

Preprint version of: Kulczycki, E. (2019). Writing a History of Communication Models: Modes of Historical Narrative. In M. Bergman, K. Kirtiklis, & J. Siebers (Eds), *Models of Communication* (pp. 97–112). Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315231402-7/writing-history-communication-models-emanuel-kulczycki>

Writing a History of Communication Models: Modes of Historical Narrative

Abstract: When communication scholars write the history of their field, they must decide which papers and concepts belong to this history. The present article examines some criteria that allow the making of such a decision. It also analyses the two ways of justifying the use of past ideas in communication history. The first is the strong version of presentism, which leads to the conclusion that past and contemporary thinkers have investigated the same communicative reality. The other is the weak version of presentism, which shows that communication historians have to re-contextualise past ideas in order to incorporate them into the history of communication. In this way, communication history is divided into two parts: an implicit part, which requires a re-contextualisation, and an explicit part, which does not need to be re-contextualised in the practice of writing communication history. An analysis of the two ways suggests that dividing communication history into two parts can bring about some clarification to the practices of writing history and can help avoid jumping from one perspective to another.

Keywords: Presentism, Communication History, Philosophical Realism, Communication History, Communication Studies

1. Introduction

The practice of writing communication history dates back centuries and it is evident for the majority of scholars that various past societies understood communication differently from those of today. During the development of communities, our languages, which we use for communication, reasoning and argumentation, change. Moreover, along with this evolution, we create new concepts that transform our worldviews and our understanding of the social world.

What is less obvious, looking at the generally accepted beliefs above, is that most of them are founded on the basis of unspoken assumptions. Historians of communication are very often unaware of the views that define the ways in which they write communication history and connect past and present understandings of communication. In other words, they do not perceive difficulties in combining, for example, Aristotle's work on rhetoric with Shannon's mathematical theory of information as part of the same communication history. Aristotle and Shannon did not use the same terms, concepts or even languages. Therefore, the research problem examined in this article is as follows: what assumptions are made in order to use past

ideas as part of communication history? Such assumptions have to be justified, as they shape the practice of writing any history.

The aim of the present paper is to bring clarification to our practices of writing communication history by examining how we justify the use of past ideas and connect them with contemporary concepts of communication.

Such a methodological question is important, especially when we write the history of communication models or, generally, the history of the field of communication studies. Various corresponding problems are typical for social sciences and the humanities in general, when scholars write histories of their disciplines. In *A New History of the Humanities*, Rens Bod cautions: “If we squeeze historical intellectual activities into a straightjacket of present-day expressions, we run the risk of descending into an undesirable kind of ‘presentism,’ in which the past is interpreted in terms of current concepts and perspectives” (Bod, 2013, p. 8). Thus, the revelation of assumptions that are accepted in communication history can help us avoid the type of presentism described by Bod. This task could be undertaken, for instance, by philosophers. As David L. Hull writes: “If the philosophical views that a historian holds have any influence on the history he writes, and I cannot see how such influence can be avoided, then philosophers have something to contribute to history” (Hull, 1979, p. 2).

It might be a truism to say that not every ancient or modern thinker wrote about communication. However, when writing the history of communication models, how can one decide whether to include Protagoras or Aristotle in one’s history and whether to disregard Thales or Heraclitus? There has to be some criteria that would justify this decision. Otherwise, communication history would just become the history of everything. Thus, the present article focuses on ontological and epistemological assumptions that determine the modes of historical narrative.

The argument in this article is divided into five sections. In Section 2, I show how communication history might be defined. In Section 3, I analyse the positions of strong and weak presentism as two ways of justifying the use of past ideas. In Section 4, implicit communication history and explicit communication history are presented as consequences of weak presentism. Finally, in Section 5, the conclusions as well as the usefulness of the findings are outlined.

2. What communication history is about

The starting point of our discussion should be a definition of “communication history.” However, before doing so, every scholar must assume some definition of *communication* and of

history itself. Otherwise, the discussion would never end because there would simply be a clash between the various mutually exclusive perspectives and approaches that function in communication studies.

