

Richard John Ascárate

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Johannes Burkhardt, Christine Werkstetter (Hg.): Kommunikation und Medien in der Frühen Neuzeit

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From 13th to 15th September, 2001, members of the Early Modern Working Group of the Deutscher Historikerverband gathered in Augsburg for a fourth convention, subsuming their discussions upon the occasion under the theme of *Kommunikation und Medien in der Frühen Neuzeit*. This volume, a massive compilation of introductory essays, papers, and a discussion group transcript proceeding therefrom, covers far wider ground than the thematic terrain might suggest (Martin Luther, the Gutenberg printing press, *flugschriften*, and the heady, copious, and internationally-dispersed correspondence of Erasmus, for example, come immediately to mind).

The sequence of rubrics under which the editors have assembled the contributions by thirty authors and participants – from the two dimensions of classical early modern print media to the three dimensions of villages, cities, regions, kingdoms, Europe, and the world as communicative spaces, to informational strategies behind propaganda, secrecy, and news networks, and finally to the human body itself as medium – “schreitet den Kreis des Möglichen ab” (S.3). Only a sample of the varied content can be touched upon here with a collection of this length and scope.

A podium discussion opens the volume, wherein four historians debate the dual questions of whether the early modern era began with the development of print and if the era of typography in the age of digital media is finally over. As *Google* and the libraries of Harvard, Stanford, Oxford, the University of Michigan, and New York City Public Library system consider placing as many as 30 million of their volumes online, the latter question has – besides obvious communicative, informational, and educational aspects – tremendous economic implications which, unfortunately, none of the participants pursues. Afterwards, using the title page images of Thomas Garzonus's *Piazza Universale* (Vienna 1589, Frankfurt 1626) as starting point, Ute Schneider analyzes the printed word as both mediator of knowledge and foundation of any number of professions nowadays taken for granted: scholar, illustrator, publisher, annotator, book fair organizer, and even literary reviewer and critic. Christopher Friedrichs looks at the multiple social and political functions – market, theater, dance hall, courtroom (and concomitant jail), religious hall (and sometimes storage room for religious objects), apartment for high officials, and tourist destination – that European *rathäuser* assume[d], as revealed in architectural layout and design. Regina Pörtner uncovers survival strategies of crypto-Protestants in Maria Theresa's Austria, whereby even a suspicious literacy could betray one's denominational preference, as a “kaiserliche Resolution vom 29. August 1733,” which “ordnete [...] eine Verschärfung der

Aufsicht über wandernde Handwerksburschen, Bilderkramer und Kraxenträger als mögliche Büchereinschlepper an" (S.197), attests.

An embarrassment of riches, truly, yet the volume ultimately disappoints in several ways. Although the editors claim that the convention topic "nicht nur eine große Zahl von Historikerinnen und Historikern aus Deutschland, sondern auch aus dem übrigen Europa und den USA anzog" (S.2), only four papers come from scholars working outside of Germany, while of these only one each comes from Switzerland and the United Kingdom and two from Canada. Further, and this may be attributable simply to a philosophical or stylistic difference between American and German scholarship, none of the authors in this collection grounds his or her findings in any significant way theoretically. The early modern era witnessed not only a media explosion, but also the discovery of a New World and a corresponding mass-production and international proliferation of maps and visual representations, all somewhat reminiscent of the information and communication explosion that began in the 1980s with the establishment of the World Wide Web and the polyglot cacophony of the global village. Nevertheless, Marshall McLuhan makes few appearances in any of the essays. In her own piece on spaces of social communication as reflected in Tirolean court proceedings, Maria Heidegger offers an admirably researched analysis of archival material on the quest for juridical truth, arguing that "[d]as Gerichtsritual garantierte gewissermaßen einen geregelten Kommunikationsablauf" (S.198), but might have added more breadth and depth to her insights had she also invoked Michel Foucault (specifically, his *Discipline and Punish*, 1975). The collection contains fewer images than might be expected on a book covering such a richly illustrated time. Silvia Serena Tschopp, in her essay on the rhetoric of images and the communicative function of oral and graphic visualization in journalism on the 1631 destruction of Magdeburg, avails herself of neither images nor graphics. Finally, several times during their ruminations on times past the authors seem to bump against modern problems and issues without recognizing them. In her essay on the outbreak and spread of plague in capital cities, Christine Werkstetter observes that the "Pestforschung wurde bereits vielfach auf die Versuche der betroffenen Orte und Städte hingewiesen, das Auftreten von 'verdächtigen Krankheiten' [...] zu verheimlichen und dann zu verharmlosen, um zu verhindern, daß man vom politischen und wirtschaftlichen Leben ausgeschlossen würde," and that "[d]iese 'verweigerter Kommunikation' [...] ließ der Seuche Zeit, sich auszubreiten, bevor – nach Verruf und Bannisierung – alles getan wurde, um sie in den Griff zu bekommen und einzudämmen" (S.291). Drawing obvious parallels to the political and social recognition of AIDS victims around the world from the 1980s to today would have added a contemporary dimension – hence, relevance and wider interest – to the analysis. But "[e]ine solche historische Semiotik," as Jörn Sieglerschmidt writes in another context using words that could easily be applied to many other examples from the book, "bedarf allerdings eines gründlichen theoretischen Fundamentes" (S.460).

Richard John Ascárate (Washington, D.C.)