

Registration form

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1b. Title of research proposal

Reporting at the boundaries of the public sphere
Form, Style and Strategy of European Journalism, 1880-2005

1c. Summary of research proposal

This research project aims to study (a) the transformation of European journalism through the categories of form and style, and (b) transformations in the public sphere which accompanied this development. It will result in (1) two PhD theses on forms of reporting, the interview and the reportage, which contested the boundaries of the public sphere, and (2) a synthesizing study on the development of European journalistic styles and their contribution to the enlargement of the public sphere.

The study of the transformation of journalistic forms and styles is a new field of study. It uses a comparative approach to examine the development of journalistic practices, routines and conventions in their cultural, political and economic context. By doing so it tries to reveal the ideological framework of journalism at a certain time and place, i.e. the underlying processes which determine which issues are public and which are not.

Journalism is a performative discourse which by the choice of forms and stylistic devices aims to impose and legitimise valid representations of the social world. Journalistic texts should be understood as strategic interpretations of reality which create meaning. Both the interview and the reportage were 'invented' in a process of professionalisation since the 1880s to gain (a) professional authority and (b) autonomy towards politicians and other public figures. As both genres and discursive practices they embody the ideological framework of the 'new', non-partisan journalism.

Newspapers will be studied from countries which are representative for the three European media systems distinguished by Hallin and Mancini (2004), i.e. Great Britain, the Netherlands and France. This comparison can elucidate institutional and cultural differences which influence the pace and character of journalistic change. This project benefits from history, literary sciences and communication studies by combining content analysis and stylistic analysis of journalistic texts with historical research into their contexts.

Keywords:

Journalism History, Form and Style, Public Sphere, Journalism Culture, Political Culture

Research proposal

2. Description of the proposed research (3994 words)

2a. Research topic

This research programme is based on the presupposition that the history of journalism since the 1880s should be studied as a history of continuous contestation over the boundaries between the public and the private sphere.¹ In the time span of the proposed project the public sphere seems to have gradually increased in size. Throughout the long twentieth century contemporary commentators complain about journalism, about the extensive exposition of private matters in public, and about popularisation and entertainment taking the place of public debate. The questions how and why journalism developed new and subversive forms and styles to represent the social world and how the boundaries of the public sphere have become blurred underlie this project.

Studying this struggle over the right to represent social issues can provide important insights into the functioning and development of journalism, and in transformations in the public sphere as well. It is analytically challenging to focus on the boundaries of the public sphere because by doing so the formation of power can be made visible. These boundaries are always in flux; they are contested, defended and negotiated since transferring private issues to the public sphere where they become object of debate and opinion formation is a necessary step which precedes social and political change. In other words, issues first have to be recognised as relevant before they can be taken up in the political realm.

The power of the media rests on their ability to represent the social world to a broader public; which subjects are discussed in public, how are they discussed and with which goals and effects? Journalists are important actors in the public sphere because mass media connect the political realm with civic society; they facilitate the exchange of information and the expression of opinions which are crucial to address and solve issues of general interest. This implies that journalistic texts should be understood as strategic interpretations of reality which create meaning. Journalism is a performative discourse that aims to impose and legitimise valid representations of the social world.

However, journalists do not act autonomously. Other actors – e.g. political parties and politicians, general interest groups, religious communities and social movements – also want to gain control over public debate. Journalism operates in political, sociocultural and economic contexts – which differ historically and cross-nationally – and under severe pressure from other actors in the public sphere. Journalism in some periods has joined together with other actors in the public sphere to gain authority (for example political parties), while in other periods it strives for autonomy. In addition, its acting is restricted by broader moral and cultural codes which determine what is acceptable to print.

