

Introduction to Media and Communication Studies at the University of Halle-Wittenberg

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## Reinhold VIEHOFF

### **Introduction to *Media and Communication Studies at the University of Halle-Wittenberg***

Since the demise of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and its reunification with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), in Germany there exist more than one hundred universities or university-equivalent institutions of higher education (such as art schools, business schools, and schools for administrative and technical subjects). In addition, there are eighty-seven *Fachhochschulen*, institutions of higher learning similar to polytechnics and colleges of business and trade professions in the US and Canada. Almost all of these universities and colleges offer some media-related course of study; in other words, at least fifty or more degrees primarily focused on the media are currently offered in Germany. The emphases, curricula, and academic requirements for each of these degrees may vary from university to university. It is important to highlight this diversity at the beginning of this thematic issue of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/>> in order to locate the papers in the issue appropriately. The focus here is on one particular university -- the 500-year old Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg <<http://www.uni-halle.de/>> in Halle, in the former East Germany -- as most of the contributions to current discussions in media and communication studies included here have their origins at this university's Department of Media and Communication Studies <<http://www.medienkomm.uni-halle.de/institut/>>. It is thus fair to say that these studies represent merely a small, yet exemplary section of the very dynamic and quickly changing field of media and communication studies -- *Medien- und Kommunikationwissenschaften* -- in Germany. It is also worth emphasizing a second point: in Germany, at least three different analytical approaches to communication, the mass media, and the media in general coexist, not always peacefully: *Zeitungswissenschaft & Publizistik* (journalism), *Kommunikationswissenschaft* (communication studies), and *Medienwissenschaft* (media studies). To each approach corresponds a network of academic institutions and scholarly journals that are relatively insulated from one another and that offer clearly distinguished arenas for debate and discussion. Among those three, *Zeitungswissenschaft* (newspaper studies) is the oldest and perhaps most established tradition. It is now taught and researched frequently as *Publizistik* (journalism), thus reflecting how its subject matter has expanded over the years. Influential institutes and departments that pursue this approach are located at the universities of Mainz, München, Münster, Dortmund, and Eichstätt. From the beginning of the last century onward, a second approach has found its place at German universities that is now taught under the label of *Kommunikationswissenschaft* (communication studies). It is characterized by a greater reliance on social science methods and a focus on the mass media. This approach is not easily identified with particular universities; but research and teaching at the universities of Dresden, Mannheim, Leipzig, Göttingen, and the Humboldt University in Berlin reflect this perspective. Finally, *Medienwissenschaft* (media studies) has emerged from literature departments. More than the two others, this approach is interested in the aesthetic and historical contexts of media development. The institutional origins of *Medienwissenschaft* can be traced to the universities of Aachen und Siegen; at the latter, a national research cluster on television was established in 1984. Starting from this investigation of television and its modes of presentations and genres, a range of paradigmatic solutions and methodological strategies have evolved that constitute the theoretical core of the current landscape of the discipline. Today, departments at the universities of Hamburg, Lüneburg, Marburg, Siegen, Kassel, Paderborn, and Halle-Wittenberg are active in developing this tradition. Obviously, this brief and sketchy account does not provide a picture of the diverse and complex landscape of scholarship and institutions where the study and teaching of the varied aspects and types of media are located in Germany. Parallel to, and sometimes within, these three branches there is further specialization with regards to both practical concerns and methodology. One need only consider the discussion of pictorial analysis, of visuality, and of visual perception that has

greatly increased over the last few years to appreciate that not all debates fit easily into this rather general picture of the field.

Within the field of media and communication studies, *Medienwissenschaft* is the most recent disciplinary development. Consequently, introducing this approach has involved some struggle with the two more established branches and it has taken some time to establish it in on the institutional landscape. As soon as differentiation within a discipline leads to competing claims on resources such as funding, reputation, students, and academic positions, serious academic competition takes inevitably the place of the intrinsic appreciation of disciplinary innovation. Just consider one example: research institutions that are committed to *Medienwissenschaft* are currently pushing the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG), the major funding agency of the federal government to recognize their work as a *sui generis* discipline, and to have their projects submitted in competitions for funding refereed by scholars active, specifically, in *Medienwissenschaft*. Until now, *Medienwissenschaft* has not been granted such independent administrative status by the DFG, and the discipline is categorized under theatre studies and literature; by contrast, *Publizistik* and *Kommunikationswissenschaft* have their own peer referees for DFG applications, with all the corresponding advantages. As mentioned previously, *Medienwissenschaften* have evolved from literary studies and it is within this and its related fields where *Medienwissenschaft* seeks to find its own profile and academic recognition. Most of the well-known and influential scholars currently working in *Medienwissenschaft* began their academic career, and thus their academic socialization, in literary studies, especially in German literature departments. This heritage still influences the choice of topics, the methodology, and last but not least the theories that are considered appropriate for the analysis and understanding of the media. This historical background explains why so many departments of *Medienwissenschaft* have only recently become institutionally independent of the literature departments that gave birth to them. The competition for scarce resources that I referred to previously enters into the equation here as well: whenever new departments and institutes are being founded, financial and other resources of the university must be redistributed accordingly. Given the very tight financial limits that scholarship currently faces at German universities, changes will almost always lead to losses for existing departments. Such losses are rarely, if ever, simply consented to by those on the losing side; instead, they give rise to disputes and debates about the intellectual, institutional, and academic merits of a subject or approach.

