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The Unleashing of Daily Consumption of Mass Media in Western Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century
A Case Study of Germany and Great Britain

NOTE:

THIS IS A DRAFT VERSION OF THE WORKING PAPER, WHICH I PRESENT IN BRIEF AT THE WORKSHOP.

AFTER THE WORKSHOP I MAY FINISH THE WORKING PAPER IN A REVISED AND RELEVANT VERSION WITH A FINAL CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION SECTION.

1. Introduction

At first I will diversify a statement by Martin Lyons, author of several works on the history of reading and writing practices: "The half century between the 1880s and the 1930s was the golden age of *print culture* in the West: the first generation which acceded to mass literacy was also the last to see *print media* unchallenged as *communications media* either by the radio or by the electronic media of the twentieth century. The reading public acquired several new layers and *print media like magazines, newspapers and periodicals* had reached a mass readership." They became "an everyday object of consumption like soap or potatoes." (Lyons 2010: 153) The German communication scientist Jürgen Wilke (2000) denotes this epoch in media history briefly as the age of unleashing of mass communication: a mass press appeared country by country in Western Europe; the English, the French and the Germans have become nations of newspaper readers; reading became a daily business which shaped the behaviour and consciousness of the people.

There is a large amount of research that shows the fundamental conditions, which brought the mass press into existence and reviews the economic, cultural, political, social and technological developments, which contributed to the growth of a mass market for newspapers, magazines and periodicals in the late 19th century. In contrast to previous research this paper focuses the spotlight directly on audiences and readers themselves or, in other words, on the process of the unleashing of media use. Of course there are a number of academics and scholars, which have explored and outlined the dimensions and questions of a history of the modern reading culture, for instance from national perspectives: Richard A. Alticks *English Common Reader* (1957), David Vincents (1983) and Jonathan Rose' (2001) studies about the British Working-class Reader, James Smith Allens (1981, 1991) and Martyn Lyons (2001, 2008) histories of reading in modern France, Rolf Engelsings (1970), Rudolf Schendas (1970, 1977) and Gideon Reuveni (2006) studies of the growth of reading Germany and last but not least Jeffrey Brooks *When Russia Learned to Read* (1985) (for more, see bibliographies of Cavallo/Chartier 1999: 443-71; Fischer 2003: 365-72; Lyons 2010: 226-33). From these body of literature we know a lot of the economic, cultural and social history of authorship and publishing, the book trade, print markets, public libraries, literacy trends, popular education and the reading public of European countries in the long nineteenth century. However, the general focus of this research lies on the book, we learn more about the development of the mass consuming of books rather than the evolution of the readership of the popular press as the first modern mass media.

Nevertheless, some book historians points out the vitally role of the press to the cultural transformation process of the emergence of a Western European mass literary culture. For instance Martin Lyons observed in his *History of Reading and Writing in the Western World* that "this transformation was driven by the press. It went hand in hand with the appearance of large-circulation daily newspapers and illustrated magazines, which attracted advertising revenue and were no longer exclusively dependent on expensive subscriptions." (2010: 137) This can be supplemented by an assumption in Richard D. Alticks social history of *The English Common Reader*: "Viewed in a long perspective, the relationship between the development of a mass audience in the nineteenth century and the rise of the cheap periodical was simple: the growth in the number of readers made periodical publishing an increasingly attractive commercial speculation, and the more

papers that were issued for popular consumption, the more the reading habit spread." (1957: 318)

All in all, the aim of my paper on the history of media use is to detect consolidated findings about the amount and extent, the habits and styles of media use, particularly of the mass press, at the beginning of an emerging modern media system in Western Europe during the time of the long nineteenth century on the example of Germany and Great Britain.

I don't want to be misunderstood. I can't and will not write now *the (Hi-)Story* of the unleashing of daily consumption of popular press in Western Europe, that is just too early. I think for us it is still a long, hard road to a European communication or media history, this applies, as far as I can see, to every research field, and so this paper can also really only be a small piece of the puzzle. – But let's start.

The paper begins by briefly reviewing the comparative view: (1) design, goals and levels of comparison; (2) research concept and methodology; (3) choice of countries. The following sections goes on to discuss sources to write a European history of unleashing of daily media use and to present a scheme of how we can reconstruct flesh-and-blood-readers. Finally, the last section offers some first impressions of mass media use in Great Britain and Germany on the threshold to the 20th century.

