

THE HISTORY OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

CONTESTED MEMORIES

EDITED BY

DAVID W. PARK & JEFFERSON POOLEY

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Dedication

To James W. Carey (1935–2006)

Acknowledgments

Edited volumes such as this are obviously the result of spread-out collaboration. Some of our collaborators do not, however, appear in the table of contents. For this reason, the editors wish to thank a number of others who made the volume possible.

Damon Zucca at Peter Lang was a source of inspiration and encouragement. When he left Peter Lang, he was replaced by Mary Savigar, whose patience and creativity made it enjoyable to work on the volume. Bernie Shade's assistance in all things technical was another essential element in putting this together. It would be hard to imagine a more supportive publishing team.

The volume springs indirectly from countless conversations with friends and academic co-conspirators, many of whom do not appear in this volume. The editors wish to thank, in particular, Fernando Bermejo, Jaap Bos, Mark Brewin, Craig Calhoun, Ray Fancher, Larry Gross, Meghan Grosse, Jen Horner, Steve Jones, Elihu Katz, Kurt and Gladys Lang, Carolyn Marvin, Neil McLaughlin, Jeff Olick, Petteri Pietikainen, Michael Schudson, and Eleanor Townsley. We are especially grateful to Sue Curry Jansen for her support and quiet wisdom.

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Dave Park & Jefferson Pooley



Foreword

HANNO HARDT

The field of communication studies has come of age, and with this new maturity comes the need to construct a genealogy of practices in a manner that explains and connects the various strands of fact and fiction, validates memory, and confirms intellectual identities to secure its place among the social sciences. The resulting “invention of tradition,” to use Eric Hobsbawm’s phrase,¹ is an institutional profile that not only reflects the accomplishments of the field but also identifies the disciplinary roots and their connections to what is now a considerable academic enterprise in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

Thus, communication studies has discovered history, not only as an essential instrument with which to forge the story of its own significance but also as a desirable form of authentication and legitimation in the intellectual community through a process of differentiation. After all, the perceived need for an identity involves the construction of a fiction that serves to place the institution—or the field of study—in reality. The published histories of communication studies authenticate and, together with the reproduction of compatible “key” texts as confirming evidence, help to reinforce the reigning explanation of the field’s origins. Frequently, their tables of contents effectively illustrate the ideological range of the effort.

The essays in this book provide a welcome opportunity to reflect on how communication studies articulates its relationship to history, what contributes to the materialization of the past, and, more basically, what a history of communication studies is for. These questions are rarely, if ever, addressed, since communication studies arose out of a positivist paradigm of the social sciences during the early twentieth century with its prejudice against the value of a literary (or humanistic) discourse about communication in society. In the meantime, as Lyotard observes,

living after the “grand récit,” when the larger story of “the exigent unfolding of beginning, middle, and end no longer carries any currency” demands a new orientation in time and space, or, more specifically, a reconsideration of communication studies as historical narrative.²

Also, understanding the centrality of the historical account in the form of a history of communication studies becomes important at a time when skepticism about the value of historical knowledge—or anything else for that matter—feeds into a public uncertainty and generates recurring questions about whose history and in whose interest. And yet history is crucial, especially for a sense of identity among another generation of scholars in the field. Their search for an identity challenges the responsibility of a history of communication studies to produce relevant answers not only about its own role but also, for instance, about the place and time in which labels such as mass communication, communication, media studies, or cultural studies replaced older designations, such as journalism or speech. These were possibly administrative acts of differentiation to emphasize the distinctiveness of doing communication studies, but without much clarification regarding the nature of these developments.

History, according to Roland Barthes, is an ideological elaboration, and the received history of communication studies at this time only confirms the dominant belief that its presence is grounded in a continuity of practices associated with established and, therefore, credible representations of communication as a field of inquiry about the social, political, or cultural processes of society. Thus, the received history as a mode of understanding is an ideological construct, based on traditional views of doing history. The latter is a process of gathering facts and establishing a chronological order, which invites a classification of periods and the production of a narrative. This not only reflects the time and place of its beginning but is relative to the structure of communication studies.

The problems of doing a history of communication studies, however, are much older and grounded in the continuing debates regarding the nature of history, which has occupied modernist as much as postmodernist thought. Thus, it may be appropriate to note here that traditional views of writing history were confronted much earlier by American pragmatism and the New History of James Harvey Robinson in particular.³ The latter considered the study of history a tool for change, providing opportunities for adaptation, or, as John Dewey suggests, “a lever for moving the present into a certain kind of future.”⁴ This perspective was modified by the rise of historical relativism, and the work of Charles Beard and Carl Becker, specifically, who questioned the belief in an objective rendition of the past and argued that the writing of history was an act of faith rather than a product of an objective social science.⁵

These developments are important reminders for a contemporary historiography of communication studies. They suggest the presence of a progressive approach to making history at a time when the idea of communication and the emerging conditions of a mass society became an interdisciplinary concern, which launched a research agenda pertaining to the role of media and communication in a democratic (American) society. Furthermore, it is also a reminder of the role of relativism, which has grown out of a lack of confidence in notions of truth or objectivity, and which resurfaces in the contemporary debates regarding the making of history.