The second presupposition which underlies this research project is that forms and styles of journalism are fruitful analytical categories to study the development of journalism in relation to its functioning in the public sphere. In this project the years 1880-1920 are considered a transitional period holding the seeds of a paradigmatic change in European journalism. In the years after the 1880s, in most countries a mass press came into being. It responded to the needs of the emerging 'democratic market society' and adapted to its

¹ Habermas's concept of the public sphere, which he first formulated in his *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, and reformulated in his *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns* and *Faktizität und Geltung*, has been criticised extensively (for a good overview, see Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the public sphere*). While many of the historical and political-theoretical points of criticism are valid, the concept of the public sphere *an sich* still offers an inspiring conceptual device and cohesive theoretical framework.

logic.²

During the twentieth century journalism developed from a mainly partisan institution into an independent profession which emphasized its task as the fourth branch of government. I suggest that this ideological transformation of journalism expressed itself in stylistic changes and the 'invention' of new journalistic forms. The continental reflective style lost ground to the Anglo-American news style. This style aimed to blur the boundaries of the public sphere to reach a more autonomous position in society and to fulfil consumers' needs as well. Scoops and disclosures 'sold', while they also strengthened journalism's reputation as an independent social force. By examining journalistic styles and forms, the strategies journalists used to accomplish these goals can be revealed.

International comparative research – as is proposed in this project – is necessary to understand this development of journalistic practices, conventions and routines in their broader context. Thus far this has virtually been ignored. However, the results from an international conference the applicant organised in Groningen and a follow-up conference in Hobart, Australia show that this approach provides important new insights.³ Systematic research can stress the national and cultural peculiarities of journalism and explain national differences in European journalism.

This analysis will be rooted in the model of the three media systems distinguished by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini. They categorised countries according to the character of their political systems and cultures, the development of their media landscapes and the level of professionalisation of journalism.⁴ The countries selected for this project, Great Britain, France and the Netherlands, correspond to these media systems. Thus a representative study of European journalism is assured.

Form and Style in Journalism

Form and style have not yet received the attention they deserve in media history. Scholarly research has for a long time focused on the institutional framework of the press: its organisational, political, technological and economic aspects. This research laid the empirical foundation which made a shift to a broader, cultural framework possible. In recent decades the focus of study has moved to journalism practices, conventions and routines. The emergence of journalism as a profession has been studied in various national contexts.

Research into the categories of form and style along the lines I suggest takes a necessary next step. It studies the structure of journalism by focusing on journalistic texts and the process of representation. Not only the particular content of a news item is of importance, but also the news item itself: how it is structured and written, how it is presented to readers, how it fits into larger thematic discourses. This is important because while the content of news changes every day, form and style ensure the ritual function of news.⁵ As Michael Schudson has put it: 'the power of media lies not only (and not even primarily) in its power to declare things to be true, but in its power to provide the forms in which the declarations appear'. Form and style are essential to make people believe that a newspaper's representation of the social world is valid.⁶

² Schudson, *Discovering the news*. The spread of literacy and technological innovations in newsprint production, printing and distribution created profitable conditions, while governments removed legal and financial impediments. The growth of democracy, urbanisation and the rise of a consumer society increased the demand for news.

³ The contributions to the conference in Groningen (2/3 June 2005) are collected in Broersma, *Form and Style in Journalism*; Cf. my keynote lecture, 'Investigating form and style in journalism', at the conference in Hobart (14/15 December, 2006) and Høyer and Pottker eds., *Diffusion of the News Paradigm*.

⁴ Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*.

⁵ Broersma, 'Form, Style and Journalistic Strategies'.

⁶ Schudson, *The Power of News*, p. 54.

Studying the emergence and historical development of conventions of form and style deepens our understanding of how journalism works. In this project newspapers will be studied as cultural forms which embody social codes about acceptable modes for representing social reality. The process of gathering, selecting and presenting news is in most cases based on unnoticed and unquestioned conventions and professional routines. Firstly, these principles and practices determine which parts of reality are represented; which facts fit the form. Secondly, the form chosen determines how news is framed; the same facts can be used to construct different stories. Conventions of form and style determine which stories are told and how they are told, and by doing so they determine how we experience the world. Schudson speaks in this respect of the politics of narrative form.

