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Review of Jutta Ernst, Dagmar von Hoff, and Oliver Scheiding, eds, *Periodical Studies Today: Multidisciplinary Analyses*

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Reviews

Jutta Ernst, Dagmar von Hoff, and Oliver Scheiding, eds, *Periodical Studies Today: Multidisciplinary Analyses* (Studies in Periodical Cultures, no. 1) (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022). 501 pp. ISBN 9789004468313

The volume under review announces the birth of a new series dedicated to periodical scholarship, which certainly is good news for the research field. Inaugurating ‘Studies in Periodical Cultures’ (Brill), edited by Jutta Ernst and Oliver Scheiding, *Periodical Studies Today* intends to outline the [series](#)’ general purpose, namely to offer ‘theoretical and methodological approaches to an interdisciplinary, transnational conception of periodical studies’. Among the recent efforts to transform Periodical Studies into a solid discipline, the volume presents a helpful contribution—even if its anthological structure might not be the best choice to systematize the field. Being aware of this problem, the editors, Jutta Ernst, Oliver Scheiding, and Dagmar von Hoff, claim that the categories used to structure the contributions are rather arguable. They want to give an overview of the current state of the research field and, therefore, inspire further attempts at systematization.

Bringing together seventeen contributions from various disciplines such as American, English, German, and Romance Studies, Media Studies, Animation Studies, History, and Journalism, *Periodical Studies Today* is the result of a conference held in Mainz (2017), organized by scholars partly affiliated with the newly established research group on Transnational Periodical Cultures (TPC). The volume not only gathers contributors from European research networks like Transfopress and the DFG group Journalliteratur, but also independent scholars and professionals, making it a convincing transdisciplinary and transnational enterprise.

The editors have clustered the contributions into seven sections. Each

section opens with a short introduction, explaining its main categories and linking them to the other sections. In the volume’s introduction, Ernst and Scheiding give a useful overview of the recent theoretical and methodological developments within the field and justify the volume’s structure. It is based on two major theoretical objectives: (1) understanding periodicals as socio-material entities in a ‘media ecology’ and (2) connecting the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century periodical focus with a perspective on contemporary magazines in order to create a ‘transepistemic’ approach to periodicals.

According to the first objective, periodicals should not be analysed as ‘autonomous objects’ but should be understood in terms of ‘sociomaterial textuality, that is, as net/networks that exist both inside and outside the medium’ (p. 1). This connection of the material object and its social environment is labelled as a ‘media ecology’—a key term in the volume. Strategically, it is used by the editors to invite researchers to use more ‘practical and analytical approaches to periodical forms in journalism and design studies, communication and media studies, consumer and materiality research, sociology, and other social sciences’ (p. 7). The difference between object features and social environments is reflected in the order of sections in the volume. While the first four sections (Seriality and Order, Materiality, Multimodality, Translation) offer an ‘inside’ focus on periodicals, the last three sections (Infrastructure and Agency, Community, Location and Transfer) address the ‘connections outside the printed body’ of periodicals (p. 2). However, such a structure is a bit counter-intuitive: contrary to the volume’s

major theoretical objective to understand periodicals as part of a wider media ecology, it divides what should be united. A future elaboration of this 'media ecology' might bring these different perspectives—inside and outside—closer together.

According to the second objective, the volume intends to broaden the research field, integrating contemporary magazines, especially independent magazines, more forcefully into the corpus of periodical studies. The editors complain about a 'heavy focus on nineteenth-century periodicals and modernist magazines' (p. 6) in current research. Even if the reviewer doubts this diagnosis, he is curious to learn more about the theoretical claim of a transepistemic analytical perspective linked to the argument: research on slow print media in the digital age, such as contemporary indie magazines, could help to understand former periodical cultures and ecologies differently. The newly established series offers the perfect platform for further research on this perspective.

The first section in *Periodical Studies Today*, 'Seriality and Order', presents a fundamental characteristic of periodicals, their 'follow-up promise' (p. 27). On the one hand, seriality is shaped by infrastructural conditions; on the other hand, seriality defines the material appearance of the medium as well as its reception and consumption. Thus, the two contributions in this section have a systematic character. While Gustav Frank and Madleen Podewski reach out for a general definition of periodicals based on seriality, Vincent Fröhlich points to the essential methodological challenge to analyse not only textual, but also visual seriality.

With courageous effort, Frank and Podewski try to define periodicals as *periodicals*. They find their definition within the theoretical framework of the history of knowledge, viewing periodicals as a peculiar mode of archiving knowledge which is situated between the 'newspaper mode' of notation and the 'bookish mode' of systematization (p. 29). For this reason, they are most interested in

the page layout of periodical series, what Podewski calls *Druckordnung*. However, the attempt to foster a 'robust' and coherent theory might be (mis)understood as exclusive, since it claims that neither the dimension of infrastructure and production, nor periodicals' embeddedness within 'networks of meaning' explain the 'overall system' of periodicals (p. 45). Furthermore, the claim that newspapers might not be proper 'periodicals' in this sense contradicts the volume's many contributions dedicated to newspapers. Understood as a controversial manifesto, Frank and Podewski's contribution could still help to enhance the discussion of how to conceptualize periodicals as a whole. Equally strong in theoretical claims, Fröhlich uses Ludwig Wittgenstein's term of family resemblance to develop analytical tools in order to understand visual seriality in periodicals, which, according to him, has not been sufficiently addressed so far. The concept of family resemblance, combined with concepts like 'porosity' (Luisa Calè) and the 'open form' (Margaret Beetham), might help to create adaptable and flexible tools for other objects.

