

Journalism History and Digital Archives

By Henrik Bødker. New York: Routledge, 2021. 180 pp. Paperback. \$43.99.
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Henrik Bødker's *Journalism History and Digital Archives* maps practical possibilities for the digital excavation of news-related ephemera. Originally a special issue of *Digital Journalism* (vol. 6, no. 9), this anthology of ten case studies from an interdisciplinary group of authors employs a range of analytical, computational, and discursive methods to sift through massive amounts of journalistic material, uncovering what past historiographical approaches could not. The volume demonstrates how news stories become activated across technological interfaces and geographies and exist in different institutional contexts. Some studies mine data of decades past to dig deeper into established digital archives of newspapers, while others seek better representation of historical materials such as online documentary video that existed outside the scope of institutional archival collections. The authors are curious about what automated information retrieval and data reorganization can accomplish in the context of archival practice, and they endeavor to discover where exactly these methods' inevitable limitations lie.

Bødker is an associate professor at Aarhus University's School of Communication and Culture and has published on the cultural history of media and journalism, most recently focusing on the discourse of climate change in European news media.¹ While his scholarship has focused on journalism, his consideration of multiple subjects within critical media studies and his ability to zoom out to the larger, structural implications of how we interact, respond, and alter media as social and political subjects makes him a suitable editor for an anthology of this type. Bødker's research, like that of many cultural studies scholars, builds on the work of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model.² While not himself an archivist by training, Bødker's journalism research involves uncovering the material conditions and infrastructures behind media. The various types of articles included in the anthology indicate Bødker's comprehensive understanding of the current stakes of research in communication, media, and journalism.

Prior to reading, I was concerned that a title of this kind would be too narrowly focused on topics within digital humanities, specifically the neoliberal application of computational methods to humanistic works and how concepts created within media and cultural studies can be efficiently compartmentalized and quantified into data science. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the anthology's scope reaches critical depths, demonstrating how the variate tendrils of discourse, material, community, and history must be equally considered by archivists, journalists, and researchers when analyzing journalistic and media-cultural history with digital

tools. Chapters in this volume bring subaltern media from community-fostered archives into public view; some calibrate methods of automated analysis to historiographical approaches, while others rhetorically preserve the integrity of born-digital materials by situating their production, dissemination, and collection within digital platforms.

The authors strongly critique the lack of infrastructure for digital preservation and call out the marginalization of the individuals involved in the creation and dissemination of these materials. As Quintus Van Galen and Bob Nicholson found, for example, researchers are able to access a trove of nineteenth-century British newspapers because of a concerted and funded effort to preserve pages as they were published. Meredith Broussard and Katherine Boss, as well as Matthew S. Weber and Philip M. Napoli, point out that this has simply not been the case for news stories that are born-digital. Similarly, a lack of infrastructure exists for the proper preservation of collections that center on marginalized populations, as Pernilla Severson, Subin Paul and David O. Dowling, and Stuart Davis each interrogate. Paul and Dowling, as well as Davis, contend that broken access to media produced by communities without socioeconomic power is the result of inadequate support from government and institutions. Throughout the anthology, authors highlight how communities express the desire to maintain sovereignty over the representation of the media they create and how that media is distributed and preserved.

Even in cases where historical materials are preserved institutionally, this preservation is not a guarantee that the materials will be accessible. Thomas Birkner, Erik Koenen, and Christian Schwarzenegger situate the history of German newspapers into distinct phases based on different digital archives' approaches to object visibility, organizing accessibility to journalistic media across institutions and platforms by their respective exhibits and capacities for search optimization within the digital archive. Juliette De Maeyer and Dominique Trudel adjacently reinvigorate nearly forgotten media history by creating a Twitter bot that tweets reassembled phrases extracted from images put through an optical character recognition process. Curious about the origins of Franklin Ford's theory of remediation, De Maeyer and Trudel refashioned fragments of Ford's life through randomly assorted Twitter posts and, in doing so, reified Ford's desire for "journalism without journalists" (p. 170).

