Stuart Allan

News Culture

Second Edition

NEWS CULTURE

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For my parents, Beverly and Robert Allan, with love and respect

SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD

The Issues in Cultural and Media Studies series aims to facilitate a diverse range of critical investigations into pressing questions considered to be central to current thinking and research. In light of the remarkable speed at which the conceptual agendas of cultural and media studies are changing, the authors are committed to contributing to what is an ongoing process of re-evaluation and critique. Each of the books is intended to provide a lively, innovative and comprehensive introduction to a specific topical issue from a fresh perspective. The reader is offered a thorough grounding in the most salient debates indicative of the book's subject, as well as important insights into how new modes of enquiry may be established for future explorations. Taken as a whole, then, the series is designed to cover the core components of cultural and media studies courses in an imaginatively distinctive and engaging manner.

Stuart Allan

Introduction
THE CULTURE OF NEWS

Have you noticed that life, real honest-to-goodness life, with murders and catastrophes and fabulous inheritances, happens almost exclusively in the newspapers?

(Jean Anouilh, dramatist)

I believe that no mass journalism in history has lived up to its responsibilities as well as have American network television news organizations. But we need to find some innovations without lowering our standards. There is only a limited professional satisfaction in informing people who have gone to sleep.

(Harry Reasoner, broadcast journalist)

Excited declarations that we live in a 'news-saturated society' are being made so frequently these days that they almost risk sounding clichéd. The types of developments usually cited include 24-hour televisual newscasts, of which **CNN**'s is now one of several, as well as 'news-talk' radio ('all news, all the time') stations, the rise of '**infotainment**' television (ranging from 'news-magazine shows' to 'fly-on-the-wall' **docu-soaps** and **reality-based television** programmes), the expansion of interactive 'info-channels' with the advent of **digital news services**, or the rapid proliferation of 'cyber-salons' or **newsgroups**, as well as formal news conferences, being held on the Internet. No doubt most would agree that these are indeed fascinating developments worthy of serious attention. Still, if we accept that 'news' of some description has been in circulation since the earliest days of human society, then assessing its relative degree of 'saturation' for people's lives over the years would prove to be a rather challenging task. What would appear to be above dispute, however, is that the sheer range of different forms of news discourse has never been greater than it is today.

Looking back over the course of the twentieth century, it is possible to begin to place these more recent developments in the news culture of countries such as Britain and the United States within a larger context. In the first decades of the century, for

instance, the newspaper press ruled the day – 'press barons', such as Northcliffe, Rothermere and Beaverbrook in Britain or Hearst and Pulitzer in the USA, were able to exert considerable control over the public agenda. Competition over the definition of the most pressing news stories of the day also came from the cinema. **Newsreels** were a regular feature in cinemas by the time of the First World War, informing captivated audiences about a world far beyond their personal experience. *Time*, the first weekly news magazine in the USA, began publication in 1923, with its main competitor *Newsweek* appearing ten years later. Broadcast news similarly began in the 1920s with the **BBC** in Britain and fledgling commercial stations in the USA, although radio journalism would not fully develop until the Second World War. Televisual newscasts had assumed a form that we would recognize today by the mid-1950s, and had displaced newspapers as the most popular source of news by the 1960s. During the 1970s, journalists began using **ENG** videotape cameras to record their stories, and were able to relay them from virtually any point in the world via portable communications satellite link-ups by the late 1980s. The 2003 war in Iraq saw journalists scoop their rivals by filing stories from the field using satellite telephones and notebook computers. Needless to say, each of these developments, among a myriad of others, has had profound implications for how journalists go about their work and, just as importantly, how their audiences relate to the world around them.

In choosing the title *News Culture* for this book, it is my intention to signal from the outset a commitment to establishing a rather unconventional agenda for the study of the institutions, forms, practices and audiences of journalism. To the extent that one can safely generalize about the wide variety of existing examinations of the news media within the humanities and social sciences, I think it fair to suggest that many of these analyses share a distinguishing feature. That is to say, they usually prioritize for examination a media–society dichotomy which treats the respective sides of this relationship as being relatively exclusive. Studies tend to focus on either the media themselves, so as to ask questions about how they affect society (the findings usually make for grim reading) or they centre on the larger society in order to explore how it affects the media ('the public gets the media it deserves'). In both instances, the relationship implied by the media–society dichotomy is often simply reaffirmed as one consistent with the role 'everyone knows' the news media play in a democratic society. To borrow an old maxim, the news media are assumed to be afflicting the comfortable while, at the same time, comforting the afflicted.

A key aim of this book is to render problematic this media–society dichotomy. I want to suggest that the invocation of such a dichotomy is placing severe limits on the sorts of questions that can be asked about the news media in our society (or, for that matter, just how democratic our society is in the first place). Should the news media be removed, in analytical terms, from the social, economic and political contexts within which they operate, we run the risk of exaggerating their power and influence. Similarly, any inquiry into how modern societies are 'made and remade in every

individual mind' on a daily basis, to use Williams's (1989a [1958]) apt turn of phrase, needs to account in one way or another for the efficacy of the news media. In other words, then, I want to argue that we need to break down this media–society dichotomy so that we may better grapple with all of the messy complexities, and troublesome contradictions, which otherwise tend to be neatly swept under the conceptual carpet. It is important that we take sufficient care to avoid losing sight of how the news media are embedded in specific relations of power and control while, at the same time, recognizing the ways in which they are working to reinflect, transform and, if only infrequently, challenge these same relations over time.

It is with this concern in mind that I have introduced the notion of 'news culture' as a means to help facilitate critical efforts to transcend the media–society dichotomy. A closer inspection of this dichotomy reveals some of the ways in which it shapes different modes of inquiry into news as a distinctive research object. Three such lines of investigation may be briefly sketched as follows:

- *News as an object of policy formation*: for approaches giving priority to the governmental sphere, news is treated as an agent of representative democracy. Questions are raised about state regulation of the news media, including issues such as 'due **impartiality**' or 'fairness', official secrets (such as where 'national security' is concerned), **DA-Notices**, censorship, libel and defamation, advertising, freedom of information, privacy, **doorstepping** and '**cheque-book journalism**'. Members of the news **audience** tend to be conceived of primarily as voters possessing rights which require protection through agencies such as the Press Complaints Commission (**PCC**), Independent Television Commission (**ITC**) and the **Radio Authority** in Britain, and the Federal Communications Commission (**FCC**) in the USA.
- *News as an object of commodification*: viewed from the vantage point of an economic approach, the status of news as a commodity to be bought and sold is emphasized. Audience members are primarily thought of as current (or potential) consumers, the attention of whom may be purchased in turn by advertisers (or, in the case of public news broadcasting, quantified in order to justify public subsidy or licence fees). The changing dynamics of news media **ownership** are scrutinized, particularly as they pertain to relations of profit accumulation and maximization at local, national or global levels.
- *News as an object of public opinion*: still another approach situates news as an object of 'rational-critical debate' within the realm of the public sphere (the writings of Habermas (1989, 1992) are particularly applicable here). Attention focuses on the decisive role the news media play in establishing a discursive space, one framed by the state and economic domains on either side, for public deliberations over social issues. The formative influence of the news on popular attitudes is accentuated by conceiving of the news audience as citizens engaged in public dialogue.

Each of these approaches has proven to be extremely important in generating vital insights into how the news media operate in modern societies such as those of Britain and the USA. Nevertheless, each is also necessarily partial and selective in what it identifies as being relevant to its concerns. This book will attempt to dwell on those aspects which tend to fall between the cracks of these more familiar types of approaches.

The concept of 'news culture', I shall argue, resists the analytical separation of the 'cultural' from the 'economic' and the 'political' prefigured by the media–society dichotomy. In so doing, it may be employed to help rethink the ideological assumptions, modes of perception, and even unconscious expectations, which need to be sustained by journalist and audience member alike if a news account's claim to be a factual representation of reality is to be upheld. As a form of social knowledge, a discourse identified as 'news' exhibits certain evolving yet characteristic features which are shaped in accordance with cultural rules or conventions about what constitutes 'the world out there'. That is to say, while journalists typically present a news account as an 'objective', 'impartial' *translation* of reality, it may instead be understood to be providing an ideological *construction* of contending truth-claims about reality. This is to suggest that the news account, far from simply 'reflecting' the reality of an event, is effectively providing a codified definition of what should count as the reality of the event. This constant, always dynamic process of mediation is accomplished primarily in ideological terms, but not simply at the level of the news account *per se*. Instead, the fluidly complex conditions under which the account is both produced and consumed or 'read' will need to be accounted for in a critical approach to news culture.

It will be my objective over the course of this book to discern the contours of news culture with an eye to mapping several of the more prominent features of its terrain. Accordingly, a brief overview of the different chapters is as follows:

- The discussion commences in Chapter 1 by tracing the emergence of 'news' as a form of discourse from the earliest days of human civilization up to and including the early twentieth-century newspaper press. Special attention is given to the rise of 'objective' reporting methods, showing how by the 1920s they had been formally legitimized by many news organizations in Britain and the USA as being consistent with professionalism.

- The focus shifts in Chapter 2 to examine the early days of radio (new material about the reporting of D-Day is added in this edition) and televisual news in Britain and the USA. Of particular interest are the ways in which the narrative forms and devices of broadcast news were conventionalized. Many of the news formats and reporting practices familiar to us today are shown to have been the subject of considerable discussion and debate, their larger significance for the coverage of public affairs being anything but clear at the time.

- Chapter 3 returns us to the current 'mediasphere', to borrow Hartley's (1996) term, in the first instance by engaging with competing conceptions of the role the

news media play in structuring public debate. Next, an evaluative assessment is offered of a variety of studies concerned with the routine, day-to-day practices of news production or newswork. Particular attention is devoted to journalists' interactions with their sources, together with the attendant implications for news access.

- In Chapter 4, the textual features of news as a distinctive form of discourse are centred for investigation in relation to newspapers, radio and television. Special priority is given to the question of 'hegemony' as it informs critical research into the ways in which these different genres of news *naturalize* or *depoliticize* certain definitions of reality as being representative of 'common sense', of what 'everyone knows to be true'.

- Following next in Chapter 5 is an exploration of how news texts (both **broadsheet** and **tabloid** newspapers, as well as televisual newscasts) are actually 'decoded' or 'read' by viewers, listeners and readers. The varied uses of news, particularly in the household, will be considered so as to discern the lived materiality of the daily practices, rituals, customs and techniques shaping the negotiation of its meanings within the context of everyday life.

- Insights provided by feminist and gender-sensitive critiques of news form the basis of Chapter 6. Beginning with an analysis of the gender politics of 'objective' reporting, the discussion proceeds to show how the norms and values of white, middle-class male journalists typically sustain a 'macho culture' in the newsroom. Attention then turns to the recurrently sexist ways in which women are represented in the news media, particularly with regard to news coverage of incidents of male violence committed against them.

- Chapter 7 develops Hall's (1990) distinction between 'overt' and 'inferential' racism so as to deconstruct the racialized projection of an 'us and them' dichotomy in the news. The ways in which this dichotomy is maintained, reinforced and contested are examined in relation to the reporting of 'law and order' issues, as well as during times of war. In terms of the latter, this edition also discusses how Al-Jazeera, an Arabic news network, reported on the casualites of the war in Iraq. Lastly, the chapter scrutinises the pressures routinely placed on ethnic minority journalists to 'write white', that is, to produce news accounts which conform to a predominantly white audience's preconceptions about the social world.

- Chapter 8, a new chapter for this edition, examines online journalism. It begins by situating journalism within the brave new world of the Internet, before proceeding to discern several key innovations in the development of Web-based reporting. Included in the discussion of the emergent forms, strategies and conventions of online news is a consideration of how the Oklahoma City bombing was reported. Next, we turn to the atrocities of September 11, 2001, paying particular attention to citizen-produced reporting on the Web. Lastly, the challenges posed in covering the war in Iraq are examined by focusing on 'warblogs' as an alternative type of reporting.

- The book draws to a close in Chapter 9, which has been expanded since the previous edition. It focuses, in the first instance, on various critiques of the news media, not least those which contend that 'real journalism' is at risk of disappearing into a 'sleazoid infotainment culture'. In this context, the chapter proceeds to examine television news, before engaging directly with issues around 'newszak', celebrity and 'tabloidization'. Lastly, in making the case for rethinking journalistic practice, several strategies for change are identified and explored. The reader is thus encouraged to continue with the work of calling into question the familiar types of assumptions ordinarily made about news culture by both journalists and their critics alike.

1 | THE RISE OF 'OBJECTIVE' NEWSPAPER REPORTING

> When a dog bites a man that is not news, but when a man bites a dog, that is news.
> (Charles Anderson Dana, editor and proprietor, *New York Sun*, 1882)

> Its primary office is the gathering of news. At the peril of its soul it must see that the supply is not tainted. Neither in what it gives, nor in what it does not give, nor in the mode of presentation, must the unclouded face of truth suffer wrong. Comment is free but facts are sacred.
> (C.P. Scott, editor and proprietor, *Manchester Guardian*, 1922)

This chapter's discussion is devoted to the rather daunting task of sketching several broad contours of newspaper history in Britain and the USA. Of course, even a book-length study could only begin to meet such a challenge, so I shall be necessarily selective in my approach here. A reasonable place to start, it seems to me, is by trying to cast the question 'what is a newspaper?' in historical terms. As we shall see, such an inquiry needs to stretch back far beyond the invention of the printing press to a time when news was simply spread by word of mouth. It is in the nineteenth century that our discussion really begins, however, as I shall seek to prioritize for consideration the ways in which modern newspaper journalists have endeavoured to professionalize their methods of reporting over the years. More specifically, attention will focus on the historical factors which gave rise to the practice of 'objective' newspaper reporting as a means to promote new definitions of 'the **public interest**'.

Following a brief overview of the origins of the newspaper and its development across the centuries, this chapter turns to examine 'popular journalism' as it was represented by the 'pauper press' in Britain and the 'penny press' in the USA in the 1830s. Of particular importance, in my view, is the need to trace the ascent of the various economic, political and technological factors which together were helping to consolidate the cultural norms of 'neutral', 'non-partisan' reporting. Accordingly, this assessment proceeds to consider, among other issues, the introduction of the electric

telegraph in the 1840s, the intensification of varied appeals to professionalism among journalists by the 1890s, and the widespread endorsement of the ideological values of 'unbiased' reporting by journalists following the First World War. It will be argued that it was around this time that the key features of 'objective' journalism, as we recognize it today, were slowly becoming conventionalized for reporters and their readers alike.

From smoke signals to daily newspapers

Before exploring several issues in the history of newspaper journalism relevant to our discussion of modern news culture, it is advantageous to pause and consider some of the more salient factors which led to the emergence of the newspaper itself (see also Smith 1979; Innis 1986; Stephens 1988; Sreberny-Mohammadi 1990; Craven 1992; Schudson 1995; J. Thompson 1995; Fang 1997).

Difficulties in defining precisely what should count as a news account date back over 500 years, since it was during the fifteenth century that the English word 'news' broadly assumed the meaning familiar to us today by displacing the Old English notion of 'tidings'. This is not to suggest, of course, that the concept of news was not already in public use. Indeed, we can assume that it has its ultimate origins in the very development of language in oral or preliterate communities thousands of years ago. Spoken news, whether in the form of gossip, sermons, ballads or tales, was an effective form of communication. Still, it was always at risk of possible misinterpretation (deliberate or otherwise), to say nothing of faulty memories. Nevertheless, this type of information helped to sustain a shared sense of social order. Such communities often had their own, usually highly ritualized, customs for disseminating news at a distance, typically relying on strategies such as messengers running relays, fires, smoke signals or the banging of drums.

Not surprisingly, communicating news over vast expanses of time and space became much easier with the advent of writing. Today's researchers, particularly archaeologists and anthropologists, continue to uncover evidence concerning the advent of a range of different writing devices. Examples include the 'pictographs' written on clay tablets by the Sumerians (who would later invent numerals and, along with the Akkadians, develop 'ideographs') for the purposes of record keeping in southern Mesopotamia around 3500 BC. Another crucial advance came with the use of papyrus reeds by the Egyptians in about 2200 BC. While papyrus lacked the durability of clay, stone or wood, it was possible to inscribe symbols on it much more readily and its lighter weight ensured that it could be more easily transported. These advantages were not lost on the Greeks, who were quick to exploit papyrus, together with their elaboration of the Phoenician alphabet, in the larger interests of trade and commerce, as well as education, literature and science. A few centuries later in China, writing would be committed to bamboo (about 500 BC), then on to silk, and finally on to paper following its invention, reportedly by a eunuch named Ts'ai Lun, in about AD 105, toward the end of the

Han dynasty. Significantly, paper would not begin its slow journey to the world beyond China for another 500 years, when Buddhist priests initially took it to Korea and Japan.

The invention of paper in Europe, which according to many historians was an event that arose independently from developments in China, would not take place until the twelfth century (paper was first used in Britain in 1309). Even then, its popularity did not overtake that of parchment until printing was firmly established. Although credit for the invention of movable type also belongs to the Chinese, Western accounts typically cite Johann Gutenberg of Mainz, Germany, as its originator. Whether or not he was influenced by the evolution of typesetting in China, or the use of metal type in Korea, is a matter of dispute among some historians. In any case, Gutenberg, a goldsmith, succeeded in introducing a typographical system in the 1440s which quickly revolutionized printing throughout Europe. By utilizing a process whereby each letter was moulded individually, and was then continuously reused, he was able to produce texts – most famously a 42-line Bible of 1282 two-column pages around 1457–8 – with a wine press converted for the task. The first printing press in Europe astonished members of the public, even frightening some who regarded its capacity to make near perfect copies of texts as the 'black art' of the devil. From then it was a race among printers in different European cities to further refine this technology, leading Thomas Carlyle to state over 300 years later: 'He who first shortened the labour of copyists by device of Moveable Types was disbanding hired armies, and cashiering most Kings and Senates, and creating a whole new democratic world; he had invented the art of printing' (cited in Fleming 1993: 227).

The stage was now set for the development of the forerunners of today's newspapers. Although handwritten notices about government affairs appeared in the days of Julius Caesar who, in 59 BC, had decreed that they be publicly displayed on a daily basis, the printing press facilitated the circulation of news throughout society in a way never witnessed before (the first in England was set up in 1476). As historian Mitchell Stephens (1988) writes:

> In 1483 the owner of one press charged three florins for each twenty pages to print a book that a scribe might have copied for one florin for twenty pages. But that press could produce 1,025 copies for the money, the scribe one copy – three times the expense, a thousand times the audience . . . And each printed copy that marched off a press had a crucial advantage: it was an exact replica. Those thousands of readers would each receive the same story, with no *added* errors, distortions or embellishments.
>
> (Stephens 1988: 84–5)

Printed pamphlets or broadsides, which sometimes presented news narratives in the form of prose or a rhyming ballad, were slowly beginning to replace newsletters copied by hand by the start of the sixteenth century. Newsbooks followed next, the more sensational of which were often referred to as *canards*, which consisted of several pages of news usually about the same topic. Items of public interest included news of state

announcements, victories in battle, royal marriages, executions of witches, and the like, as opposed to accounts of everyday events.

Many historians of the press have argued, though, that the roots of the modern newspaper are most clearly discernible in the weekly news-sheets which originated in Venice close to the end of the sixteenth century (the first of which were still being written by hand). Referred to as a *gazette* after the name of the coin (*gazetta*) used to pay for a copy, they typically consisted of a single sheet of paper folded over to form four pages. These gazettes reported on events from across Europe, largely of a political or military nature, mainly by drawing upon the accounts of travelling merchants and diplomats. As their popularity grew, they began to expand in the range of their news coverage until, by the 1600s, they were beginning to resemble a form broadly consistent with today's newspaper.

Disputes continue to surface among press historians regarding which publication deserves to be acknowledged as the world's first newspaper, with different titles from Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland usually receiving the most attention. This controversy stems, in part, from disagreements over how best to define what constitutes a newspaper as distinct from other, related types of publication. In a European context, Anthony Smith (1979: 9–10) suggests that news publishing passed through four distinct stages over the course of the seventeenth century:

- first, there was the single story (a 'relation' or 'relacioun'), usually published months after the event being reported on
- second, a continuous series of 'relations' were brought together and published on a near weekly basis as a 'coranto' (the first in the English language appeared in Amsterdam in 1620)
- third, the 'diurnall' appeared, which supplied a weekly overview of newsworthy occurrences transpiring over successive days
- the fourth stage in the evolution was the 'mercury', a form of newsbook where the journalist typically spoke in a personal voice, and the 'intelligencer', which addressed its audience in a more formal or official voice.

Throughout the 1600s, then, these and related types of publications spoke to an ever expanding audience as literacy levels underwent rapid improvement. Available in towns and cities in bookshops and coffee houses, and sold in rural areas by hawkers and peddlers, they 'brought sex and scandal, fantasy, sensationalism, bawdiness, violence and prophecy to their readers: monstrous births, dragons, mermaids and most horrible murders; but they also brought items of news' (Craven 1992: 3; see also Boyce *et al*. 1978).

It was not until the early eighteenth century, however, that the daily newspaper, with its wide coverage of subject matter, was fully established in Britain. The first daily was the *Daily Courant* which was launched on 11 March 1702 on premises 'next Door to the King's-Arms Tavern at Fleet Bridge' (see also M. Harris 1997). Initially composed of a single sheet of two columns, it sold for one penny and offered its readers both domestic and international news (the latter translated from 'the Foreign Paper from

when 'tis taken'). The *Daily Courant* was soon joined by a series of new dailies such that, according to Smith (1979), by 1750:

> London had five daily papers, six thrice-weeklies, five weeklies and, on a far less official level, several cut-price thrice-weeklies, with a total **circulation** between them of 100,000 copies (up to one million readers) a week. The average weekly wage, at ten shillings, was higher in London than in the provinces, and brought the purchase of an occasional newspaper well within the reach of all but the poorest workers.
>
> (Smith 1979: 56–7)

Despite the severity of tax and libel laws, there was a steady increase in the sales of daily newspapers throughout the century. This was attributable, in part, to general population growth, the spread of literacy, and the continuing expansion of networks of distribution. In the case of the last factor, the use of new roads in and out of London by stage-coaches and wagons, as well as the growing proficiency of the General Post Office across Britain, were particularly significant (see also Herd 1952; M. Harris 1978; Jones 1993; O'Malley *et al*. 1997).