2. The Comparative View

2.1 The Long Nineteenth Century, Newspaperisation and the Unleashing of Mass Communication: Designs, Goals and Levels of Comparison

Jane Chapmen emphasises in her *Comparative Media History* "the importance of the nineteenth century for the roots of the media and for their continuation into the twentieth century" (2005: 3): "Print was the dominant form of media communication right through the nineteenth century, and newspapers were the principal medium for several hundred years." (ibid.: 7) In a similarly sense Eric Hobsbawm opines even that "the middle ages ended in the 1860s when international news could be cabled freely from a sufficiently large number of places on the globe to reach the next morning's breakfast-table." (1975: 60) Whatever, this means, on the one hand, that some key features of present-day media were set in this epoch and, on the other hand, the relationship of the extension of modern media and the other far reaching processes of modernity, like commercialisation, industrialisation, urbanisation. According to Douglas Kellner we can describe the take off of the mass press in the second half of the 19the century as "one of the main trends of contemporary capitalist societies (…) the synthesis of advertising, culture, information, politics and manipulation." (1989: 132; cf. Chapman 2005: 72) Instead, not alone critical cultural theorists observe the emergence of the press as a modern social institution during this time. "The modern newspaper is a capitalistic enterprise", yet the German political economist and Zeitungskundler Karl Bücher notes at the beginning of the 20th century: "Each number of a great journal which appears to-day is a marvel of economic division of labour, capitalist organization, and mechanical technique; it is an instrument of intellectual and economic intercourse, in which the

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potencies of all other instruments of commerce – the railway, the post, the telegraph, and the telephone – are united as in a focus." (Bücher 1901: 242-43) On this macro-level communication historians can use the comparative perspective to relate "media as part of ongoing developments (modernization, democratization, etc.)", "of an aesthetic, cultural symbolic universe, a network of discursive structures that reflect and influence historical development and the mentality of specific periods", and "of the institutional infrastructure of culture and society" (Bondebjerg 2002: 66, 67) To this end, from this point of view we can get an insight "of a media history in which the relation between the national, local and regional inside the individual national state is more strongly and directly related to the interaction between the different national levels and processes of globalization." (ibid.: 78)

Paved by increased growth of population, urbanisation and literacy, newspaper industry created the first mass market for media, included that main characteristics of modern press, "mass-circulation popular and quality newspapers with chain ownership" (Chapman 2005: 71), based on economic efficiency as well as "dailiness" (Scannel 1996; cf. Moores 2005: 16ff.) – a key feature of consumer behaviour in media use till this date – emerged in this time. Indeed, at the beginning of the new century the British academic, man of letters, politician and, for a few years, the President of the Royal Statistical Society Leonard Courtney wrote that everyone's "lives get newspaperised": "The morning paper comes with the morning breakfast of all who have not to hurry off to their toil as soon as the day begins, and a workman whose leisure comes in the evening makes his evening paper part of the solace of the hour. Almost everybody at some time or other receives in the course of the day some account of the movement of the world outside his own personal experience, coupled with some doses of instruction as to the way he should view what is going on. Sober folk go so far. As for the intemperate, the taste may grow on them until, if their means afford it (or, perhaps, don't afford it), they seem to be reading all day long. Morning papers, evening papers, mid-week papers, week-end papers, magazines, containing newspaper articles a little prolonged, at home, in the club, in the railway carriage, or tramcar, they are always reading or talking of what they have just read." (Courtney 1901: 365) On this lower level of everyday culture communication historians can use the comparative view for "studies that taking their point in either the way people use and talk about media", to describe "the everyday contexts of media use" (Bondeberg 2002: 66, 68) and reconstruct behaviour patterns, consumption habits, lifestyles and practices of audience and reception in different societal and regional context. In such a way we can examine the development of different kinds of audience and media experience, between national, local or regional predefined cultures (regional distinctions), we can explore differences of elite and popular media use inside one culture, "the divide between *high* and *low* forms of culture" (Jensen 2002: 96) (social distinctions), or, at last, known under the cue *the global in the local*, we can study variations across nation states and similarities between different world regions as well as cross-border variations and similarities on different stages of ongoing globalisation and modernity (transnational distinctions).

