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Making News by Doing Work: Routinizing the Unexpected[1]

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Noting that, on the one hand, variability in raw materials impedes routinization and that, on the other hand, organizations impose routines to control the flow of work, this article explores two related questions: (1) How can an organization routinely process unexpected events? (2) How do newsmen decrease the variability of events that form the raw material of news? The article examines five classifications used by newsmen to distinguish among events-as-news. First, the article analyzes these classifications as definitional "categories." That approach failing for specified reasons, it views these same classifications as typifications. This analysis stresses the extent to which typification of raw materials arises out of the requirements of the organizational structure of news work. It pays special attention to some practical problems concerning the control of work. It also discusses the ramifications that arise for the news organizations from the manner in which an event occurs. Some implications of the analysis are discussed.

One theme dominant in the sociology of work is the "control" of work. Proponents of the structural and technological approach (Perrow 1967; Thompson 1967; March and Simon 1958) stress that organizations routinize tasks if possible, for routinization facilitates the control of work. As discussed by Hughes (1964) and others of the Chicago school (Becker, Geer, and Hughes 1961), persons at work always have too much work to do. To cope with this problem, they try to control the flow of work and the amount of work to be done.

Prompted, possibly, by a view of routine as negotiated process (Bucher 1970), members of the Chicago school extend the discussion of work to the handling of emergencies. For instance, Everett Hughes (1964, pp. 55–56) suggests that the professional's "struggle . . . to maintain control over [his or her] decisions of what work to do and over the disposition of [his or her] time and [his or her] routine of life" may be particularly acute for workers who "deal routinely with what are emergencies to the people

[1] Lewis A. Coser, Rose Laub Coser, Arlene K. Daniels, Robert Emerson, Carolyn Etheridge, Kenneth A. Feldman, Melvin Kohn, and Marilyn Lester were all kind enough to read earlier drafts, as were newsmen James Benet and Howard Epstein. I owe a special debt to Rue Bucher, Eliot Freidson, and Harvey Molotch who criticized several drafts. The extent of my debt is indicated by the slight resemblance this version bears to earliest versions, discarded upon sound advice.

who receive their services." He speaks of this situation as introducing a "chronic tension" between worker and client, and, in an often quoted passage, explains: ". . . the person with the crisis feels that the other is trying to belittle his trouble. The physician plays one emergency off against the other; the reason he can't run right up to see Johnny who may have the measles is that he is, unfortunately right at that moment, treating a case of the black plague" (p. 55). Hughes's example suggests that, in handling some types of emergencies, specialists seek to impose priorities and routines upon them. It also implies that some workers, such as doctors, lawyers, and firemen, may profitably be viewed as specialists in handling *specific* kinds of emergencies.

Sociologists have paid scant attention to workers who routinely handle nonspecialized emergencies, ranging from fires and legal cases to medical problems. Yet, some workers do precisely this task. Newsmen (and they are still overwhelmingly men) stand out as workers called upon to give accounts (for a discussion of accounts, see Scott and Lyman [1968]) of a wide variety of disasters—*unexpected* events—on a *routine* basis. News work thrives upon processing unexpected events, events that "burst to the surface in some disruptive, exceptional (and hence newsworthy)" manner (Noyes 1971). As Helen Hughes (1940) noted, "Quickening urgency" is the "essence of news" (p. 58).

That workers impose routines upon their work poses a problem concerning nonspecialized unexpected events: how can an organization routinize the processing of unexpected events? Specifically, how do newsmen[2] routinize the handling of a variety of unexpected events in order to process and to present accounts and explanations of them?[3] For, without some routine method of coping with unexpected events, news organizations, as rational enterprises, would flounder and fail.

[2] Throughout this paper, the terms "news organization" and "newsmen" are used as though they were interchangeable. In part, this is because one speaks with newsmen and observes them. The participant observor can neither interview nor observe an organizational rationale. However, there is also some theoretical justification for this usage. Zimmerman (1970, p. 237) concludes, "It appears that the 'competent use' of a given [organizational] rule or set of rules is founded upon members' practiced grasp of what particular actions are necessary on a given occasion to provide for the regular reproduction of a normal state of affairs." And this article asks how news organizations can process accounts of emergencies while continually reproducing a normal state of everyday affairs.

[3] Some topics are necessarily excluded here. The most important is, how do newsmen distinguish between newsworthy and non-newsworthy events? For purposes of analysis, I assume that the events discussed have already been deemed newsworthy and that the newsmen must decide how to classify that event-as-news. In practice, the decision that an event is to be made into news and characterization of an event-as-news are mutually dependent. Frequently, they are inseparable procedures. For instance, arguing that a story should be written about an event, a reporter may state, "Of course that's news. . . . It's a good hard news story, similar to the one about [another event] that we ran last week."

To answer these questions, this article uses two ideas developed in the sociology of work. (1) Routinization is impeded by variability in raw material (an idea in the organizational literature [Perrow 1967]). (2) Persons categorize the objects of their work to control it (an idea in the literature on occupations and professions [Becker et al. 1961]). Together these ideas suggest that the way in which newsmen classify events-as-news decreases the variability of the raw material processed by news organizations and facilitates routinization.

The first part of this paper explores the newsmen's classifications of events-as-news as definitional categories. It asks, How do newsmen define categories of news? What are the bases of their definitions? Are their categories sufficiently consistent to enable the routinization of news work? The answers indicate that this method of analyzing the classifications is inadequate.