The editors of *The Handbook of Communication History* (Craig, Simonson, Peck and Jackson, 2013, p.1) present such an operative definition and indicate two domains of communication history. The first domain includes: “ideas, practices and processes, institutions, materialities, and events of communicative expression, circulation, and exchange.” The other includes: “itself with the past study of all of those things – or, less obliquely, the history of the field of communication, its disciplinary subfields, and other sometimes articulating fields that have historically investigated communication in one form or another” (Craig et al., 2013, p.1). Communication history is not an old practice. The emergence of this academic field dates back to the 1970s. There are not many works investigating this practice in a metatheoretical way, i.e. how communication history is conducted and the assumptions on which it is founded. Among recently published works, the most important are *The Handbook of Communication History* (2013), two special issues of *Medien & Zeit* (3–4/2011) entitled “What is Communication History? European Answers”, and the book *Explorations in Communication and History*, edited by Barbie Zelizer (2008). There are also many other important articles, books and journals (e.g. *Media History*) investigating some methodological and theoretical problems of writing communication history (e.g. Crowley and Heyer, 2011; Scannell, 2011; Nerone, 2006; Jensen, 2002; Schudson, 1991; Delia, 1987; Stevens & Garcia, 1980). However, it is impossible to discuss all the important works here. To take just one example, the bibliography for the (online) *History of Communication Research* by Jeff Pooley includes over 2,000 papers. Therefore, in the present paper, I refer only to the various works that allow me to discuss the problem of historical narrative in the practice of writing the history of communication models.

The above-mentioned domains represent two main subfields of communication history. The first domain can be understood as the research subject of media history. The other domain can be understood as the research subject of the history of communication studies.

The first subfield, i.e. *media history*, constitutes part of communication history. Here, scholars investigate, for example, the history of the Polish press, the history of writing, the history of reading in cultural perspective and the history of ancient and modern rhetoric. Hence, we can say that *media history* is a very broad term that subsumes many historical subdisciplines and, in effect, one can perceive some scholars as communication historians, e.g. Harold Innis (2007), Jack Goody (2006) and Elizabeth Eisenstein (2005). Moreover, some may say that a medieval philosopher who wrote about the development of Greek rhetoric was also a communication historian.

The other subfield, i.e. *history of communication studies*, investigates the manner in which reflection on communication has developed and how new academic disciplines of communication and institutions have been established. There are many perspectives here (e.g. intellectual, institutional and biographical), which produce multilevel analyses of the past as well as the current state of communication studies. Löblich and Scheu (2011) show just how such a historiographic inquiry can enrich an understanding of our academic practices.

Contemporary communication scholars include among their precursors, for instance, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, who used words like “dialogue/conversation/debate” (gr. διάλογος), *ēthos* (gr. ἦθος), *pathos* (gr. πάθος) and *logos* (gr. λόγος) rather than “communication” (lat. *commūnicāre*). Nonetheless, the concept of communication has played a major role in political economy and sociology since the nineteenth century. In the first half of the twentieth century, there were crucial publications that alluded to *communication* as a central term and concept in the humanities and social sciences. As such, in the practice of writing communication history, we have to respond to the challenge of avoiding a ‘naïve presentism.’ In such an unwelcome version of presentism, past ideas from Plato or Aristotle are interpreted in terms of present communication studies and perspectives in which ‘communication’ is the key concept.

However, is it possible to completely avoid some kind of presentism and to understand the past on its own terms? There is no simple answer to this question and, as widespread studies in the methodology of history and metahistory show (Armitage, 2014; Oreskes, 2013; Moro Abadía, 2008), writing a history of human practices is a process of negotiating various concepts and perspectives. Although writing communication history faces various difficulties, there is an even more important question: how can we overcome them? In addressing this issue, scholars should bear in mind that the most important factor, which shapes the results of communication history, is the very purpose of writing.

3. Justification for using past ideas in communication history

The task of answering the question of “Why do we write communication history?” is very similar to the task of defining communication. There are many answers and it is impossible to find a common denominator for them all. However, the most often cited answer is that writing history and investigating the past illuminate the present and allow us to understand our own times.

Thus, adding the concept of communication can expand the theoretical tool bag we use in understanding the past.

