

Constructing Epochs in the History of the Press

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Changes are our inevitabilities and the forward spin of news media beg us to look for more – but does change make up a form, or do changes occur in a sequence which point consistently in certain directions, beyond the events we report – enough to inform our futures? Reflecting on some shifts in presshistory I have been consciously selective looking for some manifestations of regularities in the kaleidoscopic picture which the world press presents us with. Being open-minded about what epochs represent, but still trying to identify them and to explain their succession, it is my opinion that the study of history will continue to make a substantial contribution to the understanding of how and even why media systems develop.

Historians prefer to signal their explanations by titles like “The Age of”, or by “The Rise and Fall of”. Both a given age and the empires that rise and fall may with some imagination be seen as unique. But terms like “age” also allude to growth and maturity and thus suggest an explanation by comparison to organic life. Social scientists are more fond of terms like ‘revolution’ or ‘societies’: “The Industrial Revolution”, “The Information Society” etc. These are contexts that combine into a “socio-technological development”, often with explicit explanations of how one epoch or stage transforms into another. Crisis in the economy or in the control over means of production are the foremost agents of change in Marx theory. Within alternative paradigms deficiencies in the means of efficient communication, in infrastructures, or in the control of information when system borders are expanding, may be the “driving forces” that release the transformations of one stage into another (Beniger 1986).

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Constructing epochs is useful at least for making titles and chapters for a narrative. But epochs also have another function, they often signify human responses to a common challenge that endures over some years. ‘Epochs’ may serve as the context for important events in the past and thus be conceived of as past environments which we vicariously can experience. In both cases ‘epochs’ are recognized as larger and more stable than historical actors and events, yet they are often considered unique.

‘Unique’ is often a honorific term meaning something unsurpassed and worthwhile to remember. In this sense epochs may appear as self contained by their unique qualities, never to be repeated, but only admired at a distance as e.g. “golden ages”. Epochal events are ‘unique’ because they differ from something going on before, replacing old routines and paradigms. Thus uniqueness also have the meaning of a rare ‘combination of circumstances’ at given moments and places. In essence the unique element is a ‘timing’ of different events that makes certain new social arrangements possible which did not exist before. Such contingencies are often the beginning of something new, ‘uniqueness’ being copied and transformed and thus continued. If successful the social arrangements may be institutionalized as new routines, simply because they are difficult to replace by alternative contingencies.

Uniqueness, however, must regularly be characterized by the use of general terms, denoting what is not unique. Our choice of concepts for commonness may indicate what combines ‘epochs’ into a coherent whole. More concretely our problem is: – Which conditions are general enough in character to bind our ‘epochs’ together? For example what is common to ‘newspapers’ from early 17th century to our present day dailies, when even the newsprint has changed considerably? The essence of making

newspapers are evidently not something material, but an idea or a social arrangement that may change with the environment and various infrastructures.

Putting these ideas together of similarities and differences that follow each other in an orderly succession we easily end up by suggesting a teleological theory of change driven by inherent necessities and aiming at certain over-individual goals. This is not my intention. My idea of epochs of the press is that they are multidimensional, both similar in some respects, when compared cross-nationally, and in other respects unique.

My suggestion of parameters from which epochs can be constructed is: a) the cultural base of journalism: its types, forms of content and presentation; b) the material base of technology and economy of production: from which develops the changing structure of markets and competition; c) the institutional base of power as demonstrated by the organization and professionalization of journalism, as well as by the negotiations and interactions performed between the press and other political and social institutions. We are not considering censorship systematically, even though it obviously is an important parameter for how press systems can organize and behave.

While all three parameters are important for the operation of newspapers – to the extent of having an almost systemlike interdependence – we may still expect to find national varieties of configuration of elements, simply because the speed of diffusion of technologies internationally may differ from the speed with which journalistic inventions are diffused and adapted to different political environments. The application of a new technology often requires coping with cultural conditions nationally, requiring additional social inventions locally. So the spread of some new journalistic forms may lag far behind the spread of new technologies. In sum this produces both differences and similarities when we compare press systems cross-nationally.

We are far from suggesting any automatic technological determinism behind these diffusions, or a linear progression from the original liberating invention of printing during mid 15th century. Our three parameters may be conceived of as semi-autonomous, each representing values and strategies that do not automatically harmonize. Journalism contains e.g. ideals of the veracity, scope and variety of information and expressed opinions – in short an oversupply – that does not easily combine with technical and economical efficiencies under mass communication. Nevertheless technology, economy, and journalism depend on each other. Institutions –

broadly conceived – forms frameworks for negotiating such paradoxes within corporate and cultural contexts. Epochs may then be broadly characterized as given configurations of these essential elements, institutional arrangements and journalistic genres for the production and publishing of newspapers that are rather stable over a period.

American historiography of the press is accused of being myopically preoccupied with great editors and their papers depicting a linear progress towards more press freedom, media autonomy and professional journalism without much regard for a broader social or intellectual context (Stevens and Dicken Garcia 1980). By contrast, Jürgen Habermas (1962) – in an almost platonic manner – use what Schudson (1997) more recently has criticized as an idea ‘declinism’ from a ‘golden age’ in journalism history. Our own position is that the succession of epochs are not necessarily linear and do not point to any given direction. In the following we will discuss the construction of epochs under the perspective of a diffusion of press technology and journalism internationally as well as its structural consequences for the economy of the press. As will become clear; as various epochs are made up of many different and sometimes unique pieces nationally or regionally, the succession of epochs in the press are not likely to share any one destiny when we observe them cross-nationally.

