Breaking the News:
Telegraphy and Yellow Journalism in the Spanish-American War

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ABSTRACT: This essay reengages the familiar topic of yellow journalism through the historical and formal discontinuities introduced by electrical telegraphy during the Spanish-American War. It places popular newspapers such as William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* in the context of signal-processing technologies such as telegraphy and the wire-based press, which allowed for the manipulation of alphanumeric data through electrical signals. By breaking down the continuities of communication into discrete series and signals, telegraphy created the conditions necessary to coordinate action at a distance through the manipulation of serial data: the signs, signals, and other discrete bits of intelligence that were actively reconstructed by newspapers to produce the continuous spectacle of war news and sensational journalism.

KEYWORDS: yellow journalism, telegraph, electricity, newspapers, Spanish-American War, periodicals

The usual citizen . . . knows as little of the forces that bring him his news each day as of that which through other wires brings his electric light.
    —Arthur Brisbane[1]

We dwell in stories and histories in order not to feel the lightning's short circuit.
    —Friedrich Kittler[2]

Let me start with a popular anecdote about war and periodicals. It takes place in January 1897, a year before the sinking of the USS *Maine* and the beginning of the Spanish-American War. Its key players are William Randolph Hearst,

newspaper tycoon and publisher of the *New York Journal*; Richard Harding Davis, correspondent and golden boy of New York journalism; and Frederic Remington, artist and illustrator of the West. As the story goes, Hearst dispatched Davis and Remington to Cuba to report and illustrate the unfolding scene between Cuban rebels and Spanish authorities. They were "instructed to remain there until the war began; for 'yellow journalism' was alert and had an eye for the future."[3] Shortly after arriving in Cuba, however, Remington grew bored by the lack of action and sent a telegram to Hearst: "Everything is quiet. There is no trouble. There will be no war. I wish to return." Hearst infamously replied: "Please remain. You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war."

Fact or fiction, the anecdote folds so perfectly into the popular narrative about yellow journalism that its veracity hardly matters. Simply invoking it is enough to cloud the reader in what W. Joseph Campbell describes as "the distorting effects of 'the aesthetic fallacy,' a condition in which facts and details are used to construct 'a beautiful story'—a story that distorts or supplants empirical truths."[4] The story carries such an aesthetic punch that few are even aware it was first quoted not as a critique of yellow journalism, but as praise for a new form of journalism "which is not content merely to print a daily record of history, but seeks to take part in events as an active and sometimes decisive agent."[5] Self-activated journalism "does not wait for things to turn up," Hearst's *Journal* proclaimed in 1897, but actively works to "get things done."[6] Even fewer take note of the fact that the entire action of the anecdote hinges on the presence of the electrical telegraph, whose signals technically encode Hearst's command, transmit his instructions, and move the action forward. In the discursive wake of New Historicism, the mere act of telling the anecdote conceals the technical conditions of its possibility: the wires and electricity that allow Hearst—his finger on the pulse—to harness god's lightning in the service of producing, manufacturing, and coordinating "breaking news." From this perspective, we might draw on Friedrich Kittler and say that we dwell in the story precisely "in order not to feel the lightning's short circuit": the breaking news that periodically flashes across the wire signal by signal, pulse by pulse, dividing the continuity of events into the periodic relay of telegraphic signals.

In this essay, I reengage the familiar topic of yellow journalism through the historical discontinuities introduced by telegraphy during the Spanish-American War. In recent decades, cultural historians have drawn on the war's diverse archive of material culture to tell important narratives about the role of popular media in the production of spectacle, romance, and imperialism. While ostensibly attuned to media, most of this scholarship fails to distinguish between the cultural media of signs, symbols, and stories, and the technical media that encode these representations through procedures governed by discontinuity, seriality, and signal processing. With yellow journalism in particular, scholars have focused almost exclusively on the role of the sensational press in "establishing important visual and discursive precedents for how a broader network

of print, visual, and popular culture mass-marketed war and empire."[7] As a supplement to this approach, my essay draws attention to telegraphy in order to excavate and elucidate the technological procedures through which stories of sensationalism, spectacle, and media propaganda functioned. More specifically, it works to reconfigure popular newspapers such as Hearst's *Journal* and Pulitzer's *World* in the context of what Friedrich Kittler refers to as the "discourse networks" of the late nineteenth century, specifically signal-processing technologies such as telegraphy and the wire-based press, which allowed for the manipulation of alphanumeric data through electrical signals—the kind of signals that encoded words and letters, traversed the laws of geography, and created the conditions for new forms of communication and manipulation.[8] The yellow press's commitment to a "journalism of action," I argue, was enabled and materialized during the war by electrical telegraphy, which created the conditions necessary to coordinate "action" at a distance through the manipulation of discrete signals: the serial data through which news was discretized and delivered across the wire and repurposed in print as the periodical spectacle of sensational journalism.

Of course, telegraphy's relationship to war news certainly predates the events of 1898, stretching back to the Mexican-American War and the Civil War, where it was harnessed by news organizations to connect readers to the latest intelligence from the front. Outdoor bulletin boards frequently transcribed breaking news from the wire, and newspapers often disseminated telegraphic intelligence in print, attracting large crowds to hear war news read aloud, a scene popularized by Richard Caton Woodville's famous 1848 painting *War News.* It was not until the Spanish-American War, however, that a handful of papers were able to exploit unprecedented amounts of cash and other resources to actively create, coordinate, and manipulate war news through the telegraph's short circuit, a circuit whose invisibility, I argue, belied the real effects and discontinuities it produced in the breaking news of the newspapers. Never before had a handful of newspapers been able to manipulate the telegraph as a means to produce such a self-activated, self-reflexive, and self-promotional relationship to war news. In response to the breaks and discontinuities created by telegraphy, new forms of journalism began to actively refit the news to capitalize on its formal effects: its speed, its seriality, its ability to generate speculation, and its method of transmitting news through periodic signals.

