SSOAR

Open Access Repository
www.ssoar.info

Exploring digital yesterdays - reflections on new media and the future of communication history
Schwarzenegger, Christian

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:
GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

gesis
Leibniz-Institut
für Sozialwissenschaften

Mitglied der
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Exploring Digital Yesterdays –
Reflections on New Media and the Future
of Communication History

Christian Schwarzenegger [*]

Abstract: *»Erkundungen des digitalen Gestern. Reflektionen zu 'New Media'
und zur Zukunft der Kommunikationsgeschichte«*. This paper emanates from
the consideration that communication history cannot only focus on communi-
cation that is within today's past but must also to cope with challenges com-
munication history will face in "tomorrow's yesterdays". In nowadays perspec-
tive, apparent challenges for the future of communication historiography are
posed by the impact of (now) new media technologies and digitalization. The
article reflects about different shifts digitalization may bring for communica-
tion historiography, in terms of digital media as sources and the impact of digi-
tal communication on the understanding of temporal and spatial relations in
communication historiography. Doing so, the paper discusses from a communi-
cation studies perspective if "new media" history likewise entails a new "media
history". The article concludes that digital media will prompt communication
historians to adapt to new conditions. Such adaption to the respective "new" is
depicted as constituent of historical research as communication history has ev-
er been kind of change management.

Keywords: communication history, future, digitalization, New Media, sense of
time, sense of space.

1.   Introduction

Communication history, as the historical reflection and reconstruction of pro-
cesses of social communication in the past, cannot only focus on the communi-
cation processes that lie within today's past. It also has to cope with the chal-
lenges that present and future communication will pose for the academic

---

[*] Christian Schwarzenegger, Department for Media and Educational Technology, Augsburg
University, Universitätsstrasse 10, 86159 Augsburg, Germany;
christian.schwarzenegger@phil.uni-augsburg.de.

reconstruction of communication processes in "tomorrow's yesterdays". In 2003, Roy Rosenzweig observed that historians tend to assume that responsibility for preserving the past of digital data is a merely "theoretical and technical issue, tomorrow's problem or at least someone else's problem" (Rosenzweig 2003, 759). Nevertheless, it seems to be common sense that historiography is not just a matter of dealing with the past, but also has to ensure that future scholars will be prepared and equipped to reconstruct our present properly.

From today's perspective, some apparently major challenges are posed by the impact of (now) new media technologies, like the ephemeral nature of online content and social media communication or the hybridization and amalgamation of public and private spheres on the web; in other words, these are the challenges posed by digitalization, which is routinely said to be possibly one of the most important phenomena to have influenced Western culture over the last few decades (Jenkins 2006; Grant and Wilkinson 2009; Balbi 2011).

In what follows, I will address some of the potential shifts that digitalization may bring about for communication historiography from a communication studies' perspective. Accordingly, the focus will be on interrelated areas which will, presumably, be most affected by what is sometimes labelled with the commonly unspecified term 'digital turn'. I will first consider the issue of sources, in particular the new sources that will be valuable for a communication history of the digital age. This primarily concerns digital media sources and the challenges they pose in terms of preservation, availability, accessibility and evaluation. Consequently, a brief review of the qualities of digital sources and their effect on "the future of preserving the past" (Cohen 2005) will be produced. In considering the question of whether a history of new media will also herald the dawn of a brand new media history, I will elaborate on the questionable and relative novelty of what we consider to be new media. I will also depict the prerequisites for deploying these new sources that are not so new after all, as well as the long established research strategies for making use of sources that can also be applied to their digital counterparts. This will be followed by a brief discussion of the implications that the digital age might have for one of the fundamental categories of historical sense making: understanding time and the temporal relationships that we deal with and discuss in communication history. The discourse on new media is closely related to metaphors of acceleration and the rise of immediacy in a culture of speed (Tomlinson 2007). Having reflected on how the digital age might affect our understanding of the "past", the focus will switch from temporality to a category that is indissolubly linked to time: space. Just as with time, space is a fundamental category in historical social research, and has been widely discussed since the emergence of electronic media and message transmission systems and is increasingly contested in new/digital media discussions. The paper delineates some of the

cornerstones of these discussions and highlights three levels at which future communication history might be affected in terms of spatiality.

