

The Year That Defined American Journalism: 1897 and the clash of paradigms

W. JOSEPH CAMPBELL

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In a well-known book entitled *What Are Journalists For?*, American author Jay Rosen (1999) describes activist "civic" or "public journalism" and advocates it as a preferable alternative to the canonical model of detached objectivity that satisfies professional norms but leaves citizens disengaged. As W. Joseph Campbell shows, Rosen's title question would have been as deeply controversial 110 years ago as it was when Rosen asked it. In his tightly-focused study of the year 1897, Campbell argues that the year saw a clash among New York newspapers between a "journalism of action" represented by William Randolph Hearst's *Journal* and a model of detached journalism embodied by Adolph Ochs's *Times*; both of these models, in turn, were challenged by Lincoln Steffens's "anti-journalistic" literary journalism in the *Commercial Advertiser*. For Campbell, the year 1897 holds the key to the triumph of the *New York Times* model of impartial or "objective" journalism as the predominant model, as it was through the contingent events of that year that Ochs's vision prevailed.

This is a lively and fascinating book, beautifully written and thoroughly researched. It effectively captures the American *fin-de-siècle*, providing a snap-shot yet admirably conveying the dynamism and anxieties of the period. The book's first chapter convincingly situates the clash of journalistic paradigms in the wider cultural context, evoking new communication technologies, gender roles, a faster paced society, violence in sports and the last great gold rush. Subsequent chapters provide content analyses of the leading papers, arguing that the *Journal* and *World* offered higher-quality journalism than is often appreciated; archivally-based biographical examinations of "exceptional journalism in journalism's exceptional year"; and a closely-reasoned argument that the *Journal's* famous jailbreaking episode, in which Evangelina Cisneros was freed, was not a hoax as scholars have typically thought.

In detailing the clash of paradigms, Campbell describes the commercial context in which they developed, so that the "journalism of action" and its detached, fact-based opposite were as much about the efforts by Hearst and Ochs to create market niches for the *Journal* and *Times* as they were about the ideals themselves, while the anti-journalistic literary model was something of a backlash by cultural elites against a mass-produced genre. The journalism of action, influenced by British journalist W. T. Stead's crusades on behalf of Bulgarians massacred by Turks and underage London virgins preyed upon by dissolute aristocrats (and his self-promoting articles defending "Government by Journalism"), was often an excuse for a newspaper to insert itself into the story. For example, the *Journal* excoriated the New York government officials who planned no events commemorating the political unification of the five boroughs and very noisily stepped in to remedy this government inaction, showing that activist journalism need not involve issues as significant as questions of war and peace or tyranny and freedom. For its part, the *Times* also linked its detached professional model to its audience-building efforts. Not only did it regularly contrast itself favorably with the "freak journalism" of the *Journal* and other activist papers, and solicit favorable comments about itself from trade publications and

out-of-town newspapers, but even its famous slogan, "All the News That's Fit to Print," was the product of that quintessential New Journalism institution, the contest. (One wonders if other finalist slogans would have stood the test of time so well: for example, "A Decent Newspaper for Decent People" or "The News of the Day; Not the Rubbish").

According to Campbell, the question of why the *Times's* model triumphed can be answered in large measure by contingent events: the *Times's* dramatic price reduction coupled with Hearst's off-putting personality, among other (mostly short-term) factors. But one might ask in what sense can we say that the *Times's* model has triumphed? Although objectivity is hegemonic in journalism schools, it is not clear that it has ever corresponded neatly to ordinary readers' expectations of journalism. Within newspapers and television news "texts" themselves, the triumph seems to be largely a matter of location. While the front section follows the dispassionate *Times* model, the editorial page, personal advice columns, lifestyle features and "faith and values" sections of papers, and the tabloid and investigative television news programs, all seem to embody in different ways the Hearst or Steffens models more than the Ochs model. In the 1897 "clash of paradigms" the choices were posed starkly, but it is probably best to think of the clash's outcome in only relative terms. In addition, Campbell takes pains to underscore that readers of all classes read both the *Journal* and the *Times*, and other examples of all three models, but he probably is too quick to dismiss the role of social class in audience formation.

