

Observing the Everyday: Journalistic Practices and Knowledge Production in the Modern Era

Veranstalter: Hansjakob Ziemer, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin / Kerstin von der Krone, German Historical Institute Washington DC

Datum, Ort: 03.03.2017–04.03.2017, Washington, DC

Bericht von: Kerstin von der Krone, German Historical Institute Washington DC

In 1903, the Austrian journalist Emil Löbl observed in his book *„Kultur und Presse“* that „many of today’s readers“ see their newspaper as a „universal encyclopedia,“ the study of which, they believed, helped them fulfil their duty as „cultivated people“ (*Kulturmenschen*) to stay informed. Whether or not this was a positive development, journalists needed to recognize that „modern readers expected of newspapers the greatest degree of universality, the widest variety, the most complete abundance of content.“¹

Löbl’s account reflected the growing self-awareness of journalists regarding their profession and the societal impact of their work. His book was part of a professionalization process that saw the founding of professional associations and training and research institutions in Europe and North America in the early twentieth century such as the Columbia School of Journalism (New York) in 1912 or the Institut für Zeitungskunde (Leipzig University) in 1916. This process entailed claims to a kind of epistemological authority that derived from the work of journalists, as they produced new knowledge for their readers instead of merely conveying undigested facts.

HANSJAKOB ZIEMER (Berlin) took Löbl’s reflections as his starting point at a two-day workshop in early March entitled *„Observing the Everyday: Journalistic Practices and Knowledge Formation in the Modern Era“* held at the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC, in cooperation with the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (Berlin). It brought together European and North American-based scholars from disciplines such as history, media studies, cultural and literature studies, intellectual history, and

the history of medicine.

The workshop explored many facets of the history of journalism and mass media in Europe and North America, scrutinizing how journalism and journalistic practices not only disseminated information but also shaped our knowledge about the world. Presentations shed light on the role of journalism in knowledge transfers, the impact of technology on journalistic practices and writing techniques, and the self-understandings of journalists and journalistic communities in different historical contexts.

The role of journalistic practices in processes of knowledge transfer was discussed in two panels. First, TOM EWING (Blacksburg) and ERIC ENGSTROM (Berlin/Munich) highlighted encounters between the medical professions and journalism. Ewing discussed how news of the „Russian influenza“ spread at the end of the nineteenth century through medical journals and newspapers, oscillating between sensationalized reports about the rich and famous, statistical data on the spread of the disease through Europe and North America, and its perception either as an epidemic or a media-induced hysteria. Engstrom’s presentation showed how journalists like Herman Heijermans challenged the perception of psychiatry and the representation of mental asylums by introducing new investigative methods. Heijermans had sneaked into a Berlin asylum and published an eyewitness account of the treatment and living conditions of psychiatric patients. Ewing and Engstrom both highlighted how mass media challenged professional boundaries, which subsequently led to questions about authority, not only with respect to journalistic and medical professionals, but also with respect to state and local officials. Who could gain access to information and who controlled the message?

The second panel on knowledge transfer broadened the perspective to other professional and intellectual arenas. DANIEL SIEMENS (Bielefeld) discussed the role of courtroom journalism in early twentieth cen-

¹ This report is based on observations previously published on *“History of Knowledge”*, April 26, 2017, see <https://historyofknowledge.net/2017/04/26/journalistic-practices-and-knowledge-production/> (14.09.2017).

tury, drawing on cases from Germany, the United States and China. Although these reports were part of the growing genre of human-interest stories, they provided more than entertainment. Rather courtroom journalism offered information on social realities and produced social knowledge in times of change. Siemens also showed that journalists were not neutral observers but active participants of trials. As such they challenged expert knowledge of lawyers and other professionals involved in cases, argued against or in favor of the accused, and in some cases could provide agency to those who lacked a public voice. Siemens emphasized as well that the emotional dimension of some trials and the lack of trust in legal procedures and institutions contributed to the scandalized courtroom „drama.“

SUSANNE SCHMIDT (Berlin/Cambridge) addressed the role of journalism and journalists in the production, transmission, and representation of expert knowledge and highlighted the multiple roles journalists could take on. She elaborated on journalist and writer-researcher Gail Sheehy's book „Passages“ (1979) and her use of methods and findings in contemporary social sciences. Sheehy's work was strongly opposed by social scientists at the time. Her research methods were contested and her work labeled as „pop psychology,“ which reinforced professional boundaries between academia and journalism. Schmidt explicitly showed how much the reception of Sheehy's work was also based on a gender bias that contributed to the harsh criticism of the quality of her research and her qualification as a writer-researcher.