We have termed our approach ‘differential diffusions’ of innovations: which imply that adaptations to national or local conditions often end up in distinctly different configurations of constituent components, compared synchronically and cross nationally. This approach contrasts the immanent or teleological view of media development which holds that the iron law of historical change drives media systems in a similar direction, irrespective of local conditions. In short, not all media systems must necessarily end up as copies of an American prototype.

Habermas’ Lost Atlantis

Jürgen Habermas’ (1962) construction of epochs in his *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* is perhaps the best known. Habermas’ combines data from Germany, France and Great Britain mostly from the 18th and 19th centuries. His first aim, he recollected 31 years later, was to derive the *ideal* public sphere from these historical contexts (Habermas 1991: 422). But by depicting his “golden age” Habermas also anticipate some uniform and inherent mechanisms of decay.

Each epoch in Habermas analysis is distinct both by its dominant mode of news production, by how and by whom the control of publishing is maintained or shared, and by the dominant strategies towards public life. Habermas suggests the following epochs: 1) the simple news press of small printer work-shops where the content mainly came from translations of foreign newspapers; 2) the journals, newsbooks and newspapers from the 17th to the first half of the 19th century closely linked to a milieu of literary salons and coffee-houses where the roles of editors, writers and publishers often mixed; 3) the opinion press with hired editors expressing or fighting for general ideas, and with rather passive publishers; 4) the party press with strong links to political parties and; 5) the commercial press with rather active publishers hiring journalists to realize their business idea of a newspaper for the masses.

Linked to the study of 'öffentlichkeit' or to the public sphere, Habermas' idea of a succession of stages in the press is perceived diagnostically as an irreversible process. It forms a story of lost social significance in journalism and the destruction of discourse in the public sphere as the newspaper industry develops into a means of manipulation for the powerful, even in formally democratic regimes. The villain in this technologically determined development is commercialism: Papers catering to ever larger audiences, and publishers building ever more extensive media empires to reap the profits from advertising. The combined effect of this is to unify unrelated and uncommunicating social groups as passive publics and to homogenize cultural variety under the banal common denominator in journalism. In this situation political discourse in the media is 'refeudalized': arguments and elite opinion are only demonstrated by media to be silently consumed by the public and thus apparently legitimized in a showcase democracy.¹ This conclusion is not unexpected in view of the standard explanation given by the Frankfurter School of how hegemonic control develops in media.

Politics in feudal systems was strictly forbidden as a topic outside the court. The fight for freedom of speech in 18th century Sweden at first was a fight to extend the right of talking politics in the open among very restricted circles of alternative elites within the nobility or among the more successful proprietors fighting first of all for more freedom for themselves, especially from state regulations and taxes in their business affairs (Vegesack 1995). Habermas "golden age" is the end of the 18th century London. The flexibilities of attitudes and the diversity of expressed opinions were matched by a

wide variety of small-scale newspapers and journals in an open market place. The turnover of newspapers and other publications was very high, as the circulation figures were limited by a primitive technology of printing keeping the level of initial investments low.

When Parliament ended without renewing the License Act May 1695 it freed the British press from pre-publication censorship. A chance which was immediately seized by many to start new publications. The next Parliament met in November but failed to pass another licensing act. This was not primarily intended as a support of press freedom in general, but was rather a pragmatic realization by politicians of their inability to control the vicissitudes of the manifold British publishing industry at the time. The parties, religious dissenters and other movements outside Parliament were well served by journalists and hack writers taking any position that was in demand at the moment. All of them were infighting and wildly undisciplined politically. Opinion-making was therefore utterly unpredictable and public debate was full of recriminations and countercharges: essays altered with rumor, news, slander and entertainment. You had what modern economists call an atomistic competition among numerous journals competing for public attention.

An unanticipated effect of letting journalism loose was a general redirection of attention from foreign to domestic affairs, and towards politics, especially the affairs of Government in periods when Parliament was out of session (Sommerville 1996). A general lack of determination by politicians as to exactly which newspapers to license and which to let free of interference were nurtured by the fear of losing support by certain newspapers and of retaliation from others (Leth 1996). Often the government succeeded by diverting opinions in opposition papers, sometimes by the help of hidden subsidies, rather than by closing them down. Instead of censorship indirect controls were introduced by the Stamp Act in 1712 – the "taxes on knowledge" – to restrict the publishing of certain newspapers by making them too costly for the common reader, hurting mainly those papers catering to the middle and lower classes.² In addition libel laws should discourage journalists from scrutinizing politicians and the civil service too closely. But these laws proved cumbersome in court and frustrating for the government prosecutors.

The volatile publication market became a perfect arena for diverse oppositional communities where arguments were more easily introduced and then carried into coffee houses where newspapers were

regularly read aloud or in silence and later discussed by everyone who cared to do so, transforming newspaper consumption into a social act. These characteristics of coffee-house conversation confirm basic premises in Habermas theory of communicative actions which imply that the conduct of discourse contain an inner logic among partners who could enter discourse on equal terms. In his 'ideal speech situation' arguments combine with each other or are replaced by more generally shared ideas. For Habermas this critical rational discussion is not simple bargaining, or a zero sum game, but an act of imagination and invention for the common good (Habermas 1981).

Habermas ideas of a "golden age" are challenged from what we learn from more recent analyses of the history of press freedom, particularly from a re-reading of the history of the British press during the 17th and 18th centuries. The key question is of course: who is privileged to enter what kind of discourse on equal terms with whom, and when? In other words, what are the social and psychological barriers to be passed before you can practice Habermas 'communicative logic'?

