

## **Book reviews**



## **Not Just “If It Bleeds, It Leads”: The Constructive Journalism**

**Peter Bro, *Constructive Journalism: Precedents, Principles, and Practices***  
(Routledge, London and New York, 2024)

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In recent years, in Iași, the city where I live, at least two journalistic initiatives have been launched – [www.iasulnostru.ro](http://www.iasulnostru.ro) (2021) and [www.iesenii.ro](http://www.iesenii.ro) (2022) – with an editorial policy that is not centred on adverse events according to principles such “a good news story is a bad story” and “if it bleeds, it leads.” Conversely, these online publications seek to highlight exemplary practices, effective solutions, and inspiring narratives that can foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the city and its residents. In its account of the journalistic project, [www.iasulnostru.ro](http://www.iasulnostru.ro) states that it “set out with the mission to do a different kind of local journalism, cleaner and more *constructive*. (...) We believe that local journalism is an essential public service for the vitality of a city. However, the sensationalism and negativity in the local media keep away those tired of reading about political scandals and traffic accidents. That is why there has never been a greater need for independent local journalism that amplifies the voices of local people finding solutions, whether they are local entrepreneurs, community activists or people in government. Together, we are building a local publication that brings to light the people, places and organisations that are making Iași a better city”.

As I delved into the latest work of Peter Bro, Professor, PhD, and Director of the Centre for Journalism at the University of Southern Denmark, I couldn't help but draw parallels with the local journalistic websites I had encountered. His topic – *Constructive Journalism: Precedents, Principles, and Practices* – is of local interest and global significance. The Danish author's title aligns perfectly with the reader's expectations. Despite its concise nature, the volume provides a robust theoretical foundation and a credible exploration of the history of the principles and practices specific to *constructive journalism*, both past and recent.

For any reader – whether authorized or not – of this book, it is evident that Peter Bro is deeply invested in the *conceptual clarity* of constructive journalism. The initial efforts of the pioneers to delineate the characteristics of constructive journalism and to distinguish it from other forms of journalism, which “maintain the need to be open to new developments,” are, “in many ways,

open for interpretation by journalistic practitioners.” (p. 10) Over time, this *conceptual elasticity* has resulted in myths and misunderstandings among journalistic practitioners and researchers, including those who support and oppose constructive journalism. While it has had advantages in the short term by attracting the interest of many who are dissatisfied with traditional types of journalism and/or have ideas about how to develop journalism into constructive journalism and new directions, it might have disadvantages in the longer term. A review of journalism’s evolution throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries reveals that constructive journalism, both in concept and as a set of principles and practices, has limited news value (p. 11-12). In this regard, Peter Bro’s position is unambiguous: “The history of journalism (...) shows that every time active movements have developed, the lack of conceptual precision and authoritative accounts has eventually led to their demise.” (p. 12)

That is why, although Bro refers throughout the volume and explicates preferred definitions such as that of Haagerup, the founder and CEO of Constructive Institute – “constructive journalism is a response to increasing tabloidization, sensationalism and negativity bias of the news media today”, “an approach that aims to provide audiences with a fair, accurate and contextualized picture of the world, without overemphasizing the negative and what is going wrong” ([www.constructiveinstitute.org](http://www.constructiveinstitute.org) – accessed July 7, 2024), or that of Gyldensted and McIntyre – “an emerging form of journalism that involves applying positive psychology techniques to news processes and production in an effort to create productive and engaging coverage, while holding true to journalism’s core functions” (2017, p. 23), in the last chapter the author suggests “the best way to define the concept as it stands today might be”:

“Constructive journalism call on journalists, editors, and others in the news media to present problems as well as potentials (what works already or what could work in the future) to reflect the world more accurately. For some constructive journalists presenting potentials is an end in itself, for others this is simply the means to another end, namely, to help society solve its problems.” (p. 87)

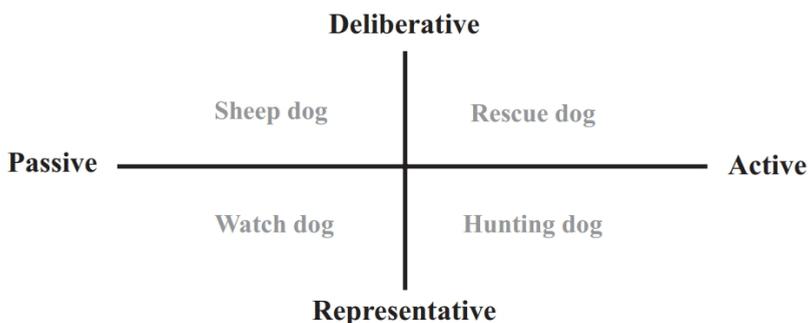
As Bro observes (p. 51), the history of active journalism – considering the three major movements from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries – indicates that journalists who are motivated to assist society in addressing its challenges can do so in four distinct ways:

1. They can present the problems and allow others to determine the appropriate course of action if anything.
2. They can present potentials and allow others to decide, if anything, on the best action.
3. They can promote solutions and attempt to prompt action, among others.
4. They can participate in the implementation of solutions themselves.