The second section of the paper approaches the same classifications as typifications. (By typifications, I mean classifications whose meanings are constituted in the situations of their use.) It asks, How are these classifications related to the practical organizational tasks confronting newsmen as they go about their work? How are they related to the contingencies of the situation that the newsmen are reporting? This analysis suggests that typifications enable the routinization of news work. More important, typifications arise out of and reflect the requirements of the organizational structure within which news stories are constructed. This structure and the exigencies of the way the story develops combine to define events as the raw material of news work. The last sections of the article explore the theoretical implications of this analysis.

Throughout this essay, I shall refer to events (happenings in the everyday world), to news (accounts and explanations of events presented by news organizations), and to events-as-news. Derived from the theoretical problem posed here, this last term indicates that newsmen categorize events not only as happenings in the everyday world, but also as potentially newsworthy materials—as the raw material to be processed by news organizations.

A NOTE ON METHODS

The data presented here were gathered by participant observation at two sites. They were a local independent television station affiliated with a major network and a daily morning newspaper with a circulation of about 250,000. Both had substantial competition within their own medium and from other media. Both are located in the same city, a major television market. Research at these two sites lasted a little over two years. Informants knew me to be a sociologist engaged in research.

As part of the research, I observed work in the newsrooms, accompanied newsmen to news events, and then followed the course of their stories through the news process. I also conducted semiformal interviews on a regular basis. They were used to glean information concerning the initial choice of which event-as-news to cover and to ask questions about the handling of specific stories whose processing I had observed. In addition, I asked newsmen for definitions of the terms they were using. Specific hypotheses did not prompt the requests for definitions. Rather, to observe adequately, I had to know the meanings of the terms I heard used.

Most of the data discussed here are taken from the newspaper field notes. The local television station concentrated upon local stories, and so it was the newspapermen who were more likely to discuss stories of national scope. I have used national stories as extended examples, because they are more accessible to the sociological reader. However, the principles and definitions invoked by both the electronic and the ink-press newsmen were generally the same. Disagreements on these topics will be specified.

NEWSMEN ON CATEGORIES OF NEWS

At work, newsmen use five terms to differentiate categories of news: hard news, soft news, spot news, developing news, and continuing news. Journalism texts and informants explain that these terms differentiate *kinds of news content* or the *subject* of events-as-news. Asked for definitions of their categories, newsmen fluster, for they take these categories so much for granted that they find them difficult to define. To specify definitions, newsmen offer examples of the stories that fall within a category. They tend to classify the same stories in the same manner, and some stories are cited with such frequency that they may be viewed as prototypes. This section reviews the prototypical cases mentioned by informants.

Hard News versus Soft News

The informants' main distinction was between hard news and its antithesis, soft news. As they put it, hard news concerns events potentially available to analysis or interpretation and consists of "factual presentations" of events deemed newsworthy (for a discussion of "factual presentations" and analysis, see Tuchman [1972]). When pressed, informants indicated that hard news is "simply" the stuff news presentations are made of. For instance, asked for a definition of hard news, a television editor offered the following catalog of basic news stories: "Hard news is the gubernatorial message to the legislature, the State of the Union Address to Congress, the train-truck accident or the murder, the bank hold-up, the legislative proposal . . . and the fire tomorrow."

This editor and other informants voluntarily contrasted hard news with soft news, also known as the feature or human interest story. Some examples of soft news stories are: an item about a big-city bus driver who offers a cheery "good morning" to every passenger on his early morning run, a feature about a lonely female bear, a story about young adults who rent for a month a billboard proclaiming "Happy Anniversary Mom and Dad."

Newsmen distinguish between these two lists by saying that a hard news story is "interesting to human beings" and a soft news story is "interesting because it deals with the life of human beings" (Mott 1952, p. 58). Or, they state that hard news concerns information people should have to be informed citizens and soft news concerns human foibles and the "texture of our human life" (Mott 1952, p. 58). Finally, they may simply summarize, hard news concerns important matters and soft news, interesting matters.

Each of these separate yet similar attempts to distinguish between hard news and soft news presents the same classificatory problem. They are difficult to use in everyday practice, because the distinctions overlap. Take the last attempt to state the difference between the two lists: frequently, it is difficult—if not impossible—to decide whether an event is interesting or important or is both interesting and important. Indeed, the same event may be treated as either a hard news or a soft news story. During the two-year period, the observed television station presented as feature stories some events that its primary television competition presented as hard news and vice versa.

Spot News and Developing News

Difficulties also appear in the newsmen's distinctions between spot news and developing news. The most important of these difficulties is that the newsmen partially abandon the statement that the categories are based upon the content or subject matter of events-as-news.

Asked to discuss spot news, newsmen replied that spot news is a type (subclassification) of hard news. Newsmen cited the fire as a prototypical example of spot news. (Occasionally, informants added a second example, either a robbery, murder, accident, tornado, or earthquake.) The subject matter of all examples was conflicts with nature, technology, or the penal code.

Asked about developing news (another subclassification of hard news), the newsmen cited the same examples. Asked, then, to distinguish between spot news and developing news, informants introduced a new element, the amount of information that they have about an event-as-news at a given point in time. When they learned of an unexpected event, it was classed

"spot news." If it took a while to learn the "facts" associated with a "breaking story," it was "developing news." It remained "developing news" so long as "facts" were still emerging and being gathered. When I pressed by pointing to previous statements that the subject of the story determined that story's classification, the newsmen insisted that both statements were correct. In essence, they countered, the subject matter of certain kinds of events-as-news had a tendency to occur in specific ways (e.g., fires break out unexpectedly; many demonstrations are preplanned). And so, newsmen happen to learn of them in certain ways.

