

INTRODUCTION

Expanding media, expanding histories

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It is early September in Lund in southern Sweden. The majestic trees sway gently in the late summer breeze. A group of university students are looking at the thousand-year-old Skårby rune stone outside the local cultural historical museum. An information panel reveals that the runic inscription translates as ‘Ka-Ulfr and Autir, they erected this stone to Tome, their brother, who was the owner of Gudis Snape.’¹ But the students have not come to gather historical facts or decipher the message. Instead, they are there to look at the rune stone as a medium: its material form and conditions, its ability to store information, and how this affects the permanence and reproducibility of its message. Completing the task requires some background knowledge, but above all it requires that the students exercise their historical imagination.

Reconvened in a seminar room, the group presents their findings to the class. Their exploration has strayed into truly creative, intellectual territory. What if the content of the message remained the same, but the form was different, the students ask. What if the message had been shouted from a hilltop rather than carved in stone? And what would the equivalent contemporary medium look like? Surely the rune stone is ages-old social media, communicating and mediating social ties in fewer than 280 characters, Twitter’s character

limit since 2017? As a culmination of their presentation and to the amusement of their classmates, the students demonstrate their new media history Twitter account and its first runic tweet.

The rune stone exercise prompts the freshers to engage in theoretical reflections that unlock a new understanding of media. From this perspective, the important question is not ‘What is a medium?’ but rather ‘How is it a medium?’ In this process of inquiry, the historical context of a phenomenon in time and place becomes vital. A medium, according to such a perspective, is simply whatever mediates something under specific historical conditions. Mediation means to establish a connection—a transmitting link—between things, people or phenomena that are fundamentally different. In this respect, it is productive to think of a medium as something much more extended rather than a mere instrument, channelling communication. In short, a medium is that which is in the middle—a mediator. Even a stone or a human being can be a medium given a specific historical and cultural setting. Marshall McLuhan’s much-cited maxim ‘The medium is the message’ is aptly rephrased as ‘The medium is the messenger’.²

This volume makes the case for an expanded view of media history. Over the past two decades, media history has emerged from the fringes of two established disciplines, media studies and history, and matured as a field in its own right. Media history today engages in scholarly debates that range far beyond the traditional narrative accounts of media genres, technologies, or institutions such as the press, film, radio, or television. A social and cultural perspective, indebted to the ‘new cultural history’ and popularized by Asa Briggs and Peter Burke in their seminal book from 2002 (revised in 2020 with Espen Ytreberg), has since gained ground in the field of media history.³ Mono-modal historical accounts that view a single medium in isolation have given way to multimodal, contextual approaches that acknowledge the wider landscape, culture, or system of which a medium is a part.⁴ The idea that media are technology and culture in

equal measure—or, as Lisa Gitelman has put it, social protocols—is widely accepted by contemporary media historians. Media may be technologies, but they are defined by cultural imaginaries, norms, and practices.⁵

Social and cultural histories of media help challenge deep-seated beliefs about historical and technological developments today. Energized by theoretical work of Wolfgang Ernst, Erkki Huhtamo, Jussi Parikka and others in media archaeology, media history disproves the assumption that the late twentieth century was the peak of media diversity. Instead, the scholarly enterprise has questioned the idea of cumulative growth, looking to a less linear, progress-oriented, and teleological understanding of historical trajectories. Productive discussions have evolved around concepts such as obsolete, dead, or residual media, pointing to the importance of acknowledging that past media technologies and landscapes need to be understood on their own terms, and not in relation to any present measures of success or failure. Past media are not prequels to the present, nor do contemporary media represent the natural culmination of a historical development.⁶

An important key to the advances of media history as a field is the digital transformation of society. Not only is the very term mass media defunct, for example because of digital atomization, but concepts such as multimedia, intermedia, and convergence have turned historians' attention also to the interwoven or entangled character and the overlapping, multimedia complexity of past media landscapes.⁷ For example, in the light of digital media, the conventional division of earlier scholarship between active publics and passive audiences appears increasingly obsolete. Participation, involvement, and engagement are not predicated by digitalization, yet their omnipresence have attuned media historians to look for comparable behaviour in past media landscapes.⁸