The first regularly published newspaper in the American colonies was *The Boston News-Letter*, which was established by the town's postmaster, John Campbell, in 1704 (an earlier title, Benjamin Harris's *Publick Occurrences*, was closed after a single issue by the colonial authorities). Formerly a handwritten newsletter, this weekly newspaper relied heavily on European news obtained from the pages of various London publications. The country's first daily newspaper was not founded until 1783, when the *Pennsylvania Evening Post and Daily Advertiser* appeared in Philadelphia. Months after its launch the publisher, Benjamin Towne, was indicted as a traitor for having lent his support to the Tories during the city's occupation by the British. Journalism, as Schudson (1995: 45) argues, had become intensely political since the Stamp Act controversy had forced printers to choose sides in 1765. While some titles shied away from publishing any form of news which might be regarded as controversial, others made every effort to incite a revolutionary fervour among their readers.

By the close of the eighteenth century, then, the foundations were being laid for a newspaper press which, according to its champions, would come to represent to the world the epitome of democratic power, prestige and influence. Not everyone shared this view, of course, a point expressed rather forcefully in the words of one commentator writing in 1799:

> The American newspapers are the most base, false, servile, and venal publications that ever polluted the fountains of writing – their editors the most ignorant, mercenary and vulgar automatons that ever were moved by the continually rusty wires of sordid mercantile avarice.
>
> (cited in Innis 1986: 158)

Differing opinions as to its proper role and deserved status apart, by the 1800s the ascension of the newspaper press as a vitally important forum for public discussion, debate and dissent was assured.

The emergence of popular journalism

It is now apparent, in light of the discussion above, that the emergence of a newspaper press committed to advancing 'the public interest' by reporting the reality of the social world in a 'non-partisan' manner has been a fairly recent development. Most historical accounts of the rise of 'objective' journalism, as we shall see, point to a series of crucial developments in the early decades of the nineteenth century concerning the 'pauper press' in Britain and the 'penny press' in the USA. Both types of newspapers were launched during this period with the expressed aim of securing a mass readership interested in the kinds of news which the more 'traditional', 'high-minded' newspapers largely neglected to cover.

Turning first to the 'pauper press', as it had come to be known in Britain during the early nineteenth century, it is important to note that it succeeded in attracting a largely working-class **readership** because of its commitment to delivering a form of journalism these readers wanted to see at a price that they could afford. An emphasis was placed on reporting news events which had a distinct 'human interest' angle, as they were perceived to possess a greater entertainment value. For example, in 1834 the publisher of the *Twopenny Dispatch*, Henry Hetherington, promised readers that they would find on its pages:

> a repository of all the gems and treasures, and fun and frolic and 'news and occurrences' of the week. It shall abound in Police Intelligence, in Murders, Rapes, Suicides, Burnings, Maimings, Theatricals, Races, Pugilism, and all manner of moving 'accidents by flood and field'. In short, it will be stuffed with every sort of devilment that will make it sell.
>
> <div align="right">(cited in Stephens 1988: 204)</div>

The pauper press, mainly made up of weekly titles, stood in marked contrast to the so-called 'respectable press'. This even though these mainstream titles, as Williams (1978: 46) remarks, were not particularly respectable: 'there had been heavy direct bribery of journalists by Ministers, and official advertising was steered to papers favourable to Government opinion'. Many of the pauper press titles, available for the price of a penny or two, were actively campaigning for radical social change in the face of the Newspaper Stamp Duties Act which had been imposed with the clear intention of destroying them. Evading this politically motivated tax, which had also been extended to advertisements and paper, was a necessity if these titles were to retain their relatively cheap price.

Governments of the day were fearful of the threat radical journalism posed to established relations of power and privilege, while the proprietors of the 'respectable' press wanted to reduce the competition for readership. Both groups therefore saw important advantages to be gained by restricting the ownership of newspapers to fellow members of the propertied class. In the words of one angry parliamentarian at the time:

> Those infamous publications of the cheap press tended to disorganise the very frame of society . . . they inflame their [the poor's] passions and awaken their selfishness, contrasting their present condition with what they contend to be their future condition – a condition incompatible with human nature, and with those immutable laws which Providence has established for the regulation of civil society.
>
> (cited in Curran 1978: 64)

The stamp duties, like the ongoing prosecutions for seditious and blasphemous libel, helped to realize this aim, but did not succeed in curbing the influence of the illegal unstamped press entirely. Rather, it was the convergence of these interests with those of advertisers which proved to be even more effective in silencing oppositional voices.

Two factors were particularly significant here: first, advertisers were typically anxious to avoid any association with controversial publications, especially if it meant the risk of incurring the wrath of the Crown. Second, they were willing to place their advertisements only with those titles which attracted an audience made up of people possessing the financial means to purchase their products. By this logic, the 'lower orders' of society inclined to support the campaigning press were, by definition, all but excluded. As a result of these and related factors, few radical titles could match the editorial content of their 'respectable' rivals. Nor could they afford to invest the capital required to stay up-to-date with the latest improvements in press and ink technologies. Consequently, far from inaugurating a new era of press freedom and liberty, this period witnessed the introduction of a much more effective system of press censorship: 'Market forces,' as Curran and Seaton (1997: 9) argue, 'succeeded where legal repression had failed in conscripting the press to the social order' (see also Asquith 1978; Boyce *et al*. 1978; Koss 1984; O'Malley 1986; K. Williams 1998, Curran 2002).[1]

The gradual decline of the radical press in Britain may be mapped in relation to the rapid ascension of a middle-class press following the repeal of the 'taxes on knowledge' (the stamp duty was substantively reduced in 1836, and withdrawn altogether in 1855; the duty on advertising was removed in 1853 and that on paper eliminated in 1861). Of the various titles which became dailies following the abolition of the stamp duty in 1855, the most successful was the *Daily Telegraph*. In contrast with *The Times*, for example, which sold at seven pence, the *Daily Telegraph* moved to drop its price to a penny so as to entice a much wider readership to its pages. Sales underwent a dramatic surge upwards, quickly leading to a point where it assumed a dominant position in the market (by 1877 its daily circulation was the largest in the world). A leader writer on the staff in the 1860s, Edward Dicey, would later outline the basis of the newspaper's commitment to popular journalism in 1905:

> We were given a free hand, as we knew that if we produced something the public would like to read we should not be blamed even if we diverged to some extent from the instructions given us at the morning meetings. We had no great respect for constituted authorities, we cared very little for preconceived opinion, and we

were not troubled with too strict reverence for absolute accuracy. We were, if I may venture to say so, the pioneers of the Press today.

(Dicey 1997 [1905]: 105)

The penny dailies like the *Daily Telegraph*, while for all intents and purposes middle-class newspapers, nevertheless saw the potential profits to be gained by stretching their appeal to include working-class readers. In many ways, however, they were simply emulating mass circulation strategies which had been firmly established across the Atlantic since the 1830s (see also Lee 1976; Griffiths 1992; Wiener 1996; Allan 1997a).

In the United States, the penny newspapers championed popular forms of journalism which were very similar to those initially embraced by the pauper press in Britain. The *New York Sun*, which appeared on 3 September 1833, is generally regarded as the first of the penny newspapers, and it was almost immediately followed by the *Evening Transcript* and the *New York Herald* (later by the *New York Tribune* in 1841 and the *New York Times* in 1851). From the city of New York, the penny press quickly spread to the other urban centres, beginning with Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore. The use of the steam press in the 1830s was followed by the introduction of the Hoe rotary press in 1846, thereby enabling the mass production of newspapers on a scale never seen before. While perhaps too much has been made about these technological changes by some writers who see in them a determining influence, they nevertheless significantly altered the dynamics of commodification for better (newspapers could be sold more cheaply) and for worse (the start-up costs for establishing a title quickly became prohibitive). By the middle of the nineteenth century, as Shi (1995) suggests, the USA was 'awash in newsprint'. Specifically, in '1840 there were 138 daily newspapers in the country; thirty years later there were 574; by the turn of the century the total was 2,600' (Shi 1995: 95). During the same period, he adds, overall circulation increased from less than 2 million to over 24 million. By the end of the Jacksonian era, then, the penny press would succeed in displacing the commercial or mercantile press, as well as the explicitly sectarian press, from the positions of prominence which they had previously enjoyed (the party press would virtually disappear by 1875).

The contours of 'public opinion' were being quickly redrawn by this new type of newspaper which sought to claim for itself the status of being the people's voice in a society undergoing democratization. Due to its reliance on market-based income, namely sales and advertisements increasingly directed at consumer items, the penny press provided its customers with a much less expensive product (about five cents cheaper on average; payment was made to 'newsboys' or 'little merchants' on the street, not via annual subscription; see Bekken 1995; Leonard 1995). As a result, these newspapers offered a different type of access to the public sphere, for they were able to declare a greater degree of political independence from government and party. Indeed, not only did some of these newspapers define themselves as 'neutral in politics', but also many tended to be indifferent to elite political events. According to Schudson (1978: 21), a lead in the 9 December 1833 edition of the *New York Sun* about a 'short

item of congressional news' was typical: 'The proceedings of Congress thus far, would not interest our readers.' This when the first issue of the same newspaper had proclaimed that its aim was 'to lay before the public, at a price within the means of everyone, all the news of the day.'

For most of the penny newspapers, then, reporting 'the news of the day' entailed a commitment to a new, distinctive range of news values. In particular, the local 'human interest story' was to be prized above all others, for it best represented the conditions of contemporary life as they touched the experiences of 'the masses'. These newspapers thus tended to restrict their coverage of party politics or issues of trade and commerce to matters of popular interest, electing instead to fill their pages primarily with news about the police, the courts, small businesses, religious institutions, and 'high society'. News from the streets and private households, especially suicides, fires and burglaries, had mass appeal (in this way the line between 'public' and 'private' life was effectively blurred: Schudson 1978; Smith 1979; Schiller 1981). As James Gordon Bennett, founder of the *New York Herald*, declared in the 11 May 1835 edition of that penny newspaper: 'We shall give a correct picture of the world – in Wall Street – in the Exchange – in the Police Office – in the Opera – in short, wherever human nature or real life best displays its freaks and vagaries' (cited in Roshco 1975: 32). Thus in presenting to their readers a 'gastronomy of the eye' largely made up of 'the odd, the exotic and the trivial', to use Carey's (1986: 163) terms, these newspapers were expeditiously redefining what could and should qualify as news for 'ordinary people' in the context of their daily lives.

This radical remapping of the public sphere fundamentally transformed not only popular conceptions of what should constitute a news event, but also how that news should be communicated. In seeking to satisfy the needs of a general readership far more encompassing in class terms than that of their more established rivals, the penny newspapers utilized a language of reporting which emphasized the significance of everyday life in a 'realistic' manner. The *New York Herald*, for example, had been launched in 1835 with a pledge 'to record facts, on every public and proper subject, stripped of verbiage and coloring' (cited in Shi 1995: 95). Despite the ongoing criticisms of 'sensationalism' being levelled at the penny press by the six-penny newspapers (especially with regard to crime and scandal, the coverage of which was deemed to be 'morally dubious'), there was a conviction among the editors and journalists of the new titles that there was a growing 'public demand for facts'.

This perception that the appeal of 'facts' was intensifying among newspaper readers, arguably attributable to the ascension of 'realism' in areas as diverse as science, architecture, literature and the fine arts, encouraged journalists to strive even harder to present the information on their pages in the most literal way possible. The penny press thus began to reflect a marked preference for factual news coverage (at its most literal this would simply consist of verbatim transcripts of official statements), over ('subjective') editorial explanation. Ironically, then, as an elite press previously preoccupied with partisan interests gave way to a popular one which sought to prioritize a public

interest, the goals of explanation and critique were increasingly being played down in favour of a panorama of facts ostensibly devoid of evaluative comment.

Separating 'facts' from 'values'

The introduction of the electric telegraph in the 1840s is also typically cited by newspaper historians as a crucial contributory factor informing the emergence of journalistic 'objectivity' as a professional ideal, one based on the presentation of 'unvarnished facts'. Credit for the world's first telegraphic patent belongs to two British physicists, William F. Cooke and Sir Charles Wheatstone, who together in 1836 created a prototype system. The first fully working version was patented the following year by Samuel F.B. Morse in the United States. It would take about another six years, and a substantial financial investment from the US Congress, before an experimental telegraphic line was ready to be tested before the public. This successful demonstration, which took place on 1 May 1844, relayed the news from Baltimore that the Whig Party had nominated Henry Clay for President and Theodore Frelinghuysen for Vice-President to an anxious Morse waiting at the other end of the line in Washington, DC. Later that same month, Morse used his sending device in the Supreme Court chamber to tap out the first official telegraph message, 'What hath God wrought?' The second message was 'Have you any news?'

Four years later, six New York newspapers organized themselves into a monopolistic cooperative to launch the Associated Press (AP), a wire service devoted to providing equal access for its members to news from one another and, more importantly, from sources in distant sites (the Mexican War, and later the American Civil War, being prime examples). News reports, which had previously travelled by horse and boat (carrier pigeons were used only infrequently), took on an enhanced degree of timeliness which had far-reaching implications for the redefinition of a public sphere. This point was underscored by Bennett of the *New York Herald* when he commented on the significance of the telegraph for the political public sphere:

> This means of communication will have a prodigious, cohesive, and conservative influence on the republic. No better bond of union for a great confederacy of states could have been devised . . . The whole nation is impressed with the same idea at the same moment. One feeling and one impulse are thus created and maintained from the centre of the land to its uttermost extremities.
>
> (cited in Stephens 1988: 227)

The news values of newspapers were thus being recast by a new language of dailiness, one which promoted a peculiar fascination for facts devoid of 'appreciation' to communicate a sense of an instantaneous present.

Debates regarding the strictures of non-partisan, factual reporting took on a new resonance as AP began to train its own journalists to adopt different norms of reporting.

This included the 'inverted pyramid' structure of news accounts, as unreliable telegraph lines made it necessary to compress the most significant facts into the summary 'lead' paragraph. Moreover, because newspapers of very different political orientations were subscribing to its service, the 'impartiality' of AP's 'real time' news accounts became a further selling feature. 'Opinions' were left for the client newspaper to assert as was appropriate for their 'political stripe'. In the words of the head of the AP Washington bureau, an individual who had worked for the service since its inception:

> My business is to communicate facts; my instructions do not allow me to make any comment upon the facts which I communicate. My dispatches are sent to papers of all manner of politics, and the editors say they are able to make their own comments upon the facts which are sent them. I therefore confine myself to what I consider legitimate news. I do not act as a politician belonging to any school, but try to be truthful and impartial. My dispatches are merely dry matters of fact and detail. Some special correspondents may write to suit the temper of their organs. Although I try to write without regard to men or politics, I do not always escape censure.
>
> (cited in Roshco 1975: 31)

These emergent conventions of wire service reporting, apparent as they were not only in a 'dry' language of facts but also in the routinization of journalistic practices, were clearly helping to entrench the tenets of 'objectivity' as a reportorial ideal.

In Britain, the first news received by telegraph to appear in the newspaper press occurred on 6 August 1844 in the form of a telegram from Windsor Castle announcing the birth of Queen Victoria's second son. This development set in motion a series of events which would enable news to travel at breath-taking speeds. By the early 1850s, British engineers had succeeded in stretching a submarine telegraph cable across the English Channel to France, as well as one between England and Ireland. It would take several attempts before a viable transatlantic telegraph connection was established, but in 1866 a British steamship laid down a submarine cable between Valentia, Ireland and Heart's Content, Newfoundland (it was the first of 15 such cables that would be laid by 1900). Using combinations of terrestrial and submarine cables, Britain was linked by the early 1870s with South-East Asia, China and Australia, and later Africa and South America. As Thompson (1995) points out, the advent of the telegraph was leading to the uncoupling of space and time:

> Up to the 1830s, a letter posted in England took five to eight months to reach India; and due to monsoons in the Indian Ocean, it could take two years for a reply to be received. In the 1870s, a telegram could reach Bombay in five hours, and the answer could be back on the same day . . . Rapid communication on a global scale – albeit along routes that reflected the organisation of economic and political power – was a reality.
>
> (J.B. Thompson 1995: 154)

Most of the information being transmitted along these lines was of a commercial nature, often consisting of financial data such as forecasts about commodity trading. Various governments were also quick to exploit the technology, primarily for political (and, as in the case of the Boer War, military) advantage. News of interest to the public made up only a small part of the messages, but its significance for how newspaper organizations 'covered' the world was profound.

'Telegraphic journalism', as it was sometimes called at the time by commentators, dramatically transformed how newspaper readers perceived the world around them. The 'latest telegrams' were rapidly becoming a regular feature of most dailies, thereby creating a sense of immediacy which was making 'news' and 'newspapers' synonymous. Just as was the case with their counterparts in the USA, British journalists were placing a greater emphasis on processing 'bare facts' in 'plain and unadorned English'. Each word of a news account had to be justified in terms of cost, which meant that the more traditional forms of news language were stripped of their more personalized inflections. This development was particularly pronounced in relation to 'foreign' news, where the public demand for it was growing (especially with respect to the British Empire) in direct relation to increases in the costs associated with providing it. Of the mid-century daily newspapers, only *The Times* was willing and able to meet the expense of an extensive network of correspondents and 'stringers' to telegraph news from around the world. For its rivals, an alternative source of foreign news were the daily reports being relayed by the European news agencies, the most important of which for British newspapers was Reuters (Havas of France and Wolff of Germany were the other two main ones; see also Boyd-Barrett 1978; Palmer 1978; Read 1992; Rantanen 1997).

The telegraphic news coverage generated by the Reuters news agency provided the other leading newspapers in London with the means to compete with *The Times* for a fraction of the price otherwise necessary to set up an independent set of news bureaux. Established as a financial service in London in 1851 by Julius Reuter, a German journalist, by 1858 the agency had evolved into one entrusted to supply news from around Britain and the world with unrivalled speed and accuracy. Considerable pride was taken in communicating the essential facts of 'hard' or 'spot' news free from the distorting influences of personal opinion. Commenting on the constraints which conditioned the norms of telegraphic reporting, Sigismund Engländer, Reuter's chief assistant, declared in 1889:

> I inaugurated myself, nearly thirty years ago, the present service of sober, naked statements of facts for our services, but at that time the newspapers published only a few sober telegraphic announcements of facts, and telegraphy itself was in its infancy: but your Editors still shrink from developing any light and colour in the service, and believe the dull skeleton of telegrams alone to be acceptable.
>
> (cited in Read 1992: 103)

More than one newspaper editor shared Engländer's concern about this over-reliance on 'naked statements of facts'. For example, Lord Burnham of the *Daily Telegraph* wrote:

> On 9th May 1864, a naval battle took place between the fleet of Denmark and the combined fleets of Austria and Russia. If there be anything in which the British public takes deep interest, it is a sea fight; yet here was a battle almost within earshot of our own eastern seaboard, and the London press on the following morning published less than a quarter of a column of details, supplied by Reuter's agency. There was no special correspondence, no graphic narrative.
>
> <div align="right">(cited in Palmer 1978: 207)</div>

Burnham proceeded to argue that this problem would eventually improve by the next century, but it was becoming apparent to many at the time that the near fetishization of facts for their own sake was the driving logic of telegraphic journalism. Indeed, this logic was neatly pinpointed when, in 1894, a correspondent for *The Times* was informed that 'telegrams are for facts; appreciation and political comment can come by post' (cited by Stephens 1988: 258).

The toil of ink-stained hacks

Current debates over whether or not journalism properly constitutes a fully fledged profession, one with specialized rules of method and ethical conduct (like medicine, law or engineering), date back at least to the early nineteenth century. It was about that time when the term 'journalist' was becoming widely used, although journalism itself was not held to be worthy of the efforts of a gentleman, let alone a gentlewoman, with the possible exception of the writing of editorial leaders for *The Times*. Its gradual climb to 'respectable', if not prestigious, status encountered several difficulties along the way. An example of the sort of attack launched by critics includes that expressed by the philosopher John Stuart Mill:

> In France the best thinkers and writers of the nation write in the journals and direct public opinion; but our daily and weekly writers are the lowest hacks of literature which, when it is a trade, is the vilest and most degrading of all trades because more of affectation and hypocrisy and more subservience to the baser feelings of others are necessary for carrying it on, than for any other trade, from that of the brothel-keeper up.
>
> <div align="right">(cited in Elliott 1978: 177)</div>

Efforts to organize journalism as a profession took a significant step forward when the National Association of Journalists was founded in 1884 (it would become a royal chartered institute six years later: see Underwood 1992). Its main aim, according to Elliott (1978: 175), was 'to achieve professional status for journalists by promoting the

interests of journalists, raising their status and qualifications, supervising their profes-
sional duties and testing qualifications for membership'. An alternative definition of
professionalism, this one based upon unionism, was mobilized in 1907 when the
National Union of Journalists (NUJ) became the world's first trade union for journal-
ists (Ecclestone 1992). Primarily concerned with enhancing the living conditions of its
members, the NUJ fought for a national agreement on minimum wages which was
eventually achieved in 1919 (see also Bromley 1997).

Several historians, in examining evidence of the day-to-day routines of news writing
in the nineteenth century, have highlighted the significance of certain reporting prac-
tices for attempts to justify a claim to professional status. The fundamental virtues of
the 'respectable' journalist, according to this emergent ethos, were speed, accuracy and
the ability to work under deadline pressure (here 'respectable' typically meant male, as
by sexist reasoning women were deemed to be 'unsuited' for the task; see K. Mills 1990;
Sebba 1994; see also Chapter 6). The temporal constraints of periodicity meant that
journalists were now favouring those types of 'news events' which were likely to change
on a daily basis. As well, the growing public demand for facts meant that accounts had
to be double-checked in order to ensure an 'unblemished version of events'. Here the
significance of the practice of shorthand as part of the journalist's craft comes into
play, as Smith (1978) writes:

> The acquisition of various systems of shorthand, leading up eventually to the
> universally applicable system perfected by Pitman, gave reporters their true
> mystery. It separated the correspondent from the reporter. It meant that a man
> [*sic*] could specialise in observing or hearing and recording with precision . . . It
> gave the reporter an aura of neutrality as he stood between event and reader; it
> gave him the chance to feel that he represented the interests of the newspaper's
> clients; it connected the task of reporting to the perspective of experimental
> science; and it gave the writer a tool which enabled him to aspire to the status of
> the engineer and the philosopher.
>
> (Smith 1978: 162)

By the end of the nineteenth century, journalists recognized that a knowledge of
shorthand was crucial if the rudimentary standards of '**objectivity**' were to be upheld
as being representative of professionalism.