Continuing News

Asked to define continuing news, informants reverted to discussing the subject matter of an event-as-news. As the newsmen put it, continuing news is a series of stories *on the same subject* based upon events occurring over a period of time. As a prototype, the newsmen cited the legislative bill. The passage of a bill, they explained, is a complicated process occurring over a period of time. Although news of the bill's progress through the legislative maze may vary from day to day, all stories about the bill deal with the same content—the bill's provisions and whether they will be enacted. In this sense, they said, the story about the legislative bill continues as news. (Other examples cited by informants included trials, politics, economics, diplomacy, and war. Almost all examples were confrontations within or among recognized institutions.)[4]

Then, once again, the newsmen partially modified their statements. Maintaining that certain kinds of news content tend to fall under the rubric "continuing news," they added that certain kinds of content (stories about legislative bills and trials, for example) "simply" tend to occur over an extended period of time.

From Category to Typification

Examination of the newsmen's definitions of their categories had been prompted by the notion that the categories would enable the routinization of work. To be sure, the definitions, prototypical examples, and lists of events decrease the variability of events as the raw material of news. Yet they are problematic: the newsmen state that their categories are based upon the subject matter of events-as-news. But it is difficult to apply consistently their distinctions between hard news and soft news. Also, dis-

[4] One young reporter, classifiable as a "young turk," included a conflict between social movements and government among his examples. Characterization of social movements is presently being negotiated between younger and older newsmen and is frequently discussed in journalism reviews.

cussing spot news, developing news, and continuing news, the informants introduced a *seemingly* extraneous element: the subject matter of certain kinds of events-as-news tends to happen in certain kinds of ways. And so, newsmen "just happen" to be alerted to the need to process them in different ways.

The newsmen's insistence that the way something happens is important to their classificatory system suggests a reconsideration of the relevance of classifications to the organization of work. The need for a reanalysis is supported by attempts to discuss events that become news (Boorstin 1964; Molotch and Lester 1971) and by research on disasters (Bucher 1957). For, like the newsmen, this research insists that the way an event happens influences accounts of it. For example, discussing a plane crash, Bucher (1957) argues that, faced with a disaster, persons try to locate the point in the process that "caused" the accident so they may prevent future accidents from happening in the same manner. Bucher's findings suggest that the way in which an event happens, the classifications used to describe the event, and the work done to prevent a recurrence are related. They prompt the proposal that newsmen do not categorize events-as-news by distinguishing between kinds of subject matter.[5] Rather, they typify events-as-news according to the way these happen and according to the requirements of the organizational structure within which news stories are constructed.

The theoretical distinction between "category" and "typification" is crucial, for "typification" implies a phenomenological perspective.[6] "Category" refers to classification of objects according to one or more relevant characteristics ruled salient by the classifiers, frequently by what anthropologists term a "formal analysis." (For a discussion of categories and formal analysis, see Tyler [1969, pp. 2, 194–342].) The use of "category" connotes a request for definitions from informants and a sorting of those definitions along dimensions specified by the researcher. "Typification" refers to classification in which the relevant characteristics are central to

[5] Strictly speaking, this statement is not accurate, for newsmen also use a parallel set of classifications seemingly based upon content, such as "education news," "political news," etc.

[6] The phenomenological perspective is not alien to sociological thought. In recent years, researchers (Zimmerman 1970; Cicourel 1968; Emerson 1969; Emerson and Messinger 1971; Sudnow 1965) have discussed the relationship of typification to practical tasks in people-processing organizations. Examining the production of typifications has enabled labeling theorists to highlight the moral and occupational assumptions underpinning the treatment of deviants: It has enabled them to locate the *practical* considerations that police, judges, doctors, and social workers rely upon to label offenders and clients (for an extended discussion, see Emerson and Messinger [1972] and Freidson [1971]). As Schutz pointed out (1962), typifications help to routinize the world in which we live. They epitomize the routine grounds of everyday life; they enable us to make limited predictions (projections) and thus to plan and to act.

the solution of practical tasks or problems at hand and are constituted in and grounded in everyday activity. The use of "typification" connotes an attempt to place informants' classifications in their everyday context; typifications are embedded in and take their meaning from the settings in which they are used and the occasions that prompt their use.[7] (Anthropologists use "componential analysis" to discover meaning in context [see Tyler 1969, pp. 255–88, 396–432].)

TYPIFICATIONS OF NEWS

Because typifications are embedded in practical tasks in everyday life, they provide a key to understanding how newsmen decrease the variability of events as the raw material of news. This section argues that news organizations routinize the processing of seemingly[8] unexpected events by typifying them along dimensions that reflect practical tasks associated with their work. These tasks are related to both organizational structure and the manner in which an event occurs. As summarized in table 1, newsmen's

TABLE 1

PRACTICAL ISSUES IN TYPIFYING NEWS*

Typification	How Is an Event Scheduled?	Is Dissemination Urgent?	Does Technology Affect Perception?	Are Future Predictions Facilitated?
Soft news	Nonscheduled	No	No	Yes
Hard news	Unscheduled and prescheduled	Yes	Sometimes	Sometimes
Spot news	Unscheduled	Yes	No	No
Developing news	Unscheduled	Yes	Yes	No
Continuing news	Prescheduled	Yes	No	Yes

* As McKinney and Bourque note (1972, p. 232), typifications are flexible and undergo continual transformation. Technically, then, as noted by Lindsay Churchill (personal communication), recording typifications in this manner transforms them into components of a typology.

distinctions between hard news and soft news reflect questions of scheduling; the newsmen's distinctions between spot news and developing news pertain to the allocation of resources and vary in their application ac-

[7] Schutz's (1962) use of the term "typification" is slightly different from that used here. In some contexts, Schutz uses the term "category" to apply to social science constructs. At other times, he refers to categories as a subtype of typification whose application depends upon the specificity of the phenomenon being typed. Another attempt to grapple with some of these issues may be found in McKinney (1970).