2.   The Perils of the Future

"I would tell you the future but the future has changed, what used to be the future has been all rearranged." This line by folk singer Delaney Davidson contains a warning to the common man that could also be applied to scholars: there is danger in talking about the future, for the future that a scholar prophesizes may be subject to change. Social scientists, philosophers and, in the last couple of years (and probably coming off worst), economists, who dare to make predictions about a future based on their contemporary observations, calculations and models, are in great danger of exposing themselves to ridicule. Indeed, this danger exists as soon as scholars use their expertise to comment on events, phenomena or processes that are still ongoing. Writing about how communication history might be explored in the future means stepping into that danger zone. To minimize the risks I follow Elena Esposito's (2007) differentiation between present futures and future presents. The first term refers to a probable projection of contemporary observations through time, and certainly tells us more about the questions we raise and the answers we provide in the present than it can provide insight into what the future will really be like. The latter term, meanwhile, refers to particular presents as they will effectively be in the future. Nobody can know to what degree – if at all – the present futures we predict today will match the future presents. We just have to be aware, as Esposito puts it, that we will face a future about which all we know is that it is likely to be different from what we expected. In other words, we can only prepare to be surprised (Esposito 2007, 30). According to Jo Reichertz, this can make scholars' accounts about possible futures either more modest or more courageous (Reichertz 2005, 53).

3.   Digital Communication and the Sources of Tomorrow

3.1   The Persistent Significance of the Source

The quality of sources, including their preservation as well as the ability to retrace, access and evaluate them, is decisive for historical work. This is because it is in historical research that we encounter the "well familiar predicament of the historian locked into the present to reconstruct earlier human experience" (McLuskie, Kinnebrock and Schwarzenegger 2011, 3). During the methodological debate, Niels Brügger condensed this viewpoint into the notion that historians tell (hi)stories, while the past does not (Brügger 2010, 4). Ac-

cording to the hermeneutic tradition, the historian must piece together the "facts" of history and put them into a coherent narrative about the past. By mirroring the decisive role of sources, it is possible to find a significant number of research papers, books and essays on topics such as the future of preserving the past (Cohen 2005), the sources of history in a digital era (Rosenzweig 2003) and the future of gathering, preserving and presenting history on the web (Cohen and Rosenzweig 2006). Others have dedicated their work to the challenges that a rapidly changing medium such as the web poses for the theoretical and methodological toolboxes of historical research and the specific skills required to find and evaluate sources on the web and make the web itself both a potential source and a potential object of (historical) study (Lyman 2002; Rosenzweig 2004; Schneider and Foot 2004; Brügger 2009; Brügger 2010; Ankerson 2012).

In general, we can differentiate the potential sources for a communication historiography into "testimonies" and "remains" (Howell and Prevenier 2001, 17). The "testimonies" are records that were created purposely to provide insight into how something has been or took place. However, the use of these testimonies is not limited by the purposes for which they were originally created. "Remains", on the other hand, originate from past situations and provide insight by their mere existence. Both kinds of source require preservation and, once saved, need to be evaluated according to internal and external criteria in order to determine their genuineness, genesis and originality (ibid., 56-68). This applies to all source-critical work in communication history that is carried out today, was conducted yesterday and will be performed in the future.

Moreover, the sources that we think of when it comes to reconstructing the past of digital communication will appear in the form of either testimonies or remains. Accordingly, this indicates that as the materiality of sources changes from analogue to digital, they will thus have some peculiar new qualities. This general categorization of sources does, however, remain the same. Whether faced with old or new media, old or new sources, or digital or analogue materials, historians will have to keep on doing what they are professionally trained to do. As Daniel Cohen (2005, 13) puts it: "Historians will have to continue to look for evidence of internal consistency and weigh them against other sources. In any media, new or old, solid research is the basis of sound scholarship."

3.2 Old Sources and New Sources

In his inspiring essay on "doing media history in 2050", which is a valiant projection of what the future may bring for media and communication historiography, Gabriele Balbi differentiates between what he calls *old* and *new sources* (Balbi 2011, 134) and explains the essential differences between them. In his view, *old* sources for media history are analogue data, generally in form of physical objects such as papers or magnetic material. The notion of *new*

(historical) sources then relates to digital data that will become digital sources in the near future. The distinction between *old* and *new sources* is therefore not to be understood as dichotomous or exclusive. It must be acknowledged, as Balbi does, that *old sources* such as papers (e.g. documents, prints and texts), magnetic material tapes, and audiovisual recordings on various forms of storage media (like tapes, film or photography) co-exist with new digital sources and the digital derivatives of old sources. This co-existence of the old and new will continue. Even though it is quite plausible that mass media, telecommunications and the new media of the late 20th and early 21st century will be an essential resource (Balbi 2011) when it comes to studying the history of communication, not all communication history will depend on digital sources. Moreover, in the future, the analogue sources of today will not disappear, but will still be relevant depending on contexts and research interests.