2.2 Research Concept and Methodology

Of course, the comparative approach is one of the most demanding methods of

communication and media history. The idea is equally simple as its implementation is ambitious, there's a lot to consider. Right from the design necessary requirements of comparative frameworks are many (cf. Chapman 2005: 6-8; Esser 2010a,b):

- choice of *starting point* and *media epoch*
- choice of *media industries*
- choice of *nations or regions* and *research strategy*:
    - implied comparison in a single case/paired comparison
    - large-n/small-n sample
    - most different/most similar systems design study
- choice of *comparative narrative*:
    - comparative descriptions/explanatory comparison
    - qualitative/quantitative
- *theoretical frame*:
    - action-based
    - culture-based
    - or structuralist theoretical view.

On a second level, there must be observed and restrained the broad field of communication and media history itself. Ultimately, it is the basis to compare and contrast different nations, regions or systems, at last to define dimensions and factors for research of geographical and cultural differences and similarities.

But, certainly, it is impossible to consider all this aspects, facets and factors of media history, furthermore in a cross-national view, in a single study. Hence we must honour that "research interest in historical issues is clearly growing together with the maturity of the field" (Jensen 2002: 96). On this note I refer to Paddy Scannel's research-generations-model of communication and media histories: "knowledge about how the institution works (first generation) makes the necessary basis for explaining the output of that institution", in other words, for 2nd generation histories which "addressing questions beyond the basic organisation and output of a given medium." (Salokangas 2002: 103-04 in reference to Jensen 2002: 96) If we supplement this model, then we can call comparison media histories as 3rd generation histories. Comparisons are based on collaborations, they force us to discuss, read, think and research in a cross-national way. This requires from us to break momentarily with national research cultures, which produce national media histories. In this sense finally I would like to modify an idea by Klaus Bruhn Jensen: every world region (like Europe, like Northern Europe or like the West) "can be seen to constitute a cultural laboratory of sorts, in which the media system of each country may be juxtaposed with those of the rest, and which, in addition, may be compared as a whole with the media environment of other regions in the world." (2002: 96)

In this spirit the first step into research field of the unleashing of mass media consumption in late 19th century Western Europe is "to piggyback on existing evidence", analyzing previous national media histories to reconstruct the broader context or, not always available in older periods, even "performing a secondary analysis of the various national data sets and interpreting findings with reference to a common theoretical

framework." (Jensen 2002: 96) Moreover, at the start of such research comparative description is the narrative of choice: "Comparative descriptions imply applying the same questions to materials from different countries, thereby identifying similarities and differences, and enabling researchers to assess (…) the extent" to which national developments "really are unique." (Salokangas 2002: 101) In short, such studies serve exploratory purposes. Hence comparative descriptions mostly based on case studies. Klaus Bruhn Jensen emphasises the role of case studies in comparative media history and notes that "case studies are not restricted to single events, settings, or organizations, but can be performed of historical periods or nations states, relying on quantitative as well as qualitative methodologies." (2002: 96; cf. Gomm/Hammersley/Goster 2000; Hamel 1993; Ragin/Becker 1992; Yin 2003a,b) He refers to Charles C. Ragin. "With reference to the presence or absence of specific social factors in a given period or region, which might explain a particular course of events or the dominance of certain cultural forms" (ibid.), he has developed one application of this general idea (cf. Ragin 1987, 1994). That sounds easier than it is. We must be very careful in the implementation of this research strategy in history research. Notably, historical case studies are strong limited in its range of explanation, we cannot answer all our questions of the same value; sometimes there are only sources for one the nations or regions of the sample; and there are some things we can clarify any more, because we have simply a lack of sources to reconstruct all the facets of a historical media use: "Compared to other aspects of the communication process, which may be examined through traditional historical sources such as legislative documents, the records of media organizations, and some (admittedly imperfect) archives of media contents, reception does not exist in the historical record". (Jensen 1993: 20) We'll see, it is not so bad as Klaus Bruhn Jensen sceptically means, nevertheless, he is right when he says that historical mass media reception "can only be reconstructed through the intervention of research." (ibid.) A result of such discovery research should be historical-based qualitative generalisations: narratives variables and types (cf. Halkier 2003: 118-22). Most concretely, our case studies about the growth of mass media use should make, totally free from the conditions of empiricist representativeness, general claims in the sense that it aims at better and deeper understanding of the not-self-explanatory use of modern mass media (cf. Eriksson 2006).