[8] Inasmuch as unexpected events can be recognized as such, they must themselves be typified in some way. If they can be recognized and accordingly typified, they are not "completely" unexpected. So, one must speak of "seemingly" unexpected events.

cording to the technology being used; and the typification "continuing news" is based upon problems in predicting the course of events-as-news.

Hard News: The Flow of News Work and Scheduling

As previously noted, "quickening urgency" is the "essence of news." Because it is timely and urgent, hard news "demands" speed, especially in gathering "facts" and meeting deadlines. Both Breed (1955) and I (1972) have described these processes. We stressed that the need for speed is so overarching that it influences characteristics of news stories. If newsmen do not work quickly, the hard news story will be obsolete before it can be distributed in today's newscast or in the newspaper sold tomorrow.[9] As Park wrote (Park and Burgess 1967, p. 19), old news is "mere information."

In contrast, soft news stories do not need to be "timely." The Sunday newspaper is padded with feature stories about events that occurred earlier in the week. Because they are concerned with "timeliness," newsmen make fine distinctions. They explain that some kinds of content (hard news stories) become obsolete more quickly than others (soft news items). This distinction is based upon the distribution of nonscheduled, prescheduled, and unscheduled events as hard news and as soft news.

A *non*scheduled event-as-news is an event whose date of dissemination as news is determined by the newsmen. A *pre*scheduled event-as-news is an event announced for a future date by its convenors; news of the event is to be disseminated the day it occurs or the day after. An *un*scheduled event-as-news is an event that occurs unexpectedly; news of it is to be disseminated that day or the day after. *The type of scheduling characteristic of an event-as-news affects the organization of work.*

Most hard news stories concern prescheduled events (a debate on a legislative bill) or unscheduled events (a fire). Newsmen do not decide when stories about prescheduled and unscheduled events-as-news are to be disseminated. Newsmen do decide when to gather "facts" and to disseminate accounts and explanations of nonscheduled hard news stories. Nonscheduled hard news stories tend to involve investigative reporting. The publication of the Pentagon Papers by the *New York Times* is an example of a nonscheduled hard news story, for the *Times* held the papers three months before it published extracts, digests, and analyses of them. Processing nonscheduled stories, the news organization controls the timing and flow of work.

[9] Some events-as-stories, especially spot news, appear on newscasts before they reach the morning newspapers. However, I frequently observed television newswriters churning out a script while reading a newspaper. Morning newspapers also serve as sources of ideas for evening newscasts.

Members of the news enterprise almost always control the timing and flow of work required to process soft news stories. Few soft news stories concern unscheduled events, as indicated by the previous list of feature stories. Another example is "The Man in the News" series run by the *New York Times*. Like the obituaries of famous men and women, the "facts" can be gathered, written up, and edited in anticipation of future dissemination. Prescheduled soft news also includes such annual "February stories" as an item appropriate to Washington's birthday, another for Lincoln's birthday, and a third for Valentine's Day. A reporter may be assigned to these stories days in advance, and the specific information to be included in the story may be gathered, written, and edited days before its eventual dissemination.

Of course, there are exceptions to these rules. But news organizations handle those exceptions in a manner that conserves manpower and retains control of the flow of news work. For instance, "facts" to be used in a feature story about the atmosphere at an important trial cannot be gathered in advance. Nor can feature information about an unscheduled event, such as a fire, be gathered in advance. However, the impact of these events-as-feature stories upon the allocation of manpower is minimal. In the first case, a reporter may be assigned to write the "feature angle" of the trial several days in advance and his name stricken from the roster of reporters available to cover the fast-breaking news of the day. In the second case, the same person generally reports on both the hard-news "fire" and its soft-news angle, so that the news organization conserves manpower.

In general, the distinction between hard news and soft news as typifications reflects a practical task in news organizations: scheduling work in relation to both the way an event-as-story happens and the way in which a story is to be processed and disseminated.

Spot News: Allocating Resources and Dealing with Technology[10]

Governing the flow of news work, like the organization of most work, involves more than scheduling. It also involves the allocation of resources

[10] Some might argue that other organizational variables, such as size, interorganizational relationships, and market structure influence the allocation of resources as much as or more than technology does. To be sure, markets are of some relevance. Television is primarily an entertainment medium. But, as indicated elsewhere (Tuchman 1969), technology appears to determine the size of the general-news organization, the work needed to process a story, and the relationship between a news organization and a more centralized news-processing agency. For instance, although both the newspaper and the television station subscribe to Associated Press reports, only the electronic medium has the capability of disseminating information at the same time as a more central news-processing agency, in its case, the network with which it is affiliated. Similarly, one need not have film of an event, such as a plane crash, to interrupt programming and announce this "newsworthy event."

and the control of work through prediction. To cope with these tasks, newsmen distinguish among spot news, developing news, and continuing news.

Spot news events are unscheduled; they appear suddenly and must be processed quickly. The examples of spot news offered by informants indicate that spot news is the *specifically unforeseen event-as-news*. For instance, although the newsmen may anticipate the probability of a fire, they cannot specifically predict where and when a fire will start. This inability to make a specific prediction concerning some events affects the flow of news work. If a three-alarm fire starts close to deadline, information must be gathered and edited more quickly than usual to meet that deadline. If a major fire starts 50 miles from the city room, transportation problems influence the time needed to gather and to process "facts" and so influences the allocation of resources to cover the fire.

