections with other disciplines, like sociology or political science, is a common theme. Other fields crop up frequently in the 2018 issue too, but in a notably distinctive pattern: In the later installment, the claim is that other disciplines are constitutive and co-equal participants in sub-disciplinary formations that—as a result—come off as detached from communication as such. To cast the point differently, communication research, in 1983, was the unquestioned reference point; other disciplines come into the picture as antecedents, rivals, or confederates.

By 2018 much of the focus had devolved to cross-disciplinary formations that, in the authors' portrayals, are not particularly rooted in communication research. A paper on "intergroup communication," for example, devotes its brief historical excursus to the subfield's independent ancestry, and ongoing development, in social psychology and sociolinguistics (Gallois et al. 2018, 310). Another contribution, on "postcolonial communication and media studies," is oriented to what the authors describe as "the larger interdisciplinary terrain of postcolonial studies—populated largely by scholars in literary studies, history and anthropology" (Kumar and Parameswaran 2018, 348). There is, in those 2018 essays that do address the field at large, a palpable sense that even *joint* custody of communication and media-related topics is far from secure. In 1983, communication research—as an identifiable referent—was at the center of memory claims, even in the context of disciplinary cross-pollination. References to the discipline as such, by 2018, had become more tentative, even diffident.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that one of the few mnemonic tropes with any measurable purchase in 2018 is *fragmentation*—the claim that the field has splintered over time. The editors' introduction, for instance, calls out the "extraordinary pluralism of our field" to justify the pointillist spread of the issue's contributions (Fuchs and Qui 2018, 220). A paper on "global media studies," in another example, struck a nostalgic note about how, in decades past, scholars had "grappled with 'big questions.'" A field "in disagreement over big questions," the author continued, "is more vibrant than a field fragmented into a 'live and let live' ethos, proliferating siloed, disconnected journals" (Kraidy 2018, 342). The fragmentation story is, in that sense, the tropic exception that proves the rule: Mnemonic tropes have an insignificant place in the 2018 issue, especially set in relief against their extraordinary fecundity in 1983. One crude index

of the gap is the average number of distinct mnemonic claims per article, across the two periods. The 1983 collection averages nearly three-and-a-half such claims per article, a figure that fell, by 2018, to under one claim per article.

Other than the fragmentation theme (three invocations), the only tropes with more than a single mention in 2018 concerned the field's internationalization (four), the "administrative vs. critical research" divide (three), and the field's "mainstream" or "effects" tradition (five). Tropes that were, in 1983, prominent—invoked in seven or more essays—were, in many cases, not mentioned at all in 2018. Even developments *subsequent* to 1983—like the alleged debate between political economy and cultural studies, or the declining significance of the "mass" concept—are barely mentioned in 2018 (once each).

Consider references to touchstone works. In 1983 seven contributions appealed to Harold Lasswell's (1948, 37) "who says what in which channel to whom with what effect" formulation. The allusion, in 1983, was plainly a commonplace, a staple of shared disciplinary knowledge. Most of the references do not include a citation to Lasswell's essay, and a pair do not even mention his name: such is the expectation of mutual understanding. Gaye Tuchman (1983, 330), for example, calls it "the famous phrase"; Francis Balle and Idalina Cappe de Baillon (1983, 148) and Tamas Szeckso (1983, 97), in their essays, invoke "Lasswell's model" and "Lasswell's paradigm," respectively, *without* the quote, calling on readers to fill in the "who says what. . ." gap themselves. There is, too, an almost ritualistic return to Bernard Berelson's (1959) obituary for communication research in the 1983 papers—a series of quarter-century refutations. Schramm's (1983) lead essay is organized around Berelson's mistaken "withering away" claim. Six other articles invoke Berelson's requiem too—though not, in every case, with the unblushing triumphalism of the Schramm paper. The important point to stress is that neither work—not Lasswell's nor Berelson's—appears even once across the twenty-one 2018 essays. Nor has any substitute work taken their place.

The same is true for the more generic shorthands—the histories-in-a-phrase that were, in 1983, so prominent. The putative "hypodermic needle" or "magic bullet" theory of interwar media influence appears in eight separate essays, and not once in 2018. The linked refrain that mid-century Columbia researchers coalesced around a "limited" or "minimal effects" conclusion appears in seven of the 1983 essays, and just once in 2018. The same pattern holds for other tropes. The linear, "sender-message-receiver" model, the "theory of mass society," the upsurge in humanistic approaches: Each of these appears seven or eight times in 1983, and not at all in 2018.

