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“All media have been new at some point—invented, launched, changed, and sometimes forgotten” (p. 4). Found in the first pages of the introduction, this statement points to what authors Johan Jarlbrink, Patrik Lundell, and Pelle Snickars seek to accomplish in this book: a sprawling historical survey of media, from pre-human times to the current digital age, anchored by pivotal moments of social, cultural, scientific, and technological developments. *From Big Bang to Big Data: A History of Media* is a big history that traces longer trajectories of different mediums, bridging technologies, cultures, interplays, and environments throughout a linear historical narrative that brings a media lens to the *longue durée*.

The book bucks traditions of academic publishing. It is a narrative, visual, and accessible read. The hardback is beautiful, bringing university-contained concepts into flowing sections accompanied by summaries of key thinkers and their concepts. This is an academic book, referencing noted scholars and thinkers throughout, but there are no citations nor numbered chapters (another tradition bucked). On the one hand, the history the book narrates flows together, highlighting overlaps and simultaneities over clean breaks. But with forty-four unnumbered sections, this uncommon organization can be an irritant for those looking to assign it in a course or use it for communal reading practices.

This is a book that would attract researchers and scholars, as well as any reader seeking to engage in a media-driven perspective on the *longue durée*. What is missing for these readers, however, is who is writing. There is minimal information given about the authors—apart from their names and their acknowledgements. I would have liked to know a little about them—what histories and associations they bring to this narrative and what inspired them to craft it. Yet the book is not without a humanistic touch. It begins with a story by a Serbian author, depicting a man with a stall at a market in Belgrade who recounts popular soap operas for his visitors. Such human elements are part of the authors’ writing craft, and what makes this media history particularly compelling.
This story also launches the approach taken in the book: “The new rarely replaces the old. It is more common for the old and the new to interact, complement, or influence each other” (p. 3). Emphasizing such overlaps, this storytelling method to mediology is how Jarlbrink, Lundell, and Snickars bring out the broader relevance of the technologies and tools they discuss throughout the book.

The book’s structure is temporally linear, and as a big history, begins at the earliest point of our historical imaginary—the big bang, as referenced in the title. “Is the big bang a media phenomenon?” the authors ask at the outset; they explore the question by bringing in communication theorists like Claude Shannon and physicists like Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson (p. 11). This gives way to the “Geomedia” and “Biomedia” chapters that tease out the geological and biological history of media materials and networks. Both chapters connect these histories to media today—the geology of media, for example, gives a long look at the natural history of raw media materials like copper, lithium, and gold, which build the devices we use, and the biology of media demonstrates the bodies that comprise the networks which make transmissions of information possible. The authors also align the book with other big histories that begin their narratives pre-humanity. These approaches to media set the book apart from its peers—as a history, it is intrinsically interdisciplinary, underscoring the medial elements layering the story of human history itself. Jarlbrink, Lundell, and Snickars survey the evolution of the oral human, the emergence of visual communication, the development of writing systems, and the invention of paper, all as part of the earlier history of media. In using this approach, they include the development of roads, highways, libraries, universities, museums, and community rites as foundational to media systems at different points in history. Moreover, the approach is distinctly global, a refresher from big histories that lean primarily into Western narratives. The authors refer to the development of libraries in Baghdad as central to the transmission of knowledge; the translation of Greek, Chinese, and Persian (among others) into the vernacular Arabic as central to the dissemination of knowledge; the Inca empire’s khipu systems as a nonoral, non-written communication form; and the commonization of paper in medieval Europe as central to everyday, religious, and legal networks of communication. Bringing in these histories lends a comprehensive approach to media, the study of which so often begins with the invention of the printing press.

The printing press is indeed where the book goes into more dominant approaches associated with media history. Hereon, the authors take time to describe both technological developments and the cultural shifts taking place—the invention of the printing press is rightly referenced as bringing about “the printing revolution,” but also a “paper culture” and contributing to the development of networks like the European postal system (pp. 91, 93). With the printing revolution providing the ability to mass-disseminate ideas on paper came the popularization of the print vernacular language as examined by Elizabeth Eisenstein, a bourgeois public sphere in the sense of Jürgen Habermas, and massive religious reformation in Europe. The reference to specific scholars is helpful in connecting the concepts underlining this history academically, but there are no footnotes or endnotes, though there is a descriptive reference list and index as the last sections of the book. For the scholar or researcher looking to trace sources, this is an irritant, but such is the style throughout the book. This portion of the book also leans into dominant sources of the Western tradition. What might the printing press have meant for South Asia or North Africa? With the first quarter of the book deploying a global history approach, such inquiries are glaringly missing, though we do read very briefly about nonimperialist newspapers in South America and the Middle East.

The rest of the book surveys media in the time of modernity, and the last quarter, in the digital
era. We are taken into the development of electric media such as the telegraph, the development of cable networks, and mass media cultural shifts connected to the camera and the television. Here, the authors incorporate North America as well, from references to early American journalism practices like muckraking to Canadian public service broadcasting successes like *Hockey Night in Canada* (1931- ). This is exemplary of the strength of the book, that this chronological overview is rife with technological and cultural overlaps. The newspaper, the radio, or the television, for example, are not discussed in isolation, but rather, conjunctionally, as coinhabitants through major social and cultural developments throughout the centuries. Such overlaps accompany the reader into the last chapters, where computerization, the proliferation of internet access, the popularization of smartphones, and the emergence of tech giants give us a broad contemporary history of the world we now know.

Complementing this narrative content are the interspersed information sheets summarily describing “Key Thinkers in the History of Media.” From Sybille Krämer to Robert Darnton, from Harold Innis to Walter Benjamin, from Marshall McLuhan to N. Katherine Hayles and more, these one-page summaries are an easy guide for readers looking to understand scholars and their ideas about media. These pages are digestible, perfect for the reader who picks up the book but might not have the time (or the head, after a long day) to delve into the narrative of the book itself. A weakness: these key thinkers are of the traditional Western canon. This neglects the opportunity to bring different thinkers into the fold, which could truly have set the book apart from the numerous monographs on media history published in the last decade. But its dialogue with scholars of media, in the information sheets and throughout the *longue durée* narrative, makes it clear that this is a thoroughly researched history. Jarlbrink, Lundell, and Snickars's meticulous narrative crafting, thoughtful inclusion of visuals, and occasional interesting anecdote make it both an informative and enjoyable read.
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