Historians have also offered critical perspectives on contemporary technical environments and 'new media', questioning the obsessive

‘newness ideology’ by pointing to the constant remixing of old and new.⁹ Media history thus serves as a healthy reminder that even the newest of media will age and grow old; the internet or large language models are not the apex of human capacity for technological invention, but represent fleeting moments in the incessant flow of media history.¹⁰ Here, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s concept of remediation resonates among media historians because of its engagement with how new media technologies regularly refashion prior media forms, creating a constant interplay between old and new.¹¹

Another significant development in media history today is the increasing awareness of the subject’s global and transnational dimension.¹² While national media systems and institutions were long the main focus for media historians dealing with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a growing number of scholars are now exploring geographically cross-cutting themes or international comparisons. The greater attention to space and scale has resulted in studies of transnational communication networks and infrastructure such as transatlantic cables, transnational organizations, and transcultural flows of media content.¹³ Arguably, this shift has had the greatest consequences for broadcasting history, a topic long constrained by national frameworks of interpretation.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the relevance of a transnational turn in early modern and non-European history remains subject to debate.¹⁵ To avoid the pitfalls of eurocentrism and anachronism embedded in the concept of transnationality, Marie Cronqvist and Christoph Hilgert have thus proposed a conceptual framework of entangled media histories, which accommodates the diverse and wide-ranging spatial and temporal dimensions of media history today.¹⁶

The ideas outlined above all inspire and inform the present book. Although half the volume centres on Scandinavian and especially Swedish media history, the studies were all conceived in extensive discussions about the value of temporally and spatially expanded media histories. Problematising the concepts of space and scale does

not invalidate the importance of geography. In a field dominated by British, American, and German perspectives, Scandinavian media history serves as a reminder that there is a world outwith Verona's walls. The authors represent a mix of junior and senior scholars affiliated with the research environment of Lund University's Section for Media History at the Department of Communication and Media. Some of the authors are trained historians; others have arrived by way of media and communication studies, the history of ideas and science, library and information studies, book history, and art history. The volume is a result of our past and ongoing discussions about what characterizes media history as a scholarly enterprise, the value of a social and cultural historical approach to the media, the expanded media concept, and the specific contribution a media historian can make in a constructive dialogue with other research fields.

Media history's emergence at the intersection of media studies and history lends itself to a simplistic narrative of a happy marriage of an emphatically theoretical discipline with an emphatically empirical one. The origins of media history, however, are of course more complex than that. Media research, with its traditions of content analysis and ethnography, has brought theory but also methodological rigour and empirical scope to the table. Conversely, the image of the historical discipline as atheoretical and empiricist has long been at odds with reality. By default, media history is attentive to temporalities and change over time. The chapters in this volume each strike their own balance between theoretical and empirical contribution. This balance, however, is not simply a result of the authors' disciplinary training, but a conscious choice given the research task at hand. Ultimately, the aim of this volume is not only to disseminate new original research. Each chapter also engages with one or more key concepts in current discussions of relevance to the field of media history. This includes for example the relationship between old and new media, the concepts of remediation, media systems, media culture, intermediality, media convergence, remediation, media

use, and media events. The list is by no means exhaustive, but it is representative of the discussion within the scholarly community in Lund and its international partners in the research network Entangled Media Histories.

Outline of the book

Adhering to the guiding principle of paying equal attention to cultural and material approaches, this volume is divided into two sections: 'Media cultures and events' and 'Media materialities and infrastructures'. Despite the division, the cultural and material perspectives should not be seen as mutually exclusive. In the chapters, it is rather a matter of entry point or main emphasis. The reader will find little about singular histories of a particular medium such as the press, television, or internet. This does not mean that newspapers and other historically dominant media forms are absent; on the contrary, they are indeed integral parts of diverse temporally and spatially situated media cultures, environments, or systems. Equal attention is drawn to phenomena which have, sometimes due to their ephemeral or mundane character, remained in the shadow of traditional media historiography—phenomena such as the spiritist seance, the art replica, or the office ring binder.