Common sense tells us that access to the media, to selected fora or to inner circles of any importance is restricted and closely guarded even in formally open societies. The idea of a public sphere of any import open to all or even to the majority is at best an ideal which is seldom practiced. And this, of course, was not very different in the 18th century, even in England. "Habermas's argument idealizes the element of rational discourse in the formation of the public sphere and neglects the extent to which its institutions were founded on sectionalism, exclusiveness, and repression." George Eley (1992:321) argues.

Likewise, Paula McDowell (1998) maintains – in her valuable study of women in public life in London at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries – that there existed a diversity of journals and newspapers for contending economic interests, religious factions and other communities of opinion. In fact a multitude of 'public spheres' in Habermas understanding, not only the bourgeois one. What became distinctive of the rising bourgeoisie in revolutionary and post-revolutionary London was not only their fight with the ruling aristocracy, but also their systematic containment of feminist activities in public discourse and of plebeian counter cultures. Writing of the 19th century as well as for the whole history of Habermas 'public sphere' Geoff Eley (1992:306) emphasizes the existence of competing publics: "The emergence of a

bourgeois public was never defined solely by struggle against absolutism and traditional authority. Also, it necessarily addressed the problem of popular containment as well." McDowell (1998:8) repeats the conclusion verbatim, and sets it in the context of the 17th century as well.

Despite the more narrow interests which motivated a widening of public discourse, freedom of expression was hailed as a universal human right. The arguments in its defense, however, were primarily intended to serve men of private property with prestige: "the governing class of Tories and Whigs (at the end of the 18th century) remained panicky about the spread of literacy and the popular press", remarks John Keane; at Whig banquets it was a favorite toast for the freedom of the press, but coming to power in 1782 the Whigs kept the same restrictions on the press – like the "taxes on knowledge" – as did the Tories (Keane 1991:34).

Governments may have been concerned by what went on in coffee-houses, but discussions went in all directions, like public debate in newspapers and journals. Opinion making was not organized or disciplined in any specific way. Coffee-houses could never agree on any plot against the Establishment (Sommerville 1996). Or – topics in coffee house discourse were rarely synchronized to the agenda or the priorities of Parliament (Leth 1996: 279). So, while few deny the importance of coffee houses in democratizing political conversation for a predominantly male public in the 18th century, the political impact of these many conversations was probably negligible outside coffee houses since only very few could vote, or could talk directly to politicians with any consequences.

The link from publicly expressed opinions to influence in politics is very fragile: extending the franchise does not automatically imply broadening the public sphere. The problem is, of course, not only how media interact with informal conversations of private persons, but also how media are linked to the ongoing discourse of politics where parliaments and decision-makers are involved. Taking this more state-centered view of the functioning of a public sphere in a broader political context, Michael Schudson analyzes public debate in the United States in the 1780s–1790s. He concludes: "The American Founding Fathers in the 1780s conceived and established a republican government but, outside of the central requirement of frequent elections, they did not readily tolerate a 'public sphere' of opinion formation and public communication to link people to it." (Schudson 1997:311-30). This general view of the proper public discourse con-

tinued for some years. The Constitutional Assembly in the US met for four months in 1787 without the agenda or any decision being published. The US Senate met for its first six years in secret (Schudson 1992).

James Curran (1991) criticizes Habermas ideas from a different historical experience. First Habermas downplays the role of the viable radical press in the 18th and early 19th century as an alternative 'public sphere', and then he neglected the political implications of the market forces which were released when the "taxes on knowledge" were abolished. Revenues from the burgeoning advertising market was channeled mainly to bourgeois papers and thus succeeded in effectively killing first the radical 'unstamped' press, and then the Labour press in the latter part of the 19th century. The public sphere which Habermas describes throughout is first and foremost a bourgeois sphere of controlled, 'enlightened' and 'civilized' conversation which in fact kept those not educated in these refined manners effectively outside public discourse.

In other words – Habermas "golden age" does not look so lustrous on closer inspection. Habermas found it difficult to discover anything comparable to the apparently open (but restricted), the seemingly disinterested (but discriminatory) public discourse of the late 18th century London. The universal human rights, as originally conceived in Enlightenment and in early Liberalism, were in fact reserved for certain groups in politics. These contradictions in political theory – and conflicts of interest in practical politics – could not be solved within the confines of a late 18th century public sphere, or any other forum existing at the time.

By idealizing it beyond historical realities Habermas oversaw a serious moral dilemma in the liberal tenet. By his neglect Habermas also overlooked the moral indignation behind the later efforts to extend the franchise and to transform the oligarchic bourgeois human rights into more universal democratic rights. Since this also involved acting on a larger scale, both an enhanced organizational capacity, strict discipline and – in the end – increased political power became necessary instruments; all of which were alien to Habermas philosophy.

Habermas (1993) himself revised some of his ideal conditions for a public sphere more recently, but he has not to my knowledge revised the suggested succession of stages in presshistory. Thus Habermas' doomsday diagnosis and his projected line of decay in the press after the 18th century may also be up for a re-interpretation more in line with

the standard view of how political freedom was won for the masses in Western Europe.

When the fight for freedom of expression was not easily won for alternative elites during the 18th century and not won for ordinary people even during the 19th century, the party press became towards the end and in the beginning of the 19th century a powerful means to raise alternative voices to the hegemonic conservative culture and to break out of the confines of a bourgeois public sphere.

