

Perception and Concepts of Current Events and Time in Early Modern Newspapers

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The dimension 'time' plays a basic role for the daily press and is firmly established in the consciousness of media studies and media history. The journal „medien und zeit“ (“media and time”) prominently places special emphasis on this connexion in its title; Th. Birkner conceived his “History of Journalism in Germany” under the motto “Soliloquy of Time” (Birkner 2012). Historians use newspapers as (additional) sources to approach easily accessible representations of current affairs or discourses. Nevertheless, the coordinate 'time' has been rarely explicitly conceptualised in media historiography (Stöber 2008; Hömberg/Schmolke 1992, here in particular Hemels, Hömberg, Wilke; Dooley 2010; cf. also Wald 2009). The connection between newspapers as chronicles of their present on the one hand and 'professional' historiography on the other has only been addressed in its outlines (Pompe 2012, Wilke 2009; cf. in general Erll 2017, ch. 5). Research on intermedial exchange processes between newspapers and other (periodical) media has recently profited from important impulses, as well. (Bellingradt 2014; Detering 2017). Against this background, we want to transdisciplinarily think, discuss and finally write about four foremost praxeological connections:

Acceleration and retardation as reflected in the daily and weekly press

In this section the glance of media on the current of news shall be thematised. For instance, the following questions can be addressed:

How did editors technically respond to the perceived acceleration of incoming news, for example by reducing the intervals between issues or expanding single copies?

Which textual and paratextual information can be found on the 'viral' velocity of rumours which spread from mouth to mouth, on the time-consuming evaluation of written and printed news and finally on the waiting time for official, ultimate, politically approved 'truths', slowed down by meticulous censorship and included in the “grannies” (“Gromamas”) of the news trade, as M. F. Trenk von Tonder termed court newspapers?

How did newspaper offices assess post facilities and their speed, and how did they try to accelerate the acquisition of news and also the distribution of their press products?

How was the establishment of the French (optical) telegraph network received as a noteworthy and powerful innovation?

How did editors react to fluctuations of the flow of news (e.g. with abbreviations in boom periods or 'filling material' in less promising slack seasons, especially during winter time)?

Which advice was offered to the audience on the economy of time in newspaper reading?

Philological parameters

The representation of current news needs specific (functional and literary) modes of presentation. In this respect we ask for deliberations on the modalities of reports and narratives and their implications:

What about different 'levels of time', particularly resulting from daily reports from more or less distant geographical spaces of events (connected with vast war theatres or with traveling diplomacy) which influenced each other directly or indirectly?

How did authors work with some sort of 'slow motion' or 'time lapse', respectively, to capture events precisely, immediately, authentically (e.g. indicating minutes, hours or days) on the one hand, and to explain short-, mid- and long-term processes on the other?

How was time, or the stream of time, respectively, narratively morphed (for example in P. Ricoeur's sense)?

Did authors switch between different modes of tense, especially from articulations of past tense to present tense or future (perfect)?

How did the necessities of seriality as well as periodicity influence the text (perhaps in the usage of cliffhangers)?

Which typographic means (such as dashes, semicolons, interrogation marks) contributed to the retardation or acceleration of reading newspaper texts?

Intermedial perspectives

Under this heading we want to elaborate how daily and weekly newspapers, monthly or quarterly magazines and almanacs as well as calendars or even ephemeral new-year cards represented current events, developments and discourses in a specific way. In this context, the following answers can be dealt with:

How were events and processes represented and recycled in different periodical media by a single author, within a publishing house and in regional or supra-regional media clusters?

Which contents and text genres (such as letters, anecdotes, original documents) of the encompassing and multifaceted texts in the daily press were absorbed into magazines and eventually in calendars, and which shape did 'distillates' take?

Which additional, more time-devouring textual and pictorial material was supplied in newspapers on the other hand, to explain events or to fill up the newspaper copies in uneventful times?

Which ideas did editors express when it came to passing on contemporary information and sources beyond the needs of contemporaries?

Popular analyses of contemporary issues

Political and moralistic reasoning in prose and verse at the turn of the year was a recurrent element in early modern periodical media and provides perspectives on the conceptualisation of past, present and future. Comments on the following questions are welcome:

Which sober, satirical, dystopic and utopic drafts can be found?

Which role did (religious) eternity and infinity play in a predominantly worldly media setting?

How were new, conceptually connoted calendars like the French Republican Calendar questioned?

How can the perception of 'contemporaneity' which was developed with examples from the 16th to the early 18th centuries, be adopted to look at community building in the late, 'early-national' 18th century?

The mentioned connections should be understood as impulses which can be further developed and supplemented.

Please send your proposal in German or English to an.golob@uni-graz.at until 19 April 2019. Accepted participants will be informed by the end of May. An edited volume with a selection of papers is envisaged, extended papers will be due by the end of December 2019. Unfortunately, we are not able to support travel or accommodation, however, catering will be provided.

Select bibliography

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