Some events that newsmen nominate for membership in the typification "spot news" are of such importance that newsmen try to create a stable social arrangement to anticipate them. (For a discussion of the newsman's view of importance, see Tuchman [1969].) This takes place even if the probability that the event will occur is minute. For instance, the city desk of most major dailies is staffed around the clock in case a spot news event should occur. The *New York Times* London Bureau processes and relays international stories from far-flung regions of the world because the London time zone enables bureau members to get a jump on the schedules of people working in the New York time zone (Adler 1971). The president of the United States is covered 24 hours a day in case something should happen to him. Continually creating stable social arrangements such as these to cope with spot news requires both extended allocation of resources (assigning a staff member to sit at the city desk all night) and immediate reallocation of resources (pulling a reporter off another story if and as necessary).

As one might expect from findings that the organization of work is influenced by its technology (Hage and Aiken 1969; Perrow 1967; Thompson 1967), the allocation of resources in the newspaper newsroom was different from the allocation of resources in the television newsroom. At the newspaper, at least three of the 20-person staff of general reporters and rewrite men were in the city room from 8 A.M. until midnight. Usually, they covered minor stories by telephone, rewrote copy phoned to them by correspondents scattered in small towns around the state, and wrote obituaries. To some extent, this work is essential: the items produced fill small holes in the newspaper and are supposed to be of interest to some readers. To some extent, it is busywork to alleviate the boredom of sitting and waiting for a specifically unforeseen event to happen. If needed, though, this reserve personnel was available to cover spot news.

The television station had few reserve reporters and no reserve cameramen, except from 4 P.M. to 6 P.M. and from 9:30 P.M. until 11:00 P.M. At these times, reporters and cameramen, bringing their film to be processed, had generally returned from their assignments. They would wait either to cover a spot news story or to go off shift. Should a specifically unforeseen event occur at any other time of day, the station had to (1) pay overtime, (2) pull a reporter and a cameraman from a less important story they were already covering, (3) pull a cameraman from a "silent film story" he was covering by himself, (4) hire a free-lance cameraman, (5) pull a staff announcer from his routine duties, such as reading station identification, or (6) assign a newswriter to act as reporter after gaining permission from the appropriate unions. The alternative(s) chosen depended upon the specific situation.

Two points concerning these arrangements are of particular pertinence. First, newsmen stress that creating and recreating stable situations to cope with spot news is a continual, ongoing process. As they discuss it, it seems more like a battle. Second, the nature of those created situations depends upon the technology used by the medium.

Developing News: Technology and the Perception of Events

Practical problems of dealing with a technology are so important that they even affect the newsman's perception of a spot news story, especially whether he will apply the typification "developing news" to an event-as-story. In the case of developing news, technology provides a lens through which events-as-news are perceived.

Developing news concerns "emergent situations" (for a discussion of emergent situations, see Bucher [1957]), as indicated by the following prototypical example. A plane crashes. Although this event is unexpected, there are, nonetheless, limitations upon the "facts" it can possibly contain. The newsmen would not expect to run a story stating that those reported dead have come to life. Nor would they expect to run a report of an official denial that a crash occurred. The "facts" of the news story are: a plane crashed at 2:00 P.M., in Ellen Park, when an engine caught fire and another went dead, damaging two houses, killing eight people and injuring an additional 15 persons. All else is amplification. Since the plane crash was specifically unexpected, reporters were not present to record "facts" "accurately." "Facts" must be reconstructed, and as more information becomes known, the "facts" will be more "accurate." Although the actual event remains the same, the account of the event changes, or as the newsmen put it, "the story develops." Ongoing changes of this sort are called "developing news."[11]

[11] Although newsmen only single out this type of news as being subject to ongoing

Most spot news stories are developing news. Since both present interrelated work demands, the newspapermen tend to use the terms interchangeably. Television newsmen use the term "developing news" in a more restricted manner: they identify some stories as spot news that newspapermen term "developing news." This variation occurs because of the differing technologies associated with the two media.[12] The process of covering the death of Martin Luther King—an event that raised different practical problems for the two local media—illustrates this variation.[13]

At the local newspaper, King's injury and subsequent death were labeled "developing news." A continual flow of updated copy needed editing and "demanded" constant revision of the planned format. The executive editor learned of the attempted assassination and plotted a format for the front page. King's condition was reported as "grave" by the wire services, and the editor drew another format, including stories about other topics above the fold on page one. A wire service bulletin reported King to be dead; all other stories were relegated below the fold. Every story on page 1 needed a new headline of a different size of type, and lead paragraphs of some stories had to be reset into smaller type. Inside pages were also affected.

The television network with which the observed local station is affiliated reported on King's condition as a developing story. Periodically, it interrupted programs to present bulletins. But, this was a spot news story for the local television station's personnel. Obviously, the format of the 11 P.M. newscast was modified early in the evening. Because of the network's bulletins, the story about King (whatever it might have turned out to be) had to be the program's lead. At the newspaper, the production manager and compositors bemoaned the need to reset the front page three times, each reset accompanying a major development in the story. All production staff worked overtime. At the television station, readjustments in production plans meant less work, not more. By prearrangement, the network preempted the first few minutes of the late evening newscast to tell the story, just as it had preempted the same five minutes some months earlier to report the death of three astronauts.

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change, phenomenological theories would insist that this process is ongoing for all kinds of news at all times. Suffice it to say that developing news provides a particularly clear example of indexicality (for an explication of indexicality, see Garfinkel [1967] and Wilson [1970]).

[12] Howard Epstein (personal communication) notes an additional problem that developing news poses for newspapers, the point at which to "break" a story for successive editions. For instance, should one hold the mail edition for fifteen minutes to include the start of a speech or should one hold the start of the speech for inclusion in the later home-delivery edition. Television competition makes this decision more difficult and somewhat "meaningless," for whatever the newspaper editors decide to do, the television newscast may carry the speech first.

