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André Belo

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News Exchange and Social Distinction

André Belo

In the past two decades the phenomenon that Harold Love called “scribal publication”—meaning the circulation of handwritten texts in a wider or narrower public form—has become visible in early modern European social and cultural history.¹ This is also true in the particular field of the history of news. Handwritten newsletters were one of the types of the “scribally published texts” identified by Love, alongside a wide array of political documents, music and poetry. Although Love’s study was centred on seventeenth century England, scribal publication existed all over early modern Europe. Moreover, in recent years a new awareness of the social function of handwritten newsletters has been fostered in studies of various parts of Europe. To mention just two of the most relevant: Mario Infelise’s research has shown in detail how Venetian and other Italian handwritten newsletters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, called *avvisi*, were at the origins of public information.² Their circulation, following diplomatic and merchants’ networks, was European in scale, and the appearance of weekly printed periodicals in the beginning of the seventeenth century did not fundamentally change, for several decades if not more, the importance of the circulation of handwritten news. For the Iberian world, Fernando Bouza has clearly identified the phenomenon, and analyzed it with his vast knowledge of archival sources.³

Such considerations have the potential to displace printed periodicals from what we can call their historiographical “splendid isolation”. Printed gazettes, corantos, mercuries, *courriers*, posts and *postillons* ought to be studied and understood in relation to manuscript news of different kinds, on which, as Infelise has also pointed out, they continued to depend in structure and content well into the eighteenth century. The much discussed “question of the origins” (an idol of the historian’s tribe, according to Marc Bloch) that haunted

1 Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993).

2 Mario Infelise, *Prima dei Giornali. Alle Origini della Pubblica Informazione* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2002).

3 Fernando Bouza, *Corre manuscrito. Una Historia Cultural del Siglo de Oro* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2001). Ch. 4 is particularly concerned with newsletters (*cartas de nuevas*).

national histories of the newspaper can thus be put in perspective, losing much of its relevance.⁴ The same relativisation, I think, applies to the question of the appearance of periodicity, which should be displaced from print alone to the wider picture of the periodical circulation of messages via the post, handwritten or printed.

The purpose of the first part of this chapter is to present a number of methodological arguments that demonstrate that the nexus between handwritten and printed news—corresponding, in general, to perceived degrees of publicity in the circulation of news—is fundamental to any understanding of the mechanics of news circulation and exchange in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe. I will also argue that social status and social distinction had a crucial role in such mechanics. In the second part I will try to present these methodological arguments at work, drawing on case studies from seventeenth century France and eighteenth century Portugal. While I focus on those parts of Europe with which I am best acquainted, I am nonetheless convinced that these arguments could provide the basis for methodological generalisation about a coherent system of information that spread all over early modern Europe. I am also aware of the bias created by a perspective that concentrates essentially on the relationship between manuscript and print, and does not consider the specific importance of oral messages or of iconography and images in the exchange of information; the same, of course, applies to other non periodical printed and handwritten objects which were also important to the culture of news in this period. If I do so, it is to maintain my analysis within a scope—two different textual news media circulating and often read alongside each other—that allows for systematic comparisons.

A System of Information

In the first place, printed and handwritten news were structurally connected all over Europe for sociological reasons: the connection was made by the social agents dealing with the news, who worked and published in both media. In fact, periodical newspapers can be conceived of as commercial initiatives destined to amplify a small part of the information that was also available by other, more discreet, means of circulation, as was the case of newsletters. We have several examples of the participation of publishers of printed gazettes in the distribution—commercial or otherwise—of handwritten news. The nature and extension of this association could certainly vary, but socio-professional

4 Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'Histoire ou Métier d'historien* (1949; Paris: Armand Colin, 1993), p. 85.

contiguity between the two forms of reproduction of news was the rule. One such publisher was Johann Carolus, the editor of what has been identified as the first printed periodical—the *Relation* (1605) printed in Strasbourg—and who was also a seller of handwritten news.⁵ Several Italian gazetteers in Genoa, Milan or Torino likewise extended their activity as news gatherers and publishers from manuscript to print without stopping their previous activity.⁶ For early seventeenth century England, we can cite the example of Nathaniel Butter and his collaborator John Pory, active in the development of news business in both manuscript and print.⁷ In France, even though I have found no direct evidence of Théophraste Renaudot's activity as a producer of handwritten news, we do know the names of several contributors to his printed gazette who were engaged in the regular production of newsletters. In Portugal, as we shall see, the editor of the Lisbon gazette in the first half of the eighteenth century was a regular purveyor of handwritten news to correspondents that were themselves editors of handwritten periodicals.

A second and very concrete reason not to study printed periodicals isolated from other media is the fact that early modern readers did not read printed news without comparing it with a number of heterogeneous sources of information that were far from limited to print or to periodicals. Because of the structural difficulty of ascertaining the accuracy of circulating news, but also of their unequal political and social relevance, written reports on current events were the object of an extensive reading intended to multiply the sources of information.⁸ News readers read both handwritten and printed news in complementary ways, which, of course, added to the ongoing stream of information and commentary that could be obtained visually and orally, and exchanged face to face.