2.3 Choice of Countries

To define the case sample, I chose Great Britain and Germany. Besides foreign language options, this selection is supported by two main reasons. At first, both countries are pioneers in the emerging of modern mass media in Western Europe. In spite of different societal contexts, especially strong differences in government-media relations (press freedom, press law) and media structures, both nations experienced in the late nineteenth century the boom of the newspaper business as well as the growth of a mass audience with new, socially differentiated and dispersed layers. Until today they shape our image of Europe as newspaper continent (cf. Pfetsch 2007: 214; Gustafsson/Weibull 1997). The second reason lies in the corpus of sources of this research. The *social question*, one of the undesirable side-effects of the nineteenth-century modernisation process, was also a "primary impulse" for the rise of empirical social research, which deals with the "human consequences of nineteenth-century industrialization", "with the problems of poverty, disease, and, disorder that arose." (Halsey 2004: 43). If we go to

Great Britain, then we can see: "Government, national and local, became the focus of a scientific revolution with heroes like William Farr and heroines like Florence Nightingale devoted to developing and disseminating clear record keeping and scientific statistics as bases of reform. Statistical societies sprang up in urban Britain. Expertise rose in public life. The survey began to emerge as an instrument of social policy." (ibid.: 44) There is a similar trend to notice, if we look to Germany: "The origin of the social survey in Germany can be traced back to the material and social upheaval brought about the by the industrial revolution. The purpose of most surveys was to find out what the material and moral condition of the working classes was. The motivation behind them was unmistakably the desire for reform and legislation." (Oberschall 1965: 3) Anyhow, in a comparison of the developments of empirical social research and sociology in both nations notes the British social historian Peter N. Stearns: "German sociologists were the first to study the social effects of industrialization extensively. By the early twentieth century, when masses of workers were still entering factory industry for the first time, sociologist were ready to investigate the process of adaptation through systematic interviews. British researchers in the same period, besides being dedicated amateurs for the most part, focused on the urban poor and on material conditions too exclusively still. (…) For purposes of understanding the working class in manufacturing, German sociological research was long unrivaled." (Stearns 1970: 303) Primarily for the criticism of sources it is important, to keep this and others national differences in early social research at the back of one's mind.

3. Sources

What sources can we use for a history of the unleashing of daily use of the popular press? From the book history we know many types of primary sources to reconstruct the cultural transformation, "when reading became a daily habit rather than a special occasion" (Rose 1992: 48): autobiographies, diaries and memoirs of ordinary people, oral interviews, letters to the editor, library borrowing registers, library reports and statistics, reader surveys and last but not least studies of the early social research.

So far, from all this material that used by reading historians, they paid too scant attention to sources of the emerging social research. The basic resources of this are surveys and studies of the empirical sociology appeared in the second half of the 19th century nation by nation in Europe and the United States. This corpus of sources provides an exciting historical basis for writing a history of media use in the 19th and early 20th century and shows us once more that "the experience of the great mass readers" do not lies, what Robert Darnton even meant, "beyond the range of historical research." (1990: 177, 212) There is, as an example for Great Britain, Charles Booths multi-volume survey of *The Live and Labour of the People of London* (1902-03): "What Booth had accomplished (…) was a detailed chronicle of the life, the work, the housing, and the leisure of the working class in late Victorian London." (Halsey 2004: 39) Or there is, as another example for Germany, Adolf Levensteins *Die Arbeiterfrage* (1912, The Worker Question), which was a result of an extensive single survey about the relationship between modern industries and the psychic inner live of workers. It based on a comprehensive questionnaire in order to collect for the first time a widespread data set about wages and work, house life, politics and religion, hopes, leisure and wishes of German labourers. Levenstein, an outsider,