The party press came in several waves in the Nordic countries – somewhat weaker as time passed by: The liberal revolution of the middle class was followed by the social-democratic revolution of workers and then by small-holders and farmers – till the market potentialities were overextended and the waves began to fall back.

Acting as a political infrastructure the party press became an integral part of the Scandinavian political systems. The liberal and conservative press were born in a dialectic power play between caucus parties in the National Assemblies fighting over parliamentary reforms and finally for public support. Party committed newspapers eventually became the public face of parties yet to organize on a national basis. As a rule bourgeois newspapers remained private by ownership. By contrast, the social-democratic press was from the beginning the most essential part in the strategy of forming a wider alternative political culture. For both bourgeois and socialist parties their newspapers in periods acted as substitutes for local party organizations, because of a more general lack of organizational capacity to fill all the political roles nationwide required by a multi-party parliamentary system.

To a certain extent this pattern depends on large resources – relatively speaking – to be collected on central hands fostering oligarchy and manipulation from the center. But the Scandinavian political parties were seldom oligarchic to the same extent as e.g. the German socialists or the American party machines. The newspapers of the Norwegian Labour were e.g. for a long period owned and operated by local chapters of the party and the trade unions. The national party had for long periods no means to control the local party press – neither politically nor financially. Local editors often acted as politicians as well as publishers and could in periods come into rather violent opposition to the national party which contributed considerably to two party splits in the 1920s.

For Habermas the Party press clearly deviated from the ideal of his communicative actions on sev-

eral accounts: messages were onedirected on a propagandistic or a pedagogical principle not on a communitarian. The party press was centralized and thus rather insensitive to local opinions etc. On the other hand, the party press contributed essentially to build and later to widen a parliamentary democracy.

Alternative Ways of Constructing Epochs

Habermas anticipates both a unilinear diachronic development and, to a large extent, similar synchronic systems of 'öffentlichkeit' cross-nationally. In this article, however, I argue that epochs of the history of the press are multidimensional and that the diffusions of innovations along these parameters are neither synchronized nor teleologically determined. But even if many changes in different media systems are not similar when compared chronologically, common characteristics may appear when we compare how various aspects of the systems change longitudinally and cross-nationally, process by sub-process. As we have made clear, there is always a cultural lag in the adoption of new technology and especially in the adaptation of journalism to new market possibilities.

I will try to demonstrate by some select examples how approximately the same changes of technology and economy cross nationally can give quite different results in journalism varying with the national and historical contexts, and how – when we disregard chronological time – similarities may appear later when some of the initial contingencies for a 'new' journalism with a popular appeal appear, with e.g. the development of a mass market cross-nationally similar to the American prototype.

Just as newspapers are variable products, so epochs of the presshistory are also adaptable to local characteristics. Publishing of newspapers combines so many different elements that it is unlikely that all of them will spread in the same fashion. Some elements are more likely to be similar cross-nationally than others while differences may mainly be due to how some culturally sensitive elements of media performance combine within national contexts. Therefore, the importance of each of the proposed parameters in the introductory section may vary from one country to another, and from time to time: it is sometimes more important to follow political doctrines for the performance of journalism than to increase circulation, but somewhere else and at the same time the opposite may be true.³

The easiest group of factors to trace longitudinally of our three proposed parameters is those re-

lated to technology of production and the economy of publishing, since their combinations seem to produce rather predictable transformations of market structures of the newspaper industry cross-nationally in democratic societies (Høyer, Hadenius and Weibull 1975, Communications 1997:3).

Technologies are usually developed to solve concrete production problems that have been defined by market demands or by the prospects of profits. Such combinations of factors may at first only be present at highly selected places, as London in the beginning of the 19th century. Here we saw the start of modern methods in the mass production of newspapers in 1814 by the introduction of the cylinder press in *The Times*, invented mainly by Friedrich König from Saxony. The place was London, the greatest metropolitan area in the world at the time, and with the worlds largest newspaper, it was not Germany where most of the component technologies originated. That production methods were most steadily improved later on in the United States can also be explained by almost the same combination of rapid urbanization and the freedom of the press – or by the prospects of unrestrained market growth. When the cost of development is paid, the new methods of production can more easily be spread to new and less urbanized markets, releasing processes that resemble those found elsewhere.

The second technological revolution in printing, beginning in 1814, took off in the mid-Victorian period and ended with Mergentallers Linotype machine in 1886.⁴ This rapid change in production methods started a process of industrialization in the press that involved both journalists and their trade in a wider sense. Their workplace was organized differently, journalism became a full-time job pursued within newspaper-offices, professional organizations became more feasible with a steady workforce having an address, and paradoxically – journalism became more routinized easier to cast in impersonal and neutral patterns of presentation, distinct from literature (Høyer and Lauk, forth.).

US total daily readership increased almost tenfold from 3.5 million by 1880 to 33 million copies by 1920. This limited period of exponential growth – mainly between 1880 and 1910-1920 – overlaps nicely with the so-called second industrial revolution.⁵ The rapid expansion of circulation roughly followed the well known S-curve of diffusion of innovations.⁶ Partly released by falling prices of newsprint followed by increased competition from the 1860s. Similar expansions during a relatively short period of 40-50 years can be observed internationally.

Some structural features of what happened next is well known. Developments in the national press usually followed a given trajectory economically from centralized production to increasing differentiation both in number of places of publication and in number of competing newspapers published locally until the market saturated at approximately 1.5 copies per household around 1920. From then on newsmarkets started to concentrate, almost as a mirror image of expansion, first in the geographic periphery, later on in more centralized and metropolitan areas.

