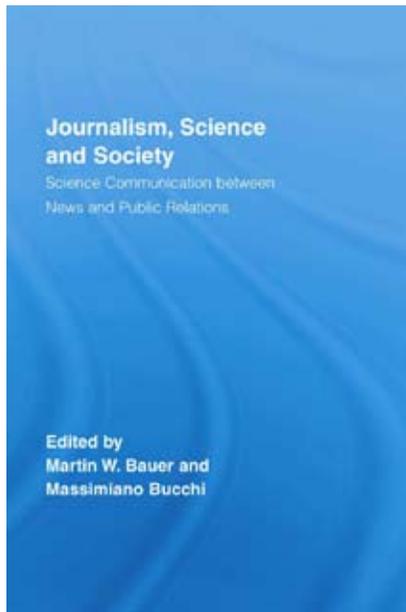


edited by Susan M Shirley



JOURNALISM, SCIENCE AND SOCIETY: SCIENCE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN NEWS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS. EDITED BY MARTIN W BAUER AND MASSIMIANO BUCCHI. NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE; 2007. 262 PAGES. HARDCOVER: \$115. ISBN-10 0-415-37528-2, ISBN-13 978-0-415-37528-3.

Journalism, Science and Society is an ambitious collection of essays on a recent trend in science communication: the influence of celebratory public relations on science journalism. The inspiration for the book and some of its content come from two international conferences on science communication held in Italy in 2003 and 2005. The conference atmosphere is conveyed by the international authors' diverse backgrounds and styles. Unfortunately, like some conferences, the book is uneven in quality; it also suffers from many proof-reading errors. Nonetheless, several of the essays are striking.

In the introduction, the editors outline the book's theme: How and why has public relations (PR) affected science journalism in recent years? The question is addressed in four distinct sections—historical analyses, journalists' perspectives, PR practitioners' perspectives, and international commentary—each containing about six essays. The essays mainly discuss written science communication.

The first section of the book contains analyses of science communication in Britain, Italy, and Latin America in the last 50 to 100 years. One of the highlights is the essay by Jeff Hughes, science historian at the University of Manchester in England. Hughes uses the correspondence between the editors of the *Manchester Guardian* and one of Britain's first science journalists, James Gerald Crowther, to show how British popular science communication developed in the 1920s and 1930s. The excerpts are often entertaining: "We cannot take more than the two articles we asked for, and we should be glad if you would kindly fashion them out of the three you have sent." Other excerpts indicate that scientists' active involvement with the mass media was crucial in getting their research covered. This section also contains informative analyses of science reporting in Britain, by Martin W Bauer and Jane Gregory; in Italy, by Massimiano Bucchi and Renato G Mazzolini; and in Latin America, by Luisa Massarani and others.

In the second section, British and Italian science journalists discuss how editors,

scientists, readers, and PR practitioners influence science news reporting. Nearly all the articles in this section are engaging and informative, and I would like to read more work by several of the writers, including Tim Radford, Luca Carra, Chiara Palmerini, and Jon Franklin. Franklin, a veteran journalist, writes in "The End of Science Journalism": "If science was ever a thing apart, a special way of living and of seeing things, that time is past. Today, science is the vital principle of our civilization. To do science is critical, to defend it is the kernel of political realism. To define it in words is to be, quite simply, a writer." The essay is based on a lecture that Franklin gave at the University of Tennessee in 1997.

The third section presents science PR practitioners' experiences and guidance for PR. These essays are structured as study guides, with bulleted lists of suggestions and helpful headings. A valuable and disturbing article by Carlos Elias, a Spanish journalist and scholar, outlines how governments can use PR tactics to stifle discussion. The methods include restricting government scientists' access to the mass media, launching PR attacks on dissenting scientists, and creating artificial controversies. Elias analyzes the political handling of two Spanish environmental disasters: a toxic-waste flood in the Doñana nature reserve in 1998 and an oil spill on the Galician coast in 2002. "In the first case", Elias writes, "the government's attempt to control scientific evidence was successful, in the second case the government found its match in the protesting scientific community." Also of note are articles by Bob Ward, by Winfried Göpfert, and by Jane Gregory and coauthors.

The fourth section of the book contains commentary by science communicators in Australia, Japan, South Africa, South Korea, and the United States. All the articles in this section are informative, and two of them review notable articles in other sections. A frequent observation is that scientists' collaboration with the news media is crucial for accurate and abundant science reporting. For example, South African science-communication

consultant Marina Joubert writes, “Most scientists complain that there is too little science, especially local science, in our press. On the other hand, journalists complain of uncooperative scientists.”

Major scientific organizations believe that funding depends on proper communication with the public and use PR to promote a favorable public image. Press releases are often picked up uncritically by the news media, and this leads to reporting that glosses over controversy. In contrast, articles like the one by Björn Fjæstad show that in the absence of PR, journalistic news coverage tends to focus on the unfavorable. Perhaps PR and investigative journalism counterbalance each other.

Although the book contains much valuable material, some articles lack focus, and reading is too often interrupted by

unintentional word repetitions, mislabeled graphs, and misplaced punctuation. The most amusing typographic error is an accidentally printed editor’s query to an author.

In summary, the book is thought and conversation provoking, and it comes at a much lower price than attending two conferences. Several of the articles cite classic works; the reference lists are valuable resources in themselves. Nevertheless, readers might prefer that the book had a higher overall quality or a lower price.

Olga Kuchment

OLGA KUCHMENT recently graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with a PhD in chemistry. She wrote this review while a Science Editor intern.

Book Note



THE LIBRARY AT NIGHT. ALBERTO MANGUEL. NEW HAVEN, CT: YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2008. 373 PAGES. HARDCOVER \$27.50. ISBN: 978-0-300-13914-3.

Manguel writes, “we continue to assemble whatever scraps of information we can gather in scrolls and books and computer chips, on shelf after library shelf, whether material, virtual or otherwise, pathetically intent on lending the world a semblance of sense and order.” *The Library at Night* is his quest to understand why we continue such ambitious pursuits when they often fail.

He begins by contemplating his personal library in France, built on the site of a 15th-century barn and castle. The title refers to the mood in his library, which changes at night when the work and distractions of the day are finished.

Each chapter examines libraries from a different perspective. For example, chapters titled “The Library as Space” and “The Library as Shape” explore the architecture of libraries. Other chapters, all with titles beginning with “The Library as . . .”, expound on themes of organization (order), psychology (mind and identity), place (island and home), survival, and myth. “The Library as Imagination” is a humorous look at a catalog of books that should have been written, imaginary titles and plots, and libraries in fiction, such

as that of Captain Nemo in Jules Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*.

Manguel uses famous libraries to illustrate his points and discusses how the functions of libraries and librarians have changed. He contrasts the role of libraries as repositories of the history of civilizations and cultures with the World Wide Web, an almost unlimited space for knowledge storage in an almost “constant present”.

The prose in this book is rich and strewn with references to classic literature (some of it obscure). The text is illustrated throughout with images and photographs and is indexed and annotated. Overall, it is an eloquent exposé best read in your favorite library chair—at night.

Susan M Shirley

Correction: On page 132 of the July–August 2008 issue, the correct surname of the reviewer is Yount.