A last general reason why the heterogeneity of news media was fundamental to the early modern system of news is because such heterogeneity was adapted to the multiplicity of social conditions and values that was seen as intrinsic to the social world itself. Different degrees of publicity allowed the re-establishing of social distinctions that printed news tended to erase. They also permitted

5 See Thomas Schröder, 'The Origins of the German Press', in *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Brendan Dooley and Sabrina A. Baron (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 128.

6 Infelise, *Prima dei Giornali*, p. 97.

7 See Sabrina A. Baron, 'The Guises of Dissemination in Early Seventeenth Century England: News in Manuscript and Print', in *Politics of Information*, ed. Dooley and Baron, pp. 45–6.

8 See Ian Atherton, "'The Itch Grown a Disease': Manuscript Transmission of News in the Seventeenth Century', in *News, Newspapers, and Society in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Joad Raymond (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 45.

news writers and readers to solve potential contradictions between different worlds of action, allowing the expression of opinions and the sharing of information in certain social spaces—in contrast with others spaces where the same messages should not or could not be diffused. The activity of spreading the news to an audience was thus mediated by a series of forms of distinction and fragmentation of such an audience, according to perceptions of specific social ties and values. The careful consideration of the audience's differences was a fundamental aptitude to be learned in the social world, leading to the adjustment of one's speech—and the news it conveyed—according to the addressee.

The Added Value of Handwritten News

The reasons for the social importance of handwritten news have been underlined by different authors and I will briefly now present my own typology. They all are, in one way or another, connected to the added value handwritten news could have in the social world in relation to printed news. This added value of handwritten news derives from four different, albeit interconnected, characteristics:

- a) Higher speed of publication and greater openness to the inclusion of last minute news.
- b) Personalised content, potentially adapted to addressee.
- c) Political discretion.
- d) (Self-regulated) social control over the circulation of texts.

Before proceeding, some important qualifications have to be made. The features presented above are not static; are not intended as an absolute rule; and did not depend solely on the form of reproduction of the texts, but rather on a set of interconnected social circumstances that influenced the circulation of news. The characteristics assigned here to handwritten news formed a potential added value that nonetheless needed to be *activated* on specific occasions. Nevertheless, my hypothesis is that this added value could be confirmed on a sufficient number of occasions as to be considered structural, understood and adapted by social agents to their own goals of news exchange and publication.

Another qualification concerns the risk of reifying the differences between news media, in particular manuscript and print. As suggested above, the distinction between them is relevant only to the extent that it was associated with

a perception of the different degrees of publicity in the circulation of news. In seventeenth and eighteenth century French and Portuguese sources the distinction between printed and handwritten news is usually crossed by the distinction between 'public' and 'particular' news. Although these distinctions did not align perfectly, we can say that in this period handwritten newsletters were the privileged media, conveying 'particular' news or discrete comments on news within socially restricted networks. In contrast printed news was, by definition, considered public. This does not mean, to be sure, that there was no public news flowing in manuscript—the distinction between Venetian *avvisi pubblici* and *avvisi secreti* is sufficient to remind us of this.⁹ When news was public, confirmed or not, it could flow in different media, and by word of mouth. Even though one of the roles of news networks was to limit the diffusion of news in order to maintain its added value, news could escape such social control.

Still, from a political point of view, social self-regulation seems to have been the reason why political authorities tolerated, to a limited extent, the exchange of otherwise potentially dangerous content about current events. This does not mean, once again, that there was no porousness in the circulation of handwritten information; rather that it was easier to control or to react to unintended appropriations of such information within socially selected networks. Apart from the political ones, a number of reasons have been pointed out, by Sabrina A. Baron for instance, to explain this (relative) social self-control of handwritten information: namely economic (when they were sold, the high price of newsletter's subscriptions) and cultural ones (the ability to read and write).¹⁰ To these reasons I think that we should also add the non-monetary value that handwritten news could have in the social market when its circulation was restricted. Handwritten news included a good share of rumours, unconfirmed news and speculation over upcoming events. News networks had an interest in not making entirely public part of the information they exchanged because such news could be used in the evaluation of court politics and rival factions, the matrimonial politics of the nobility, the royal nominations for offices, or anecdotes and rumours concerning the ruling families' reputations and health.

Because of its social value, handwritten news could be used in many different ways. Not only commercially, by the selling of newsletters, but also as a gift, a mark of distinction offered by ambassadors, secretaries, soldiers and all those engaged in the dispatching of news, within relations marked by the values of

9 Infelise, *Prima dei Giornali*, p. 31.

10 Baron, 'The Guises of Dissemination', pp. 48–50.

service and deference. As correspondence reproduced at distance social hierarchies of rank and privilege, letters multiplied occasions for rendering favours and receiving some form of benefit in return. Depending on the nature of the relationship between correspondents, there were vertical logics at work (of service and patronage) and horizontal ones (where an idea of equality by friendship prevailed). The exchange of news participated in this extensive social traffic. In order to have success in this game, a judicious evaluation of media and, more generally, of the expected audience of news, was fundamental.