Not all future questions of communication history will require digital sources, and only some of those that do will require only digital sources; for most topics, future communication historians will instead have to base their research on a combination of both. Accordingly, the implications that digital sources have for communication historiography affect the field only partially, although this part is increasingly important. A kind of "digital turn" of communication history will thus not be absolute and will not affect the entire field to the same extent; for some research, digital sources will be vital, while for other questions they will be of limited relevance.

3.3 New about the New – Challenges and Peculiarities

The *new sources* can come in different guises, because we can distinguish digitalized and born-digital data. Digitalized data actually comprises *old sources* that were transformed into digital material. These are thus hybrids of the old and new. Born digital data refers to data that has never existed in a printed or other analogue form. A third type of data would be data that is re-born digitally. This relates to born digital data that was stored in a web-archive and, due to the nature of web-archiving, is re-born since every archived website is transformed into a new original that differs from any version of the site that has actually ever been on the web (Brügger 2009; also see Brügger 2012 in this issue). Digitalized data is closely related to initiatives of digital history, which is making historical research, materials and knowledge accessible on the internet for researchers as well as an interested public. The question is, in the words of Daniel J. Rosen and Roy Rosenzweig (2006, 3): "In what ways can digital media and digital networks allow us to do our work as historians better?" In what follows, the focus will be on (re-)born digital data.

Issues of collecting and preserving *new sources* have been regularly discussed for more than a decade now. Back in 2002, Peter Lyman depicted the preservation of web content as a cultural, technical, economic and legal prob-

lem. However, the nature of this issue is reminiscent of the unresolved problems that can already be identified as the reason why cultural heritage in other formats was previously lost in pre-digital times (Lyman 2002). In a nutshell, these problems revolve around the question of how much to save, how to select what to save and how to then save it. Furthermore, almost 10 years later, essentially the same problems are mentioned by Gabriele Balbi (2011), who particularly emphasizes the point that the significance of a source for researchers of future presents cannot be properly determined from a present view and nor can we predict how the technical process of preservation will work in the future. These three questions will be answered in terms of cultural awareness, technical routines, economic potential and funding, as well as with respect to the legal clarification of, for instance, copyright or privacy matters. Additionally, Megan Ankerson reminds us that all decisions about what to archive are also decisions about what not to archive, thereby creating not only outsets of narrative constructions, but also, as she puts it, employing a phrase used by Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "a particular bundle of silences" (Ankerson 2012, 390). The questions of who preserves what and how, as well as the consequences of the answers, are thus also reflected in terms of social and economic power. Ankerson, again making reference to what web-historiography and historical research on new digital media can learn from traditional communication history, points out that broadcast historians have paid "significant attention on the role of power in saving and writing about the past, particularly when exploring gender, marginal groups, and the everyday experiences of ordinary users" (Ankerson 2012, 389). She concludes that it would thus suit internet studies and historians of the web to also pay the same attention to configurations of power. Moreover, as Daniel J. Cohen has emphasized, "digital archives can be far larger, more diverse, and more inclusive than traditional archives" (Cohen 2005, 10). So, as Cohen puts it,

> "the most profound benefit of online collecting is an unparalleled opportunity to allow more varied perspectives in the historical record than ever before. Networked information technology can allow ordinary people and marginalized constituencies not only a larger presence in an online archive, but also generally a more important role in the dialogue of history" (Cohen 2005, 10).

Quoting the founder of the "Internet Archive" (headquarters in San Francisco), Brewster Kahle, Cohen adds: "The Net is a people's medium: the good, the bad and the ugly. The interesting, the picayune and the profane. It's all there" (quoted in Cohen 2005, 10). As in many topical areas devoted to digital communication and new media, it is possible to see the concurrent emancipation of previously mute voices and the struggle for control: as digital sources may allow for more competing narratives of history and close-ups of ordinary life, the power to control the remains documenting the digital past is also in danger of narrowing possible future accounts of history. In other words: "Communication histories must be critical so that their narratives of communication history

are not simply describing prevailing economic and political power that restrain the writing of media histories" (McLuskie, Kinnebrock and Schwarzenegger 2011, 4).

