January 2010

# Book Reviews: Volume 12

Follow this and additional works at: https://arrow.tudublin.ie/icr

Part of the Communication Technology and New Media Commons

# BOOK REVIEWS

B. O'Neill, M. Ala-Fossi, P. Jauert, S. Lax, L. Nyre and H. Shaw (eds), *Digital Radio in Europe: Technologies, Industries and Cultures*

Bristol: Intellect, 2010. 248pp, £24.95 Stg. ISBN 978-184150-279-3

Rosemary Day, *Community Radio in Ireland: Participation and Multiflows*

New Jersey: Hampton Press, 2009. 209pp, €17.99 ISBN 978-577273-859-1

Pat Hannon

Drawing mostly from extensive cross-national research conducted by the Digital Radio Cultures in Europe research group (DRACE), this ambitious collection sets out over 11 chapters to explore the many facets of digital radio, and in doing so provides insightful contexts surrounding the technologies, policies and approaches behind the drive to make radio all digital.

In Chapter 1, O'Neill and Shaw give the background to the founding of the EBU (European Broadcasting Union) in 1950. From a project established in 1987, it was envisaged that the DAB signal would have the capacity to carry the primary audio of radio and more, such as text and pictures. Moreover, it was hoped that the standard would be adopted worldwide. This was not to be as Stavitsky and Huntberger outline in their chapter: The US chose to use the IBOC (In-Band, On-Channel) which works alongside the existing infrastructure. DAB was new from the ground up.

When BBC radio threw the switch on its first national DAB service in 1995, the then Managing Director of Radio, Liz Forgan, hailed it as a new dawn for radio and comparisons were made with the introduction of the compact disc. Market research projected that 50 million new DAB radio sets would be purchased over the following ten years. Alas, this never happened and the book explains why. Even as DAB went to air, it was already technically outdated. As O'Neill and Shaw write: 'The quest was never to find the best or most innovative neutral digital radio solution – it was, by the very nature of who framed the question, to find the best and most innovative digital radio solution which would serve the needs of the status quo – in this case the concept of European unity and ideology as led by the EBU and its network of public broadcasters' (p39).

O'Neill explains how, when DAB was being launched back in 1995, it was referred to as being 'CD quality' (when in fact it is MP2). This statement was to become DAB's Achilles heel as stations quickly reduced the bit rate to pack in more stations.

The book's focus is not solely on the technical aspects but also considers the wider cultural perspective with the analysis extending beyond the boundaries of Europe to include US and Canada. Shaw's chapter on 'The Online Transformation' is the book's most perceptive and reveals how the online and podcasting world are changing the consumption of radio's output. The standard linear schedule is broken down and time-shifting takes over. The iPod generation fillets the best bits of radio to be enjoyed as and when they want it. US broadcaster NPR is ahead of the curve as they synthesise what the web can offer and how people actually listen. There's a good discussion on where all this convergence is going to and a suggestion from Shaw that micropayments might be a way to cover the music rights that is the bane of all podcast producers – while listeners can now download the much loved Desert Island Discs, most of the music is removed 'for rights purposes'.

Reading this book gives one a solid grasp of what has been happening to make the oldest broadcast medium more fit for modern purpose. The editors may have had to include 'Europe' in the title to satisfy the funders, but it is actually a global perspective. There are inevitably small overlaps between some chapters. However, as most people will probably dip in and out of the book, this overlap is actually quite helpful. This is a 'must have' book for media students, radio researchers and lovers of radio alike.

Hallett even considers the challenges for community radio, offering useful context for assessing Rosemary Day's volume on the sector in Ireland. Part of the *EURICOM Monographs: Communicative Innovations and Democracy* series, Day's book is built upon original PhD research with longer-term observation and investigates six community radio stations spread across Ireland: DSCR, NEAR FM, WDAR (all in Dublin), CRY in Youghal, Co Cork, and CCR in Connemara.

