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Puff, Helmut, Ulrike Strasser, and Christopher Wild, eds. Cultures of Communication: Theologies of Media in Early Modern Europe and Beyond

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Puff, Helmut, Ulrike Strasser, and Christopher Wild, eds.
Cultures of Communication: Theologies of Media in Early Modern Europe and Beyond.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. Pp. xi, 255 + 28 ill., 9 plates. ISBN 978-1-4426-3037-6 (hardcover) \$65.

The quincentenary of Martin Luther's ninety-five theses has sparked multiple conferences around the world to commemorate the Reformation and re-evaluate this history with its counterpart, the medium of print. It is into this context that *Cultures of Communication* brings a diverse collection of essays that refuse to focus on the subjects that have been ubiquitous this year, making a conscious effort to include both Reformation and Catholic theologies and histories, and media analyses that extend beyond the technology of communication. The subtitle of the volume, *Theologies of Media in Early Modern Europe and Beyond*, also hints at the volume's very welcome extension of early modern media studies to the European colonies and colonial history in the Americas.

In the introduction to the text, the editors state their intention to question the adage that there would not have been a Reformation without print, instead joining the now emerging scholarly discourse on whether there may not have been a successful print revolution had there been no Reformation. Here, they present the unifying concept of the volume, as they argue that one of the primary reasons behind print's success was that media and mediation were a central concern in the period. Though the claim is rather broad, it does provide fruitful ground for the resulting ten essays in the volume, which offer wide-ranging studies on the intersections of religion and communication.

Part 1 focuses on what the editors term "vertical" communication, specifically the concept of communication between God and humanity. The section appropriately begins with the difficult question of Christ as a medium. Here, Christian Kiening tackles Nicholas of Cusa's meditations upon the question of divine vision in relation to representations of Christ, and the way the icon permitted believers to comprehend the infinite and simultaneous absolute vision of the divine. The chapter is followed by Lee Palmer Wandel's overview of competing ideas about materiality and the body, and the resulting differences in beliefs in elements such as transubstantiation.

Part 1 also includes two studies on the practice of liturgical singing. Helmut Puff's essay focuses on Thomas Müntzer's distrust of most media, which he saw

as obstacles rather than bridges, and his suggestion for alternatives such as the more embodied practices of liturgy and singing (aptly termed as “mediated immediacies” by Puff). In contrast to this chapter, Susan G. Karant-Nunn’s essay moves from the prescriptive conceptualization of singing to the actual practice of lay people attending the services, specifically their refusal to sing during Lutheran services. This ethnographic study is an important addition to the preceding essays, demonstrating the ways in which theories of media were incorporated into the lived experience of believers. The study is also outstanding due to its interest in the question of a *lack* of media use, and the resulting implications.

Of course, in this wide array of media consideration, the volume includes a substantial emphasis on print in two essays that consider the ways in which print was used as more than a “pure” device for the dissemination of knowledge. Marcus Sandl focuses on the referents in the event of the Diet of Worms, during which Martin Luther took time to confirm his authorship of his printed works, and in effect created what Sandl describes as a “double presence” of his persona and his books. Sandl argues that Luther destabilized the simple equivalence between himself and his printed material, and thus created a “multi-mediality” for the reformation. Daniel Weidner also focuses on the medium of print in his essay on baroque German literature, where he argues for an expanded understanding of the medium beyond its technology. Weidner looks at the use of the medium as he astutely considers what he calls the “plurimediality” of print and its ability to function as a device of experience and epistemology.

Part 2 of the volume focuses upon religious media in the European colonies in the “New World.” Andrew Redden analyzes angels as devotional media in the lay culture of Spanish colonial America, where they were conceived as conduits between humans and God. Redden does mention the discrepancy this concept creates with regard to the place of clergy in this otherwise direct connection that is created by the angels—a question that would be fruitful for further exploration. The essay is an important expansion of the perspective of the volume as it presents an analysis of a non-European devotional culture in a colonial context. Markus Friedrich considers the practice of letter-writing in Jesuit missionary culture and makes a convincing argument for the importance of further research into the multifaceted genre. Renate Dürr follows with a study of José de Acosta’s writings on the important question of language and translation in missionary work, and the politics surrounding conversion and

religious education. Part 2 ends with Susanna Burghartz's study of Dutch discovery narratives, which begins with an interesting analysis of place as a spiritual medium in the history of discovery and discovery narratives.

Overall, *Culture of Communication* offers diverse studies of the roles that media played in early modern devotional and religious thinking. It would be of interest to scholars of devotional culture, reformation, colonial history, print history, and theories of communication. The volume is intentionally broad, as it seeks to expand what is usually understood by media studies. It provides a wide-ranging thematic exploration of communication and the roles of media alongside individual-focused case studies that offer new perspectives and insights into various forms of communication. Though the essays in this volume are somewhat disparate, the ultimate product highlights the sheer interdisciplinarity of media studies, and is overall a valuable addition to scholarship on the diversity and ubiquity of communication media in Europe and its colonies.

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Scarlatta, Gabriella, and Lidia Radi, eds.

Representations of Heresy in Sixteenth-Century France.

Essays and Studies 40. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2017. Pp. 299 + 26 ill. ISBN 978-0-7727-2187-7 (paperback) \$34.95.

The editors and authors make clear throughout this collection that the century's religious struggles "manufactured" heretical identities. Yet to say that "heresy" primarily acted as a polemical construct is not to claim it held no purchase over actual religious attitudes. Charges of heresy served as powerful engines in the century's gradual construction of confessional identity. In other words, to paraphrase recent historians of confessionalization, confessional identity proves the consequence of Reformation struggles, not their cause, a point that Andrew Spicer makes with admirable clarity in his concluding remarks about the gradual sharpening of distinct religious boundaries over the course of the wars.

Lidia Radi's article argues that Guillaume Michel's 1518 *Le Penser* belongs to a *Miroirs des Princes* tradition that aimed to shape dispositions in