In order to keep handwritten news as news and preserve its political and social value, limitation of access to the network from the outside was fundamental. To publish information within a restricted audience was also to hide it from a wider audience. This delimitation of the audience of news operated also inside the networks. Researchers who have studied early modern correspondence exchanging political and social information are familiar with the reiterated requests to keep discretion about particular news, not to publish it to other people who could potentially also have access to such information. This restriction of the audience of handwritten or particular news was not only conducted by a political evaluation of the risks of publishing—the risks of causing problems with authority or the risks to one's reputation; there were also criteria of social distinction at work, with a persistent distinction between a scholarly perception of news and a 'vulgar' one, between good curiosity and 'popular' curiosity and opinions, the latter often associated with an immoderate passion for news. Enlarging the audience—in a model of news as a social merchandise such as the one I am presenting—was equivalent to a depreciation of its value.

No source to my knowledge expresses this added value of handwritten news more simply and effectively than the well-known, often quoted, lines of the play *The Staple of News* (1626), by Ben Jonson. Cymbal, the Master of the news shop, and Fitton, one of his emissaries, explain to Penyboy Junior why they prefer newsletters to printed news:

Fitton. O sir, it is the printing [of news] we oppose.
 Cymbal. We not forbid that any news be made
 But that't be printed; for when news is printed,
 It leaves, sir, to be news. While 'tis but written –
 Fitton. Though it be ne'er so false, it runs news still.¹¹

11 Ben Jonson, *The Staple of News*, ed. Anthony Parr (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 96 (ll. 46–50).

Ben Jonson—even though this was not his direct purpose in the play—gives us here a powerful insight on the social function of handwritten as distinct from printed news. His is a definition of news based precisely on its value. From the perspective of the newsletters sellers of Jonson's play, it is the fact that news were not printed, that is, the fact that they circulated among a socially more selected audience than printed news, that made them worthwhile—with wealthy customers willing to give good money for them. If and when news reached the printing press, information became more public and its added value disappeared. As Fitton explains in the last line quoted, in the world of handwritten news the distinction between true and false information existed but was less important than the awareness that both true and false news circulated. This awareness was political in a broad sense.

The use of Ben Jonson's play as a transparent historical source could certainly be contested. However, to the purpose of this chapter, more important than the 'realism' of its plot and characters, is its significant criticism of the development of the social commerce of news. Several other seventeenth century writers reacted to this development with ridicule.¹² In a way, the same criticism was offered by the Italian engraver Giuseppe Maria Mitelli in his well-known drawings satirising passionate news hearers and readers. In the perspective of this chapter, such literary and iconographic sources can be interpreted as symptoms of an existing social phenomenon, the extension of the audience for news at various moments. They are markers, albeit not necessarily objective ones, of the 'vulgarisation' of news and the momentary disruption of social control over its circulation. We shall see another example of this in the last section of this chapter.

Social Control and Social Use of News in Seventeenth Century France: The Dupuy Cabinet

Correspondence between French men of letters in the decades from 1620 to 1640 leads us to an elite place of literary and political sociability in Paris: the Dupuy academy (or 'cabinet', as it was named afterwards) of the two brothers Pierre and Jacques Dupuy.¹³ Meeting in the library of a high magistrate,

¹² Further references in Atherton, "Itch grown a disease", p. 43 and n. 32.

¹³ On the composition of this network, see Jérôme Delatour, 'Les frères Dupuy et leurs correspondances', in *Les Grands Intermédiaires Culturels de la République des Lettres*, ed. Christianne Berkvens-Stevelinck, Hans Bots and Jens Häselser (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005), pp. 61–101.

Jacques-Auguste de Thou, who was their cousin and whose network of correspondence they partly inherited, these two magistrates animated an assembly of scholars that exchanged all sorts of information over several decades, on erudite matters and on current events. Saturated with news in a variety of media, the Dupuy assembly dealt with oral, handwritten and printed information that could arrive at a daily rhythm. News was local, from Paris and the Court, and from distant regions, conveyed in letters sent regularly by correspondents from different parts of France and Europe; the content of these letters was often read aloud in the assembly. The sources of information of the Dupuy brothers included foreign printed periodicals; they were also in contact with Théophraste Renaudot, the administrator and writer of the *Paris Gazette*, first published in May 1631.

This gives a perhaps idealised impression of a seventeenth century academy; it is therefore important to note that the abundance of information that reached the Dupuy brothers does not mean that all the persons that were in contact with them, by letter or in the meetings of their assembly, had transparent access to the same information, at the same time or on equal terms. In the letters they sent to the Dupuy brothers correspondents were well aware of the habit of reading aloud the content of their messages in the academy. When necessary, they attached prescriptions that particular information not be communicated to the whole of the audience. Here is a quotation from a letter by Philippe Fortin de la Hoguette, a military man and also a relatively successful writer, who regularly sent news from southwest France to the Dupuy brothers. Concerning the important conflict between the Duke of Epernon and the archbishop of Bordeaux in the year 1633, he wrote: “Lisés bas maintenant si vous voulés que je vous die des nouvelles de ces quartiers car encor que je sois toujours plus veritable que partial, je pourois estre estimé tel de quelques uns de ceux qui hantent chés vous par l’interest de leurs maistres” (“Read silently now if you want me to give you news from these quarters, for although I am always more truthful than partial, those who frequent your assembly by interest of their masters could think of it differently”).¹⁴ La Hoguette was making a request to restrict the audience for his letter, based on a political calculation of the different factions existing in the Dupuy circle. Political discretion could be requested from the addressee in order for the sender to maintain a reputation for impartiality.

