CALL FOR PAPERS

Transmedia History: Circulations, Reconfigurations and New Methodologies

International conference

University of Lausanne
27-28 January 2025

25 November 1963 - A crowd of television, radio and press journalists attending District Attorney Henry Wade's press conference in Dallas, three days after the assassination of President Kennedy.
Photo Bill Sauro, Library of Congress, Wikimedia Commons.

16 March 2020 - The Swiss Federal Council's YouTube-streamed press conference announcing the start of lockdown at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the associated live-tweet.
Photo Martin Grandjean, CC-BY-SA.

impresso Media Monitoring of the Past

UNIL | Université de Lausanne

Hosted by the Impresso project and the History Department of the University of Lausanne
Conference website: https://impresso.github.io/transmedia/

Motivation

How can "transmedia" history be put into practice from both theoretical and empirical perspectives? The international conference "Transmedia History"—organised by the Impresso project[1] and the University of Lausanne's History Department[2]—will gather scholars from various backgrounds around this question to exchange views on new prospects opened by digitisation and digital tools to carry out transmedia research.

Media history is composed of a myriad of parallel histories, which makes comparisons difficult (Fickers 2018, 121). Research in the field has indeed long focused on single types of media (newspapers, television, radio, …) or single institutions within their national contexts. In the mid-2000s however, the transnational turn—which spread across all historical disciplines—allowed for new trends in research objectives to emerge (Bourdon 2008; Vallotton and Nicoli 2021). Research scopes overcame previous temporal and spatial frameworks and thereby became less driven by institutional perspectives than by contents and their circulation. Moreover, this new focus on transnational perspectives enlarged its scope to encompass a wider range of topics within media studies, such as technologies and communication. The development of the history of communication, cultural industries, techniques, and international relations all contributed to a form of *décloisonnement* or decompartmentalisation, that paved the way for a more comprehensive history of media systems (Mattelart 2002). These new approaches were made possible most notably by mass digitisation of media sources and the improvement of their online accessibility to researchers. International research networks gathered around such transnational ambitions. The first engaged with the history of the book (Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing - SHARP[3]) and the history of television (European Television History Network - ETHN, (Post)Socialist Television History Network), while, later on, other groups broached the radio (Transnational Radio Encounters - TRE[4]) and the press (Transnational Network for the Study of the Press in Foreign Languages - Transfopress[5]). The transnational turn was a major breakthrough that resulted in important publications (see for example Mollier and Lyon 2012 for the book; Fickers and Johnson 2012 for the television; Badenoch, Fickers and Henrich-Franke 2013 for radio and a global history of French-speaking press which is currently in the making).

It remains, however, that research in media history continues to face borders it has not managed to cross yet: beyond geographical borders, those between media institutions and between different types of media remain mostly uncrossed (Cronqvist and Hilgert 2017, 134). This challenge gave the impulse for the establishment of the Entangled Media Histories (EMHIS)[6] network in 2013. In a milestone article published in 2017, Marie Cronqvist and Christoph Hilgert—both members of EMHIS—defined the concept of entangled histories "as a means of better understanding the dynamic interconnectedness of media across semiotic, technological, institutional and political boundaries in history" (Cronqvist et Hilgert 2017, 130). Rather than accumulating histories of different media, they advocated for a focus on the elements that bridge them. This idea has a certain genealogy (Müller 2000) and theoretical debates have also broached the matter. This perspective was indeed articulated

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[1] https://impresso-project.ch/
[2] https://www.unil.ch/hist/home.html
[3] https://sharpweb.org/
[4] http://www.transnationalradio.org/
[5] https://www.chcsc.uvsq.fr/transfopress-transnational-network-for-the-study-of-foreign-language-press
[6] https://emhis.blogg.lu.se/

in different ways depending on the historical subdiscipline (global history, history of communications, history of techniques, history of cultural industries that incorporate sociological methods, etc.) and the national and linguistic areas. Despite this, a lack of empirical studies persists, primarily due to the enduring division of knowledge and the practical challenges associated with navigating separate, multilingual archives. These factors discourage research that moves beyond compartmentalised, sector-specific approaches. With the exception of a handful of significant works (see most notably Daniel, de Lima Grecco, Tamagne and Zierenberg 2023), monomedia perspectives still dominate the field of media history and too little research is being carried out on exchanges and cooperation between media.

This international conference aims to extend those efforts and reflections by inviting papers that prioritise a "transmedia" approach. We seek to present research that explores media history through the simultaneous analysis of different media, thereby emphasising the significance of the media ecosystems in which they co-evolve. A variety of terms have been used in fields like art history, narratology, journalism and communication to explore the interconnectedness of media (cross-media, intermedia, transmedia, etc.). With regards to history, it has occurred to us that "transmedia"—first used in narratology (Jenkins 2006)—was most suited to capture our ambition. We believe that it encompasses the study of various forms of circulation that occur between media (institutional, economic, technological, aesthetic, or content level). In this sense, we argue that "transmedia" refers with greater accuracy to our objective of transcending monomedia units.