Appeals to professionalism, as noted above, have always been hotly contested among
journalists in the USA. Some historians maintain that journalists began referring
to their craft as a profession as early as the Civil War, while others eschew the idea
of professional status altogether. In any case, there seems little doubt that it was the
penny press in the 1830s which firmly established the institution of paid reporters,
although it would still take several more decades for salaried positions to become the
norm. By mid-century, various social clubs and press societies were being created as
informal, shared spaces for journalists to meet to discuss their concerns about what
was rapidly becoming – in the eyes of many of them – a 'profession' (this when the

drinking of toasts from skulls was not an unknown practice at some of these clubs). These spaces were formally inaugurated after the Civil War with the opening of the New York Press Club in 1873. It was in this period, just as the newspaper was being redefined as a big business requiring financial investment on a large scale, that journalists' formal claims to a professional status deserving of public esteem were becoming widespread. As Schudson (1978) points out, this status was contingent upon the public recognizing certain differences between the so-called 'old-time reporter' and the 'new reporter':

> The 'old reporter', according to the standard mythology, was a hack who wrote for his [*sic*] paycheck and no more. He was uneducated and proud of his ignorance; he was regularly drunk and proud of his alcoholism. Journalism, to him, was just a job. The 'new reporter' was younger, more naïve, more energetic and ambitious, college-educated, and usually sober. He was passionately attached to his job.
>
> (Schudson 1978: 69)

Concomitant with this shift from reporting as a provisional occupation like any other to a 'respectable, professional career' was a growing perception among journalists themselves that they were assuming, at the same time, a responsibility to contribute to the general welfare of an increasingly democratic society (see also Hardt and Brennen 1995; Leonard 1995; Matheson 2003).

In common with certain other occupational groups, such as those of medicine or law, many British and US journalists sought to legitimize their claim to professional status with reference to a larger sense of 'public responsibility'. More specifically, this affirmation of a specific obligation to the reader was typically framed on the basis of a commitment to exposing the 'truth' about public affairs, regardless of the consequences, and no matter how unpalatable. These and related developments were informing the emergence of newspaper titles determined to adopt a progressive 'crusading' role in the name of public service. Leading the way in the USA was the *New York Times*, a daily generally held by 'opinion leaders' to be the embodiment of reasoned, factual news coverage. Illustrative of this endorsement of 'straight' reporting is a statement made by the publisher Adolph Ochs, who purchased the title in August 1896. In the course of outlining the newspaper policies following his acquisition of the title, Ochs declared:

> It will be my earnest aim that *The New York Times* give the news, all the news, in concise and attractive form, in language that is parliamentary in good society, and give it as early, if not earlier, than it can be learned through any other reliable medium; to give the news impartially, without fear or favor, regardless of any party, sect or interest involved; to make the columns of *The New York Times* a forum for the consideration of all questions of public importance, and to that end to invite intelligent discussion from all shades of opinion.
>
> (cited in Schudson 1978: 110–11)

This quotation highlights a convergence of the discourses of factual journalism with those of professional responsibility *vis-à-vis* the public sphere, in general, and the interests of its affluent readers, in particular. With its new motto of 'All the news that's fit to Print', the *New York Times* sought to claim for itself the status of an open forum for debating public affairs. This when the boundaries of its definition of 'serving the public' were recurrently projected in a way which justified existing relations of power and privilege, namely those of wealthy white males, as being consistent with American democracy.

'Objectivity' as a professional ideal

In the years immediately following the close of the First World War in Europe, the necessary conditions were in place for a general affirmation of the tenets of 'objectivity' among both journalists and their critics. Popular disillusionment not only with state propaganda campaigns, but also with the recent advent of 'press agents' and 'publicity experts', had helped to create a wariness of 'official' channels of information. For those journalists alert to the danger of equating reality with official definitions of truth, the need for more 'scientific' methods to process facts was increasingly being recognized.

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that over the course of the 1920s the ideal of 'neutral' reporting gradually became synonymous with the invocation of the 'public interest' for many news organizations. While in Britain this ideal tended to be left implicit to most definitions of journalistic practice, in the USA it was formally enshrined as a professional standard by a number of different bodies. By way of example, in April 1923 the American Society of Newspaper Editors announced their 'canons' of journalism, the fifth one of which reads, in its entirety, as follows:

> Impartiality – Sound practice makes clear distinction between news reports and expressions of opinion. News reports should be free from opinion or **bias** of any kind.
>
> 1. This rule does not apply to so-called special articles unmistakably devoted to advocacy or characterized by a signature authorizing the writer's own conclusions and interpretations.
>
> (cited in Roshco 1975: 46; see also Willis 1991; Salcetti 1995; Matheson 2000)

In other words, 'impartiality' demanded of journalists that they distinguish 'facts' from 'values' if their respective newspaper was to be recognized as a free arbiter of truth. As many of these journalists quickly discovered, however, such a commitment to 'value-free' reporting frequently had disturbing implications in professional terms. Specifically, many of the most passionate advocates of 'objective journalism' were the very editors and publishers intent on opposing the unionization of their newspapers. From this self-serving perspective, a journalist could hardly be a dispassionate,

non-partisan observer while, at the same time, belonging to such a 'controversial' organization as a union.

Interestingly, the near-obsession with 'objectivity' indicative of most US newspapers often encountered criticism from abroad. According to one historian, for example, the French 'condemned a worsening quality of journalism, which put facts before ideas, and attributed it to "americanisation" ' (Lee 1976: 231). Then again, in somewhat stronger language, the US press baron Joseph Pulitzer declared: 'In America, we want facts. Who cares about the philosophical speculations of our correspondents?' (cited in Chalaby 1996: 311). In any case, this appeal to 'objective', non-'biased' reporting was slowly becoming institutionalized, to varying degrees, throughout the 1920s in the growing professional culture of US and British (albeit to a lesser extent) journalism. Evidence of this gradual process of institutionalization is apparent in factors such as the following:

- more reporters began to specialize in relation to distinct news topics (labour, science, agriculture, and so forth) using 'impersonal', fact-centred techniques of observation
- there was further refinement in news interview conventions, leading to more aggressive questions being asked of public figures (the interview itself being a relatively recent invention)
- more prominence was given to the by-lined news account
- greater emphasis was placed on new genres of 'investigative' and 'interpretative' reporting, the latter being increasingly displaced from 'hard news' into political columns
- there was a more pronounced reliance on quotation marks for source attribution
- finally, improvements in the relative degree of autonomy from the day-to-day control of both proprietors and editors were being secured.

Each of these developments spoke in a different way to public scepticism about the ideal of realizing 'the plain truth' on the pages of a newspaper. By dispensing with the language of 'truth' in favour of that of 'objectivity', journalists underscored the necessity of discerning how 'the world out there' was being represented from an interested or 'biased' viewpoint. That said, however, even if each and every statement of fact was to be subject to verification, the professionally validated rules and procedures of 'objective' reporting did not directly call into question the existence of absolute truth. 'Objectivity' demanded of journalists only that their role be delimited to one of facilitating the public's right of access to facts free from partisan values. One of the most influential journalists writing in the USA in the 1920s, Walter Lippmann (1922), gave voice to this redefinition in his book *Public Opinion*. 'The function of news,' he wrote, 'is to signalize an event, the function of truth is to bring to light the hidden facts, to set them into relation with each other, and make a picture of reality on which men [*sic*] can act' (Lippmann 1922: 226). It was his view that only through 'accomplished facts' could news be able to 'separate itself from the ocean of possible truth'.

Chapter 2 extends this discussion by investigating how these types of issues were dealt with in the early days of both radio and televisual news broadcasting in Britain and the USA.

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Note

1 Here it is worth bearing in mind, however, that there remains today a range of alternative forms of journalism which resist, to varying degrees, the market forces shaping 'mainstream' news organizations. Examples include, amongst others, various publications (and, increasingly, websites) linked to social movements, trade unions, political groups and parties, single-issue campaigns, ethnic minority groups, religious organizations, and so forth (see Atton 2002; Curran and Couldry 2003). My thanks to an anonymous reviewer of the first edition of *News Culture* for suggesting that I point this out.

2 | THE EARLY DAYS OF RADIO AND TELEVISION NEWS

Television newsreels will, of course, continue to develop and be of the greatest interest and attraction, but there is surely not the least possibility that they will ever replace the news on sound.

> (Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, Chair of the BBC Board of Governors 1947–52)

Before you leave home in the morning, even before you finish your second cup of coffee, you are going to become an ear and eyewitness to every major world event – as it happened while you slept, as it happens *now* . . . This is the morning briefing session that will arm you with information to meet the day more fully than any citizen has ever been armed before.

> (Announcement made at the launch of **NBC** morning news programme 'Today', 14 January 1952)

The thorny issue of whether or not journalists are capable of providing a 'duly impartial' account of the social world has long preoccupied many researchers interested in the operation of the news media in modern societies. As we saw in Chapter 1, the norms and conventions broadly held to be indicative of news factuality have undergone a series of important changes since the arrival of the daily newspaper in the eighteenth century. In this chapter, our discussion carries on from the 1920s, where we left off, but initiates a turn to consider the early days of radio and television news broadcasting.

Once again, we shall retain a dual focus on developments in reportage in both Britain and the United States. Such an approach, it is hoped, will enable a number of comparisons to be made by highlighting points of similarity and difference between their respective news cultures. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that at the time, as is the case now, these two models of broadcasting provided many journalists located around the world with formative sources of alternative ideas, strategies and tactics to use when defining what should count as a proper, authoritative 'newscast'. On this basis, it will be shown how notions such as 'impartiality', 'balance' and

'fairness' were encodified as guiding principles for broadcast journalism in these two countries in surprisingly different ways. I shall argue that despite these differences, however, there was a shared desire on the part of broadcasters to offset fears, both governmental and corporate, about the dangers these new forms of journalism might pose *vis-à-vis* the articulation of popular dissent across the public sphere.

BBC News on the 'wireless'

When the British Broadcasting Company began its General News bulletins from London on 23 December 1922, it did not have in its employ a single journalist engaged in reporting the day's news. The cries of alarm expressed by newspaper proprietors about unfair competition from the wireless had been taken so seriously that a prescriptive injunction was inserted in the company's licence. BBC news reports were to be strictly limited to summaries prepared by a consortium of news agencies (Reuters, the Press Association, Exchange Telegraph and Central News) and then broadcast only after 7:00 pm, so as to minimize any potential harm to the sales figures of the daily press.

Improvements in this situation were achieved only gradually, even though John Reith, the managing director-general of the BBC (he would later be the first director-general of the corporation from 1927 to 1938), consistently petitioned the postmaster-general to reduce the restrictions on news coverage. In 1924, for example, he wrote a letter requesting 'permission to handle controversial subjects, providing we can guarantee absolute impartiality in the act' (cited in Scannell and Cardiff 1991: 27). His request was flatly denied; 'controversial' matters continued to be prohibited for fear of their potentially dangerous influence on public opinion.

About two years later, during the General Strike of May 1926, the BBC was provided with a remarkable opportunity to proclaim its independence while, at the same time, demonstrating its willingness to obey government instructions behind the scenes. The strike having temporarily closed almost all of the newspapers, the public turned to the wireless for reports on the crisis; the BBC responded with up to five bulletins a day, most of which included at least some material it had gathered itself. At stake was the BBC's political loyalty, an issue which was framed in terms of its capacity to uphold the tenets of 'responsible' (that is, non-controversial) reporting in the name of 'impartiality'. As Reith wrote in a memorandum to Stanley Baldwin, the Prime Minister, the BBC could be trusted to endorse the government's position against that of the trade union movement. In his words: 'Assuming the BBC is for the people and that the Government is for the people, it follows that the BBC must be for the Government in this crisis too' (cited in Burns 1977: 16–17). Government ministers were therefore given direct access to BBC microphones in order to advance their definitions of the crisis, while voices from the opposition parties and the trade unions were virtually silenced. Many listeners who were disgruntled with the 'one-sided' radio coverage, as

one historian notes, took to using the term BFC (British Falsehood Corporation) to express their indignation (Pegg 1983: 180).

This 'baptism of fire' for the BBC, as it was later characterized by some newspaper commentators, underlined how the direct line of control held by the state over the company under the legal authority of the Wireless Broadcasting Licence was being translated into self-censorship. At the same time, however, the strike proved that a national audience could be created for broadcasting. In the words of Hilda Matheson, the first head of the Talks Department, writing in 1926: 'The public and wireless listeners are now nearly synonymous terms' (cited in Curran and Seaton 1997: 141; see also Briggs 1961–95; Davies 1994; Crisell 1997).

In the years immediately following the General Strike, Reith sought to further enhance public trust in the BBC's 'authentic impartial news'. He recognized that a greater degree of independence would have to be established for the company from direct government surveillance, even if the use of such pressure was the exception rather than the rule. His efforts were largely in vain, although he did achieve some success in advancing a revisioning of the BBC, in institutional terms, as a national service in the public interest which was deserving of a more prominent reportorial role. By January 1927, when the BBC had achieved corporation status by royal charter, an earlier time slot of 6:30 pm had been secured for the news bulletins. Further concessions had also been won with regard to the use of live 'eyewitness accounts' (especially in the case of sporting contests and public events, such as the coronation of 1937).

Still forced under its licence conditions to avoid any type of programming which could be regarded as controversial, which was also taken to apply to the proceedings of Parliament, the corporation nevertheless began to grant itself more latitude in the imposition of self-censorship despite the postmaster-general's veto power. The government's confidence in the BBC's willingness to be respectful of the limits of its 'independence' was slowly being reinforced, and the ban on controversial broadcasts was lifted in 1928 (if only experimentally at first). There was also at this time a growing sense that the mutual interests of the Post Office, the newspaper proprietors and the press agencies were inhibiting the introduction of the more interesting and informative news formats being offered by broadcasting systems in other countries. By way of an example, the BBC's extremely narrow definition of what were appropriate 'news values' meant that on Good Friday 1930, its news editors declared that in their view 'there was no news of the normal type or standard for broadcasting, and as a result no news bulletin was given' (cited in Scannell and Cardiff (1991: 118) who observe, in turn, that the announcer simply declared that 'there is no news tonight'). While this 'no news' news bulletin cannot be regarded as typical, it does provide a telling illustration of the relative rigidity of the topical parameters (and their attendant 'news values') within which the corporation was attempting to operate in order to placate its administrators.

By the end of 1934, changes were underway to turn BBC News into an independent department, a move designed, in part, to further encourage public confidence in its

corporate ethic of neutrality. The separation of News from the Talks Department was linked, in part, to charges of 'bias' being made against the latter department. If newspaper commentators framed the new division as the BBC's 'Answer to Tory Suspicions of Radicalism', within the corporation 'it was seen as a result of a sustained campaign by the right-wing press against alleged BBC "redness" ' (Scannell and Cardiff 1991: 118). Also underway at this time was a gradual shift to embrace more accessible, if not popularized, norms of reporting, particularly with respect to questions of style, tone and format. In 1936, the journalist Richard Dimbleby, who would later be recognized as perhaps the most influential radio reporter ever to work for the BBC, proposed a radical redefinition of what should constitute radio news:

> It is my impression, and I find it shared by many others, that it would be possible to enliven the News to some extent without spoiling the authoritative tone for which it is famed. As a journalist, I think I know something of the demand which the public makes for a 'News angle', and how it can be provided. I suggest that a member or members of your staff – they could be called 'BBC reporters or BBC correspondents' – should be held in readiness, just as are the evening paper men [*sic*], to cover unexpected News for that day. In the event of a big fire, strike, civil commotion, railway accidents, pit accidents, or any other major catastrophes in which the public, I fear, is deeply interested, a reporter could be sent from Broadcasting House to cover the event for the bulletin.
>
> (cited in Scannell and Cardiff 1991: 122)

This configuration of a public audience for the bulletins which is demanding a 'news angle', and one which is 'deeply interested' in catastrophes (perhaps regrettably so in Dimbleby's eyes), cut against the grain of previous conceptions of the BBC's audience. Moreover, it brought to the fore the issue of what type of newscast would be best suited to presenting the news (see also Miall 1966). Interestingly 1936 would also see the BBC undertake its first rudimentary forms of audience research.

The corporation's self-declared responsibilities *vis-à-vis* the listening public were posited within the dictates of government influence, notwithstanding its occasional assertion to the contrary. For this and related reasons, it would be years before Dimbleby's vision was realized. In the meantime, the news bulletin's authoritative claim to impartiality relied almost exclusively on material acquired via the news agencies, even in those instances where the newer forms of technology made 'on the spot' reports possible. Deviations from this general pattern would occur only rarely until the outbreak of war, clearly the most important of which was the live broadcast (on both radio and television) of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's return to London from his meeting with Adolph Hitler in Munich. Still, when Britain declared war against Germany in September 1939, the BBC possessed only a tiny staff of reporters, of whom one was Dimbleby, to call into action.

Over the course of the early years of the war, a variety of reportorial innovations would rewrite the conventions of radio journalism. In rounding out this section, our

attention turns to the events of D-Day, the first major test of the BBC's newly fashioned War Reporting Unit. Just past dawn on the morning of 6 June 1944, when hundreds of ships began approaching the Normandy coastline of France, the Unit was primed to cover the event. The Corporation broke the news to its listeners at 8:00 am that morning, with announcer Freddy Allen reading the statement: 'Supreme Allied Headquarters have issued an urgent warning to inhabitants of the enemy-occupied countries living near the coast. The warning said that a new phase in the Allied Air offensive had begun' (cited in Nicholas 1996: 211–12). It was followed by a short extract drawn from a 'flash' from a monitored German source, the Transocean news agency, reporting that Allied paratroops had landed in France. At 9:32 am, a special bulletin declared the official news that 'D-Day has come . . .', citing as its source Communiqué No. 1 from Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF). The Communiqué simply stated: 'Under the command of General Eisenhower, Allied Naval Forces, supported by strong Air Forces, began landing Allied Armies this morning on the northern coast of France' (cited in Hibberd 1950: 253).

More substantive details would emerge in News bulletins over the course of the day, supplemented by eyewitness perspectives provided by the Corporation's correspondents (no longer described as 'observers'). In anticipation of the invasion, 48 of these correspondents had been assembled into the War Reporting Unit in May of the previous year. Each of them was experienced in providing 'actuality' in vivid terms, making effective use of the 'midget' recorders devised by BBC engineers. These recording machines were lightweight (or, at 40 lbs, relatively so) and portable, enabling the correspondent to record one hour's worth of material on 12 double-sided discs stored in the lid (Cumberlege 1946; Royle 1987). The resultant forms of 'on the spot' field reporting, engendering at times a breath-taking quality of immediacy, were intended to furnish the listener with 'pictures in sound'.

Interestingly, it was the launch of a new programme on D-Day, the 30-minute *War Report*, which formally marked a turning point in the BBC's war reportage. It was announcer John Snagge who introduced *War Report* to listeners immediately after the Nine O'Clock News, its regular timeslot from that day forward. This first edition of the programme highlighted radio's technological reach with on-the-spot actuality material – both live and recorded – from a range of correspondents reporting events at firsthand. Included that day were dispatches recorded 'live' the night before by correspondents awaiting embarkation with the Allied forces, as well as Richard Dimbleby (the Corporation's first accredited war correspondent), Frank Gillard and Howard Marshall from the shores of Normandy. In the hours to come, some 17 BBC correspondents 'sailed with the navies, flew with the bombers, jumped with the paras, landed with the gliders and hit the beaches with the US and British armies' (Hudson and Stanier 1997: 69–70). Evidently Snagge's words, 'and now over to Normandy', were long remembered afterwards (Miall 1994: 26).

By making extensive use of actuality material, a new approach to radio journalism was being fashioned with an extraordinary appeal for audiences demanding 'authentic'

news. Adopting an 'essentially personal and informal' style, this 'news magazine' went to the air every night in the months to come as the invasion continued apace, regularly attracting 10 to 15 million listeners in Britain (and millions more overseas). *War Report*, in the BBC's own words, promised to deliver the 'latest and fullest picture of the war' to the listener. It 'took the microphone to places where things were happening, and let it listen – as one would one's self like to listen – to the sounds of battle, to the voices of men just returned from the fighting line, to observers who spent that day touring the scene of action' (cited in Briggs 1970: 662).

In the case of correspondent Frank Gillard, for example, the opportunity to report from Normandy finally came when he scrambled ashore with troops in an assault craft. His firsthand observations, recorded from the beach at Arromanches, stated:

> At first sight everything round the beaches still looks chaotic – there's still so much wreckage and litter lying about. Smashed-up buildings, tangles of wire, heaps of driftwood, enormous bomb-craters, waterlogged landing-craft just pushed out of the way . . . wrecked vehicles piled one on top of another . . . but despite appearances everything is thoroughly under control. To prove it there are those unending columns of men and vehicles pouring inland in perfect order . . .
>
> (cited in Stroud 1969: 35)

Reporting under near-constant artillery fire and bombing, Gillard made the best of a difficult situation on the beach area, before finally being able to move inland with the advancing troops. Movement was difficult, not only because of the enemy counter-attack, but also because of the cumbersome weight of the recording equipment. Even when a set of recordings was complete, ensuring its safe return to Britain was at times a formidable challenge. 'You just took your chance,' he later recalled, 'and gave them to anybody who was going back. I was always going down to the beaches hoping to find a destroyer or other craft that was making a return journey' (cited in Stroud 1969: 36). It was only on the third day, when landing-strips had at last been secured, that matters improved. Gillard was able to arrange with pilots to take the heavy discs back for the BBC to broadcast. It would be the Royal Signals, however, who provided a more practical long-term solution, namely by making available a truck with a VHF transmitter perched high on the seafront's cliffs. Once given the official go-ahead, he was able to speak – subject to the constraints of censorship – directly to the BBC.

Public recognition of the BBC's reportorial achievements registered on both sides of the Atlantic, and beyond. In the US, for example, some 725 radio stations had rebroadcast BBC invasion news. The 'actuality' recordings of the sounds of warfare, like the voices of the soldiers, were said to have made a particularly deep impression with members of the public. 'Beginning at 12:40 am last Tuesday, and on through the day you had a feeling that radio, in its capacity as an informant, had grown up', observed *The New York Times*. 'The service of the British Broadcasting Corporation, as D-Day listeners know, was not less than superb. [Its actuality broadcasts] came over bringing a sense of reality and on-the-spot realism beside which the contrived studio program

seemed virtually static' (*The New York Times*, 10 June, 1944; see Cumberlege 1946: 52–3; Briggs 1970: 637).

