

Introduction

Tom Watson

Watson, Tom (ed.). *Perspectives on Public Relations Historiography and Historical Theorization*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

In this sixth and final volume in the *National Perspectives on the Development of Public Relations: Other Voices* series, the focus is on historiography and theorization of the history of public relations. In the five chapters, leading PR historians explore aspects of historiography in essays that express personal views. They have reflected on the five preceding books of national histories, of which two have contributed chapters. The authors have also considered recent developments in historiography, the philosophy of history and historical sociology.

The series editor Tom Watson opens the book with an exploration of themes that arose from the five books; German PR historian, Gunter Bentele make a case for stratification models to interpret the emergence of PR; U.S. historian Margot Opdycke Lamme considers the role of biography in the history of public relations; Jacquie L'Etang, from Scotland, discusses the philosophy of history from a sociological standpoint; and German PR historian Stefan Wehmeier argues for a different approach to PR historiography from the New Annalistic stance.

The opening chapter, 'What in the world is Public Relations' explores the history of public relations in a meta-analysis of 47 chapters covering 74 countries in the five books the series. Tom Watson considers the Antecedents, Springboards, Restraints that have shaped public relations and the Historiography applied to interpret them in an attempt to identify common factors in the development of public relations, as well as important differences in the tapestry of histories that the series has produced. He found there were few generalizable factors other than, in many (but not all) countries, that public relations' expansion since the middle of the 20th century has been fostered by political democracy and increasingly open economies.

Gunter Bentele's chapter, 'Problems of Public Relations Historiography and Perspectives of a Functional-Integrative Stratification Model', challenges the widely-held view that 'all communication and representation is PR' and argues that while there is a pre-history of public relations, the 'real' history of public relations as organized activity commenced in Germany, at least, in the early 19th century. He applies his 'functional-integrative'

stratification model with its layers of historical activity in order to argue the case for historiography that is criteria-based and linked to the development (and backward steps) in practice and theory.

The focus on biography in Margot Opdycke Lamme's chapter "Where the Quiet Work is Done": Biography in Public Relations' addresses the 'Great Men' approach which has been dominant in U.S. approaches to the history of PR. She contends that a wider, more diverse and more questioning approach is needed in the use of biography for historical analysis and critique: 'As a field we have clung to drawing within the lines for long enough. We need to go back to finger painting, to the traces of our history, to start with ourselves and see where to follow the handprints of our profession.'

Jacque L'Etang's chapter, 'Where is public relations historiography? Philosophy of history, historiography and public relations', makes a case for the history of public relations to be approached from sociological perspectives in order to identify and critique the societal role of public relations 'within the context of social change'.

The fifth chapter from Stefan Wehmeier, 'Historiography (and Theory) of Public Relations History', discusses positivist and postmodern approaches before opting for a reflective and constructivist analysis based on the 'Neue Annalistik' (New Annalistic) theory of history that has been proposed by German historiographer Lucian Hölscher.

Added together, these chapters comprise a major review of philosophical approaches to the history of public relations and the historiography of the field. They approach the debate from different perspectives and also review important recent contributions from other historians more generally and historians of public relations, in particular. The chapters are a loud, emphatic coda to the *National Perspectives on the Development of Public Relations: Other Voices* series which has widened the knowledge base of the history of public relations around the world.