

Chapter 10

Hollywood Knowledge: Communication Between Scientific and Entertainment Cultures

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Abstract There is a longstanding perception among scientists and members of the entertainment industry that they represent two distinct cultures. In this social context, science communication is not merely communication from an expert community to a lay community but is more akin to intercultural communication. This perception has led to the development of a new category of science consultant within Hollywood: ‘boundary spanners’. Boundary spanners take on the identity of a scientific expert in the scientific community and that of a filmmaking expert in the entertainment industry. At the same time, their authority within those communities also rests upon their own unique social identity as a boundary spanner. The boundary spanner’s process involves the synthesis of information from the culture of science, the translation of that information into the culture of entertainment, and finally the transformation of the information into a finished cultural product. For boundary spanners, success is achieved when the transformed product on the screen bears enough resemblance to scientific authenticity to satisfy both the scientific and the entertainment communities.

Keywords Cinema, entertainment industry, boundary spanner, science consultant, intercultural communication, scientific expertise

The scientists believe they are gods and the entertainment people believe they are gods themselves. So, let us say it is a battle of gods.

—Pablo Hagemeyer of ‘The Dox’ consulting group.¹

Historically, filmmakers employed research scientists as consultants to instil their films with scientific accuracy (Kirby 2003a,b, Frank 2003).² Even in successful

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¹Unless otherwise noted, all information and quotes concerning Pablo Hagemeyer and The Dox come from Pablo Hagemeyer, interview by David Kirby, Munich, Germany, 13 December 2001.

²My discussion in this chapter is predominantly confined to boundary spanners’ work on popular, fictional films. Despite television’s faster paced production practices, the processes by which boundary spanners deal with science are comparable between television and film.