[13] I observed coverage of King's death at the newspaper. Activities at the television station are reconstructed from the television newsmen's subsequent accounts.

The degree to which resources must be reallocated to meet practical exigencies and the way reallocation is accomplished depends upon both the event being processed and the medium processing it. The technology used by a specific medium does more than "merely" influence the ways in which resources are allocated. It influences the typification of event-as-news or how that news story is perceived and classified.

Continuing News: Controlling Work through Prediction

Spot news and developing news are constituted in work arrangements intended to *cope* with the amount of information specifically predictable *before* an event occurs. This information is slight or nonexistent, because the events are unscheduled. In contrast, continuing news *facilitates* the control of work, for continuing news events are generally prescheduled. Prescheduling is implicit in the newsmen's definition of continuing news as a "series of stories on the same subject based upon events occurring over a period of time."[14] This definition implies the existence of prescheduled change. For instance, the account of the progress of a legislative bill through Congress is an account of a series of events following one another in a continual temporal sequence. An event occurring at any specific point in the sequence bears consequences for anticipated events.

Because they are prescheduled, continuing news stories help newsmen and news organizations to regulate their own activities; they free newsmen to deal with the exigencies of the specifically unforeseen. Take that legislative bill. It is to be channeled through the House, the Senate, and the executive office. To cover this series of events-as-news, the newsman must be familiar with the legislative process. Such familiarity may even be viewed as part of his "professional stock of knowledge at hand" (a term discussed by Schutz [1962, vol. 2, pp. 29 ff.]). He knows the ideas of pertinent committee members, as well as the distribution of power within the House committee, the Senate committee, and the Senate as a whole. In addition, he also knows the progress being made by other legislative bills. With this cumulative stock of knowledge at hand, he may not only predict the bill's eventual disposition, including the specific route through the legislative process (this bill will be bogged down in the House Ways and Means Committee), but also, he can weigh the need to cover this bill on any one day against the need to cover another bill for which he had comparable information. The newsman's "expert" or "professional" stock of knowledge at hand permits him, other newsmen, and his news organization to control work activities.

This matter of control is a key theme in the study of work, for there

[14] An issue beyond the scope of this paper arises: how do newsmen decide that two events are about the "same topic"?

is always too much work to be done. In news work, no matter how many reporters from any one news organization may be assigned to a legislature or to work at a specific beat or bureau, newsmen (and news organizations) are inundated with more work than they can do. There are so many bills being introduced, so many committee hearings, so many minute yet potentially important readjustments in the distribution of power. In a sense, the newsmen make more work for themselves by choosing to cover several stories in a cursory manner rather than covering one story intensively. Certainly, such a practice is tempting, for the newsman wants to turn in as much copy as possible and this is accomplished more easily by skimming the surface of many stories than by digging down a potential "blind alley" to provide intensive coverage of one event-as-news. The latter alternative is made even less appealing by the possibility that the news desk will dismiss the story as "illegitimate," as frequently happens to stories about social movements. More important, the news desk, the beat reporters, and the news bureaus are increasingly inundated by larger and larger batches of news releases. Most of these can lay claim to being a legitimate hard news story. As I have discussed elsewhere (1972), hard news is "factual" and newsmen are leary of news analysis. As a result of this emphasis upon "facts," newsmen interpret the increasing piles of news releases as more and more stories for them to cover.

Being able to predict the future coverage of a continuing story (whether it concerns a bill, a trial, or a new economic policy) enables an editor, a bureau chief, and, ultimately, a newsman to decide where to go and what to do on any one crowded day. Also, the ability to predict helps the individual newsman to sort out which reportorial technique to use on various stories. For instance, drawing upon the collective professional stock of knowledge shared by newsmen, he can decide which of today's assignments require his presence at hearings, which can be covered by telephone, which can be reconstructed through interviews with key informants, and which "merely" require him to stick his head through a door to confirm that "everything" is as anticipated. The ability to predict enables the news organization in general and a reporter in particular to make choices and still accomplish such mundane but routinely necessary tasks as chatting with potential news sources.

The continuing news story is a boon to the newsman's ability to control his own work, to anticipate specifically and so to dissipate future problems by projecting events into a routine. The newsman's and the news organization's ability to process continuing stories routinely by predicting future outcomes enables the news organization to cope with unexpected events. At the very least, it enables an assignment editor to state, "Joe Smith will not be available to cover spot news stories a week from Tuesday, because he will be covering the *X* trial." In sum, continuing news typifies events

as raw materials to be specifically planned for in advance, and this typification is constituted in practical tasks at work.

An Additional Issue: The Typification "What-a-Story!"

The discussion insistently suggests that newsmen typify events-as-news to transform the problematic events of the everyday world into raw material which can be subjected to routine processing and dissemination. As summarized in table 1, typifications are constituted in practical problems posed by events-as-news. They impose order upon events as the raw material of news and thus reduce the variability of events as the raw material of news. Also, the process of typifying channels the newsmen's perceptions of the "everyday world as phenomenon."[15]

That typifications channel perceptions raises another issue. As indicated by recent research (Sudnow 1965; Cicourel 1968; McKinney and Bourque 1972), people and groups typify and take for granted background features in order to operate in everyday life. But those same background features can cause problems specifically because they are taken for granted. That is, a system of typification can never be all inclusive; it continually requires readjustment (Schutz 1962; Wilson 1970; McKinney and Bourque 1972). Typifications can even be seductive. For instance, faced with the need to predict and to plan, the newsmen may be seduced into applying what everyone knows, that is, what all newsmen collectively agree upon (see Tuchman 1972; Schutz 1962, vol. 1, p. 75). Having a collective stock of knowledge at hand and a system of typification partially based in the utility of known-in-detail prediction, newsmen may predict inaccurately. The Wilson-Heath and Dewey-Truman elections are classic examples of such "inaccurate prediction."[16]

[15] Zimmerman and Pollner (1970) raise similar issues regarding the sociologist's treatment of the "everyday world as phenomenon," although Luckmann (1972) correctly points out that, technically, the everyday world is not a "phenomenon."

