

Call for Papers – Workshop (GHI Washington, D.C. - March 2–4, 2017)

Organizers:

Dr. Kerstin von der Krone / German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.

Dr. Hansjakob Ziemer / Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin

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

Fueled by the innovation of the mass press, the decades before and after 1900 witnessed a golden age of journalism both in terms of sheer quantity of press products and the professionalization of the vocation. It was during this period that journalists emerged as professional interpreters of the social world. Recent studies have shown that by the 1920s the periodical press did not simply attempt to reproduce “raw information,” but they also claimed to represent a “knowledge in itself” that was largely independent of other discourses (D. Matheson, 2000). While journalists used observational techniques before and after, they now applied their skills not only to record the phenomena of the world but also to create hierarchies of knowledge and to claim authority on what they wrote. What people knew about the world they often learned through newspapers and magazines. An exceptionally influential space was created by the emergence of the feuilleton in Central Europe and feature stories in the Anglo-American sphere that allowed readers to reflect on social issues and the state of society: it became—in the words of Emil Löbl (1902)—an “encyclopedia of the day.” On a daily (or weekly) basis, the newspapers and the feuilletons in particular fulfilled a substantial need for sustainable analysis which had been traditionally been offered / supplied by the book. Journalists were the chief agents involved in this transformation of the public sphere and created a new set of practices and skills. They observed and captured the often immaterial and invisible phenomena of the everyday world: the culture of the metropolis and its atmosphere, social life, psychology of human being, natural phenomena, developments in the arts; they all became subject of journalistic attention which depended on a professional consensus on values such as scrutiny, objectivity, and novelty. Journalists invested in new techniques such as the interview and the report, and their practices—note-taking, writing, creating types, organizing and classifying observations, and others—helped to establish them as producers, gatherers, and transmitters of the social knowledge of their time. This brought them into an alliance with the emerging social sciences and humanities, in particular with sociology, anthropology or contemporary history. Their work was supported and often shaped by editorial decision-making and the material culture of the newspaper business such as front-page layouts, paper size, and printing techniques.

Even though there has been a considerable amount of studies on the feuilleton as a genre along with some fruitful approaches towards a history of reporting and interviewing, journalistic work as a practice of knowledge has rarely been analyzed. Hence, this workshop will stimulate an

interdisciplinary and transnational approach to new kind of sources and ask how and why these knowledge practices emerged. This workshop focuses on the emergence of these new knowledge practices and the formation of a more or less tightly knit epistemic community of journalists on both sides of the Atlantic under their historically specific local and regional conditions. It will be held on March 2-4, 2017 at the German Historical Institute (Washington, D.C.) in cooperation with the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science. It attempts to bring together work in progress from various disciplines by scholars interested in placing the history of journalistic practices within a history of knowledge.

We encourage the submission of papers, especially of those sharing work in progress. Guiding questions could be:

- Why did new journalistic genres evolved in this period? How were they connected to specific types of knowledge? How was journalistic knowledge gathered and shaped? How was it then adapted and transformed into other kinds of knowledge such as sciences, politics, etc.?
- Who were these journalists? What were their interests? How did they form an epistemic community that began to share similar values, virtues, and practices?
- In what ways did journalists position themselves among social scientists and novelists? Did they intermingle or did they distance themselves from them?
- How can we write a history of journalistic practices that includes journalistic note-taking, writing, traveling, and observation techniques?

The workshop will be conducted in English. The organizers will cover travel and accommodation expenses for invited participants. Please send a short abstract of a proposed contribution (no more than 400 words) and a brief academic CV with institutional affiliation as one PDF file to journalism-workshop@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de.

Deadline for proposals is August 31, 2016.

For questions please contact Dr. Hansjakob Ziemer (hjziemer@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de) and Dr. Kerstin von der Krone (krone@ghi-dc.org).