A good example of the social use of news among writers is the case of Jean Chapelain, a French man of letters whose social identity has been brilliantly

14 Letter sent from Blaye, 23/11/1633; *Lettres aux Frères Dupuy et à leur Entourage*, ed. Giuliano Ferretti (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1997), p. 337.

analyzed by Christian Jouhaud.¹⁵ Jean Chapelain used his literary and political skills to be promoted into the academic circles of the Court of France between the Reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV. The writing of news in letters and in ‘relations’ to be published in the printed gazette were among the ways by which he served his patrons, securing protection and favours in exchange. From Paris, he sent courtly news to members of the high nobility engaged in the wars of the kingdom of France, like the Duke of Longueville or the Marquis of Montausier. In exchange, he published in Paris, by different means and to different audiences, the feats of arms of his patrons: he sent articles to the printed gazette, wrote larger narratives of the same battles to be printed as pamphlets, but also diffused his news orally in the meetings of the hotel de Rambouillet, news that arrived from there to the nearest circles of the Duke of Richelieu.¹⁶ The publication of news in high places was thus a means of serving the reputation of members of the high nobility; this logic of service extended to people collaborating with Chapelain in collecting and sending news. These included Jean Epstein, a German news collector and a Calvinist, very active in Paris in those years, and associated with Renaudot in the translation and printing of German news for the *Gazette* from the summer of 1631. At the request of Chapelain, Epstein started sending in 1639 German and Dutch news to the Marquis of Montausier who was in Alsace. In exchange for this Epstein obtained, at the beginning of 1640, a letter of naturalisation as a French citizen from the Chancellor. The intervention of Chapelain seems to have been decisive in this. The naturalisation was probably Epstein’s payment for the services he was providing.

How Peiresc Read his Gazette

One more detailed point of view on the circulation of news in this same period may be constructed out of the correspondence sent from 1617 to 1637 by Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, the famous French scholar of Aix-en-Provence, to the Dupuy brothers in Paris. Jacques and Pierre Dupuy provided Peiresc with “la communication des choses du temps”, that is to say, current news—not necessarily political—from the French court and other places.¹⁷ From Aix, Peiresc sent the Dupuy brothers exclusive information from his vast network

15 Christian Jouhaud, ‘Une identité d’homme de lettres: Jean Chapelain (1595–1674)’, in *Les Pouvoirs de la Littérature. Histoire d’un Paradoxe* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), pp. 97–150.

16 Jouhaud, ‘Une identité d’homme de lettres’, pp. 118–19.

17 *Lettres de Peiresc publiées par Philippe Tamizey de Larroque*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1890), p. 282.

of correspondence which included an important Mediterranean dimension. For the purpose of this article, I have examined this correspondence for references to the circulation of the *Gazette de France* and to its first administrator and writer, Théophraste Renaudot.

From September 1631 Peiresc began to receive the recently created Parisian gazette dispatched by the Dupuys. In 1633, Renaudot, who was also in correspondence with the Dupuy brothers but wanted to have direct access to Peiresc's valuable information and network, requested them to convince Peiresc to correspond with him directly. Peiresc refused emphatically, in spite of the flattering remarks made by Renaudot and his attempts to send Peiresc small gifts as signs of distinction. The same kind of refusal occurred in the case of Ismaël Boulliau, according to Stéphane Haffemayer.¹⁸ Boulliau refused to become a correspondent of Renaudot's and to share with him the particular news he had from Poland on more or less the same grounds as Peiresc.

The refusal to correspond directly with Renaudot, by Peiresc, Boulliau and probably other members of the Dupuy network, is significant. Peiresc justifies this refusal by a set of socio-cultural oppositions, implicit and explicit. In a letter dated from 18 April 1633 Peiresc explains to Dupuy the reasons for such a denial:

... je n'abhorre rien tant que de passer pour un donneur d'avis, car j'aymerois bien mieux n'en recevoir jamais, et m'en passer tout à fait comme j'ay fait durant mon sesjours de campagne assez longuement. Je voudroys mesme esviter (et me rançonnerois volontiers pour cela) de passer pour un homme trop curieux de sçavoir les nouvelles du monde, s'il estoit possible, car l'importunité y est aulcunes foys bien grande, de la part de ceux qui en viennent demander, et qui s'imaginent qu'on soit non seulement obligé de leur en dire quand on en a, mais d'en avoir quand on n'en a point, au moins de celles qu'ils cherchent....¹⁹

(There is nothing I despise more than being taken for a giver of *avis*. I would rather not receive any news at all, as I did for long during my sojourns in the country. I would even like, if possible, to avoid ... being known as a man too curious of the news of the world. It is sometimes a great inconvenience to be asked for such news, and those who send for it think that we are obliged to give it not only when we have it but also when we don't....)

