Communication and Media Studies, History to 1968

Peter Simonson
University of Colorado at Boulder

John Durham Peters
University of Iowa

The international history of communication and media studies has yet to be written. To this point, most histories have been national, with the bulk of attention devoted to North America and western Europe. These emphases are not unwarranted, for the field established itself first on either side of the North Atlantic, was disseminated outward from there, and with a few notable exceptions remains best established in those regions today.

By necessity, this entry follows some of the traditional lines of analysis, but also aims to offer an overview of the interdisciplinary and transnational origins of the field, from its prehistory in the late nineteenth century through its institutionalization in the post-World War II era – when departments, doctorates, journals, and professional organizations were established in sufficient numbers to birth a separate field of communication from its several parent disciplines.

THE PREHISTORY OF A FIELD, 1870–1939

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, newspapers and “communication” became objects of sustained scholarly inquiry. To be sure, there had been influential analyses of

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both earlier (and doctoral theses as early as 1690 [Atwood & de Beer 2001]), but not before the 1880s did there begin a coordinated scholarly effort to interpret the press and related phenomena which were increasingly collected under the sign “communication.” The home discipline was political economy and its then sub-field, sociology. The most important work was done in Germany, France, and the US. One important thread developed from consideration of transportation systems and another from concern with publics, masses, and community. The German political economist Albert Schäffle’s *Structure and life of the social body* (1875–1878) portrayed society as an organism whose transportation/communication systems functioned as nerves. Schäffle influenced the University of Michigan’s Charles Horton Cooley, whose research on railroads led to a grander social theory of communication, the first of its kind in the US (c. 1895–1909). By then Karl Bücher, another German political economist, had conceived of a *Zeitungswissenschaft*, or science of newspapers, and offered a course on the history, statistics, and organization of the press system (Hardt 2001). In *fin de siècle* Paris, the sociologist Gabriel Tarde, whose theory of social imitation was implicitly about communication, published articles on conversation, public opinion, and the press, continuing a longer French preoccupation with newspapers most influentially pursued by Alexis de Tocqueville. In Berlin, the American Robert Park was hearing lectures about social interaction given by Georg Simmel, and readying himself for a 1904 dissertation on crowds and publics.

Others devoted attention to newspaper study in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Max Weber proposed an ambitious but unrealized study of the press in 1910, while Columbia University’s A. A. Tenney developed basic methods of content analysis (→ Content Analysis, Quantitative; Content Analysis, Qualitative) that catalyzed newspaper studies by graduate students there into the 1920s, just as Park was overseeing better-known sociological research on the press at the University of Chicago. In 1916, Bücher founded the Institut für Zeitungswissenschaft at the University of Leipzig, the first such institute devoted to the science of the press, combining political economy, sociology, and history. The first American journalism schools had opened by then, but were devoted to the training of journalists and would not conduct serious academic research for another generation.

World War I and the Russian Revolution focused international attention on propaganda, widely used by all the major combatants (→ Propaganda; War Propaganda). In the US, political scientists like Harold Lasswell did some of the most important scholarly work, while the public intellectual → Walter Lippmann and the philosopher John Dewey weighed in with widely read books on the subject. In Germany Karl Jaeger coined the term *Publizistik* in 1926 to name a field concerned with publicity, media, and the formation of publics, while the philosopher Martin Heidegger explored communication (*Mitteilung*) in his hugely important *Being and time* (1927). The Agitprop Department of the Soviet Central Committee organized newspaper readership studies in the 1920s, enlisting linguists and literary critics to examine the content and style of the official mass press (Lenoe 2004).

Journalism programs were established in China, Japan, and Finland in the 1920s, drawing variously upon American and German models. In 1935, Brazil’s new Federal University in Rio established a professorship devoted to the study of journalism as a literary and social phenomenon. Following a more professional model, Argentina’s National University formed the first school of journalism in South America (1935), and
half a dozen other Latin American countries would follow suit before 1950 (Cuba in 1942, Mexico 1943, Peru and Ecuador both in 1945, Venezuela and Brazil in 1947). US journalism schools began producing scholarly research in the 1930s, initially of a historical sort, and led by Willard Bleyer and Frank Luther Mott, both of whom had doctorates in English. As director of Wisconsin’s School of Journalism (est. 1927), Bleyer linked journalism with the social sciences and trained a cadre of academics who disseminated the model to other American universities.