In the first section of the book, cultural perspectives on the media are at the forefront. The four chapters all pay homage to the ritual perspective of communication, once suggested by James Carey in his influential book *Communication as Culture*, but also related perspectives and themes such as media communities and media events.¹⁷ Two of the contributions discuss the ceremonial function of a media event, albeit from different angles. In her chapter, Ulrika Holgersson analyses the public funeral of Swedish former liberal prime minister Karl Staaff in 1915. Drawing on Nick Couldry's work on media rituals, Holgersson demonstrates how a media event predating universal suffrage could be subjected to deep political polarization.

The ritual or ceremonial construction of community is central also to Christine Davidsson Sandal's chapter on spiritist seances at the turn of the twentieth century. However, while Holgersson discusses the macro dimension and the public staging of a (mass) event, Davidsson Sandal zooms in on the small group of spiritists and their event-making in the seance room. Employing the concepts of seeing practice, participatory media, and media protocols, she examines the seance as an arena defined in equal terms by social ties, media practices, and a joint understanding of reality.

The following two chapters employ the concept of media system and something akin to mediated visibility in relation to the cultural construction of communities. Taking his point of departure in the empirical case of the mediated persona of the German emperor Wilhelm II, Betto van Waarden traces the emergence of a transnational media system at the turn of the twentieth century. Like Holgersson, van Waarden also brings up the sometimes conflicting, uneven characteristics of this emerging media system. In fact, the Kaiser's persona not only resonated with audiences across European borders; at the same time, it could be used to channel antagonizing and excluding tendencies in different societies.

Visibility can also have an important didactic character. In his chapter on the Gallup poll as a new medium in early 1940s Sweden, an import from the US, Eskil Vesterlund suggests that the opinion poll could be interpreted as a statistical attraction in its historical context. Through the Swedish Gallup institute's polls, and their visual remediations in the press, the 'average Swede' was constructed and presented to him- or herself in an atmosphere of encouraging national participation and civic self-understanding. The mediation of the polls not only constructed an imagined cultural community, Vesterlund argues with a reference to Benedict Anderson, but also an imagined statistical community.

Vesterlund's emphasis on opinion polls as a new medium, a new technology, serves as a bridge between the first and the second part

of the volume, 'Media materialities and infrastructures'. Here the material perspective takes centre stage and while James Carey provides a key theoretical influence in the first part, inspiration in the second part comes from the work of John Durham Peters, Lisa Parks, Shannon Mattern, and others on media as infrastructures, logistics, networks, and traffic.¹⁸ Charlie Järpvalld's chapter on the information system of the paper-based office is an exploration of the ring binder as a new medium, focusing on how it was received and negotiated as a part of a larger information infrastructure in different countries from the late nineteenth century to the 1980s. Understanding the binder as an ordering device and directing attention to the different parts of the ring binder—its closing mechanism, cover, and index, and last but not least the all-important filing holes—Järpvalld reveals that seemingly trivial artefacts can be objects of great importance to media history.

While Järpvalld's chapter concentrates on the information system of the workplace and its media assemblages, Marie Cronqvist shifts the discussion of media logistics in everyday life to another spatial setting, the domestic sphere. In her chapter, she outlines the changes in the choreography of the media home as presented in the printed IKEA catalogues between 1950 and 2020. Drawing upon theories on domestication of technology and using the concept of media ecology, Cronqvist traces the object careers or life cycles of media technologies in the home and shows how they have always been entangled in discussions about problems with media overflow as well as holding out the promise of relaxation and 'quality time'.