18 Stéphane Haffemayer, 'Théophraste Renaudot (1586–1653): les Idées Humanitaires d'un Homme de Communication' [2011] <hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/63/73/14/PDF/RenaudotColloqueNV.pdf>, 2 [03/03/16].

19 *Lettres de Peiresc*, 2: 498–9.

Peiresc seeks here to distinguish himself from correspondents who dedicate exclusively to giving news in the model of the *avvisi* (“donneur d’avis”). Implicit is the nobler activity of gratuitously exchanging literary and antiquarian news between fellow scholars. Clearly, Peiresc places Renaudot on the side of the “donneur d’avis”, as opposed to men of letters of good curiosity that were part of the Dupuy and Peiresc’s more exclusive circle. Excessive curiosity for current events is condemned and considered to be in contradiction with an ideal of sane curiosity. The ideal opposition between the disorderly world of the court and the peaceful man of letters retired in the country is also latent.

There is here an implicit contempt—sometimes explicit as he often avoids naming him directly, initially calling him *gazetan* and later *gazetier*—for Renaudot as a man of letters, consumed by a false, ‘mundane’ curiosity, the obligation of collecting news from current events to insert in the gazette. In one letter of march 1634 Peiresc insinuates that Renaudot’s main motivation with his periodical is profit—neglecting honest correspondence for the sake of his business.

By his refusal, then, Peiresc recreates a moral and social hierarchy involved in intellectual commerce. For Peiresc, it is a question of defining a legitimate circle of curiosity and not enlarging it. Reputation is also the issue: he doesn’t want to be a correspondent to Renaudot, not so much because of the content of the exchange, from which he could possibly obtain useful information, but because of the possibility of “passer par un donneur d’avis”, of being confused with a simple news reporter. The establishment of a moral and social hierarchy allows Peiresc to distinguish between good and bad curiosity and ultimately to justify to Dupuy his refusal to act in that capacity.

There emerges a contradiction worthy of exploration—one I would call ‘Peiresc’s blind spot’. Far from the ideal image of the retired man of letters, Peiresc was at the centre of one of the largest networks of his time, nourishing a circulation of information of all kind and very distant parts of the world, from Asia to Northern Europe.²⁰ Peiresc devoted a great deal of his time to maintaining his network. Such activity demanded weekly information received by letter, including “la communication des choses du temps” by Dupuy. To be

20 For a cartographic sketch of Peiresc’s network, see Robert Mandrou, *Histoire de la pensée Européenne*, vol. 3: *Des Humanistes aux Hommes de Science. XVI^e–XVII^e siècles* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), pp. 248–9. See also the introduction to the third volume of the series *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, where Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond describe Peiresc’s profile as a man of letters and correspondent, with an ethos of intellectual detachment. The authors identify him as an icon of the ‘republic of letters’ of early modern Europe: *Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe 1400–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 4.

sure, Peiresc's curiosity for current events included those published in Renaudot's paper. After having received for the first time an issue of the *Gazette*, in the beginning of September 1631, Peiresc not only asked Dupuy to repeat the action but begged him to send to Aix-en-Provence two copies of the periodical per week, in order to keep one copy for himself and to satisfy other readers' curiosity with the other one.

But perhaps the most interesting thing about Peiresc's remarks concerning the *Gazette* does not relate to its content, but to the speed of its distribution. In fact, from November 1632 onwards, Peiresc complains regularly in his letters to Dupuy about the slowness of the gazette. He was receiving it with a delay of 10 to 14 days in respect to the date of publication, whereas other readers in Aix, like the Maréchal of Vitry and the President of the Parliament, were receiving the *Gazette* with a lag of one week only. Making his own calculations about the time necessary for letters to arrive from Paris to Aix (which included a relay in Lyons), Peiresc concluded that the only possibility for the periodical to get to Aix in one week was by the dispatching of some copies by Friday's post, one day earlier than the printed date of publication, which was by that time a Saturday, in order for the letters to arrive at Lyons before the departure of the Tuesday ordinary. The goal of the operation was to satisfy the curiosity for a *fraîche* gazette by a few high-ranking readers in Provence. From this conclusion he accuses Renaudot of deception (*supercherie*), both of Dupuy and of the readers who believed the true date of publication of the *Gazette* to be a Saturday.

A few months later, Peiresc did start to receive a *fraîche* gazette directly from Renaudot, within eight days of publication. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that such a change occurred precisely at the moment when Renaudot formally asked Peiresc, via Dupuy, to be his correspondent. By honouring Peiresc with a more up to date gazette, Renaudot was expecting, in return, an affirmative answer to his request, which, as I have mentioned, never arrived: by the end of 1633 Renaudot was still trying to secure Peiresc's direct correspondence, receiving as an answer, via Dupuy, that if he wanted some of Peiresc's news he might as well look for them in the letters to Dupuy.

