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Learning from Braudel

Seeing the familiar strange

Re-mapping Journalism History

Methodological Approaches to European Communication and Media History

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European Communication History II: An Introduction to Theoretical Perspectives

Ed McLuskie, Susanne Kinnebrock, and Christian Schwarzenegger

In memory of Hanno Hardt, 1934-2011

This issue of *Medien & Zeit* follows up a range of case studies aimed at revealing communication histories that were analyzed in Part I, studies conducted in light of geographical and cultural borders. They highlighted historical artifacts; examined their availability in university curricula and research centers; addressed for different countries the status and history of communication history as an academic profession; and highlighted strengths, limitations, and prospects awaiting a distinctly European account of the historical record. Such scholarship seeks to uncover history. Part II aims to turn the matter around, showing how history might inform scholarship. Here, four essays examine theoretical shifts as appropriate to historical shifts that produce re-readings of communication history. Specifically, shifts in historiography from the national to the transnational address the thematic question, "What is European Communication History?", with theoretical issues and recommendations that take note of the recursive, EU-era problem of the nation in a transnational milieu. Essays in Part II trace this recursiveness to earlier times, preceding the formation of today's Europe, and locate it along lines — theoretical and material — of communication and media history. Each essay offers ontological and material reasons to reconceptualize European communication history as a transnational project. Three of the four authors make distinctly different cases for communication history as transnational history, suggesting, at the very least, that "the national" cannot and, in fact, has not developed within the geographical borders of the nation. A fourth essay offers reflections on the conduct of European communication history beyond the shift from national to transnational frameworks for theory.

The first essay by Kittler argues to retain Jürgen Habermas's concept, public sphere, as an ontological category for European communication history, even though controversies and criticisms persist with Habermas's concept. Kittler notes its advantage for connecting unduly separated academic disciplines, leading to another outlook on communication history that can be fruitful if one studies the city as a transnational thread of human experience throughout Europe. Cities, according to Kittler, interpenetrate one another as models of civilization and debating publics. Conversations alight across European cities, supported, the second essay by Fickers argues, by media whose history at least since the telegraph is a history of movement across national borders into city centers. Kittler takes a theoretical cue from Fernand Braudel's emphasis on cities for European history in general, proposing a concept of a "transnational public sphere" as a revision of Habermas's analysis. While cautioning against adopting "the public sphere" concept wholesale, Kittler suggests that the city instead of the nation enriches the theory of a transnational public sphere. Thus modified, using the transnational public sphere for European communication history can proceed without entanglements that often linger in pro-con issues about the status of nations and, for some, nationalism in contemporary Europe. Kittler's analysis of the city as the jump-off point for reconceptualizing the public sphere into transnational territory becomes an account of communication as the potential and actual engine of social-political change emanating from multiple city-points in Europe.

Fickers describes the transnational perspective as both historiographical trend for theory and old news for the history of media technologies. While issues surround what some see as a theoretical paradigm shift, Fickers uses national cases to show that the national explanatory narrative did not fit since the telegraph bypassed borders and newspapers differentiated through

variegated cultural enclaves. From telegraphic transgressions of nations and regions, through newspaper content traveling new technologies of transmission, to the clandestine reception of other countries' television programming, Fickers demonstrates that media developments since the nineteenth century encouraged processes throughout Europe that were indifferent to borders, as well as cultivating audiences exposed to alternatives across the border(s). Fickers concludes that national media diets included inevitable and sometimes clandestine media consumption. European communication history, therefore, may be much more transnational than the practice of communication historiography has thus far explicated.

Ellefson's essay takes the idea of the transnational even beyond Europe, proposing a linguistic and cultural re-mapping of history. Like Kittler, Ellefson proposes making the transnational a conceptual starting point for European communication history. Focusing on journalism history, that history of inquiry appears to Ellefson too nationalistic, regardless of debates within the histories involved. Making the case that too much of journalism history is nationalistic, Ellefson finds impetus to perform a re-mapping beyond geographic borders. In addition, Ellefson takes a lesson from the history of nations: national histories are less durable than linguistic and cultural histories, reason enough to substitute the more durable for conceptual tools of historical research. Whereas Kittler proposes to ground communication history in the cultural reach of city-based geographies, Ellefson grounds analysis in linguistic and cultural traditions that historically persisted across geographic borders. Ellefson offers cases of long-standing cross-border linguistic practices that should be read as a theoretical extension of nations already established throughout, for example, Scandinavia, into Estonia and Pomerania, and even into Africa and the Caribbean. These linguistically and culturally produced nations carve out other nations in ways that map transnationality while retaining the concept of the nation-state in a manner quite different from any geographical framework.

Concluding the issue, Klaus Arnold's essay elaborates on methodological approaches to the writing of European communication and media histories. Arnold reminds us that a re-calibration of perspectives in communication historiography from a mainly national to a transnational level, and to thereby broaden views to the wider field of Europe is not only advisable because of reasons intrinsically scientific and to let research keep pace with processes of Globalization and Europeanization. It also has a political dimension. In order to foster the idea of Europe's unity and the concept of a European identity, research that treats Europe as a single field contributes to the perception of the described as just that, a single unit and common field. Depicting recent studies and how they methodologically dealt with the history of mass media communication in Europe Arnold showcases typical ways and conceptions of how Europe and a European public sphere are sketched and re-enforced in current comparisons and transfer analyses. By unveiling modes, strategies and also scarcities – like and especially the low representation of Southern and Eastern European countries – in the slowly emerging field of European communication historiography Arnold's essay not only approaches an answer to the state and practice of communication history in Europe today but also allows to conclude what ideas of "Europe" or "European public sphere" prevail in this field.

The four essays in this second special issue open various perspectives on European Communication History as they approach it from different directions. They – each text by its own means – present manifold reasons to challenge, supplement and go beyond the framework of the nation state. The theoretical positions in this issue encourage us to question and re-draw borders in the reconstruction of communication flows to bring 'hidden publics' and minority matters in the spotlight of historiography. They stimulate research that does not neglect the spatial dimension and local provenience of social life-worlds, while emphasizing perspectives on transnational dynamics and connectivities that allow for different preconditions and patterns of cultural practice on subnational levels and at special localities. Moreover, the articles in this and in the first issue remind us of the critical point that writing the past is dialectically political with interventionist potential. As histories are shaped by social realities, the academy's assertions, in turn, also shape "what European communication history is" and what, therefore, European communication history will become.

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