Community radio has been around in Ireland since 1989 and some of the stations examined in the book can trace their roots back to pirate radio days. The author sets out to analyse how the six broadcasters compare against the concepts of community and its construction through communication; the role and meaning of public participation; and how they succeed, or not, in relation to the creation of 'multiflows' of communication.

The book establishes exactly what the community radio ideal actually is. Fundamental to the community media concept are participation by all, shared-ownership and above all, Day suggests, community building. Unlike public service and commercial stations, which are subject to the publication of quarterly listenership figures, community stations are not required to have any any objective quantitative measurement system to establish who's listening and when. Day argues that such measures miss the point of community radio (p.180).

Day's previous book on community radio was a collection of the experiences of the programme makers in their own words (Day, 2007). This text is clearly concerned with the meaning of community and it is extremely helpful that the sometimes ambigious term 'community' is explored in depth.

Reading the book gives one a true picture of how stations manage to empower marginalised groups. Moreover, in successful stations, the focus is on community building exercises over programming with high production values. Day makes no evaluating reference to the programming content of the stations. Many listeners tune in and never fully understand the concept behind the programming. Perhaps just the

sound of local voices is enough to entice them. The author suggests the stations could draw from a wider range of economic and social backgrounds to avoid sounding too focused on the maginalised and disavantaged (p.71). The final chapter proposes an interesting framework against which the community radio stations can evaluate their own performance.

The author, who has a pedigree of involvement in the medium, has raised the bar in terms of establishing a theory to underpin the practice of community radio. The book illuminates how community radio can contribute to the democratic process and help build a pluralist society (p94). Although it is US-published, with the recent escalation of academic interest in Britain and the proliferation of community stations going on air, this text will be a welcome addition closer to home.

### References

Day, R. (ed.) (2007), *Bicycle highway: Celebrating community radio in Ireland*, Liffey Press, Dublin.

### REVIEWER

Pat Hannon is a lecturer in the School of Media at Dublin Institute of Technology.

## Paschal Preston, *Making the News: journalism and news cultures in contemporary Europe*

Oxon: Routledge, 2009. 185pp, £21.99 ISBN 978-0-415-46189-4

Nora French

A recent OECD report (2010) on the newspaper industry and the internet has shown a decline in revenue generated by newspaper publishers in the years 2007-2009 in most of its member countries, but the level of decline varies significantly - from a drop of 21 per cent and 20 per cent in the US and UK respectively to 2 per cent and 3 per cent in Austria and Australia. European countries figure at high, mid and low positions on the scale of the industry's decline, and therefore studies that focus on Europe – as this book does – have much to offer in understanding the trends of the industry as a whole.

Preston starts from the point of view that journalism is in flux; its dominant Anglo-Saxon model challenged. It seeks to provide a transEuropean perspective on the changing journalism landscape. It is based on an EU supported research project, 'Media and Ethics of the European Public Sphere from the Treaty of Rome to the "War on Terror"' (the 'eMEDIATE' project), of which Preston was coordinator. Two other members of the project team, Monika Metykove and Jacques Guyot, contribute in a more minor way to the publication. Primary research – involving interviews with senior European journalists – informs the book, which is a rich,

theoretically informed account of trends and issues in journalism and newsmaking in Europe in the early part of the twenty-first century.

The introductory first chapter offers a comprehensive rationale for the remainder of the book. Emphasis is placed on the multi-dimensional approach of the theoretical framework, using concepts taken from five main research perspectives used in journalism research, i.e. those based around: individual influences – the journalists themselves; media industry routines – institutional practices and norms; organisational influences; political economy factors – broader, macro-level influences; and finally, 'the cultural air we breathe' – cultural, ideological or symbolic power.

A second feature is Preston's approach to the implications of new technologies for the media. This involves his looking at commonalities and differences between old and new media formats and balancing techno-centric and information society approaches. It is no surprise that this is a central issue given the author's long-term research interest in communication technologies; the socio-economic and cultural aspects of such technologies; and the information society.