[16] It is tempting to identify "inaccurate predictions" as mistakes. "Mistake" is a lay term (Hughes 1964). As Bucher and Stelling (1971) argue, this notion is cast aside in the course of professional socialization to be replaced by concepts emphasizing the process of doing work. Given evidence of inaccurate *collective* predictions, the newsmen essentially argue: we are specialists in knowing, gathering and processing "general knowledge" (Kimball 1967). If and when our predictions are collective, they are necessarily accurate, for they are based upon shared expertise. The newsmen continue: since our stock of knowledge is necessarily correct, the situation is in "error." That is, the situation changed in a way we could not anticipate. The post hoc explanation of Heath's "surprise victory" over Wilson, offered in the daily press, supports this interpretation: confident of victory, Wilson did not campaign sufficiently. Scared by accounts he was the underdog, Heath made a special effort to win. A similar process, dependent upon knowledge in detail, might also explain Agnes's ability to con. her doctors (Garfinkel 1967, pp. 116–85, 285–88). Given their stock of knowledge at hand, the doctors assumed it was impossible for a boy to self-administer the correct dosages of the correct hormones at just the right time to interfere with "normal" sexual development.

Inaccurately predicted events-as-news require major unplanned alterations in work processes. Like spot news, they are unscheduled and specifically unforeseen. Like developing news, they are perceived through the lens of a specific technology. Like continuing news, they involve both postdiction and prediction of an event as a member of a chain of events. They challenge knowledge and routines that newsmen take for granted.

Newsmen cope with the problems of inaccurately predicted events by invoking a special typification—"what-a-story!" This typification is constituted in the unusual arrangements that are routinely made to cope with a "what-a-story!" That newsmen typify these events emphasizes the centrality of typification to their work and the degree to which typifications are constituted in their work.

Symbolically, the degree to which this typification is itself routine is captured by the almost stereotypical manner in which verbal and nonverbal gestures accompany the pronunciation of "*What* a story!" "What" is emphasized. The speaker provides additional emphasis by speaking more slowly than usual. The speaker adds yet more emphasis by nodding his head slowly, while smiling and rubbing his hands together.

Stereotypically, Hollywood portrays the relatively rare "what-a-story" as the routine of the "exciting world of news." The editor in chief rolls up his sleeves and writes headlines; the copy boy gets his "big break" and is sent to cover a major assignment; someone cries, "Stop the presses!"

Sociologically, the extent to which unusual arrangements are routinely made to cope with a "what-a-story" is illustrated by the reaction of newspaper informants to President Johnson's speech of March 31, 1968. Learning of Johnson's announcement that he would not run for reelection, the newsmen immediately instituted taken-for-granted routines to handle the "what-a-story" and referred to similar situations in the past.

Johnson's speech was prescheduled; the newspaper, like other news media, had an advance copy of the text that omitted, of course, Johnson's "surprise announcement" that he would not run for reelection. As Johnson spoke on television of the deescalation of American bombing, the men awaited companion stories concerning reactions of political leaders to the so-called bombing halt. These were to be sent by the wire services. A preliminary format had been drawn for page 1. The lead story about the military situation (the "bombing halt") had been headlined and edited and was being set into type. Page 1 was also to include a political story, not placed prominently, about the 1968 election. Several other assessments of the political situation had already been set into type, including columnists' analyses of the 1968 presidential election to be printed on the editorial page and the page opposite the editorial page, a political cartoon showing Johnson speaking on the telephone and saying "Yes, Bobby," and a small story speculating whether Robert Kennedy would join Eugene

McCarthy in challenging the president as a candidate for the Democratic nomination. The newspaper was in good shape for the first edition deadline, 11:00 P.M.

And then it happened: bedlam. A prescheduled announcement concerning the continuing "Vietnam problem" and warranting a limited amount of political speculation turned into a major surprise of military, political, and diplomatic importance. An excited assistant city editor ran, shouting, into the city room from before the television set of the newspaper's entertainment critic. His action was perhaps more unprecedented than the president's announcement.[17] The telephone of the assistant managing editor rang. The managing editor was calling to discuss coverage of the speech. The assistant managing editor automatically said "Hello, Ted," before he had even heard the voice on the other end.[18]

It would be impossible to describe the amount of revision accomplished in a remarkably brief time as telephoned reporters, volunteering editors, and mounds of wire service copy poured into the newsroom. But the comments of editors and reporters are telling. Lifting their heads to answer telephones, bark orders, and clarify them, the editors periodically announced, "*What* a story! . . . the story of the century . . . what a night; what a night . . . who would have believed it . . . there's been nothing like it since Coolidge said, 'I will not run.' "

These remarks are telling. First, they reveal the extent to which typification is based upon taken-for-granted assumptions. For the newspaper's top political reporter, when covering the New Hampshire primary, had offered to bet anyone that Johnson would not run for reelection. Few had taken his bet, and they had taken it for only $1.00, because it would be like "taking money from a baby."[19]

[17] The newsmen were particularly proud of the quiet that dominated the newsroom. One editor, who had worked at the *New York Times,* claimed the news of D-Day spread through the *Times'* city room in whispers.