The qualities of the new digital sources have been widely discussed in academia and, like the discussions about issues of preservation, we can see that an over-time consistent set of crucial points is often addressed. In the introduction to their volume on digital history, Cohen and Rosenzweig sketch seven qualities of digital media and networks: capacity, accessibility, flexibility, diversity, manipulability, interactivity and the nonlinearity that is due to hypertextuality. Quality, durability, readability, passivity and inaccessibility are sketched as dangers, respectively (Cohen and Rosenzweig 2006). Included in these terms are other characterizations, such as scarcity and abundance or the ephemerality or volatility of digital data, as well as the "somewhat fleeting" permanence[1] of the web (Schneider and Foot 2004, 115), relating to the fact that websites are notoriously unstable objects (Ankerson 2012, 900). It is easier, as Ankerson illustrates, to find a film from 1924 than a website from 1994. The aforementioned qualities and threats have both been discussed up to now along mostly the same lines. In a dialectic tradition we can see that the hazards listed are partly the inversion or "evil twins" of the strengths. Without elaborating on all of these qualities and dangers, in what follows I will go on to stress just one point (comprising several of the named qualities and dangers, particularly interactivity and nonlinearity) that seems to be both very important and highly problematic for a future communication history.

While *old sources* can basically be archived in the form in which they were presented, and no additional steps are needed to recreate the experience of the original (Schneider and Foot 2004, 115), web content needs to be reconstructed, which takes a lot of effort. Moreover, the original experience cannot simply be restored, as numerous works on web historiography and web archiving have shown (see also Brügger 2012 in this issue). Digital data is fluidly and dynamically changing over time (Balbi 2011, 137) because it is interactively and collaboratively created as a result of what William Uricchio has described as "participatory culture" (Uricchio 2006, 68-70). For preservation purposes, it is thus

---

[1] Schneider and Foot describe the web as being at the same time ephemeral as well as having a sense of permanence that clearly distinguishes it from performance media. "Unlike theater, or live television or radio," they say "web content must exist in a permanent form in order to be transmitted. The web shares this characteristic with other forms of media such as film, print, and sound recordings. However, the permanence of the web is somewhat fleeting. Unlike any other permanent media, a website may destroy its predecessor regularly and procedurally each time it is updated by its producer; that is, absent specific arrangements to the contrary, each previous edition of a website may be erased as a new version is produced. By analogy, it would be as if each day's newspaper was printed on the same piece of paper, obliterating yesterday's news in order to produce today's" (Schneider and Foot 2004, 115).

extremely difficult to define an infinite or complete status of the collectable (Uricchio 2009). Balbi assumes that there is an intrinsic paradox to the idea of preservation: historians aim to permanently preserve and study objects that are purposely ephemeral and changeable by design (Balbi 2011, 137). The challenges posed by that participatory culture are not limited to preserving web-content in the way that it was available on the web for a user on a specific date. Additionally, how users experience web content is the result of highly personalized, non-linear social navigation and is influenced by dynamic adaptation and editing. For future communication historians, the task of reconstructing the paths upon which particular web content was approached by its users will be important, and more than just challenging. Tracking and reconstructing social navigation on the web is a major problem for communication studies that focus on the contemporary flow of information in (personal) web architectures and news' streams. This will be even more dramatic for a historical reconstruction of how people got in touch with specific content. The path to what people consume on the web is genuine and resolves in a genuine reception situation. This may again be irrelevant for many of the future research interests of those in the field of communication history. Yet there is a tendency in communication scholarship to infer from the content: a) a possible degree of knowledge that people may have had about a certain topic at a particular moment in time, because information "was there in the media"; and b) the possible effects of this content. We know from communication studies that the context and framing of how information was received is crucial for how it is interpreted and made sense of. Accordingly, historical reconstruction based on a single version and one path to the information provided in the digital media at a particular point in time may prove to be inadequate when it comes to understanding the processes of social communication on the very micro-level that the social web and new media promised to make accessible to the historian.

4. "New Media" History = New "Media History"?

4.1 The Novelty of New

The field of communication history that is most likely to be dependent on born digital sources is the historiography of new media and communication therein. As communication in new, meaning digital, media is expanding, we also see that due to the interactivity and reciprocity in participatory culture, the boundaries between private and public communication have become blurred and unclear (Papacharissi 2010). Consequently, in order to comprehensively reconstruct public communication, new and social media content will also require consideration in future communication history. This is essential not only because political parties and media institutions deploy social media as well, but

also due to the interconnectedness of mediated personal communication and mass media channels in many-to-many communication, where each person can "become a communication and information switchboard, between persons, networks, and institutions" (Wellman 2004, 127). Digitalization has, in the words of Johan Fornäs', enabled "a convergence of media that have previously been developed in mutual separation" (Fornäs 2008, 897). Convergence, crossmediality and intermediality demand sensitivity with respect to the complex synergies and interrelations of old and new media that an isolated medium-specific analysis may miss (Thorburn and Jenkins 2004; Uricchio 2006). New media today produce myriads of remains that in the future will serve as *new sources* for such a complex form of analysis.