It is not necessary to go into more detail about the routes and times of the ordinary mail from Paris to Aix via Lyons in the 1630s. It is worth underlining once more the contrast between what Peiresc wrote in letters about his own lack of curiosity for current events and his concern with the speed of the circulation of printed news. Peiresc, like any other reader eager for the news, not only saw no interest in an 'old', no longer current, *Gazette*, but he could see far beyond that; he was an expert in the knowledge of the different mechanisms involved in the circulation of letters and periodicals at distance: the various routes and timings of the post, the carriers, the procedures of surveillance, etc.

Not only was he curious about the content of the *Gazette*, but also about the small social hints, only understandable by experts in curiosity like himself, that could be deciphered in the paper's circulation. In these mechanisms we must include aspects that had a moral component: for instance, the creation of small distinctions between readers by sending the gazette earlier to those who were considered of a higher rank, *hors pair*. To be sure, Peiresc respected this logic of honouring social precedence in readership. What he could not understand was why other readers not that much 'hors du pair' were receiving the *Gazette* before him.²¹ In his eyes such a way of proceeding—giving *Gazettes* early to those who did not merit this distinction, and deceiving readers about the true date of the *Gazette*—lowered Renaudot's credit among honourable people (*gens d'honneur*).

The particularity of Peiresc's reaction to the circulation of the *Gazette de France* allows us to sketch one model of a reader: that of the well-connected scholar, who not only reads but contributes to the ongoing edition of circulating news; has access to different layers of information, public and 'particular', within a network; has the capability to read critically through these different layers. His position, shared by other well informed readers of his time, can be defined as that of someone who could produce news about the news. Not only did he have access to particular sources of information who made him a very reliable source of information in a network—someone a gazetteer was eager to have as a correspondent—but he was capable also of understanding the circulation of the network from within, scrutinising the contrast between public and less public information, observing the circulation of the new printed periodical and reader's response to this circulation. This ability was, to be sure, a result of Peiresc's particular skills in building his own network of information, but it was also a result of the relation between handwritten and printed news as I have tried to define it. Differences of speed and the irreplaceable social functions of handwritten correspondence gave added value to news exchanged within networks. A broad perspective on and close observation of news circulation itself was one of the consequences of such added value.

Eighteenth-Century Portuguese News Networks in their Relation to the Lisbon Gazette

From a European perspective, the Portuguese case may startle us by the scarcity of press initiatives during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

²¹ *Lettres de Peiresc*, 2: 408–9.

Whilst in these same decades in central and northern Europe printed periodicals multiplied in a variety of titles and genres, in Portugal there was no such development. If the long war against Spain after the 'restoration' of 1640 was at the origin of printed monthly newspapers, first the *Gazeta* (1641–7) and then the *Mercúrio* (1663–7), no license or privilege to print a periodical was conceded by the Crown for almost four decades thereafter. The *Gazeta de Lisboa*, the first weekly Portuguese newspaper, was published for the first time in 1715, nearly a century after the first examples in central and northern Europe. Such a peripheral position in the European map of printed newspapers, both in space and in time, probably correlated to Portugal's peripheral position in the general economy of the production and commerce of printed objects, an economy in which Portugal depended on the importation of specialised—religious and scholarly—books printed in cities like Amsterdam, Leiden, Antwerp, Frankfurt or Paris and redistributed first via Lyons and then Geneva.²² The small internal market probably dissuaded printers from trying new, risky, ventures, which included periodicals.

If we displace our perspective from the observation exclusively of printed periodicals to the circulation of news more broadly, it becomes apparent that the absence of gazettes in Portuguese was by no means synonymous with a lack of information on current affairs. Scholarly networks, connecting diplomatic circles, literary academies or religious orders, were well informed of European military and political news, which arrived via different media, printed and handwritten, in periodicals or in separates, following the regular rhythm of international postal connections. Knowledge of the content of the printed European gazettes and pamphlets—read in their original language or translated—was thus part of the Portuguese networks' reception of news.

When the *Gazeta de Lisboa* was first published, in August 1715, it entered a system of news exchange where printed and handwritten news already had complementary roles. By printing periodical news in Portuguese on a weekly basis, the *Gazeta* contributed to the reshaping of this system. Newsletters contemporary to the periodical reacted to the novelty of the weekly printed sheet of news by integrating it in their own horizon of news writing. One such newsletter was the 'Gazeta em forma de carta' ('Gazette in the form of letter') attributed to José Soares da Silva, a manuscript compilation of news existing from (at the latest) December 1701 that explicitly signals the incorporation of the European model and vocabulary of news. Although we are ignorant of the details of its circu-

22 For a preliminary presentation of this question, with specific bibliography, see André Belo, *As Gazetas e os livros. A Gazeta de Lisboa e a Vulgarização do Impresso, 1715–1760* (Lisbon: Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa, 2001), pp. 28–33.

lation, the content of the text clearly testifies to the circulation of news in periodical form.²³ And as far as we can deduce from this compilation, the appearance of a new gazette in Portuguese in the summer of 1715 was rapidly noticed among newsletter writers, and its visibility became central to patterns of consumption. From the beginning, Soares da Silva assumed that the reader of his own newsletter also read the new printed gazette and abstained from redundancy by referring only to the news that the printed gazette did not include. From this moment on, Soares da Silva's newsletter was displaced, and developed a more specialised function: delivering news not included in the printed periodical.