dilettante and social reformer, "burned with an intensive desire to present to the world the living thoughts" (Oberschall 1965: 95) of the working class. It is not necessary to go into further details about these studies at this point, but one can point out that in both studies we find manifold insights in print media use as well as newspaper use. As a short example, I present a finding of Booths Live-and-Labour-Study. Booth tested the standard of life between different working classes and social layers also by the taste for reading and noted in brief: "The taste for reading (…) is no question of class. In nearly every section there seem to be born students, and everywhere are also found eager readers of the current trash of the day. Many men in every class read nothing but the sporting papers. The main difference discernible lies in the use by the working classes of a weekly in place of a daily paper, and with the introduction of halfpenny papers this distinction each year less marked. The proportion of income spent on literature of one kind or other is perhaps as great with the poor as with the rich, and free libraries are largely used by a limited number of people." (Booth 1904: 335) Even from this small snippet, we learn a lot about newspaper use at this time, we learn something about: social differences and distinctions, individual costs, media-sense, used papers, places of reading, types of readers and after all societal moral concepts of reading: "More people could read than ever before but, (…) the book was being swamped by an ocean of triviality produced by the newspaper press." In the sense working-class readers "were regarded by elites as problematic", they "read too much, too indiscriminately, too subversively. Mass reading was a new social problem." (Lyons 2010: 153) – Let's leave it at that.

Now, I will introduce the character of sources in some detail, which we have been left by the early social research for our purposes. From the broad spectrum of empirical sociology of these decades I'm interested in the sources, which examined the social situation of different sociocultural classes, environments or layers. These are primarily: social inquiries (by single scholars, the government or societies like the British Royal Statistical Society or in Germany the Verein für Socialpolitik), social-empirical monographs (like factory, household, income, life, milieu or sociographic studies) or studies done by outsiders (dilettantes, educators, clergy, social reformers) (see, as an illustration of the diversity of this field in Germany, Oberschall 1965). Especially this corpus of sources provides an exciting historical basis for writing a history of media use in the late 19th and early 20th century. Again and again I've seen during my source research, notably studies focusing on social change as a result of modernisation offer, in the mode of "thick description" (Clifford Geertz), various findings about the access to, the consumption and use of books, magazines, newspapers and trashy literature. The reason is simple: They were also interested in social situations as well as the recreation activities. Because behind the growing free time one assumed a new social problem and now they wanted to now: What people do at this time? Reading, particularly reading the daily press, was more than other forms of leisure like a coffee or a tea break, an evening walk, an exchange of pleasantries with a neighbour or relaxing in the garden. Newspapers "figured as the centrepiece of home evening entertainment before radio, then television, usurped this role", they "brought the world into one's home, and their continuing importance for, and effects on, the era cannot be stressed to strongly", they "comprised for the majority of readers their entire universe of outside information, their primary link to the world at large." (Fischer 2003: 296) Therefore, early social researchers were also interested in periodicals as a previously unknown and unpredictable factor in everyday life contexts as well as social change. Their focus group was of course for the most of the

part the poor and the working class. That is why these sources feature findings of the pre-communicative phase in the (mass) communication process including:

- *individual costs:* monetary, mental, time budget
- *motives:* needs, expectations, functions, interests, routines

of the not self-explanatory use of modern mass media.

What we find in this corpus of sources in detail? One, although not the most important dimension of early social-empirical studies is the level of everyday culture and social conditions as well as context and situations, which involves mostly qualitative data and narratives taking their point in either the way people live. This includes the everyday contexts of print media use (family background, housing conditions, income, working hours, work loading); expenditures for education, leisure and literature; relations between use of different media (books, newspapers, magazines) and different forms of leisure; narratives about reading; quantitative demographic data. For instance, the German clergyman August H. Theodor Pfannkuche answered in his survey *Was liest der deutsche Arbeiter?* (1900, What read the German Worker) on the question: Which groups have the highest interest in education and reading? – those with the highest wage, those with the shortest working hour and those with a union membership. The premise, he added, is certainly a sufficient print media offer (cf. Pfannkuche 1900: 65ff.). Twenty years later the German social researcher Ludwig Kantorowicz dealt in his study *Die sozialdemokratische Presse Deutschlands* (1922, The social-democratic press in Germany) with the limitations of the need of workers to reading periodicals and distinguished between a physiological (receptivity, spare time vs. working time) and a financial (salary vs. subscription price) limit.

In the sense the sources point out that print media use was in competition with other necessaries, with other everyday commodities and with other forms of recreation. It remains: routines in using mass media were turned out slowly. The Unleashing of daily consumption and use of periodicals was a "process of grassroots cultural transmission" (Rose 1992: 54). This illustrates a remark in Lady Florence Bell's, a British playwright, social reformer and writer, *Study of a Manufacturing Town* (1907): "On the whole, I think it may be stated that a large majority of people of both sexes, in every walk in life, read, with hardly any selection of their own, what comes under their hand, what is suggested to them, and what they see being read by the person next door." (Bell 1907: 143f.) All in all, I want to hold on, only a critical arrangement as well as a systematic classification of the "social-action-remains" ("Handlungsüberreste" in the sense of Peter Hüttenberger) of media use, handed down by the early social-empirical research, allows us to reconstruct the historical turning point of daily media consumption at the beginning of the media modernity.