This outline of almost lawlike structural transformations covers many local variations and divergent developments especially in journalism and in the relations between press and politics. Some trends in journalistic genres eventually became more international, but even if the development in Western democracies has been towards more independent media institutions over time, it has followed different roads locally.

Taking the long term view: The development of new forms of journalism benefited from larger editorial departments, from larger formats and more space generally which the industrialization of the press allowed for; while journalistic independence grew more gradually over time from expanding audiences, increased advertising and the concentration of competitors locally, giving journalists more influence.

The picture for the development of journalistic methods is more complex than for the economy of publishing. Divergent and seemingly contradictory trends have been observed: One trend of the 'new long journalism' towards a broader and slightly 'top down' perspective, and another trend towards a more grassroots oriented 'bottom-up' perspective. The first trend is connected to the development of reporting that followed from a more professionalized journalistic occupation at the end of the 19th century (Schudson 1978). Events are more often represented as interrelated and set within broader frames of time and space. Between 1894 and 1994 journalism of US quality papers developed towards broader reportage, longer stories, wider contexts and more analysis where "journalists identified individuals less often by name and more often by demographic group." (Barnhurst and Mutz 1997:41). The other trend – mainly for populist tabloids – has been towards spot news and 'infotainment', as is the modern term for stories more narrowly conceived: centered both on common individuals and celebrities within dramatized events and with spectacular destinies (Franklin 1997, Dahl 1998).

Both of these trends seem to have an older origin at the European continent – from dramatic stories in flysheets, from short and truncated news as derived from mailed messages as well as from essays – but the 'new journalism' at the end of the 19th century has been "modernized" with an immense increase of accessible information through the telegraph. For American reporting James Carey (1975) has proposed the following stages: From bulletin-board type announcements to revolutionary propaganda, to partisanism, to sensationalism, to objectivity, to interpretative, investigative, and (finally) to advocacy journalism.

The canons of journalism run in a different direction in party controlled newspapers compared to the commercial press. But these apparent contradictions did not always produce immobilizing cross-pressures between party loyalty and journalistic professionalism. The advent of mass parties in Scandinavia in the last two decades of the 19th century also promised a mass market for newspapers hiking on the band-wagon, on the condition that they committed themselves to one of the feuding parties. Polarization over the issue of parliamentarism versus royal prerogatives made it almost impossible to stay out of the conflict without losing both confidence and readers. The political differentiation in the press that came out of these confrontations was most expressed in Denmark where a four-daily system gradually appeared from the 1880s and existed to the 1950s: One newspaper for each of the four major parties competed in the major cities (Thomsen 1972).

The timing of expansion – how, where and when the reader market started to grow rapidly – had lasting consequences for the political composition of the press. As the readership for newspapers expanded new entries had to find their niche. The ensuing social stratification of the newspaper reading public has perhaps been studied most thoroughly for Finland where Päiviö Tommila and his colleagues identifies altogether 16 types of newspapers from 1800 up to 1950; each type addressing a socio-cultural segment as its target public: From the Swedish speaking educated upper class (> 1820), to the Finnish speaking educated class and land owners (1830s >), towards workers (1890s >) and small holders (1900s >) and the population in peripheral districts (1920s >), just to mention a few (Tommila 1988:490).

Both in Norway and in the United States newspaper consumption had the sharpest rise between 1880 and 1900, as it did in Denmark for which we also have data (Høyer 1995, Thomsen 1972). These

similarities across the Atlantic, however, produced quite different results. As it is related in various histories of the press, the opportunities of a mass market changed the party/press relations in opposite directions. In the United States the party press gradually disappeared as the income from advertising grew,⁷ but in Scandinavia a multi-party press was formed and later institutionalized for most of a century by almost the same initial process.⁸ A cultural lag in the formation of nation-wide mass parties between the US and Scandinavia may have been the most decisive difference.⁹

In Scandinavia the party system was not fully formed but had an increasing popular support when the newspaper market started to expand. This coincidence made a lasting imprint on the genealogy of the Norwegian press. Newspapers established a decade or so in advance of the rapidly rising consumption proved to be among the most sturdy and long-lived up to the present, compared both to newspapers started in early 19th century or after 1920. It took about 100 years to reduce the number of newspapers published in 1865 to a third of its original size, while the comparable mortality rate for the cohort of newspapers started between 1920 and 1939 was only 25 years.

The political composition of the cohort of newspapers started before 1865 was predominantly conservative or liberal, because these parties were the main contenders when the press became politicized in the 1880s (Høyer 1975).¹⁰ Political parties and their newspapers established in this century, by contrast, are represented to a far lesser degree in the present press, if represented at all. The Nordic Labour press challenged the Bourgeois press between 1900 and 1920 in the popular reader-market, but their party papers either cut themselves voluntarily out from the important advertising market, due to their ideologies, or they were boycotted by skeptical businesspeople.

Publishers may have the same basic priorities of increasing their circulation, anywhere, or at least of surviving an increasing competition, but the conditions for transforming these basic strategies into a 'new journalism' differed markedly at the end of the 19th century. Increased consumption gave new opportunities for journalistic entrepreneurs; opportunities which either fused in overlapping strategies between publishers and politicians, as in Scandinavia, or collided in conflicting ideas of the responsibilities of the press, as in the US. On both continents publishers eventually had to choose between news and views for readers of wildly different opin-

ions but these dilemmas appeared much earlier in the US than in many European countries.