*Making the News* is distinguished by its cross-national nature. It uses literature and research sources from a variety of European countries, which is rare and which confronts the researcher with 'many major practical, epistemological and value-laden challenges' (p. 5).

The book is informed by a cross-national research study mainly based on in-depth interviews with 95 senior journalists from 11 different European countries. The research aims not only to identify general trends in journalism culture or cultures across the continent, but also to tackle the vexed question of whether an EU public sphere has come into being, especially as regards the reporting of issues related to the EU itself.

The second chapter gives an outline historical perspective on journalism in Europe – interestingly starting with the Roman Empire rather than with Gutenberg. Chapters 3 to 7 provide the core of the book, focusing on influences on the individual journalist and on media routines and practices (chapter 3); and institutional, organisational, political-economic and cultural factors (chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7). Chapter 8 considers audiences, while chapter 9 examines whether a European journalism culture and a European public sphere are emerging – finding little evidence that this is so.

The concluding chapter summarises the findings relating to key trends and issues in journalism and discusses how journalism needs to change. The commercial imperative rather than technology is seen as responsible for the current trends in news content and in employment conditions for journalists. Calls are made for a renewal of journalists' commitment to serving the public interest, and at institutional level, a focus on the critical issue of resources. The book argues that this includes the need for new political and wider economic policies and regulations and concludes by advocating for the regulation of the media as it has now become a power in itself.

The book provides an unusually rich and in-depth account of the current state of journalism, one which comes from its focus on the continuities and changes in newsmaking. It eschews a focus on isolated, individual issues in favour of analysis of long-term trends and large-scale innovations in the industry.

It is particularly strong on the technological dimension. It reflects the author's rejection of technological determinism, instead placing social, political, economic and

cultural influences at the heart of changes in journalism. This can be seen, for example, in his account of the historic development of journalism, which is traced back to the information gathering carried out for the needs of the Roman Empire, and continued and developed by the church and, in early modern times, the state of Venice, before the development of Gutenberg's printing press.

Unsurprisingly, given the theoretical frame adopted, the stronger sections of the book are chapters 3 to 7, which deal with the different layers of influence on making the news. The chapters on audiences and on European news culture do not tie in with the same approach and appear somewhat detached from the main argument of the book.

The chapter on audiences is written by Metykova rather than Preston, which may explain its lack of integration. Her statement that audiences underlie all sections of the book and that the public is the 'god' of journalism is not evident to the reader. The general tendency of journalists to distrust audience research is reiterated here, with Metykova providing interesting comparisons between the different experiences in Eastern and Western Europe, both of which have led to audience research being seen as delivering audiences to commercial interests rather than seeing it as necessary if journalism is to work in the public interest.

The chapter on journalism in Europe provides a useful summary of the current status of journalism within the EU and the persistent difficulty the EU has in communicating effectively with its citizens through the media. Theoretically, this topic is justified as exemplifying the globalisation of journalism. However, it could have been tied in with the five explanatory perspectives of the author's main argument by focusing on the influences of industrial routines, and the organisational, institutional, political and cultural factors at play in the reporting of Europe – see for example, Statham (2007).

Others have been more optimistic in finding an increased European dimension to reporting – an emerging European public sphere not acknowledged here (Pfetsch et al., 2008; Gleissner et al., 2005).

The book is based on making the news, indeed, the term 'newsmaking' is used frequently in place of 'journalism'. Such an approach has led to emphasis on the influences examined most closely by Preston – those related to the production of the news, whether at the level of the individual, the media organisation or larger corporation of which it is part, as well as the wider political, economic and cultural contexts in which journalists operate. There is no engagement with the readers, listeners or viewers.