"Media" is understood in a broad sense here. It includes traditional media (books, posters, press, cinema, radio and television), but also recent ones such as video games, the Internet (e.g. streaming services, podcasts, online news) and social media. The targeted timeframe is extensive, spanning up to the present day. The conference ultimately seeks to present papers that contribute to a decompartmentalised and interconnected history of media. These papers will not only place media history within a broader social, political, and cultural context but also foster a dialogue among them.

In this regard, we invite papers that fall within **three main research axes**:

1. Transmedia circulations, adaptations and reciprocal influences

Media history, which was also strongly influenced by the cultural turn of the 1970s and 1980s, has gradually expanded the range of media objects studied and the actors involved (Ruppen Coutaz and Vallotton 2019). The concepts of cultural transfer (Spain and Werner 1988) and acculturation (Dulphy, Frank, Matard-Bonucci and Ory 2010) have proved useful in understanding the international circulation of media productions, which is now increasingly being studied (Mattelart 2014). Such approaches highlight the importance of mediators (Cooper-Richet, Mollier and Silem 2005; Sapiro 2012) and the creation of new transnational circulation spaces.

The aim of this initial strand of research is to identify and analyse various factors that facilitate the circulation of content and formats across media and/or that foster interactions between media:
- specific actors or media professions such as news and advertising agencies, foreign correspondents, exiles and diaspora representatives active in various media, translators, arrangers, cross-border media;
- technological innovations like the telegraph, printing technologies, digital platforms or alternate reality games;

- spaces of circulation and exchanges that transcend traditional political and/or linguistic boundaries, such as fictional serial productions, co-productions, joint-broadcasts, technical cooperation associations in the telecommunications field, foreign-language press;
- socio-economic factors like concentration and financial globalisation, liberalisation and deregulation, convergence and new consumption habits.

It will also involve considering the rhythms and temporality of information, the modes of circulation (e.g. scissors-and-paste journalism), adaptations and reconfigurations (e.g. comics to radio), as well as the transmission of practices and the mobility of people. Finally, it will be important to investigate resistance to these phenomena, in the sense of factors that hinder or trouble transmedia circulation (seasonal and geopolitical conditions, legal matters, censorship, etc.).

2. Intersections, reconfigurations and new media genealogies

Traditionally, media history has viewed the advent of new distribution channels as significant ruptures per se marking the beginning of life cycles, each eventually bound to a certain downfall. Against this backdrop, new perspectives rooted in the *new media history* (Marvin 1990; Gitelman 2006) and *media archaeology* (Parikka 2012) provided counterpoints. Some have emphasised the relevance of synchronic approaches to study global transformations in the media system, as instanced by the "invention" of the telephone and, more broadly, by the evolution of images transmission. Others have put forth diachronic perspectives. In this vein, the notion of "live" transmission—which had been used to draw a line between television and cinema—provided an entry point for the exploration of media history through the lens of interdependence and competition. Likewise, analyses of "media imaginaries" (*imaginaires médiatiques*) acknowledged new periodisations that considered, for example, the presence of prophetic literary representations in communication or the recycling of media devices bound to disappear.

The goal set by this second strand of research is to provide a refined understanding of how media define themselves in relation to each other. Additionally, it seeks to shine light upon their strategies and motives, in order to appreciate better the complex ties that they maintain (Lits 2005; Letourneux 2017). How was the advent of new media perceived, announced and narrated by existing media? How do media publicise, promote and criticise other media's content? We aim to identify productions and documentary resources that reflect such intertwined relations, such as anticipation tales, criticism in the press, advertising productions, etc. From a broader viewpoint, these considerations also address the evolution of mentalities towards new media, their gradual integration within the media ecosystem, as well as the reconfigurations of the latter.

3. New approaches, resources and methods

In what ways can the mass digitisation of archival collections and the advancement of computational analysis tools foster transmedia research? Computational research methods allow processing large volumes of data and in recent times also increasingly across languages and modalities (e.g. image, text, sound) (Arnold et al. 2021; Smits and Wevers 2023). Techniques such as text reuse detection (Salmi et al. 2020; Düring et al. 2023; Rosson et al. 2023) or the representation of textual elements in multilingual dense vector spaces (embeddings) (Reimers and Gurevych 2019) have been shown to serve large-scale comparisons and content exploration. But how exactly can computational approaches contribute to the advancement of a transmedia media history?