The start of radio news in the USA

It is difficult to say precisely when radio news broadcasting began in the United States. This is partially a problem of defining what constitutes a fully fledged newscast, but also a recognition of how dispersed the array of different radio stations was compared with a centralized BBC network (a situation aptly described by one commentator as 'chaos in the ether'). News had been relayed by 'wireless telegraphy' since the earliest experimental broadcasts, but the audience was almost entirely restricted to those 'ham' or 'amateur' operators who happened to be listening in on their crystal sets with earphones. One early event of note was the decision made by a Detroit newspaper, the *News*, to announce the returns from the local, state and congressional primary elections on 31 August 1920. The next day's edition of the newspaper declared:

> The sending of the election returns by the Detroit *News* Radiophone Tuesday night was fraught with romance, and must go down in the history of man's [*sic*] conquest of the elements as a gigantic step in his progress. In the four hours that the apparatus, set up in an out-of-the-way corner of the *News* building, was hissing and whirring its message into space, few realized that a dream and a prediction had come true. The news of the world was being given forth through this invisible trumpet to the waiting crowds in the unseen market place.
>
> <div align="right">(cited in McLauchlin 1975: 111)</div>

Evident in this quotation are a number of interesting points, not least of which is the configuration of the public sphere as an 'unseen market place'. Rather tellingly, and in sharp contrast with notions of public service broadcasting developing in Britain and elsewhere at the time, this commercialized rendering of the audience for radio underscored its profit potential.

Historians more typically identify a scheduled broadcast made in Pittsburgh on 2 November 1920 as deserving particular attention. That night, station KDKA (operated by the Westinghouse Corporation) went on the air to relay news of the Harding–Cox presidential election returns, an event which attracted thousands of wireless enthusiasts. The broadcast, using a 100-watt transmitter, took place in a shack built atop of one of Westinghouse's taller buildings as a temporary studio. To help fill the gaps between returns, a hand-wound phonograph was used. The resultant 'radio mania' sparked by this 'national sensation' spread far and wide, to the extent that sales of receiving sets reached about 100,000 by 1922, and over half a million in 1923 (Lichty and Topping 1975; Czitrom 1982; Fang 1997). By 1925, 'five and a half million radio sets were in use in the United States', according to Stephens (1988: 276), 'nearly half the number in use in the world.'

It was the financial imperative of increasing radio equipment sales which led the manufacturing companies to introduce regular forms of programming on their stations. KDKA was soon joined in broadcasting news bulletins by a number of stations situated across the USA. The station WJAG in Nebraska, owned by the Norfolk *Daily News*, was arguably the first to inaugurate a daily noon-time news broadcast on 26 July 1922, while the New York *Tribune* aired a daily fifteen-minute news summary via WJZ beginning 3 February 1923 (Danna 1975a). It was typically the case that these stations derived the content for these bulletins from newspaper accounts, namely because it was far cheaper to have the announcers read 'borrowed' extracts than it was to employ reporters to generate news.

By the early 1930s, the public was becoming accustomed to the idea of this new medium as a 'hard' news channel. NBC, with Lowell Thomas, had been the first to launch a fifteen-minute newscast five times a week in 1930, with the other networks following in step by 1932. Two news events occurred in 1932 which highlight, from the vantage point of today, several aspects of what was becoming distinctive about radio news. The first was the tragic kidnapping of the infant son of Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh in New Jersey on 1 March of that year. Charles Lindbergh was a world famous aviator, having been the first person to make a solo non-stop flight across the Atlantic Ocean on 20–21 May 1927. Reporters with NBC News were among the first to learn of the kidnapping, yet the network evidently refused to broadcast the story because it was judged to be 'too sensational'. This decision was reversed hours later as NBC joined other stations in clearing its evening schedules for several days as news flashes brought fresh details to light (the child's body would not be discovered for about ten weeks). The sheer volume of the news reports was unprecedented, leading some to argue at the time that it represented 'perhaps the greatest example of spot news reporting in the history of American broadcasting' (cited in Bliss 1991: 31). In their relentless coverage of the story, radio journalists were seeking to out-manoeuvre their newspaper rivals so as to be recognized as the best sources of information for a public desperate for the latest revelation. And they succeeded.

The second formative event of 1932 was the election of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who, in the words of one newscaster at the time, 'humanized radio in a great governmental, national sense as it had never before been humanized' (cited in MacDonald 1979: 300). The use of radio by politicians was not a new development: one of the earliest of such events had been William G. Harding's Armistice Day speech in 1921. Republican Calvin Coolidge won the first 'radio campaign' in 1924, and his inaugural address was the first to be broadcast by radio on 4 March 1925. Roosevelt, however, would be the first to fully exploit the medium as a means to decisively reshape public opinion. Shortly after his victory, he initiated a series of 'fireside chats' where he spoke in a relaxed, informal manner to the radio audience about matters of national policy. Radio, according to one commentator, was now able to 'bring the people right into the White House'. Elsewhere, it was pointed out that: 'Perhaps for the first time in American history the people of the nation were made to feel that they knew their

President personally and that they were receiving inside information firsthand on important events' (cited in Lichty and Topping 1975: 302). Still, radio journalists were prohibited from attending the Senate and House press galleries, and instead were forced to use the visitors' galleries as their workplace.

Election night in 1932 had also provided radio with the opportunity to show how easily it could 'scoop' the press by reporting election returns swiftly and comprehensively. For the newspaper industry, this was the last straw. The public's growing interest in radio news programming had been worrying industry executives for some time. They were anxious about the competition for audiences that it posed, particularly where advertising revenues were concerned (several newspapers had reacted by purchasing radio stations). Nor had the broadcasters' practice of selectively 'lifting' news from the press escaped their attention. If initially they had been satisfied with on-air credit for being the source of the news items (many of which were produced via the wires services they effectively controlled), in the aftermath of the election the situation had deteriorated to the point of an all-out 'press–radio war'. In April 1933 the Newspaper Publishers' Association, the principal organization of newspaper executives, together with the major news wire services, sought to bring any further encroachment on their profitability to a halt through a variety of tactics. These tactics included, among others, charging an advertising fee for printing daily radio schedules on their pages, intimidating the sponsors of radio newscasts into placing their advertisements exclusively in the press, and denying broadcasters access to wire service bulletins.

Before 1933 came to a close, however, the combatants in the 'press–radio war' had agreed to a compromise in what one writer called the 'smoke and hate-filled rooms' of the Hotel Biltmore in New York City (cited in Danna 1975a: 343). The so-called Biltmore Agreement meant that radio stations such as those operated by NBC and CBS could broadcast only two five-minute newscasts per day (one at 9:30 am and another at or after 9:00 pm) in order to 'protect' both morning and evening newspapers; were to ensure that only news summaries provided by the Press–Radio Bureau were used (which began on 1 March 1934); had to refrain from engaging in their own news-gathering activities; and, finally, avoid including advertisements in newscasts, although sponsorship of commentary was permitted (Danna 1975b; Sterling and Kittross 1978: 123; Bliss 1991: 42–3). This arrangement did not hold for very long, primarily because independent ('non-chain') stations, many of which were locally based, began to gather and report their own news. Moreover, the news agency Transradio had also stepped in to fill the 'news blackout gap' left behind by the Associated Press, United Press and International News Service. In about a year's time, the main tenets of the Biltmore Agreement were being openly transgressed to the point that it had been effectively rendered defunct. Other attempts to limit radio news would be launched by print media groups throughout the 1930s, but none would prove successful.

In marked contrast with the political climate in which the BBC was operating at the time, there was no corresponding attempt on the part of government regulators to enforce a definition of 'impartiality' on broadcasters. The Federal Communications

Commission was established by Roosevelt's administration in 1934 to coordinate the use of radio (as well as the telegraph and telephone). It possessed the powers to revoke, or refuse to renew, a licence where it determined that a station's policies and programmes were inconsistent with 'the public interest, convenience and necessity' (fines could also be imposed). Such action was extremely rare, however, leading to charges being made that the FCC was little more than a 'paper tiger'. In the eyes of broadcast reformers fearful about the growing network control of radio, the FCC was failing to meet its public responsibility to ensure access to the airwaves for those groups who felt that their right to free speech was being denied (they included educators, agricultural interests, the labour movement, civil libertarians and religious groups: see Engelman 1996). Any notion of public service broadcasting, they maintained, was incompatible with the conformity of opinion represented by an advertising-dominated commercial system.

Such claims were countered by organizations such as the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), a powerful lobbying group capable of bringing formidable pressures to bear on the FCC in order to protect the interests of commercial radio. The NAB sought to discourage the airing of 'controversial' viewpoints by imposing on its membership what it considered to be a new ethical code of practice. This code prohibited the discussion of issues deemed to be controversial outside of those news and related programmes specifically devoted to the expression of opinions. In this way, the NAB argued, it was ensuring that radio stations would be self-regulating so as to reduce the likelihood of the federal government intervening to monitor the content of programming. Although the code was legally unenforceable, it succeeded in severely restricting the diversity of voices being heard. Most broadcasters were content to interpret the code in such a manner as to virtually rule out the exploration of any subject which even had the potential to upset programme sponsors.

Critics of the NAB argued that while newscasts were not formally placed under the same restrictions, they were nevertheless being made to conform to the spirit of the code. That is to say, the values endorsed by the code affixed broadcasting's proclaimed commitment to public service within strictly commercial imperatives. The boundaries of journalistic 'impartiality' were thus being defined, in part, by a conception of the audience not as citizens in need of a public forum for argument and debate, but rather as potential consumers in search of entertaining diversions from everyday life. The implications were startling when one considers, for example, that according to a 1939 *Fortune* survey: '70 percent of Americans relied on the radio as their prime source of news and 58 percent thought it more accurate than that supplied by the press' (Czitrom 1982: 86).

The limits of 'impartiality': British television news

Although Britain's first experimental televisual programme had been transmitted from Broadcasting House on 22 August 1932, and news had made its appearance on 21 March 1938 (a recording of radio news presented without pictures), newscasts would

not be a daily feature on television until 1954. The television service had returned on 7 June 1946, having been closed down during the war years, in part because of fears that enemy bombers would home in on the transmitters. The radio news division prepared a nightly summary of the news to be read on television by an unseen announcer, while a clock-face appeared as the visual component. Newsreels were now manufactured in-house, due to the refusal of the cinema newsreel companies to supply them, and outside broadcasts were also regularly featured.

The BBC, always fearful of the charge that its views were being broadcast in its newscasts, took elaborate care to ensure that it observed a commitment to 'impartiality' as a professional and public duty. Given its responsibilities as a trustee in the national interest, the corporation could not be seen to be expressing a partisan position, especially in matters of public policy. Indeed, anxieties expressed by members of the main political parties that the BBC could ultimately appropriate for itself the status of a forum for national debate to match that of Parliament led, in turn, to the implementation of the 'fourteen-day rule' beginning on 10 February 1944 (it would stay in place until 1957). By agreeing (at first informally) not to extend its coverage to issues relevant to either the House of Commons or the House of Lords for fourteen days before they were to be debated, the BBC succumbed to pressures which severely compromised its editorial independence. No such restrictions were requested *vis-à-vis* the newspaper press, nor would their imposition likely to have proven to be successful.

By the early 1950s, with Britain engaged in the war in Korea (filmed coverage of which sparked public interest in the televisual reports), the arrival of competition from the commercial sector in the form of the Independent Television (ITV) network was imminent. BBC officials scrambled to get a daily newscast on the air prior to the launch of the new, commercial rival. Two weeks before the Television Act received the royal assent, the first edition of the BBC's *News and Newsreel* was broadcast on 5 July 1954. While the 7:30 pm programme had been heralded as 'a service of the greatest significance in the progress of television in the UK', Margaret Lane, a critic in the corporation's own journal, *The Listener*, was not convinced:

> I suppose the keenest disappointment of the week has been the news service, to which most of us had looked forward, and for which nobody I encountered had a good word. The most it can do in its present stage is to improve our geography, since it does at least offer, in magic lantern style a series of little maps, a pointer and a voice . . . The more I see of television news in fact the more I like my newspaper.
>
> (cited in Cox 1995: 38)

Shortly thereafter, Gerald Barry would comment in his television column in the *Observer* newspaper:

> The sad fact has to be recorded that news on television does not exist. What has been introduced nightly into the TV programmes is a perfunctory little bulletin of

news flashes composed of an announcer's voice, a caption and an indifferent still photograph. This may conceivably pass as news, but it does not begin to be television.

(cited in Davis 1976: 13)

By June 1955, the title *News and Newsreel* was dropped in favour of *Television News Bulletin*. The ten minutes of news was read by an off-screen voice in an 'impersonal, sober and quiet manner', the identity of the (always male) newsreader being kept secret to preserve the institutional authority of the BBC, to the accompaniment of still pictures (as the title suggests, the news was then followed by a newsreel). Only in the final days leading up to the launch of its 'American-style' rival on the new commercial network did this practice change, and then only partially. In the first week of September 1955, the BBC introduced the faces of its newsreaders to the camera, but not their names. The danger of 'personalizing' the news as the voice of an individual, as opposed to that of the corporation, was considered to be serious enough to warrant the preservation of anonymity. This strategy, which had its origins in radio, arguably communicated an enhanced sense of detached impartiality for the newscast, and would last for another eighteen months (the policy of anonymous newsreading would continue for BBC radio until 1963: Goldie 1977; Schlesinger 1987: 37; see also Briggs 1961–95; Winston 1993; Camporesi 1994).

The Television Act (1954), introduced by Winston Churchill's Conservative Party government after two and a half years of often acrimonious debate, had set up the Independent Television Authority (for a flavour of the opposition's attacks, see Reith 1974). The ITA established, in turn, Independent Television News (**ITN**) as a specialist subsidiary company in February 1955. Contained in Clause 3 of the Act were the following instructions:

3.–(I) It shall be the duty of the Authority to satisfy themselves that, so far as possible, the programmes broadcast by the Authority comply with the following requirements, that is to say:

(a) that nothing is included in the programmes which offends against good taste or decency or is likely to encourage or incite to crime or to lead to disorder or to be offensive to public feeling or which contains any offensive representation of or reference to a living person;

(b) that the programmes maintain a proper balance in their subject-matter and a high general standard of quality;

(c) that any news given in the programmes (in whatever form) is presented with due accuracy and impartiality; . . .

(f) that due impartiality is preserved on the part of the persons providing the programmes as respects matters of political or industrial controversy or relating to current public policy; and

(g) subject as hereinafter provided in this subsection, that no matter designed to serve the interests of any political party is included in the programmes.

The imposition of these prohibitions on to the independent programme companies, especially with respect to the formal obligation to observe 'due accuracy and impartiality', was broadly consistent with the general editorial policy of the BBC. Still, an important difference with respect to how impartiality was to be achieved had been signalled, if not clearly spelt out. Where the BBC generally sought to reaffirm its impartiality over a period of time, ITN would have to demonstrate a 'proper balance' of views within each individual programme.

At 10:00 pm on 22 September 1955, ITN made its début on the ITV network. The 'newscaster' for that evening, as they were to be called, was Christopher Chataway, a onetime Olympic runner who had been working as a transport officer for a brewery. The other 'personalities' hired by the network included the first female newscaster on British television, Barbara Mandell (a former radio news editor in South Africa), who presented the midday bulletin, and Robin Day, then an unknown barrister with little journalistic experience, who fronted the 7:00 pm bulletin. 'News is human and alive', declared Aidan Crawley, ITN's first editor, 'and we intend to present it in that manner' (cited in Hayward 1998; see also Crawley 1988). This view was reaffirmed by Geoffrey Cox, who assumed the role of editor just months after the launch following the resignation of Crawley over budget disputes with the networking companies. It was Crawley and Cox's shared opinion that 'the power of personality' in presenting the news was a crucial dimension of the effort to attract public attention away from the BBC and on to ITN as a distinctive news source (see also Paulu 1961; Sendall 1982). Here it is also interesting to note that Cox came from a newspaper tradition, namely the London *News Chronicle*, which presumably gave him a different approach to televisual news values than his counterparts at the BBC for whom radio news was the norm.

In contrast with the BBC's anonymous newsreaders, ITN's newscasters were given the freedom to rewrite the news in accordance with their own stylistic preferences as journalists, even to the extent of ending the newscast with a 'lighter' item to raise a smile for the viewer. Cox was well aware, though, that the advantages to be gained by having newscasters who were 'men and women of strong personality' (who also tended to be 'people of strong opinions') had to be qualified in relation to the dictates of the Television Act concerning 'due accuracy and impartiality'. Given that ITN was a subsidiary company of the four principal networking companies, lines of administrative authority were much more diffuse than was the case in the BBC or, for that matter, in the newspaper press. Still, pressure from the networking companies to increase the entertainment value of the newscasts was considerable.

Consequently, Cox (1995: 75) saw in the Act's requirements the means to negotiate an even greater degree of day-to-day autonomy from institutional constraints:

Impartiality, if it was interpreted actively, and not passively, could be a means both of protecting our independence and of strengthening our power to gather and interpret news, to arrive at the truth. It was a safeguard against pressures not only from the Government or other people of power, but also against the views

and whims of the programme companies who owned us . . . These few words [Clause 3] could free a television news editor from the proprietorial pressures which were then widespread in **Fleet Street** – much wider than is the case today. They could give him [*sic*] the freedom to create something new in popular journalism.

Robin Day (1995: viii), who would eventually become one of Britain's best-known journalists, has credited Cox's editorial standards at the time for securing 'vigorous, thrusting news coverage, responsibly and impartially presented in popular style' (see also Day 1989).

The question of how best to ensure that the newscast conveyed a commitment to impartiality for its audience was a serious challenge. As Day (1995) has since recalled:

> In the early formative days, he [Cox] had to inculcate a belief in impartiality into the mixed group who came together in 1955 to form the first television journalists of ITN. There was a small core of newsmen, mostly ex-BBC, headed by Arthur Clifford, the brilliant News Editor, who were trained in the discipline of impartiality. Others had no such background. There were cameramen and film editors from the cinema newsreels, where coverage had often been blatantly propagandist. There were journalists from Fleet Street, where proprietors expected their views to shape the contents as well as the policies of their newspapers. There were writers who believed that news should be seasoned by opinion.
>
> (Day 1995: viii)

In Day's view, Cox possessed a 'profound belief' in the principles of 'truth and fairness', qualities which meant that under his editorship 'ITN succeeded in combining the challenge and sparkle of Fleet Street with the accuracy and impartiality required by the Television Act' (Day 1995: ix). If this assertion is a somewhat boastful one, it nevertheless reaffirms how, from a journalistic point of view, the tenets of impartiality tend to be rendered as being consistent with professionalism.

This 'discipline of impartiality', with its appeal to the separation of news and opinion, also had implications for ITN's configuration of 'the public' for its newscasts. In its first year, ITN dramatically redefined the extent to which so-called 'ordinary' people could be presented in a televisual news account. Street-corner interviews, or **vox pops** as they were often called by the newscasters, began to appear on a regular basis. Moreover, at a time when 'class barriers were more marked', Cox (1995) recalls that ITN sought to portray the news in 'human terms' through reports which

> brought onto the screen people whose day to day lives had not often in the past been thought worth reflecting on the air. It gave a new meaning to the journalistic concept of the human interest story. In Fleet Street the term meant stories which were interesting because they were of the unusual, the abnormal, the exceptional. But here the cameras were making fascinating viewing out of ordinary everyday life, bestriding the gap between the classes – and making compulsive television out of it. Whether the story was hard news or not did not seem to matter. It was

life, conveyed by the camera with honesty and without condescension, adding interest and humanity to the bulletins in a way unique to this new journalistic medium.

(Cox 1995: 57)

Cox maintains that his sense of ITN's audience at the time was that it was 'largely working class', yet this assumption could not be allowed to 'bias' the network's news agenda. ITN's preferred definitions of 'news values', if not quite as restrictive as those of the BBC, still ensured that a potential news source's 'credibility' or 'authoritative-ness' would be hierarchically determined in relation to class (as well as with regard to factors such as gender and ethnicity).

The news agenda was similarly shaped by a principle of 'impartiality' which dictated that analysis and interpretation were to be scrupulously avoided in both the spoken news and film report segments of the newscast. However, expressions of opinion could be included in the newscast through studio interviews. These 'live' segments facilitated a stronger sense of immediacy, for spontaneous or 'off the cuff' remarks added a degree of excitement that might have otherwise been denied in the name of editorial fairness or balance. Perhaps more to the point, though, they were also more 'cost-efficient' than film reports.

By 1956, the BBC had elected to follow ITN's lead. In seeking to refashion its televisual newscasts to meet the new 'personalized' standards of presentation audiences were coming to expect, the corporation began to identify its newsreaders by name. It also emulated ITN by allowing them to use teleprompters in order to overcome their reliance on written scripts. Further technological improvements, most notably in the quality of film processing, similarly improved the visual representation of authenticity. That said, however, the question of whether or not to use dubbed or even artificial sound to accompany otherwise silent film reports posed a particularly difficult problem for journalists anxious to avoid potential criticisms about their claim to impartiality. Much debate also ensued over what circumstances justified imitating ITN's more informal style of presentation, particularly with regard to the use of colloquial language, to enhance the newscast's popular appeal (previously BBC news writers had been told to adopt a mode of address appropriate for readers of the 'quality' press). ITN had also shown how the new lightweight 16mm film camera technology could be exploited to advantage 'in the field' for more visually compelling images (complete with 'natural sound') than those provided by the newsreel companies with their bulky 35mm equipment. Indeed, through this commitment to 'bringing to life' news stories in a dramatic way, as well as its more aggressive approach to pursuing 'scoops' (exclusives) and 'beats' (first disclosures), ITN was stealing the march on the BBC with respect to attracting a greater interest in news among viewers.

The same year also saw the range of newsworthy topics for both the BBC and ITN substantively extended with the suspension of the so-called fourteen-day rule (it would be formally withdrawn by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in July 1957). In the

absence of this form of government control, both the BBC and ITN networks were able to redefine what could count as legitimate political coverage. It was at this point, then, that they were at last effectively positioned within the public sphere to realize their current status, arguably that of alternative forums of debate to Parliament. If for some politicians their worst fears were being realized, others saw in these same developments the potential for further enhancements to the structures of democratic accountability. In any case, as Robin Day (1989: 92) would later recall in his memoirs: 'It is an incredible fact of broadcasting history that in the very year that ITN began (1955) there had been a general election in which there was no coverage by BBC broadcasters of the campaign, *not even in the news bulletins*.'