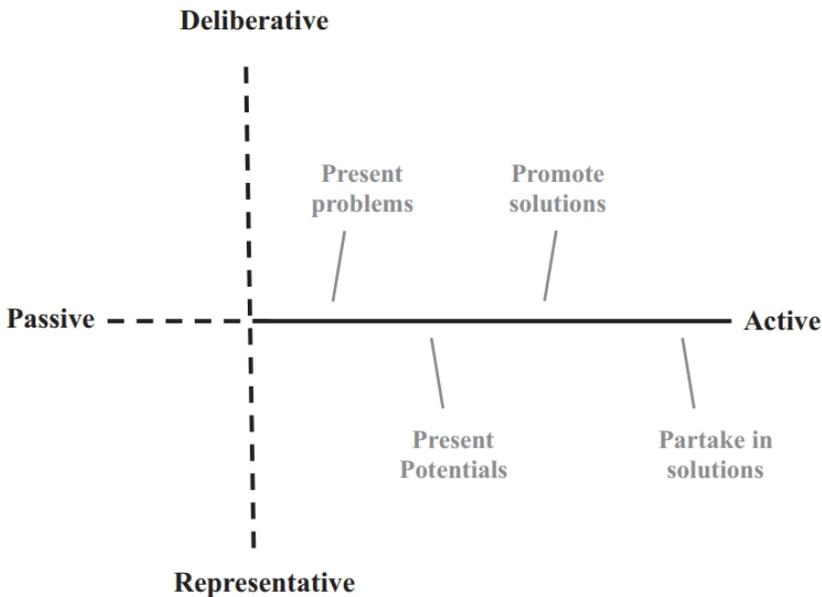
As can be seen, the *potentials*, defined by Bro as “things that already work or could work well in the future – and as such help inspire others” (p. 31), constitute a second approach. By examining the principal movements in the

nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, the volume reveals that each collective endeavour has sought to achieve more than merely presenting problems (active journalism in its most fundamental sense). However, there are notable differences between the movements regarding the extent to which the founders believed that journalists – and, by extension, the news media – should be active. In this context, the founders of the constructive journalism movement appear to be the least active, as they have come to espouse the view that constructive journalism should only “move” the world – Peter Bro paraphrases Gyldensted (1995) – by presenting problems and potential solutions.

The different types of journalism show that it is not enough to just say there is passive and active journalism, says Bro (p. 51). We must look at the differences and similarities between traditional journalism and the active movements from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Instead, this dichotomy in the *journalistic compass* can be seen as a *continuum*, where active journalism can build on four different approaches. The least active approach is presenting problems. Journalists publish news stories to alarm their audiences but leave it to readers, listeners, and others to decide what to do. This is active journalism at its simplest. In of active journalism, journalists assume responsibility for addressing issues and potential problems within the newsroom. In this context, active journalists are committed to facilitating positive change, and they do so by advocating for solutions that the general public can readily adopt to address societal issues. Such active journalists feel a sense of responsibility for addressing societal issues. Yet, it is only at the fourth degree that they also engage directly in the actual solutions rather than merely leaving this to individuals outside the newsroom. Some observers may perceive the third and fourth degrees as forms of activism, characterised by journalists’ intentional efforts to drive change and assume a social responsibility in this regard. However, it is crucial to distinguish between activism and advocacy. The latter pertains to individuals or entities (such as political parties and candidates) who represent a specific viewpoint on behalf of an organisation or individual. This form of advocacy was a practice that Hearst, Pulitzer, and occasionally Northcliffe were accused of engaging in.



**Figure 1:** Bro’s journalistic compass (p. 8)



**Figure 2:** The active journalism continuum model, illustrated by Peter Bro (p. 52)

Finally, a brief overview of the volume. Bro's opening chapter outlines its primary objectives, including elucidating the similarities and differences between various forms of journalism and examining the strategies employed by contemporary journalists, editors and news organisations to become more constructive in their approach. Moreover, it aims to demonstrate how these innovative approaches align with the fundamental principles of journalism and elucidate their relationship with diverse journalistic practices. Chapter 2 presents an analysis of the historical precedents of constructive journalism, demonstrating that many contemporary issues being debated by practitioners, including the role of the passive or active journalist, have been recurring themes for centuries. Nevertheless, despite the endorsement of some of the most prominent figures in the field, none of these endeavours has resulted in a more enduring contribution to journalism's evolution. One of the principal reasons for this is the need for more clarity surrounding the fundamental principles of journalism, particularly about the extent to which active journalists can engage in their work without contravening other foundational norms established at modern journalism's advent. In Chapter 3, which outlines the principles of constructive journalism, it becomes evident that there are multiple avenues through which journalists can be constructive and that the extent to which they can act as agents of change varies. The chapter concludes by examining the interrelationship between these four approaches and other fundamental principles in journalism, including neutrality, objectivity, and responsibility. Chapter 4 presents a comprehensive account of the evolution of constructive journalism, focusing on its contemporary manifestations, modes of presentation to audiences, and the

participation of individuals in the construction of news stories. The book concludes with an examination of the strategies journalists and researchers can adopt to ensure the success of their efforts to enhance the quality of journalism. The final chapter, the fifth, introduces a novel definition of constructive journalism that may benefit this endeavour.