Scholars also explored other media in the interwar years. Film study had begun before World War I (the Italian Futurist Ricciotto Canudo, the German sociologist Emilie Altenloh, and the Harvard psychologist Hugo Munsterberg had all written monographs). In the 1920s and 1930s, the League of Nations sponsored an encyclopedia of film, and the Payne Fund sponsored studies on the impact of movies in the US. Rudolf Arnheim went from studying Gestalt psychology with Kurt Lewin at the Psychological Institute of the University of Berlin to publishing books on film and radio. Lewin emigrated to the US in 1933, and over the next decade laid foundations for group communications research at the University of Iowa and MIT. Tarde, Simmel, and Cooley had all written about face-to-face interaction, but published notes from George Herbert Mead’s 1927 lectures probably had a greater impact on the study of communication.

Hundreds of thousands of Jews fled central Europe after the Nazis came to power in 1933, among them intellectuals who would play key roles in the institutional formation of communication study. Some emigrated to other European countries (Kurt Baschwitz settled in Holland), but many more went to America, where they cross-pollinated domestic institutions and ideas and helped bring mass communication research into existence. From Austria came Paul Lazarsfeld, who had studied and worked at the University of Vienna, where he conducted perhaps the earliest scientific survey of radio listeners and advised the first Austrian dissertation on radio, written by his future wife, Herta Herzog (Audience Research). From Germany came Theodor Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt Institut für Sozialforschung. Lazarsfeld was instrumental in developing methodologically sophisticated objectivist approaches to mass communication, while the Frankfurt scholars formulated brilliant critical theoretical alternatives (Critical Theory). Their paths crossed briefly through Lazarsfeld’s Office of Radio Research (ORR), begun at the University of Newark but moved to Columbia in 1941, and soon renamed the Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR). Initially funded by Rockefeller money, Lazarsfeld’s institutes survived and grew through commercial and government sponsorship of audience, marketing, and propaganda research (Propaganda in World War II). In conversation with Lasswell, whom the Rockefeller Foundation brought in for its important Communications Group seminar (Gary 1999), Hadley Cantril, and later with Robert K. Merton, hired by Columbia in 1941, Lazarsfeld oversaw development of a social scientific field that by the mid-1940s was being called “communications research.”

Scholars in literature departments also turned their attention to media and communication in the interwar years. In the US, speech teachers had broken from English and created their own association in 1915. Over the next several decades they differentiated themselves into two camps, one devoted to traditional humanist inquiry of rhetoric and oratory, another advocating instead “speech science” (Speech Communication, History of). In England, F. R. Leavis wrote an English dissertation on the relation of
journalism and literature in the eighteenth century (1924). At Cambridge in the 1930s, he teamed with his wife Queenie to analyze mass culture and its media with the tools of literary criticism (as Robert Silvey was conducting survey-based audience research for the BBC). Among those influenced by Leavis’s work were a Canadian, Marshall McLuhan, and a Welshman, Raymond Williams, both of whom took Leavisite criticism as points of departure for their own influential analyses of media and culture two decades later.

**COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA RESEARCH INSTITUTIONALIZED, 1940–1968**

World War II played an important role in establishing international frameworks for communications research. In the US, many of the leading students of propaganda and mass communications joined the war effort, working for the Office of War Information (OWI) and other government agencies, where they solidified social networks and refined methods of content analysis, focused interviews, survey research, and laboratory-based experimentation. Allied victory reshaped the global balance of power, prompted formation of the United Nations, and ushered in a new era of international hope counterbalanced by Cold War hostilities. Communication became a relevant concept across many fields of study. American government money flowed into universities and went overseas, funding communications research in the name of democratic institution building, development, and American influence. Europe re-established traditions of media inquiry interrupted by the war, and the new United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, est. 1947) extended mass communication research around the globe.

