



HAL
open science

The Covid Doxa

Laurent Mucchielli

► **To cite this version:**

Laurent Mucchielli. The Covid Doxa. *Kritische Gesellschaftsforschung*, 2024, 2, pp.380-402. halshs-04669519

HAL Id: halshs-04669519

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-04669519v1>

Submitted on 15 Aug 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Public Domain

The Covid Doxa: how propaganda, censorship and the politicization of Covid have destroyed our intellectual and moral bearings

Laurent Mucchielli (Centre Méditerranéen de Sociologie, de Science Politique et d'histoire,
UMR 7064, CNRS, Aix-Marseille Université & Sciences-Po Aix)

Kritische Gesellschaftsforschung (Critical Society Studies), 2023, 2, pp. 380-402.

<https://cdoi.org/1.1/065/000050>

Abstract

In the West, during the Covid crisis, leading scientists and many physicians publicly voiced their disagreement with the WHO's account of the pandemic, as well as with the health policy management of the crisis by most governments. Under normal circumstances, such criticism would have prompted contradictory debate. But not only did such debates never take place, these scientists were censored and treated as pariahs. How can we understand this? This article proposes some answers, showing 1) that the official account of the crisis has a structure that forms a deceptive but coherent narrative, claiming the name of Science (the author calls this the Covid doxa) 2) that this narrative has been protected at the cost of censorship and ostracization on an unprecedented scale, 3) that this narrative has been imposed as “indisputable truth” by a veritable cartel set up to ensure control of legitimate information, a cartel mainly in the USA and made up of the pharmaceutical industries, the WHO under the influence of Bill Gates' network, the governments of most countries, the digital giants and the legacy media.

In the West, during the Covid crisis, leading scientists – some of the most famous – publicly voiced their disagreement with the WHO's account of the pandemic, as well as with the health policy management of the crisis by most governments. In return, they have suffered every form of symbolic degradation (insults, defamation), intimidation, moral harassment, professional bullying and administrative sanctions (Martin, 2021 ; Liester, 2022 ; Mucchielli, 2022g ; Shir-Raz et al., 2022 ; Rouchier, 2024). They have also experienced censorship that rendered their work invisible, even in academic circles. Ultimately, this treatment resembled that of the wider population: as soon as they voiced important criticisms, they found themselves labelled “anti-vax / conspiracy / extreme-right” and regarded as a small minority of irrational and dangerous people. How was such a denial of scientific processes and findings and such a of democracy possible? To answer these questions, we need to study the social actors who mobilized and the techniques they deployed

to secure for themselves the “monopoly of legitimate information” (Bourdieu, 1996, 82). In this sense, I will show 1) that the official account of the crisis has a structure that forms a coherent narrative (which makes it difficult to criticize it only in part), and claims to speak in the name of Science, 2) that this narrative (*récit*, in French) was protected at the cost of censorship and ostracization on an unprecedented scale, which fell on all scientists and doctors who expressed their disagreement in the public arena, 3) that this narrative has been imposed as “indisputable truth” by a veritable cartel set up to ensure control of legitimate information, a cartel that has developed mainly in the USA and has proliferated worldwide made up of the pharmaceutical industries, the World Health Organization (WHO) largely under subsidized and under the influence of Bill Gates’ network (Mucchielli, 2022a, 66sq), the governments of most Western countries, the digital giants and the legacy media.

1. The Covid doxa: a story like a children's tale

The sea of declarations of all kinds, as well as the sometimes hesitant and even contradictory speeches and decisions of public officials, may have given the impression of a relative cacophony in 2020. However, an analysis of the speeches made by the main national political leaders, the management of the WHO, its major private funder (Bill Gates) and the heads of the pharmaceutical industries easily reveals a narrative structure which has never varied, and which I have called the Covid doxa (Mucchielli, 2022a). The doxa is first and foremost a narrative whose “fundamental schema, the logic of actions and the syntax of characters, the temporally ordered course of events” must be analyzed, as Umberto Eco (1985: 133) put it. The narrative is necessarily presented as “a series of temporally ordered propositions”, with a beginning and an end, all organized around a semantic matrix that gives coherence to the whole (Adam, 1996: 12-18). It is then a narrative designed to make the audience adhere to an explanation of the events they have experienced or are currently experiencing: “a narrative finds its meaning only in accomplishing a certain effect on the person (or persons) for whom it is intended” (ibid: 11). Sociologically speaking, doxa is a standard of thought that, at a given moment, helps to protect the social order. It is therefore not simply the dominant discourse. Or rather, if it is, it is because it is above all the discourse of the dominant. The doxa then takes on the dimension of what Bourdieu (1998: 49) called a *sociodicy*, “i.e. a theoretical justification for the fact that they are privileged”. In this case, the idea is that “the most competent govern” (ibid: 48), that they have mastered scientific information, that they rely on a ‘scientific consensus’ and on ‘indisputable’ figures that ‘speak for themselves’.

The Covid doxa is therefore a narrative that orders the world and gives it a particular meaning. In my opinion, this narrative is structured around four fundamental sequences. Firstly, it suggests that we are faced with a zoonosis (a virus of animal origin transmitted to humans) constituting “an unprecedented threat” and “an enemy of Humanity”, in the words of WHO Director Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in mid-March 2020, who echoed the catastrophic predictions of English epidemiologist Neil Ferguson regarding the mortality that this virus would cause (whose prediction had already been disproven in several cases [Fund,

2020]). In concrete terms: we are all seriously threatened. Incidentally, this fundamental premise of the story, its inaugural event, is not only designed to instill fear (and therefore create suggestibility). It also contains two other implicit assertions: on the one hand, the affirmation of the natural origin of the virus, designed to conceal the reality of genetic manipulation of the virus and the industrial processes based on it; on the other, the belief in the magical power of numbers to objectify and predict. These two elements are at the heart of scientism, which is where an old scientific ideology and industrial propaganda come together. Secondly, it was asserted that “traditional” medicine could do nothing in the immediate future to cure the disease (Covid) caused by this virus, since all available treatments outside the patent - i.e. all treatments that don't make money for industry and its shareholders - (hydroxychloroquine, azithromycin, ivermectin, chlorine dioxide, vitamins C and D, etc.) were claimed to be ineffective or even dangerous. It should also be noted that, while waiting for a vaccine, the doxa's supporters tried to impose a patented antiviral (Remdesivir) whose ineffectiveness was quickly demonstrated (Roche, 2022).

Thirdly, the doxa stated that the only thing to do in the immediate future would be to multiply “social distancing” measures, and ultimately to take this logic to its logical conclusion by imitating China and locking everyone up in their own homes. This lockdown, which the protagonists of the doxa assured, would break the transmission chains of the virus and thus halt the epidemic – in defiance of all the “pandemic plans” that have been put in place afterward.

Fourthly, it was argued the epidemic would not end until we were delivered by the vaccine. It's like the *deus ex machina* at the end of an ancient play. Let's quote the WHO Director again, on April 13, 2020: “in the end, the development and distribution of a safe and effective vaccine will be necessary to interrupt transmission completely”.

This account of the pandemic is more than just questionable: it is seriously flawed. Indeed, we know 1) that the origin of SARS-CoV-2 is not natural but artificial, with dangerous Sino-American genetic manipulations hiding behind the fable of the pangolin and the bat (Mucchielli, 2022e; Henrion-Caude, 2023; Banoun, 2023); 2) that this virus has never threatened the survival of the human race in any way, as its lethality only concerns the very elderly or those who are already very ill, and the increase in “all-cause” mortality observed in the year 2020 is very low or even non-existent in many countries, including in the West (Mucchielli, 2022a; Toubiana, 2022; Chaillot, 2023); 3) supposedly predictive mathematical models have proved to be false or irrelevant (Rouchier, 2022); 4) a whole range of very inexpensive medical treatments are available to treat the sick, avoiding both aggravation (hospitalization and eventual death) and the medium- and long-term effects of the disease (“long covid”); 5) that containment measures, far from “saving lives”, did not stop or even significantly slow down the mortality caused by the epidemic in any country (De Laroche Lambert et al., 2020 ; Ben David et al., 2021), and in return have caused serious socio-economical and psychological damage to populations (Schippers, Ioannidis, Joffe, 2022), less ‘lockdowner countries’ (such as Sweden) having better health and economic results (Andersson, Jonung, 2024); 6) that the supposedly “95% safe and effective” vaccines manufactured in just a few months by the pharmaceutical industry are, in fact, experimental

gene therapies which have not stopped the epidemic or reduced Covid-related mortality in any country in the world (Mucchielli, 2022k), and which have, on the contrary, led to an increase in the number of sufferers and deaths due to their numerous undesirable effects (Mucchielli et al. 2022b; Cotton, 2023 ; Mead et al., 2024).