The study of forms and styles stresses how societies are shaped by representations of social reality in the public sphere through journalistic media. It shows how newspapers work as 'social maps', how they construct meaning, how they articulate social worlds and how they build communities. Professional conventions and routines, and the articles which follow from them, reflect the cultural and ideological values of a society at a given moment. If we want to understand media and the 'logic' of the public sphere, we have to examine the forms and styles of journalism. By doing so media history links up with the 'cultural turn' in the humanities; in political studies and history, for example, nowadays not only institutions and political contents are being studied, but also the style and performance of politicians.⁸

In addition, the categories of form and style make systematic international comparative research possible. The content of news items is bound to their national context, but forms and styles refer to accepted and widely used news conventions and routines, and to broader cultural discourses. They tend to travel internationally. This process of cultural diffusion reveals the way journalistic conventions and routines are influenced by the culture in which they function.

Style refers to practices and the routines which underlie them. It is to a large extent not a personal quality of an individual journalist; through education and socialisation in the newsroom journalists relate to shared sets of rules (or cultural values) which structure their stories. Routines determine what journalism is and what it should be to a specific group. What is included and excluded from stories is to a large extent determined by routines; they provide the ideological framework which lies behind the process of gathering, selecting and presenting news.

To present information journalists need form. Form refers to conventions at the level of texts, illustrations and typographical elements. It is 'everything a newspaper does to present the look of the news'.⁹ Studying journalistic forms at the levels of conventions of structure, design and genre provides a window on the ideological framework of journalism. Choices concerning design, the structure and length of news items, and the use of rhetorical devices articulate a newspaper's style. They express how a newspaper wants to be seen and how it wants its readers to experience social reality.

Genres are textual forms, or patterns, which organise a story and articulate a journalistic style. They structure the reception of news; they represent an unspoken agreement between the journalist and his readers about what to expect and about what is acceptable, and they make it possible to interpret texts as they are meant to be.

⁸ Carey, 'The Problem of Journalism History'; Corner and Pels, eds., *Media and the Restyling of Politics*; Nash, 'The 'Cultural Turn''; Pels and Te Velde, eds., *Politieke stijl*; Te Velde, *Stijlen van leiderschap*.

⁹ Barnhurst and Nerone, *The form of news*, p. 3.

Genres embody conventions which influence what is included and excluded in a story. Picking a genre implies a choice about the way in which a subject is represented in the newspaper.

The introduction and use of new genres is mainly a cultural and ideological process in which journalists try to grasp reality and gain autonomy. The two PhD projects will focus on the interview and the reportage and the routines and practices which are related to both genres. These genres have been chosen because they pre-eminently operate at the boundaries of the public sphere. Both presuppose an active and professional journalist who wants to make public facts which until then belonged to the private domain. In this respect they embody the transformation of journalism since the 1880s.

A classification of styles

This research project builds on a classification of styles the applicant developed earlier and that has to be further verified empirically.¹⁰ It aims to overcome the teleological perspective which dominates media history. In this vision the development of journalism and the press is predetermined by pre-eminently Anglo-American notions like press freedom, objectivity, impartiality, and the distinction between facts and fiction. This has prevented serious analysis of other styles and forms (since in this approach they do not belong to the domain of *journalism*). Too often they are interpreted as just a necessary stage in the development of journalism as a profession, as a step to 'modernisation'.

In the proposed model the media landscape is considered a dynamic field of relations. Currently three styles are distinguished, which can exist alongside each other in a single country – and at some transitional moments even in one medium – though usually one of them will dominate at a certain time in history. Each style uses specific forms to position itself. By relating styles to the three ideological models for journalism introduced by Schudson, it is possible to analyse specific articles according to the discursive strategies they use.¹¹

- The reflective style has its roots in partisan journalism. Until the Second World War most European newspapers wanted to educate, instruct and persuade readers to certain political or sociocultural views, and considered news of less importance. This style was first and foremost discursive. It centred around opinions and analysis.
- The news style centred around facts. It arose in the United States in the 1830s and was market oriented. News value instead of political bias became the basis of selection, while objectivity became the moral norm.¹² The news style can be used in two models:
 - o The story model primarily has a narrative character. Newspapers want to create 'satisfying aesthetic experiences' for readers; they try to fulfil their needs. They tend to use an involving style (often labelled as sensational) that appeals to readers' emotions.
 - o The information model embodies the professional ideology which is dominant in journalism nowadays. Papers want to transmit information and favour the rational ideals of objectivity, balance, fairness and neutrality. Journalists consider themselves professionals who supply news that they consider important for civic participation. They use a restrained and detached style that appeals to the readers' minds.