MORITZ NEUFFER (Berlin) discussed the interplay between postwar critical theory and journalistic practices in intellectual journals, also known as „theory journals,“ since the mid-twentieth century. These journals were places of collaboration between journalists and academics, intellectuals and philosophers and made equal use of academic and journalistic textual modes. Similar to other papers, Neuffer highlighted the blurry lines between journalism and other professions, the multiple roles authors played, and the multiple epistemic practices they used, which in this case included not only the production of

texts, but also their visualization in the form of artful print designs.

Newspapers were the first mass medium, promoted in part by technological developments that were the subject of the papers given by LISA BOLZ (Paris), ANNIE RUDD (Calgary), and HEIDI TWOREK (Vancouver). Bolz discussed the telegram, which not only conveyed the latest news but inspired new journalistic techniques and practices. Rudd highlighted the increasing importance of photojournalism in the interwar period, drawing on the highly influential work of Erich Salomon and his „candid camera.“ Tworek emphasized the blurred lines and potential misconceptions of news gathering by spies and intelligence agencies, on the one hand, and journalists and news agencies, on the other, with journalists sometimes working for both or being accused of doing so.

With the emergence of mass media since the late nineteenth century, journalists had to work out an understanding of their profession and define a set of shared standards and ethics. HANSJAKOB ZIEMER (Berlin) in his paper analyzed a survey among German journalists in 1929 which showed that they predominantly understood journalism as a calling („*Berufung*“). They contended with the standards of journalistic training, the level and kind of knowledge a journalist required, and how it could be acquired. Or was one simply born to become a journalist, as some of those surveyed maintained? Ziemer's as well as Alexander Korb's paper explored the formation of journalistic identities, considering individuals and journalistic communities and taking into account biographical and generational characteristics and commonalities.

ALEXANDER KORB (Leicester) explored the fate of conservative and right-wing journalists who became leading voices of postwar (West) Germany such as Hermann Proebst, Peter Haerlin, Giselher Wirsing, and Klaus Mehnert. Korb highlighted their socialization in conservative and „*völkisch*“ circles and their early careers in Nazi Germany, where they often served in occupied territories. This practical and political knowledge became a valuable resource once they rose to become editors of leading German newspapers. Korb showed how journalists employed

self-fashioning strategies which enabled some of them not only to establish themselves successfully but to continue their work under a different political regime.

ELENA MATVEEVA (Heidelberg/Washington) and NORMAN DOMEIER (Stuttgart/Vienna) addressed similar questions when discussing the international dimensions of journalism. Matveeva presented the career of Maurice Hindus both in the United States and his native Russia, which spanned revolution, romanticism, and Cold War ideology. Hindus' bilingual and bicultural competence became an asset in his career and allowed him to return to revolutionary Russia as a foreign correspondent. Here he established the idea of revolutionary journalism, through which he hoped to humanize the image of revolutionary Russia and which shaped his early work on Russia and the Soviet Union. Hindus authored journalistic articles, essays, and various books on Russian and Soviet affairs that helped to foster his career not only as a journalist but as an expert and adviser on the subject in Cold War America.

Norman Domeier also addressed the role of foreign correspondents and the impact of extreme political and social change on journalism and its international and transnational ties. His paper dealt with the fate of the Associated Press (AP) Germany office after 1941 when the United States entered the Second World War, which led to the internment of all American journalists who were then formally exchanged for German officials and spies. New archival findings by Domeier showed how AP Germany was quickly transformed into a German photo agency under SS control, led by Helmut Laux, a German photo-journalist who had previously worked for AP. The so-called „Büro Laux“ not only had access to AP Germany's photo archive and technical equipment, to some degree it also remained part of the international network of AP offices and was engaged in a daily picture exchange with the AP headquarters via offices in Lisbon and Stockholm. „Büro Laux“ was closely connected to the highest levels of the Nazi regime. Pictures sent by AP first circulated among the inner circle before they were used and misused in the German press. After

the war Laux and other journalists concealed their close relations to the highest circles of Nazi Germany, rather successfully it seems, as all continued their careers.

The historical themes of this workshop resonate all the more because they call to mind debates in our own time about journalism and its broader social and cultural relevance. Since the papers explored journalistic practices and their relationship to truth and authenticity, secrecy and transparency, scrutiny and credibility, it is perhaps unsurprising that the issues of „fake news“ and „faking“ came up, too. Nineteenth-century „faking,“ discussed by ANDIE TUCHER (New York) and PETRA MCGILLEN (Hanover) did not necessarily entail the complete fabrication of news, although it did garner attention in the professional debates among writers and journalists.