2. Invisible and ostracized leading scientists

The fact that the official narrative did not correspond to observable reality quickly became apparent to many researchers, as well as to many doctors. On the research side, it was not a few “second fiddle” or “rookies” seeking publicity who voiced their disagreement with the management of the pandemic and the analysis behind it – but on the contrary - some of the world’s best in their fields. In France, this was the case for the physician-researchers at the Institut Hospitalo-universitaire “Méditerranée Infections”, a center of excellence built up over a decade of effort and thanks to numerous public subsidies, whose publications are cited the world over. Yet, far from taking their assessments seriously, they were treated in the public debate as “charlatans” or even “forgers”, with journalists taking recourse to a level of personification and demonization of their leader (Didier Raoult) comparable to the era of McCarthyism (Mucchielli, 2022a: 47-58). Similar treatment was meted out to another of France's best-known biologists, Luc Montagnier, winner of the Nobel Prize in 2008 for his co-discovery of the virus responsible for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). He was publically portrayed as if he had become senile or demented (Mucchielli, 2022e: 231-232). All dissenting voices were treated with the same contempt (“conspiracy theorist”, “angelist”, etc.) and/or censorship. Here are three international examples.

The Great Barrington Declaration

The first is that of the group of Anglo-Saxon epidemiologists who, in early October 2020, adopted the Great Barrington Declaration. It states that “Current lockdown policies are producing devastating effects on short and long-term public health”, and that the people at risk on whom prevention and protective measures should concentrate were well identified (people who are already very old and/or very ill, while “for children, COVID-19 is less dangerous than many other harms, including influenza») and that the rest of the population would gradually become immune until they reached a stage of herd immunity independently of vaccination. The declaration has been signed by more than 16,000 scientists worldwide, and nearly 48,000 medical practitioners. Once again, its three initiators are among the world's best-known and most respected figures in their scientific fields: Martin Kulldorff, Professor of Medicine at Harvard University, biostatistician and epidemiologist specializing in the detection and monitoring of infectious disease epidemics and the evaluation of vaccine safety, Sunetra Gupta, Professor at Oxford University, epidemiologist specializing in immunology, vaccine development and mathematical modeling of infectious diseases, and Jay Bhattacharya, Professor at Stanford University School of Medicine, specializing in public

health, infectious diseases and vulnerable populations. Their text is signed by many other leading scientists, such as Michael Levitt, professor at Stanford University and winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2013.

The world's most quoted epidemiologist

My second example is that of John Ioannidis, Professor of Epidemiology at Stanford University, who is probably the best-known (or at least most-quoted) epidemiologist in the world, for his empirical research, for his methodological demonstrations (he has shown, for example, that randomized studies presented by the industry as the only convincing ones are ultimately no more reliable than observational clinical studies [Ioannidis et al., 2001]), but also for his ethical positions, since he has repeatedly raised the question of organized corruption by the pharmaceutical industries in the medical sciences (Ioannidis, 2005, 2019). With the Covid crisis upon us, Ioannidis began to warn in mid-March 2020 that the radical decisions taken by governments (such as general containment) were based on biased statistical predictions and a highly inadequate analysis of the available data, with the result that the lethality of the virus was unduly dramatized (Ioannidis, 2020). He then worked with two Italian researchers to collect and analyze the first available data on Italy, which played a pivotal role in the political-sanitary handling of the crisis in the West. In the first week of April, the three researchers published an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association from which crucial lessons should have been learned (Boccia, Ricciardi, Ioannidis, 2020). They noted 1) that the target population was the very elderly (and Italy has the oldest population in Europe), 2) that mass testing enabled infected people to be identified immediately, isolated and the local epidemic extinguished, and 3) that public hospitals were structurally short of beds and chronically overloaded in winter, so it was necessary to avoid overloading them by reserving access for people in a serious condition, with others needing early treatment in outpatient clinics, 4) that hospitals are a major source of infection for both patients and nursing staff, and that drastic hygiene measures should therefore be applied and nursing staff systematically tested, 5) that a shortage of oxygenation equipment in public hospitals has cost many lives.

In other words, to effectively combat a seasonal flu-like epidemic that was more contagious than usual, four things were essential. The first was to immediately focus protection efforts (hand washing, wearing of FFP2 masks, ventilation of indoor spaces, etc.) on the most vulnerable people and not on the general population (a conclusion identical to that of the Barrington Declaration). The second was to carry out massive testing to detect and temporarily isolate infected people within countries, but also at borders to quarantine infected travelers (a strategy identical to that of the Marseille IHU). The third was to provide real treatment (rather than abandoning patients to their homes) upstream of the hospital, reserving it for serious cases. And the fourth was to give hospitals the means to make their premises safe from the risk of infectious spread, and to be able to treat patients properly. Finally, together with two Stanford colleagues and Bhattacharya, he published at the end of

the year a statistical study of 10 Western countries demonstrating the overall uselessness of confinement in the light of mortality statistics (Bendavid et al., 2020).

BMJ saves the honor of medical science journals

Third example: throughout the health crisis, while some of the best-known scientific journals (in particular the Lancet and the New England Journal of Medicine) were publishing fraudulent articles (Mucchielli, 2022f), another major biological and medical science journal embodied ethics, critical thinking and the ability to resist industrial and/or political pressure: the British Medical Journal. As early as June 24, 2020, in an editorial entitled “Commercial influence and Covid-19”, two of the journal's editors and two Australian professors of medicine pointed out that the research community had been lamenting for years “systemic weaknesses in the regulation of drugs, devices and tests” in the face of commercial influences, and that this was likely to skew the management of the Covid epidemic (Moynihan et al., 2020). They give the example of the British government, which “used ‘commercial confidentiality’ to justify concealing the names of nine covid-19 antibody tests that had been found to be insufficiently accurate”. They also pointed out that “speed should not undermine basic standards for trustworthy evidence”. They gave the example of Remdesivir, an antiviral drug manufactured by the American company Gilead, which was not approved at the start of the pandemic for lack of evidence of any efficacy. In early April 2020, the New England Journal of Medicine published a small descriptive study of a compassionate use program for Remdesivir involving 53 patients. This study had been funded by Gilead, and a third of the authors were Gilead employees. Unsurprisingly, Gilead's press release reported “clinical improvement in 68% of patients in this limited dataset”, with the press unisono headlining the “hope” that this treatment would save “two-thirds of patients” (ibid). However, two weeks later, the Lancet published a randomized placebo-controlled trial which concluded that there was no statistically significant clinical benefit, and which had to be stopped due to side effects in 12% of patients. This didn't stop Gilead from continuing to inundate the public with misleading press releases, and America's top public health official, Antony Fauci, from declaring that Remdesivir could become the “standard of care” for Covid. In this announcement, Fauci claimed to be basing himself on the preliminary results of a publicly-funded study, which would therefore not be suspected of being under commercial influence. However, when this study was finally published a month later, again in the New England Journal of Medicine, it was discovered not only that there was no effect of this treatment on the mortality of Covid patients, but also and above all that the most influential public health player (Fauci) in the most influential country in the world was also one of the most corrupt. It emerged that 1) “the primary outcome had been changed during the trial” and that the “treating physicians were allowed to switch trial participants from placebo to remdesivir, bringing an early end to masking for some participants”, just after Fauci's public announcement, 2) that Gilead had supplied the entire (very expensive) drug for the trial, that one of the trial investigators was a Gilead employee and that six other authors had declared financial links with Gilead, 3) that an additional note revealed that Gilead employees participated in discussions on protocol development and in weekly calls from the protocol

team. In short, Gilead was involved from start to finish in the organization, methodology, conduct and, most probably, publication of this research, in accordance with the principle of ghost writing so widespread in the medical sciences (Light et al., 2013; Gøtzsche, 2014; Sismondo, 2018; Mucchielli, 2020).

On November 2, 2020, four American and Canadian researchers (from the universities of Cambridge, Boston and Vancouver) returned to the fray in the BMJ, warning that: “Despite increasing evidence on the unintended, adverse effects of public health interventions such as social distancing and lockdown measures, there are few signs that policy decisions are being informed by a serious assessment and weighing of their harms on health” (Bavli et al., 2020). They deplored a politicization of public health issues, questioned the psychological effects of containment and called for “models that aim to understand the effect of covid-19 policies on health also consider lives lost as a result of the economic consequences of the response to the pandemic to avoid portraying a false choice between the economy and health” (ibid.). They attempted to quantify the damage caused by cancellations or postponements of hospital care. In general, they warned of the prevailing dogmatism (stating in particular that “a ‘zero covid’ goal is neither realistic nor sustainable for most countries”), and called for the cost/benefit balance to be re-established in public decision-making.