The American inspired 'paradigm' of balanced, objective (neutral), event-oriented news stories may have been inspired by a market strategy trying to build a readership which included different social strata of conflicting political views. Publishers who primarily tries to influence the opinion of their readers, by contrast, do not see the significance of ideas like journalistic balance, detachment and objectivity.¹¹

On this background Marion Marzolf (1982) describes how the American 'new journalism' of Joseph Pulitzer, James Gordon Bennett Jr. and Adolph Ochs during the 1870s and 1880s became models of entrepreneurs in Scandinavia through Henrik Cavling who remade *Politiken*, Copenhagen as editor in 1905, and five years later by Oscar Hemberg in *Dagens Nyheter* in Stockholm. Most of the advertising, the leader and most of comments were dispelled from the front page and replaced by more hard news. The break with traditional editing methods was probably more gradual for the provincial press. The news interview, a central feature of the news paradigm, was still rare for the Swedish press in 1925 (Ekecrantz 1997), and this finding corresponds with Norwegian observations for the same period (Nonseid 1997).

In other words, the basic conditions for political discourse clearly influence how journalism is conducted. Even routine transactions between politicians and journalists differ between Western democracies. The hierarchical controlled and elite-centered access to public information in countries like Great Britain and France contrasts sharply with the Scandinavian Countries and the US, mainly due to differences in political culture. (Official Secrets Act in the UK v Freedom of Information Act in the US).

By much the same set of hypotheses Jean K. Chalaby (1996) tries to explain why the adaptation of the modern news paradigm was delayed in France. She argues that the difference of censorship between Great Britain and France decisively influenced journalism differently. Censorship was more strict and lasted longer in France as compared to Great Britain and apparently instigated a different journalistic culture.

Chalaby compares how news was evaluated in the two countries between 1830 and 1930, with an emphasize on comments and a literary style in the French press as compared to the factual and neutral journalism in the Anglo-American press. She then

outlines some consequences of such differences – in amount of informational news presented, in variety of journalistic genres, volume of advertising, number of pages and of hired journalists etc. – more of this in the British press, less in the French. Not only censorship, but also a difference in the development of central urban markets and some culturally bound differences in the respect for intellectuals contributed to the contrast in journalism, Chalaby maintains. Journalism was professionalized earlier in certain respects in Great Britain, while French newspapers relied more heavily on contributions from outsiders from the literary system and from the academic establishment. Despite this variance the French press gradually adopted the American inspired news-paradigm from the 1920s, as in Scandinavia.

An Institutional Perspective

In strictly empirical research stages are seldom defined unless a time series of data depict some few interrelated factors that accelerate or decelerate systematically. The multidimensional elements of media production diffused differentially and cross nationally – as described by the foregoing section – may not produce a coherent overview. Without some kind of overarching theoretical synthesizing these more restricted conceptions may eventually result in an unnecessary complexity of competing ‘epochs’.

An alternative approach that promises more unity analytically may be to relate the various parameters to an idea of a developing media institution, less dependent on consent from government and other institutions of society. The institutional approach by itself does not offer a theory. It is more the realization that an occupation over time develops institutions at various levels of society as well as an ideology to defend its autonomy. Also institutions may change between epochs, but changes of institutions may be different than changes in our three parameters, expressed as ideas of journalism and the role of media in society.

The institutional approach to press history is often accused of a delimiting ‘media centric’ view which excludes important media contexts. Schudson (1991:178) has emphasized the importance of current historical contexts: “I take important internal changes in journalism to be explicable only with reference to broader social change encompassing journalism.” The social sciences, however, define ‘institutions’ more widely by concepts like technology, organizations, hierarchies, social roles, custom-

ers, competition, markets, external and internal economies etc.: Factors determining potentials and border conditions for interactions inside the trade and for the organized communication and negotiations with partners outside.

With an institutional approach we may be in a better position to analyze the interfaces, confrontations and conflicts that has to be reconciled within media organizations; both in relation to the environment as well as in the relations between various professional groups internally. Differences emanating from journalistic, economic and technological interests must be settled in a way that makes the media organization sustainable in the market. The binding forces here will be market strategies, journalistic conventions and professional ideologies more generally including ideas of (a partial) independence from other social institutions. The critical question being how the borderlines are drawn between what shall remain professionally autonomous and the social obligations of the trade that allows for interference from outside authorities or calls for a professional self justice.

The core of an ‘institution’ is some widely accepted ideas of a unique purpose and role behavior that must eventually be adjusted to broader social norms. Institutionalized professionalism in addition is a collective sense of belonging; being aware of challenges that often confront journalists and of how to handle them, referring to a code of professional conduct etc. All of this serves as a justification of journalism to be – at least partly – independent of economic calculations.

Patricia L. Dooley (1997) has systematically read programmatic declarations introducing new or redesigned newspapers during the 18th and 19th centuries to look for how publishers and editors defined their role relative to the public as communicators of politics, different from the role of politicians. She has also read court proceedings from libel suits during the 19th century for the same purpose. The American Revolution and the Bill of Rights had left newspapermen somewhat bewildered as to how the publishing system should function politically. Press freedom contained no recipe of how to behave journalistically. Dooley concludes that it took about two centuries to arrive at a consensus of the media as vital links, or journalists as independent actors, serving the political system without being part of its constitutionally defined obligations. However, ideas of independence were present all the time, but not always consistently since newspapers continued well into the 20th century to systematically support certain parties and candidates.