The discipline of *Medienwissenschaft* has certainly profited from the dominant role that electronic and digital media have acquired over the last two decades and the way in which these developments are at the forefront of public consciousness and discourse. No one who seriously reflects on society, on culture, or on the ways in which particular events, topics, and social groups are represented in the media can fail to notice that the media have become the dominant force in forming public discourse, in creating public opinion, and in constructing a shared social reality for our society. The old philosophical conundrum, "If a tree falls in the forest, and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?" applies to the media: if a tree falls in the forest and the media don't cover it, has it really fallen? The message is clear: there are good reasons to doubt whether anything is present in our shared social reality if it has not been reflected in the media. These are the premises on the basis of which German universities, or at least those bodies within them which have the power to decide on the creation of new departments and institutes, have based their decisions, and these decisions must be described as unequivocal. Although these bodies hardly ever include scholars specialised in *Medienwissenschaft*, there has usually been a clear majority for the establishment of institutes or departments with such a focus. In culture and society today, the media have undoubtedly gained such importance that universities cannot do without research and teaching that concentrate exclusively on their analysis. This has been the most powerful argument over the last two decades to foster the creation of new institutes and departments for *Medienwissenschaften*. The emergence of curricula, textbooks, introductory and methodological texts, and of a canon of seminal scholarship over the last decade or so has marked the extent to which *Medienwissenschaft* has cut its ties with literary studies and gained intellectual and institutional independence. They are in the process of leaving behind what Thomas Kuhn called the

pre-paradigmatic stage and to reach the status of a scientific paradigm. At the same time, and in spite of the search for distinctiveness and a clear-cut profile, the field is remarkably adaptive: perhaps because a sense of transformation and change still persists, there is a great interest in and openness to theories and approaches that fall outside the current mainstream. The methodologies of *Medienwissenschaft* is very catholic indeed, ranging from social science methodologies for the analyses of content to interpretative approaches to film, etc., and scholars working in the discipline are testing a wide variety of theoretical approaches such as found in cultural studies, in Pierre Bourdieu's field theories, in Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, in cultural anthropology, etc. I think it is safe to say that German-language *Medienwissenschaft* today allows for a fascinating opportunity to explore and to establish, indeed, transdisciplinarity and a discipline firmly anchored in both the humanities and the social sciences.

As indicated, the papers selected for the present issue of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* represent work by scholars affiliated with the Department of Media and Communication Studies <<http://www.medienkomm.uni-halle.de/institut/>> of the University of Halle-Wittenberg and they exemplify the above briefly described developments (for the table of contents of the issue link to <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss4/>>). In alphabetical order by authors' names, the work presented here includes:

Anne Bartsch and Susanne Hübner's paper "Towards a Theory of Emotional Communication" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss4/2>>), where the authors outline a model of emotional communication conceptualized as a process of mutual influence between the emotions of communication partners. To elaborate this general notion further, four working definitions of emotional communication are introduced, each of which is based on a different theory of emotions. In the second part of the paper, an integrative framework is proposed that reconciles the four working definitions and their underlying theories of emotion. According to this framework, emotional communication comprises three interrelated levels of complexity: 1) innate stimulus-response-patterns, 2) associative schemata, and 3) symbolic meaning. Finally, Bartsch and Hübner discuss how emotional communication can be described in terms of general communication theory, and conclude that the three complexity levels are heterogeneous with regard to definitional issues in general communication theory. Hence, emotional communication cannot be subsumed under a single theory of communication. Taken separately, however, each complexity level of emotional communication can be related meaningfully to approaches in general communication theory.