A few weeks later, BMJ editor Kamran Abbasi published an article entitled “Covid-19: politicisation, corruption, and suppression of science” (Abbasi, 2020). In it, he wrote some very strong words, believing that “Science is being suppressed for political and financial gain”, that “Covid-19 has unleashed state corruption on a grand scale, and it is harmful to public health” and has revealed “how the medical-political complex can be manipulated in an emergency - a time when it is even more important to safeguard science”. Analyzing the British case, Abbasi began by noting that the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), formed to advise the government, was working in opacity. He then recalled that a report by Public Health England on Covid-19 and social inequalities had been blocked by the Department of Health and its authors forbidden to speak to the press. He also pointed out that the British government had just placed an order for a million poor-quality antibody tests and, to achieve this, had tried to prevent the publication of the critical opinion of members of the same agency. In the end, Abbasi showed the deception of political decisions supposedly based on science. There can be no science if data is not made public to allow free examination by researchers, if the conclusions of scientific studies are subject to “political interference” and if the public health system is “compromised by conflicts of interest”. Abbasi pointed out that this problem primarily concerned the SAGE: The UK’s pandemic response relies too heavily on scientists and other government appointees “with worrying competing interests, including shareholdings in companies that manufacture Covid-19 diagnostic tests, treatments, and vaccines”. And he concluded by writing on the one hand that “suppressing science, whether by delaying publication, cherry-picking favourable research, or gagging scientists, is a danger to public health”, and on the other that “Politicisation of science was enthusiastically deployed by some of history’s worst autocrats and dictators, and it is now regrettably commonplace in democracies”.

Finally, it was also in the BMJ that we were be reading the most serious articles about vaccines against Covid, from the pen of another of the magazine's editors, Peter Doshi (Professor at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy). As early as the beginning of November 2020, and again in January 2021, in view of the first available data, he warned that Pfizer and Moderna's clinical trials had been seriously flawed, did not respect the anonymity of participants (were not double-blind studies), did not adequately test the vaccinated group (thus minimizing the frequency of vaccinated people who nevertheless had a Covid infection in the following weeks), and also sought to minimize as far as possible the adverse events that had nevertheless occurred in large numbers right from the start of the trials (Doshi, 2020, 2021 ; Fraiman et al., 2022).

Protesting doctors ignored or muzzled

As for doctors, the same invisibilization operated. Yet here too, in addition to individual resistance and disobedience to instructions not to treat patients ('stay at home and take paracetamol if you have a fever or pain'), significant collective action took place right from the start. In France, we should mention at least the creation of the "Laissons les médecins prescrire" association in March 2020, which quickly brought together more than 2,000 doctors, as well as the petition launched in April by Christian Perronne (professor of medicine, specialist in infectious and tropical diseases, and former WHO expert) and physician and former health minister Philippe Douste-Blazy. Entitled "Traitement du Covid-19: ne perdons plus de temps!", the petition quickly gathered almost 600,000 signatures. There were also numerous local initiatives, such as the "Covid Médecins 974" collective on Reunion Island, supported by dozens of local doctors and some of the island's elected representatives. None of these, however, ever made it into the public debate, because everywhere in the West, a cartel of censors stood in the way.

3. The return of organized censorship and the faltering of democracy

Censorship was widespread during the Covid crisis. Encouraged by the pharmaceutical industry, the WHO and most governments, it was organized by digital giants and journalists. Finally, it was tolerated and even taken up by many researchers and doctors, who were thus able to conceal doubts, make reluctance disappear and render contradiction invisible, to the point of exercising censorship within scientific institutions, whether in the evaluation processes of scientific publishing or in the running of ordinary academic life.

How to make dissident scientists invisible

In France, in September and October 2020, with the help of L. Toubiana (epidemiologist at Inserm) and J.-F. Toussaint (professor of physiology at the University of Paris), I launched a collective action in the form of tribunes offered for signature to researchers, academics and caregivers. Several hundred of them responded. The first ("Covid: we no longer want to be governed by fear") was published without difficulty in Le Parisien on September 11. Far from

opening up a debate, this intervention frightened the guardians of the doxa. Our troubles began with the second article (“It’s urgent to change our health strategy in the face of Covid-19”). Accepted by the journalist in charge of the debates section at the Journal Du Dimanche, it was censored at the last moment by his editor-in-chief without any explanations, and the same scenario was then repeated at France Télévision. The third article (“La deuxième vague n’est pas virale mais économique et sociale: l’appel de 250 intellectuels”) was published without difficulty in Marianne on October 8. The fourth (“Containment is worse than the disease for French society”), on the other hand, was accepted, then again censored at the last moment by the newspaper’s editor-in-chief, and finally published with great difficulty by the communist magazine Regards on October 29. Finally, when compulsory vaccination and the discriminatory logic of the “pass” were introduced in the summer of 2021, censorship would even occur on the part of the newspaper *Mediapart*, which claims to be a prime defender of freedom of expression, investigation and whistle-blowers. And from then on, we would never be heard of again in the mainstream media, which would in turn use every possible means to discredit us. While these collectively written articles and signature collections offered substantial material to facilitate real scientific and medical debates, none took place.

What we experienced and observed in France happened in most countries worldwide. The fact itself is relatively banal in terms of the history of scientific and medical controversies (Martin, 2014), but in this case it has taken on the same international and simultaneous dimensions as the reaction to the epidemic. It is therefore an integral part of it. Another edifying example, from the UK.

In early November 2021, claiming to rely on “independent fact-checkers” (in reality another private company, Lead Stories, to whom “fact-checking” is outsourced), Facebook censored the British Medical Journal page in the name of “combating misinformation”. The front page featured the first part of an investigation by investigative journalist Paul Thacker, which the journal had just published (Thacker, 2021). In it, he explained how Pfizer, in order to profit from the windfall, had outsourced its clinical trials to a company which, under pressure, “falsified data, unblinded patients, employed inadequately trained vaccinators, and was slow to follow up on adverse events reported in Pfizer’s pivotal phase III trial”. And it also showed that the main US federal health authority (the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)) had been informed of these major problems as early as September 2020, but had ignored them. A few months later, two of the magazine’s editors returned to the case, also revealing the content of their discussions with Lead Stories and Facebook. Faced with authoritarian arguments, they concluded: “why is Facebook acting in this way? What is driving its world view? Is it ideology? Is it commercial interests? Is it incompetence? Users should be worried that, despite presenting itself as a neutral social media platform, Facebook is trying to control how people think under the guise of ‘fact checking’” (Coombes, Davies, 2022).

All over the world, some of the best researchers in their fields have been branded as “charlatans” or “conspiracy theorists”, some have been subjected to media’s cabals and even had their private lives invaded, and all have been insulted, defamed, ostracized or even

punished (suspended or dismissed from their academic positions). All have - for the first time in their lives - experienced the worst difficulties in simply being able to publish their work (rejection of articles submitted to journals before peer review, rejection of manuscripts on principle by their usual publishers, etc.). All have also discovered censorship, deletion of accounts (de-platforming) or blocking the visibility of content without being informed (shadow banning) on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.) and on the Internet (starting with YouTube, owned by Google-Alphabet), including on platforms dedicated to research (ResearchGate and pre-print sites). No communication medium was spared. All the accounts of dissident researchers and doctors are similar, and some research is beginning to compile and analyze them (Martin, 2021; Liester, 2022; Mucchielli, 2022g; Shir-Raz et al., 2022; Broecker, 2022). This general censorship has been organized within the framework of partnerships - some formal, others informal - between states, digital giants and the legacy media. This is now widely commented on in the American independent press (e.g. Lowenthal [2023], from whom I borrow the expression “new information cartel”).