In contrast, in calling for the renewal of journalism in his conclusion, the author first recommends a recommitment to serving the public interest, arguing that individual journalists should orient themselves towards the public. A focus on providing news rather than making it, in other words, where the purpose of newsmaking – to inform the public, to contribute to citizen engagement – is brought to the fore – would shift the orientation in the direction which Preston advocates. News provision, news dissemination, and news consumption can be added to newsmaking in this approach where the audience, in Metykova's words, would become 'the god term of journalism'.

Since Preston and his colleagues carried out their research, the severe global economic crisis has weakened the dominance of the liberal economic policies and neo-

conservatism which had led to the over-commercialism of journalism, the commodi-fication of the news and the diminution of the professional autonomy of journalists along with other professionals. The current situation provides a more opportune con-text than Preston could have foreseen to rebuild a journalism better suited to serve the needs of society as a whole. The failure of journalism to investigate economic power as closely as political power is seen to have been a factor leading to the cur-rent financial and fiscal problems. Its renewal, driven by public rather than private or commercial interests, is one of the changes needed to safeguard against their reoc-currence.

## References

Gleissner, M. and C.H. de Vreese (2005), 'News about the EU Constitution: challenges and media portrayal of the European Union Constitution', *Journalism*, 6 (2): 221–242.

OECD (2010), Working Party on the Information Economy, *The Evolution of News and the Internet*, June 2010 Paris: OECD.

Pfetsch, B, S. Adam and B. Eschner (2008), 'The Contribution of the Press to Europeanization of Public Debates: a comparative study of issue salience and conflict lines of European Integration', *Journalism*, 9 (4): 256–492.

Statham, P. (2007) 'Journalists as Commentators on European Politics: educators, partisans or ideologues?' *European Journal of Communication*, 22 (4): 461–477.

## REVIEWER

Dr. Nora French, Head of School of Media, Dublin Institute of Technology.

# Christopher Morash, *A History of the Media in Ireland*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010. 244 pp. ISBN 978-0-521-84392-8 (hbk). No price stated.

## John Horgan

There are huge problems attending an enterprise of this kind. Summarising the key developments of more than 450 years in a field as complex as media – let alone analysing them, evaluating them, or relating them to each other or to historiography in general – demands a breadth of knowledge and a grasp of detail that is granted to few mortals. To attempt it in fewer than 250 pages is high-wire stuff.

That Christopher Morash has succeeded to the extent that he does is attributable to a number of factors evidenced in the book itself. One is the sheer volume of old-fashioned, painstaking, academic leg-work he has put into it. There is hardly a page in the book that will not send the interested reader scurrying off in search of more detail from his sources. Thomas Davis's critique of the British action in Afghanistan (p. 82) has an astonishingly contemporary ring, enhanced when you consult the orig-inal in full. His sketches of the development of the railways, of the postal systems,

the telephone system, and of other aspects of media-related communications technology are deft, well-referenced and persuasive, even as he takes a firm stand against technological determinism and the idea that culture is overly dependent on technology (p. 4). Its general readability is enhanced by spiky, provocative but well-argued mini-theses, such as his analysis of the 1916 Rising as, in part, a 'media event' (p.127), which has echoes of Baudrillard.

Inevitably, there is a Procrustean aspect to the way in which he has distributed his evidence across a framework that combines cultural theory and 'mapping', elements of post-modernism, the Habermasian concept of the public sphere, and a number of other ingredients, and occasionally the evidence does not fit quite as neatly as he would wish it to. His assertion that the mediatisation of the Great Famine was significant (p.79), while buttressed by references to previous, unreported famines, does not address the problematic issue of why later famines (e.g. 1879) were not similarly mediatised (except in the *Freeman's Journal*). His analysis of the growth and development of the nationalist regional press in late nineteenth century is well-illustrated, but there is – for this reader at least – a significant lacuna: the absence of any substantial treatment of the Unionist regional press south of what became the border with Northern Ireland, particularly as it existed in the larger urban centres and the garrison towns.