Claudia Dittmar's paper "Television and Politics in the Former East Germany" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss4/3>>) in which she analyzes how in the former East Germany (GDR), while television audience was restricted severely by government, at the same time West German broadcasts acquired a substantial audience and what the impact of these broadcasts had on the audience. West German television programs enjoyed a high level of popularity with the East German population, thereby posing the greatest competition to the GDR's own television stations. As a result, GDR television was forced to counteract the impact of West German television. Dittmar discusses how the West German media were accused of attempting to influence the East German audience ideologically and how the leadership of the GDR sought this to prevent by all means. The resulting competition on the airwaves forced the television stations of the GDR to adapt to the wishes of its audience, even if this meant that entertainment won the upper hand over the mediation of socialist politics and policies: Popular programs of West German television were countered with programs of mass appeal produced in the GDR.

Kathrin Fahlenbrach's paper "Aesthetics and Audiovisual Metaphors in Media Perception" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss4/4>>) in which she presents a model of audiovisual analysis where focus is on audiovisual aesthetics perceived physically and affectively. Fahlenbrach starts out from the assumption that image and sound are inseparable in audiovisual media and must be treated as a unit, a "synchresis" (Chion). Fahlenbrach proposes that only this premise is able to cover the pre-consciously perceived elements sufficiently, namely the sensorial and affective structures of audiovisual aesthetics. Fahlenbrach articulates some aspects for an audiovisual aesthetics that concentrate on the interfaces between audiovisual perception and audiovisual design and employs to this end the Aristotelian concept of *aisthesis*. Following the

theory of cognitive metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson), Fahlenbrach assumes that audiovisual codes and signs always rely fundamentally on schemata of physical and affective experience. Following George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Fahlenbrach regards the mapping of physical schemata onto acoustic, visual, and, respectively, audiovisual elements in the media as a metaphorical process. Drawing on an example of film sound, she explains how filmmakers project acoustic qualities onto visual *Gestalt* patterns and thereby construct audiovisual metaphors that we recognize immediately and long before we reflect on them, that is, they activate meanings that rely on basic experiences of our body.

Florian Hartling's paper "The Canonization of German-language Digital Literature" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss4/5>>) on "Net Literature," a relatively young phenomenon, that has its roots in experimental visual and concrete poetry and hypertext. With the use of new media technology, this new genre of literature has acquired much interest and is now considered to be one of the most important influences in contemporary art. Not only does Net Literature connect sound, video, and animation with interactivity and allows new forms of artistic expression, it also impacts significantly on the traditional functions of the literary system. Hartling suggests that, in relation to Net Literature, the notion of the "death of the author" gives birth to the "writing reader." Hartling presents the results of his study where he applies the concept of "canon" to German-language Net Literature and where he attempts to find out whether, in this new form of literature, a "canon" has already been formed. Based on Karl Erik Rosengren's framework of "mention technique," a sample of German-language reviews of Net Literature was analyzed. The study intends to test the applicability of Rosengren's method to the analysis of Net Literature, that is, whether it is valid to use a method that was originally developed for the empirical study of the traditional literary canon for the study of an emergent Net Literature.

Gerhard Lampe's paper, "A New Look at Robert J. Flaherty's Documentary Art" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss4/6>>), in which the author challenges the general view of documentary film director Robert J. Flaherty's work. In film studies, it is generally assumed that Flaherty ignored cinematographic developments and kept repeating himself by telling his stories of mythical battles of the individual against the powers of nature in always the same old-fashioned way. He is said to have improved his "photographic eye" with the help of improved lenses and more detailed shots; nevertheless, he did not show any interest in editing problems and sound recording. By comparing Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), *Moana* (1923-25), and *Man of Aran* (1934), Lampe shows that the continuity-editing-system and 180° system which emerged in Hollywood at the time of the transition from silent to sound production was also adopted by Flaherty in his films. Lampe argues that Flaherty in fact modernised his cinematographic style after shooting the semi-documentary "Paramount"-film *Taboo* (1929-30) with Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau.

Detlev Nothnagel and Gilda Vera Aguirre's paper on "Mental Models of Communication and Television Advertising" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss4/7>>), where the focus is on the question whether and if so, how and to what extent television advertisement spots differ cross-culturally. In contrast to the majority of studies on this topic, Nothnagel and Aguirre concentrate on a protocol-based formal analysis that is statistically oriented. In a more general perspective, the relation between face-to-face communication and communication mediated by technology is scrutinized. Provided that there are important differences, one hypothesis would be that they originate in habits of communication older than those found in technically-mediated communication. That would, at least in part, presuppose a transfer between different media, linking the organization of speech with that of pictures, etc. As only comparative studies are suited to address these questions, two samples are compared in the study, contrasting German and Ecuadorian examples of data. In order to avoid an overestimation of cross-cultural differences and to get a handle on content-related fluctuations, intercultural differences are measured in a parallel fashion.