There was, as the "ferment" noun was intended to convey, a pitched paradigmatic battle taking place on the pages of the 1983 special issue. The field's American mainstream—represented by Schramm, Elihu Katz, and Ithiel de Sola Pool, among others—came under withering assault from many angles. North American political economists like Dallas Smythe, Vincent Mosco, and Herbert I. Schiller were joined by an array of European dissenters. The battle was joined, in large part, through historical claim-making. So references to the longstanding "divide" between "administrative" and "critical" research were legion—traceable, in many of the mentions, to Paul Lazarsfeld's (1941) coinage of the distinction. In a similar spirit, big-brush historical labels—mostly pejorative—were splashed across the 1983 essays. Countless variations on the theme of a "mainstream" tradition appeared—a lexicon of opprobrium that included epitaphs like "dominant paradigm," the "dominant positivist tradition" (Mosco 1983, 244), the "positivistic/behavioristic blindness" (Halloran 1983, 274), "behavioral positivists" (Blumler 1983, 168), "the behavioral science of communications" (Carey 1983, 311), "liberal pluralists" (Lang and Lang 1983, 139), "traditional sociopsychological concerns" (Katz 1983, 52), a "long-standing psychologistic bias" (Gans 1983, 180), the "functionalist approach" (Mattelart 1983, 68), and even portmanteaux like "neopositivists of the dominant paradigm" (Rosengren 1983, 200). Indeed, the "dominant paradigm" phrase alone appears 18 times in the 1983 collection.

Reference to the "mainstream" does re-surface in 2018, but in strikingly different terms. Gone are references to ascriptive bludgeons like "positivist" or "behavioristic." There is mention, in one essay, to the "dominant conceptual analysis" (Sparks 2018, 390); another cites "a paradigm of communication effects" (Neuman 2018, 369); and a third refers to the "professionalized mainstream of communications research" (Murdock 2018, 363). None of them is venomous, and the third is revealing in its subsequent characterization: "the professionalized mainstream of communications research," wrote Graham Murdock (1983, 363), "and its segmentation into largely self-contained subareas." As a whole, the essays defy the issue editors' call for a revival of critical dissent. The emphasis, when the old debates appear at all, is on detente—on their exhausted relevance. One of the big quantitative journal studies wraps up on this point:

> To conclude, the state of research and theory in [the *Journal of Communication*] suggests that "Ferments in the Field" is somewhat a misnomer, as it wrongfully implies the existence of contemporary tensions regarding epistemological and methodological assumptions. Yet in the post-1990s, there is little evidence for tensions and real synergies be-

tween diverse or competing approaches in *JOC*, with (post-)positivistic, micro-level, mass media research having the clear upper hand. (Walter et al. 2018, 439)

An almost identical point was stressed in the 2018 paper on communication policy research. The field, the authors argue, has made significant progress, in part, thanks to "leaving the 'turf wars' between administrative and critical research behind." Indeed, they add, there is "now a consensus that the separation into these two research traditions has often been misunderstood and overplayed" (Just and Puppis 2018, 329). There is, at any rate, nothing like the mnemonic lancing that so permeated the 1983 special issue. Seventeen essays—almost half—wielded some variation of the "behaviorist"/"positivist"/"functionalist" catch-all pejorative. In a now-familiar pattern, not one of the 2018 essays marshaled a similar insult-by-inscription.

A final axis of contrast has to do with disciplinary status itself. A telling irony of the 1983 volume is that both field-boosters and critics agreed that communication studies had arrived, so to speak, on the academic stage. For the celebrants, the steady march of institutionalization—the PhDs conferred, the new programs cropping up, the sheer volume of *activity*—was a very good sign indeed. Schramm's (1983, 12–13) essay is an unapologetic catalog of forward movement: "At the time of the Founding Fathers, no more than a handful of communication doctorates were given in any year: in 1983, it is likely that one hundred or more will be awarded." Yes, intellectual progress has lagged behind the institutional gains—but not that far: "I suspect that the better journals in the field and the upper third of the papers would get a good market even from those tough critics, the Founding Fathers." Eight other essays from the 1983 volume endorsed the trope of an advancing discipline, evenly split between critics who fretted about the new prominence and those—like Schramm—who saw reason to cheer. An example of the fretting came from Jeremy Tunstall (1983, 92), in his classic dismemberment of U.S. communication research: "The fact that a single individual can teach courses in, say, magazine editing and research techniques in social psychology is a tribute to human adaptability, not to a well-conceived academic discipline."