## **Discovering the age of unreason**

**Douglas Murray, *The War on the West***  
(Broadside Books, 2022)

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Douglas Murray's *The War on the West* stands out as a critical and relevant assessment of contemporary sociopolitical dynamics, particularly the ideological disputes that have come to define modern Western discourse. Murray's investigation, published by Broadside Books in 2022, presents a comprehensive exploration of the ideological disputes that have intensified in recent years, typified by what he refers to as a 'war on the West.'

This investigation covers a wide range of topics, including cultural wars, historical revisionism, racial issues, the impact of Critical Race Theory, and societal manipulation by the so-called “Global Cult”. It questions popular narratives about the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccines, and the presence of viruses. The author emphasises critical thinking, challenging official narratives, and rejecting manipulative forces in society.

The book opens with an introduction, followed by four chapters. There is an interval between chapters one through three. The first chapter focuses on race, followed by an interlude on China as a counterpoint to how the woke movement views and treats China, even though the country is doing the precise thing that the woke movement is protesting. Chapter two delves into the complex narratives surrounding history, followed by an interlude on the moral and practical obstacles of race reparations. This chapter highlights revisionist trends in current history, particularly utilising the perspective of the *1619 Project*, which redefines the genesis story of the United States in a way that many historians regard as factually incorrect. Murray is particularly critical of the project's creator for failing to engage in scholarly discourse before making broad historical claims, and he highlights the project's subsequent discreet shifts in reaction to academic criticism.

Religion, as examined in Chapter 3, emphasises the intrusion of modern ideology into religious institutions, hence affecting traditional rituals and beliefs. This is followed by an interlude on gratitude, which considers the larger societal ramifications of these ideological developments. The final chapter delves into culture, criticising how current movements frequently denigrate Western cultural

achievements while ironically embracing Marxist ideals, despite their Western origins and the past atrocities committed in their name,

The author investigates how the “Global Cult” (p. 364) manipulates numerous sectors through psychological warfare, media control, and the suppression of dissenting voices. According to Murray, this manipulation is widespread in the media, academia, and business practices, where current events are controlled and opposing viewpoints are frequently muted. Murray demonstrates how this control stifles open debate and critical thinking, resulting in a homogenised viewpoint that serves the objectives of the “Global Cult”.

Murray criticises the push for diversity, social justice projects, and the promotion of Critical Race Theory, claiming that these efforts are modifying cultural standards, resulting in divisiveness, censorship, and the suppression of opposing ideas. He says that, while these movements profess to promote inclusivity and equity, they frequently result in increased division and conflict. By emphasising identity politics and group complaints, these projects can mask individual merit and build an environment in which opposing viewpoints are not accepted.

Murray also sees the COVID-19 outbreak as a fabricated issue used to push what the author has called the “Hunger Games Society” agenda (pp. 381-384). He claims that the epidemic was utilised to control populations and reshape society through fear, propaganda, and compulsion. According to Murray, the response to the epidemic demonstrated how governments and strong entities might use a catastrophe to impose vast changes and strengthen their influence over people's lives.

In a more speculative vein, Murray investigates the reality of non-human beings such as Archons and Wetiko, as well as the role of alien influences in shaping human consciousness and civilization. He urges people to become more aware and reject these dominating forces, arguing that knowledge and critical thinking are essential for defeating manipulation. This investigation into metaphysical and extraterrestrial elements provides a new depth to his critique of contemporary society.

Murray concludes his book with a reality check. For all of the West's foes, as well as all of the Westerners who have fallen victim to their never-ending attacks, one can offer a few brutal facts to challenge the left's story. Among them is “the most devastating proof of all, which is the simple matter of footfall: a footfall that is entirely one-directional. For there is, even today, no serious movement of people in the world struggling to get into modern China. For all its financial prowess, the world does not wish to move to that country. It does want to move to America and will go to extraordinary lengths – even the risk of life – to reach that goal” (p. 292).

Overall, *The War on the West* is a thought-provoking and enlightening study that is vital for understanding the ideological struggles that are creating modern Western nations. The War on the West asks readers to engage critically

with current ideological disputes while also appreciating the West's complex past. It asks them to recognise and oppose the forces that seek to manipulate and divide. In doing so, Murray's work provides an important filter through which to understand and manage what he appropriately refers to as the Age of Unreason.

Murray encourages readers to critically assess the narratives they encounter while still appreciating Western civilization's complex history and accomplishments. This book is highly recommended for academics, students, and anybody interested in the intersection of history, ideology, and modern politics.