What the Twitter and Facebook files reveal

The takeover of Twitter by multi-billionaire Elon Musk in October 2022 revealed the way in which the US government (under Trump and then Biden) and its agencies (the FBI, as well as a new agency created ad hoc in 2016: the Global Engagement Center) have been trying for years to control information circulating on the Internet, initially under the pretext of combating “Russian interference”, and largely succeeded in doing so during the health crisis. The French media, with the exception of France Soir, were careful not to report on this. Under Biden, from January 2021 onwards, the focus was on tracking down “anti-vaxers”, and the administration put heavy pressure on Twitter executives, accused by the new president of spreading “fake news that kills people”. This was explored in the lawsuit brought by journalist and writer Alex Berenson after his account was deleted in August 2021. By now some of the discussions that took place between the US government and the social network’s management have become public, as well as some of the techniques used (first by robots, then by employees of small companies to whom Twitter also outsources content “moderation”), to implement censorship. This is how a scientist as renowned as Prof. Martin Kulldorf saw his posts censored or made invisible in the name of “the fight against disinformation”. He was in fact on a “blacklist” drawn up by Twitter executives in response to government pressure. And when this censorship wasn't aimed at individuals, it was organized around a particular subject, such as the origin of Sars-Cov-2, the US government having long tried to impose the pangolin fable to divert the public gaze from the genetic manipulations carried out on viruses for years in Wuhan, as part of a partnership between China and the USA. In February 2020, the Global Engagement Center published a report in the media entitled “Russian Disinformation Tools Take Advantage of Coronavirus Concerns”, containing a list of “disruptors”, i.e. a series of associations, companies or individuals expressing doubts about the “official” origin of the virus, amounting to several thousand overall.

In the end, as American journalist M. Taibbi writes, “the real story that emerges from #TwitterFiles is that of a federal bureaucracy dedicated to censorship, in full expansion, targeting neither the left nor the right per se, but the entire population” perceived as a potential threat (quoted by France Soir, 2023d). He speaks of an American “censorship industrial complex” that was first set up for strictly political reasons (to get rid of Trump and the “populist threat”), then extended to protecting the health crisis narrative (France Soir, 2023f). In this way, Taibbi concludes, the complex that was intended to be “a bulwark” against disinformation has itself become “a major source of it”.

Facebook (now Meta, which also owns Instagram and WhatsApp) also actively participated in this phenomenon. The political temptation to control it is immense, given that it is the world's largest social network (nearly 3 billion monthly users by 2023). In the United States, this raises important legal and political debates about freedom of expression and ways of circumventing the First Amendment (e.g. Klonick, 2018; Lakier, 2021). This political pressure is indeed a heavy reality. The Cambridge Analytica scandal (named after the company that was able to illegally exploit the personal data of more than 87 million Facebook users between 2014 and 2016, and which played a role in the 2016 US presidential election and then in the Brexit) made this abundantly clear. Another very recent example: the NGO Human Rights Watch has accused Meta of censoring pro-Palestinian content since the start of the Gaza war in October 2023 (Luscombe, 2023). In such a context, it comes as no surprise to discover that the Biden administration put heavy pressure on Facebook during the Covid crisis, to discredit or attempt to invisibilize critics of the Doxa, notably on the question of the virus's origin (natural or artificial) as well as, and above all, on the question of vaccines. As in the case of Twitter, it is judicialization that enables the disclosure of private exchanges between the Biden administration and the management of the social network (Ingram, 2023; Tracy, 2023). In particular, we learn how the White House (notably Rob Flaherty, Director of Digital Strategy) asked Meta management to broaden its censorship because "your service is one of the main drivers of vaccine hesitancy". The effort will focus in particular on the issue of adverse vaccine reactions, which the U.S. government will ask Meta to make as invisible as possible. We've seen the results.

Pfizer and Moderna monitor social networks to censor criticism of their “vaccines”

The Twitter files also reveal how the pharmaceutical industries put pressure on the social network to impose their propaganda. For example, in late summer 2021, Dr. Scott Gottlieb, a former FDA official turned Pfizer executive (again, those back and forth between the public and private sectors) and CNBC contributor (again, those links with the mainstream media), intervened with Twitter’s moderation team to censor criticism of vaccination, particularly among children, or even a simple question about the ability of vaccines to stop the virus’ transmission chains (France Soir, 2023c).

Another journalist looked at the Moderna files (Fang, Poulson, 2023; Fang, 2024). The subject here is vaccination and its repeated campaigns to sell as many products as possible,

which enabled the company to rake in unheard-of profits in 2021 and 2022, and five of its executives to join the club of American billionaires. The year 2023 was likely to see the fertility of the goose that laid the golden eggs dry up. So it was necessary to ensure that “consumers are educated about the need for the vaccine” (Arpa Garay, Moderna's Sales Director). The company began by launching new media advertising campaigns (one TV spot features a child following a thread and then a red ribbon, whose narrator explains that it is a strand of mRNA that should make it possible to identify cures for all diseases, another associates the anti-covid mRNA vaccine with a “healthy lifestyle” and a “health routine”). At the same time, Moderna set up a “disinformation department” within its marketing arm. We have since learned that the latter “has worked with former law enforcement and public health officials to monitor and influence vaccination policy, and that “the key to this success is an NGO called Public Good Projects (PGP)”, which happens to be funded by a grant from the Biotechnology and Innovation Organization, the main lobby representing Pfizer and Moderna. It was within this framework that representatives of the main social networks, members of government agencies and journalists from general news websites were brought together to tackle the causes of “vaccine hesitancy” and “misinformation”. It was also within this framework that a network of 45,000 healthcare professionals was designed to be intellectually trained to help combat this “misinformation”, which risked lowering the company’s profits. We also learn in passing that Moderna set up a “global intelligence division” during the crisis, recruiting Nikki Rutman, a former FBI analyst. Moderna organized censorship with the management of social networks such as Twitter, to whom “PGP regularly sent lists of accounts to be amplified and others to be deleted”. This censorship primarily targeted influential people expressing doubts or criticisms about gene therapies, their efficacy and safety, but also, and more broadly, about vaccine requirements decided by governments.

WHO and Western governments seek to impose their version of history

The WHO has organized its propaganda with the help of digital giants and social networks (Mucchielli, 2022g). As early as February 15, 2020, its Director General declared: “We're not just fighting an epidemic; we're also fighting an infodemic. False information spreads faster and more easily than this virus, and is just as dangerous. That’s why we’re also working with search engine and social media companies like Facebook, Google, Pinterest, Tencent, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube and others to stop the spread of rumors and misinformation. We call on all governments, businesses and media outlets to help us sound the alarm without fueling hysteria.” To ensure that its messages prevail, the WHO has set up a global communications strategy overseen by the Director of the Department of Pandemics and Epidemics and steered by the Head of “Digital Solutions”. First, an agreement was reached with Google “to ensure that people searching for information on the coronavirus would see WHO information at the top of their search results”. Next, the communications team enlisted the help of major social networks and even companies like Uber and Airbnb to spread the “right messages” (Ritchel, 2020). Finally, the WHO and its partners have recruited “influencers” or opinion relays (most of whom appear in a video entitled “Coronavirus: every day counts”, posted on YouTube on

March 14, 2020), to ensure control of social networks and YouTube.After the WHO, it is the United States government that have sought to control public debate, imposing the dominant narrative as the only legitimate one, with all the means at their disposal. The first is the withholding of disturbing information. In the USA, as Liester (2022) reminds us, “The New York Times reported that two years into the pandemic, the CDC has published only a small fraction of the data it has collected on Covid-19. For example, the CDC has been collecting data on hospitalizations for over a year. These data are broken down by age, race and vaccination status, but most of this information has not been made public.” Similarly: “although the FDA approved Pfizer’s vaccine only 108 days after Pfizer began producing records to the agency, the FDA’s response to the lawsuit was to ask a federal judge to allow them to publish only 500 pages per month, which meant it would take 75 years to publish all the data. The FDA, which has 18,000 employees and a budget of over \$6.5 billion a year, said it could only publish 500 pages a month because of its limited resources” (ibid.). The same is true in France, where the Direction de la Recherche, des Études, de l'Évaluation et des Statistiques withheld data on the vaccination status of deceased persons (Chaillot, 2023), or the truncated publication of the report by the Office parlementaire d'évaluation des choix scientifiques et technologiques on “the side effects of Covid-19 vaccines and the operation of the French pharmacovigilance system” (Mucchielli et al., 2022b). In New Zealand, the government even went so far as to prosecute a whistle-blowing statistician for disclosing unpublished statistical data ¹.

Then, governments reinvested the full panoply of propaganda techniques long described in the social sciences: instrumentalizing fear to create a state of suggestibility (constant dramatization of the epidemic, repeated announcements of its imminent return, etc.), the use of a series of “experts” and “white coats” to “tell the science” in the media, the use of the “rigged choice” technique as a form of blackmail (as French Health Minister Olivier Véran put it: “Would you rather be vaccinated or reconfined?”), the rhetoric of the scalded frog (announcing that anti-covid vaccination will be reserved for the frail and nursing staff, when in reality the aim is to gradually inject the entire population, including children and pregnant women), an similar communication techniques (Mucchielli, 2022a, 94-99).

