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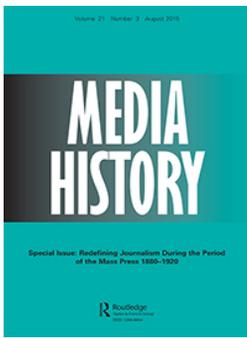
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# REDEFINING JOURNALISM DURING THE PERIOD OF THE MASS PRESS 1880–1920

## An introduction

**John Steel and Marcel Broersma**

While history is the sum of continuous change, in some eras the course of things changes more profoundly and quickly than in other. At the turn of the twentieth century, the massive transformations that came with the rise of the mass press set the standards for new roles and functions for journalism in society. The ‘old’ journalism, rooted in ideological frameworks and targeting a relatively small and elitist part of society, was complemented with a ‘new’ journalism that tried to cater the needs for information of a much bigger audience based on increasingly distinct journalistic criteria.<sup>1</sup> Journalism had to essentially redefine itself, to remain economically viable, find audiences, and establish a position in what could be labelled a ‘democratic market society’.<sup>2</sup> In this ‘professional project’ new role perceptions of what journalism should be and how journalists should act came into being. A ‘reflective style’ rooted in ideological frameworks as well as literary and intellectual values was supplemented with a ‘news style’ which centred around facts, news values and active reporting.<sup>3</sup>

These transformations were not revolutionary—traditional conceptions of journalism existed alongside new initiatives—nor did they happen overnight. Although both utopian and dystopian discourses of contemporary observers suggest that journalism quite quickly changed for the better or worse, these dynamics of change were slower and more subtle. However, with hindsight one can conclude that the media landscape and the journalistic profession looked profoundly different at the end of the 1920s than it did four decades earlier. The reconceptualization of news, journalism and the news industry that took place during this period laid the grounds for the development of the profession for over a century—until the rise of the Internet disrupted the field again.

The collection of essays in this special edition addresses various dimensions of change in journalism along the lines of technology, economy and professional repertoires, norms and practices. It draws from a bigger collaborative project between the Centre for Media and Journalism Studies at the University of Groningen and the Centre for the Study of Journalism and History at the University of Sheffield. The project ‘Capturing Change in Journalism. Shifting Role Perceptions at the Turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries’, jointly funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research and the British Arts and Humanities Research Council, has sought to examine the changes within journalism at distinct historical junctures. It starts from the assumption that crucial to understanding journalism’s future role is looking to previous moments when its position in society was seemingly tenuous. To investigate the mechanisms underlying processes of rapid transformations, it analyses

the strategies journalism has applied to justify its role in society and how this translates into the content of media and the perception of audiences.

How did journalism navigate between economic rationales and audience preferences in a time of rapid change to reinforce its authority and justify its role in society? How did these changes translate into new professional norms and routines as well as the substance of news coverage? And how did they impact on the way citizens are enabled to participate in democratic processes and community life through news media? These questions were addressed during a two-day conference at the University of Sheffield in July 2013. Scholars from 10 countries presented papers that aimed to conceptualise the dynamics of change during the rise of the mass press. From the conference, we have brought together five papers which we feel capture the essence of the conference and its aims, as the papers herein cast interesting light on this Janus-faced period in which journalism was both looking backward at its heritage and its traditions as well as looking forward to new opportunities and technological, social and political environments. We feel that the essays in this special collection reflect developments within journalism during this important period of European history.

### Dimensions of Change

Jane Chapman's essay aptly begins this collection as she examines the newspapers of the Women's Social and Political Union: *Votes for Women* and *The Suffragette* as they sought to push forward their political goals within a context in which competition in the newspaper market was fierce. Advertising in particular, and competition to win advertisers, was of course key to ensuring a newspaper's success. Yet Chapman skilfully demonstrates that even militant newspapers like *The Suffragette* and *Votes for Women* sought to use the market to their advantage, carrying adverts for products that would appeal to women who were politically as well as materially aspirational. In emphasising this negotiation of the political and economic realm, Chapman draws our attention to the way in which even radical newspapers understood the concept of marketing.

Continuing the theme of journalism during this period negotiating with and adjusting to the new economic environment, Mark O'Brien and Kevin Rafter's essay highlights the way in which the *Irish Independent* combined elements of 'New Journalism', or what they argue in Ireland was more a 'New Commercialism', with the deeply conservative broader religious context. Focussing on its proprietor William Martin Murphy, the authors emphasise the way in which Murphy sought to ensure his commercial interests would not be compromised by the excesses of New Journalism. In doing so he was mindful of tempering the excesses of New Journalism within the context of a deeply conservative Catholic society.

Sarah Lonsdale's essay focuses on the impact the great upheaval and transformation within journalism and wider society had on writers—the men and women who contributed to the new newspaper environment and operated along side it. Lonsdale's essay sketches out the ways in which economic imperatives affected journalism and literature as 'the literary field became fractured' as the economic imperatives of the new era clashed with romantic notions of artistic purity and integrity. Prescient of the imperatives of modernism as well as the market, this essay explores the ways in which writers and journalists negotiated the literary field within this new context.

The writer/journalist or rather the materials of their profession are the focus of the next essay in this collection. Here Johan Jarlbrink examines the materiality of the practice of journalism by looking at the changes in technology that helped shape the way in which journalists worked in Sweden. According to Jarlbrink, the imperative for truthfulness meant that journalists had to become much more mobile in order to authentically report the world in which they inhabited. He observes also, however, that this mobility has more recently given way to journalists becoming increasingly sedentary, as the technology of contemporary journalism renders them so.

The final essay in our collection is from Christoph Raetzsch and also looks at some of the specific technological and normative transformations within journalism at this juncture. Specifically Raetzsch examines the development and impact of photography and how it was transposed into print at the time in a manner that has a legacy today. He argues that the half-tone process, increasingly seen in popular magazines in the 1890s, helped shape the notion of objectivity within journalism, noting that the use of photography ‘instates a schema of objectivity that already begins legitimizing journalistic reporting before photographs themselves play any role in journalistic news media’.

### Notes

1. Wiener, *Papers for the Millions*; Conboy, *Journalism in Britain*.
2. Schudson, *Discovering the News*.
3. Broersma, *Form and Style in Journalism*; Høyer and Pottker, *Diffusion of the News Paradigm*.

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