4. How Can We Reconstruct Flesh-and-Blood Readers?

Referring to the special character of relics of media action, an adequate data interpretation requires elaborate propaedeutics. Therefore, I have drafted a sociographic model to analyse and interpret, to combine and link these various data on media use in

its primary socio-historical contexts. The systematic placement of data and tracks of early mass media use with the help of this sociographic scheme allows to reconstruct "flesh-and-blood readers" (Lyons 2010: 9)

- in life contexts:
  - social conditions
  - impacts of social position
  - cultural capital
  - resources

- of daily media use:
  - forms
  - functions
  - skills
  - habits
  - practices
  - places.

As a starting point of interpreting results of social-empirical research, I refer to the German media researcher Michael Meyen (1999, 2000), who points out three basic steps of a propaedeutics of a "historical data analysis" for such studies: (1.) source criticism, (2.) source comparison, (3.) source diversity. That means finding answers to problems like: Under which circumstances these studies are arisen, under which conditions they were held? How are data, findings and results delivered? How we can combine different studies? How we can close gaps in historical tradition?

On a second level the scheme should focus our attention to the different historical traces of daily media use. Or in other words, the scheme works by heuristic method, contextualisation and complementary interpretation and allocates the various relics in life contexts and sociographical relationships. It embeds the media use in historical contexts of everyday life, social classes and groups, cultural and social environments.

This is the basis to relate and understand findings in a third step in a comparative view. In a fundamental study of "National Character and European Labour History" the British social historian Peter N. Stearns (1970/71, 1974) emphasises "that greater attention be paid to industry-wide similarities among workers in different countries" and "suggests, for example, that conditions peculiar to English, French and German miners may be at least as important as the national characteristics of either the English, the French or the German." (Stearns/Walkowitz 1974: 6f.) Thus he urges "that historians and sociologists pay more attention to industrial work patterns, to particular historical developments within a given situation (such as political or economic pressures), and to the impact of widely differing institutions within the nation – urban or rural setting, regional distinctions, ethnic sub-cultures and so forth." (ibid.: 7)

Last but not least, the scheme enables us to augment, combine and crosscheck data gleaned from early social research with other conventional sources of reading history, like autobiographies, memoirs or diaries, library statistics and records, magazine articles and newspaper reports, results of oral history projects and so on.

As far as I can see, there are six main topics, which we can explore from this body of sources for a (comparative) history of media consumption and media use in the long nineteenth century:

- micro-economic structures of costs and resources
- competitors of media use
- intenseness of reading
- motives
- places
- range

5. First Impressions

5.1 The Case of Great Britain

The British historian Paul Thompson gives in his large-scale oral history project *The Edwardians. The Remaking of British Society* (1975, 1992) some key data of English mass audiences at the last decade of 19th century. Based on his interviews, he adhered that "the only herald of the mass entertainment of the future was the newspaper." Though, there was a notable gap between dailies and weeklies: "Daily papers were reaching less than a fifth of the adult population in 1910. Most homes took just Sundays." (Thompson 1992: 171; Tab. 1) This illustrates a small impression of Charles Booth's Life-and-Labour-Survey: "A deacon of a Congregational church gives the following description of the people in his neighbourhood: 'They get up at nine or ten, and as he passes to his chapel he sees them sitting at breakfast-falf-dressed or lounging in the window reading *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper.*'" (Booth 1903: 47)

Tab. 1: Circulation of Dailies and Sundays

	Popular Sunday Newspapers read by	Daily Newspapers read by
1850	5 %	-
1900	30 %	15-20%
1920	-	50 %
	of Adult Population	

(Cunningham 1990: 308, 312)