Sadashivam Rao's paper, "An Analysis of Websites of Bi-national Heterosexual Couples" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss4/8>>), on the design of world wide web homepages of bi-national couples. Rao shows how such websites become locations of the re-invention of

notions of culture, generating a particular practice of representation, namely that of "hyphenating." Rao contends that the subjects of personal homepages enter the domain of the internet as entities already embedded in many other domains of discourse such as those of nationalism, culture, and media. Further, Rao proposes that this specific genre of websites reflects traces of these discourses. Of course, in the process of the website design itself, the artefacts used undergo changes in that they might be transformed or combined together to derive new forms or generate new meanings. In this manner, the world wide web becomes an arena for the expression, reification, and recreation of already existing discourses.

Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's paper, on "Imre Kertész's Nobel Prize, Public Discourse, and the Media" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss4/9>>), is a discussion of aspects of media coverage in German-, Hungarian-, and English-language newspapers and magazines of the 2002 Nobel Prize in Literature, awarded to Imre Kertész. The perspective of Tötösy's analysis is to gauge the importance and impact of media coverage comparatively in the three cultural and media landscapes. Based on selected examples from newspapers and magazines with an international scope, Tötösy argues that the reception of Kertész's Nobel Prize suggests the convergence of the media (as the message) and the contents of the message within public discourse, resulting in Kertész's role as a public intellectual despite his reluctance to assume this role. Tötösy demonstrates that the media discourse reveals significant differences in the reception of the prize, pointing to different stages in democratic values in the context of the relevance of the Holocaust today. In addition, the media reception reveals how far a particular society accepts (Germany, the USA, and Canada) or rejects (Hungary) the historical relevance of Kertész's work as unique in the literature of the Holocaust.

Reinhold Viehoff proposes in his paper "Media Icons of War and the Instrumentalisation of Images in US-American Media Today" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss4/10>>), that the destruction of Iraq dictator Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad in April 2004 by the US army represents an attempt to instrumentalise the logic of mass media as a strategy of public diplomacy. Viehoff explains the logic of mass media and public diplomacy of the US government and US media today in the context of the history of the destruction of monuments as played out on the landscape of media during and following the demise of the Soviet empire. Viehoff proposes that the media images of the toppling of Hussein's statue is linked, historically, to the iconic representations of the divestiture of Central and East European dictatorships. Further, the divestiture of tyranny of the Soviet empire and its media images have been capitalised on in the strategic media image construction of the deposition of Hussein's government of tyranny. Based on specific examples of media images, Viehoff analyses the process in which the iconisation of images occurs in the case of Hussein's divestiture. In his conclusion, Viehoff proposes that the strategy of media and its icons used in the US media suggest misguided intentions. These misguided intentions are due to particularities in the processes of reflection in current US-American media systems.

Martin Grimm's book review article, "New Books in German Media and Communication Studies" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss4/11>>), is on selected recent publications in German media and communication studies: Wolfgang Bock, *Bild-Schrift-Cyberspace. Grundkurs Medienwissen* (2002), Ulrich Schmitz and Horst Wenzel, eds., *Wissen und neue Medien. Bilder und Zeichen von 800 bis 2000* (2003), Johannes Bittner, *Digitalität, Sprache, Kommunikation. Eine Untersuchung zur Medialität von digitalen Kommunikationsformen und Textsorten und deren varietätenlinguistische Modellierung* (2003), Carsten Winter, Tanja Thomas, and Andreas Hepp, eds., *Medienidentitäten. Identität und Kontext von Globalisierung und Medienkultur* (2003), and Udo Göttlich, Clemens Albrecht, and Winfried Gebhardt, eds., *Populäre Kultur als repräsentative Kultur. Die Herausforderung der Cultural Studies* (2002).

The final item of this thematic issue *Media and Communication Studies at the University of Halle-Wittenberg* is Martin Grimm's "Selected Bibliography of German-language Books in Media, Communication, and Cultural Studies (2000-2005)" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss4/12>>).

Last but not least, I thank the anonymous reviewers of the papers for their comments, the advisory board of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu>>, and the editor of the journal, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, who is also our colleague in the Department of Media and Communication Studies at the University of Halle-Wittenberg, for the opportunity to present the work of scholars affiliated with our Department to the broad spectrum of readers in English. We also thank *CLCWeb* editorial assistant Luz Angelica Kirschner (Pennsylvania State University) for her much needed help with the editing of the papers in this thematic issue of the journal.