In the section on 'Materiality' three contributions explore the importance of the material dimension of periodicals. In his introductory note, Scheiding distinguishes a material competence from a textual competence. Nicola Kaminski and Andreas Beck likewise reveal, in striking close readings, how textual and material (visual) signs are in tension with each other, indicating the displacement of texts or the limited value of programmatic utterances. With a surprising twist of perspective, Ellen Gruber Garvey shows how periodicals' material affordances are not only to be interpreted as such but can also be linked to historical practices, like compiling newspaper archives. Her comparison to digital databases deserves further research.

The following section, now explicitly focusing on 'Multimodality', refers to the second major aim of the volume, analysing contemporary and

independent magazines and their affective role. Sabina Fazli highlights the affective dimension of magazines, introducing Andreas Reckwitz's concept of an 'affect generator'. In contrast to 'digital media's hyper attention', contemporary magazines create highly affective practices of 'deep attention' to the physical and multimodal qualities of print media (p. 186). Accordingly, Wibke Weber and Hans-Martin Rall identify a recent turn in journalistic practice (and journalism studies) towards visual storytelling, which takes advantage of alternative layouts and content presentations. Abby Hohenstatt explores the creation of visual identity in indie magazines.

In the introduction to the section on 'Translation', Jutta Ernst emphasizes the importance of language for branding in contemporary magazine culture. However, the following two contributions treat historical subjects. A specialist in Translation Studies, Florian Freitag deepens our understanding of de- and recontextualization through the theoretical and methodological achievements of Periodical Studies. Iulia-Karin Patrut shows how transnational avant-garde magazines negotiate between cultural centres and peripheries. This section is hardly distinguishable from the final section in the volume, 'Location and Transfer', which questions the relation of periodicals to the 'outside', too.

The section on 'Infrastructure and Agency' seems like a fruitful import of Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory. Highlighting the 'sociomaterial relations and interactions' of periodicals (p. 307), the section defines distribution and production facilities as communication processes inside and outside the newsroom. Stability and change are the key terms used to analyse infrastructure. Exploring the archives of Germany's famous newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Maximilian Kutzner exposes communication processes between newsrooms and foreign institutions in order to explain publication decisions and the newspaper's reception. Oliver

Scheiding and Anja-Maria Bassimir use an original ethnographic approach to look inside the contemporary newsroom of a religious magazine, gathering information which would be hard to find in any archive. They especially show the ambiguous and sometimes conflicting character of editorial decisions within a highly complex 'media ecology', which is concerned both with economical and ideological success.

The section on 'Community' links back to a lot of subjects previously discussed (such as the periodical's affective dimension, its ways of creating a sense of belonging etc.), and balances the 'inside' and 'outside' perspectives developed in the introduction: communities produce periodicals and are produced by them. Anne-Julia Zwierlein focuses on the latter perspective, showing how penny fiction weeklies invited readers to participate. This created a sense of belonging to a bigger community which is conceptualized by analogy with public oral speeches. She contradicts the understanding of mass media readership as 'passive consumers, in the manner of the Frankfurt School' (p. 392), without further developing her argument. Clemens Spahr explicitly connects the two perspectives, showing that the foundation of a philosophical and literary magazine like the *Dial* (1840–44) catalyzed a dynamic process of networking. Even if this magazine was economically unsuccessful, Spahr shows how the major actors profited from the project and its established network and communities.

Opening with a focus on the temporal dimensions of periodicals, the volume closes with a turn to the periodical's spatial dimensions in 'Location and Transfer'. This section is not so much about the poetics of chronotope, but more about mobility and transfer of periodicals and their actors, seen in their role of transcultural mediators. This is a major research goal of the network Transfopress, represented by the two contributions by Anaïs Nagel and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink. Mark J. Noonan opens this last section with a stimulating contribution on

the topography of colonial New York's 'printscape' (p. 419). His suggestion to use the term printscape instead of print culture deserves further clarification. Deeply reflecting on her methodology, Anaïs Nagel focuses on cultural transfers in the Upper-Rhine press. Using a quantifying approach, she questions simplified interpretations of historical newspapers. Tracing the lives of two Franco-Canadian press entrepreneurs, Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink reapplies the concept of the 'cultural broker' (Mary Ann Jezewski and Paula Sotnik). He uses his case-studies to show how these cultural brokers had to negotiate between their ideological aims, local authorities, and readers with different ideologies. The need for negotiation led

to hybrid strategies, like simultaneously publishing Catholic songbooks and liberal-republican newspapers. The contributions of this section could indicate the direction towards an integrative approach, combining perspectives from social history, cultural studies, and print history with more surface- and material-oriented close readings.

All in all, *Periodical Studies Today* is a convincing first step on a journey inaugurated by this new book series on periodical research, opening up rich perspectives for further theoretical systematization.

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