When psychological pressure wasn't enough, governments used their police forces (for example, to enforce confinements, and in this respect France went particularly far in repression to contribute to this “experiment in mass obedience” [Boulakia, Mariot, 2023]). They also used every administrative and hierarchical mechanism to punish and intimidate dissidents. In France, this included the administrative persecution of the Marseille IHU for three years, and administrative sanctions (Professor Perronne was dismissed as head of department at the Garches hospital, as was Professor Parola at the Marseille IHU), the countless threats and sanctions issued by the French Medical Council (Conseil de l'Ordre des Médecins) against General Practitioners treating their patients with hydroxychloroquine, azithromycin or ivermectin, or taking too close an interest in the undesirable effects of anti-covid vaccination. And in the opposite direction, the government has favored and rewarded those who would relay its propaganda, nurturing what I call courtly phenomena (Mucchielli,

¹ “Covid jab whistleblower appears in court – updated”, *Daily Telegraph*, 4 December 2023.

2022d and h). J.-F. Delfraissy, Chairman of the “Covid-19 Scientific Advisory Board”, was made Commandeur de la Légion d'Honneur on January 1, 2022, with all other members of this group receiving the same distinction. Former French Health Minister A. Buzyn was also made a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, despite her indictment in September 2021 by the Cour de Justice de la République (CJR) for “endangering the lives of others” in her handling of the Covid-19 epidemic. Among those promoted, we also note C. Chidiac, Chairman of the Infectious Diseases Commission of the Haut Conseil de la Santé Publique, which issued the opinion of March 5, 2020 excluding hydroxychloroquine and promoting Remdesivir, even though 97 of the 114 members of this commission received money from Gilead. In a personal capacity, he claims to have received almost 100,000 euros from the pharmaceutical industry in recent years, including Pfizer, Gilead, Janssen and AstraZeneca. Also honored were J. Reynes (head of the COVIDOC study at Montpellier University Hospital, which was halted before completion, officially due to a lack of patients, but in reality because the initial results confirmed the efficacy of the treatment proposed by the Marseille IHU), K. Lacombe (media regular, supporter of Gilead’s Remdesivir at the start of the crisis), N. de Lamballerie (member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the REACTing network, which provided the bulk of the members of the Covid-19 Scientific Advisory Board), É. d’Ortenzio (scientific coordinator of the REACTing network), F. Ader (head of the DISCOVERY trial at Lyon University Hospital at the request of the Ministry of Health, a trial which was also strangely halted before completion) and F. Crémieux (sent in June 2021 to manage Marseille’s hospitals and bring the IHU into line). Add to this the self-promotion, within INSERM (2020), of those who also served political power best during the crisis. The “Inserm Grand Prix” was awarded to D. Costagliola, the “Prix Recherche” to F. Ader (already mentioned) and to F. Mentré (methodological leader of the DISCOVERY trial), the “Prix Opecst-Inserm” to Y. Yazdanpanah (REACTing, Covid-19 Scientific Advisory Board) and even the “International Prize” to Anthony Fauci, a key figure at the interface between the government, the federal administration, industrialists and major foundations (starting with Bill Gates’), whose corruption is attested to and who played a central role in the imposition of the doxa (Kennedy, 2021).

The State against the people? The corruption trail

The U.S. government has protected manufacturers against the public. P. Thacker has shown that Pfizer subcontracted its clinical trials to a company (Ventavia Research Group), where an employee noticed major problems which she reported to her superiors without result, then informed the FDA, resulting not in the opening of an investigation but in the dismissal of this whistle-blower (Thacker, 2021). And what can we say about the way politicians have lashed out at people who, for various reasons, did not want to be vaccinated? While the fight against discrimination (on the basis of skin color, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) is being trumpeted everywhere in the name of Human Rights, and is an important benchmark for just about every political party with the exception of the extreme right, these same people and political formations have organized a new form of fundamental

discrimination between citizens. Depending on whether or not one is vaccinated, one may or may not be able to exercise your fundamental rights and freedoms as a citizen. Let us not forget the violence of the political and journalistic commentaries, between those who wanted to throw non-vaccinated people in prison, deny them access to healthcare systems or cut off their social benefits (see for example Szymanski, 2022). The late European Green MEP Michèle Rivasi (isolated within her own political movement) was perfectly right when she spoke of an “apartheid logic”. As well as being ineffective from a public health point of view, all these measures are extremely dangerous from a democratic point of view. In any other context, they would have revolted any basic democrat, who would have sworn that, while he was alive, he would never participate in creating a new kind of fundamental discrimination, probably referring to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet most of these people endorsed measures that were totally at odds with their official values. Locked in the covidist narrative, they became blind to reality, unable to understand the true workings of what was playing out before their eyes. And yet we have witnessed such crucial phenomena as the collapse of the boundaries between public and private interests or, to put it simply, the replacement of the police state by the state-partner of industry (Mucchielli, 2022a, 2022c). I would go even further: if we take up the vaccine slogan “95% safe and effective”, we have to consider that in many Western countries, the state has transformed industrial marketing into public policy. And to achieve this, it has exploited all its resources, as well as all its means of constraint and pressure.

Fernand Braudel (1985) warned us: “Capitalism triumphs only when it identifies with the State, when it is the State”. And here we are. Across the Atlantic, corruption by the pharmaceutical industry is at an all-time high. One of the reasons, as classic as it is unspeakable is of course the fact that, in the United States, the pharmaceutical industry is by far the one that gives the most money to political candidates (Wouters, 2020)². What about in other countries? In France, we remember the Cahuzac affair, during which this former Minister of the Economy declared that payments had been made by Pfizer to a Swiss bank account in 1993 and were intended to finance the electoral campaign of Michel Rocard (then First Secretary of the Socialist Party and front-runner in the 1994 European elections), it is also worth pointing out that “the pharmaceutical industry has financed all the political parties” in France³. The investigation of the case never went any further as could be expected. In the United States, corruption has penetrated deep into the health administration over the last thirty years, as its financial dependence on industry has grown. The same problem applies to the European Medicines Agency (EMA), 85% of whose budget is funded by the pharmaceutical industry (Béguin, Brisard, 2016). And far from diminishing with publicly available documentation of this fact (such as a major report by the European Court of Auditors [Court, 2012]), the problem has only worsened. Appointed Director General of the EMA in November 2020, Emer Cooke has spent most of her career in the pharmaceutical industry, notably AstraZeneca (whose vaccine she authorized in early 2021, before it was

² Wouters (2020) showed that, from 1999 to 2018, the pharmaceutical industry spent \$4.7 billion, an average of \$233 million a year, lobbying the U.S. federal government; \$414 million on contributions to presidential and congressional candidates, national party committees, and outside spending groups; and \$877 million on contributions to candidates and state committees.

³ “Cahuzac assure qu'un compte en Suisse devait financer la campagne de Rocard”, *Le Parisien*, 5 September 2016.

withdrawn from the market in the face of significant adverse effects), and was even employed by the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations, their main lobby, before joining the administration. And the problem doesn't just concern this agency. The affair of the private SMS messages exchanged between European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen and Pfizer's CEO to negotiate the purchase of vaccines for half a billion Europeans suggests that the entire European administration is riddled with corruption.

Google and Facebook take control of information

In 1996, American artist and cyber-activist John Perry Barlow penned the famous "Declaration of Independence for Cyberspace" in response to the first censorship scheme devised by the US government (the Communications Decency Act). This illustrates the "democratic promise" that was the "genetic code" of the Internet in its early days (Cardon, 2010). 30 years on, the naivety of this statement seems obvious. As far as freedom is concerned, cyberspace has become, on the one hand, a globalized commercial space in which digital giants are enriching themselves in a way that seems unprecedented in industrial history ⁴, and on the other, the most powerful tool ever invented for controlling communication flows, which governments in every country and every political regime enviously covet.

The reality is there for all to see: the world's largest video platform, YouTube, has admitted to deleting 800,000 videos containing "disinformation" in the first two years of the crisis (Liester, 2022). For its part, Facebook has not been outdone (nor has the smartphone social network Instagram, which Facebook has owned since 2012). Mark Zuckerberg's company announced in early 2021 that it had censored 167 million messages linked to the pandemic between March and October 2020. At issue in particular was the treatment of Covid with hydroxychloroquine, as noted by its "supervisory board" in January 2021 ⁵. Here's another concrete example: in France, a group called "Recensement effets indésirables vaccin Covid Officiel" was created on Facebook in mid-July 2021, and gathered 200,000 subscribers in barely three weeks, just long enough for Facebook to close the page down (Mucchielli et al., 2022a, 383). In return, the digital giant made no secret of the fact that it would, on the contrary, put its powerful resources at the service of propaganda, for example by offering 100 million euros worth of advertising space "to health authorities and associations promoting vaccination or prevention campaigns around the world" ⁶.