Reading Plato's *Phaedrus* or Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as works on the communicative dimension of our practices and social world is very common (Ramsey & Miller, 2003; Peters, 2001; Kittler, 1999; Krippendorff, 1990). Dues and Brown (2001, p.17) write in *Boxing Plato's Shadow*: “ (...) communication study is a 2500-year-old endeavor, begun in ancient Athens by the sophists, who focused on the study of rhetoric.” However, only in a few works is there an explicit indication of how we should read these ancient texts. Jensen (2010) uses the term “re-actualizing” in his writing about Aristotle's ideas, re-contextualising them against current communication studies. Moreover, Jensen highlights that:

just as readings of past thinkers run the risk of exaggerating their present relevance, the reading may overdo the differences, sometimes in a self-assertive, agonistic fashion (...) In the case of communication with historical sources, it is in my interest to benefit from the unforeseen, even unforeseeable relevance of the classics' statements and arguments (2010, p. 22).

The editors of *The Handbook of Communication History* perceive this task in a similar manner: “ From our current conceptual horizons, we can retroactively redescribe these representations and preservations of speeches as species of communication history before its time” (Simonson et al., 2013, p. 16). Naturally, re-contextualising the works of ancient thinkers can be very fruitful and can illuminate our present theories. Craig and Muller (2007) write: “Understanding the idea of communication historically, we can come to see the taken-for-granted assumptions about communication of our own time in a different, more critical perspective” (2007, xiv). However, when we write the history of communication studies, the following problem occurs: can we label Aristotle a communication theorist; or rather, should we name him a precursor of communication theory? This is not a trivial issue, although it could look as such. Hull (1979) points out in “In the Defense of Presentism”:

I have heard historians complain of calling anyone a biologist prior to Lamarck's coining the term ‘biologie’ in 1802. I can see the point of not confusing the sort of thing which Aristotle did with the activities of a Lamarck, Darwin, or Pasteur, but I cannot see how refusing to term Aristotle a ‘biologist’ will help in the least. The gap between Pasteur and Lamarck is even greater than that between Lamarck and Aristotle. Current usage departs even more radically from Lamarck's original usage. To be sure, Darwin did not use the term ‘evolution’ in the *Origin of Species*. At the time it referred roughly to what we now call ontogenetic development. (...) If use of one's own language in writing about the past is presentism, then presentism is a necessary element in good historiography (p. 8).

Communication history is written in our own language, in our times. The key consequence of this statement is as follows: we need a translation to explain the world of the past – only then will the past illuminate the present. A translation is essential because concepts and ideas that are available to us are taken from our present and not from the past (Moro Abadía, 2008). Hull (1979) presents how such a translation of concepts can be achieved:

One way to overcome the difficulties introduced by the relativity of meaning is to use the closest contemporary term while warning the reader of the relevant differences. Another is to introduce the term actually used at the time but with an appropriate explanation (p. 9).

It means that we need a translation and that this need justifies some version of presentism in writing communication history.

Using past ideas in communication history could be regarded as a form of presentism, or simply a form of history, because this is an inevitable part of writing communication history. Bevir (2004) writes that “historians of ideas recreate historical objects from relics available to them in the present”; he then adds, “historians of ideas cannot justify their theories by reference to the procedures they adopt for arriving at them” (p. 124). Nonetheless, the justification of such a practice is based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of particular communication scholars. Therefore, it is possible to reconstruct the major ways of justifying the use of past ideas. What should be stressed is that these types of justifications are very often implicit and unspoken. However, such assumptions determine the practices of writing communication history and of re-contextualising past ideas.