The latter is frequently seen as a continuous process, reliant on the curiosity and insights of each generation, which seeks to describe the history of communication studies as a continuity. In fact, continuity as a guarantor of certainty has remained a characteristic of doing history, which is but a process of connecting with the past to explain the present conditions, if not the potential of the future. Consequently, communication studies becomes a historical narrative of successive, if not continuous, practices at the expense of contemplating the possibilities of discontinuity or, as Nietzsche suggests, acts of forgetting rather than remembering as a driving force in constructing history, in which perception is biased to deliver a calculated judgment. Michel Foucault calls it “effective” history, a history without constants, but with its focus on events in terms of their “most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations.”⁶

Indeed, what are the fictions of continuity in a history of communication studies? Which offer stability of the academic enterprise? And whose versions of the historical narratives prevail? These are guiding questions about its constructed history, which should inform the emerging idea of communication studies.

Thus, the past of communication studies emanates from various sources as a methodologically uniform and theoretically monolithic series of practices, despite its claims of interdisciplinarity. A dialog with individuals (biographies) and texts (documents and books or articles) produces an institutional history that is as much about establishing identity as about defining power. The result is a narrowly construed vision of communication studies, rooted in the traditional social sciences but with claims of liberation or independence, which have become manifest—despite Wilbur Schramm’s initial skepticism—in the expressed idea of communication studies as a discipline. The latter, too, is an example of differentiation as a means of defining identity.

The more recent arrival of cultural studies (in the United States) and its reception, or rather co-optation, by communication studies has added a new dimension to the idea of change. It has done this by possibly expanding—if not redirecting—the very notion of communication studies as political, and considerations of ideology and power, in particular, as central to any understanding of communication as social practice.

In fact, the exclusionary tendency of a traditional history of communication studies, with its focus on leaders (e.g., “fathers”) and on the explanatory nature of quantitative analyses of communication and media processes, associated its identity with the traditional social science apparatus that had dominated social inquiries during most of the twentieth century. Or, as Michel de Certeau (1988) reminds us, “history is entirely shaped by the place in which it is developed.”⁷ That place was occupied by entrenched interests in methodological conventions, borrowed from quantitative sociology, and distinguished by the paucity of theoretical debates. The latter are marked by a preoccupation with facts and chronological descriptions, reflecting the presence of technocratic ideals rather than creative impulses, which define the boundaries of historical explanation.

The return to culture, with the embrace of cultural studies and its larger ideological and political concerns, introduced a number of co-determinants of a new identity associated with a sense of engagement in social and political change. Their subsequent contributions to the potential materialization of a “new” history of communication studies can be found not only in the recognition of an anthropological or ethnographic dimension but also in literary and philosophical considerations of communication, all of which reinforce its centrality in human interaction.

In other words, the history of communication studies as a mode of understanding intellectual work on communication changes its site and draws on a large variety of interdisciplinary sources, among which Raymond Williams is as important as Wilbur Schramm or John Dewey, and Clifford Geertz, for instance, is as relevant as Ingmar Bergman and Cindy Sherman. Their work, standing in as examples for many others, reflects the intellectual and artistic efforts that have gone into the societal discourse about communication. They become part of the historical dimension of communication studies and give further credence to its fundamental role in exploring and interpreting society.

Thus, a critically relevant history of communication studies discloses the reversal of traditional prejudices and introduces the rise of a new identity from the interplay of disciplinary accounts regarding communication or, more generally, from the discontinuities of past narratives, or the quilt of cultural memory with its endless possibilities of explanation, its appreciation of fiction, and its roots in the politics of representation.

The arrival of postmodernism, which denies the grounding of (modernist or traditional) history in reality, reminds historians of communication studies of the relativity of their pursuit. But it also challenges their ideas of truth, or even contingent truths, and reveals the ideological dimension of historical work as concealed by methodology. Discrediting history as we know it allows for creating new histories in accordance with the interests and beliefs of their creators, who can draw on the political potential of postmodernism with its intrinsically

antihumanistic stance. Under these conditions the history of communication studies as an orderly structure of discourse for the purpose of disseminating some truth about the past is reduced to a rhetorical product of the individual historian.