The two final chapters of the book also thematize infrastructure and media circulation with a focus on books and art copies respectively. In Sune Bechmann Pedersen and Henning Hansen's contribution, the focus is the often overlooked 'midlife' of a medium. Media scholars tend to favour histories of origins and early developments over maturation and death, but in this chapter, the authors study the expansive infrastructures allowing tourist guidebooks to

reach wide readerships in the second half of the twentieth century. Concentrating on a bestselling Danish guidebook series, the chapter draws on archival images and texts as well as oral history to explore the creation, production, and distribution of tourist guides in the era of mass travel.

Material circulation is also at the heart of Charlotta Krispinsson's chapter on copying practices in early modern Antwerp. Contemporary digital culture is saturated with copied data. This relentless reproduction of digital images today is the starting point for Krispinsson's reflections on the concept of originality and the circulation of art replicas in the seventeenth century. Conventional art history has favoured original artists over painters and printmakers specialized in copying, but as Krispinsson shows, the circulation of images between the media of painting and print involved translation and the adding of new content, resulting in 'unique' copies. The chapter is thus a story of intermedial exchange, which provided a cornerstone for the development of early modern visual culture.

The book offers several vectors for the reader. Aside from the nexus of cultures and materialities outlined above, it also contains recurrent themes such as politics and political manifestations or events, represented in particular by Holgersson's and van Waarden's contributions; everyday life, the mundane and media use, present in Järpvall's, Davidsson Sandal's, and Cronqvist's chapters; old new media, discussed in the contributions by Vesterlund and Järpvall, and visual culture, emphasized in the chapters by van Waarden, Krispinsson, Cronqvist, and Vesterlund. Transnational perspectives inform the chapters by Bechmann Pedersen & Hansen, Krispinsson, and van Waarden, while constructions of national communities are highlighted in the chapters by Holgersson and Vesterlund. Transmedial perspectives are key to the argument in the chapter by Davidsson Sandal, but present also in Krispinsson's and Vesterlund's contributions. This non-exhaustive list of cross-cutting themes

speaks to the diversity of contemporary media history as the field is slowly, but surely maturing.

Expanding (media) histories

The expanded media histories presented in this volume point to the audacious conclusion that all history is media history—at least in the sense that a media historical perspective unlocks the mediality of historical and archaeological sources like the Skårby rune stone. To approach a rune stone as a medium rather than a mere message from a distant time requires that the historian consider the form as well as the content of the communication situation. It also teases out the transhistorical dimension of how the permanence of the engraved stone is essential to mediation over hundreds, or even thousands, of years. The stone is a messenger, establishing a connection between sometimes radically heterogeneous and divergent worlds. As the media philosopher Sibylle Krämer has put it: ‘The messenger bridges distances but does not eliminate them; mediation and separation are intertwined in the figure of the messenger.’¹⁹

The variety of mediating phenomena covered in this book—be they office ring binders, furniture catalogues, spiritist seances, public funerals, emperors, opinion polls, art replicas, or tourist guide books—could all be seen as such messengers, connecting things that are non-identical and distant from each other. The furthest distance is perhaps covered in the seance, which bridges life and death. In this sense, media history is not only broader than at a first glance. It can expand our minds and not least our interrogation of historical sources in the shape of material traces, documents, files, pictures, moving images, and even the archive itself. If we recognize that a medium is that which mediates, writing history demands media historical reflections. And if we regard the historical source as a medium and a messenger, what are the implications for an expanded historical source criticism?