The audience for handwritten news thus adapts to the existence of the printed gazette. The phenomenon is also apparent in the other compilations of handwritten news that are known for this period, of which the most important seems to be the 'diário' ('journal') of the fourth count of Ericeira, Francisco Xavier de Meneses. Recent research on news and networks in eighteenth century Portugal has shown the important role of this member of the Portuguese high nobility and academic patron in the configuration of news networks starting, possibly, in the war of the succession of Spain and until the end of the 1730s. Ericeira seems to have been a key figure in the diffusion of handwritten news to a group of selected correspondents.²⁴ He used his political position in the court, in the Portuguese nobility and in the most important academies of his time to disseminate news and thus exert a form of control over social reputation and political alignments. He had a close relationship with the editor of the gazette, Montarroio Mascarenhas, whose (frustrated) candidature to the new Royal Academy he supported (1721). Ericeira was himself a regular supplier of courtly and academic news to the gazette and, in exchange, Montarroio Mascarenhas kept the count up to date to his own news. This probably included giving the count access to the content of the printed periodical prior to its publication, allowing the count to reflect this knowledge in the writing of his own news.

This helps to understand why, as also happened with the 'Gazeta em forma de carta', the printed gazette was implicitly, and often also explicitly, present in Ericeira's news. This presence was not merely a matter of quotation or a testimony of reading: Ericeira was one of those expert readers who, in the way of Peiresc a century earlier, produced "news about the news" of the gazette (and other sources) in the discreet world of handwritten information.

23 The idea is expressed by João Luís Lisboa: 'Gazetas feitas à mão', in *Gazetas Manuscritas da Biblioteca Pública de Évora*, 3 vols., ed. João Luís Lisboa, Tiago C.P. dos Reis Miranda and Fernanda Olival (Lisbon: Colibri, 2002–12), 1: 16.

24 See Tiago C.P. dos Reis Miranda, 'Proveniência, Autoria e Difusão', in *Gazetas Manuscritas da Biblioteca Pública de Évora*, ed. Luís Lisboa *et. al.*, 2: 13–42.

In 1734, unhappy with the comments and rumours that he noticed were being added to his news, and also with its circulation beyond the limited social circle that he expected to influence—distorted news and rumours arrived at the royal palace—the count, in his own words, “left the business of gazetteer”, reduced the number of addressees of his news and continued to send them only to a very restricted noble audience.²⁵ In spite of this, it is likely that, during this period, the news produced by the count of Ericeira, either via the gazette’s editor or directly, reached other correspondents. Among these were the members of the academy of Santarém (*Academia Escalabitana*), a town not far from Lisbon, and rapidly accessible via the Tagus river, thus possessing a good position as a relay of courtly news in the direction of northern Portugal. From 1740 onwards, two men of letters from Santarém, Montês Matoso and Pereira de Faria, both notaries, created a formalised series of handwritten periodicals, relying on correspondents in different points of central and northern Portugal (Coimbra and Oporto, several monasteries) and also in Lisbon, including the editor of the gazette. Surviving correspondence shows the regular exchange of information between the offices of Montarroio and Santarém. From Lisbon, Montarroio sent the latest news from abroad and from the court; in Santarém, the two scholars edited a handwritten periodical entitled ‘Folheto’ or ‘Mercúrio’, dated from Lisbon, and emulating in form and anticipating in content the printed courtly gazette. In exchange, they would send to Lisbon the news they could gather from central and northern regions of Portugal. There was also an important exchange of genealogical information between them—a knowledge that was used in services for the nobility and various institutions and also in news writing; a good part of such information was not considered worthy of the gazette, but it was relevant to Montarroio’s labour in genealogical research and to enrich his collection of archives. In recompense, aside from sending them his own fresh handwritten news, Montarroio published the activities of the academy of Santarém in the gazette whenever it was possible. The fact that this publishing of academic accomplishments in the gazette extended to several other academies suggests that this form of exchange was common.

The Dynamics of Change

Ericeira, Montarroio and the provincial academics from Santarém passed much of their time writing and dispatching news to their correspondents.

²⁵ *Gazetas Manuscritas*, 2: 321, 317.

News of current affairs satisfied their curiosity, but it also had a social value and enriched their personal and familiar archives. Nonetheless, their activity as both news readers and writers was also marked, whether consciously or not, by what I have called above 'Peiresc's blind spot': from their point of view, curiosity for current events was only acceptable within restricted social circles, and the expansion of such curiosity to a wider public dimension was morally reprehensible. If seen through the point of view of news networks, the history of news circulation in Portugal in the first half of the eighteenth century is in a good part the history of this tension between the growth of a public eager for news on the one hand, and on the other the reluctance of established networks to relinquish social control over news. Available sources allow us to observe these dynamics, and significant critical reactions to the loss of such social control. I will mention two significant moments of this tension, as symptoms of change in the world of news circulation, and then conclude.