In either case, however, the history of communication studies as text fashions consciousness and may exert a considerable influence on defining identity. Thus, academic coursework, in particular, beyond any direct historiographical accounts of communication studies, with its choice of literature and its detailed interpretation of facts, which are laden with meaning, implicitly strengthens the dominant historical narrative. Teaching offers a suitable context for acquiring an intellectual identity, which is currently prone to be indistinguishable across the field of communication studies, since the latter by and large represents an ideologically homogeneous environment.

Exceptions are rare, but their presence allows for another kind of differentiation, one that shifts place and time for a distinctive perspective from which to consider the past and construct the present. Thus, the entry of Marxism into communication studies, however tentative, at the end of the twentieth century contained a new recognition of critique and historical scholarship vis-à-vis practical political goals. Here the received history of communication studies becomes a bourgeois narrative, endowed with the power of a discipline and its ideological fervor. A Marxist history of communication studies, on the other hand, embedded in an emancipatory project, insists on exposing the reigning theories and understandings that guide the dominant historical project and relies on pursuing issues of power within the historical reality of productive relations and types of social, economic, and political control. Such an approach, however, may well work against the (American) tendency to search for a common ground in which, as Alvin Gouldner put it, “historical development presumably occurs not through polemic, struggle, and conflict, but through consensus.”⁸

These multiple realities for a contemporary history of communication studies, emerge from a general climate of skepticism and from the consequences of relativism in a pursuit of understanding one’s intellectual identity in the academic community. They provide alternatives while addressing some familiar issues of doing history, and their presence suggests the potential for a constructive discourse regarding the form and function of a history of communication studies and the ways in which it could inform present practices.

More specifically, these reflections should also be a reminder of the noteworthy relationship between history and social theory. As disciplinary lines become blurred, communication theorists begin to draw on the analytical power of the historical narrative in their pursuit of understanding communication as a cultural phenomenon, citing Foucault, Bourdieu, Geertz, and Williams, among others, or turning to Marx and Weber, whose works contain a historical dimension.

Thus, doing history becomes a challenge and a responsibility for the historian of communication studies regardless of any particular ideological disposition. The challenge is to succeed in demystifying the function of the history of communication studies itself, for instance, while the responsibility lies in rendering interpretations that make a meaningful contribution to critically assessing the public role of communication studies. As James Carey suggested almost a generation ago, “the history of mass communication research is more than the history of ‘findings’ ... [it] must include ... a history of the changing world of mass communications: of the purposes to which these institutions are put, the audiences that gather to them, the social structures which they more or less shape.”⁹

In other words, much remains to be done for a critical discourse about history that helps confront the social and political issues inherent in doing communication studies. In the meantime, it seems worth remembering that Walter Benjamin had it right when he insisted that the perspective from which we view the past will be shaped by the struggles in which we engage in the present.

NOTES

1. Hobsbawm and Terence, *The Invention of Tradition*.
2. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 77.
3. See Robinson, *The New History*.
4. Dewey, *The Theory of Inquiry*, 238–239.
5. See Beard, “Written History as an Act of Faith”; Becker, *Every Man His Own Historian*.
6. Foucault, “Neitzche, Genealogy, History,” 124.
7. Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 69.
8. Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, 17.
9. Carey, “The Ambiguity of Policy Research,” 441–442.

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Introduction

JEFFERSON POOLEY AND DAVID W. PARK

“Strictly speaking, there is no history of mass communication research.”

—JAMES W. CAREY¹

Most of the published histories of mass communication studies are airbrushed and Whiggish. Accounts of the field’s origins and development typically appear in textbook capsules and annual review essays, and tend to emphasize the progressive unfolding of a new science. Even the stirrings in the 1970s to challenge this progressivist narrative remained thoroughly presentist in other ways. Relative to the disciplinary history produced by the other social sciences, moreover, the historiography of mass communication research is anemic and notably unreflective. It is in this sense that James Carey’s claim, quoted earlier, is true. Strictly speaking, there is very little history of mass communication research—at least the sort that takes the field’s past as a serious object of study.

This volume is a response to Carey’s lament about the field’s neglect of its own past. The authors represented here, in the book’s first section, “The State of the Historiography,” address that neglect head-on. The volume’s second and third sections (“Institutional Histories,” “People and Places in the History of the Field”) take up Carey’s implicit challenge: these chapters exemplify a rigorous (if also catholic) approach to the history of the field. Taken together, the chapters collected here are meant to model, in a tentative way, the high standards that would characterize an emergent subdiscipline devoted to such study.

In this introduction, we briefly compare the history of communication research to the historical self-scrutiny of the other social sciences. We offer, in passing, some suggestions to help explain the field’s relatively meager body of

history. In the balance of the introduction, we propose a set of traits that a richer, more scholarly historiography might embody.