Some scholars have already discussed this question from the point of view of digital history. Recent decades have witnessed the digitization of historical records at a breakneck pace all while the dawn of ‘the digital age’ in the 1990s is emerging as a historical period in its own right.²⁰ The stupendous amount of digitized and born-digital sources available to historians today requires that researchers understand the specific ‘digitality’ of their particular sources.²¹ As Helle Strandgaard Jensen has argued, all historians—no matter their time period and area of expertise—must possess a measure of digital archival literacy to navigate the complex media landscape in which historical sources are generated, transformed, and retrieved.²² Media historians attuned to the mediality of historical traces are at the forefront of this ongoing reappraisal of historical source criticism for a digital age of abundance.²³

A key argument stressed in Briggs and Burke’s *A Social History of the Media* is that it is as necessary for communication scholars to take history seriously as it is for historians—‘whatever their period or preoccupations’—to take ‘serious account of communication, including both communication theory and communication technology’.²⁴ But considering the rapid digitization—or shall we say (re)mediation?—of historical sources today, there are other and broader lessons to draw from this disciplinary two-way traffic. In 1961, E. H. Carr stated in his canonical book *What is History?* that ‘the more sociological history becomes, and the more historical sociology becomes, the better for both’.²⁵ His words found a receptive audience and became a rallying cry for the social history in ascendance at the time. Almost thirty years later, in 1989, Lynn Hunt evoked Carr’s words in her introduction to the *The New Cultural History* volume, a book that became immensely important as it set the table for a new theoretical and methodological paradigm in historiography, demonstrating to historians the relevance of the linguistic turn and cultural constructivism.²⁶

Media history today owes much to the advent of social history in the 1960s and the new cultural history of the 1990s. Both historiographical paradigms led to advances in new theories, perspectives, and methods. Yet another three decades have passed. As we conclude this volume, reflecting on the digital condition, the expanded media concept, and the mediality of historical sources, it is high time we suggest that the more historical the study of media becomes, and the more media literate and digitally responsive historical research becomes, the better for both.

Notes

- 1 Kulturen, Lund, sign next to Skårbysten 1: 'Ka-Ulfr och Autir de satte denna sten efter sin bror Tome, som ägde Gudis Snape'.
- 2 Guillory 2010. The messenger model is developed by Krämer 2015.
- 3 Briggs et al. 2020; see also Hunt 1989.
- 4 In Sweden, the cultural history of the media had been promoted in particular in the book series *Mediehistoriskt arkiv* (2006–), www.mediehistorisktarkiv.se. See, for example, Ekström et al. 2006; Jülich et al. 2008; Cronqvist et al. 2014.
- 5 Gitelman 2008.
- 6 Lister et al. 2009, 54. For media archaeology, see, for example, Parikka 2012; Ernst 2013. The 'dead media' discussion was initiated by science fiction writer Bruce Sterling in the late 1990s. The term 'residual media' originates in Raymond Williams' work and was picked up by Acland 2006.
- 7 Jenkins 2006.
- 8 Ekström et al. 2011.
- 9 See, for example, Gitelman & Pingree 2003; Manovich 2001; Park et al. 2011; Chun et al. 2016.
- 10 Balbi & Magaudda 2018, 19.
- 11 Bolter & Grusin 1999; see also Thorburn & Jenkins 2003; Acland 2006.
- 12 Conrad 2016, ch. 6.
- 13 See, for example, Fickers & Grisct 2019; Blevins 2021; Tworek 2019.
- 14 See, for example, Hilmes 2012; Fickers & Johnson 2012; Föllmer & Badenoch 2018; Potter et al. 2022.
- 15 Iriye 2007, 373–6; Yun Casalilla 2014; Werner & Zimmermann 2006.
- 16 Cronqvist & Hilgert 2017, 130–141.
- 17 Carey 2008.

- 18 Peters 2015a; Näser-Lather & Neubert 2015, for example, Peters 2015b on infrastructuralism; Parks & Starosielski 2015, for example, Mattern 2015 on the deep time of media infrastructure.
- 19 Krämer 2015, 79.
- 20 Milligan 2019.
- 21 Brügger 2018, 5.
- 22 Strandgaard Jensen 2021.
- 23 Fickers 2012 compares today's digital abundance with the boom of critical source editions in the late nineteenth century, when growing accessibility prompted new methodologies and established new practices of historical source criticism.
- 24 Briggs et al. 2020, 2–3.
- 25 Carr 1990, 66.
- 26 Hunt 1989, 1.

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