The third axis of this conference aims to identify (new and/or digital approaches that facilitate and bolster comparisons. Besides, it seeks to discuss methods which enable analyses of the circulation of contents and formats at scale, in order to enhance our understanding of information fluxes (Lundell, Hannu et alii 2023). Until recently, most projects that embraced data-driven approaches focused on a single media, mostly the press (see for instance Viral Texts Project[7], Oceanic Exchanges[8], Computational History and the Transformation of Public Discourse in Finland (COMHIS)[9] or Information Highways of the 19th Century[10]). Research now starts to explore how to set up the processing—and how to conduct the analysis—of transmedia data; projects in the likes of TwiXL: An infrastructure for cross-media research on public debates[11], Clariah Media Suite[12] and Impresso - Media Monitoring of the Past II[13] all welcomed this goal. We therefore look to understand the effects that the use of digital tools and methodologies has on the research practices of media historians (changes in scale, shifts between close and distant reading). More broadly, we want to question how the facilitated exploration of media sources affects the way we carry out historical research, especially in the field of media history (changing relation to sources, cross-fertilisation of research fields, emergence of new objects of study, new ways of presenting results, etc.). In doing so, we seek to assess the added value of digital tools for media history (Weber, Comte and Vallotton 2023).

By embracing a transmedia approach, papers gathered for this conference will:
- showcase shared, entangled histories, as well as differences and lesser-known relations and connections between media;
- discuss the application of novel methods and tools to conduct historical research and ground a theoretical and empirical reflection on complex interactions between media;
- enhance the global understanding of media ecosystem dynamics.

This conference seeks to contribute to the clarification and development of a transmedia approach in the historical sciences. It aims to address transmedia **from a historical, long-term perspective** and, more broadly, to promote a decompartmentalised, entangled history of media. We therefore encourage presentations from junior and senior researchers who wish to share their empirical and methodological approaches in this field.

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[7] https://viraltexts.org/
[8] https://oceanicexchanges.org/
[9] https://www.kansalliskirjasto.fi/en/projects/comhis-computational-history-and-transformation-public-discourse-finland-1640-1910
[10] https://www.oru.se/english/research/research-projects/rp/?rdb=p2403
[11] https://twi-xl.humanities.uva.nl/
[12] https://mediasuite.clariah.nl/
[13] https://impresso-project.ch/

Practical information

The conference will be held at the University of Lausanne. Remote participation (via Zoom) will be possible only if absolutely necessary and on explicit request.

Working languages at the conference will be English and French. All speakers are kindly requested to prepare slides in the other language to accompany their talk. We strive to publish selected papers in the form of a special issue in a media history journal.

If speakers' home institutions cannot cover travel and accommodation costs, partial or full support may be available depending on the number of requests. Please submit an explicit request for this funding. Priority will be given to junior researchers.

Submission procedure and important dates

July 15, 2024: Proposals must be submitted via Easychair:
https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=transmedia2025
Proposals (max. 350 words) should include a title, a clear outline of the research question, a bibliography (max. 5 references); please add a short bio-bibliographical note (max. 150 words) and a note as to whether or not you intend to travel to Lausanne. In EasyChair, please use the "Title and abstract" section to upload your plain text proposal: the abstract, its references and the bio–bibliographical note can be inserted in the same field. No need to produce a PDF document.

Early September, 2024: Notification of acceptance after a selection process conducted with the help of the Scientific Committee members.

December 13, 2024: Those interested in taking part in the publication project submit a paper of circa 6,000 words to be forwarded to the organisers and panel discussants.

January 27-28, 2025: International conference at the University of Lausanne.

April 1, 2025: Submission of final versions of papers selected for publication.

Organisation committee

Raphaëlle Ruppen Coutaz, Section d'histoire, Université de Lausanne
François Vallotton, Section d'histoire, Université de Lausanne
Marten Düring, C²DH, Université du Luxembourg
Martin Grandjean, Section d'histoire, Université de Lausanne
Arthur Michelet, Section d'histoire, Université de Lausanne

Scientific committee (in alphabetical order)

Alexander Badenoch (Utrecht University); Gabriele Balbi (Università della Svizzera italiana); Kaspar Beelen (University of London); Mireille Berton (Université de Lausanne); Carolyn Birdsall (University of Amsterdam); Marie Cronqvist (Linköping University); Andreas Fickers (Université du Luxembourg); Matthieu Letourneux (Université Paris Nanterre); Simone Natale (Università degli Studi di Torino); Nathalie Pignard-Cheynel (Université de Neuchâtel); Yannick Rochat (Université de Lausanne); Valérie Schafer (Université du Luxembourg); Thomas Smits (University of Amsterdam); Dominique Trudel (Audencia Business School); Nelly Valsangiacomo (Université de Lausanne); Hans-Ulrich Wagner (Hans Bredow Institute); Anne-Katrin Weber (Université de Lausanne); Melvin Wevers (University of Amsterdam); Daniela Zetti (Universität zu Lübeck).

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