Yet is that enough (paraphrasing the title of Benjamin Peters' outstanding essay, published in *New Media & Society*) to lead us into thinking that new is new (Peters 2009) and that writing the history of new media truly puts us on the threshold of a brand new *media history*? Balbi's distinction of *old* and *new sources* provides a supportive image, since the notions of old and new illustrate difference and change. However, it is also tempting to overemphasize the degree of novelty that we really face when working with these *new sources*. As *new* is set to a state of permanency, the coming-of-age of digital media is out of sight in Balbi's definition. As Peters notes, "'new media' is widely used as a vague umbrella term for emerging communication technologies which happen to be digital" (Peters 2009, 16). Accordingly, we see a "consistent association of the term not with the emergent quality but the digital construction of those media" (ibid.). However, as Peters also notes, this does not mean digital, or at least it cannot mean this for a long period of time. In the year 2050, which is stressed in Balbi's projection, the media that are now new will already be old and it is likely that something completely different will be new. *Old* and *new* are relative qualities.

This coming-of-age of new media is compellingly depicted by Benjamin Peters as he refers to the inaugural issue of *New Media & Society*, published in 1999. In this issue, several renowned representatives of various fields of academia were asked the question: "what's new about new media?" In his introduction to their thematic essays, Roger Silverstone stated that: "New media technologies, in their supposed novelty, have to be tested not just against the old, but in the context both of the past and present, against the social and the human" (Silverstone 1999, 11). He thus concluded: "Novelty is, therefore, the problem" (ibid.). Five years later, in 2004, the follow-up question was: "what changed about new media?" This time, the introduction, authored by Leah Lievrouw, highlighted that since the previous survey we have gained more experience with new media and have experienced the mainstreaming thereof; they have become part of our everyday lives. In this period of only five years, the banalization of what was previously novel had already occurred and studies

would now need "to shift away from thinking of ICTs as extraordinary, and to accept and study them as normal or 'banal'" (Lievrouw 2004, 14).

If we regard *novelty* as a temporary stage in a continuing process, and lay bare the present *new* of its extraordinariness, we can see that historical research has in the long run always been about adapting to new challenges. The history of communication is full of such "liminal phases" where emerging technology is still to be understood (Lagerkvist 2009, 4) and has "temporarily destabilized the relations among existing media" (Thorburn and Jenkins 2004, 3), ultimately becoming mundane. Johan Fornäs's concise observation that "some media are newer than others" (Fornäs 2008, 898) encourages us to critically analyze the impact of new media's novelty. The new digital media of today are not the first media to be new. Indeed, as Ben Peters cunningly observed, "all media were once new before they were old" (Peters 2009, 22; see also Gitelman and Pingree 2003; Gitelman 2006). In that sense, the communication history that addresses periods when a particular medium was new is already a history of new media (ibid., 23). However, this point is not made to relativize everything, or to claim that new media will not have a significant impact on the shape of communication history to come. Nor is it all about something old dressed up as something new; turning towards the digital will lead to change for the future presents of communication historiography, although this change and the need for adaptation also signify continuity.

4.2 New Media History = A New Sense of Time?

Thus far I have elaborated on some of the characteristics and peculiarities that new digital media are likely to bring about for a future communication history. I have therefore tried to depict how a digital turn will require historical research to adapt to new conditions and consider new prerequisites. However, I have also argued that such adaptation to the relative new is a continuous constituent of historical research over time. In order to produce coherent narratives about the past that are based on traces from the past, communication history has to establish strategies and refine skills that allow for the processing of such traces, whatever their guise. But what about the implications that new digital media have for our very understanding of the "past"? What does it mean to historicize content that is "constantly revised, deleted and 'saved over'" (Ankerson 2012, 386), while the amount of data available expands rapidly and estimations about the average lifespan of websites are somewhere between only 44 and 100 days? When does the past of digital communication begin, given that the time of digital media is basically the *timeless time* (Castells 1996) and the instantaneousness of the now?