The Seriality of Spectacle

Accounts of telegraphy often begin with Samuel Morse's inaugural message across the wire—"What hath God wrought"—which he famously lifted from the Old Testament, encoded into dots and dashes, and transmitted across an experimental line from Washington to Boston on May 24, 1844.[9] Unfortunate-

ly, the emphasis on the biblical allusion has drawn our attention away from Morse's perhaps more significant second message: "Have you any news." Moreover, the anecdote about the inaugural message is historically inaccurate. Annie Ellsworth, daughter of the commissioner of US patents, in fact selected the biblical quote for transmission, not Morse. And, more significantly, Morse and his partner, Alfred Vail, had already successfully transmitted a message several weeks earlier. In an experiment on May 1, 1844, Morse and Vail decided to see if they could wire news from Annapolis Junction to Washington faster than a speeding train. Stationed in Annapolis, Vail received news from passengers traveling south from Baltimore—in this case, that the Whig Party had nominated Henry Clay for president—and then telegraphed the news ahead to Morse in Washington, scooping the passengers by a hour and a quarter. When the train finally arrived in the capital, those on board "heard the newsboys shouting their extras, and saw, in cold print, their supposed information, [and] their astonishment knew no bounds."[10] In its power to wire the news ahead, the telegraph created a break between the continuity of physical travel and the discontinuity of signal transmission, a break that inaugurated not simply a new speed for the news, but a new arena for the production and manipulation of news into coordinated spectacle. The word "newspaper" might have already suggested a break between old and new, but the telegraph initiated a further break that short-circuited the previous news cycle, refitting the news for a new mode of circulation.[11]

As it turns out, one of the first to capitalize on this break was the wizard of electricity himself, Thomas Edison. As a newsboy on the Grand Trunk Railway, Edison arrived in Detroit one morning in April 1862 and noticed that the bulletin boards were "surrounded with dense crowds" reading the latest news of "60 thousand killed and wounded" at Shiloh. Studying the crowds, Edison later wrote that he "conceived the idea of telegraphing the news ahead, went to the operator in the depot and by giving him *Harper's Weekly* and some other papers for three months, he agreed to telegraph to all the stations the matter on the bulletin board."[12] Knowing the demand for news would outstrip his normal supply of papers, Edison convinced the editor to give him an extra thousand copies of the paper on credit, lugged them on board, folded them for sale, and proceeded to increase his asking price at every station along the track. He sold out by midday. It was the very next day, according to Edison, that he quit the newspaper business and began to teach himself telegraphy, inaugurating his bright future on the breaking news of events at Shiloh. While he still lacked the power of a publisher to print news, his manipulation of the telegraph allowed him to capitalize on breaking news by breaking it down even further, station by station, signal by signal, minute by minute. Through its ability to coordinate the signals and intervals through which news is transmitted on the wire, the telegraph provided Edison with a new means to increase anticipa-

tion for war news, divide and conquer its sales, and even adjust its value in print based on new speeds and intervals. His manipulation rested on the fact that the telegraph broke with the physical continuity of travel and produced a new set of conditions in which he could actively coordinate news into the production of mass spectacle.

It is important to remember here that both periodicals and telegraphs record, archive, and transmit culture discontinuously, breaking down messages into serial arrangements and issuing them at periodic intervals. The telegraph encodes messages by breaking down the relative continuity of alphabetic writing through a series of discontinuous pulses and intervals. In a similar fashion, albeit in a different medium, periodicals also break down the appearance of continuity by arranging and transmitting bits of culture serially. This is perhaps the major reason why the field of periodical studies has benefited so immensely from electronic databases. Like the database, periodicals are non-narrative formats that divide and distribute culture in ways that disrupt the continuity projected by the book. The fact that we mine periodicals for bits of history, and then translate those bits into cultural narratives, relies on their serial configuration. We might interpret them through signs and stories, but from a technical perspective they are edited and archived through discrete bits and series that break down the illusion of continuity, resist the narrativizing tendency of historical discourse, and challenge us to read and write history in new ways. As archives, their discontinuous seriality precedes and conditions the continuity of their signs, stories, and sensationalism.[13]

The discontinuous seriality of periodicals is even more apparent with matters of time, a fact that databases tend to elide given how they flatten the temporal difference of installments through their spatial logic. Mark W. Turner's work on periodicity illuminates how matters of time have always played an integral role in coordinating cultural habits, patterns, and rhythms.[14] With their overlapping "temporal rhythms," periodicals mark and divide culture according to different beats, intervals, series, and periodicities.[15] These rates of circulation in time might seem easy to dismiss, but they ultimately sync and materialize cultural patterns into habit, reality, and history. It could easily be argued, for instance, that the most important aspect of yellow journalism during the war was not the spectacle of its sensational content, but the fact that a paper like the *Journal* sometimes issued as many as forty editions a day—a rate of circulation that illustrates just how dramatically telegraphy adjusted the rhythms and intervals of news during the height of the war, further dividing the news into breaking events, installments, series, and features. The telegraph was not just a technology used by newspapers to transmit the news at near-instantaneous speeds; it was also a technology harnessed by newspapers to actively manipulate the news into new forms of coordinated spectacle.