In his *Discovering the News* Michael Schudson (1967) describes a development of increased independence from government interference, a growing professional awareness and a broader consensus from the last two decades of the 19th century within the American press of what the professional values are. Schudsons suggested epochs of the American press are: 1) Newspaper monopolies during the colonial period, requiring a permit from the British government, 2) the “dark age of the party press” until the middle of the 19th century, 3) commercialization starting with the ‘penny papers’ from the 1830s, but most typically during the 1860s and 1870s, 4) the professional era, most typically from the 1920s. This is not a story of decay à la Habermas, but of growing independence and progress for and by the press grounded on a professional ideology inspired by mainstream contemporary currents in American thought.

Schudson follows the succession of epochs as depicted in standard histories by e.g. Frank Luther Mott (1942) in his *History of the American Journalism* and Michael and Edwin Emery (1996) in *The Press and America*. However, while the Emerys and Luther Mott mainly interpret emerging professionalism as an endogenous phenomenon within journalism, both Lippmann (1922/1946) and Schudson explain it by parallel developments towards professionalization within other occupations, by dominant ideas of pragmatism, and by the beliefs in facts and objectivity in American life in general.

Facts are information disconnected from specific systems of knowledge in religion or in ideologies and thus exchangeable across differences in cultural identifications. By providing only the bare facts the press asked readers to put them into their preferred system of knowledge, and thus kept newspapers free of involvement and obligations. From the turn of the 19th century, however, journalists faced steadily better organized sources of information in business and politics bent on directing the flow of news according to their interests. From the 1920s on ‘objectivity’ in journalism became a slightly more risky method: a combination of aggressive news interviews and the balancing of ‘facts’ from different sources of information, while the journalist remained as an impartial outsider.

Hazel Dicken-Garcia (1989) later on added important substance to this description in her content analysis of journalistic standards during the 19th century America. Dicken-Garcia gives important details concerning current ideas of journalistic standards, the role of the press in society and criticism of journalistic conduct. The overall picture which she

draws accords well with Schudsons description: The idea of a free press which guided public discussion and criticism of the press inspired journalists to gain social respectability on their own professional terms.

The concentration of media resources, on which this culture of journalism could develop, has grown gradually: one system of interaction, and various infrastructures for the retrieval and dissemination of informations developing out of each other – almost like a succession of epochs. In this broader sense of an ‘institution’ the press developed through various stages of consensus, of pivotal events and watershed experiences that made professional values visible in society like the Pentagon Papers, Watergate etc. (Rudenstine 1996). An approach which may be termed ‘culturalist’ and which emphasizes that journalistic routines are influenced more by the contemporary cultural climate than by narrow economic interests, materialist conditions or by business concerns (Curran 1990). An accompanying assumption is that the idea of professionalism makes journalism less dependent on economic interests.

This interpretation of a gradual consensus-building – free of profit motifs – has recently been challenged as top down excusing “property and ownership at the expense of an understanding of news-work.” (Hardt and Brennen (eds.) 1995). Arthur J. Kaul (1986) maintains that professionalism hides latent class conflicts: “The professionalization of journalism, with its “public service” ethos, was an “adaptation maneuver” to insulate newspaper owners/publishers against profit-threatening commercial crises, class conflicts, and public disenchantment with the press.” It was publishers not the journalists that fought for ‘professionalism’, stressing the apolitical ‘objectivity’, meaning content dependent on authoritative sources of information. Publishers were afraid of the dangerously “involved”, “investigative”, “adversary” or “muckraking” journalism where journalists are more visible in the communication process and where more than passive information was at stake.

It is a rather common observation that there exists regular differences of interests not only between the press and other institutions outside, but also between various groups within each media organization having different relations to the environment: The regular conflict, drawing the most of attention, is between capital and journalism – publishers versus editors – editors versus journalists.

These classical controversies were given a repetition in Sweden during the summer of 1998. The core of the conflict was plans from the multi media

barony of the Bonnier family to buy a competing morning quality paper to its leading *Dagens Nyheter* in Stockholm, giving the Bonnier family almost monopoly control over advertising and distribution in the capital and – as it was feared – also a decisive control over the career of talented editors and journalists thus – indirectly – setting the media agenda in public affairs. One well known editor in chief of *Dagens Nyheter* – Arne Ruth – retired after writing a two page long article articulating his fears of company censorship if he stayed on.

Two recent tendencies – giving management more control – are prevalent in Anglo-American journalism. First the market driven journalism where the audience is segmented into narrow consumer groups according to a master formula for the journalistic product designed by marketing experts, giving special groups more pointed news, but eroding the idea of public service in journalism (Underwood 1993). Then growing freelancing – a return to Grub Street scribes – in the production of both television and print journalism making journalists more vulnerable to employer-specified ideas (Franklin 1997).

The impenetrable and tightly organized teamwork in modern media may strengthen the integrity of journalism towards powerful adversaries, even

publishers do not always understand the intricacies of journalism. But in the same organizational setup – with hierarchically controlled sub-editing – there is also dangers of a certain de-professionalisation of the individual journalist (Høyer and Lauk, forthcoming). Also the more militant defense of ‘professionalism’ contains some inherent dangers for public discourse. The demand of “journalism for journalists”, of closed union shops and the like, may come at odds with freedom of expression when the narrow ‘institutionalist’ approach is accepted as a guiding line (Nordenstreng 1997).