Again, looking back can give us some idea about what to expect from the future. As Rasmus Kleis Nielsen has put it, speed and a sense of the acceleration of time are, in a sense, old news, both as an experience and an object of

study, even though the technologies involved are always new (Nielsen 2009, 299). Ever since the advent of electronic media and communication (namely the invention of the telegraph), it has been widely conceded that they have contributed to a change in both our experiences as well as the social concepts of time and space. Communication history has, therefore, turned this change of a sense of space and time into a subject of reflection (see, with reference to the telegraph, Rantanen 1997; Standage 2007; Müller-Pohl 2010). With the "spread of new media and their publicly acknowledged potentials for the further speeding up of an already accelerated modernity" (Nielsen 2009, 300), the debates intensified, resulting in a great deal of literature presenting concepts such as time-space-distanciation (Giddens 1990) or time-space-compression (Harvey 1990). Qualities such as rapidity, speed, instantaneousness, simultaneousness and synchronicity were emphasized, often to either declare that time had annihilated space or that time had become irrelevant as all information and social interaction was available at any time.[2] Without elaborating on these briefly referenced concepts, we can see that acceleration is a persistent topos, finding a hitherto climax in the instantaneousness of digital communication. Moreover, as before, future communication history will need to both intensively address the complex role that digital communication plays in the perception and conception of time as well as consider the senses of time at the point that is currently under study. Furthermore, consideration of such theoretical concepts could foster an awareness of the plurality and synchronicity of the different parallel, competing and alternative histories that could be told. Indeed, as mentioned above, the vast and diverse archives of digital sources allow for such manifold vistas.

Time and the role thereof in historical processes will continue to be a topic for consideration by those involved in the field of future communication history. However, will the time span for when something becomes history change? Communication history observes and narrates in terms of temporal relations, thereby establishing an order and sequencing prior, later and, presumably to an increasing extent, simultaneous experiences. It thus reveals or constructs causal relationships and reduces contingency (Rüsen 2001; Bauer 2006). In order to obtain coherence, history mainly observes the processes that are already concluded. This delineates when a potential "past" of future communication history can begin, namely as soon as processes that are to be reconstructed are, or appear to be, concluded. There will not be much of a change for a rather distant past: the reconstruction of today's occurrences in, say, 2050 will then depend on the sources that are available at that time, however abundant or scarce they may be. As we did not live in a golden age of preservation before digitalization (Rosenzweig 2003, 740), and because historians are experienced in creating

---

[2] A review of these debates, with examples, can be found in Tsatsou 2009.

accurate historical accounts from scarce sources, and as strategies to historically evaluate huge amounts of data are likely to be developed, either case will be manageable. A more significant change may be that more recent pasts could become an area of interest for communication historiography. Given the dynamic and rapidity of change and development in digital communication, events that happened very recently in terms of years could also be analyzed by way of historiography. Furthermore, given the ephemerality of digital sources, there are many ways in which the methodology of historical research can be beneficial for bridging the methodological gaps of contemporary social research, which investigates or uses communication in new media. Johan Fornäs, for instance, has depicted how mixing media history with media ethnography can help to overcome the current "presentism" in approaches to new media, thus also helping to avoid the notion that media history is reduced to a method for studying the past (Fornäs 2008, 899). Supporting that view, there may actually be a new sense of time in future communication historiography that responds to demands for a new complexity in analyzing the media-scapes of today. This would link media historiography as close to research on the contemporary as likewise the historical "past" of communication history is close to the respective "now."

4.3 New Media History = A New Sense of Space?

In the previous section about time, I have already noted that time and space are related social categories and that both are frequently discussed according to their relationship to one another. In his influential book on postmodern geographies and the reassertion of space in critical social theory, Edward Soja has formulated that history is never completely spaceless (Soja 1989, 14), while historian Karl Schlögel has stated that "in space, we read the time" (Schlögel 2006). The question is: what changes may a turn to digital media bring about for the role that spatiality plays in any future reading of past times?

The communication studies' perspective on space has always been ambiguous. Terhi Rantanen (2003) reminds us of Marjorie Ferguson's observation that in the Laswellian dictum of the communication process, ("who says what in which channel to whom with what effect"), which has strongly affected the fields of communication research, the temporal and spatial dimensions are missing because the questions "when" and "where" are not asked. Taking communication studies' recently growing interest in the dimension of space into account, especially the significance of new media for spatiality, future communication historiography will have to establish a sense of space on at least three inter-related levels: topics, research units and sources.

On the level of topics, future communication history will need a sense of space to explore the yesterdays of questions about the mobility of people and devices, ubiquity, cross-border civic engagement, transnational communica-

tion, and connectivity. A series of questions related to globalization and the distribution, circulation and appropriation of media content and technologies will also be essential.

On the level of research units, a sense of space will imply a questioning of the nation or region as a quasi-naturalized departure point of research and the rigorous theorizing of the choice of units (Hepp 2010; Livingstone 2012). Digital communication encourages processes that are indifferent to borders, and so the unit of research must not be taken for granted. This is because being confined by a nation or smaller geographical or political containers may cause historians to overlook the essentials of the processes they aim to reconstruct. A sense of space in future communication historiography also means opening our eyes to "seeing the familiar strange" (Fickers 2011) in transnational communication processes. It likewise requires us to acknowledge the plurality of co-existing spatial and temporal interrelations. In a perspective on audiences, and due to downloading and web-streaming, personal media repertoires are not determined by what national media markets offer, meaning that space will be important and research units need to be flexible.