US television news begins

In December 1941, a time when war had been raging across Europe for over two years, life was close to normal for most people living in the USA. That normality was abruptly shattered one Sunday, however, by a news flash from station KGU in Hawaii. Programming on the NBC radio network was interrupted as an announcer hurried on to the air to reread it to a national audience:

> BULLETIN: We have witnessed this morning the attack of Pearl Harbor and the severe bombing of Pearl Harbor by army planes that are undoubtedly Japanese. The city of Honolulu has also been attacked and considerable damage done. This battle has been going on for nearly three hours. One of the bombers dropped within fifty feet of Tanti Tower. It's no joke – it's a real war.
>
> <div align="right">(cited in Rose 1975: 354–5)</div>

This radio bulletin, complete with its errors in detail concerning the bombing of Honolulu (it would later be revealed that all but one of the explosions in the city were caused by US anti-aircraft fire) and the duration of the attack, sparked near panic across the country (Rose 1975). Everyone, it seemed, was instantly turning to radio for the latest developments; everyone, that is, with the exception of a tiny audience of people who were watching television's first 'instant special' on CBS in New York.

CBS had begun a regular television service only months earlier, providing two fifteen-minute news programmes on each weekday (described by the station as a 'roundup of news, together with the latest bulletins and background developments': cited in Nielsen 1975: 421). The news staff consisted of two people, Richard Hubbell as the newsreader and Robert Skedgell as the writer. As Skedgell would later recall: 'The newsroom, if it could be so called, was an open space just large enough to hold two desks, one UP radio wire, and a couple of filing cabinets. It looked like an insurance office' (cited in Bliss 1991: 219). The shocking news from Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 compelled Hubbell and Skedgell, together with the help of 'various regular radio correspondents', to broadcast their programme for the first time on a Sunday. In Skedgell's words:

I believe we were on air at about 3:30 and continued non-stop until 1:30 the next morning . . . There was not very much hard news that Sunday night, so much of our report was speculative: where the Japanese fleet was, what the Japanese intentions were, where the US fleet had gone, how much damage it had suffered. Of course, the maps were brought into considerable use, along with our usual graphics ['symbols of tanks, planes, bomb bursts, sinking ships, and so forth – no film, no switches anywhere'], during the long hours.

<div align="right">(cited in Bliss 1991: 219–20)</div>

In the hours following the catastrophe, as military censors turned the stream of 'hard facts' into a meagre trickle, journalists of every type were turning to official sources to add substance to conjecture. President Roosevelt's address to a joint session of Congress the following day reached an estimated 79 per cent of US radio homes, while the next evening's 'fireside chat' registered a rating of 83 per cent (Lichty and Topping 1975: 454). The television coverage, in contrast, was less than satisfactory. Due to its inability to establish a video line to Washington, CBS was reduced to providing an audio feed accompanied by a studio camera shot of a US flag, gently waving in a breeze generated by an electric fan.

Television news, which had first appeared in the USA during the 1930s on several experimental stations, did not get fully underway until after the Second World War. The first regularly scheduled network newscast to adopt the general characteristics familiar to us today was *The CBS-TV News with Douglas Edwards*, which appeared in a fifteen-minute slot each weekday evening beginning in August 1948 (newscasts would not be lengthened to half an hour until September 1963). It was sponsored by the car manufacturer Oldsmobile. NBC was next with *The Camel News Caravan* beginning in February 1949, sponsored by Winston-Salem, makers of Camel cigarettes. Advertisements formed a part of each newscast, and in the case of *The Camel News Caravan* went even further. The newsreader, John Cameron Swayze, sat at a desk to read the news, a packet of Camel cigarettes and an ashtray (the word 'Camel' on its side in clear letters) strategically placed beside him. Further sponsorship 'distortions' took many forms, as Barnouw (1990) elaborates:

Introduced at the request of the sponsor, they were considered minor aspects of good manners rather than news corruption. No news personage could be shown smoking a cigar – except Winston Churchill, whose world role gave him special dispensation from Winston-Salem. Shots of 'no smoking' signs were forbidden.

<div align="right">(Barnouw 1990: 171)</div>

The pace of the newscast was brisk, with the 'breezy, boutonniered' Swayze moving it forward each day with the line 'Now let's go hopscotching the world for headlines!' before bringing it to a close with his customary 'That's the story, folks. Glad we could get together!' (cited in Barnouw 1990: 102–3). Rival newscasts followed shortly

thereafter on the ABC (formerly NBC's 'Blue Network') and DuMont networks (the latter collapsed in 1955).

Most of the editors and reporters who found themselves working in television news had backgrounds in either newspapers, the wire services or radio news organizations. Such was likewise the case for the producers and production people, although they also tended to be drawn from wire service picture desks, newsreels, and picture magazines (Nielsen 1975). The significance of these disparate backgrounds is apparent in the types of debates which emerged regarding how best to present news televisually. In essence, the television newscast represented a blending of the qualities of radio speech with the visual attributes of the newsreel. With little by way of precedent to draw upon, a number of variations on basic newscast formats were tried and tested during these early years.

If the techniques of radio news provided a basis for anchoring the authority of the voice-over, it was the newsreel which supplied a model for the form that television news might take. Aspects of this model included 'the fragmented succession of unrelated "stories", the titles composed in the manner of front page headlines, and the practice of beginning each issue with the major news event of the day, followed by successively less important subject matter' (Fielding cited in Winston 1993: 184). Newsfilm items tending to be the principal component of the newscast (video tape was first used in network news in 1956), although switches to reporters in other cities were by now a regular feature. The performative role of the 'anchorman' (women were almost always denied this status: see Chapter 6) was also firmly established by the mid-1950s. One exception to the general rules in play was the early morning *Today* programme on NBC. Its mix of news, features and variety show elements enjoyed wide popular appeal, the latter leading to the inclusion of a charismatic chimpanzee named J. Fred Muggs as a regular member of the presenting team for several years (Barnouw 1990: 147–8, 168).

By 1954, television had displaced radio in the daily audience figures for usage of each medium, registering just under 3 hours to radio's 2.5 hours according to various surveys (Bianculli 1992: 58). Newscast formats had become relatively conventionalized from one network to the next by this time, although the question of how journalistic notions of 'impartiality' and 'fairness' were to be achieved in practical terms was the subject of considerable dispute. The determined search for ever larger ratings figures, due to the higher sponsorship revenues they could demand, made television news increasingly image-oriented in its drive to attract audiences. An emphasis was routinely placed on staged events, primarily because they were usually packaged by the news promoters behind them (whether governmental or corporate) with the visual needs of television in mind. News of celebrities, speeches by public figures, carnivals and fashion shows made for 'good television', and such coverage was less likely to conflict with sales of advertising time.

Significantly, then, the very features of television news which some critics pointed to as being vulgar, banal or trivial were often the same ones which advertisers believed

created an appropriate tone for the content surrounding their messages. Pressure was recurrently brought to bear on the networks to ensure that their viewers, as potential consumers, would not be offended by newscasts presenting the viewpoints of those from outside the limits of pro-business 'respectability'.

At the same time, the networks were also under increasing pressure from the Federal Communications Commission to observe the tenets of what would eventually evolve into a fully fledged '**Fairness Doctrine**' as part of their licence obligations. Attempts had been made by the FCC even before a statutory basis for the doctrine was established in 1959 to enforce a principle whereby the right of stations to 'editorialize' on the air would be strictly limited. These attempts at regulating fairness, promoted under the FCC's 1949 report *In the Matter of Editorializing by Broadcast Licensees*, revolved around a declaration that:

> Only insofar as it is exercised in conformity with the paramount right of the public to hear a reasonably balanced presentation of all responsible viewpoints on particular issues can such editorialization be considered to be consistent with the licensee's duty to operate in the public interest.
>
> (cited in Sterling and Kittross 1978: 305)

In general, the FCC's efforts met with little success throughout the 1950s, partly due to its inability to adequately police the requirements. A further contributory factor was the commission's internal confusion over how best to delimit a balance between advocacy on the part of the broadcaster, on the one hand, and the rights of those expressing opposing views, on the other (these issues were clarified to some extent in the Communications Act (1960), although not to the satisfaction of any of the parties involved). The net effect of the fairness requirements, then, was to encourage the makers of news programmes to avoid reports which were likely to attract the attention of the FCC even if, as was likely the case, its strictures would lack sufficient bite to be meaningful.

Daily newscasts in the 1950s were regularly supplemented with special event news coverage. One of the most significant examples, at least in terms of the sensational viewing figures it generated, was the televising of the 1950–1 Senate hearings into organized crime. Chairing the hearings, which were held over a period of weeks across the USA, was Estes Kefauver, a Democratic senator from Tennessee. His skill in posing penetrating questions propelled him to national prominence as he was widely credited with unravelling many of the intricate webs of deceit being spun in the testimony of certain witnesses (at times, according to one ratings service, New York City's entire viewing audience was watching the proceedings: Bliss 1991: 252). For most commentators, the testimony of reputed gangster leader and 'big-time gambler' Frank Costello signalled the highpoint of the coverage. Due to his angry refusal to allow his face to appear on screen, the cameras focused instead on his nervously twitching hands; in so doing, one of the most talked about television images to date was created. Many commentators were quick to observe that television had provided a revealing close-up of psychological tension that could only be described on radio. A *Broadcasting*

magazine editorial published later that year declared that this coverage of the hearings had 'promoted television in one big swoop from everybody's whipping boy – in the sports, amusement, and even retail world – to benefactor, without reservations. Its camera eye had opened the public's' (cited in Bianculli 1992: 57; see also Sterling and Kittross 1978: 288).

The public's eye was similarly pried open on a more regular basis by a range of public affairs programmes, the first of which on network television was *See It Now* on CBS. Hosted by one of the most respected broadcast journalists in the USA, Edward R. Murrow, this weekly half-hour programme did not shy away from controversy. Perhaps most famously, it was widely regarded as having played an instrumental role in exposing the pernicious underpinnings of McCarthyism. Nevertheless, and as noted above, on a much more typical, day-to-day level, newscasts of the 1950s did their best to avoid controversy for fear of offending either advertisers, on the one hand, or the FCC, on the other. As a result of these and related factors, the ideological limits represented by 'fair' and 'balanced' reporting were extremely narrow. That is to say, the shallowness of much of what passed as reporting was directly linked to these anxieties over precisely where 'impartiality' ended and 'editorialization' began. Such apprehensions routinely led to self-censorship, thereby severely compromising the network's proclaimed commitment to providing journalism consistent with the public interest. It would be only in the course of the next decade that television reporters would truly begin the long process toward realizing the ideal of 'free speech' more closely associated with their rivals in the newspaper press.

By the early 1960s, public opinion surveys were routinely indicating that television was beginning to displace both radio and the newspaper press as the principal source of news for audiences in Britain and the United States. Many commentators were asserting that the capacity of broadcast news and current affairs programming to shape 'the public agenda' signified that the electronic media were providing a progressive, even democratizing function with regard to public enlightenment about social problems. Other commentators were far more pessimistic, arguing that the lack of democratic accountability over broadcasting institutions was ensuring that commitments to journalistic integrity would always be rendered subordinate to the interests of state and corporate elites.

It is precisely this dispute over the proper role and responsibilities of the news media in a democratic society which serves as the starting point for our discussion in Chapter 3.

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3 MAKING NEWS: TRUTH, IDEOLOGY AND NEWSWORK

> The fundamental obligation of the reporter is to the truth.
>
> (Fergal Keane, BBC journalist)

> News may be true, but it is not truth, and reporters and officials seldom see it the same way.
>
> (James Reston, US journalist)

Truth, according to an old journalistic saying, is the news reporter's stock-in-trade. This principle was reaffirmed by Fergal Keane, a widely respected BBC foreign correspondent, in a televised Huw Weldon Memorial Lecture (broadcast 20 October 1997 on BBC 1). In his words:

> The art of the reporter should more than anything else be a celebration of the truth . . . The reason millions of people watch and listen is because we place the interests of truth above everything else. Trust is our byword. That is the unalterable principle. It is our heritage and our mission, and I would rather sweep the streets of London than compromise on that . . . The fundamental obligation of the reporter is to the truth. Start messing with that for any reason and you become the moral accomplices of the secret policemen.

These are powerful words, eloquently spoken. At one level, it seems to me, the implications of Keane's argument are clear: a journalism resolutely committed to 'the truth' must never hesitate to uncover and expose lies, deceit and misrepresentation regardless of the consequences.

At another, more subtly complex level, however, the implications of Keane's declaration quickly prove to be much more challenging to discern. This reference to 'the truth' begs a rather awkward question: namely, whose definition of what is true is being upheld as 'the truth'? The answer to that question goes to the heart of ongoing debates over whether or not the news media 'reflect' social reality truthfully, or the

extent to which journalists can produce a truthful news account. These debates typic-
ally restrict the discussion to one regarding how best to separate 'facts' from 'values'.
The assumption that 'the truth' resides entirely in the former leaves to one side the
problem of whether or not such a separation is actually possible in the first place. In
light of these types of issues, then, this chapter will examine how the news media work
to define the ideological limits of 'truth' by exploring how journalists produce news
accounts which claim to be 'objective' reflections of reality.

   In the first instance, our attention turns to consider two competing perspectives on
the role the news media play in structuring public awareness and debate about social
problems. Specifically, the 'liberal pluralist position' will be counterpoised against the
'political economy position' so as to identify several factors pertinent to the larger
social context within which journalists operate. Next, we examine a range of insights
generated by researchers attempting to explore the ideological dynamics of newswork
practices, that is, the day-to-day routines of news production which inform the cultural
construction of news as an 'impartial' form of social knowledge. Here the focus is on
the extent to which the codified conventions of newswork contribute to the *naturaliza-
tion* of the various social divisions and inequalities indicative of modern society, prin-
cipally by helping to reaffirm these inequalities as being *appropriate, legitimate* or
inevitable in ideological terms.

Structuring public debate

The conviction that the citizen's right to freedom of speech is best protected by a mar-
ket-based mass media system is at the core of the liberal pluralist conception of the
journalist's role in modern society. Many of its advocates, who arguably include most
journalists themselves, maintain that the news media represents a **fourth estate** (as
distinguished, in historical terms, from the church, the judiciary and the commons).
Journalism, as a result, is charged with the crucial mission of ensuring that members of
the public are able to draw upon a diverse 'market place of ideas' to both sustain and
challenge their sense of the world around them. This responsibility for giving expres-
sion to a richly pluralistic spectrum of information sources places the journalist at the
centre of public life. Thus it is the news media, to the extent that they facilitate the
formation of public opinion, which are said to make democratic control over governing
relations possible.

   The performance of this democratic function is contingent upon the realization of
'press freedom' as a principle safeguarded from any possible impediment associated
with power and privilege. The news media, according to the liberal pluralists, must
carry out the crucial work of contributing to the 'system of checks and balances'
popularly held to be representative of democratic structures and processes. More spe-
cifically, by fostering a public engagement with the issues of the day, they are regarded
as helping to underwrite a consensual (albeit informal) process of surveillance whereby

the activities of the state and corporate sectors are made more responsive to the dictates of public opinion. As arenas of arbitration, the news media are said to allow for clashes over decision making to be expressed, adjudicated and ultimately reconciled in such a way as to ensure that neither cumulative nor continuous influence is accorded to a single set of interests (see also McQuail 1992; O'Neill 1992; Carper 1997; Wheeler 1997). Liberal pluralist researchers insist that the capacity of a particular news organization to present the necessary 'plurality of viewpoints' is preserved 'by virtue of the clash and discordancy of interests which exist between owners, managers, editors and journalists' (Bennett 1982: 41; see also Golding and Murdock 1996).

Opposition to the liberal pluralist position, despite its continued salience in public debates about the news media, has been advanced from a number of different angles by researchers adopting a much more critical stance. For these alternative approaches, many of which rely on a political economy framework for their analyses, the basic tenets of liberal pluralism are in need of serious revision. The writings of Karl Marx have provided an important starting point for several of these lines of critique, including a celebrated passage which he co-wrote with Frederick Engels in *The German Ideology* around 1845:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it . . . In so far, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they . . . among other things . . . regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.
>
> (Marx and Engels 1970 [1845]: 64–5)

This passage clearly challenges several of the assumptions underlying liberal pluralist arguments. The 'ruling ideas of the epoch', to be loosely understood as the representations of a 'dominant ideology', are not forced on the subordinate classes, nor are they to be reduced (conspiratorially) to 'useful fictions'. Rather, the Marxist position maintains that the capitalist ruling class must work to advance its particular class-specific interests by depicting its ideas, norms and values in universal terms. That is to say, these 'ruling ideas' need to be mobilized as being consistent with the beliefs of ordinary people, as being the only correct, rational opinions available to them (Marx and Engels 1970 [1845]: 65–6). Mass media institutions, whether publicly or privately owned, are controlled by members of this ruling class (see Figure 3.1). Each one of these institutions reproduces these 'ruling ideas', to varying degrees, so as to lend justification to the class inequalities engendered by capitalist society as being *reasonable* or *commonsensical*. In this way, the media help to ensure that the danger of radical protests emerging to disrupt the status quo is sharply reduced.

Figure 3.1 News Corporation

NEWSPAPERS

United States
New York Post

United Kingdom
The Times
The Sunday Times
The Sun
News of the World
TSL Education

Australia
More than 100 national, metropolitan, suburban, regional and Sunday titles, including the following:
  The Australian
  The Weekend Australian
  The Daily Telegraph
  The Sunday Telegraph
  Herald Sun
  Sunday Herald Sun
  The Courier-Mail (42 per cent)
  Sunday Mail (Brisbane) (42 per cent)
  The Advertiser
  Sunday Mail (Adelaide)
  The Mercury
  Sunday Tasmanian
  The Sunday Times
  Northern Territory News
  Sunday Territorian

Fiji
The Fiji Times
Sunday Times
Nai Lalakai
Shanti Dut

Papua New Guinea
Post-Courier (63 per cent)

FILMED ENTERTAINMENT

United States
Fox Filmed Entertainment*
  Twentieth Century Fox Film
    Corporation
  Fox 2000 Pictures
  Fox Searchlight Pictures
  Fox Music
  Twentieth Century Fox Home
    Entertainment
  Twentieth Century Fox Licensing and
    Merchandising
  Twentieth Century Fox Television
  Fox Television Studios
  Twentieth Television
  Regency Television† (50 per cent)
  Blue Sky Studios

Australia
Fox Studios Australia

Latin America
Fox Studios Baja*
Canal Fox*

TELEVISION

United States
Fox Broadcasting Company*
Fox Television Stations*
  WNYW   New York, NY
  WWOR   New York, NY
  KTTV   Los Angeles, CA
  KCOP   Los Angeles, CA
  WFLD   Chicago, IL
  WPWR   Chicago, IL
  WTXF   Philadelphia, PA
  KDFW   Dallas, TX
  KDFI   Dallas, TX
  WFXT   Boston, MA
  WTTG   Washington, DC

Figure 3.1 continued

WDCA	Washington, DC	
WAGA	Atlanta, GA	
WJBK	Detroit, MI	
KRIV	Houston, TX	
KTXH	Houston, TX	
KMSP	Minneapolis, MN	
WFTC	Minneapolis, MN	
WTVT	Tampa, FL	
KSAZ	Phoenix, AZ	
KUTP	Phoenix, AZ	
WJW	Cleveland, OH	
KDVR	Denver, CO	
WRBW	Orlando, FL	
WOFL	Orlando, FL	
KTVI	St. Louis, MO	
WITI	Milwaukee, WI	
WDAF	Kansas City, MO	
KSTU	Salt Lake City, UT	
WBRC	Birmingham, AL	
WHBQ	Memphis, TN	
WGHP	Greensboro, NC	
KTBC	Austin, TX	
WUTB	Baltimore, MD	
WOGX	Gainesville, FL	

Europe
Balkan News Corporation

Asia
STAR
STAR Plus
   STAR News
   STAR Movies
   STAR Mandarin Movies
   STAR World
   STAR Gold
   STAR Chinese Channel
   ESPN STAR Sports (50 per cent)
   Channel [V]
   Xing Kong Wei Shi
   Vijay Television (51 per cent)

Latin America
Cine Canal
Telecine

Australia and New Zealand
Premium Movie Partnership†
   (20 per cent)

CABLE NETWORK PROGRAMMING

United States
Fox News Channel*
Fox Cable Networks Group*
   FX
   Fox Movie Channel
   Fox Regional Sports Networks
     (13 owned and operated)‡
   Regional Programming Partners†
     (40 per cent)
   Fox Sports World
   SPEED Channel
   Fox Pan American Sports†
     (38 per cent)
   Rogers Sports Net† (20 per cent)
   National Sports Partners† (50 per cent)
   National Advertising Partners†
     (50 per cent)
   National Geographic Channel –
     Domestic† (67 per cent)
   National Geographic Channel –
     International† (50 per cent)
   Los Angeles Dodgers
   STAPLES Center† (40 per cent)

Australia
Fox Sports Australia (50 per cent)

DIRECT BROADCAST SATELLITE
TELEVISION

Europe
Sky Italia (80 per cent)
   Sky Sport

Figure 3.1 continued

Calcio Sky
Sky Cinema
Sky TG 24
British Sky Broadcasting (35 per cent)
Sky News
Sky Sports
Sky Travel
Sky One
Sky Movies

Latin America
Sky Latin America DTH Platforms
Mexico – Innova (30 per cent)
Brazil – NetSat (49 per cent)
Sky Multi-Country Partners
(30 per cent)

Australia
FOXTEL (25 per cent)

Asia
Phoenix Satellite Television
(45 per cent)
Hathway Cable and Datacom
(26 per cent)
China Network Systems
(18 Affiliated Cable Systems)
(20 per cent)
Sky Perfect TV! (8 per cent)

MAGAZINES AND INSERTS

United States and Canada
News America Marketing
In-Store
FSI (SmartSource Magazine)

SmartSource iGroup
News Marketing Canada
The Weekly Standard
Gemstar-TV Guide International
(43 per cent)

Australia
InsideOut
donna hay

BOOK PUBLISHING

United States, Canada, Europe and Australasia
HarperCollins Publishers

OTHER

Europe
NDS (78 per cent)
Broadsystem Ventures
The Wireless Group (19 per cent)
Convoys Group
Sky Radio (93 per cent)
News Outdoor Group (75 per cent)

Australia and Asia
National Rugby League (50 per cent)
News Interactive
Festival Records
Newspoll (50 per cent)
UTV Software Communications
(20 per cent)

Notes
* Held by News Corporation's 81 per cent owned Fox Entertainment Group (FEG).
† Reflects percentage held by News Corporation's 81 per cent owned FEG.
‡ Fox Regional Sports Networks are all 100 per cent owned except Fox Sports Net South, which is 88 per cent owned, and Sunshine Network which is 94 per cent owned.