In the present paper, I examine two major ways in which scholars justify the use of past ideas in communication history. I label them: 1) *strong presentism*, which justifies our practices mostly through ontological justification and 2) *weak presentism*, which justifies our practices mostly through epistemological justification. This suggests that when we write the history of communication, we are always somehow presentists. However, the key difference between these two versions of presentism depends on writing about assumptions on the mode of historical narrative. The strong version of presentism is mostly implicit while the weak one is very often explicitly stated as an approach to writing history. Nevertheless, in the actual practice of writing a communication history, it is very difficult to identify a ‘pure’ way of justification. Rather, both versions of presentism should be perceived as Max Weber’s *ideal type* (Burger, 1976) or Thomas Kuhn’s *exemplar* (Kuhn, 1996), which means that they are reconstructed modes of justification and very often interfuse. A classification of the ways in which scholars justify the use of past ideas could be made in many different ways because there are many

possible modes of historical narrative. For instance, one can assume that every presentism can be reduced to one mode and that its opposite is a narrative logic mode, as per Frank Ankersmit (1983). Moreover, there could be a 'middle' mode, e.g. Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics (2004). However, in the present paper, I discuss modes that are actually used in works on communication history.

3.2. Strong presentism

The first way of justifying the use of past ideas in writing communication history comes from the perspective of 'strong presentism.' Communication historians believe that they describe and investigate the *same* communicative reality, communication practices and the concept of communication as various past thinkers. This means that communication itself is a phenomenon independent of the inquiring observer. In such a perspective, researchers assume that although Shannon did not use the same language as Plato, they nevertheless described highly similar communication. One can say that it is typical of an objectivistic (and universalistic) worldview in which researchers assume that social facts are described and not constructed in the process of inquiry. Such was the ambition of the first of the modern historians, Leopold von Ranke (2011), who wrote that history has to present the past as it actually happened.

The key assumption, which establishes this way of *ontological justification*, is the objectivistic character of reality. Thus, the argument is based on *the nature of reality* and refers to the philosophical realism in which the research subject is investigated, not constructed. The possibility of using past ideas results from the structure of reality and the place of *communication* in this structure. Communication is one of many possible forms of relations between objects, i.e. people, machines, animals and others.

Most communication historians only implicitly assume such a perspective. For instance, Paul Starr (2004), in *The Creation of the Media*, or Michael Dues and Marry Brown (2001), in *Boxing Plato's Shadow*, write history without justifying their choices of the historical narrative. They do not explain their process of writing communication history through philosophical realism. In their opinion, they simply write communication history because it is possible and this possibility is determined by the nature of social reality.

The critique of the strong version of presentism, which is based on philosophical realism, has been ongoing for centuries, e.g. in the field of communication studies through the concept of social constructivism and communicative constructivism (Knoblauch, 2013). Based on such a perspective, communication itself may be perceived as an ahistorical phenomenon: the

media of communication (e.g. languages, terms, concepts or books) have changed but communication in the present is the same as in the past. Therefore, paradoxically, we can write communication history and use past ideas in spite of the fact that languages and concepts have changed. If the task of the historian is to describe, as accurately as possible, former states of the world, then they cannot abandon the question of how words relate to the world. There is no one simple answer to this issue. However, we must recall that a great part of our knowledge of the past rests on the interpretation of symbols. Moreover, following the linguistic turn in history, we should not forget the role of language in historical knowing.

Communication is often considered to have universal applicability. However, it might well turn out to be a term circumscribed by the specific conditions of contemporary Western societies. Simmel (1977) highlights that:

the task of enabling us to see the event 'as it really happened' is still naively imposed upon history. In opposition to this view, it is necessary to make clear that every form of knowledge represents a translation of immediately given data into a new language, a language with its own intrinsic forms, categories, and requirements (p. 77).

Stanford (1998) thus maintains that the historian's task is to convey to us, i.e. their contemporaries, the profound interpretations and understandings of what they have found.

3.3. Weak presentism

The second way of justifying the use of past ideas in writing communication history is from the perspective of a weak version of presentism. Strong presentism assumes that the past can be described and assessed in terms of present concepts and ideas (Moro Abadía, 2011). Weak presentism assumes that the past can be described and assessed in terms of present concepts and ideas only when we simultaneously re-actualise and re-contextualise past ideas. In weak presentism, scholars do not discover or describe the *actual past reality*; they construct some collective representations of such past realities and concepts.

The key assumption establishing this *epistemological justification* is the possibility of *translation* through a re-contextualisation of past ideas. Our social reality as well as our cognition of reality are shaped by the use of various terms and concepts. Therefore, if a language has changed, and if we use new concepts, then we have many worldviews to investigate. Thus, we need a translation not only between two languages (e.g. Plato's and Shannon's) but also between two worldviews: 1) that of Plato, in which there are no concepts of mind and information constituting the contemporary understanding of communication, and 2)

that of Shannon, which describes a process of communication without referring to the context that is external to communication.