Command, Control, and Coordination

In his 1898 article "The Modern Newspaper in War Time," managing editor of the *New York Journal* Arthur Brisbane described the Spanish-American War as a time when no expense was too costly and no idea too eccentric. The charter of "boats alone amounted to over fifteen hundred dollars per day," cable tolls cost "fifty to eighty cents per word," and every man "in the newspaper office was presently engaged laying his suggestions before the chief editor."[16] Ideas and experiments ran the gamut, and cost and circulation skyrocketed. During the height of the war, the *Journal* spent more than $50,000 a week (the equivalent today of about $1 million), "enough to eliminate all the profits of the most profitable newspaper in America."[17] Money was spent on dispatch boats, wire fees, carrier pigeons, signal balloons, first-class cameras, correspondent salaries, and anything else that worked to actively capture, record, organize, and transmit events into the spectacle of war news.[18] In June 1898, Hearst even traveled to Cuba, chartering a steamer from the Baltimore Fruit Company and refitting it with a printing press, a darkroom, and enough staff to publish a "Cuban Edition" of the *Journal,* a project that ultimately failed.[19]

What gets lost in this spectacle is the extent to which the entire enterprise of newsgathering relied on the telegraph for communication and coordination, just as the military, the railroads, and other corporate organizations relied on the wires to coordinate the movement of goods, bodies, and transportable items. In his seminal essay on the telegraph, James W. Carey shows how the telegraph permitted for the first time "the effective separation of communication from transportation," creating the conditions for intelligence "to control physical processes actively."[20] Before the telegraph, the power to actively coordinate physical processes from a distance was simply impossible; the time delay that came with travel could not keep pace with changes on the ground. After the advent of telegraphy, however, manipulating action from a distance was no longer an exercise for the imagination because one could now control, coordinate, and adjust physical actions through signal processing.

Although few of Hearst's papers from the war have been made public, we know from the available record that he frequently deployed cables to dispatch "explicit and detailed instructions to his far-flung representatives."[21] Given the scale of a paper like the *Journal,* which included hundreds of war correspondents deployed in the field, it is entirely reasonable to assume that the periodic relay of cables set the conditions in which newsgathering materialized. Technically speaking, coverage of the war for a newspaper like the *Journal* was as much about manipulating the discontinuities of time and space as it was about manufacturing the continuity of stories and spectacles. On the wire, sensationalism broke down into periodic series and signals, the kind of data that only the most powerful newspapers could actively manipulate by capitalizing on

the break between communication and transportation to control the produc-
tion of war news.

The difficulty with demonstrating the validity of this argument is that
few cables and telegrams actually survive, creating gaps and discontinuities
in history that short-circuit the typical means of argument through evidence.[22]
Fortunately, however, it was a consistent practice of yellow journalism to in-
clude evidence of its action directly within publications, often by reprinting
copies of telegrams, cables, receipts, bank notes, and the like. On February 17,
1898, for example, fewer than forty-eight hours after an explosion ripped the
forward hull of the *Maine* and sent the battleship to the bottom of the harbor,
killing 266 of its 345 crew members, Hearst crowded the front page of the *Jour-
nal* with an announcement advertising a $50,000 reward "For the Detection of
the Perpetrator of the Maine Outrage."[23] Two days later, he upped the ante by
embedding a copy of a Wells, Fargo & Co.'s certificate of deposit, replete with
his name, deposit number, and cashier's signature authenticating the reward's
validity.[24] On the same page, the paper also transcribed a series of cables from
French papers celebrating its "journalistic enterprise"; below that, a scrap from
the previous day announced the "Admiration of Europe" in response to the
Journal's action. To dismiss these bits and fragments as mere self-promotion is
to miss the significance of the discontinuities they materialize, formally break-
ing up the news on the page, bit by bit, form by form, cable by cable. From
a technical standpoint, these bits and fragments were the serial data manipu-
lated by the *Journal* to self-consciously activate the news into the spectacle of
"breaking news," the kind of news that literally broke the page into a space of
discontinuity, innovation, and experimentation.

At the same time, the *Journal* also deployed the practice of quoting and
embedding telegrams to gather public opinion, coordinate national campaigns,
and circulate the latest news from around the globe. On February 19, for in-
stance, the *Journal* featured a series of cables received from standing governors
in which they responded to the *Journal*'s request—sent the previous day by
telegraph—for their "opinion as to the duty of the United States in references
to recent events."[25] In the center of the page, they even embedded a cable from
the governor of Washington, John R. Rogers, written in manuscript and calling
for immediate action: "Indecision and cowardice in the presence of a high and
solemn duty will meet with universal and well merited contempt." The other
cables were more cautious: "Patriotism, not jingoism, is needed to meet the
present emergency," wrote the governor of Oregon. "Leave everything in the
hands of the President, who is competent to deal with the emergency," wired
the governor of Connecticut. A few weeks later, the newspaper turned to the
telegraph again, this time to coordinate a national campaign to raise funds for
the building of a monument to the men who died in the explosion (Figure 1).
Here, too, the *Journal* embedded copies of telegrams addressed to Hearst and
wired through the Western Union Telegraph Company. In the center of the

page, for example, a cable from Clark Howell, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution,* accepted the *Journal*'s invitation to serve on a committee dedicated to raising funds for the monument.[26] Immediately above it, another embedded cable from James Cardinal Gibbons endorsed the plan and pledged his support. As all of these examples illustrate, the *Journal* actively turned to the wire to solicit public

FIGURE 1. Telegrams embedded in the *New York Journal*, March 1, 1898.

opinion, coordinate national campaigns, and self-consciously promote its own action as part and parcel of the news itself.