On the level of sources, a sense of space will help us to understand some of the peculiarities of digital data. As Gabriele Balbi stated, it does not make sense to speak of digital data in terms of nationality, as "digital historical sources erode national boundaries and establish new international relationships" (Balbi 2011, 140). Reconstructing paths of social navigation on the web can also make emphasizing the "where" of sources necessary. Generally, a sense of space for sources will help us to assess availability and the credibility of digital sources: contemporary examples show that the spatial origins of digital data can be disguised (e.g. to prevent prosecution). This prompts another possible space related concern about future communication history: how should we write a digital communication history of the countries without a free internet, where online communication is restricted and where civil action groups have to disguise themselves to secure their personal communications?

5.   Conclusion

In his iconic book "Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit" ("In Space We Read Time"), Karl Schlögel argues that the inflationary call for turns that is taking place in academia today has the potential to undermine claims of exclusivity for such turns. In Schlögel's view, turns are nothing but shifts in perspective that allow us to draw attention to previously neglected fields, as well as to blind spots, or at least hidden aspects, of scholarship. Turns thus indicate an extension of historical interests and sensitivities, not full change. In that sense Schlögel concludes that in order to write a history that is appropriate when it comes to

revealing the complexity of reality, there can never be enough turns (Schlögel 2006, 68).

In my reflections on present futures when it comes to writing the past of digital yesterdays, I have tried to depict that a possible digital turn, which is a turn to digital communication and our now new media and digital sources, will require the adaptation of communication historiography, thus bringing about continuity.

By highlighting the relativity of new media's novelty, I have attempted to portray that there is neither a reason for euphoria nor one for doomsaying, as we are neither the first nor the last communication historians to face the challenges of the new. Unmatched in history, however, is the stockpiling of the contemporary academic accounts that a future communication historiography will be able to utilize as sources. Future communication history will benefit from today's communication studies, just as it was argued that historiographical expertise could be highly supportive of the new media studies of today.

When faced with this prospect of a present future of communication history, there is no need to lose our composure. Of course there will be change, there always has been, and historical research has always been a kind of change management. In Delaney Davidson's song, the verse about not being able to make out the future as it has changed is followed by the final line: "But everything gets good in the end." Is communication historiography ready for its digital future? The answer is: it is, in parts. In any event, the future will come. The rest will follow.

References

Ankerson, Megan S. 2012. Writing web histories with an eye on the analog past. *New Media & Society* 14 (3): 384-400.

Balbi, Gabriele. 2011. Doing media history in 2050. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 8 (2): 133-57.

Bauer, Thomas A. 2006. Geschichte verstehen: eine kommunikationstheoretische Intervention. *medien & zeit* 21 (1): 26-39.

Brügger, Niels. 2009. Website history and the website as an object of study. *New Media & Society* 11 (1-2): 115-32.

Brügger, Niels. 2010. Web history, an emerging field of study. In *Web history*, ed. Niels Brügger, 1-28. New York: P. Lang.

Castells, Manuel. 1996. *The information age: economy, society and culture: volume 1: the rise of a network society.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Cohen, Daniel J. 2005. The future of preserving the past. *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship* 2 (2): 6-19.

Cohen, Daniel J., and Roy Rosenzweig. 2006. *Digital history: a guide to gathering, preserving, and presenting the past on the web.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Esposito, Elena. 2007. *Die Fiktion der wahrscheinlichen Realität.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Fickers, Andreas. 2011. Seeing the familiar strange: some reflections about actants, actors and arenas of transnational media history. *medien & zeit* 26 (4): 16-24.

Ferguson, Marjorie. 1990. *Public communication: the new imperatives: future directions for media research.* London, Newbury Park: Sage.

Fornäs, J. 2008. Bridging gaps: ten crosscurrents in media studies. *Media, Culture & Society* 30 (6): 895-905.

Giddens, Anthony. 1990. *The consequences of modernity.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Gitelman, Lisa. 2006. *Always already new: Media, history and the data of culture.* Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Gitelman, Lisa, and Geoffrey B. Pingree, eds. 2003. *New media, 1740-1915*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press

Grant, August E., and Jeffrey Wilkinson. 2009. *Understanding media convergence: the state of the field.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Harvey, David. 1990. *The condition of postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change.* Oxford, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Hepp, Andreas. 2010. Comparing transnationally and transculturally: Leaving Container Thinking. *medien & zeit* 25 (4): 4-9.