Communication established itself institutionally through institutes, programs, and departments. Wilbur Schramm was a key figure, who drew upon Lazarsfeld’s model to establish the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois in 1948, and another at Stanford in 1956 (the latter partly backed by the Ford Foundation, which supplanted Rockefeller as chief private funder of communications research after the war). Schramm edited communications readers, trained graduate students, and through wide-ranging international contacts exerted great influence on the field. Other universities established programs as well, including the University of Chicago, whose Committee on Communication (est. 1947) remained active through the 1950s, led by David Riesman, Morris Janowitz, and Elihu Katz among others (Wahl-Jorgensen 2004). Magazine and newspaper magnate Walter Annenberg endowed a School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania (est. 1959), which would eventually become a leading center in the field. Louis Guttmann took Lazarsfeld’s model overseas when he emigrated from the US and established the Israel Institute of Applied Social Research (1947), an early site of public opinion research in that country. Katz began spending half his year at Jerusalem’s Hebrew University in 1956, at which point he became the key figure in building Israeli communications research.

In the US the geographical center of gravity lay in midwestern public universities, which brought scholars of speech and mass media together, sometimes uneasily, under the covering term of “communication.” After the war, speech faculty had established the National Society for the Study of Communication (an early version of the International Communication Association), which in 1950 launched the *Journal of Communication*. 
Though there were a handful of critical, cultural, and historical scholars working in the US, “The coalescence of American communication research was founded on the hegemony of quantitative social science,” as one observer notes (Delia 1987, 71).

Some drew upon American models in postwar Europe; others re-established native traditions of Zeitungswissenschaft and Publizistik; Finland’s University of Tampere established a chair of newspaper science in 1947. In Amsterdam, Kurt Baschwitz formed the Dutch Institute for the Science of the Press (1948) and organized a series of conferences that led to the founding of the Gazette (1955) as a central journal in the field. In Germany, Publizistik was institutionalized under Emil Dovifat at the Free University of Berlin, and by others at the Universities of Munich and Munster (Vroons 2005). At the University of Hamburg, the Hans Bredow Institute for Radio and Television was established in 1950, and began publishing a journal, Rundfunk und Fernsehen, the following year. Diverse spirits advocated the use of empirical methods, ranging from Theodor Adorno, working at the repatriated Frankfurt Institut, to → Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, who founded the Allensbach Institut für Demoskopie (1947) and utilized survey methods in a long career as a conservative pollster and theorist. Adorno’s assistant, → Jürgen Habermas, conducted a public opinion study of student attitudes in 1961, a year before publishing his hugely influential critical-historical work, The structural transformation of the public sphere (→ Public Sphere).

In France, where public opinion research and press institutes (est. 1937–1938) had been closed down by the war, the study of the press resumed in 1947 at the University of Paris, under the guidance of legal scholar and historian Fernand Terrou. An international leader in the field known as information in France, Terrou founded the journal Les Études de Presse (1946) and served as the first director of the French Institute of the Press (est. 1951) and first president of the International Association of Mass Communication Research (founded with UNESCO backing in 1957) (→ International Association for Media and Communication Research [IAMCR]). UNESCO played important roles after 1947 by publishing bibliographies, sponsoring studies of mass communication systems around the world, and funding research centers, most notably the International Center for Advanced Study of Journalism in Latin America (CIESPAL, est. 1959 in Quito, Ecuador).

American foreign policy played a significant role in the spread of communications research. In US-occupied postwar Japan, the press was considered an important building block of democracy, and new journalism programs were established at four universities. In 1949, the Institute for Journalism and Communication Studies was founded at Tokyo University, and two years later the Japan Society for Studies in Journalism and Mass Communication (ma su ko my ni ke shyo n) was formed, headed by Hideo Ono, who had begun Tokyo University’s journalism program in the 1920s. Everett Rogers and other US development researchers conducted studies and trained students from around the world, spreading a paradigm of communication as diffusion from a centralized source, which served multiple purposes (→ Rogers, Everett; Development Communication). The Ford Foundation funded some of the work (sometimes in coordination with the CIA), and in the 1960s helped establish communication institutes in South and East Asia, including the Indian Institute of Mass Communication at the University of New Delhi (1965).