Time and Telegraphic Description

On the night of the *Maine* explosion, only two correspondents in Havana were able to get off dispatches with news of the tragedy: F. J. Hilbert of the Associated Press and Sylvester Scovel of the *New York World.* While the explosion broke the *Maine* at precisely 9:40 p.m., news of the event broke over the AP at 1:20 a.m., sending newsrooms scrambling to get the breaking news into the morning edition.[27] At large papers like the *Journal* and the *World,* wires were directly connected to the pressroom to instantly register the minute-by-minute breaks, rhythms, and pulsations of news across the wire. As Brisbane observed, "New wires were put in, not merely to the desk of the editor but in the pressroom, where important news went straight from the wire to the rotary press, attached to the plate in 'the fudge,' to appear on the street printed five minutes after it had been received."[28] The "fudge" served as a repository for holding the latest news, which in this case amounted to telegrams and cables converted into printed matter to be inserted into blank spaces dedicated for the insertion of last-minute items into the newspaper. Bonnie M. Miller cites the *Louisville Courier-Journal* as an example where the editors quickly "revamped the first and second pages" to make room for breaking news of the *Maine* explosion; to supplement the headline, they also reprinted a four-column picture of the battleship that had been previously published three weeks earlier. "In ten minutes," Miller writes, "the editors set up the story, placed it in form, and sent the paper to the stereotypers," scrambling to rearrange the paper to register the breaking news across the wire.[29]

In Havana, meanwhile, Sylvester Scovel of the *World* fired off a bulletin about the explosion within minutes of its rupture, wiring a cable to the *World* with details in time for a fourth-edition extra, which was published at 5:00 a.m. on February 16. Within the hour, night editors of the *World* wired the correspondent back with instructions to coordinate divers on their way to inspect the wreckage: "Have sent divers from Key West to get actual truth, whether favorable or unfavorable. First investigation by divers with authentic results worth $1000 extra expense to-morrow alone."[30] A day later—immediately below the headline "Maine Explosion Caused by Bomb or Torpedo?"—the *World* announced that they had "Sent a Special Tug, with Submarine Divers, to Havana to Find Out" (Figure 2).[31] They also coupled the headline with a graphic illustration of the *Maine* literally exploding into bits, drowning in a cloud of smoke and fire riddled by scraps of iron and pieces of flesh flying through the air. To call the image sensational is an understatement. And yet, its depiction of exploding fragments and breaking parts helps to illustrate how the event of the

explosion physically broke the news into a series of bits that were discontinu-
ously, telegraphically, and periodically converted into the spectacle of news,
stories, and headlines. Even the caption described the image as an eyewitness
account of the explosion reconstructed from the "telegraphic descriptions" sent
by Scovel. With the serial data sutured into breaking news, little did it matter
that the "Special Tug" was actually denied access to the wreck by Spanish au-
thorities. The scene of action had already begun, breaking the news into just
the kind of data that the new journalism sought to capture, manipulate, and
mark up for circulation.

For all its sensationalism, we might read the image as both a product and
illustration of the discontinuities introduced by telegraphy. For, along with
initiating action and coordinating events, the telegraph also produced a sig-
nificant break between word and image during the war. Since the possibility

FIGURE 2. "Maine Explosion Caused by Bomb or Torpedo?," *New York World*, February 17, 1898.

of transmitting halftone photographs over the wire was still a few years away, it was popular for editors to rely on graphic illustrators to produce images quickly and inexpensively, with the added benefit that they could break with "the formal constraints of accuracy" and invent details to animate events into the illusion of live action.[32] As with the *World*'s first illustration, many of the earliest images of the *Maine*, as Miller observes, were "based solely on second-hand tidbits of verbal description," or what the *Houston Post* called "thrilling word pictures."[33] Only after time had elapsed for photographs to travel back to the states did graphic artists begin to produce hand-drawn images from actual photographs taken on location. And because correspondents had to pay by the word for dispatches, they "often sent only succinct bits of information"—just enough details to lend credibility to the claim that they were based on "telegraphic description" from an eyewitness source.[34]

While the speed and instantaneity of the telegraph were important, it was the telegraph's ability to formally break and short-circuit "news" that materialized in the pages of newspapers. By breaking images into words, words into signals, and events into serial updates, the telegraph circulated discrete bits of information that enabled newspapers to claim legitimacy for their news while still allowing writers and illustrators room to sensationalize the news through acts of imaginative reconstruction. In this way, telegraphy created the conditions for newspapers to further suture a culture of evidence-based reporting to a popular culture rife with sensationalism, spectacle, and propaganda.[35] It also carried into print a new sense of "time-criticality" that allowed newspapers to self-consciously break, measure, and manipulate the news with telegraphic precision.[36] Stories about time, speed, and itineraries, for example, began to register the subtle effects of telegraphy by realigning events into measurable intervals, drawing attention to matters of time, circulation, relay, and other temporal markers of their own news gathering. When the first actual photograph of the wreck finally arrived in New York, it was reproduced the next day in the *World* with a caption delineating its precise itinerary: "The photograph left Havana by steamship Olivette at 2 P.M. Wednesday, arrived at Key West at 10:30 P.M.; at Port Tampa, Fla., 4 P.M. Thursday; left Tampa by New York express at 7 P.M. Thursday, and arrived at New York at 2:15 yesterday afternoon. It is here reproduced exactly."[37] Even syntax was beginning to register and reflect the telegraph's rhythm, breaking the news into discrete bits and measurable intervals—controlled and synced, of course, through the coordination of telegraphic signals.