In addition to newspaper experience, Thompson paints a very bleak picture of British reading behaviour at this time: "Although the British were the most literate nation in the world – with a mere 5 per cent of adults formally counted as illiterate – no other forms of reading were normal. The public libraries lent less than two books a head a year (…). (…) There were some great readers, of science, religion and politics as well as novels." But, he notes, this was only "a small group." (Thompson 1992: 171) Commoner and rival hobbies were gardening, keeping pets, the broad and various spectrum of entertainment outside the home like bicycling, fishing, playing football or walking (cf. ibid.). Nevertheless, the "significant institution" of urban popular entertainment "was the pub". Surely, the pub "was the location for much besides the consumption of alcohol" (Cunningham 1990: 305), because not for nothing Thompson suggests that drinking was also the biggest competitor for reading: "a paper once a week was a poor substitute for a nightly glass of beer." (Thompson 1992: 171) Still, the neighbourhood bar, pubs or public houses were for its costumers important water gates of popular reading experience: "Besides drink they would find warmth, cheerful lighting, food to eat and newspapers to read" for free on the counter and last but not least in "Edwardian Britain there was one public house for every three hundred people." (ibid.: 173)

To explore and prove these findings and first impressions of oral history, I have selected for a start a study of early British social research, which I have already mentioned in this

paper, Lady Bell's *At the Works. A Study of a Manufacturing Town* (1907). This local study was "the outcome of an intercourse of nearly thirty years with a large population of ironworkers in the north Yorkshire. During this time more than a thousand working-men's homes have been visited". Lady Bell has tried "to describe, so far as it is possible for an onlooker to do so, the daily lives of the workman engaged in carrying on the Iron Trade of this country in one of its centres of greatest activity." (Bell 1907: VII)

The Middlesbrough-survey was a local study in the best sense of the word. Bell presents us chapters about the genesis of the town, the process of ironmaking, the expenditure of the workman, accommodation, illness, home life drink, betting and gambling as well as elaborate data sets about recreation and reading. Before I say anything about this data, I would give a note to the source criticism of such studies. It applies to many of these sources, not only for this, that they were following contemporary, prescriptive and subjective definitions of popular culture and workers culture. By the way, in this epoch has also the typical British distinction between lowbrow-, middlebrow- and highbrow-culture its roots. (cf. Gelfert 1999: 294ff.)

But let's start leastwise with a little impression. First we find in the reading-chapter a statistical overview of, believe it or not, two hundred brief narratives about the reading experiences of the workman and their families:

Tab. 2: Middlesbrough Reading-Experiences (total: 200 cases)

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       17 women who cannot read
       8 men who cannot read
       28 houses where no one cares to read
       8 men who actually dislike reading
       3 women who actually dislike reading
       7 women who say they 'have no time it.'
       50 houses where they only read novels
       58 houses where they read the newspaper only
       37 houses where they are 'fond of reading' or 'great readers'
       25 houses where they read books that are absolutely worth reading

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(Bell 1907: 162)

If we remember Paul Thompon's oral history of the Edwardians, then some of it is also confirmed by Bells survey. Also Bell notes that "Sunday is the workman's day of leisure" (Bell 1907: 132) and stress the cleavage between the readers of dailies and weeklies. She underlines that "some only read a daily paper, the favourite being a local halfpenny evening paper (…). It contains a summary of general news, a serial story, a good deal of sporting information, also gossip and commercial news." (ibid.: 144) In contrast, she suggests that Sunday papers, "containing several sheets, and providing a good deal of miscellaneous information", are "a very special feature in the literature of the working classes. They are provided in view of the fact that the Sunday is the principal day on which both men and women are likely to read, and they consist of special papers, such as The Umpire, The People, Reynold's Weekly, Lloyds News, Weekly Dispatch, The Week, News of the World, Sunday Chronicle." (ibid.: 144f.)

Moreover, we find out that the weeklies were the first, which have negotiates the barriers of (Sunday)-limited leisure, mental-physical workload and costs. To put it in a nutshell, the weeklies establish for the first time ever a routine behavior in reading newspapers, magazines and periodicals. Surely, we can learn much more than this from this source, for instance about different reading habits of men and women, kids and teenagers, their favourite reading matters, their motives and places of reading and all the rest of it. But at this time let's leave it at these results.

