

BOOK REVIEW

A Fabricação do Presente:

*Como o jornalismo reformulou
a experiência do tempo nas
sociedades ocidentais*

CARLOS EDUARDO FRANCISCATO

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REVIEWED BY **Tattiana Teixeira**

Journalism is made, *par excellence*, in the present time. This maxim is proven in the undergraduate classrooms and in the editorial rooms day by day in a routine that is rarely questioned. In order to explain how journalistic temporality has been gathering strength down through the centuries and what are the implications of this practice, Carlos Eduardo Franciscato, professor of the Communication Course at the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS), Brazil, takes us on an interesting historical journey in the recently-launched *A Fabricação do Presente – Como o jornalismo reformulou a experiência do tempo nas sociedades ocidentais* (The Making of the Present – How journalism has reformulated the experience of time in Western societies). The book is an adaptation of his doctorate thesis presented in 2003 in the Postgraduate Program in Communication at the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil.

For the author, more than just a mere rule, the adoption of the present time by journalism contributes to the construction of the social experience of the present. “Journalism does not create the present time, but it acts in an outstanding way as a reinforcement of a social temporality”, he declares. In this work, Franciscato maintains that this research seeks to understand the concept of journalistic present, composed, according to the author, of five interrelated categories: instantaneousness, simultaneousness, periodicity, novelty and public revelation.

Divided into four parts, the book shows a careful bibliographic review of works related to the history of journalism – especially that of the United States and of Europe – up to the contemporary period and the changes produced by the most recent technological advances. Far from surrendering to the commonplace of explanations based on technicalities,

Franciscato tries to demonstrate that journalistic temporality is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. In order to understand it, the author begins his analysis with the origins of journalism, since the XVII and XVIII centuries, when the periodical press arose, and dwells a little more deeply upon the changes that took place starting with the XIX century, when society witnessed the arising of innovations that directly affected daily life and that consolidated what the author calls “culture of the present time”, a phenomenon also established in a certain way by journalism itself as a social practice.

The comprehension of this culture and of how it was related to journalism constitutes the main focus of the second part of the book. In it, Carlos Franciscato discusses how journalism became a kind of reference in people’s daily lives, even creating, since the beginning of the Modern Age, a kind of obsession for the consumption of news, something that became stronger as the years passed. The author also talks about how the technological innovations that arose between the XVI and XIX centuries modified internally journalistic organizations and practice. That is to say, if journalism contributed to the consolidation of certain social phenomena – such as the culture of novelty and the very establishment of a public sphere based on the reading and discussion of newspapers in the ‘coffee houses’ – it was also influenced by the surrounding reality, by the tensions and by the conflicts that directly affected its establishment as a social institution. Here we find clues to how the journalist’s figure was being constructed in the midst of this complex scenario – a subject which is taken up again in the last chapter – and to how the means of journalistic production were constituted and how they evolved leading to the strengthening not only of a professional identity, but also of normative principles related to social commitments inherent in this practice.

In the third part of the book, the author presents the characteristics of the five categories created in order to understand the journalistic present. Once again, Franciscato has recourse to a historical journey in his analysis that is very rich in providing a differentiated view of the formation of journalism’s complex temporality. What is gathered from reading this chapter is that the establishment of each one of these categories occurred by means of a dialectic process involving journalistic practice and social-cultural phenomena, especially those resulting from technological advances, becoming clear in an immediate way in the relations established with the reading public and in the very way of socially experiencing the present time.

The changes that have been affecting journalism since the XX century are highlighted in the fourth and last part of the book. Franciscato analyzes how the new technologies have transformed journalistic institutions and the journalistic present, and systematizes what he understands as the eight basic characteristics of journalism, based on normative, technical and historical aspects. The author resuscitates classic studies such as those of the sociology of journalism in order to establish a relation between the temporal factors and journalistic production. Online journalism, the idea of real time and the way in which these transformations affect the journalistic present is the high point of the chapter that takes up again the discussion regarding simultaneousness, instantaneousness, public revelation, novelty and periodicity, in the light of contemporary journalism.

Obligatory reading both for undergraduate as well as for postgraduate students, the book *A fabricação do presente* has at the least two great merits. The first is providing the reader with an interesting panorama of what has already been produced on the social history of journalism, which is more than useful, fundamental for researchers in training. The second is demonstrating the audacity of Professor Carlos Eduardo Franciscato who attempts to avoid the commonplace in order to comprehend theoretically and conceptually one of the main elements of journalism: time.

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