

HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF MEDIA IN-USE

(= Historisches Wörterbuch des Mediengebrauchs), edited by Heiko Christians, Matthias Bickenbach, and Nikolaus Wegmann, Köln: Böhlau, 592 p. In Press

Instructions for Use (Draft Translation from the German original by CM)

Reference works promise easy access to knowledge. Efficient and readily accessible, they facilitate speedy orientation. Less self-evident is that our HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF MEDIA IN-USE is not being published as a database, but, of all things, as a book – and this in the face of an escalating proliferation of media. But the book format is only there obsolete, where one understands it merely as a simple container for knowledge. The book can be more.

The editors have chosen the book because it is handy – not only in the haptic sense, but also because of its ease of use in certain contexts. The dictionary is intended for teaching and self-instruction in the many courses of study in the area of media. This does not exclude the non-academic reader: on the contrary. *As a book* it should animate the reader to make the leap from an individual media usage into a history of media's applications, into the various forms and the effective definitional power of this history in the media world. The book can cast a new light onto the familiar, spotlight neighboring entries and thus awaken the reader's interest. The editors are aware that this development cannot be guaranteed.

Each article is structured to provide assistance. All lemmata aim at a necessary degree of abstraction between bare-bones empiricism and overambitious theory in order to gather together the most divergent disciplinary approaches in view of usage. Ways of using media are neither reduced to quantitative measurements and statistics nor are they abstracted into the idiosyncratic vocabulary of a master thinker. Last but not least: the articles do not get lost in details that speak only to experts. The structure of the entries corresponds to a heuristic that reliably leads to problems and their political-social, technical and historical contexts. Having been set as the mandatory procedure for all articles, this heuristic enables a comparative observation of different uses of media.

Each article begins with an **anecdote**. These can be surprising and precisely as such revealing stories that take their material from literature, politics, history or everyday life. As

significant *story* this narrative introduces the topic; as unexpected discovery it rouses curiosity and in this way prompts further reading. This is the place where ways of use become vividly and intuitively accessible as nowhere else. Media practices are not archived in simple data and evidence, rather they are to be first discerned in stories. Together with the **etymology** of each concept, the anecdote – alongside the concrete forms of use – provides the narrative thread of the article. The historical dimension of the respective manner of use is further developed through the known (use-) **contexts** of the concepts and the **cycles of demand/fashions** that indicate fluctuations not only in the semantic field, but also within technoid or (alternatively) everyday forms of language use. Finally, in a further step, **antonyms** to each analyzed praxis are staked out and explored. To give an example: Where there is a critical polemic of media and culture against "distraction", there one will simultaneously always find praise for what has been defined as its *opposite*, "concentration".

A *Historical Dictionary* does not remain mired in the past; after all, knowledge is won from the present. Every article ends the discussion of the set of problems found within each concrete media praxis by tracing them into the present, where situations are notoriously unclear. Together this is bundled with the consideration of **perspectives** concerning the applicability of the knowledge collected up to that point. This assessment is tied up with a sketch of the **research positions** motivating the article. A selection of recommended literature prompts further reading. **References** provide orientation within the dictionary, and each article ends with a complete **bibliography**.

The classic encyclopedic-alphabetical index suggests a completeness and representativity that cannot be present in the media environments (old or new), in the constantly changing forms of usage to be analyzed here. The only constant is, to quote Hans Freyer from 1965, a permanent "transformation of the foundations of normality within social life through the invasion of new technology". Technology is not only the knowledge, coalesced in patents, of tinkerers or engineers, technology is also the concrete manipulation of machines through developers and users. Behind the exclusive concentration on the concrete forms of media usage is a self-contained analytical perspective: usage is brought into play as the media historical counterpart to unaugmented machine technology and its *intended* purpose. Media are first and

foremost what their usage makes of them. With this counterintuitive postulate we see ourselves as adopting a traditional book- and knowledge format in order to adapt it to current conditions.

That the editors have chosen this heuristic also has to do with the state of media studies. Its swift advancement is indubitably spectacular. But this success must first be secured. Perhaps this very HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF MEDIA IN-USE can contribute to the consolidation – as addition to the foundational disciplinary concepts without which no field can exist. An analogous development might be this: after World War I, sociology provided itself with the "skeleton" (Max Weber) of such foundational concepts. Yet no such canon of foundational concepts exists for media studies at this time. A candidate for such a canon, following the working hypothesis of this dictionary, is the concept of *media usage*. With its help we might succeed in observing the world of media precisely where their proverbial dynamic becomes evident: at the front lines.

"The entertainment industry is in every sense of the word misuse of military equipment." Friedrich Kittler's seminal words cite not only the topos according to which 'war is the father of all things'. Read as an aphorism with epistemological surplus value, Kittler's words are the historical example of the definitional power of media usage. Radio originally developed for the military is re-purposed for entertainment. Instead of orders, music is transmitted. Media apparatuses, according to Kittler's tenet, can be employed in manners that countermand their original intended use. Each new and differing use can further bring forth other, no less significant successes.

As such, the dictionary at hand does not strive to present only correct or even just common ways of use; it especially does not seek to recommend practices to the reader as orientation. Rather what should become clear is that even the most prevalent uses of media are always just *one* potential manner of dealing with a medium. Innovation and creativity are present not only within the technical apparatus, but are equally to be found within media usage.

The individual articles of the dictionary do not begin by questioning what media *really* are, how book, writing or video game differ from one another. Nor is there an interest in the foundations of analog or digital encoding of media. Entries such as *intermediality* or *information* would be sought here for naught. Instead, the verb form draws attention to the mutual interaction between media and their use. This complex relation cannot be theorized as

such. Solely possible is an historical analysis of individual histories without pretensions to overarching coherency. We are convinced that the present dictionary represents the right format with which to enrich a widely diversified knowledge of media.

The guideline of an authoritative heuristic as scaffolding for each individual article requires an intensive cooperation between authors and editors. The editors and editorial staff thank the authors for having taken this elaborate set-up upon themselves.

The Editors