Uncovering media history is another clear theme in the anthology. James F. Hamilton, grounded in Raymond Williams's notion of cultural inquiry as investigation into living and breathing language with conjoining social formations, deconstructs the term "broadcast" in search of its meaning as both a form of dissemination and a means of transmission, using digital archives to uncover its abstractness. While Hamilton's article formally invites cultural studies into the fray, Marcel Broersma and Frank Harbers probe the other end of the volume's theoretical spectrum: through automated content analysis, they examine European journalism to analyze stories' conceptualizations and modes of expression by topic. Paul and

Dowling, Davis, and Broussard and Boss also provide critically engaged pieces that get to the bottom of why doing rigorous research with digitally preserved materials is so difficult, and why it may not get better if the institutions that claim to be stewards of knowledge do not provide the monetary funds and structural resources that stewardship requires. I find these discussions to be exciting and growing in possibility—but, like all other scholarly sociocultural and historical explorations, they need infrastructural support.

As someone critical of computational methods for media and humanities research, I found these case studies and their observations to be, on the whole, practical and comprehensible. Each article is measured in its approach to examining materials within their respective contexts, as well as to the subject matter and communities that were involved in the materials' production. While archives and the historical formulation of archival practice are discussed throughout, I feel that this anthology is slightly more aligned with communication research than historiography of special collections. This feeling of dissonance could be attributed to the nature of the media-involved—newspapers, historical artifacts of a particular media scholar, and born-digital videos that the authors explore. However, I do not find it productive to draw harsh boundaries between disciplines, especially in the context of activating born-digital and digitally preserved materials. When critically examining the history of journalism, communication, and media, it is only natural to consider the integrity and structure of those digital archives, as Bødker articulates in his introduction. The linking of digital materials, and the proper scrutiny involved in such propagation, provides robust evidence for contemporary research in media and journalism studies. Because current trends in communication, for example, involve deconstructing digital and social media, access to the work of archivists who preserve web pages, application programming interfaces, and online-only articles is incredibly important to the continued functioning of these disciplines. This crossroads, between drawing conclusions about how a particular community is using digital archives versus handling the digital archives themselves, is why I shifted my scholarly focus from communication and media studies to libraries and archives, specifically to digital preservation. Yet, because these disciplines all study web archiving and the humanistic examination of historical and sociocultural data, this is not so much a shift as a transposition.

What interests me, as well as the authors of this anthology, is the decoding of digitally preserved materials. Without accessible means of observing such materials, the methodological work and evidence required to respond to pressing research questions and historiographical shifts fall apart. Because the authors discuss how preservation infrastructures either fail or are nonexistent, this volume is a useful guide for understanding how archivists and researchers in communication, digital journalism, and media studies are approaching the application of computational methods to historical and archival research. The authors are, gratefully, also disinterested in a

purely Western perspective on media history and the study of journalism. Because of its range of subjects and solicitations, this is a comprehensive introduction to unraveling the layers of journalism history as it exists digitally.

A thorough volume, *Journalism History and Digital Archives* features authors and research that weave together cultural studies, digital journalism, and archival practice. While the authors use historical analysis of digital media rather than more traditional modes of inquiry within archives and special collections, they understand the realities of researching journalistic and news-contingent media. The case studies included tackle deep questions with intelligence, intention, and grace. Each author acknowledges the material stakes of their methodologies relative to our ever-progressing world, which tends to eclipse preservation and infrastructure in favor of technoromanticism and the bottom line.

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University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

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- ¹ Henrik Bødker and Irene Neverla, *Environmental Journalism* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Andreas Ytterstad and Henrik Bødker, "Climate Change Journalism in Norway—Working with Frequency around the 'Green Shift,'" *Journalism Studies* 23, no. 11 (2022): 1291–1307, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2022.2084143>; Henrik Bødker, "Synchronicity, or Not: On the Temporal Relations between Journalism and Politics," in *Reimagining Communication: Experience*, ed. Michael Filimowicz and Veronika Tzankova (New York: Routledge, 2020), 117–31.
- ² Henrik Bødker, "Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model and the Circulation of Journalism in the Digital Landscape," in *Stuart Hall Lives: Cultural Studies in an Age of Digital Media*, ed. Kathrine Sender and Peter Decherney (New York: Routledge, 2017), 57–71. For those not familiar with Hall's work, he may be best known as the founder of the field of cultural studies, which in very simplified terms seeks to examine how power relates to mass culture and popular media. His writing and pedagogy defy disciplinary boundaries; his article "Constituting an Archive" is particularly relevant to both archives generally and to *Journalism History and Digital Archives* specifically: Stuart Hall, "Constituting an Archive," *Third Text* 15, no. 54 (2001): 89–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528820108576903>.