Source: News Corporation Annual Report 2003. Figures as of 30 June, 2003

Marx's personal knowledge of journalism was shaped by the ten years he spent, while living in London, as a European correspondent for the *New York Tribune*. An impassioned advocate of a free press, who regarded it as a means to counter forces of oppression for the greater welfare of society, he nevertheless did not write at length about the news media. For political economists engaged with these issues today, then, Marx's preliminary insights need to be recast in relation to journalistic institutions the likes of which he could not have even anticipated in the nineteenth century. Broadly speaking, modern political economists have retained Marx's focus on class power as a determinant factor of social control in order to document the impact of changing patterns of news media power and influence within local, national and (increasingly) global contexts. Of particular concern are the growing levels of concentration, conglomeration and integration of ownership in this sector, for these dynamics are directly linked to a range of issues associated with control over journalistic content.

For example, many political economists argue that news media power is being restricted to an ever smaller number of (usually white and male) hands; that the corporate priority of profit maximization is leading to increasingly superficial news formats where content becomes evermore uniform and the spaces available to report on controversial issues sharply reduced; and, that corporate fears over 'the bottom line' are reshaping judgements about newsworthiness in ways which frequently all but silence alternative or oppositional voices. Such voices – including those in the labour movement, trade unions, feminists, anti-racists, environmentalists, anti-poverty activists and other groups committed to progressive social change – are routinely characterized as representing a threat to the interests of 'market sensitive' news organizations. Thus the implications of reducing news to just a commodity form like any other are profound, particularly when these types of critical voices are struggling just to be heard within the confines of ideological parameters conditioned by the drive for 'efficiency gains' (and with them greater advertising profits). It is with these kinds of concerns in mind that political economists continue to channel their research into campaigns aiming to bring about a fundamental reorganization of the current dynamics of media ownership and control, a process to be achieved primarily through the radical restructuring of state regulatory policies.

In seeking to provide a conceptual framework to account for the interrelation of these types of dynamics at the level of news content, Herman and Chomsky (1988) have developed a 'propaganda model'. Writing from a US perspective, they argue that there exists within that country's commercial news media an institutional bias which guarantees the mobilization of certain 'propaganda campaigns' on behalf of an elite consensus (propaganda is deemed to be broadly equivalent with dominant ideology in this analysis). Notwithstanding this 'guarantee', however, the economic power of owners of capital over the media does not culminate in the creation of a political vacuum. Rather, in their view, the news media 'permit – indeed, encourage – spirited debate, criticism and dissent, as long as these remain faithfully within the system

of presuppositions and principles that constitute an elite consensus' (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 302). Liberal pluralist treatments of the news media as autonomous institutions are thereby to be countered by examining the systematic subordination of the media *vis-à-vis* the functional requirements of dominant classes. To the degree that the powerful are able to coordinate the fluctuating boundaries of public opinion through the exercise of control over what will be found in media content, class power will be successfully reproduced.

Liberal pluralist notions of a 'free', 'independent' and 'objective' news media are thus countered by Herman and Chomsky's (1988: 298) contention that if the news media perform a societal purpose at all, it is to 'inculcate and defend the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state'. Propaganda campaigns may be instituted either by the state itself or by one or more of the top media firms (or even in unison), but in all instances the collaboration of the mass media is a prerequisite (1988: 33). In order to specify the 'secret' at work behind the 'unidirectionality of propaganda campaigns', Herman and Chomsky (1988: 33) define its effectivity in terms of a 'multiple filter system'. By drawing attention to these respective 'filters', they are seeking to demonstrate the extent to which journalists reiterate uncritically official positions of the state while, simultaneously, adhering to its political agenda. The resultant news product, they maintain, ultimately makes for 'a propaganda system that is far more credible and effective in putting over a patriotic agenda than one with official censorship' (1988: xiv).

Briefly, five component 'filters' of this model, each of which interact with and reinforce one another, are identified by Herman and Chomsky (1988: 3–31) as follows:

1   The first filter to be accounted for concerns the commercial basis of the dominant news organizations: specifically, the size and the scale of the investment required to run major news outlets, the concentration and conglomeration of ownership and cross-ownership patterns, and the power and wealth of the proprietors and their managers. Close ties between the media elite and their political and corporate counterparts ensure that an 'establishment orientation' is ordinarily maintained at the level of news coverage (here issues of placement, tone, context and fullness of treatment are particularly important). It is this top tier of major news companies which, together with the government and wire services, 'defines the news agenda and supplies much of the national and international news to the lower tiers of the media' (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 4–5). At the same time, the resultant 'profit orientation' of these organizations, many of which are under intense pressure from stockholders, directors and bankers to focus on 'the bottom line', is a further key aspect of this filter shaping news coverage.

2   The second filter pertains to the influence of advertising, the principal income source for commercial news organizations, on media content. 'With advertising,' Herman and Chomsky (1988: 14) write, 'the free market does not yield a neutral system in which final buyer choice decides. The *advertisers'* choices influence

media prosperity and survival.' Historically, media relying on revenue from sales alone have found it very difficult to compete with the resources available to their advertising-subsidized rivals. This dynamic typically leads to such outlets being pushed to the margins, where eventually many are forced to close down. Herman and Chomsky also point out that advertisers are primarily interested in affluent audiences due to their 'purchasing power', and thus are less inclined to support forms of news and public affairs content which attract people of more modest means. Moreover, there is a strong preference for content which does not call into question their own politically conservative principles or interferes with the 'buying mood' of the audience.

3   The news media's over-reliance on government and corporate 'expert' sources is cited as the third filter. Herman and Chomsky (1988: 18) describe the symbiotic relationship that journalists have with their information sources, arguing that it is driven both by economic necessity and a reciprocity of interests. These powerful establishment sources provide journalists with a steady, reliable flow of 'the raw material of news', thereby allowing news organization to expend their resources more 'efficiently'. The relative authority and prestige of these sources also helps to enhance the credibility of the journalist's account. The routine inclusion of such 'experts' not only shapes the news agenda, but simultaneously makes it much more difficult for independent, non-official sources to gain access. 'By giving these purveyors of the preferred view a great deal of exposure,' Herman and Chomsky (1988: 24) maintain, 'the media confer status and make them the obvious candidates for opinion and analysis.'

4   Filter number four addresses the role of 'flak' or negative responses to media content as a means of disciplining news organizations. Complaints, including threats of punitive action, 'may take the form of letters, telegrams, phone calls, petitions, lawsuits, speeches and bills before Congress' (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 26). 'Flak' can be produced either by individuals, state officials in their ceaseless efforts to 'correct' news coverage, or by various advocacy groups, including politically motivated 'media monitoring' campaigns or 'think tank' operations. Such forms of 'flak' can prove costly for news organizations, not only at the level of legal disputes but also in terms of the potential withdrawal of patronage by advertisers due to organized consumer boycotts. Still, Herman and Chomsky (1988: 28) suggest that these makers of 'flak' receive respectful attention by the media, only rarely having their impact on **news management** activities explicitly acknowledged.

5   The final filter is the role of the 'ideology of anti-communism' as a 'political-control mechanism'. 'This ideology', in Herman and Chomsky's (1988: 29) words, 'helps mobilize the populace against an enemy, and because the concept is fuzzy it can be used against anybody advocating policies that threaten property interests or support accommodation with Communist states [such as China or Cuba in the 1990s] and radicalism.' This 'national religion' of 'anti-communism', they argue,

has served to fragment the political left and the labour movements, as well as ensured that liberals and social democrats are kept on the defensive. Its corresponding influence on the news media has also had far-reaching implications: 'In normal times as well as in periods of Red scares, issues tend to be framed in terms of a dichotomized world of Communist and anti-Communist powers, with gains and losses allocated to contesting sides, and rooting for "our side" considered an entirely legitimate news practice' (1988: 30–1).

Overall, then, only the 'cleansed residue', having passed through these successive filters, is pronounced 'fit' to call news. This is not to suggest, however, that the news media are monolithic in their treatment of controversial issues. Rather, Herman and Chomsky (1988: xii) state: 'Where the powerful are in disagreement, there will be a certain diversity of tactical judgments on how to attain generally shared aims, reflected in media debate.' Nevertheless, views which contest the underlying political premises of the dominant state discourse, especially with regard to the exercise of state power, will almost always fall outside of the parameters demarcated by the limits of elite disagreement. The 'filters' identified above are deemed to be working to reinforce these parameters in ways which make alternative news choices difficult to imagine. This process, they contend, 'occurs so naturally that media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news "objectively" and on the basis of professional news values' (1988: 2).

News values and frames

The 'propaganda model' briefly mapped out above usefully highlights a range of important issues. Here, though, it is important to bear in mind that it not be interpreted so narrowly as to suggest that the news media are to be viewed strictly as purveyors of propaganda coincidental with the interests of ruling class domination. Some interpretations of Herman and Chomsky's approach risk reducing the news media to tired ideological machines confined to performing endlessly, and unfailingly, the overarching function of reproducing the prerogatives of an economic and political elite through processes of mystification. Journalists would then become little more than well-intentioned puppets whose strings are being pulled by forces they cannot fully understand. Meanwhile the news audience – admittedly an unexplored given in this model – would then appear to be composed of passive dupes consistently fooled into believing such propaganda is true.

Any conflation of news with propaganda is, in my view, unsustainable. The propagandist, unlike the journalist (at least under ordinary circumstances), sets out with the deliberate intention of deceiving the public, of concealing 'the truth' so as to direct

public opinion in a particular way through manipulative tactics, devices and strategies. To make the point bluntly, then, journalists are not propagandists. 'A journalist who intentionally fabricates or misleads', writes Newkirk (1998), 'is as ill equipped for journalism as a doctor who intentionally mistreats patients is for medicine'. This is not to deny, however, that the factors Herman and Chomsky attribute to 'propaganda' with their notion of 'filtering' are crucial determinants shaping the operation of the news media. Their study is also rich with startling evidence of how the US news media have been implicated in official propaganda campaigns at the level of 'foreign' news (examples of reporting examined range from Central America to Indo-China). I wish to suggest, however, that its more compelling insights regarding the determinants of news coverage need to be further developed, in the first instance by taking account of the everyday practices journalists engage in when constructing news accounts as truthful 'reflections' of reality.

For many of the critical researchers focusing squarely on the dynamics of news production, it is the culture of routine, day-to-day interactions within specific news institutions which has warranted particular attention. From a variety of different conceptual perspectives, notably those associated with cultural and media studies, sociology, criminology and ethnomethodology among others, they have sought to investigate the ideological imperatives embedded in the work of constructing news as a truthful representation of reality. An effort is made by these researchers to problematize or 'make strange' the everyday activities of journalists, or newsworkers as they are often called in these studies, as they go about performing their job. Drawing upon a range of research strategies, including questionnaires, in-depth interviews, participant observation and ethnography, these investigations have endeavoured to document the fluidly contingent means by which the ideological character of news is encoded through the professionalized norms and values of reporting.

Even a glance at the front pages of different national newspapers on a given day, or the national news broadcasts on rival networks, typically reveals a broad similarity in the 'stories' being covered, and the hierarchical order in which they have been organized. Journalists, as well their editors and all of the other individuals involved in the work of processing news in a particular news organization (hereafter the term 'news-workers' will be used to encompass all of these different roles), bring to the task of making sense of the social world a series of 'news values'. These news values are operationalized by each newsworker, as Hall (1981) suggests, in relation to her or his 'stock of knowledge' about what constitutes 'news'. If all 'true journalists', he argues, are supposed to know instinctively what news values are, few are capable of defining them:

> Journalists speak of 'the news' as if events select themselves. Further, they speak as if which is the 'most significant' news story, and which 'news angles' are most salient, are divinely inspired. Yet of the millions of events which occur every day in

the world, only a tiny proportion ever become visible as 'potential news stories': and of this proportion, only a small fraction are actually produced as the day's news in the news media.

(Hall 1981: 234)

Hence the need to problematize, in conceptual terms, the operational practices in and through which news values help the newsworker to justify the selection of certain types of events as 'newsworthy' at the expense of alternative ones. To ascertain how this process is achieved, researchers have attempted to explicate the means by which certain 'news values' are embedded in the very procedures used by reporters to impose some kind of order or coherence on to the social world. After all, the world has to be rendered 'reportable' in the first place, a point succinctly made by Barthes (1973) who once observed: 'What is noted is by definition notable'.

There is an extensive research literature concerned with 'news values', much of which elaborates upon an innovative study conducted in the mid-1960s by Galtung and Ruge (1981) on the structure of foreign news in the Scandinavian press (see, for example, Epstein 1973; Roshco 1975; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Fishman 1980; Hartley 1982; Ericson *et al*. 1987; A. Bell 1991; Dayan and Katz 1992; Zelizer 1992). In selectively drawing upon these attempts to specify the informal (largely unspoken) rules or codes of *newsworthiness*, the following factors may be regarded as being significant:

- *Conflict*: 'balanced' journalism dictates that 'each story has two sides'; when these 'sides' are in dispute, a sense of *immediacy* is likely to result at the same time that potential *interest* is enhanced through *dramatization*.
- *Relevance*: the event should be seen to impinge, however indirectly, on the news audience's lives and experiences. The *proximity* of the event is a related factor.
- *Timeliness*: recent events are favoured, especially those that have occurred in the previous 24 hours and which can be easily monitored as they unfold in relation to institutional constraints and pressures.
- *Simplification*: the significance of an event should be relatively unambiguous; the diversity of potential interpretations may then be kept to a minimum.
- *Personalization*: an emphasis on human actors 'coping with life on the ground' is preferred over abstract descriptions of 'faceless' structures, forces or institutions.
- *Unexpectedness*: an event which is 'out of the ordinary' is likely to be 'novel' or 'new', thereby enhancing its chances of being caught in the news net. As an old cliché goes: 'Dog bites man isn't news; man bites dog is'.
- *Continuity*: an event should allow for the projection of a sense of where it 'fits in' so as to allow for prescheduling, a significant consideration for a news organization allocating its resources. A related factor is its *consonance* or conformity to the newsworker's (and audience member's) preconceptions about what type of 'news story' it is likely to resemble.
- *Composition*: a mixture of different types of events must be processed on any given day, thus events are chosen in relation to fluctuations in the 'news hole' to be

filled. Divisions between, for example, international, national and local news are usually clearly marked in regional newspapers and newscasts.

- *Reference to elite nations*: a hierarchy is often discernible here which gives priority to events in those countries which are regarded as 'directly affecting the audience's well-being', such as the USA and other members of the 'first world'. This is at the expense of those events taking place in other places, particularly developing or 'third world' countries which only infrequently receive newsworthy status (and then only under certain terms: see Chapter 7).
- *Reference to elite persons*: activities performed by politicians, members of the monarchy, entertainment and sporting celebrities, corporate leaders, and so forth, are far more salient in news terms than those of 'ordinary people'.
- *Cultural specificity*: events which conform to the 'maps of meaning' shared by newsworker and news audience have a greater likelihood of being selected, a form of ethnocentrism which gives priority to news about 'people like us' at the expense of those who 'don't share our way of life'.
- *Negativity*: 'bad news' is ordinarily favoured over 'good news', namely because the former usually conforms to a higher number of the above factors. As the celebrated media theorist Marshal McLuhan once remarked, advertisements constitute the only 'good news' in the newspaper.

The news culture indicative of one news organization will be at variance with that of others, of course, but researchers have been able to identify a variety of shared assumptions which recurrently underpin these daily negotiations. Thus while news values are always changing over time and are inflected differently from one news organization to the next, it is still possible to point to these and related news values as being relatively consistent criteria informing these assignments of significance.

News accounts, then, may be deconstructed in ideological terms so as to elucidate how these news values help to rule in certain types of events as 'newsworthy' while, at the same time, ruling out alternative types. At the heart of these processes of inclusion and exclusion are certain 'principles of organization' or 'frames' (Goffman 1974) which work to impose order on the multiple happenings of the social world so as to render them into a series of meaningful events. Precisely how a particular news event is 'framed' by the journalist claiming to be providing an 'objective' or 'balanced' account thus takes on a distinct ideological significance. Gitlin (1980) extends this ethnomethodological notion of 'frame' to argue for a consideration of how the daily routines of journalism strive to *naturalize* the social world in accordance with certain discursive conventions. News frames, he argues, make the world beyond direct experience look natural; they are 'principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters' (Gitlin 1980: 6; see also Allan 2002).

The subject of often intense negotiation between journalists and their editors, as well as their sources, frames help to render 'an infinity of noticeable details' into practicable

repertoires. Frames thereby facilitate the ordering of the world in conjunction with hierarchical rules of inclusion and exclusion. As Gitlin (1980) contends:

> largely unspoken and unacknowledged, [frames] organise the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports. Frames enable journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely: to recognise it as information, to assign it to cognitive categories, and to package it for efficient relay to their audiences. Thus, for organisational reasons alone, frames are unavoidable, and journalism is organised to regulate their production.
>
> (Gitlin 1980: 7)

Once a particular frame has been adopted for a news story, its principles of selection and rejection ensure that only 'information' material which is seen to be *legitimate*, as *appropriate* within the conventions of newsworthiness so defined, is to appear in the account. 'Some of this framing', Gitlin (1980: 28) argues, 'can be attributed to traditional assumptions in news treatment: news concerns the *event*, not the underlying condition; the *person*, not the group; *conflict*, not consensus; the fact that "*advances the story*", not the one that explains it.'

The invocation of a news frame is not to be viewed, however, as a means to preclude the encoding of 'information' which might explicitly politicize the seemingly impartial definitions of social reality on offer. Rather, the very authoritativeness of the frame is contingent upon its implicit appeal to 'objectivity', which means that it needs to regularly incorporate 'awkward facts' or even, under more exceptional circumstances, voices of dissent. The news frame's tacit claim to comprehensiveness dictates that it must be seen as 'balanced' and 'fair' in its treatment of counter-positions: indeed, after Gitlin (1980: 256), 'only by absorbing and domesticating conflicting values, definitions of reality, and demands on it, in fact, does it remain hegemonic.' Accordingly, it is through repetition, through the very everydayness of news discourse, that the prevailing frames (once again, neither arbitrary nor fixed) acquire an ostensibly *natural* or taken-for-granted status.

Routinizing the unexpected

In discussing the day-to-day activities of reporting, journalists and their critics alike often draw upon the metaphor of a 'mirror' to describe how the social world is 'reflected' in news accounts. The pioneering US broadcast reporter Edward R. Murrow once famously stated, for example, that journalism 'must hold a mirror behind the nation and the world' and that, moreover, 'The mirror must have no curves and must be held with a steady hand' (cited in MacDonald 1979: 310). This language of reflection is similarly employed in critiques of news coverage to pinpoint evidence of 'bias', that is, to question whether journalists have mirrored reality in an 'objective' manner or,

failing that, the extent to which they have allowed certain 'distortions' to creep into the reporting process.

Not surprisingly in light of the issues raised in the discussion above, many critical researchers have dismissed the 'mirror' metaphor for being too simplistic. Even its advocates, they point out, have to acknowledge the vast number of 'blind-spots' which render certain types of events virtually invisible. The mirror metaphor is also difficult to sustain due to its inability to account for the ideological dynamics embedded in the newsworker's mediation of the social world. This process of mediation involves not only a series of procedures for knowing the world but, equally importantly, for not knowing that world as well. As Hallin (1994) writes of the 'mirroring' qualities of so-called 'objective reporting' of governmental affairs in the USA:

> A form of journalism which aims to provide the public with a neutral record of events and which, at the same time, relies primarily on government officials to describe and explain those events obviously has the potential to wind up as a mirror not of reality, but of the version of reality government officials would like to present to the public.
>
> (Hallin 1994: 52)

In light of these types of criticisms, Tuchman's (1978) concept of a 'news net' has been widely regarded as a much more suitable metaphor than that of a reflective 'mirror'. Introduced following her research into newswork practices, the idea of a news net is a more useful way of conceptualizing this imposition of order on the social world. News, in her analysis, is a social resource which, through its very construction, implies a series of particular constraints or limits on the forms of knowledge which can be generated and called 'reality'.

Tuchman's study, which draws on data gathered by participant observation and interviews with newsworkers over a ten year period in the USA, documents how news organizations disperse a news net that intertwines time and space in such a way as to allow for the identification of 'newsworthy' events. If the news net is intended for 'big fish', as she argues, then at stake in conceptual terms is the task of unravelling this 'arrangement of intersecting fine mesh (the stringers), tensile strength (the reporters), and steel links (the wire services) supposedly provid[ing] a news blanket, ensuring that all potential news will be found' (Tuchman 1978: 22). That is to say, the bureaucratic threads of the news net are knitted together so as to frame certain preferred types of occurrences as 'news events' while, concurrently, ensuring that others slip through unremarked.

A news net stretched to encompass certain centralized institutional sites, ones where news is 'likely to be made today', reinforces a myriad of normative assumptions about what should constitute the public agenda. The problem of defining what counts as an 'appropriate news story' is directly tied to journalistic assumptions about what the news audience is interested in knowing. Tuchman's (1978: 25) study discerned three general premises incorporated into the news net: first, readers are interested in occur-

rences at certain localities and not others; second, readers are concerned with the activities of only specific organizations; and third, readers find only particular topics to be worthy of attention.

In light of this set of working assumptions, Tuchman (1978: 25–31) maintains that three interrelated methods of dispersing reporters can be described using the following criteria: geographic territoriality, organizational specialization and topical specialization.

First, 'geographic territoriality' is the most important of the three methods basic to the news net. Each news organization divides the social world into distinct areas of territorial responsibility so as to realize its respective 'news mission'. Assessments can then be made as to where news is most likely to happen – in effect, as McQuail (1992) notes, a self-fulfilling tendency – thereby allowing for a considerable degree of pre-planning. The news mission is a double-sided dynamic: on the one hand, it conforms to certain presumptions regarding what the audience 'wants to know' while, on the other hand, it sets these presumptions against pre-given financial and technological constraints (on the importance in this regard of the international news agencies, such as Reuters, Associated Press, United Press International and Agence France Presse, see Wallis and Baran 1990; G. Reeves 1993; Herman and McChesney 1997; Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen 1998; van Ginneken 1998).

Second, 'organizational specialization' is another method for dispersing reporters. Beats and bureaux need to be set up in connection with the numerous organizations that are regularly 'making news' in that specific territory. Examples range from the 'crime beat', including such places as the police station, courts or prisons, to other sites routinely generating news like the city council, the fire and rescue services, the health authority, and so forth. Due to their formal status as sources of centralized information, these sites are legitimized as the preferred places for newsworkers to collect the 'facts' they require. The coding of a given news item as 'belonging' to a – particular site is not always a straightforward decision, however, and can lead to conflict within the news organization (see Roshco 1975; Gans 1979; Fishman 1980; Zelizer 1992; J.L. Reeves and Campbell 1994; Glover 1999).