In terms of weak presentism, this means that we use past ideas and situate Plato, Aristotle and Shannon in the same communication history, although we also assume that these thinkers investigated different social realities. We do this because we assume that:

1. Every reflection is based on tradition – we do not create new models, theories or concepts in a cultural vacuum. There is always a tradition in which we think, write and investigate. Thus, we assume that the tradition is some kind of *continuum* in which we think and write. As such, tradition is the precondition of writing any history.
2. Such a procedure is useful and enriches current communication studies. In this way, we add new interpretations and a broader context of understanding communication.

The role of weak presentism can be presented as a transformation of the question: ‘What assumptions do we need in order to use past ideas as part of communication theory?’ into the question: ‘How does using past ideas enrich current communication studies?’ Communication scholars use past ideas not because they have justified such a use but because it is useful for them. Craig and Muller (2007) point out:

The field of communication theory, considered as a tradition in its own right, is both quite new and very old. The term *communication theory* was not widely used until the 1940s, when it primarily referred to certain fields of electrical engineering that included information theory and cybernetics (...) Over time, several traditions of thought, such as rhetoric, which existed long before there was ever a field called communication theory, were incorporated into the field. Retrospectively, they came to be seen as traditions of communication theory, which is how the field came to include the multiple traditions that it now does (Craig & Muller, 2007, p. 1).

This methodological question has to do with choosing the mode of historical narration. If communication historians are self-aware, then they know that the difference between the strong and weak versions of presentism has crucial consequences for the final shape of the history that is written by them. Peters (2001), in *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*, justifies his choice of historical narration by referencing Walter Benjamin’s distinction between two modes of narration:

One mode he called historicism: it regarded history as preconstituted and given, a continuous chain of causes and effects existing in a homogeneous space-time continuum. The past waited demurely for the historian to conjure it up. The scholar needed only to call (with sufficient patience and rigour) and history would respond,

telling of things as they really were. The other mode – the one Benjamin preferred, as I do – saw in every act of historical narration a constructivist principle. The historian did not wait for the past to speak its fullness but was an activist who brought ages into alignment with each other (Peters, 2001, p. 3).

In light of Peters' considerations, one can say that strong presentism is the key assumption of *historicism*, while weak presentism is the key assumption in writing history through a *constructivist principle*. In short, Peters demonstrates two main modes of historical narration in the field of communication history. Conversely, the present article presents the grounding of these modes on ontological and epistemological levels.

The consequence of assuming the weak version of presentism is a necessity for re-contextualising the concepts, terms and ideas involved in writing communication history. Understanding past ideas is possible only through some translation. Naturally, a translation cannot be reduced only to the linguistic dimension; we obviously utilise different languages from past thinkers and those from other cultures. Siebers (2009) points out that:

long before the beginning of the European philosophical tradition, questions of communication were being discussed by philosophers, and the understanding of the nature and purpose of philosophical thinking itself has been influenced by developments in communicative cultures and forms of mediation (p. 6).

Thus, a translation must transfer the past or different conceptual framework into a conceptual framework that is contemporary and familiar to us. In this way, we transform meanings, ideas and concepts but in the same way, we can build a bridge between the past and the present. It is noteworthy that there is no point of reference that would allow us to verify whether we should re-contextualise the past or write a particular history from the beginning. While some meanings of words change, others remain the same. Therefore, we need diachronic studies that reveal which past word *anticipates* the meaning of a contemporary word. Such studies provide a good starting point for establishing the ground for the practice of writing communication history, thus suggesting that no one can say that we have re-contextualised some ideas in an appropriate manner. This is the greatest challenge of writing communication history in terms of the weak version of presentism.