That said, this work is book-ended and thematised by two concepts which, although they do not and cannot explain everything, go a fair distance towards offering us a really useful and innovative lens through which to inspect the many and varied phenomena he brings to our attention. One is globalisation; the other is the concept of Ireland as an 'imagined space' (p. 4) in which newspapers like *The Nation* were able to 'give the idea of nationality the tangible form of a unified informational territory' (p. 82), which was 'waiting to be shaped by the right combination of printed words' (p. 119), and in which Ireland can be imagined 'as the confluence of information flows, as the nodal point around which books, newspapers, signal, sounds and images circulate' (p. 226).

Although these two concepts are, in Morash's work, interdependent, the globalisation one tends to work better as an explicator of what happened, why it happened, and how it happened. The particular strength of its application here is that it doesn't regard globalisation as something that began to happen the day before yesterday, if not even more recently, but traces its antecedents, in the field of media generally as well as in relation to media in Ireland, back through the centuries in a way that illuminates the contributions of media to globalisation and the contributions of globalisation to the development of media.

There is a sub-theme here that is touched on intermittently rather than explored. This is the role – and fate – of the Irish language. As he points out, the absence of a printed literature in Irish was significant: in the eighteenth century there were only 30 books in Irish in print (p. 42). And yet the fact that eight of these 30 titles were Bibles is an intriguing pointer to another aspect of our media history which has not received substantial treatment anywhere. This is the contrast between the enhanced survival of another Celtic language ostensibly much more vulnerable to the English overlordship than Irish – Welsh – because of its intensely important role in religion and worship in 19th century Wales, and the supine, acquiescent, and facilitatory attitude to English adopted (with some honourable and unsuccessful exceptions) by the

19<sup>th</sup> century authorities of the university of which Christopher Morash is currently such an adornment, and by the Irish Catholic Church generally in the same era. There is scope for a very useful PhD here, to say the least.

Indeed, the links between language, culture, and the conceptualisation of national identity are tantalisingly hinted at, in terms which also have a distinctly contemporary ring, in James Arbuckle's complaint in the first issue of the Dublin Weekly Journal in 1725 (p. 44):

> If a good piece happens at any Time to be wrote among ourselves, there is scarce One in Ten will vouchsafe it a Reading, unless it be made Authentick by being Printed in London. Thus, our Brains being Manufactured Abroad, become an Expence to the Nation: and we are forced to make a purchase of our own Wit and Learning, which hereby are made hurtful to the Native Soil.

If the concept of Ireland as an "imagined space" is more problematic as an analytical tool, it is less because of the fluency and persuasiveness with which Morash utilises it than because of the inevitable definitional difficulties involved. There is always the risk that, like the bemused courtiers in *Hamlet*, who tried to humour the testy prince of Denmark by varying their descriptions of a cloud (it was, they averred, "backed like a weasel", or "very like a whale"), anyone who uses it will endow it with a flexibility that ends up impairing its potency.

Morash does a fine job, however, of giving it as much specificity as, I think, it can bear, and in the process forces us to re-examine not only two-dimensional approaches to historiography and the development of media, but the traditional (and still useful) tension between agency and structure as explanations, and occasionally determinants, of human behavior. In all of this, too, his insights into technology and its role are a fascinating and often useful adjunct to his concept of the imagined space. The book itself is such a miracle of compression that there are starting points for potential PhDs on almost every other page.

There are glitches here and there, but drawing detailed attention to them in a review would be unfair and petty in the face of such research, such adventurous treatment of themes and concepts, and such a passionate dedication to explication, illumination, and to the fascinating, complex history of media in Ireland. In a world bedevilled by reductionist, simplistic and axe-grinding hypotheses about media, this is a valuable, scholarly, highly readable, challenging and deeply thoughtful exploration of the many and subtle ways in which media are both constitutive of, and shaped by, the human context in which they manifest themselves.

**REVIEWER**

John Horgan, Emeritus Professor, School of Communications, DCU, Press Ombudsman.