Professionalism and freedom of the press is not only threatened from the outside but also challenged from inside media. Institutions of mass media have grown to an extent of being almost self sufficient; therefore we must recognize the fault-lines of conflict, both between media and other institutions and between contending groups within media. Whatever arguments flowing between a classical Marxist or the political economy position in research – at the one hand – and the culturalist or professionalism positions – at the other – no one seriously deny the importance of institutions as a field of inquiry – sometime a battleground – of conflicting interests, and as frameworks for the negotiation of different demands that creates professional ideologies.

Notes

1. Habermas calls this ‘refeudalization’ in the modern press. The feudal form of legitimizing royalty was to show the King in his glory during given rituals for the public thus eliciting respect. The modern form of ‘feudalized’ public opinion is to legitimize rulers, their acts and decisions by telling about it to a powerless public with little access to media. The lack of protest and the absence of public concern, is interpreted as silent consent, and thus “legitimize” the current regime.
2. This did not prevent unstamped newspapers to appear and to sell at approximately half price com-

pared to stamped newspapers. The illegal press, catering to lower middle and upper working class, was at times more numerous than the legally stamped newspapers. The formerly unstamped papers disappeared with the abolition of the “taxes on knowledge” in 1853, 1855 and 1861 respectively. See: James Curran (1978).

3. Until recently the Soviet model of a national press system by political decree from above produced much uniformity to the press in Soviet republics and in Eastern Europe; ideologically as well as in their structures and political operations. The collapse of the Soviet empire also produced quite similar problems of transition: of privatization or adapting

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- to market conditions, to handle the challenges and opportunities of international media capital etc. The collapse of the party press also made the break with old communist concepts of professionalism mandatory, but at the same time created a kind of “normative vacuum” as to what the ‘new journalism’ could be. In an united effort of retracing historical roots before Soviet time and by forming new national institutions these common problems facing the former communist countries have found both different national solutions as well as some common traits (Downing 1996, Lauk 1996, Sparks with Reading 1998).
4. The first technological revolution started approximately in 1450-55 with Gutenberg and others. The second started in 1814. When capacity of printing by the beginning of the 20th century was developed to a level where most realistic demands for capacity from newspapers could be met, even in large metropolitan areas; it did not induced the producers of printing plants to develop their technology further until the mid-twentieth century when the combination of offset, photographic setting-machines and computers started a third revolution in printing quality and in the rationalization of working operations.
 5. If we add a few years ahead of and some few years after these four decades major inventions appeared like electric power and light, the automobile, the X-ray, the radio, the telephone, the airplane, television etc.
 6. The first to depict this development in circulation figures for the United States was Melvin L. DeFleur (1970). Later on the same phase-like development of the press has been found in other countries. See for example Svennik Høyer, Stig Hadenius and Lennart Weibull (1975).
 7. Mott (1942) suggests a strong correlation between rising advertising revenues and falling party commitments. However, in his study of the Detroit press 1865-1920 Richard Kaplan (1997) demonstrates that partisanship subsided slower than advertising in general was rising. Party biased editorials in presidential election seasons decreased from 52% of all editorials in 1892 to 17% in 1916, while the percentage of party biased news space decreased from 16% of all news space to 5% for the same period.
 8. The period of the party press in the US has traditionally been delimited from 1789 to the early 1860s in journalism histories (Stevens and Dicken Garcia 1980:42). Lately Michael Schuson (1998) has argued strongly that the tradition of party committed newspapers, in the US Mid-West at least, lasted well into the 20th century. Much longer than earlier anticipated in standard histories of American journalism. See also Kaplan (1997). These revisions do not invalidate our argument, however, since the development towards uncommitted and ‘objective’ journalism went much faster in the US than in Scandinavia anyway.
 9. Another contributing factor that may help to explain the contrast in party/press relations between the US and Scandinavia at the end of the 19th century is the difference in the size of the advertising market. It was obviously more to gain from a politically uncommitted editorial policy that could appeal to a heterogeneous public in the US press than in Scandinavia.
 10. If the political commitments of the cohort of newspapers – established just ahead of, or early in the first market expansion – had in addition a strong local support in the electorate over an extended period, this combination of favorable conditions strongly contributed to their later success as market leaders, a leadership they apparently were able to maintain even after electoral support had subsided. As a result the initial correlation between electoral majorities locally and the circulation of party newspapers became weaker after some decades in the bourgeois press. Apparently market leaders had ceased to function as party papers in the minds of a majority of readers and had adopted the role of a community institution, read for a lot of non-political reasons. However, electoral support was still important for the Labour press to survive (Høyer 1975). Because their newspapers never reached the position of market leaders in the larger metropolitan markets the Labour press most often continued to serve as newspapers for committed supporters of the party. One obvious reason for this was that the Labour press generally came too late to benefit from the boost of an early market expansion. Exceptions to this rule is mainly found in the smaller and peripheral markets of non-dailies operating in monopoly situations. This part of the press has continued to expand to the present. However, these non-dailies are often not registered under the UNESCO definition of ‘newspapers’: as publications issued regularly at least four times a week. For Finland see Raimo Salokangas (forthcoming), and for Norway Sigurd Høst.
 11. In one-party systems like former Soviet Union this view was developed in the extreme. As the party was the prime agent in mass media, from whom journalists should seek advice, the role of the media became to enlighten and educate the people in socialist theory and to mobilize it for the progress of the socialist society. Ask the party first, then your readers, for what they want! As the saying goes: in the Western commercial press good news were no news, while in the Communist press bad news was not published

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