[18] Neither this incident, nor the previous one were witnessed. They were reported to me by five different newsmen as the evening progressed. After finishing dinner with his family, the managing editor routinely called the assistant managing editor each evening to check on how the newspaper was shaping up. He had already called before Johnson spoke.

[19] This event-as-news is also discussed in Tuchman (1972), and similar stories concerning the assumptions about Johnson's candidacy made by newsmen based in Washington, D.C., have circulated in the mass media. A question asked by Kurt H. Wolff (personal communication) prompts me to note a more technical interpretation of the "what-a-story." One might say that the content of the "what-a-story" challenges the newsmen's taken-for-granted notions of the social world so much that it threatens their ability to maintain the "natural attitude." (Schutz [1962, vol. 1, pp. 208–29] provides an extensive explication of the "natural attitude.") The routines used to process a "what-a-story" may then be seen as the process through which newsmen work to reestablish the natural attitude. Another approach is also possible. The five typifications previously discussed enable the newsmen to process other people's emergencies.

Second, the remarks emphasize the degree to which work routines were routinely altered. Johnson's speech of March 31 was said to require reassessing the military situation in Vietnam, reassessing the diplomatic situation vis-à-vis Vietnam, especially the possibility of successful peace talks, and reassessing the political situation in the United States. The managing editor and the assistant managing editor specifically alerted the copyboys to watch the news services carefully for analyses of these topics. Without being notified (although notifications eventually came), they "knew to expect" analyses of these topics. In addition, handling the story required a substantive amount of revision and readjustment of the allocation of resources. Significantly, all the editors took for granted the nature of those readjustments. No discussion was required to decide which political reporters would come back to work. Only minor discussion was required to decide which of the general reporters would be asked to return to work from their homes.

Third, the analogy to Coolidge (the editor who mentioned Coolidge thought the others might be too young to remember him) alerted the staff to an unusual routine. That is, rules governing the coverage of a "what-a-story" were invoked by citing another "what-a-story." Indeed, the invocation of Coolidge involves an implicit call to reduce the variability of events as the raw material of news, for it states, this event-as-news is "like" that one from years ago.

Finally, the degree to which an individual "what-a-story" is typified and, thus, routine, is indicated by the assistant managing editor's reference to previous "what-a-story(s)." He rejected an offer to help from another editor, recalling that that editor had been more of a hindrance than a help in processing a previous "what-a-story." Some months later, trying to decide the size of type to be used in a headline about Robert Kennedy's death, he thought back to Christmas and explained, "What a year! What a year. . . . The Tet offensive, Johnson's speech, King's death . . . now this."[20]

When faced with a "what a story," newsmen are themselves placed in a state of emergency. That they immediately invoke routines to handle the "what-a-story" again stresses the use of typification grounded in routine to accomplish practical tasks. In this case, the task might be simultaneously processing information and working one's way out of an organizational emergency.

[20] King's death was retrospectively treated as a "what-a-story." At the time, newsmen greeted it with head shaking devoid of glee, and some quietly discussed the racism of other staff members. The extent to which a "what-a-story" is subject to routine is forcefully indicated by an incident at the television station on the day of Robert Kennedy's death. Most newsmen were called into work at 6:00 A.M. Several were not, so they would still be fresh for the 11:00 P.M. newscast. Coming to work in the mid-afternoon, one newsman asked an early morning arrival, "Did we gather the *usual* reaction?" (emphasis added). Then, he indicated his realization that this question would seem crass to an outsider by asking me not to include his question in my field notes.

The typification "what-a-story" affirms that newsmen typify events-as-news in ways that reflect practical issues of news work and that decrease the variability of events as the raw material processed by newsmen and news organizations. It also affirms the importance of typification, for newsmen invoke a special typification to cope with the "routinely nonroutine." Like the other typifications newsmen use, this typification is constituted in practical tasks—in work.

CONCLUSION

To answer the question of how an organization can process information about unexpected events, I have examined the categories newsmen use to describe events-as-news. Based upon distinctions between and among kinds of news content, the newsmen's categories neither significantly decrease the variability of events as the raw material of news, nor explain the newsmen's activities. However, viewed as typifications, the same classifications reduce the variability of the raw material of news. News organizations can process seemingly unexpected events, including emergencies and disasters, because they typify events-as-news by the manner in which they happen and in terms of the ramifications "this manner of happening" holds for the organization of work. Each of the typifications is anchored in a basic organizational issue concerning the control of work. Further, the newsmen's typifications reconstitute the everyday world. They construct and reconstruct social reality by establishing the context in which social phenomena are perceived and defined.

To some extent, the approach used here has roots in past research on news, particularly the work of Lang and Lang (1953, 1968). However, it provides an essential modification, for past research emphasizes the notion "distortion." As Shibutani (1966) implies in his seminal work on rumor, the concept "distortion" is alien to the discussion of socially constructed realities. Each socially constructed reality necessarily has meaning and significance (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Schutz 1962). Elsewhere (1973), I have argued that "distortion" is itself a socially constructed concept. The construction of reality through redefinition, reconsideration, and reaccounting is an ongoing process. The newsmen's typifications indicate that it might be valuable to think of news not as distorting, but rather as reconstituting the everyday world.

Second, the arguments presented here, when compared to the Molotch (1970) and Bucher (1957) findings, suggest a tantalizing possibility: individuals, groups, and organizations not only react to and characterize events by typifying *what* has happened, but also they may typify events by stressing the *way* "things" happen. Of particular importance may be the way events may be practically managed, altered, or projected into the

future. Recent work on deviance (Emerson and Messinger 1972) and the recent attempts of Molotch and Lester (1972) to analyze public events suggests that such an approach may cut across areas of sociological inquiry and so prove theoretically fruitful.

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