The *World* of Codes and Signals

No publisher kept his finger on the pulse of the *World* more than Joseph Pulitzer, a man whose failing senses drew him closer and closer to the world of

codes and signals. In 1889, Pulitzer sailed to Europe to consult specialists about his failing eyesight and his acute sensitivity to noise, conditions that increasingly led to his physical separation from the *World*'s offices in New York. Despite a nervous condition where "even the crackling of paper could cause him excruciating pain," Pulitzer found in telegraphy a quiet mode of communication through which he could monitor the *World* from the soundproof rooms on his yacht.[38] One biographer writes that "the *Liberty* was a temple of silence," a floating hub in "an almost unbroken stream of telegrams, all written in code, flow[ing] from ports and distant destinations to New York, directing every part of the paper's operation."[39] Pulitzer even hired a personal "corps of secretaries" to read him telegrams in soothing voices, translating the signals into pleasant tones.[40] Like a god at sea, Pulitzer commanded the *World* telegraphically, sending and receiving encrypted messages from all corners of the globe, while his dedicated staff and confidants, "like high priests translating a religious text . . . sat each day at their desks under the gold dome with their own annotated code books, carefully deciphering a new stack of telegraphs and memos."[41]

Only one copy of these remarkable cable code books survives, though we do know that Pulitzer compiled and distributed copies to a small inner circle. Measuring at 6 inches by 9 inches, the books were about 250 pages long and contained at least 20,000 coded terms for encrypting and sending cables across the wire (Figure 3). Indexed by alphabetically tabbed sections, the terms were typed for easy reference, organized by idiosyncratic categories ("Health of Children," "Weather," "Ears," etc.), formatted to look like a newspaper column, and then pasted inside like a scrapbook.[42] The entries included code words for virtually all elements of Pulitzer's world, including codes for politicians, dates, locations, business terms, types of exchanges, amounts of money, and countless other categories. The weather alone broke down into forty-eight codes, the health of children and family thirty-seven. Codes for cash balances started with the letter "H," while frequently used names began with the letter "G." Theodore Roosevelt signaled "GLUTINOUS"; the *World* "GENUINE"; the managing editor "GRUESOME"; W. R. Hearst "GUSH"; and the Democratic Party "GOSLING." As for Pulitzer, he encrypted himself as either "ANDES" or "MARKSMAN," tagging the *Journal* "MEDUSA" and the Republican Party "MALARIA." Entries also included codes for "general message[s] from Mr. Pulitzer," including a series filed under the letter "S": "SHAME . . . Until further notice, send only Condensed Report"; "SHAMBLES . . . Read my former cable or letter carefully on the subject of——"; and "SECULAR . . . Telegraph my mail address to St. Louis."[43]

Of the more than 20,000 codes, the most important was the word "SEMAPHORE," which Pulitzer required to be included in every reply to his cables. As one editor instructed, the word should be underlined in the "reddest ink" to emphasize its message: "I have read twice and fully, clearly, surely understand and acknowledge your cable. I will do my best after careful consideration and

EARS.

SOCIABLE......Your right "Ear" was good.
SOCRATIC....Your left "Ear" was good.
SODIUM......Your right "Ear" was bad.
SOJOURN....Your left "Ear" was bad.

HEALTH OF CHILDREN, ETC.

SABLE.............We are quite well.
SACHEM..........Ralph is quite well.
SACK..............Baby is quite well.
SACRED..........Lulu is quite well.
SACKING........Joseph is quite well.
SADDLE..........Lulu is quite well.
SAFE.............Children are quite well.
SAFETY.........Other children are quite well.
SAFFRON........Ralph improving.
SAFFRANINE...Lulu
SAG.............Baby
SAGACIOUS....Joseph
SAGACITY......Lulu
SAGITTAL......Others
SAGO...........All
SAID...........Family go to country to-day.
SAINT..........Family go to country to-
SAKE...Family have gone to country.
SAILABLE......Family return in a few days to New York.
SALAD.....Family have returned to New York.
SALAM....Change of family good.
SALARY...Heard from family to-day and all are well.
SALINE..Heard yesterday from family and all are well.
SALMON...Heard two days ago and all are well.
SALTANT..Heard to-day from family.
SALTWART..Heard yesterday from family.
SALVAGE..Heard two days ago from family.
SALVER...Family are at...
SAMPLE..Family are in New York.
SANITARY..Mr. Davis leaves for...
SANITATION..Mr. Davis returns to New York.
SANCTUARY...Mrs. Pulitzer is quite well.
SANGUINE..Mrs. Pulitzer and children are quite well.
WILLIAM....How is everybody?
CHARLES....How is your health?

ANSWERS TO HEALTH INQUIRIES.

SHAPELESS....Much sickness among employees.
SHARE...Home sick; nothing serious.
SHARK...Home sick; slightly alarming.
SHARPER..Home sick; very serious.
SHAWL...Home sick; very serious.
SHEAF...Recovering rapidly.
SHED....Out of danger.
SHEEP..Feeling greatly improved.
SHEETING..Greatly recovered.
SHELF...Sick; but able to be about.
SHELTER..Been sick, but now better.
SHREBERT...Don't seem to improve.

GENERAL MESSAGE FROM MR. PULITZER.