Operating from a very different vantage point, University of Toronto political economist → Harold Innis considered the relations between communications and empire in the last
years before his untimely death in 1952. He was the catalyst for an interdisciplinary group there which coalesced around the study of media and communications, led by English professor Marshall McLuhan and cultural anthropologist Edmund Carpenter, who used a Ford Foundation grant to publish the journal *Explorations* from 1953 to 1959. Canada had no graduate programs in communication before the 1970s, but the *Explorations* group pioneered a distinctive blend of cultural, literary, and historical analysis that distinguished it from the mainstream of American research (→ Medium Theory).

Two other influential alternative approaches emerged from Europe in the early 1960s. In Paris, the Centre d’Études des Communications de Masse (CECMAS) was founded in 1960 by the sociologist Georges Friedmann and his allies Edgar Morin and Roland Barthes (whose brilliant *Mythologies* [1957] probed the contours of modern mass culture). CECMAS began publishing the journal *Communications* in 1962, which like *Explorations* served as an ecumenical forum on communication and culture before it became the leading outlet for semiology late in the decade (→ Semiotics). Meanwhile in Britain the English professor Richard Hoggart established the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in 1964 at Birmingham University (→ Cultural Studies). It was a postgraduate research institute which supplemented methods of literary criticism with sociology and history, taking its early bearings from Hoggart’s *Uses of literacy* and Raymond Williams’s *Culture and Society* (both 1958). London School of Economics social psychologist Hilde Himmelweit had conducted an important study of the effects of television on children (1954–1958, funded by the Nuffield Foundation), but sociology was slow in developing in the UK, and media studies emerged from the ranks of literature – a tradition initiated by the Leavises and updated with new left sensibilities at the CCCS. Indeed, literature served as one of the key parent disciplines for media research in many countries, including Denmark and Norway.

With varying degrees of acceptance, communications gained institutional footholds around much of the world by 1968. It was centered in the US, but had a presence across much of western Europe, though Spain and Portugal, still governed by dictatorships, were slower in establishing programs. The Baltic countries provided intellectual leadership in the Soviet Union, with Estonia’s University of Tartu becoming a key center for media research in the 1960s (when television first gained a mass audience there), under the leadership of Ülo Vooglaid, who led the Laboratory for Sociology (est. 1967) and hosted a series of USSR-wide congresses on mass communication research over the next three years (Vihalem 2001). Though one study estimated that there were no more than 20 scholars in Latin America with graduate training in the “communication sciences” (Nixon 1970), the 1959 founding of CIESPAL represented a beachhead of sorts, and a critical strand of research was beginning to emerge in Venezuela and Chile (where the Belgian Armand Mattelart taught from 1962 until the coup of 1973). Institutes of mass communication had been established in a number of Asian countries. Africa still lagged in developing indigenous research traditions, but in the 1960s it too witnessed a handful of studies conducted by native researchers.

SEE ALSO: ► Audience Research ► BBC ► Communication as an Academic Field: Africa ► Communication as an Academic Field: Australia, New Zealand, Pacific Rim ► Communication as an Academic Field: East Asia ► Communication as an Academic
References and Suggested Readings


Defining communication in Africa as well as the African diaspora is a complex task involving both cultural commonalities and differences. African communication itself reflects a complex mix of cultural values from the cultures and traditions spread across the vast continent (→ Communication as an Academic Field: Africa; Africa: Media Systems; Communication Law and Policy: Africa). While some traditional values have been fervently preserved throughout the continent, the myriad of outside influences, including European colonizers and religious crusaders, cannot be ignored. Similarly, Hecht et al. (2003, 9) explain that African-American communication builds from a “cultural amalgam of the cultural traditions, values, and norms of the indigenous African slaves as well as the European settlers who laid claim to what we know now as the United States.” Understanding African and African-American communication involves a thorough analysis of this cultural amalgam, understanding the worldviews through cultural codes (e.g., values and norms), processes (e.g., communication patterns and practices), and sense of community. We begin with a discussion of African-American communication.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNICATION

Pioneers in research on African-American communication such as Asante, Blake, Cummings, and DuBois worked to establish it as a salient area of inquiry (Jackson & Givens 2006). Western thought had long neglected African influences and these scholars advocated the need to include African-Americans in communication research and...