

The Media Workshop

The smell of fresh coffee. The dying laughter of a last minute joke. The worried glance at an empty chair as we wait on the late arrivals. The crackle of a newspaper unfolding. These serve as the announcement for the beginning of the Media Workshop under the expert guidance of Cameron Killborn.

The workshop is meant to not only introduce us to German media forms, but also to prepare us for our visit to Ulm in a few days' time. There we will be heading to the Süd-West-Presse, which is a daily newspaper based in Ulm.

The class begins like many a normal class, starting with a broad scope and then narrowing to a more specific topic of discussion. Our direction, however, causes my heart to sink like a stone. Although we had classified the media into five broad categories (Print, Visual, Audio, Outdoor and Internet), we seemed to be mainly focussing on the printed word, or, more specifically, newspapers, something that I know less than nothing about. We discuss the different newspapers one could purchase in Germany and the different views these papers held – for example, the Süddeutsche Zeitung is known to be more liberal whereas the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung is known to hold more conservative viewpoints.

We also discuss the layout of German newspapers and how they compare to South African papers. At this stage I was ready to throw in the towel.

For the better part of my life, I have regarded newspapers as embellished hogwash printed on paper that not only covers you in ink, but also gives off an awful stench. In short, newspapers are to be avoided at all costs.

But then the tide turns. Visual media (namely television) takes the front seat and the differences between private and public channels are highlighted and again compared with South Africa. This caused me to sit back and think for the first time about what our viewing pleasure is built up of – something I have never before considered.

Then talk again turns to print and censorship. Beginning in Germany, our discussion soon turns into a debate as the spotlight is cast on South Africa. Catching flame from the spark of our debate on how history influences newspapers, our debate soon grows heated as questions of Apartheid and Reconciliation are raised.

As time draws to a close and we wrap up our debate, I am left with three lingering questions which, in my opinion, do not have straight-forward answers: What is true freedom of speech and how much emphasis should we place on it? Where should the line be drawn and freedom of speech be limited in order not to offend/hurt others? How do you incorporate your history into your present without it dominating/damaging your future?

I may not know as much as I should about current affairs but I cannot help wondering how our generation (and those who will come after us) will respond to the world of media and the printed word.

(Monique Louw)