The divide—the dueling reaction to the field's institutional gains—did not fall along ideological lines. Gerbner's (1983, 361, 362) epilogue, for example, is all about disciplinary progress; it's just that the "new critique" is a fresh and salutary stage. "The discipline," indeed, is the capstone essay's protagonist. "The emergence of communications as an independent and critical discipline using the full range of methodologies is beginning," he wrote, "to right this imbalance [of

industry influence]." All the ferment, he added in the issue's very last line, attests to the "vitality of the discipline and to its ability to tackle the critical tasks ahead."

The 2018 "selfie"—as the editors (Fuchs and Qui 2018, 220) regrettably labeled the issue—has almost none of the swagger, nor the foreboding, so palpable in 1983. Communication research is, as it were, a fact on the ground—a locus of employment and the label on the door. None of the contributors can pull off treating the discipline *as a discipline*: They concede the point in their subdisciplinary gaze. The discipline at large, when it is invoked, is never—not once in the volume—described as a story of institutional gain or loss. Galloping heterogeneity is an issue to register, celebrate or bemoan, but the sense of on-the-cusp arrival—that's gone by 2018.

As a post-disciplinary formation, communication studies doesn't need memory any more—or not, at least, in the old field-spanning form. Another angle from which to make the same point is that the old tropes aren't even *legible* any more. The shorthands and storylines were useful when they could be understood.

The surge of the digital in the mid-1990s splintered the would-be discipline, and pulled down its weak and porous borders altogether. In the new Babelism of the new millennium, disciplinary memory lost whatever hold—whatever utility—it once had. Memory claims have become smaller, more parochial, and (above all) less potent, as their underlying referent—the discipline—is more like a tincture, now, in a cross-disciplinary solution. In John Durham Peters' (1986, 544) quip, communication research was Taiwan, claiming to be all of China. Thirty years later, the joke is a charming anachronism. The ambition is gone—and with it, the old mnemonic belligerence, for better or worse.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Balle, Francis, and Idalina Cappe de Baillon. "Mass Media Research in France: An Emerging Discipline". *Journal of Communication* 33.3 (1983): 146–156.

Berelson, Bernard. "The State of Communication Research". *Public Opinion Quarterly* 23:1 (1959): 1–6.

Blumler, Jay G. "Communication and Democracy: The Crisis Beyond and the Ferment Within". *Journal of Communication* 33.3 (1983): 166–173.

Carey, James W. "The Origins of the Radical Discourse on Cultural Studies in the United States". *Journal of Communication* 33.3 (1983): 311–313.

Chakravartty, Paula, Rachel Kuo, Victoria Grubbs, and Charlton McIlwain. "#CommunicationSoWhite". *Journal of Communication* 68:2 (2018): 254–266.

Cooren, François. "Materializing Communication: Making the Case for a Relational Ontology". *Journal of Communication* 68:2 (2018): 278–288.

Couldry, Nick, and Andreas Hepp. *The Mediated Construction of Reality*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2018.

Fuchs, Christian, and Jack Linchuan Qiu. "Ferments in the Field: Introductory Reflections on the Past, Present and Future of Communication Studies" *Journal of Communication* 68:2 (2018): 219–232.

Fuchs, Christian, and Jack Linchuan Qiu. "Ferments in the Field: The Past, Present and Futures of Communication Studies". International Communication Association. https://www.icahdq.org/mpage/Ferments. August 25, 2016 (July 30, 2020).

Galison, Peter. *Image & Logic: A Material Culture of Microphysics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Gallois, Cindy, Bernadette M, Watson, and Howard Giles. "Intergroup Communication: Identities and Effective Interactions". *Journal of Communication* 68:2 (2018): 309–317.

Gans, Herbert J. "News Media, News Policy, and Democracy: Research for the Future". *Journal of Communication* 33.3 (1983): 174–184

Gerbner, George. "The Importance of Being Critical—in One's Own Fashion". *Journal of Communication* 33.3 (1983): 355–362.

Hacking, Ian. "The Looping Effects of Human Kinds". *Causal Cognition: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Ed. Dan Sperber, David Premack, and Ann James Premack. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. 351–383.

Halloran, James D. "A Case for Critical Eclecticism." *Journal of Com-munication* 33.3 (1983): 270–278.

"Introduction". *Journal of Communication* 33.3 (1983): 4–5.

Just, Natascha, and Manuel Puppis. "Moving Beyond Self-Castigation: Let's Reinvigorate Communication Policy Research Now!". *Journal of Communication* 68:2 (2018): 327–336.

Katz, Elihu. "The Return of the Humanities and Sociology". *Journal of Communication* 33.3 (1983): 51–52.

Katz, Elihu, and Paul F. Lazarsfeld. *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1955.