4. Two parts of communication history as a consequence of presentism

The distinction between the two ways of justification has important consequences. If we agree that strong presentism could be an appropriate ground for communication history, then we can simply write the very history of communication. However, if we agree that our ontological and

epistemological assumptions bring us to the *weak version of presentism*, then our writing of the history of communication should be perceived in a slightly different manner. Thus, in the practice of writing communication history, especially a history of communication studies, we cannot conceal that there are differences between ancient, modern and contemporary thinkers. Moreover, we could not take it for granted that there is only one way of writing a history of our studies. There are histories because we have to re-contextualise previous ideas and concepts. Therefore, when we write communication history, we can acknowledge that there are two parts of this history, especially when we write a history of communication studies. I labelled these parts: 1) implicit communication history and 2) explicit communication history. The first part consists of such ideas, concepts and theories that have to be re-contextualised and only then can be presented as communicative. The other part consists of such ideas, concepts and theories that were written and presented as thoroughly communicative. However, when scholars (even implicitly) assume the strong version of presentism, they only write the history of communication that is not divided into the two above-mentioned parts. Let us examine the example of history of communication theories to ascertain how this distinction works.

Implicit communication history, which focuses on the development of theories, includes such ideas and concepts as Aristotle's considerations on rhetoric or medieval scholars' works devoted to the development of rhetorical practice in ancient Greece. Moreover, one can say that this part of communication history should include, for instance, Augustine of Hippo's considerations on the notion of signs and man's communion with God. These exemplars may be perceived as trivial because they are far away from contemporary communication theories. Moreover, in these past works, even the term "communication" was not used. However, as Peters (2001) points out, Socrates, Jesus and John Locke "might not have a demonstrable role in the historical semantics of 'communication,' but they are good to think with. With brilliance and articulateness, they lay out arguments and concerns that in current thinking are often muffled at best" (2001, p. 4). Historians of communication theories may have a bigger problem with such works as Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1986) or Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (2004). Wittgenstein examined language, not communication, and Gadamer wrote about hermeneutics and interpretation rather than about the practices of communication. Nonetheless, their works are inspiring for research in the field of communication studies. For instance, Wittgenstein's ideas on language games may be understood – by re-contextualisation – as an appropriate tool for investigating "communication" (Wendland, 2013). In the same way, Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutics may be used as a model for "communication" (Mangion, 2011). Therefore, the key criterion for placing some works within an implicit communication history relates to the practice of *re-contextualisation*. The criterion is not

determined by the year of publication of the work. Naturally, most ancient and modern works have to be re-contextualised. However, as Gadamer's and Wittgenstein's examples show, the implicit part of communication history may also include the works of contemporary authors.

Explicit communication history focuses on the history of theories, models and concepts that were and are designed as communicative in nature. This suggests that the phenomena and social reality, which are analysed in such works, are described and examined through the contemporary concept of communication. Therefore, one can say that the emergence of explicit communication history is connected to the first communication theory or the first model. In this part of the history of communication, we can point to such works as *The Bias of Communication* (Innis, 2008), *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* and *Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Eisenstein, 2005). Naturally, the work *Communication History* (Stevens & Garcia, 1980) also constitutes a component of the explicit part of communication history.

The idea of two parts of communication history was presented in the article entitled "Communication History and its Research Subject" (Kulczycki, 2014). The two parts were presented as: 1) a prehistory of communication history (*implicit communication history*) and 2) a study of media history and a history of communication theory (*explicit communication history*). However, the article focused on the differentiation of the collective representations in the field of communication history. In the present paper, however, I show that dividing communication history into two parts is the key consequence of reconstructing the ways of justifying the use of past ideas. Thus, implicit and explicit communication histories result from acknowledging that we need a translation as well as a re-contextualisation in our practices of writing communication history.