This censorship exercised by digital giants on behalf of political power has been observed for several years in the United States, in direct connection with the trauma constituted by Trump's election in 2016 among the upper classes (Stjernfelt, Lauritzen, 2020). It was first the fight against terrorist propaganda and far-right "hate content" that justified the

⁴ For several years now, Big Tech and the digital giants have been making more money than the oil industry or the media and communications giants. Individuals like Bill Gates and Jeff Besos have fortunes greater than the national wealth of most countries in the world.

⁵ Modération : Facebook désavoué par son propre conseil de surveillance pour son manque de clarté", *BFMTV*, 28 January 2021.

⁶ "Facebook durcit ses règles de modération contre les intox sur la vaccination", *Le Monde*, 8 February 2021.

development of censorship techniques by these Internet giants in collaboration with states in the second half of the 2010s⁷. Then, it gradually extended to other forms of censorship of more political content, to the point of exercising a kind of thought police (Badouard, 2020, 12).

YouTube makes no secret of its main censorship rules. On May 20, 2020, it added a “Regulation concerning incorrect medical information on Covid-19” to its “Community Regulations”, which until then targeted issues that were traditionally considered criminal offences in the off-line world, including incitement to hatred, calls to violence, child pornography, and identity theft amongst others. It states: “YouTube does not allow content that propagates incorrect medical information contradicting that of local health authorities or the WHO regarding Covid-19. (...) on the following subjects: treatment, prevention, diagnosis, transmission, social distancing and self-isolation instructions, existence of Covid-19”. With regard to treatment, “content claiming that ivermectin or hydroxychloroquine are effective treatments” was considered “incorrect” and therefore censored. Entire areas of medical research were therefore banned from discussion on YouTube. The same would soon also apply to vaccines (the singular allows them to be reified). In particular, it is forbidden to talk about serious side effects or to publish “content that claims that vaccines against Covid-19 do not reduce the risk of catching this disease” (ibid.).

The collective suicide of professional journalism

If only one major Western media outlet had refused to do what all the others had accepted (become mere transmission belts for the doxa) and put its resources at the service of an independent and lasting investigation into the political and health management of the pandemic, the story would have been different. But there was none. While the corruption organized by industries in the medical sciences has been the subject of countless studies and testimonies (for example Sismondo, 2018 ; Gøtzsche, 2019 ; McHenry, Juredini, 2020), these have not been discussed in the legacy media discourse on the Covid crisis. Worse still: the few investigative journalists who had carried out surveys and even written entire books on the subject (e.g. Foucart, Horel, Laurens, 2020) apparently censored themselves.

In the list of lessons that can be drawn from the crisis, there is also this one, which is bad news for democracy: journalism is dying before our very eyes⁸. The first explanation is the upheaval of its traditional business model due to the arrival of the Internet at the end of the 20th century. In France, over the past twenty years, most dailies and weeklies have lost around half their print readership, and some are facing the prospect of outright disappearance. Faced with this situation, three new sources of funding have arisen: 1) billionaires and multinationals eager to build communications and media empires; 2) certain governments, such as France’s, keen to increase their influence over the media, 3) digital giants seeking ever-greater control over the flow of information and the advertising revenues

⁷ In France, this led to the vote of the "law against the manipulation of information" on December 22, 2018, which organizes a "duty of cooperation for platforms" with a view to "combating the dissemination of false information likely to disturb public order".

⁸ Here I summarize two well-documented analyses already published on this topic (Mucchielli, 2022i ; 2023: 227-264).

that go with it. Newspaper companies jumped on the bandwagon. But by saving their jobs, journalists were accepting a profound transformation of their profession that would lead them to lose the little independence they had won in the 20th century, and to sacrifice the ethics of their profession.

The Covid crisis was a revelation of these changes. Stripped of any investigative capacity in the field, journalists have become totally dependent on information flows fed by industrial and political propaganda and filtered by press agencies and “infomediaries” (intermediaries between producers and consumers of information). The first consequence is the reinforcement of journalists’ almost exclusive dependence on the Agence France Presse (AFP) newswire, an agency whose independence from political power has been a problem from the outset. The second consequence is the increasingly important role played by fact-checking in newsrooms, a symbol of the new “communication journalism” that began to invade the entire field of journalism in the second half of the 2010s (Doutreix, Barbe, 2019; Joux, Gil, 2019).

Fact-checking is low-cost journalism, which is hastening the death of the profession, as it relies solely on reading documents online and making phone calls to produce an article claiming to unravel the truth from falsehood on any issue, all without ever leaving the office. The price to pay is the adoption of a very particular way of processing information: use of the most easily and rapidly accessible sources, artificial construction of majority and deviant opinions, hysterization and polarization of debate, formatting of content, censorship of information contradicting the discourse being promoted, etc. Two concrete examples with the case of France’s most famous daily, *Le Monde*, whose fact-checkers christened themselves the “Décodeurs” in 2017. First, let us look at how these journalists sought to discredit drugs that were not profitable for the industry. The case of hydroxychloroquine is well known, and has obviously focused the efforts of French journalists (Mucchielli 2022a, f and j). Let us talk here about that of ivermectin, a particularly effective antiparasitic, which in 2015 earned its two co-discoverers William Campbell and Satoshi Ōmura the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine. On April 13, 2021, in an article entitled “Is this a proven treatment for the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic or a false hope?”, the fact-checkers made a grand claim: “such a question, on which the lives of thousands of patients in France and millions worldwide may depend, deserved rigorous treatment by the ‘Decoders’” (on this case, see Lolo [2021]). In reality, however, the “rigorous treatment” turned into a farce. Out of 53 scientific articles available at the time, these journalists retained only 4, their argumentation quickly becoming political (ivermectin has been supported by far-right personalities, so it must be rejected) and ending, of course, on a comparison with the Marseille IHU protocol (the “great Satan” of French journalists). Second example: the question of wearing surgical masks in the public space. On May 21, 2021, fact-checkers published an article entitled “Didier Pittet and the transmission of Covid-19 by aerosols: a position that runs counter to the scientific consensus”. What was it about? On June 25, 2020, President Macron called for “an independent mission to assess the French response to the health crisis caused by the epidemic”. Didier Pittet, Head of Infection Prevention and Control at Geneva Hospital and Professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Geneva, was entrusted with the task, along with an economist from the OECD, an emeritus research director at the CNRS, a chamber president at the Cour des Comptes and a public

health doctor from Bordeaux University Hospital. But, lo and behold, in its final report, the independent mission demonstrated... independence. The report considers that “current knowledge does not allow us to scientifically prove the effectiveness of wearing a mask at population level to control the epidemic”. At the time, this contradicted the government’s line, which, after explaining at the start of the epidemic that masks were useless, subsequently made them a central element of its communication, succeeding in imposing them as a major sign of obedience and, for the most frightened, a kind of talisman. However, far from welcoming this independence and opening up a contradictory debate, the “Décodeurs” instead sought to discredit the report in order to better preserve the government’s political line. The rest is tragi-comic. To “prove” that the mask is in fact indispensable, the journalists first cite seven examples of places where “airborne contamination has been demonstrated”, thus proving the usefulness of the mask in all circumstances. There are two problems, however, when it comes to verifying the verifiers’ work. Firstly, the hyperlinks provided point to one and the same source: the blog maintained by a medical-scientific journalist on the website of the daily newspaper *Le Monde*. A handy endogamy to avoid being contradicted. Then, and this is even more serious, some of the articles quoted as “sources” say, when one takes the trouble to read them, the opposite of what they are quoted for. In other words, readers are being manipulated (Boris, 2021). As for the so-called “scientific consensus” obviously invoked by journalists, we can see that this is no more than a rhetorical argument, an argument by authority. There is no such thing as a “scientific consensus” on wearing a mask in the public space, as most independent studies conclude that it is ineffective (Langevin, 2022).

This media treatment has taken hold just about everywhere in the West, as evidenced by the European Journalism Trust Initiative initiated in 2018 by Reporters Without Borders. Agence France Presse is also part of this initiative, its “AFP Factuel” service having taken on a very important role within the agency in recent years. And through this project, which brings together most of the traditional media, the latter have also formalized their partnerships with Google and Facebook. This enormous information machine is therefore being rebuilt almost entirely on this new “prescription model”: “a traditional pyramid model from the knower to the layman, unable to evaluate the content he consumes for himself” (Doutreix, Barbe, 2019, 61).