5.1 The Case of Germany

At the same time as Florence Bell published her Middlesbrough-studie started in Germany two large-scale survey which wanted to examine the social situation of industrial workers in different sectors and regions: Adolf Levenstein's *Die Arbeiterfrage* (1912, The Workers Question), which I have already mentioned above in this paper, and the *Erhebungen des Vereins für Socialpolitik über die Arbeiterschaft in verschiedenen Zweigen der Großindustrie* (1909ff., Surveys on Workers in different sectors of the German large-scale industry). Both studies are essential and main sources to reconstruct the history of the unleashing of media consumption and media use in Germany. Because they show unromantic and very strongly the strictly social frame with all its facets and limitations in which regular media use of newspapers, magazines and periodical unfolds. Firstly, the material offers detailed data and trends about working hours and leisure time in different industries and regions. Secondly, the sources make us aware of the sector-based mental and physical pressures of the workers and underline that the most part of leisure time was used to recreation. Thirdly, we can see, though for different industries and regions, that wages were an important factor to develop and shape a relatively fixed media budget.

Indeed, the German social researcher Marie Bernays, a contributor to the Vereins-Enquete, detects in Levensteins Workers-Question the whole extent of the thirst for education of the workers: If they had enough time, they would learn, learn and learn. A own library were for many of them the greatest desire. (cf. Bernays 1912) In the sense and not least with these both studies, the workers read has become a certainty in Germany.

In particular, these studies clearly shows regional differences, especially between urban and rural settings. As an example, I single out the group of metal workers of the Levenstein-Survey. When Levenstein they asked about their taste of reading, the answers are spread out as follows:

Tab. 3: What books have you read? (total: Berlin: 712; Solingen: 696; Oberstein: 395 cases)

	valuable and scientific	socialist	trashy	not any Literature	-
Berlin	35,4	53,4	2,9	0,3	8,0
Solingen	32,6	48,3	6,2	3,0	9,9
Oberstein	4,6	16,2	18,7	14,9	45,6

(Levenstein 1912: 402f.)

If we ignore for his time the level of social desirability of the workers, then these data show that the workers had precise ideas about their reading matter as well as an urban/rural-cleavage between bad and good literature.

In general, these studies prove clear trends of the unleashing of media consumption and media use:

- with the increase of free, not only recreation time, rises the chances to a careful, focused and relaxed use of print media, books and periodicals
- with the increase of wages, rises the opportunities to consume it more frequently and regular, to subscribe a daily newspaper or a magazine or to borrow it
- = The micro-economic costs (mental, monetary, time budget) for habitualised and indentured media use experiences decreases at this time rapidly.

Moreover, I think on the basis of my research, not so much business fluctuations in wages and working hours than the crossing of micro-economic thresholds was the moving spirit for the longtime embedment of media use in everyday life. In the sense reading periodicals, reading matters and taste of reading were already at the beginning of the media modernity indicators for apparent affluence with significant effects for social differences and cultural distinctions. At the same time, it seems that regionally different pathways of modernisation and the cleavage between urban and rural settings had a strong influence, who comes in the advantage of a low cost situation for media consumption. Without doubt that demonstrate all these studies, in Germany these were best skilled and well organized industrial workers in metropolitan areas and urban settings.

As well as in Bells Middlebrough-study we find in Levenstein's large-scale survey also a host of brief narratives documented. They give us, beyond the socially conditioned micro-economic costs and resources of media consumption, useful insights into individual interests and private locations of media use.

In this context the study points out that there were three typical places for workers to consume, to read and to use periodicals:

- at home
- at the library
- in the pub

I break off at this time and stress once again the historical significance of these and other studies of the early social research. I could show hopefully that the corpus of sources of early empirical social research provides an exciting historical basis for writing a history of media use in the late 19th and early 20th century, and that these studies offer us various important findings about the consumption of books, magazines, newspapers and trashy literature, primarily of the pre-communicative phase in the (mass) communication process including individual costs (monetary, mental, time budget) and motives (needs, expectations, functions, interests, routines) of the not self-explanatory use of modern mass media.

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Consequently, in most parts of Western Europe rural demand for non-food products was very low before the nineteenth century. Specialisation of labour within the villages was only limited, with the overwhelming majority of the rural inhabitants working as small farmers, peasants and cottagers, or in proto-industry.Â In the century before the potato blight, despite the different socio-economic settings, nearly all rural parts of Europe encountered severe processes of social polarisation. Between 1750 and 1850 a growing part of the rural population was either no longer able to fall back on an (even small) family holding, or else became landless. The result was increasing dependence on (a combination of) uncertain forms of wage labour.