One cannot point to an exact work or thinker as a representation of the boundary and say: before their works, communication history was *implicit* and that, with their works, communication history became *explicit*. Nonetheless, we can assume that the emergence of an explicit communication history began around the end of the nineteenth century with the emergence of the modern understanding of the concept of communication (Carey, 2009; Peters, 2001). Communication theories, e.g. Claude Shannon's mathematical theory of communication, from the first half of the twentieth century established the ground for communication studies and made communication the primary concept in the social sciences and humanities. Therefore, the key criterion for differentiating is the assumed concept of communication in a particular work. For instance, if we want to determine whether a work from one half of the nineteenth century belongs to an implicit or explicit communication history, then we need to begin by analysing the very concept of communication. The frame of reference is a

contemporary concept of communication. Naturally, there are various contemporary concepts of communication. However, once a “contemporary concept” is chosen, it becomes contemporary for the researcher who writes communication history. Therefore, if we assume that the transmission model of communication is representative of contemporary communication studies and if, in the analysed work, such terms as ‘communication,’ ‘transmission,’ ‘sender,’ or ‘receiver’ are used, then we can acknowledge that this work falls within an explicit communication history. This work is part of this period of communication history because the concept of communication used in the work can be understood without re-contextualisation and translation.

5. Conclusion

The distinction between the two types of justification can, in fact, be made for every sub-discipline in the historical sciences. Moreover, the differentiation between the implicit and explicit parts of the history of communication can be made for the history of any discipline or field. However, communication studies have to face the problem of self-reflexivity. This means that communication scholars investigate their research subject, i.e. communication, through communication and thanks to communication: we communicate about communication and investigate this very communication in this way. Therefore, it is important to be aware of our assumptions, contexts of justification and levels of reflection. Such a self-aware approach could bring clarity to our practices of writing communication history.

Dividing communication history into two parts is a methodological consequence of distinguishing between the strong and weak versions of presentism. However, one can say that such a distinction between two periods of communication history is a methodological consequence of *reflexive historicising*. In 2013, the editors of *The Handbook of Communication History* (Simonson et al., 2013) wrote that one of the six trends in communication history worthy of being cultivated was “reflexive historicizing”:

‘Reflexive historicizing’ refers to the need for scholars in all areas of communication research to acknowledge the historicity of their subject matters and to know something of the history if only as a context for understanding present phenomena (p. 7).

It means that we – as communication scholars – should acknowledge the historicity of communication and historicise theories and concepts. Thus, reflexive historicising can be understood, or can be re-contextualised, as a form of practicing communication history in terms of the weak version of presentism. In this way, communication historians perceive both their research subjects, e.g. the forms and means of communication, and their own concepts

and theories, as historic ones. This means that communication history, which builds on such assumptions, is not a universal method for current and future researchers. Each communication history needs its own practice of re-contextualising and updating the frame of reference.

The usefulness of applying the two parts of communication history to the practice of writing communication history results from the necessity of determining which concepts and which works have to be re-contextualised. This means that through the practice of translation, we acknowledge the importance of the tradition in which our reflection grew and – at the same time – we do not claim that every thought and every work is part of the same history. In this way, we are able to keep the rigour of investigation and avoid jumping from one perspective to another.

Acknowledgments

This article was written as part of the project “A History of the Idea of Communication. An Analysis of Transformations of Communication Practice and its Social Conditions from the Perspective of Philosophy of Culture”, financed by the National Science Centre in Poland, decision number DEC-2011/03/D/HS1/00388. I am indebted to Mikołaj Domaradzki for his useful suggestions and remarks.

References

- Ankersmit, F.R. 1983. *Narrative logic. A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language*. Dordrecht: Nijhoff.
- Armitage, D. 2014. Modern international thought: Problems and prospects. *History of European Ideas*. 41(1), pp.116–130. <http://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2014.948285>
- Bevir, M. 2004. *The logic of the history of ideas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bod, R. 2013. *A new history of the humanities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burger, T. 1976. *Max Weber's theory of concept formation: History, laws, and ideal types*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Carey, J.W. 2009. *Communication as culture*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Craig, R.T. and Muller, H.L. eds. 2007. *Theorizing communication*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Craig, R.T., Simonson, P., Peck, J. and Jackson, J.P.Jr. 2013. Introduction. In: Craig, R.T., Simonson, P., Peck, J. and Jackson, J.P.Jr. eds. *The handbook of communication history*. New York: Routledge, pp.1-9.