In Andie Tucher's presentation we encountered some „Advice to Newspaper Correspondents,“ published in 1887 in „The Writer“ and including the notion that „‘faking’... is not exactly lying.“ The author of this advice, William H. Hills, maintained that every journalist and editor should be capable of distinguishing between the two. Faking meant „embellishing“ with „unimportant details“ in order to flesh out the account and make it more accessible and appealing to the reader. Petra McGillen provided another example for such grey areas between truth, authenticity, and falsehood by drawing on Theodor Fontane's correspondence reports for the „Neue Preußische Kreuzzeitung“. These reports were „false“ because the paper claimed that they were written by a correspondent on the scene, whereas the reports were really products of „armchair reporting“ based on compilations of foreign newspaper accounts.

The workshop saw papers on individual journalists and the journalistic community, discussed their professional and personal networks and the intellectual and social contexts of journalistic practices. Collaborations and alliances characterized these relationships, as did competition and conflict. Questions of authority, credibility, and respectability lay at the heart of such tensions. Similarly complex was the relationship of journalists to the state and its officials. Journalists needed ac-

cess to the state's representatives in order to acquire information and knowledge, whereas the state became engaged in its own news gathering operations characterized by espionage and public relations efforts aimed at controlling what was known and what remained hidden.

Not claiming to be comprehensive or representative, this explorative workshop was intended to start a conversation on the interplay of journalistic practices and knowledge production. On that note, some in the concluding discussion highlighted the need to go beyond the geographical, political, and cultural confines of this workshop, although there was also a strong argument for the local. The discussions began during the workshop at the GHI will be continued with a second meeting at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin in June 2018.

Conference Overview:

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

Kerstin von der Krone (GHI)

Hansjakob Ziemer (MPIWG)

PANEL I: KNOWLEDGE TRANSFERS (I)

Chair: Kerstin von der Krone (GHI)

Tom Ewing (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA): „All Nonsense and Newspapers“: Reporting the „Russian Influenza“ (1889-1890) in European and American Medical Periodicals and Newspapers

Eric Engstrom (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin / Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry, Munich): „Nach der Art eines modernen Harun al Raschid“: Herman Heijermans's 1910 Reports on the Dalldorf Mental Asylum in Berlin

PANEL II: JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES AND TECHNIQUES

Chair: Ines Prodöhl (GHI)

Heidi Tworek (University of British Columbia, Vancouver): The Secret Press Agent: How Journalists and Spies Learned Their Craft

Annie Rudd (University of Calgary): The Candid Camera, Political Authority, and the Humanizing Gaze of Photojournalism

Lisa Bolz (German Historical Institute Paris):

The Electric Telegram: Emergence and Normalization of a Journalistic Format

PANEL III: JOURNALISTIC IDENTITIES AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Chair: Elisabeth Engel (GHI)

D'Westen Haywood (University of Louisiana at Lafayette): „The Greatest Influence in the Race To-Day“: Black Newspapers, Black Manhood, and Controlling White Space [talk cancelled]

Hansjakob Ziemer (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin): „How We Became Journalists“: Journalistic Observation and the Formation of Journalistic Identity in the Deutsche-Presse-Survey of 1929

Alexander Korb (University of Leicester): „Cutting Edge Rightwing Journalism“. Why the *völkisch* press was so successful in the Weimar years

PANEL IV: TRUTH AND AUTHENTICITY

Chair: Mary Helen Dupree (Georgetown University, Washington D.C.)

Andie Tucher (Columbia Journalism School, New York City): The Fantastic Voyage of the Good Ship Wabble: Professionalizing Journalists and the Uses of the False

Petra McGillen (Dartmouth College, Hanover N.H.): Commonplace Authenticity: Fontane's Compilation of Fake „Eyewitness“ Accounts

PANEL V: KNOWLEDGE TRANSFERS (II)

Chair: Richard Wetzell (GHI)

Moritz Neuffer (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin/ Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung): „Documentation and Disclosure: Journalistic Practices in the History of Critical Theory“

Daniel Siemens (Bielefeld University): Making Sense of Social Change: Courtroom Journalism and the Creation of Knowledge, 1900-1930

Susanne Schmidt (Cambridge University / Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin): Pop, popular, popularization: Demarcating journalism from Psychology

PANEL VI: JOURNALISTIC COMMUNITIES AND MOBILITY

Chair: Anne Schenderlein (GHI)

Elena Matveeva (Heidelberg University):

Traveler in Two Worlds: Maurice Hindus's
Transnational Revolutionary Journalism
Norman Domeier (University of Vienna /
University of Stuttgart): Everyday Business
with the War Enemy: The Secret Daily Photo
Exchange between Associated Press and Nazi
Germany 1942-1945

FINAL DISCUSSION

Chair: Kerstin von der Krone (GHI) & Hans-
jakob Ziemer (MPIWG)

Tagungsbericht *Observing the Everyday: Journalistic Practices and Knowledge Production in the Modern Era*. 03.03.2017–04.03.2017, Washington, DC, in: H-Soz-Kult 21.09.2017.