Kraidy, Marwan M. "Global Media Studies: A Critical Agenda". *Journal of Communication* 68:2 (2018): 337–346.

Kumar, Sangeet, and Radhika Parameswaran. "Charting an Itinerary for Postcolonial Communication and Media Studies". *Journal of Communication* 68:2 (2018): 347–358.

Lang, Kurt, and Gladys Engel Lang. "The 'New' Rhetoric of Mass Communication Research: A Longer View". *Journal of Communication* 33.3 (1983): 128–140.

Lasswell, Harold D. "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society". *The Communication of Ideas*. Ed. Lyman Bryson. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948. 37-51.

Lazarsfeld, Paul F. "Remarks on Administrative and Critical Communications Research." *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9 (1941): 2–16.

Mattelart, Armond. "Technology, Culture, and Communication: Research and Policy Priorities in France". *Journal of Communication* 33.3 (1983): 59–73.

McLemee, Scott. "Internet Studies 1.0: A Discipline Is Born". *Chronicle of Higher Education* 47.29 (March 30, 2001): A24.

Mosco, Vincent. "Critical Research and the Role of Labor". *Journal of Communication* 33.3 (1983): 237–248.

Murdock, Graham. "Media Materialities: For A Moral Economy of Machines". *Journal of Communication* 68:2 (2018): 359–368.

Neuman, W. Russell. "The Paradox of the Paradigm: An Important Gap in Media Effects Research." *Journal of Communication* 68:2 (2018): 369–379.

Park, David W. "The Pre-History of ICA: NSSC, the Communication Course, and the Field of Communication in the Mid-20th Century". International Communication Association, May 2020, Gold Coast, Australia.

Peters, John Durham. "Institutional Sources of Intellectual Poverty in Communication Research". *Communication Research* 13.4 (1986): 527-559.

Pooley, Jefferson. "Fifteen Pages that Shook the Field: *Personal Influence*, Edward Shils, and the Remembered History of Mass Communication Research". *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 608.1 (2006): 130–156.

Pooley, Jefferson. "The Four Cultures: Media Studies at the Crossroads". *Social Media+ Society* 2.1 (2016): 1–4.

Pooley, Jefferson. "Wilbur Schramm and the 'Four Founders' History of US Communication Research". *Communications. Media. Design* 2.4 (2018a): 5–18.

Pooley, Jefferson. "The Post-Program Era: The Rise of Internet & Society Centers—And a New Interdiscipline." *Culture Digitally*. March 5, 2018b. http://culturedigitally.org/2018/03/the-post-program-era-the-rise-of-internet-society-centers-and-a-new-interdiscipline/. (July 30, 2020).

Rogers, Everett M., and Steven H. Chaffee. "Communication and Journalism from 'Daddy' Bleyer to Wilbur Schramm: A Palimpsest". *Journalism Monographs* 148 (1994): 1–52.

Rosengren, Karl Erik. "Communication Research: One Paradigm, or Four?". *Journal of Communication* 33.3 (1983): 185–207.

Ruddock, Andy. "Backstage in the History of Media Theory: The George Gerbner Archive and the History of Critical Media Studies". *KOME: An International Journal of Pure Communication Inquiry* 6.2 (2018): 81–91.

Schramm, Wilbur. "Communication Research in the United States". The Science of Human Communication. Ed. Wilbur Schramm. New York: Basic Book, 1963. 1–16

Schramm, Wilbur. "The Unique Perspective of Communication: A Retrospective View". *Journal of Communication* 33.3 (1983): 6–17.

Sparks, Colin. "Changing Concepts for a Changing World". *Journal of Communication* 68:2 (2018): 390–398.

Splichal, Slavko, and Boris Mance. "Paradigm(s) Lost? Islands of Critical Media Research in Communication Journals". *Journal of Communication* 68:2 (2018): 399–414.

Tuchman, Gaye. "Consciousness Industries and the Production of Culture". *Journal of Communication* 33.3 (1983): 330–341.

Tunstall, Jeremy. "The Trouble with U.S. Communication Research". *Journal of Communication* 33.3 (1983): 92–95.

Waisbord, Silvio. *Communication: A Post-Discipline*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2019.

Walter, Nathan, Michael J. Cody, and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach. "The Ebb and Flow of Communication Research: Seven Decades of Publication Trends and Research Priorities". *Journal of Communication* 68:2 (2018): 424–440.

Witmer, Diane F. "The Association (of) Internet Researchers: Formed to Support Scholarship in and of the Internet". *Information, Communication & Society* 2.3 (1999): 368–370.