¹⁰ This classification of styles is described in detail in Broersma, 'Form, Style and Journalistic Strategies'. It was discussed at a conference on Form and Style in Journalism in Hobart and at a conference on the Mediatization of Politics in Groningen. Cf. Broersma, *Botsende stijlen*.

¹¹ Schudson, 'What public journalism knows'.

¹² Høyer and Pottker eds., *Diffusion of the News Paradigm*, pp. 9-16.

In the twentieth century the news style spread around Europe. This research project traces this diffusion and the adaptation, moderation and transformation of the new practices, routines and conventions until 2005, while the intertwinement between the three styles will be stressed. Great Britain (North Atlantic or liberal model) was in between the American and the continental traditions. It took the lead in the adaptation of the news style. Journalism in the Netherlands (North European or democratic corporatist model) was highly partisan – or ‘pillarised’ –, while French journalism (Mediterranean or polarised pluralist model) reflects the entwinement of the political, literary and journalistic fields in this country.

2b/c. Approach and Innovation

This project explores a new field of study in media history. It uses a longitudinal examination of texts in their contexts to study transformations in journalism and the public sphere through the categories of form and style. This can shed light on the ideological framework of journalism at a certain time and place, i.e. the underlying processes which determine which issues are ‘public’ and discussed in the public sphere, and which subjects are not. The international comparative approach can elucidate the influence of national contexts and different media systems on these transformations.

Newspapers have been chosen as primary sources for three reasons.¹³ 1) In a longitudinal perspective the newspaper can be considered the most influential medium in the public sphere. 2) It is the only news medium that covers the complete period. 3) Newspapers are a relatively accessible source.

However, other media (radio, television, magazines, websites) have undisputedly influenced journalistic forms and styles. This project will examine the interaction between media through scholarly literature and through the analysis of autobiographies of journalists and contemporary debates. Some case studies might be performed on very innovative journalists, media or R/TV programmes which particularly influenced the form and style of reporting.

Content analysis and collective database

Media history has not paid much attention to journalistic texts; this was left to the social sciences and linguistics. Recently, media historians have begun to incorporate the systematic analysis of media content into their research. My thesis on the history of the *Leeuwarder Courant* has shown that this can lead to new insights.¹⁴ Content analysis and textual analysis can broaden the empirical basis of media history, which too often lacks systematic analysis of newspaper content.

The backbone of this research project will be a content analysis of three newspapers in each country. These papers each represent one of the three styles which are distinguished. The participating researchers will collect data which will be stored in a collective database. The different projects can come to specific conclusions based on these data.

Obviously, sampling is necessary. Every ten years a representative sample of two constructed weeks will be examined for each newspaper.¹⁵ In the quantitative analysis certain variables which determine the form of news (like the amount of space devoted to an article, genre, topic, illustrations, etc.) will be measured and stored in the database. The qualitative analysis will consist of extensive study of the sample texts and other

¹³ Note that content analysis of audiovisual media and the internet requires a different methodology and the results of these analyses would not be comparable to the results from the newspapers.

¹⁴ Broersma, *Beschaafde vooruitgang*. For the Netherlands, see also the current research projects by José de Kruif (UU; Vidi project) and Mariëtte Wolf (UvA; PhD project).

¹⁵ These two constructed weeks will consist of randomly selected days (two Mondays, two Tuesdays etc.) in 1880, 1890, 1900 etc. Riffe et al. concluded that this way of sampling is statistically the most adequate.

issues of the paper in the same year.

The study of form and style in journalism involves a fruitful intertwinement of research methods from the social sciences, from history and from literary sciences. It explores these approaches by putting texts in context. In my view, a text can be fully understood only with reference to a number of contexts that framed it; we must study how and why a news item is produced the way it is.

Therefore it should be stressed that content analysis and qualitative textual analysis will be combined with the traditional study of archives and historiography. After all, not only the final representations of social reality are being studied, but also the way they were brought about. Historical research of records and published material can explain the findings from textual analysis and place these in context.