This book's great virtue is in the close attention it gives to a short period that is culturally rich. In my opinion, though, he makes too much of the distinctiveness of "the year-study genre" in historical research. The methodological advantages of Campbell's approach lie in its tight focus and the richness of detail that can therefore emerge—not in whether a year is the unit of focus. This point is illustrated by Martin Conboy's recent (2006) fine textual analysis of British tabloids over a little more than a month in 2004. In addition, while Campbell has certainly shown the "exceptionality" (pp. xix, xx) of 1897, it's not clear that his assertion that 1897 is "the year when the contours and ethos of modern American journalism began to take shape" (p. xix). A case study or a "year-study" can be useful because of its representativeness rather than for being a turning-point, and Campbell asserts but never really demonstrates that 1897 constituted the latter.

This point is underscored by Campbell's choices of "exceptional journalism." Two of his examples seem to be clear cases of activist journalism, while the third, Francis Church's "Is There a Santa Claus?" editorial, hardly qualifies as journalism according to either the Hearst or the Ochs models (and one might add, other than its later fame, it is not clear by what standard Church's editorial qualifies as exceptional). These examples of exceptional journalism, then, do not fit neatly into a thesis of 1897 as a pivotal year. Looking at the argument from a different perspective, both Richard Kaplan and Gerald Baldasty (in important studies not cited by Campbell) portray the rise of objectivity less in contrast to a "journalism of action" than to overt machine-style political partisanship, and both link objectivity's emergence in different ways to economic changes over a period of several years. Campbell, by contrast, presents 1897 as something of an existential moment in which the direction of 20th-century journalism was to a large extent chosen. Whether or not one is convinced by this portrayal, Campbell has provided an evocative book that contributes significantly to journalism history and criticism.

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Voice of America: a history

ALAN L. HEIL JR
 New York: Columbia University Press, 2003
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I think it is important right off the top to clarify one serious matter. In every respect, this book is more about one person's insight into a particular period and set of experiences than it is a seriously crafted piece of history. That does not necessarily mean that this work by an insider does not have a value, but that value does come tinged with the contaminants which force a reader to be exacting in weighting the so-called truths that are offered.

Thus, what we have from the Columbia University Press is an oral history on paper which warns readers to be wary of what they read. But more on that later. First, let us look at what Alan Heil has constructed and how he accomplished his mission.

This is a long, plodding book. Its 544 pages, of which 452 are devoted to actual story telling, is broken down into 20 chapters, most of which are in the 20-page vicinity. Heil's somewhat dragged out conclusion is 26 pages in which he basically summarizes much of what has been discussed in the earlier chapters. No problem there; this is standard procedure for any work purporting to add to the scholarship of any given genre. But in many respects, Heil's editors let him down. For example, there are far too many page breaks that serve little or no useful purpose. The inclusion of these barriers interrupts much of the narrative and makes it hard to follow. The small type size does not enhance the work either. Also, each chapter contains numerous side bars which are related to the story at hand. Some of these inclusions, nearly a full page in length, would more appropriately be contained in a series of Appendices. The author continually re-acquaints his readers with personalities whom we have met earlier through references such as "among them was Sojan Pace (chapter 4)." Using the same methodology to include materials in an Appendix would have helped maintain a less-fractured structure.