Finally, journalists accepted the rhetoric of “war” without understanding what it meant. In fact, during the health crisis, they functioned in the same way as during periods of (real) war, i.e. by becoming propaganda agents. During wars, there is no search for truth and no debate. There are only those who are “with us” and those who are “against us”, and you have to choose sides. Legacy media journalists have chosen theirs. Of course, journalists are also victims of all forms of state and industrial propaganda, but they are willing victims. Far from embracing an ideal of independence and the search for truth, they have been actors in propaganda, many even believing themselves invested with a kind of educational mission. History had warned us: “in the period following the Liberation, confidence in an impartial, protective State, the driving force behind national recovery, actually reinforced the idea of the usefulness of propaganda in giving the necessary impetus to collective projects. When it enlightens and guides towards progress, it helps to consolidate democracy. Such an outlook is

the result of a long history of virtuous propaganda (...) which has made propaganda, through its various vectors - first printed, then visual and audiovisual - a kind of school for the people” (Delporte, 2006: 31, emphasis added). Journalists thus become activists, making it their mission to identify and ostracize the ‘enemies’ of ‘the cause’. Howard Becker has long described this behavior of the “moral entrepreneur” launching a “crusade for morals”: “what he discovers seems to him bad without reserve or nuance, and all means seem to him justified to eliminate it. Such a crusader is fervent and virtuous, often even imbued with his virtue” (Becker, 1963: 171).

During the health crisis, journalists thus more than ever became the new “watchdogs” of the doxa (Halimi, 2005). This began with adopting the very language and categories of thought with which rhetoric and propaganda are constructed: “scientific consensus” versus “conspiracy”, “science” versus “obscurantism”, “progressives” versus “extreme right”. Good guys versus bad guys. The thought patterns of little children.

Whether through conformism, naiveté, complicity, ideological positioning or simply cowardice, it’s clear that far from enabling any kind of contradictory debate in the public arena, the legacy media have, on the contrary, contributed massively to its closure, ensuring the predominance of the covidist narrative and manufacturing the population’s consent more than ever (see also Chomsky and Herman, 1988).

Last but not least, we need to reflect on how the scientific community itself behaved during a crisis in which everything was done in the name of ‘Science’, without respecting its methodological rules, accumulated knowledge or ethics (Langevin, 2022; Bourdineaud, 2023; Mucchielli, 2023, 205-223). The crisis also revealed the extent to which scientists were unprepared to understand an ideology that constitutes the infantile disease of Western science: scientism (Andreotti, Noûs, 2020). Most are also unaware of the way in which corruption gangrenes the medical sciences. In a word, it also seems urgent for the scientific community to critically analyze itself. I will try my hand at this in a forthcoming text.

References

- Abbasi K. (2020) Covid-19: Politicisation, “corruption”, and suppression of science, *British Medical Journal*, 371, m4425.
- Adam J.-M. (1996) *Le récit*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Andersson F., Jonung S. (2024) The Covid-19 lesson from Sweden: Don't lock down, *Economic Affairs*, 44 (1), 3-16.
- Andreotti B., Noûs C. (2020) Contre l’imposture et le pseudo-rationalisme. Renouer avec l’éthique de la disputatio et le savoir comme horizon commun, *Zilsel*, 7 (2), 15-53.
- Badouard R. (2020) *Les nouvelles lois du web. Modération et censure*, Paris, Seuil.
- Banoun H. (2023) *La Science face au Pouvoir. Ce que révèle la crise du Covid-19 sur la biopolitique du XXIè siècle*, Paris, Studios Talma.
- Bavli I. et al. (2020) Harms of public health interventions against covid-19 must not be

- ignored, *British Medical Journal*, 371, m4074.
- Becker H. (1963) *Outsiders. Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Glencoe, Free Press.
 - Béguin A., Brisard J.-C. (2016) *Effets secondaires. Le scandale français*, Paris, First.
 - Bendavid E., Oh C., Bhattacharya J., Ioannidis J. (2021) Assessing mandatory stay-at-home and business closure effects on the spread of COVID-19, *European Journal of Clinical Investigation*, 51 (4), e13484.
 - Boccia S., Ricciardi W., Ioannidis J. (2020) What Other Countries Can Learn From Italy During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 180 (7), 927-928.
 - Boris (2021) *Le Monde et les décodeurs: fausses informations et manipulations*, Mediapart. Le blog de Boris, 26 May.
 - Boulakia T., Mariot N. (2023) *L'attestation. Une expérience d'obéissance de masse, printemps 2020*, Paris, Anamosa.
 - Bourdieu P. (1996) *Sur la télévision*, Paris, Seuil.
 - Bourdieu P. (1998) Le mythe de la 'mondialisation' et l'Etat social européen, In *Contre-feux*, Paris, Raisons d'agir.
 - Bourdineaud J.-P. (2023) *La science outragée*, Ferrières, Résurgence.
 - Braudel F. (1985) *La dynamique du capitalisme*, Paris, Arthaud.
 - Cardon D. (2010) *La Démocratie Internet, Promesses et limites*, Paris, Seuil.
 - Chaillot P. (2023) *Covid 19. Ce que révèlent les chiffres officiels*, Paris, l'Artilleur.
 - Coombes R., Davies M. (2022), Facebook versus the BMJ: when fact checking goes wrong, *British Medical Journal*, 376, o95.
 - Cotton C. (2023) *Tous vaccinés, tous protégés ?*, Paris, Guy Trédaniel.
 - Cour (2012) *La gestion des conflits d'intérêts dans une sélection d'agences de l'UE*, Rapport spécial n°15 de la Cour Européenne des Comptes.
 - Delporte C. (2006) De la propagande à la communication politique. Le cas français, *Le Débat*, 138 (1), 30-45.
 - Doutreix M.-N., Barbe L. (2019) *Légitimer et disqualifier: les Fake News saisies comme opportunité de normalisation du champ journalistique*, *Études de communication*, 53, 49-66.
 - Doshi P. (2020) Pfizer and Moderna's "95% effective" vaccines - let's be cautious and first see the full data, *British Medical Journal. Opinion*, November 26.
 - Doshi P. (2021) Pfizer and Moderna's "95% effective" vaccines - we need more details and the raw data, *British Medical Journal. Opinion*, January 4.
 - Eco U. (1985) *Lector in Fabula*, Paris, Grasset.
 - Fang L. (2024) *Moderna Surveillance Operation Targeted Independent Media Voices*, 16 January.
 - Fang L., Poulson J. (2023) *Moderna is Spying on You*, UnHerd, 20 novembre [online].
 - Foucart S., Horel S., Laurens S. (2020) *Les gardiens de la raison. Enquête sur la désinformation scientifique*, Paris, La Découverte.
 - Fraiman J. et al. (2022) Serious adverse events of special interest following mRNA COVID-19 vaccination in randomized trials in adults, *Vaccine*, 40, 5798-5805.
 - France Soir (2022a) *Twitter Files, partie 2: la journaliste Bari Weiss dévoile "des listes noires" qui limitaient les audiences des utilisateurs*, 9 December [online].
 - France Soir (2022b) *Les Twitter Files dévoilent comment les pressions de l'administration Biden ont altéré la modération du débat lié au Covid-19*, 27 December [online].