Third, 'topical specialization' is the final method; at issue here is the extent to which topical specialities, such as consumer affairs, finance, education, environment, health, arts, science, the 'women's page' (see Chapter 6), travel, gardening, motoring or sports, bypass the territorial desks. Usually each topic is associated with its own department which will possess a budget to be spent on the preparation of material. A decision on the quantity of material can be made only after the territorial editors announce how much space has been left over for each of them to use (see also Epstein 1973; Norris 1997a, b; Gavin and Goddard 1998; van Zoonen 1998; Allan *et al.* 2000; Allan 2002).

Evidently, the amount of movement in and across the three methods involves considerable negotiation, and thus flexibility, as each pulls the news net in different directions. Attention may then shift to consider, among other concerns, the following:

- The economic pressure to maintain a cost-efficient, profitable news organization, in part by avoiding expenses which may not result in a final news story, means that investigative reporting is often disallowed on these terms (see G. Williams 1996; Bagdikian 1997; Franklin and Murphy 1998; Hackett and Zhao 1998; Pilger 1998, de Burg 2000, Marjoribanks 2000).
- There is a need to conform to the news organization's daily production schedule, especially where deadlines are concerned. Schlesinger (1987) uses the phrase 'stop-watch culture' to pinpoint how these relations are interwoven throughout the production process (see also Gans 1979; Curran 1990; A. Bell 1991, 1998; Willis 1991; Steiner 1998).
- Being able to routinize the uncertainty of future happenings is considered to be of critical importance as the newsworker's obligation to produce sufficient copy to fulfil 'story quotas' must be met. In contrast with 'hard' news, so-called 'soft' news or 'human interest' stories are usually less dependent on notions of 'timeliness' (see Tiffen 1989; Jacobs 1996; Kitzinger 1998; Skidmore 1998).
- This practical need to anticipate or pre-plan news-as-events, Tuchman (1978) argues, leads to the further sub-classification of three types of 'hard' news: namely, 'spot' news, 'developing' news and 'continuing' news. 'Continuing' news usually revolves around events which are prescheduled well in advance, thereby making them highly sought after by reporters and editors alike (see Fishman 1980; Dayan and Katz 1992; Miller 1993, 1994; K. Becker 1995).
- The implementation of new technologies (each have their own varying 'time–space rhythms') to enhance speed, flexibility and, thereby, professionalism (see Cottle 1995; Schudson 1995; Tunstall 1996; McNair 1998; Shingler and Wieringa 1998).

Professional ideals, such as those of 'impartiality' and 'objectivity', are thus likely to be operationalized in ways which privilege the (largely internalized) 'journalistic stand-ards' appropriate to the news organization's ethos and its priorities.

A hierarchy of credibility

The very basis upon which the journalist is able to detect 'news events', according to Fishman (1980: 51), rests on a commonsensical understanding that society is bureau-cratically structured. It is this perspective which provides specific procedures for locating knowledge of occurrences. Specifically, it furnishes the reporter with a 'map of relevant knowers' for newsworthy topics. A journalist covering a story concerning, say, the possible effects of a nuclear power plant on the health of children in a local community, knows that information officers at the plant, as well as politicians, scien-tists, nuclear energy lobbyists, health officials, social workers and environmental groups, among others, will be positioned to offer their viewpoints (see also Anderson

1997; Campbell 1999; Allan 2002). 'Whatever the happening,' writes Fishman (1980: 51), 'there are officials and authorities in a structural position to know.' This 'bureaucratic consciousness', to employ his phrase, indicates to newsworkers precisely where they will have to position themselves to be able to follow the time-line or 'career path' of events as they pass through a series of interwoven, yet discernible phases.

To clarify, H.S. Becker (1967) employs the notion of a 'hierarchy of credibility' to specify how, in a system of ranked groups, participants will take it as given that the members of the highest group are best placed to define 'the way things really are' due to their 'knowledge of truth'. Implicit in this assumption is the view that 'those at the top' will have access to a more complete picture of the bureaucratic organization's workings than members of lower groups whose definition of reality, because of this subordinate status, can be only partial and distorted. As H.S. Becker (1967: 241) writes, 'any tale told by those at the top intrinsically deserves to be regarded as the most credible account obtainable . . . Thus, credibility and the right to be heard are differentially distributed through the ranks of the system.' By this rationale, then, the higher up in this hierarchy the news source is situated, the more *authoritative* his or her words will be for the newsworker processing the bureaucratic account. Newsworkers are thus predisposed to treat these accounts as factual, according to Fishman (1980: 96), 'because journalists participate in upholding a normative order of authorized knowers in society [and] it is also a position of convenience.' After all, the 'competence' of the source should, by this logic, translate into a 'credible' news story.

Of interest in this context is Hallin's (1986, 1994) analyses of how the dictates of 'objective' reporting serve to ratify a normative order of 'credible' sources, especially when challenges to the status quo are being mobilized. The journalist's world, he argues, can be usefully characterized as being divided into three regions, each governed by different standards of reporting (1986: 116–18). These regions may be represented as concentric circles (see Figure 3.2).

1   *Sphere of consensus*: this sphere, Hallin (1986) proposes, can be defined as representing 'motherhood and apple pie'. That is to say, it encircles those social issues which are typically regarded by journalists (and, they are likely to assume, most members of the public) as being beyond partisan dispute and, as such, non-controversial. Consequently, '[w]ithin this region journalists do not feel compelled either to present opposing views or to remain disinterested observers. On the contrary, the journalist's role is to serve as an advocate or celebrant of consensus values' (Hallin 1986: 116–17).

2   *Sphere of legitimate controversy*: in this sphere, there are a range of social issues which are framed by journalists as being the appropriate subject of partisan dispute. The typical types of controversies which unfold during electoral contests or legislative debates, for example, are situated here, the ideological parameters of

Figure 3.2 captions below the diagram:

- Sphere of consensus
- Sphere of legitimate controversy
- Sphere of deviance
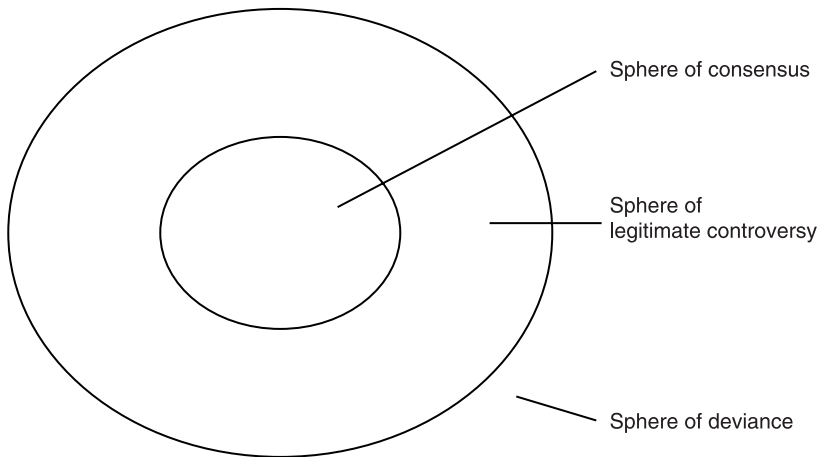
Figure 3.2 Spheres of consensus, controversy, and deviance
Source: Hallin 1986: 117

which are represented by the positions articulated between and within the main political parties (as well as the bureaucracies of the state or civil service). 'Within this region,' Hallin (1986: 116) writes, 'objectivity and balance reign as the supreme journalistic values.'

3   *Sphere of deviance*: the realm located beyond the above sphere is occupied, according to Hallin (1986: 117), by 'those political actors and views which journalists and the political mainstream of the society reject as unworthy of being heard.' Virtually any pretence of journalistic 'neutrality' falls away, he argues, as news organizations perform the work of boundary maintenance. In this sphere, journalism 'plays the role of exposing, condemning, or excluding from the public agenda those who violate or challenge the political consensus. It marks out and defends the limits of acceptable political conflict' (Hallin 1986: 117).

These respective spheres, Hallin is quick to acknowledge, each contain internal gradations, and the boundaries distinguishing them are relatively fluid and changeable. Nevertheless, this model suggests that 'gut instincts' about source credibility are politicized, as the further away a potential source is from the political consensus the less likely it will be that the source's voice will gain media access.

One of the most noteworthy attempts to document the importance of these types of dynamics in Britain was a project co-authored by Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts (1978), entitled *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. Their investigation examines how journalistic conceptions of 'competence' and 'credibility' help to ensure that news statements are almost always dependent upon

'objective' and 'authoritative' statements from 'legitimate' institutional sources. For newsworkers, Hall *et al*. (1978) write:

> This means constantly turning to accredited representatives of major social institutions – M.P.s for political topics, employers and trade-union leaders for industrial matters, and so on. Such institutional representatives are 'accredited' because of their institutional power and position, but also because of their 'representative' status: either they represent 'the people' (M.P.s, Ministers, etc.) or organised interest groups.
>
> (Hall *et al*. 1978: 58)

It follows that the 'professional rules' indicative of the routine structures of news production are typically serving to represent the 'opinions of the powerful' as being consistent with a larger 'public consensus'. Here Hall *et al*. (1978: 58) proceed to note the irony that 'the very rules which aim to preserve the impartiality of the media, and which grew out of desires for greater professional neutrality, also serve powerfully to orientate the media in the "definitions of social reality" which their "accredited sources" – the institutional spokes[persons] – provide.'

The journalist's daily struggle to negotiate the professional demands of newswork, with all of the attendant pressures, produces in Hall *et al*.'s (1978: 58) view 'a systematically structured *over-accessing* to the media of those in powerful and privileged institutional positions.' It is precisely this issue of how the definitions of certain sources are routinely 'over-accessed' to the detriment of alternative viewpoints which is crucial. Sources who enjoy high status positions in society can assume, in turn, that they are much more likely to become what Hall *et al*. (1978) call 'the *primary definers*' of controversial topics.

Accordingly, the structured relationship between the news media and this hierarchy of institutional definers permits the most powerful of the latter to set down the initial definition or primary interpretation of the news topic to be processed. It is recurrently the case that this interpretation will then be mobilized to 'command the field' with the likely result that it will, in turn, establish the terms of reference within which all further coverage (as well as any subsequent 'debate') takes place. 'Arguments *against* a primary interpretation', Hall *et al*. (1978: 58) stress, 'are forced to insert themselves into *its* definition of "what is at issue" – they must begin from this framework of interpretation as their starting-point.' Moreover, this 'initial interpretative framework is extremely difficult to alter fundamentally, once established' (Hall *et al*. 1978: 58–9). In this way, then, the news media are regarded as playing a vital ideological role in reaffirming the iniquitous power relations underlying society's institutional order.

Challenges to the concept of 'primary definition' have emerged from a variety of different perspectives. For many liberal pluralists, for example, Hall *et al*. (1978) are guilty of overemphasizing the capacity of the news media to structure public debate in ways consistent with the interests of the powerful. In their view, journalists almost always enjoy a sufficient degree of autonomy from these types of influences, thereby

ensuring that their reportage is 'balanced' and 'objective'. More usefully, other researchers have sought to extend the approach introduced by Hall *et al*. through a more rigorous assessment of the institutional imperatives of source competition.

One such intervention has been advanced by Schlesinger and Tumber (1994) in their book *Reporting Crime: The Media Politics of Criminal Justice*. Although they endorse the general argument that newswork practices typically promote the views of authoritative sources, they proceed to provide six specific points of criticism (Schlesinger and Tumber 1994: 17–21). These points, together with illustrative references to other studies, may be briefly outlined as follows.

First, the notion of 'primary definition' fails to recognize possible disputes between official sources struggling to influence the production of a news account. In the course of such a conflict it may not always be clear who is actually the *primary* definer (or by which criteria such primacy is to be defined) in a given instance.

A telling illustration of this point is documented in Hallin's (1986, 1994: 55) investigations into US news coverage of the Vietnam War: 'the case of Vietnam suggests that whether the media tend to be supporting or critical of government policies depends on the degree of consensus those policies enjoy, particularly within the political establishment.' It then follows, he suggests, that although news content 'may not mirror the facts', media institutions 'do reflect the prevailing pattern of political debate: when consensus is strong, they tend to stay within the limits of the political discussion it defines; when it begins to break down, coverage becomes increasingly critical and diverse in the viewpoints it represents, and increasingly difficult for officials to control'.

Second, the extent to which official sources engage in tactics to pass privileged but unattributable information to journalists under a cloak of confidentiality, such as through the use of 'off-the-record' briefings, is not sufficiently recognized.

Typical examples of statements from non-attributable sources, frequently presented to reporters as 'for background only' comments, include: 'according to a well-placed government source', 'sources close to the Prime Minister say', 'a trusted source has revealed', 'as **leaked** by an inside source', and so forth. In Britain, a decision made by the Labour government shortly after taking office in May 1997 to formally place **lobby briefings** by government spokespeople 'on the record' (along similar lines to the US custom) has by no means eliminated the practice. It is often described as a key element of '**spin doctoring**' (see also Glover 1999; Palmer 2000).

Third, important questions are being obscured with regard to the means by which the boundaries of primary definition are being drawn, and redrawn, as official sources compete amongst themselves (using different media strategies) over access to the discursive field of debate.

As Deacon and Golding (1994: 201–2) argue in their study of British media coverage of the 'poll tax' disputes, 'the ideological advantages of primary definition can be eroded by political vulnerability, so that an "accredited" source becomes largely "discredited" – consistently on the defensive and increasingly unable to control the

direction of public and media debate.' They then proceed to make a further crucial point: 'not only does primary definition have to be won, it must also be sustained interpretatively and evaluatively through a series of battles, in which its political vulnerability may progressively increase' (Deacon and Golding 1994: 202).

Fourth, the apparent atemporality of Hall *et al*.'s (1978) formulation needs to be highlighted, that is, its inattention to how the structure of access changes over time as new forces, and their representatives, emerge.

This point is underscored by Hansen's (1993b: 151) investigation of the strategies employed by environmental groups, such as Greenpeace, to secure access to media debates (see also Allan *et al*. 2000). In his words: 'It is one thing for environmental groups to achieve massive media coverage for a short period of time and in relation to specific issues. It is quite a different task to achieve and maintain a position as an "established", authoritative and legitimate actor in the continuous process of claims-making and policy-making on environmental matters.'

Fifth, it is the need to account for the ways in which journalists challenge official sources, even to the extent of pursuing campaigns, which is at issue. Schlesinger and Tumber (1994: 19) criticize Hall *et al*.'s (1978) approach for tending to 'overstate the passivity of the media as recipients of information from news sources: the flow of definitions is seen as moving uniformly from the centres of power to the media'. They point out that there are significant variations between different news media which need to be addressed, both in terms of the respective medium (such as between television and the press) and at the level of rival news outlets (such as different newspapers).

An illustration of this point is found in Miller's (1993, 1994) research into media portrayals of the conflict in Northern Ireland during 'the Troubles', where he argues that current affairs and documentary programmes were frequently regarded by government officials as the most difficult to manage:

> It is precisely for this reason that official agencies attempt to elucidate the exact nature of queries and even of proposed programmes before permitting access. The access that is granted is heavily bounded by the interests of the sources, but in the end they are betting on slightly longer odds than with hard news stories, which have less space and time and are less likely to do investigative reports.
>
> (Miller 1994: 109–10)

A final criticism renders explicit Schlesinger and Tumber's (1994) commitment to introducing an alternative logic to Hall *et al*.'s (1978) mode of inquiry. Specifically, they contend that most researchers have been media-centric in their approach to analysing source–media relations, a problem which can be overcome only by granting equal priority to the perspectives of the sources themselves as they work to generate 'counter-definitions'. These complex processes of negotiation or brokerage between power-holders and their opponents need to be brought to the fore.

Overall, then, it is Schlesinger and Tumber's (1994: 20) contention that the approach

advocated by Hall *et al*. (1978) is insufficiently curious about 'the processes whereby sources may engage in ideological conflict prior to, or contemporaneous with, the appearance of "definitions" in the media.' Hence the importance of centring the contested dynamics within and between source organizations as they struggle to 'get their message out' through news media which are far from monolithic in their reporting.

Analyses have much to gain, it follows, by examining the precise methods employed by news sources in their efforts to shape media agendas. News promoters anxious to have their voice articulated across the field of the news media are often only too willing to openly cater to the practical needs of newswork. Drawing upon findings derived through an extensive series of interviews with news sources situated across the British criminal justice system, Schlesinger and Tumber (1994) proceed to distinguish a number of conditions typically involved in a source's attempts to realize its goals:

1   that the source has a well-defined message to communicate, framed in optimal terms capable of satisfying news values
2   that the optimal locations for placing that particular message have been identified, as have the target audiences of the media outlets concerned
3   that the preconditions for communicative 'success' have been assured so far as possible by, for instance, cultivating a sympathetic contact or fine-tuning the timing of a leak
4   that the anticipated strategies of others (which may include support as much as opposition) are incorporated into ongoing media strategies. Support may be harnessed by coalition-building. Opposition may, for instance, be countered by astute timing or discrediting its credibility
5   that means exist for monitoring and evaluating the impact of a given strategy or tactic and for adjusting future action in the light of what is reflexively learned
6   that some messages may be as much intended for private as public communication, thus operating on at least two levels.

<div align="right">(Schlesinger and Tumber 1994: 39)</div>

The relative success enjoyed by a potential news source in 'getting its message out' is thus likely to be directly tied to its capacity to routinize its own activities, especially with respect to preparing 'copy ready' information materials with an eye to the needs of the time-pressured journalist.

Bell's (1991) examination of the principal sources drawn upon by newspaper journalists in New Zealand similarly highlights the significant role played by 'pre-existing text' in newsworkers' judgements. 'A story which is marginal in news terms but written and available', he argues, 'may be selected ahead of a much more newsworthy story which has to be researched and written from the ground up' (1991: 59). His observation that most news copy consists of reported speech (even though it is often not attributed

as such) underscores the extent to which newsworkers regularly rely on reprocessing or repackaging source material as news. Specifically, Bell (1991: 57) identifies the following 'input sources' (types of contact journalists have with sources) as being the most salient:

- interviews, either face to face or by telephone
- public addresses
- press conferences
- written text of spoken addresses
- organizationally produced documents of many kinds: reports, surveys, letters, findings, agendas, minutes, proceedings, research papers, etc.
- press releases
- prior stories on a topic, either from own or other media (newsworkers, as Bell writes, 'feed voraciously off each other's stories')
- news agency copy
- the journalist's notes from all the above inputs, especially the spoken ones.

Forms of text-based contact such as these ones encourage journalists to see the world through the eyes of their sources, if only because it makes their work that much easier to manage.

Similar types of source–media research provide further examples of some of the preferred tactics employed by news sources or event promoters (see Tiffen 1989; Eldridge 1993; Keeble 1994; Negrine 1996; Niblock 1996; J. Wilson 1996; Franklin 1997; McNair 1998; Manning 2001; Varley and Tapsall 2001; Cottle 2003). These tactics include:

- handing out to newsworkers advance copies of talks or speeches
- the scheduling of press conferences at convenient hours (safely before deadlines)
- news releases in 'ready-to-go' format, including an 'inverted pyramid style' narrative structure
- prompt access to bureaucratic personnel with pertinent information
- the opportunity to attend 'informal chats' or 'pseudo-events'.

Needless to say, source strategies such as these ones do not guarantee that newsworkers will 'stay on message', but they do enhance the likelihood that the source in question will be accorded with a privileged place in the hierarchy of access. This is no small achievement. 'The right to be considered the primary source of authoritative information about world events', as Hallin (1994: 49–50) suggests, 'should probably be considered a central component of the legitimacy of modern political institutions.' This power, he continues, is 'comparable in a secular age to the right of the church in medieval Europe to interpret the scriptures' (Hallin 1994: 50).

Diana: the story of the story

On Saturday 30 August 1997, as midnight passed, a few journalists prepared to while away the time until their shifts ended. Five hours later, the story of the decade had broken. **Gabriel Thompson** tells the story of the night Diana died

PRINCESS DIANA HAS DIED
Confirmed by Buckingham Palace

BBC announcer Nik Gowing reads the official confirmation of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, at 5.17am

12.30-1.10am: 'Have you heard the news?'

It had been a good night out and, after a little too much wine, I decided that a cup of coffee before bed was a good idea. Waiting for the kettle to boil I turned on the television as the first reports of the crash were coming in. From my time working on the *Independent* on Sunday I knew that its news operation closed at 12.30. It was going to miss the story completely. I panicked, and reached for the telephone.

Elsewhere in London, Richard Sambrook was being teased about the fact that he always carried a pager. Sambrook, the BBC's head of newsgathering, pointed out: "I need it in case the Queen Mother dies, or something." A few minutes later, the pager went off.

At *The Sunday Times*, the night editor Ian Coxon was drinking coffee as an uneventful day drew to a

At *The Sunday Times*, Coxon was blessing his luck. Not only did he have enough staff but, by coincidence the paper's royal correspondent was doing a stint on the night news desk.

Nik Gowing, one of BBC World Television's most experienced new presenters, had been asleep for just 40 minutes when the telephone rang. By 1.30am he was in a cab heading for the office. By 2.30am he was broadcasting live – and would continue to do so until 7.30am.

At one radio station, a beleaguered reporter was so afraid to leave his desk that he resorted to relieving himself into a Coke bottle.

2.30-3.30am 'Does anyone KNOW anything?'

After the first rush to get the news out, everyone began the hunt for hard facts.

close. A colleague rushed into the room with news of the crash. Coxon didn't get to finish his coffee.

After 15 minutes of fuming at colleagues' answering machines and swearing at endless ringing tones, I got through to Colin Hughes, then deputy editor of The Independent, who was at home in bed. As I told him what had happened, Hughes said immediately: "She's dead."

Another journalist caught the late-night news and rushed off to his office. He completely forgot to tell his wife what he was doing.

1.10–2.30am 'Stop the presses'

Hughes made up his mind. There was no one at the Independent on Sunday, but he was a reporter and I was a sub. We could be at the office in 30 minutes, and get a front page out to the printers by 2.30am: our last chance of the night. He rang the printers and told them to stop the presses. He ran for his car, and I jumped into a cab.

At the Independent on Sunday we had been given a reprieve by the printers, and a deadline – 3.30am. Most other papers had also managed to get a story about the crash out to their printers, and were preparing the next edition.

At the BBC, they had decided to broadcast their 24-hour World channel on both BBC1 and BBC2 throughout the night.

Everyone was wondering what had happened to Diana. Buckingham Palace had delayed making a statement: there was no real information coming from the Government, the French authorities were being obtuse.

I was talking to a French radio station, trading "live interviews with British journalists" for any news they had. They knew no more than we did. Gowing was growing more and more suspicious as he tried to separate fact from speculation. Coxon feared that the very paucity of information indicated that there was grim news to come.