Voice of America is full of questionable assertions. Heil often declares that Voice of America (VOA) was the most listened to station in various countries, outdistancing other world-wide services from other countries. However, there are no facts, either in the text or in the notes to support such contentions, only hearsay from various refugees about living in totalitarian countries where receivers were turned to unjammed VOA broadcasts. More

annoying is his constant reference to events which he links directly to VOA activities in places such as Eastern Europe. He equates the fall of communism, for one, with VOA broadcasts that kept the flame of liberty burning. There is a sense of evangelism and religiosity in this approach which wears thin at times. The reality of this situation is far more complex than his memoirs indicate. It must be noted that institutions such as the VOA were only one of a number of players in these events. On p. 244 for instance, he declares that the VOA was instrumental in forcing the leaders of the Soviet Union to recognize the criminality of the invasion of Hungary in 1956 while quietly bypassing the role that American broadcasting, particularly Radio Free Europe, had in fomenting the uprising in the first place.

As well, there are small but significant discrepancies in Heil's recounting of some tales. On p. 382, he relates the tale of an American named Ray Rising from North Carolina who was held for 810 days by rebels in Columbia. Apparently the creative Mr. Rising came armed with a Sony Walkman AM/FM radio which he discovered would not pick up stations during the daytime and only sporadically in the evening. Knowing a little about broadcast technology proved helpful: he proceeded to obtain a scouring pad which he unraveled to create an antenna. He reported that this enabled him to receive many stations day and night, and in the evening that he could pick up shortwave signals. This would not have been possible on a Sony Walkman with just an AM/FM band.

In another techno tale about the capture of a number of Thai workers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Heil relates an incident about insurgents who were contacted by cell phone in their jungle hideout. I may have missed something here, but the last time I checked there were still many parts of the world, some even in the United States, that do not have partial or complete cell phone service and The Congo was one of them. And to cap this off, there is a reference to clothing worn by some Afghan women. Anyone who has taken an interest in the conflict in that unfortunate land knows that a burka is far more than a veil. It covers the entire female body leaving only a small slit through which the wearer can view the outside world. These lapses do little to enhance the value of the work.

In the final analysis, Heil cannot be accused of being passive about his subject. After all, most of his working life was in an institution which he clearly loved and which he clearly wants remembered. He rightly notes that Americans never heard or watched VOA broadcasts because listening inside the country was not within the organization's mandate. However, he stands on uncertain turf in his support of objectivity in VOA journalism. Shortwave international broadcasters were created to bring the message of the homeland to the world. VOA was no exception. Its mandate was to promote American values and in this respect Heil reveals how that took place. To imagine such a mandate coexisting for objectivity is problematic. For those interested in strong personalities, dedicated reporters and farsighted program producers, this is a book for you. But be prepared to spend a lot of time digging through it.

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Writing for Multimedia and the Web: a practical guide to content development for interactive media, 3rd edn

TIMOTHY GARRAND

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In *Writing for Multimedia and the Web: a practical guide to content development for interactive media*, Timothy Garrand addresses writing for a broad variety of media, including text, audio and video. Garrand is focused on the production of content for multimedia rather than technical development of websites or other multimedia projects. This is not a Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) or Web design primer. The book does, however, emphasize the importance of writing for many media and becoming familiar with interactions across media.

The topics are introduced by first defining multimedia and interactive media and the role of the writer in the interactive environment. The concept of multimedia is defined by four characteristics: (1) combination of many media into a single piece of work; (2) computer mediated; (3) media-altering interactivity; and (4) linking (p. 5). Interactive media are defined more broadly: "Computer-delivered media or modes of expression (text, graphics, video, etc.) that allow users to have some control over the manner and/or order of the media presentation" (p. 5). The Web is identified as a primary site for interactive multimedia, but CD, DVD and videogames also are mentioned.

Garrand broadly defines the role of the interactive writer as well. An interactive writer may create in a variety of formats: proposals, outlines, sitemaps, treatments, walkthroughs, design documents, scripts and other written material that helps describe an interactive project. Skills are presented as they relate to different media. In working with text, one should be clear, concise, and personal. Sections of text should be written assuming they are to be scanned by readers. And, attention to information display, including the usage of navigation and links, is important in a multimedia environment (pp. 24–6).