Howell, Martha C., and Walter Prevenier. 2001. *From reliable sources: an introduction to historical methods.* Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press.

Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence culture: where old and new media collide.* New York: New York University Press.

Lagerkvist, Amanda. 2009. Transitional times: 'New Media': novel histories and trajectories. *Nordicom Review* 30 (1): 3-17.

Lievrouw, Leah A. 2004. What's changed about New Media? Introduction to the fifth anniversary issue of New Media & Society. *New Media & Society* 6 (1): 9-15.

Livingstone, Sonia. 2012. Challenges of comparative research: cross-national and transnational approaches to the globalising media landscape. In *Handbook of comparative communication research*, ed. Frank Esser and Thomas Hanitzsch, 415-449. New York: Routledge.

Lyman, Peter. 2002. Archiving the World Wide Web. In *Building a national strategy for digital preservation: issues in digital media archiving*, 38-51. Washington, D.C: Council on Library and Information Resources and Library of Congress.

McLuskie, Ed, Susanne Kinnebrock, and Christian Schwarzenegger. 2011. European communication history: an introduction. *medien & zeit* 26 (3): 3-6.

Müller-Pohl, Simone. 2010. "By Atlantic Telegraph": a study on Weltcommunication in the 19th Century. *medien & zeit* 25 (4): 40-54.

Nielsen, R. K. 2009. Review Article: Uneven accelerations. *New Media & Society* 11 (1-2): 299-306.

Papacharissi, Zizi. 2010. *A private sphere: Democracy in a digital age.* Cambridge, UK, Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Peters, Benjamin. 2009. And lead us not into thinking the new is new: a bibliographic case for new media history. *New Media & Society* 11 (1-2): 13-30.

Rantanen, T. 1997. The globalization of electronic news in the 19th century. *Media, Culture & Society* 19 (4): 605-20.

Reichertz, Jo. 2005. Ein Pfeil ins Blaue? Zur Logik sozialwissenschaftlicher Zeitdi-
agnose. In *Gegenwärtige Zukünfte: interpretative Beiträge zur sozialwissen-
schaftlichen Diagnose und Prognose*, ed. Ronald Hitzler and Michaela Pfaden-
hauer, 45-54. Wiesbaden: VS.

Rosenzweig, Roy. 2003. Scarcity or abundance? Preserving the past in a digital era.
The American Historical Review 108 (3): 735-62.

Rosenzweig, Roy. 2004. How will the net's history be written? Historians and the
internet. In *Academy & the Internet*, ed. Helen Nissenbaum and Monroe E. Price,
1-34. New York: Peter Lang.

Rüsen, Jörn. 2001. *Geschichtsbewusstsein: psychologische Grundlagen, Entwick-
lungskonzepte, empirische Befunde*. Köln: Böhlau.

Schlögel, Karl. 2006. *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit: über Zivilisationsgeschichte und
Geopolitik*, 2nd ed. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.

Schneider, Steven M., and Kirsten A. Foot. 2004. The web as an object of study.
New Media & Society 6 (1): 114-22.

Silverstone, Roger. 1999. What's new about new media? *New Media & Society*
1(1): 10-2.

Soja, Edward W. 1989. *Postmodern geographies: the reassertion of space in criti-
cal social theory*. London, New York: Verso.

Standage, Tom. 2007. *The Victorian internet: the remarkable story of the telegraph
and the nineteenth century's on-line pioneers*. New York: Walker.

Thorburn, David and Henry Jenkins. 2004. Introduction: towards an aesthetics of
transition. In *Rethinking media change: the aesthetics of transition*, ed. David
Thorburn and Henry Jenkins, 1-16. Cambridge, MA, London: MIT.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1995. *Silencing the past: Power and the production of
history*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Tsatsou, Panayiota. 2009. Reconceptualising 'time' and 'space' in the era of elec-
tronic media and communications. *PLATFORM: Journal of Media and Commu-
nication* 1: 11-32.

Urricchio, William. 2006. Convergence and diffusion: the struggle to re-define
media practice at the dawn of the 21st century. In *Media cultures*, ed. William
Urricchio and Susanne Kinnebrock, 61-88. Heidelberg: Winter.

Urricchio, William. 2009. Moving beyond the artefact: lessons from participatory
culture. In *Digital material: tracing new media in everyday life and technology*,
ed. Marianne van den Boomen, 135-46. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University
Press.

Wellman, Barry. 2004. The three ages of internet studies: ten, five and zero years
ago. *New Media & Society* 6 (1): 123-9.