* * *

Complaints about the historiography of the social sciences form their own history. In 1965, George Stocking issued his well-known charter for a history less prone to “anachronism, distortion, misinterpretation, misleading analogy, neglect of context, oversimplification of process.”² A year later, Robert Young published his fifty-page assault on the historiography of American psychology.³ Robert K. Merton, a year after Young, reaffirmed his “history” versus “systematics” distinction in a classic essay that, among other things, urged historians of sociology to “extend beyond a chronologically ordered set of critical synopses of doctrine.”⁴ From the late 1960s on, a stream of critiques, of one or another discipline’s published remembrances, has filled journals and edited volumes—in the form of origin-myth slayings,⁵ survey-*cum*-critiques,⁶ and, most systematically, a 1983 collection on *The Functions and Uses of Disciplinary History*.⁷

What’s striking about this criticism is that it has, in a sense, been heeded. Stocking, Young, and Merton pointed to the sorry state of their respective disciplinary historiographies *forty years ago*. It is not surprising that the rigor, scope, and sophistication of historical work in each field—especially psychology, economics, and anthropology—has improved steadily in the decades since. In the past twenty-five years or so, all of the established social sciences have developed self-conscious subfields devoted to their histories. However marginal to their disciplines’ centers, these subfields have nurtured, in every case, impressive work. In some disciplines, notably psychology and anthropology, researchers have erected a supporting infrastructure of associations, journals, archives, and specialized PhD programs.⁸ The ideal of a community of critical peers engaged in a collaborative project—frequently invoked as a hollow bit of rhetoric—seems more or less realized in these other history of social science subfields. Professional historians, meanwhile, have helped to fill in some of the gaps between and across these established disciplines.⁹

Nothing like this exists for the history of communication research, despite the appearance, intermittently and in isolation, of fine scholarship.¹⁰ The extant history of the field—most of it, anyway—is distinguished by unabashed engrossment with present concerns. Typically this means using history to establish scientific bona fides or the field’s legitimate place in the university. For decades one staple of the field’s self-narration, the claim that researchers at Columbia University during and after World War II replaced a mistaken faith in media omnipotence with measured findings of “limited effects,” has for decades formed the core textbook contrast between naïve pre-history and the field’s scientific coming-of-age.¹¹

Deborah Lubken's contribution to this volume ("Remembering the Strawman") traces the active life of one of the stock epithets attached to that putative pre-history, the "hypodermic needle" theory of media influence. With a Mertonian eye for semantic nuance, Lubken shows how the label has been used—even by would-be revisionists—as a way to distinguish media researchers from the lay observer.

Wilbur Schramm, the mass communication field's major institution builder in the decades after the war, supplied another lasting narrative for a young, legitimacy-starved field.¹² Schramm's story was straightforward origin myth, complete with four eminent (and unwitting) "founders" said to have converged on a science of communication. Schramm's "four founders" myth is a near-perfect example of what Charles Camic has called strategic "predecessor selection,"¹³ and this story, too, has enjoyed a long published afterlife. Lana Rakow's chapter ("Feminist Historiography and the Field") notes one of the consequences: these founders-by-ascription, all men, dominate the field's remembered past and blot out much else—including, notably, the history of feminist work and women researchers.

The history of mass communication research has been used, moreover, to grease the gears of paradigmatic succession—as a means, that is, to caricature, then batter, "old paradigm" whipping boys.¹⁴ More often, the discipline's history is mined for usable genealogies, invoked by emergent approaches that present themselves as "recoveries." Here the work of James W. Carey in fashioning a "cultural approach" to communication on the shoulders, in part, of John Dewey, Charles Horton Cooley, and the Chicago School of sociology is an eloquent case in point.¹⁵ Sue Curry Jansen's chapter "Walter Lippmann" establishes that we profoundly misremember Lippmann, and that this warped picture originates in a misleading historical trope, narrated by Carey and others, that pits an elitist Lippmann against Dewey the democrat.¹⁶

The point is that, for the field, the past has been an expedient—and a highly elastic one at that. The typical approach to writing history follows from this: a fast digest of a key idea or two, matched to thin and folksy biography. Core storylines are repeated, over and over, through uncited mnemonic hand-me-downs.¹⁷ A bundle of canonic texts is often cited, but in a gestural, even totemic way, and archives, for the most part, remain undisturbed. Most of the existing history is so resolutely internalist that it ignores external *intellectual* influences, let alone social, political, and economic ones. In particular, the extremely interesting and revealing institutional history of the field has been neglected. The great bulk of the history, finally, has been written by active participants in the field, often central figures with their own legacies at stake.

Our complaint isn't that communication studies, alone, embellishes its past with helpful and heroic narratives in the service of teaching and legitimacy. All disciplines generate usable stories such as these.¹⁸ It is all too easy, moreover, to