Project 1 (PhD student)¹⁶
Interviewing in Great Britain, France and the Netherlands, 1880-2005

This project examines interviewing as a practice and the interview as a genre. It will:

(a) examine transformations in the nature of the interview between 1880 and 2005 by using content analysis. It will *inter alia* reveal which categories of people were interviewed – and were able to gain control over what was represented in the public sphere –, which subjects were the objects of discussion and the techniques journalists used to conduct and write up interviews.

The interview as a genre pre-eminently represents the attempts of journalists to blur the boundaries of the public sphere. In this struggle for power the journalist wants to reveal as many new facts as possible, facts that were private before. The interviewee wants to hide information or views which are not profitable to him. In the text readers can recognise the course of this struggle.¹⁷

(b) analyse the debates on this interviewing through historical research. A comparison between the three countries and an analysis within the framework of the selected styles can show which factors determine the use of the interview. In the twentieth century interviewing became the most important practice in journalism. However, since its introduction the interview has regularly been the subject of fierce debate. Because of its subversive nature it has been regarded as sensational and even indecent. This project analyses how journalists try to gain autonomy and authority through the interview, and how they use it to make their papers more attractive.

Project 2 (PhD student)
Reporting in Great Britain, France and the Netherlands, 1880-2005

This project studies reporting as a practice and the reportage as a genre. In the twentieth century journalists started to address subjects themselves and actively monitor power through investigative reporting. In reportages they made issues public which other social actors wanted to keep private. This project analyses:

(a) how journalists in different journalistic styles use narrative strategies to impose and legitimise their representations of the social world. Narrativity offers an 'underlying logic' which makes news understandable in specific cultural and social contexts. Studying reportages as narratives which represent an event, or action, can reveal cultural differences which influence journalism in the three media systems distinguished.

(b) the public debate on the right of journalists to shift the boundaries of the

¹⁶ The three books which will result from this project will be published in English.

¹⁷ Schudson, 'Question Authority', pp. 74-76; Broersma, 'The discursive strategy'.

¹⁹ Cf. Roggenkamp, *Narrating the news*; Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*.

public sphere by studying case studies on controversial and revealing investigative reportages. Which modes of reporting and narrating are considered acceptable in the common good?

This project will study the routines and forms which have been developed to facilitate and legitimise reporting. It will examine which rhetoric and stylistic devices (e.g. metaphors, synecdoche and personalisation) are used and with which purpose. It will link up to developments in the literary field which were closely connected to those in journalism. This project will therefore also benefit from research into narrativity, literary journalism and the history of literature.¹⁹

Project 3 (applicant)

Styles of Journalism. European newspapers and the boundaries of the public sphere, 1880-2005

This monograph will study the shift in European journalism from the reflective style to the news style. It aims to clarify how and why journalism developed new forms and styles to represent the social world. Furthermore, it wants to answer the question of how the national context of journalism influenced this shift and led to different adaptations of the news style in Great Britain, the Netherlands and France. The reportage and the interview are in this respect important genres; they will be contrasted with genres from the reflective style. The empirical data which result from the content analysis and historical research will be used to analyse this transformation.

The project examines the development of journalism into a separate field which wants to gain autonomy from the political and literary field by developing its own discourse. It will use Pierre Bourdieu's field theory.²⁰ This offers a challenging framework for studying journalistic texts in their context; journalism will be conceptualised as a field of relations, articles will be analysed according to the discursive strategies they use to reach specific goals, and journalistic texts and their reception will be taken into account.²¹

This way the questions of why and how journalism contributed to the enlargement of the public sphere can be answered. Presupposed is that the pursuit of journalistic autonomy is performed by contesting the boundaries of the public sphere, i.e. in a struggle about the right to publish (then still) private issues. Journalism here has to balance authority against popular appeal. The strategies it uses to win readers and also become respected will be researched; they might be important movers behind the enlargement of the public sphere.

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²⁰ Cf. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*; Bourdieu, 'The Political Field, the Social Science Field, and the Journalistic Field'.

²¹ Benson, Rodney, 'Field Theory in Comparative Context', p. 489.

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