

## **The End of the World of Print**

Printing has been the most important technology over the past 500 years. For centuries the production, transmission, and reception of knowledge and information have depended on printed media: books, newspapers, and periodicals, but also catalogues, newsletters, tickets, buttons, packaging, etc. The producers of print enjoyed the benefits of enhanced social status, from authors to newspaper tycoons and print workers who have often been called the labour movement's aristocrats. With the advent of electronics and digital technologies, however, the situation has changed dramatically. Other media, notably TV and online, have cut away the monopoly of print, and the oft-cited information age is characterised by virtual rather than printed communication. What does this imply for the protagonists of the printing and publishing industry, writers, journalists, publishers, printers, distributors – but also readers? How are they affected by, how do they cope with, and how do they bring about change? Within this broad field, I would like to assist students in developing their own research project. Language of supervision and feedback will be English.

### **1. The Rise of International Publishing and Global Media Companies**

Throughout its boom phase between the mid-19th and the late 20th century newspaper and book publishing has been a predominantly national business. Reflecting language barriers as well as trends of cultural nationalism, the printed word was rarely transnational. However, technological change, the competition of radio, TV, and online media on similar markets, and decreasing trade barriers contributed to the concentration first of national publishers and then of international media businesses which combine books, newspapers, journals, TV stations, and online media. MA theses might explore the business histories of individual publishers or of different segments of the publishing industry (popular books, academic publishing, newspapers, periodicals, etc.), inquiring into how and why these transformed and with what implications on contested issues such as freedom of the press, media plurality, and industrial relations.

### **2. Printing trade unions in the twentieth century**

Printers have traditionally been in the vanguard of labour movements. Well-educated, well-organised and well-funded their unions have been vocal representations of their members' interests and, despite their usually smaller numbers, remarkably influential vis-à-vis employers and politicians. However, the transformations in technology and international markets reversed the fortunes of print unions across the world, rapidly reducing their employment opportunities and weakening their bargaining power. In many countries printers' unions would ultimately merge with bigger trade unions by the new millennium. While the general trend appears to be broadly similar internationally, the dynamics of this transformation differ greatly, depending on different cultures of industrial relations. Where does the Norwegian case – notably the Norsk Grafisk Forbund – stand in this story, and how did Norwegian unions (and their members) experience the fundamental transformation of their trade, their professional identities, and their social status in the latter half of the 20th century?

### **3. To Read or Not to Read: literacy, reading-habits, and cultural capital**

Books and newspapers have always been more than media. Mediaeval noblemen acquired large libraries for representative purposes, and the output of printed works serves as one indicator of 'development' to this day. Debates on how many books or newspapers are read by how many people serve to evaluate (and criticise) the cultural standard of societies but they also reflect on the strength of national economies: the so-called PISA shock in many European countries resulted largely from the fact that limited literacy and comprehension implied a reduction in what has come to be known as 'human capital'. Since the second half of the twentieth century (inter)national alliances of politicians,

publishers, and academics have therefore engaged in exploring the people's reading habits, producing data and studies of who reads what, how often, and why. Such sociological and marketing efforts are also of great interest in their own right: why and how do social elites come to problematize reading, and what kind of scientific results are produced?