SEAL.............Send next cable to
SEAMAN........Repeat last cable.
SEARCH.........Is everything going right now?
SEASIDE.......Send me more cables.
SEASON........I start to-morrow for New York by steamer.
SECEDE....I start for New York to-day by steamer.
SECLUDE....It is my present intention to return to New York by steamer.
SECOND....Change address for all mail written to
SECRET....Address cables hereafter, until further notice to
SECTARY....When did you hear from my children last and how were they?
SEDATIVE....Telegraph my cable address to my family.
SECULAR....Telegraph my mail address to St. Louis.
SEDIMENT....Telegraph my cable address to St. Louis.
SECTRIC....All right; I understand.
SEMAPHORE....I understand and acknowledge receipt of your telegram.
SEMINARY....I have received and understand your message, I will follow up immediately and let you know as soon as possible.
SEDENTARY....I understand and acknowledge receipt of your cablegram.
SEDITIOUS....Acknowledge my cable concerning
SEVERAL....Answer my letter in reference to
SEVERALTY....Answer my cable in reference to
SEVERE....Have a long story about—
SEXTANT....Have a short Daily Edition.
SENIORITY....Sunday Edition.
SENORITY....Send a reporter to interview
SHACKLE....
SHADOW....Cable me who wrote article or story about—
SHADY....Write me who wrote article on or story about—
SHARP....Do not make any further mention, until I so instruct you.
SHAGREEN....Keep pounding away at...
SHAM....You do not understand my idea.
SHALLOW....What I mean is—
SHALL....Test kindly Mr—
SHAMBLES....Read my former cable or letters carefully on the subject
SHAME....Until further notice, send only Condensed Report.
SHANK....Until further notice send Full Report.
SHAPE....I want clearest, but condensed report of—

When health of staff is inquired after by Mr. Pulitzer, he will use second words after "TAMBOUR."

FIGURE 3. Selection from H. A. Jenks's cable code book, the only known surviving copy of the books compiled and distributed by Joseph Pulitzer; courtesy Columbia University Libraries.

would certainly cable back and ask a question if I did not understand or felt uncertain."[44] From one angle, the word eased Pulitzer's paranoia by adding an extra layer of protection to ensure that telegrams were transmitted only once. More broadly, the word also placed Pulitzer's code within the long history of signaling at sea. Starting in the early nineteenth century, sea captains often carried a signal code book kept under lock and key; according to Joseph McMillan, "books were bound with heavy lead plates bolted to the covers so that they would sink to the bottom if a captain had them thrown overboard to prevent their capture."[45] In the case of Pulitzer, however, the word "semaphore" also situated his codes and telegrams within a contemporary discourse network of semaphoric communication, which included systems for signaling messages across distances by holding and manipulating moving parts—arms, flags, or poles—according to a predetermined code that converted the discrete movements into alphanumeric data. Etymologically, in fact, the word stems from a combination of the Greek *sēma*, "sign," and *-phoros*, "bearing, bearer," which located the conveyance of signs in a material device that broke, converted, and transmitted these signs into a coded series of discrete signals.

Throughout the Spanish-American War, the US Army Signal Corps relied on both visual and electrical forms of telegraphy in laying down telephone and telegraph wires, but also in deploying heliograph, lantern, and wigwagging in locations where wires did not exist.[46] Given Cuba's distance from the United States, virtually all breaking news from Cuba would have been mediated at some point by telegraphic or semaphoric networks, a fact that broke up and divided the continuity of "war news" into periodic relays of discrete signals. Recall that even correspondents in Cuba witnessed their words and dispatches become subject to the breaking discontinuities of the telegraph, a technology that transmitted their dispatches into serial bits that were then decoded, edited, and packaged into the continuous spectacle of news stories. Once his writing crossed the wire, questions of format, authorization, and editorial framing were out of the correspondent's control, stripped away by the divide produced by telegraphic distance.

Traces of these discourse networks then found their way into the popular press, often in accounts that introduced readers to their technical protocols. On July 3, 1898, for example, the *San Francisco Call* printed an article titled "Wig-Wagging War News from Maine to Texas" (Figure 4), in which they described and illustrated a system for communicating messages using flags, where "certain combinations of waves and movements" could be used to signal "the entire alphabet," similar to the "dashes and dots of the Morse alphabet."[47] A few days earlier, the *World* printed a dispatch from Stephen Crane titled "The Red Badge of Courage Was His Wig-Wag Flag," which the author later revised into his Cuban war story "Marines Signaling under Fire at Guantanamo."[48] Here, too, Crane delineates the new semaphoric intelligence that comes with "keeping the mind carefully upon a slow spelling of an important code message,"
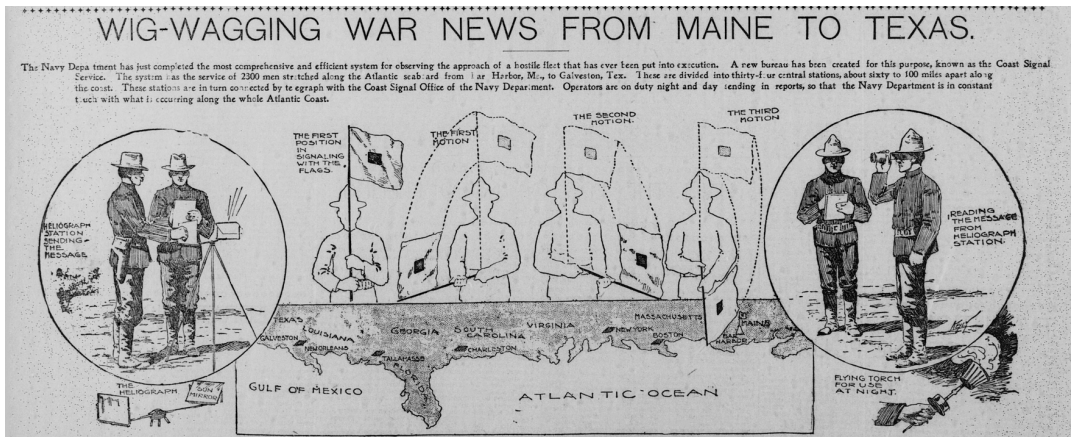
FIGURE 4. "Wig-Wagging War News from Maine to Texas," *San Francisco Call*, July 3, 1898; courtesy California Digital Newspaper Collection.

a line that subtly describes both the marine's concentration on the code of his wigwagging, as well as the writer's concentration on the code of his artful description.[49] In typical understatement, Crane places himself in the position of the signalman, figuring his work and writing as forms of coded expression. In this case, the metaphor becomes literal, as the correspondent also had to catch and throw signals across distances, transmitting dispatches word by word, cable by cable, signal by signal.

