

The University of Hong Kong
Department of Psychology

Departmental Seminar

Communicating Science: When science introspects and investigates the “thickness” in the blind spot

Date: October 7, 2013 (Monday)
Time: 4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Venue: Room 8.13, 8/F The Jockey Club Tower, Centennial Campus, HKU
Speaker: Mr. Ludovic Garattini
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Science represents the modern nexus where most if not all the wishes and expectations for solving global crises meet. All sciences (including humanities and social sciences) are called upon to “save the day.” Both the civil society and institutional apparatuses demand high level of accountability in science. It is almost as if everyone can and should have a word on what sciences can and should accomplish, because they “pay” for it. This increase in accountability becomes necessary in part also because of the potential threats to the world sciences and technologies—when poorly managed and understood—can produce (e.g., Fukushima crisis).

Within such a context of both high hopes and overwhelming need to control and report their activity and in a context in which they shall “anticipate” their results or even improvise ad hoc risk management of irrational fears in some cases, researchers are to massively and effectively communicate about their work. Nonetheless, such communication is typically done so using a wide range of not-so-familiar tools, devices, formats, media and networks; relying more often than not on “natural and personal skills” of the scientist.

From this situation, a very singular and apparently paradoxical communicative environment arises: As scientists, we are used to acknowledge our own activity as being essentially reliable to a set of specific skills such as rigorous data collection and factual reporting. Yet, when it comes to science

communication, we tend to rely on unsophisticated practices.

Many theorists (e.g., Michel Foucault, Pierre Moscovici, Bruno Latour, Baudouin Jurdant) have already shown that the modalities and ways to communicate any knowledge are in themselves modalities of knowledge production per se. Therefore, since communications and the reflexivity we have in our way to communicate knowledge shape unavoidably and give birth to the knowledge communicated itself, a focus shall be made on the knowledge of communications we can extrude from every aspect of science communication.

As such, inquiring more thoughtfully and scientifically this a priori impenetrable, very crowded and very complex “thickness” called “science communication” is of the uppermost importance, if we want to understand what sciences are and what they stand-for nowadays.

This talk aims to be an introduction to this overall approach, born within the field of communication sciences. A case study will be used to illustrate this approach: the humanoid robotic research in France and Japan. Attention will be drawn to one of the many hidden, though decisive, aspects involved in conducting science on the one hand and science communication on the other.