- Crowley, D. and Heyer, P. 2011. *Communication in history*. Boston: Pearson College Division.
- Delia, J.G. 1987. Communication research: A history. In: Bergman, M. and Chaffee, S.H. eds. *Handbook of communication science*. Newbury Park: SAGE, pp.20-98.
- Dues, M. and Brown, M. 2001. *Boxing Plato's shadow. An introduction to the study of human communication*. New York: Learning Solutions.
- Eisenstein, E.L. 2005. *The printing press as an agent of change. Communications and cultural transformations in early-modern Europe*. Eleventh edition. Vols. I and II. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.1-815.
- Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and method*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Goody, J. 2006. *The theft of history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hull, D.L. 1979. In defense of presentism. *History and Theory*. 18(1), pp.1–15.
- Innis, H.A. 2007. *Empire and communications*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.
- Innis, H.A. 2008. *The bias of communication*. Second edition. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Jensen, K.B. 2002. From media history to communication history: Three comparative perspectives on the study of culture. *Nordicom Review*. 23(1-2), pp.95–99.
- Jensen, K.B. 2010. *Media convergence*. New York: Routledge.
- Kittler, F.A. 1999. *Gramophone, film, typewriter*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Knoblauch, H. 2013. Communicative constructivism and mediatization. *Communication Theory*. 23(3), pp.297–315. <http://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12018>
- Krippendorff, K. 1990. Models and metaphors of communication. Retrieved from: http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/276/, pp.1–52.
- Kuhn, T.S. 1996. *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Third edition. Vol. 31. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 135–174.
- Kulczycki, E. 2014. Communication history and its research subject. *Analele Universitatii Din Craiova, Seria Filosofie*. 33(1), pp.132–155.
- Löblich, M. and Scheu, A.M. 2011. Writing the history of communication studies: A sociology of science approach. *Communication Theory*. 21(1), pp.1–22. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2010.01373.x>
- Mangion, C. 2011. *Philosophical approaches to communication*. Bristol: Intellect.
- Moro Abadía, O. 2011. Hermeneutical contributions to the history of science: Gadamer on “presentism.” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*. 42(2), pp.372–380. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsa.2010.12.003>
- Moro Abadía, O. 2008. Beyond the whig history interpretation of history: Lessons on “presentism” from Hélène Metzger. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A*.

- 39(2), pp.194–201. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsa.2008.03.005>
- Nerone, J. 2006. The future of communication history. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. 23(3), pp.254–262. <http://doi.org/10.1080/07393180600801856>
- Oreskes, N. 2013. Why I am a presentist. *Science in Context*. 26(04), pp.595–609. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S026988971300029X>
- Peters, J.D. 2001. *Speaking into the air: A history of the idea of communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ramsey, R.E. and Miller, D.J. 2003. *Experiences between philosophy and communication*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Scannell, P. 2011. History, media and communication. In: Jensen, K.B. ed. *A handbook of media and communication research. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies*. London and New York: Routledge, pp.191-205.
- Schudson, M. 1991. Historical approaches to communication studies. In: Jensen, K.B. and Jankowski, N.W. eds. *A handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass communication research*. London and New York: Routledge, pp.175-189.
- Siebers, J. 2009. Editorial. *Empedocles: European Journal for the Philosophy of Communication*. 1(1), pp. 5–7. <http://doi.org/10.1386/ejpc.1.1.5/2>
- Simmel, G. 1997. *The problems of the philosophy of history. An epistemological essay*. New York: The Free Press.
- Simonson, P., Peck, J., Craig, R.T. and Jackson, J. P. Jr. eds. 2013. *The handbook of communication history*. New York: Routledge, pp.1-511.
- Stanford, M. 1998. *An introduction to the philosophy of history*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Stevens, J.D. and Garcia, H.D. 1980. *Communication history*. London: SAGE.
- Von Ranke, L. 2011. *The Theory and Practice of History: Edited with an Introduction by Georg G. Iggers*. New York: Routledge.
- Wendland, M. 2013. Anti-psychologism in Wittgenstein's philosophy in reference to theories of communication. *Studia Humanistyczne AGH*. 12(4), pp.7–18.
- Wittgenstein, L. 1986. *Philosophical investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Zelizer, B. 2008. Explorations in communication and history. In: Zelizer, B. ed. *Shaping inquiry in culture, communication and media studies*. New York: Routledge, pp.1-241.