In the same year that the count of Ericeira decided to restrict the circulation of his news, a small Portuguese play, an intermezzo, took the reading of the gazette as dramatic subject.²⁶ Like Mitelli's drawings, it denounces in its own way—fairly limited from an artistic point of view—the passion in the reading of news by social groups considered unfit to do it. It stages a student and a shoemaker reading a gazette and taking sides on its news about the war (it was performed during the war of the Polish Succession). The student and the shoemaker are represented as pro-French and pro-German, respectively, and these identities are not only 'national' ones, but also moral, being associated with particular vices. Both characters start arguing over the correct interpretation of the gazette's text and in the end the argument turns physical. At that point, a verger intervenes and vigorously brings concord to the scene, by sending each of the contenders to their own duties—away from gazettes and from impertinent readings.

Félix da Silva Freire, the author of the intermezzo, was a member of the aforementioned academy of Santarém. In spite of his apprehensions concerning the social effects of reading, he was himself a conspicuous consumer of news, in every available medium. His acquaintance with the circulation of current news is beyond doubt, through his academic connections, and can also be deduced from the details of the intermezzo concerning the contents of news and the practices of reading the gazette. As in the case of Ben Jonson, in my view it is less important to know whether his dramatic text reflects a given social reality—we know, in fact, that it does not, and that Freire's characters

26 'Notícias da Gazeta do Mundo da Guerra da Europa do Ano de 1734', Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon, sig. 50-I-18, 137-71.

are highly stereotyped—than to understand his text for what it does: it fights a perceived threat, the social widening of the readership for news, triggered by international wars. Through the characters of the student and the shoemaker, Silva Freire re-enacts the old scholarly topic of the passionate love of novelties as a failing of the vulgar.

This same potential of a growing readership was also sensed, not as menace to a form of communication *inter pares*, but as a commercial opportunity by the administrators of the *Gazeta de Lisboa*. Eight years after Freire's intermezzo, in 1742, the family of printers and booksellers who held the privilege to print the newspaper developed a new editorial strategy in order to enlarge their audience and sales, by an increase in both periodicity and the number of copies. The handwritten periodicals edited in Santarém inform us of this growth. They also inform us of the moderate circulation of the periodical at the time, and of the progressive augmentation of its circulation in the spring of 1742: from 450 to 650 copies—far from the hyperbolic image of a whole society turning into a gazetteer, presented in the intermezzo.²⁷ A different copy of the same issue does not mention figures but offers a qualitative description of this enlargement, where a form of social contempt of the same kind as in the intermezzo is expressed: the new consumption of the periodical was such that every shoemaker was buying it.²⁸ We have here an additional confirmation of the ideological contiguity between the dramatic text and the handwritten news. Several testimonies, elaborated by the same group of social actors, even though in a stereotyped way, point at the same sociological phenomenon.

A few months later, in July 1742, the periodicity of the paper was doubled and the gazette began to be published twice a week, with a supplement. The reason for this innovation, as stated in an editorial, was the increasing demand of the public concerning news from the war of Austrian Succession.²⁹ The supplements were published for a decade, and we also know, by a rare document containing financial information on the administration of the gazette, that the number of the copies significantly increased in this period, almost tripling (to 1,500 copies) in the case of the ordinary issue.³⁰ The aged editor of the *Gazeta*, Montarroio Mascarenhas, was opposed to this commercial strategy

27 'Folheto de Lisboa', no. 6 (21/4/1742), Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisbon, Reservados, cod. 8065.

28 'Folheto de Lisboa', no. 16 (21/4/1742), Biblioteca Pública de Évora, cod. CIV/1–10.

29 *Suplemento à Gazeta de Lisboa*, no. 1 (13/9/1742).

30 'Mapa da despeza, que se fazia annualm.te com a impressão da Gazeta, e Suplemento; como tambem os lucros que destes exemplares se percebiam sendo Administrador Jozé Roiz Roles desde o anno de 1740, té 1748', *Biblioteca Pública de Évora*, CXXVIII/2–16, 58a.

which had the consequence of diminishing his own income and of impoverishing the quality of the printing paper of the periodical. This opposition was in fact part of the scholarly ethos that we have identified in other examples mentioned above: considering himself as a member of a commonwealth of the letters, preferring the status of the historian and the academic rather than the socially diminishing status of gazetteer, he was against the popularisation of a printed object which he considered, in the proper sense, a form of vulgarity. The difficulty with his position was the blatant contradiction between the ethos of the erudite integrating well informed news networks, and his professional subordination to a family of printers whom he considered socially inferior. The disagreement within the periodical business about the new course of the administration, of which we have further evidence in Montarrio's letters and critical responses from readers, ended up with a suit in court. In 1752 the privilege came to its term and the editor finally obtained the exclusive ownership of the gazette. Weekly periodicity and a substantial reduction of the number of printed text followed. Under Pombal, a decade later, political regalism led, not to a development of the so-called 'official press', but to almost two decades of absence of gazettes (1762–78).