- France Soir (2023a) Twitter Files, partie 11: comment le réseau social est passé sous la coupe des services étasuniens du renseignement, 1 February [online].
- France Soir (2023b) Twitter Files, partie 12: comment toute question autour de l'origine du Sars-CoV-2 a été discréditée, 8 February [online].
- France Soir (2023c) Twitter Files, partie 13: le lobbying d'un directeur de Pfizer afin de censurer des tweets sur la vaccination anti-covid, 16 March [online].
- France Soir (2023d) Twitter Files (partie 16): le deux poids, deux mesures de leur traitement médiatique aux États-Unis (et en France), 8 April [online].
- France Soir (2023e) Twitter Files, partie 17: le Global Engagement Center, ou comment l'establishment américain contre une prétendue "désinformation étrangère" par la censure, 2 May [online].
- France Soir (2023f) Twitter Files (partie 18) : Le "Complexe industriel de la censure", ou comment "sacrifier la vérité" pour "servir un récit", 8 May [online].
- Fund J. (2020) 'Professor Lockdown' modeler resigns in disgrace, National Review, May 6.
- Gøtzsche P. (2014) Deadly medicines and organised crime. How big pharma has corrupted healthcare, London, Radcliffe Publishing.
- Halimi S. (2005) Les nouveaux Chiens de garde, Paris, Liber/ Raisons d'agir.
- Henrion-Caude A. (2023) Les apprentis sorciers, Paris, Albin Michel.
- Herman E., Chomsky N. (1988) Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, New York, Pantheon Books.
- Ingram D. (2023) Republicans take aim at the Biden White House's emails with tech platforms, NBC News, 16 August.
- Inserm (2020) Prix Inserm 2020: L'excellence scientifique au service de la lutte contre la pandémie de Covid-19, 8 December.
- Ioannidis J. (2005) Why most published research findings are false, PLOS Medicine, 2 (8), e124.
- Ioannidis J. et al. (2001) Comparison of evidence of treatment effects in randomized and nonrandomized studies, JAMA, 286 (7), 821-830.
- Ioannidis J. (2019) Cochrane crisis: Secrecy, intolerance and evidence-based values, European Journal of Clinical Investigation, 49 (3), e13058.
- Ioannidis J. (2020) Coronavirus disease 2019: The harms of exaggerated information and non-evidence-based measures, European Journal of Clinical Investigation, 50, e13222.
- Joux A., Gil I. (2019) Entre transparence des sources et entre-soi: une critique du Fact-checking du débat de l'entre-deux tours de la présidentielle française de 2017, Études de communication, 53, 67-84.
- Kennedy R. (2021) The Real Anthony Fauci. Bill Gates, Big Pharma, and the Global War on Democracy and Public Health, New York, Skyhorse.
- Klonek K. (2018) The New Governors: the People, Rules, and Processes Governing Online Speech, Harvard Law Review, 131 (6), 1598-1670.
- Lakier G. (2021) Informal Government Coercion and The Problem of "Jawboning", Law Fare Media, 26 July.
- Langevin M. (2022) Au nom de la Science: la science peut-elle servir de guide à notre société?, in Mucchielli L. ed., La doxa du Covid, Vol. 2 : Enquête sur la gestion politico-sanitaire de la crise, Bastia, Eoliennes, 203-222.

- Liester M. (2022) The suppression of dissent during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, 11 (4), 53-76.
- Light D.W., Lexchin J., Darrow J.J. (2013) Institutional Corruption of Pharmaceuticals and the Myth of Safe and Effective Drugs, *Journal of Law and Medicine Ethics* 41(3), 590-600.
- Lolo E. (2021) Covid-19. Les Décodeurs du Monde sur l'ivermectine: décryptage, *Mediapart. Le blog de Enzo Lolo*, 15 April.
- Lowenthal A. (2023) The Information Cartel and the Betrayal of Civil Society, *Network Affects*, 25 April.
- Luscombe R. (2023) Meta censors pro-Palestinian views on a global scale, report claims, *The Guardian*, 21 December.
- Martin B. (2014) Dissent in Science, In Steel B. (ed.), *Science and Politics. An A-to-Z Guide to Issues and Controversies*, Los Angeles, Sage, 145-149.
- Martin B. (2021) Covid Information Struggles, *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, 10 (7), 16-26.
- Mc Henry L., Jureidini J. (2020) *The Illusion of Evidence-Based Medicine. Exposing the Crisis of Credibility in Clinical Research*, Adélaïde, Wakefield Press.
- Mead M., Seneff S., Wolfinger R. et al. (2024) COVID-19 mRNA Vaccines: Lessons Learned from the Registrational Trials and Global Vaccination Campaign, *Cureus*, 16 (1), e52876.
- Moynihan R., Macdonald H., Bero L., Godlee F. (2020) Commercial influence and Covid-19, *British Medical Journal*, 369, m2456.
- Mucchielli L. (2020) Behind the French controversy over the medical treatment of Covid-19 : The role of the drug industry, *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 56 (4), 736-744.
- Mucchielli L. (2022a) *La doxa du Covid, Vol. 1: Peur, santé, corruption et démocratie*, Bastia, Eoliennes.
- Mucchielli L. (2022b) *Le complotisme pour les nuls*, In Mucchielli L. ed., *La doxa du Covid, Vol. 2 : Enquête sur la gestion politico-sanitaire de la crise*, Bastia, Eoliennes, 161-172.
- Mucchielli L. (2022c) *La Doxa de la Covid. Plongée au cœur de la corruption*, *Nexus*, 142, 15-23.
- Mucchielli L. (2022d) *Derrière l'idéologie de la vaccination intégrale, trafics d'influence et phénomènes de cour*, *Quartier Général. Le média libre*, 19 January 2022 [online].
- Mucchielli L. (2022e) *L'épidémie de coronavirus a probablement pour origine un accident de laboratoire*, In Mucchielli L. ed., *La doxa du Covid, Vol. 2*, 223-237.
- Mucchielli L. (2022f) *'Fin de partie' pour l'hydroxychloroquine ? Une escroquerie intellectuelle (le Lancet Gate)*, In Mucchielli L. ed., *La doxa du Covid, Vol. 2*, 107-109.
- Mucchielli L. (2022g) *La pensée confinée. Une analyse de la fabrique de l'information légitime durant la crise sanitaire*, In Chapon N. (ed.), *Le confinement. Genèse, impacts et controverses*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses Universitaires de Provence, 79-102.
- Mucchielli L. (2022h) *Sociologues ou gardiens de la doxa ? Qui entache la réputation de notre discipline?*, In Mucchielli L. ed., *La doxa du Covid, Vol. 2*, 511-520.
- Mucchielli L. (2022i) *La crise sanitaire a révélé l'inquiétant déclin du journalisme*, In Mucchielli L. ed., *La doxa du Covid, Vol. 2*, 239-272.

- Mucchielli L. (2022j) Doxa anti-raoultiste et police de la pensée, In Mucchielli L. ed., La doxa du Covid, Vol. 2, 499-510.
- Mucchielli L. et al. (2022k) La vaccination à l'épreuve des faits. 1ère partie: les chiffres de l'épidémie, In Mucchielli L. ed., La doxa du Covid, Vol. 2, 345-356.
- Mucchielli L. (2023) Défendre la démocratie. Une sociologie engagée, Bastia, éditions Eoliennes.
- Mucchielli L. et al. (2022a) La dangerosité des nouveaux vaccins anti-covid - est un fait historique, In Mucchielli L. ed., La doxa du Covid, Vol. 2, 373-386.
- Mucchielli L. et al. (2022b) Pourquoi l'Office parlementaire qui enquête sur les effets secondaires des vaccins Covid ne rend-il pas publics tous ses débats?, Quartier Général. 21 June [online].
- Richtel M. (2020) W.H.O. fights a pandemic besides coronavirus: an 'infodemic', New York Times, 6 February.
- Roche E. (2022) Comment le Remdesivir a traversé l'Atlantique: un efficace traitement médiatique, In Mucchielli L. dir., La doxa du Covid, Vol. 2 : Enquête sur la gestion politico-sanitaire de la crise, Bastia, Eoliennes, 77-86.
- Rouchier J. (2022) La modélisation de l'épidémie pendant la crise de la Covid-19: tensions entre aide à la décision et lutte de visibilité disciplinaire, In Chapon N. (ed.), Le confinement. Genèse, impacts et controverses, Aix-en-Provence, Presses Universitaires de Provence, 13-39.
- Schippers M., Ioannidis J., Joffe A. (2022) Aggressive measures, rising inequalities, and mass formation during the COVID-19 crisis: An overview and proposed way forward, *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10, 950965.
- Sismondo S. (2018) Ghost-Managed Medicine. Big Pharma's Invisible Hands, Manchester, Mattering Press.
- Shir-Raz, Y., Elisha, E., Martin, B., Ronel N., Guetzkow J. (2022) Censorship and Suppression of Covid-19 Heterodoxy: Tactics and Counter-Tactics, *Minerva*, 61, 407-433.
- Stjernfelt F., Lauritzen A.-M. (2020) Facebook and Google as offices of censorship, In *Your Post Has Been Removed. Tech Giants and Freedom of Speech*, Cham, Springer, 139-172.
- Szymanski A. (2022) On the Scapegoating of the Unvaccinated: A Media Analysis of Political Propaganda During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Kritische Gesellschaftsforschung*, 1, 239-258.
- Thacker P. (2021) Covid-19. Researcher blows the whistle on data integrity issues in Pfizer's vaccine trial, *British Medical Journal*, 375, n2635.
- Toubiana L. (2022) Covid-19. Une autre vision de l'épidémie, Paris, l'Artilleur.
- Tracy R. (2023) Facebook Bowed to White House Pressure, Removed Covid Posts, *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 July.
- Wouters O. (2020) Lobbying, Expenditures and Campaign Contributions by the Pharmaceutical and Health Product Industry in the United States, 1999-2018, *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 180 (5), 688-697.