The *World* and the *Journal* also ran stories about codes and signals in the war, including one February 20 article in the *Journal* with the headline "Just How Uncle Sam Would Send a Cipher Dispatch Ordering Admiral Sicard to Havana" (Figure 5). In this feature, the newspaper charts in meticulous detail the process by which a single message—"Proceed without delay to Havana"—could be broken down into numbers, encrypted into keywords, and reconstructed into a telegram coded in cipher: *Adonite adforese potentate*.[50] As with the diagram of wigwagging above, the corresponding illustration here marks a clear divide between the action of sending and receiving messages, a divide that is visually marked and mediated by a series of discrete and discontinuous elements. In this case, a serial arrangement of numbers and words breaks down the code and renders it explicit for readers. Operations of indexing, substitution, division, and conversion help to spell out the coded instructions, marking the page with the serial data of telegraphic inscription.

Like Pulitzer's cable code book, all of these examples provide windows into the discourse networks produced by telegraphy and inscribed on the pages of periodicals. Breaking the news into bits, they challenge us to read yellow journalism not just as a vehicle for stories and sensationalism, but as a com-

FIGURE 5. "Just How Uncle Sam Would Send a Cipher Dispatch Ordering Admiral Sicard to Havana," *New York Journal*, February 20, 1898.

plex site in which the discontinuity of signs, signals, and other serial formats were broken down and manipulated to produce the continuous spectacle of war news. They challenge us to break with the continuity projected by cultural narratives and attend to the technical procedures that allow a given culture to serially store, record, and transmit data, as well as coordinate data according to specific rates, periodicities, and intervals. In the case of telegraphy, these procedures radically broke the news into new serial formats and new possibilities for active and self-conscious coordination. In doing so, they reconstructed the process by which serial bits of culture were manipulated into the continuous spectacle of news. By breaking down the old continuities of communication into new series and signals, telegraphy laid the foundations for a new kind of journalism at a distance, a journalism that actively sought to record, edit, and archive war news in ways that magnified its potential for manipulation and editorial markup. Thanks to the bits and fragments preserved by periodicals, it is still possible to actively reconstruct these practices into the historical spectacle of breaking news.

NOTES

[1] Arthur Brisbane, "The Modern Newspaper in War Time," *Cosmopolitan* 25 (1898): 542.

[2] Friedrich Kittler, "Lightning and Series—Event and Thunder," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 7–8 (2006): 64.

[3] James Creelman, *On the Great Highway: The Wanderings and Adventures of a Special Correspondent* (Boston: Lothrop Publishing Company, 1901), 177.

[4] W. Joseph Campbell, "Not Likely Sent: The Remington-Hearst 'Telegrams,'" *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (2000): 415.

[5] Creelman, *On the Great Highway,* 174. The story about the Remington-Hearst telegrams first appeared in Creelman's book, which was "intended to give the public some idea of the processes of modern journalism which [were] gradually assimilating the human race" (5).

[6] Qtd. in W. Joseph Campbell, *The Year That Defined American Journalism: 1897 and the Clash of Paradigms* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 75. As Campbell points out, yellow journalism has roots in both stunt journalism and investigative reporting, as well as the "government by journalism" advocated by William T. Stead, a central figure in Britain's "new journalism" of the 1880s. See Campbell, *Yellow Journalism: Puncturing the Myths, Defining the Legacies* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 26–50.

[7] Bonnie M. Miller, *From Liberation to Conquest: The Visual and Popular Cultures of the Spanish-American War of 1898* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 11.

[8] Kittler defines a discourse network as the "technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and process relevant data." See Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 369.

[9] Morse's inaugural message, which comes from Numbers 23:23, was frequently misquoted in the nineteenth century with a question mark. As with his second message, I quote it without punctuation to reflect how he originally transmitted it; in the original Morse alphabet, there was no code for punctuation marks.

[10] Stephen Vail, "The First Telegraph Message," *New York Times,* January 23, 1900, 6. The account of Morse and Vail's first experiment comes from Vail's son.

[11] In the decades after Morse's invention, many saw in the telegraph an end to the newspaper's monopoly on the news. With quick access to national and foreign intelligence, the telegraph was seen as a disruptive force for a medium that relied on local stories, a culture of exchange and reprinting, and the practice of filling their pages with speculation about distant events. These fears subsided as telegraphy began to shift the balance of power between providers and publishers of news. Wires were great for signaling news, but less so for its distribution, a divide that allowed publishers to capitalize on telegraphed news by repackaging it for readers. See Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-line Pioneers* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007).

[12] Qtd. in William Henry Meadowcroft, *The Boy's Life of Edison* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1911), 31–33.

[13] For more on the relationship between archives, discontinuity, and history, see Wolfgang Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive,* ed. Jussi Parikka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

[14] Mark W. Turner, "Periodical Time in the Nineteenth Century," *Media History* 8, no. 2 (2002): 183–96; Mark W. Turner, "Time, Periodicals, and Literary Studies," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 39, no. 4 (2006): 309–16; and Mark W. Turner, "The Unruliness of Serials in the Nineteenth Century (and in the Digital Age)," in *Serialization in Popular Culture,* ed. Rob Allen and Thijs van den Berg (New York: Routledge, 2014), 11–32.