For writers of audio, writing should be conversational and easy to immediately understand. Using techniques such as metaphors and sound effects improves the visual nature of the presentation (p. 32). For video production, several suggestions are offered that reinforce the strengths of the medium. Writers should present information with action and have a clearly defined structure, says Garrand. He also suggests writers be considerate of the usage of interactivity by chunking content segments, and developing original and unique characters (pp. 35–6).

The next two sections of the text clarify and expound upon different types of media, specifically informational multimedia (including websites) and interactive narrative. Informational multimedia typically have a business context, rely on a variety of data and serve to generally meet the needs of a well-defined user population. Interactive narrative, primarily the basis of video and computer games, typically involves a story. It is often non-linear in structure, but Garrand advises attention to traditional, linear media conventions. "Interactive narratives share many elements with linear film and video narrative," he writes. Because of this, it is useful to understand the basic elements of linear narrative before exploring the intricacies of interactive narrative" (p. 269).

Each section is accompanied by numerous case studies. For example, the informational multimedia section includes case studies illustrating writing a marketing

website and developing an e-learning site. The interactive narrative section includes case studies explaining how to adapt classic books to a computer game and adding a story to a simulation. These case studies are detailed and provide tangible examples of the process and deliverables in each production.

One of the biggest strengths of the book is in defining the various roles in an interactive production that involve writing skill. These roles include writer, content strategist, instructional designer, information architect, interface designer, game designer, usability expert, subject matter expert, business strategist, art or creative director, animator, graphic artist, project manager, video/audio director, photographer/videographer, voice talent or actor, programmer, and product manager (p. 57). This comprehensive list introduces students to a variety of functions to which they can apply their skills, and encourages them to think beyond traditional writing and reporting careers.

A weakness of the book is in its lack of attention to any specific technical aspects of Web development. While teaching HTML and Web design is not the goal of this text and is best handled as a separate topic, it is critical for people who are poised to work in interactive media to recognize the need for a basic understanding of the technology involved. This understanding can improve the way that a writer presents content and interacts with other members of a production team.

While Garrand states that it is important for writers to know how to create Web pages, he endorses the usage of WYSIWYG ("what you see is what you get") editors like Dreamweaver that "allow the user to create Web pages without knowing HTML" (p. 54). A brief explanation of HTML coding and other technologies like Flash and AJAX (Asynchronous Javascript and XML) with reference to additional sources for further information would emphasize the relevance of a more complete comprehension of the field.

The final chapter concludes the book by discussing how to become a professional interactive writer. Garrand recommends a variety of ways that students can gain the necessary skills, including working toward a college degree in either communication or computer sciences with a focus on multimedia. Other suggestions include embarking on certificate programs or online courses, attending conferences and professional seminars, working as an intern, creating a portfolio and networking (pp. 433–6).

This new edition of this text updates this dynamic field by adding a *Nancy Drew* writing game addressing content needs for female audiences, discussing e-learning sites and simulations, and including a glossary of multimedia and interactive writing terminology. The book is timely in its discussion of blogs, podcasts and current search engine optimization techniques.

A CD-ROM accompanies the text, providing script samples and screen shots to complement chapter examples. The book also has an accompanying website offering sample syllabi and assignments.

This book is ambitious in its approach to tackle both narrative and non-narrative productions. Each type could have merited a separate publication. But, by introducing the importance of being flexible, then applying skills across media, Garrand opens up a broader set of options for the budding writer. Taken as a whole, it would be difficult to position this book in a particular university department or school. Segments have relevance for journalism and mass communication departments, film schools and even computer science departments. Parts of the book could be emphasized or disregarded depending on the course. But the differentiation of informational and interactive narrative might be narrowing in the future, with informational journalism websites employing

narrative techniques and interactive gaming sites growing in complexity and the reliance on timely data. *Writing for Multimedia and the Web* offers techniques for both production types and provides a basis for understanding future convergence of the two.

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