[15] Turner, "Time, Periodicals, and Literary Studies," 312.

[16] Brisbane, "Modern Newspaper in War Time," 552, 547.

[17] Brisbane, "Modern Newspaper in War Time," 542.

[18] One topic not covered in this essay is yellow journalism's relationship to wire services such as the Associated Press. Hearst struggled for ten years to secure AP memberships for his city papers, eventually setting up a modest wire report for his own paper. In May 1909, he expanded this service into a national wire service called the American News Service, later renamed the International News Service. For more on telegraphy and traditional wire services, see Menahem Blondheim, *News over the Wires: The Telegraph and the Flow of Public Information in America, 1844–1897* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[19] While a Cuban edition never materialized, Hearst's steamer did reach the waters of Santiago-de-Cuba in time to report the US victory at San Juan Heights on July 1, 1898. For details of Hearst's action in Cuba, see Campbell, *Year That Defined American Journalism.*

[20] James W. Carey, "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph," in *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Routledge, 2009), 157.

[21] Campbell, "Not Likely Sent," 411.

[22] If we had an archive of telegrams sent by Hearst and his editors during the war, or by Pulitzer and his staff during the same period, we would be challenged to reconsider the very means by which we read, write, and count history. An archive that telegraphically records, counts, and calculates time in a completely different register than that of periodicals would likely confirm the discontinuities between telegraphic time and periodical time on which the machinery of yellow journalism often relied, exposing the gap between news recorded on the wire and news reprinted in the pages of periodicals.

[23] *New York Journal,* February 17, 1898, 1.

[24] *New York Journal,* February 19, 1898, 9.

[25] *New York Journal,* February 19, 1898, 7.

[26] *New York Journal,* March 1, page number unknown (page is torn).

[27] For a helpful timeline of events, cables, and editions on the day of the explosion, see Miller, *From Liberation to Conquest,* 55–86.

[28] Brisbane, "Modern Newspaper in War Time," 546.

[29] Miller, *From Liberation to Conquest,* 58.

[30] The authenticity of this telegram is uncertain, but multiple sources cite it. My version is taken from Edward Marshall, a *Journal* correspondent during the war, in his article "Covering a War," *Pearson's Magazine* 12, no. 70 (October 1901): 444.

[31] *New York World,* February 17, 1898, 1.

[32] Miller, *From Liberation to Conquest,* 64.

[33] Miller, *From Liberation to Conquest,* 58.

[34] Miller, *From Liberation to Conquest,* 58.

[35] My thanks to an anonymous reader for helping me to clarify this point.

[36] For more on "time-criticality," see Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive,* notably the chapters in Part II, Temporality and the Multimedia Archive, and in Part III, Microtemporal Media, pp. 81–146 and 147–92.

[37] "First Actual Photographs of the Wreck," *New York World,* February 20, 1898, 1. Another instance of time-criticality occurs in the February 17, 1898, issue of the *Journal,* which includes an article with the headline "Journal's Special Train, Breaking All Records, First at Capital with Full Maine Story." The report delineates the exact speed, itinerary, and arrival times of the train at each station, marking and measuring the delivery of news with telegraphic precision.

[38] Charles Henry Brown, *The Correspondents' War: Journalists in the Spanish-American War* (New York: Scribner, 1967), 13.

[39] James McGrath Morris, *Pulitzer: A Life in Politics, Print, and Power* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 2.

[40] Brown, *Correspondents' War,* 13.

[41] Morris, *Pulitzer,* 365.

[42] World Papers, "Cable Code Book Used by H. A. Jenks, Page 248–249," *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions,* accessed February 29, 2016, https://exhibitions.cul.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/pulitzer/item/2946.

[43] For other useful descriptions of these code books, see Morris, *Pulitzer,* and W. A. Swanberg, *Pulitzer* (New York: Scribner, 1967).

[44] Morris, *Pulitzer,* 365.

[45] Joseph McMillan, "Signaling at Sea," Sea Flags website, accessed March 26, 2016, http://www.seaflags.us/signals/Signals.html.

[46] For a detailed history of the US Army Signal Corps, see Rebecca R. Raines, *Getting the Message Through: A Branch History of the U.S. Army Signal Corps* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1996).

[47] "Wig-Wagging War News from Maine to Texas," *San Francisco Call,* July 3, 1898, 22. The wigwag system was invented in the 1850s by a US Army surgeon, Major Albert Myer. To the untrained observer, the signalman appeared to be "wigwagging" a flag back and forth, and thus the system was quickly nicknamed the wigwag system. Myer first used the signaling system in New Mexico during the 1860–61 Navajo expedition, though its first combat test did not occur until the Civil War in June 1861. See Albert James Myer, *A Manual of Signals: For the Use of Signal Officers in the Field, and for Military and Naval Students, Military Schools, Etc.* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1872).

[48] See Stephen Crane, "The Red Badge of Courage Was His Wig-Wag Flag," *New York World,* July 1, 1898, 3; and his revised version in "Marines Signaling under Fire at Guantánamo," *McClure's Magazine* 12, no. 4 (1899): 332–36. As James Berkey notes, the story also appeared in redacted form in the *Volunteer,* a weekly newspaper published by the Fourth Tennessee Infantry, US Volunteers, stationed in Cuba. See Berkey, "Empire's Mastheads: Rewriting the 'Correspondents' War' from the Edge of Empire," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 3, no. 2 (2011): 1–22.

[49] Crane, "Marines Signaling under Fire at Guantánamo," 336.

[50] *New York Journal,* February 20, 1898, 34.