We knew Dodi was dead. But

Diana? She was concussed, she had a broken arm, she was severely injured – which story to believe?

In the midst of all this, Gowing's desktop printer broke down. Look ing for some technical support, he spotted a chap with a beard and wearing jeans, wandering through the newsroom. Gowing demanded his aid in fixing the printer. The bearded man looked surprised but did oblige. And that is how Gowing first met Richard Ayre, deputy chief executive of BBC News.

3.30–4.30am 'The Manila connection'

Our luck changed. Because the crash was in France, it was a matter for the Foreign Office. Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, was in Manila. The time difference meant that Cook and his staff were already out of bed and therefore fair game for the British reporters who had accompanied them on the trip.

The official version is that Diana's death was confirmed just

before 5am London time. The truth is that, long before then, the reporters with Cook had rung in with unofficial confirmation of the death. All night we had survived on official statements and guesswork. Finally, we had hard news about Diana.

For the Independent on Sunday, Steve Crawshaw rang from Manila. Hughes, who likes to behave in a calm and collected manner in such situations, shouted "Yes, yes, yes!" We finally had some news from someone we knew and could trust.

Sadly, the news was that Diana was dead.

4.30–5.30am 'Diana killed in crash'

Hard news was finally arriving. We learnt that there would be an announcement simultaneously in Paris and Manila, shortly before 5am. At the Independent on Sunday we had already acted on Crawshaw's information and remade the front page with the story of Diana's death. The page was sent

to the print sites with strict instructions that they were not to start printing without our say so.

The confirmation came just before 5am. We were printing it three minutes later.

At the BBC, Gowing read the confirmation – a "snap" from the Press Association – twice on air. Twenty minutes later, Buckingham Palace issued its own confirmation. Gowing had his first and only attack of nerves, and calmly announced the news. No one knows for sure how many people around the world saw that broadcast, but the best estimate is 500 million.

5.30–7.30am 'Time to go home'

The end of the story had been told. No newspaper could keep printing any longer. Television and radio had reported the news and were now looking for more angles, and more opinions, to flesh out the coverage.

At The Sunday Times, Coxon was already thinking about how the

paper would deal with the story in the following week's edition.

At the Independent on Sunday, Hughes was calling in staff from the daily Independent to prepare the next day's paper.

Gowing handed over to another presenter and slipped quietly away. Sambrook was organising the movement of reports, cameramen, engineers and equipment to Paris.

I couldn't get a taxi home: they were all booked to rush journalists to their newsrooms around London.

It was a new day. Sambrook was delighted to discover that a royal correspondent had cut short her holiday in Devon and was on her way to London. By taxi.

A freelance cameraman was sent to Buckingham Palace. He found plenty of people – almost all clubbers who had been dancing the night away as the news broke.

As for the journalist who rushed off to his office without telling his wife what he was doing – she caught him coming home at 7.30am, and still thinks he's having an affair.

Figure 3.3

Issues of access

When asked to reflect on how they go about their daily work of identifying those 'newsworthy' sources deserving to be included in a news account, journalists will often claim that they simply follow their 'gut feelings', 'hunches' or 'instincts'. Many insist that they have a 'nose for news', that they can intuitively tell which sources are going to prove significant and which ones are bound to be irrelevant to the news frame. Drawing upon an extensive range of interviews with Canadian newsworkers, Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1987, 1989, 1991) suggest that what guides the journalist in the course of these encounters is a 'vocabulary of precedents'. That is to say, the journalist's previous experience of the rules and organizational constraints characteristic of newswork interactions with sources directs them to visualize the social world in terms of specific types of knowledge.

> The ongoing articulation of precedent in the working culture of journalists provides them with recognition knowledge (that this is a story of a particular type), procedural knowledge (how to get on with contacting and using human and documentary sources), and accounting knowledge (how to frame and formulate the story; how to justify the chosen approach to others).
>
> (Ericson *et al*. 1987: 348)

This 'vocabulary of precedents' therefore profoundly shapes who journalists speak to, what they talk about, and how that discussion is represented. As noted above, journalists typically rely on sources to furnish them with a verbal or written account of their institution's stance or position, thereby saving them the effort of having to undertake an investigation themselves. 'Moreover, even on the rare occasions when journalists do get close to the original source,' write Ericson *et al*. (1987: 352), 'they are usually required to obtain a constructed account from an authorized source rather than be able to provide their own direct interpretation.'

If newsworkers are generally predisposed to accept the words of authorized sources as being factual, then it follows that statements which differ from one another must be handled in certain prescribed ways. Newsworkers anxious to avoid potential criticism for anchoring their account on 'biased' sources must take care to frame any conflict outside of the realm of competence by foregrounding the interested perspectives of the sources. 'Precisely by conceiving of interested perspectives in social structural terms,' Fishman (1980: 124) writes, 'the reporter is able both to identify a set of competent and relevant interests and to trust that their differing accounts reveal differing factual aspects of the event.' Supplementary evidence may thus be mobilized in the form of conflicting truth-claims. For a news source to be included as part of the constellation of interests being constructed around an event, it must either explicitly or implicitly reaffirm the terms being employed by the newsworker in the initial framing of the event itself. To speak 'off topic', or to stray from the perceived area of competence (and thus

be demonstrating 'personal bias'), is to risk being positioned outside the ideological limits of newsworthiness.

Accessed voices, as Cottle (1993) found in his study of regional news, must be seen to be 'appropriate', 'articulate' and 'represent a clear point of view' to be deemed relevant. This sense of relevancy, he points out, tends to be 'construed in terms which reflect the programme's bid for popular appeal, typically involving the professional pursuit of immediacy, drama and general human interest' (1993: 89). At the same time, as the study by Deacon and Golding (1994: 202–3) confirms, a key distinction needs to be recognized between sources approached as 'advocates' (associated with a particular position) and those made to serve as 'arbiters' (regarded as non-aligned providers of information):

> Although all news sources can be thought of as 'advocates' – who each have a preferred image or message they would like to convey in the media – some are selected by journalists to act as 'arbiters' on particular issues. The views and opinions of these arbiters – provided they are comprehensible to journalists and, crucially, can be broadly assimilated within their inferential framework – are treated with greater deference than those of even the most senior 'advocates' and play a very important part in shaping media evaluations of the issues upon which they are invited to comment.
>
> (Deacon and Golding 1994: 202–3)

The 'arbiters' of a specific field of discourse, to the extent that their views guide the journalist's engagement with sources explicitly adopting a position of advocacy, are thereby performing a 'legislator' function (Deacon and Golding 1994: 16). In other words, they are helping to establish the (ostensibly non-partisan) criteria by which certain 'advocates' will be granted access to be heard on matters of controversy and, moreover, what aspect of the topic they will be encouraged to address.

Elsewhere I have described these source dynamics in relation to what I have termed the '**will to facticity**' (Allan 1995, 1998b). Once it is recognized that the truly 'objective' news account is an impossibility, critical attention may turn to the strategies and devices used by journalists to lend to their accounts a factual status. Given that this factual status can never be entirely realized, the notion of a 'will to facticity' pinpoints the necessarily provisional and contingent nature of any such journalistic appeal to truth. Newsworkers must know, for example, what questions to ask the source in order to get at the right 'facts'. Here the news frame comes back into play, for as Tuchman (1978: 81) contends, 'knowing what to ask influences whom one asks: The choice of sources and the search for "facts" mutually determine each other.' As a general rule, Fishman (1980) maintains, journalists will usually take care when first setting up interviews with a source to inform him or her about what they are to talk about:

> Journalists orient their sources toward a certain way of looking at an event: as a legal-bureaucratic entity, as a moral issue, as a part of a historical trend, and so

forth. Thus, they define for their sources the terms of an acceptable account, the terms in which all the various accounts will be framed, and the terms in which the event eventually will be described in the news story.

(Fishman 1980: 131)

During the actual interview, then, this shared narrative framework becomes, in effect, an organizing principle of inclusion and exclusion. The newsworker, according to Fishman, sets down the rules which must be obeyed if facticity and newsworthiness are going to intermesh.

A number of research studies show that in order to achieve the recognized 'credibility' required to be a legitimate or trustworthy candidate for the purpose of appropriation within the news net, individuals or groups attempting to mobilize alternative definitions of the situation are often forced to accommodate or adapt to the narrow confines of legitimized topic parameters. Attention has also been directed to how the tempo or rhythm of newswork serves, in turn, to place an enhanced emphasis on 'events', not 'issues'. Where the former have a beginning, a middle and an end, and are therefore easily processed as derivative of the *factual*, the latter implies that the line of demarcation separating the realm of facts from the realm of interpretation and explanation has been crossed. This when objective reporting dictates that this line always be respected. Hence the structural dependence on reliable institutional sources who produce consequential events. These sources, as argued above, allow for certainty to be built into the reporting process, principally through the imposition of predictability (even a certain rationality) *vis-à-vis* the confusion of the social world.

Consequently, those individuals or groups who lack regular access to the news frame (their definitions rarely getting entangled in the news net) have the option of resorting to 'disruptive access'. At stake is the need to force the temporary suspension of the routinized, habitual access enjoyed by others so as to create opportunities for their voices to be processed as newsworthy. As Molotch and Lester (1974: 108) write, these voices 'must "make news" by somehow crashing through the ongoing arrangements of newsmaking, generating surprise, shock, or some more violent form of "trouble"'(see also Gitlin 1980; McLeod and Hertog 1992; Liebes and Curran 1998). Specific investigations of the interventions mobilized by various individuals, groups and movements to secure access through 'disruptive' means include the following studies concerning news coverage of:

- the women's movement (Tuchman 1978; van Zoonen 1994; Barker-Plummer 1995; Meyers 1997; Norris 1997a; Bradley 1998; see also Carter *et al*. 1998, Gallagher 2001)
- campaigns against racism (Hollingsworth 1986; Gordon and Rosenberg 1989; van Dijk 1991; C.C. Wilson and Gutiérrez 1995; Dennis and Pease 1997; Gabriel 1998)
- the anti-war, anti-nuclear weapons and peace movements (Halloran *et al*. 1970; Gitlin 1980; Hackett 1991; A. Young 1991; Jeffords and Rabinovitz 1994; Eldridge 1995)

- the environmental and ecological movements (see Hansen 1993a; Neuzil and Kovarik 1996; A. Anderson 1997; Chapman *et al*. 1997; Adam 1998, Campbell 1999; Allan *et al*. 2000)
- campaigns over issues of sexuality, including how they pertain to lesbian and gay rights (see Dickey 1987; Gross 1989; Moritz 1992; Stratford 1992; Fejes and Petrich 1993) as well as the media politics around HIV and AIDS (Watney 1987; Lupton 1994; Miller *et al*. 1998; Allan 2002; Critcher 2003)
- anti-poverty, anti-crime and community rights campaigns (see Curran *et al*. 1986; Cottle 1993, 1994; Deacon and Golding 1994; Meinhof and Richardson 1994; J.L. Reeves and Campbell 1994; Devereux 1998; Knight 2001).

News interest is certainly not an end in itself, however, as the ensuing coverage may actually be the antithesis of that which had been initially desired by those individuals or groups struggling to articulate a counter-interpretation of the situation. All too frequently efforts to dislodge primary definitions are ignored, dismissed as 'soft news' novelties, or trivialized in other ways. As several of the above studies suggest, it is recurrently the case that the news frame is organized around the question of how quickly order can be restored to the social world, thereby ensuring that little, if any, attention is directed to the ethical implications of the issues raised through 'disruptive access' (see Belsey and Chadwick 1992; Chaney 1994; Tester 1994; Brants *et al*. 1998; Kieran 1998; K. Thompson 1998; Berry 2000). This chapter thus comes to a close by posing several points of inquiry to be addressed in subsequent chapters:

- What are the prerequisites to be met before a voice 'deserves' inclusion in media debate as an 'authoritative', 'newsworthy' source?
- In what ways have various alternative or oppositional voices been made to cater their interventionist strategies so as to conform to the routinized imperatives of newswork?
- In what ways do these journalistic inflections of 'respectability', 'competence' and 'prestige' mark the limits of 'acceptable' dissent?
- To what extent does this constant threat of marginalization, of being defined as 'deviant' *vis-à-vis* 'the consensus', condition what can and cannot be said by these critical voices?

Informing the dynamics which underlie each of these points are relations of power and resistance, relations which are constitutive of a cultural politics of hegemony whereby the parameters of truth are invoked, reaffirmed and, on occasion, contested. It is to this question of 'hegemony' as it is embedded in the textuality of news discourse that our attention turns in the next chapter.

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4 THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF NEWS DISCOURSE

A senior politician is only ever a **sound-bite** away from destruction.
(David Mellor, former Conservative government minister)

There is a strong argument that unrelieved coverage of death, crisis and disaster gives a misleading picture of what life is like for most of Britain's citizens most of the time . . . that individual news stories become divorced from proper perspective or context . . . The good news is out there, and the media shouldn't be afraid to report it.

(Martyn Lewis, BBC newsreader)

Journalists are among the pre-eminent story-tellers of modern society. Their news accounts shape in decisive ways our perceptions of the 'world out there' beyond our immediate experience. For many of us, our sense of what is happening in the society around us, what we should know and care about from one day to the next, is largely derived from the news stories they tell. Given that we have to take so much on trust, we rely on news accounts to be faithful representations of reality. We are asked to believe, after all, that truly professional journalists are able to set aside their individual preconceptions, values and opinions in order to depict reality 'as it actually is' to us, their audience. This assumption, deeply inscribed in the methods of 'objective' reporting, encourages us to accept these 'reflections' of reality as the most truthful ones available.

In seeking to render problematic this process of representation, this chapter focuses on how news discourses help to *naturalize* a cultural politics of legitimacy so as to lend justification to modern society's distribution of power and influence. More specifically, it is the extent to which these news discourses effectively *depoliticize* the dominant meanings, values and beliefs associated with these inequalities, and in so doing contribute to their perpetuation, that will be addressed. This chapter thus aims to raise important questions regarding the ways in which the language of

news encodifies as 'common sense' a hierarchical series of normative rules by which social life is to be understood. It will be argued that it is the very *hegemonic* nature of this representational process which needs to be centred for purposes of investigation so as to discern, in turn, how the parameters of 'the public consensus', and with it 'the moral order', are being affirmed, recreated and contested in ideological terms.

Accordingly, the discussion commences with a consideration of the concept of 'hegemony' as it has been taken up by critical researchers analysing the politics of 'common sense'. Attention then turns to newspaper discourse, and later to radio and televisual newscasts, in order to examine a number of the textual strategies in and through which a range of preferred truth-claims about society are inflected as *authoritative, rational* and *appropriate* – and, in this way, potentially *hegemonic*. Such an approach can be shown to provide fresh insights into the means by which news accounts appeal to apparently common-sense renderings of 'reality' ('conventional wisdom', 'received opinion', 'what every reasonable person knows', and so forth) as being self-evidently true. That is to say, it enables the researcher to denaturalize the very naturalness of the ideological rules governing news discourse's representation of 'what can and should be said' about any aspect of social life.

News and hegemony

For many critical researchers endeavouring to disrupt the seemingly natural tenets of 'common sense' in order to critique them, the concept of 'hegemony' has proven to be highly useful. Most attempts to define the concept attribute its development to Antonio Gramsci, a radical Italian philosopher who died in 1937 after more than a decade in Mussolini's prisons. Very briefly, in his critique of power dynamics in modern societies, Gramsci (1971) describes hegemony as a relation of

> 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.
>
> (Gramsci 1971: 12)

It is this implied distinction between consent and its opposite, coercion, which Gramsci recognizes to be crucial. In the case of the coercive force of ruling groups, he underlines the point that it is the 'apparatus of state coercive power which "legally" enforces discipline on those groups who do not "consent" either actively or passively' (Gramsci 1971: 12). The exercise of this coercive force may involve, for example, the armed forces of the military or the police, courts and prison system to maintain 'law and order'.

This type of coercive control in modern societies is the exception rather than the rule, however, when it comes to organizing public consent. Power, Gramsci argues, is much more commonly exercised over subordinate groups by means of persuasion through 'political and ideological leadership'. It follows that a ruling group is hegemonic only to the degree that it acquires the consent of other groups within its preferred definitions of reality through this type of leadership. In Gramsci's words:

> A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well.
>
> (Gramsci 1971: 57–8)

Subordinate groups are encouraged by the ruling group to negotiate reality within what are ostensibly the limits of common sense when, in actuality, this common sense is consistent with dominant norms, values and beliefs. Hegemony is to be conceptualized, therefore, as a site of ideological struggle over this common sense.

Gramsci's writings on hegemony have proven to be extraordinarily influential for critical researchers examining the operation of the news media in modern societies. Three particularly significant (and interrelated) aspects of the cultural dynamics of hegemony are the following.

First, *hegemony is a lived process*. Hegemonic ideas do not circulate freely in the air above people's heads; rather, according to Gramsci, they have a material existence in the cultural practices, activities and rituals of individuals striving to make sense of the world around them. That is, hegemony is a process embodied in what Williams (1989b: 57) aptly describes as 'a lived system of meanings and values', that is, as 'a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world.' It follows that hegemony constitutes 'a sense of reality for most people in the society' and, as such, is the contradictory terrain upon which the 'lived dominance and subordination' of particular groups is struggled over in day-to-day cultural practices.

Second, *hegemony is a matter of 'common sense'*. A much broader category than ideology, common sense signifies the uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the social world as it organizes habitual daily experience. Gramsci stresses that common sense, despite the extent to which it is 'inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed', may be theorized as a complex and disjointed 'infinity of traces', and as such never simply identical with a class-based ideology. 'Commonsensical' beliefs, far from being fixed or immobile, are in a constant state of renewal: 'new ideas', as he notes, are always entering daily life and encountering the 'sedimentation' left behind by this contradictory, ambiguous, 'chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions' (Gramsci 1971: 422). In critiquing what passes for common sense as 'the residue of absolutely basic and commonly-agreed, consensual wisdoms', Hall (1977: 325) further elaborates on this point: 'You cannot learn, through common

sense, *how things are*: you can only discover *where they fit* into the existing scheme of things.'

Third, *hegemony is always contested*. Far from being a totally monolithic system or structure imposed from above, then, lived hegemony is an active process of negotiation; it can never be taken for granted by the ruling group. In Gramsci's (1971: 348) words, at stake is 'a cultural battle to transform the popular "mentality" and to diffuse the philosophical innovations which will demonstrate themselves to be "historically true" to the extent that they become concretely – i.e. historically and socially – universal.' Consequently, no one group can maintain its hegemony without adapting to changing conditions, a dynamic which will likely entail making certain strategic compromises with the forces which oppose its ideological authority. Dominance is neither invoked nor accepted in a passive manner; as Williams (1989b: 58) points out: 'It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified [in relation to] pressures not at all its own.' Hence Gramsci's contention that common sense be theorized as the site upon which the hegemonic rules of practical conduct and norms of moral behaviour are reproduced and – crucially – also challenged and resisted.

Significantly, then, this shift to address the cultural dynamics of hegemony displaces a range of different formulations of 'dominant ideology', most of which hold that news discourse be theorized as concealing or masking the true origins of economic antagonisms, that is, their essential basis in the class struggle. At the same time, this emphasis on the hegemonic imperatives of news discourse allows the critical researcher to avoid the suggestion that the 'effects' of news discourse on its audience be understood simply as a matter of 'false consciousness'. As we shall see, beginning with the next section's discussion of newspaper discourse, an analytical engagement with the cultural dynamics of hegemony provides the researcher with important new insights into how news texts demarcate the limits of 'common sense'.

The common sense of newspaper discourse

'Journalists believe something is reportable', according to Ericson *et al*.'s (1987: 348) study of Canadian news organizations, 'when they can visualize it in the terms of news discourse.' This process of visualization does not constitute a neutral reflection of 'the world out there'. Rather, it works to reaffirm a hegemonic network of conventionalized rules by which social life is to be interpreted, especially those held to be derivative of 'public opinion' or, at an individual level, 'human nature'. Accordingly, many critical researchers argue that news accounts encourage us to accept as *natural, obvious* or *commonsensical* certain preferred ways of classifying reality, and that these classifications have far-reaching implications for the cultural reproduction of power relations across society.

In order to develop this line of critique in relation to newspaper discourse, critical researchers have 'borrowed' a range of conceptual tools from various approaches to

textual analysis. Particularly influential analyses of newspaper texts have been conducted using, among other methodologies, content analysis, semiotics or semiology, critical linguistics, sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis (for overviews, see Hartley 1982, 1996; A. Bell 1991; Fowler 1991; Zelizer 1992; Eldridge 1993; Fairclough 1995; Bell and Garrett 1998). These text-centred approaches provide a basis to break from those forms of analysis which reduce language to a 'neutral' instrument through which 'reality' is expressed. By foregrounding the textual relations of signification, they suggest fascinating new ways to think through Gramsci's theses concerning the lived hegemony of common sense. Moreover, these approaches allow for the opening up of what has become a rather empty assertion, namely that news texts are inherently meaningful, so as to unpack the *naturalness* of the ideological codes implicated in their representations of reality. Thus the notion of 'codification' may be used to specify the means by which the meanings attributed to a text are organized in accordance with certain (usually so *obvious* as to be *taken-for-granted*) rules or conventions.

This is to suggest that a newspaper account, far from simply reflecting the reality of a news event, is actually working to construct a codified definition of what should count as the reality of the event. In order to examine these processes of codification, the specific ways in which a newspaper adopts a preferred language to represent 'the world out there' need to be opened up for analysis. That is to say, it is necessary to identify the means by which a particular newspaper projects its characteristic 'mode of address', its customary way of speaking to its audience, on its pages from one day to the next. Shaping this mode of address, as argued by Hall *et al*. (1978: 60) in *Policing the Crisis*, are a series of imperatives governing how the 'raw materials' of the social world are to be appropriated and transformed into a news account. An event will 'make sense', they argue, only to the extent that it can be situated within 'a range of known social and cultural identifications' or 'maps of meaning' about the social world. Here a key passage by Hall *et al*. (1978) is worth quoting at length:

> The social identification, classification and contextualisation of news events in terms of these background frames of reference is the fundamental process by which the media make the world they report on intelligible to readers and viewers. This process of 'making an event intelligible' is a social process – constituted by a number of specific journalistic practices, which embody (often only implicitly) crucial assumptions about what society is and how it works. One such background assumption is the *consensual* nature of society: the process of *signification* – giving social meanings to events – *both assumes and helps to construct society as a 'consensus'*. We exist as members of one society *because* – it is assumed – we share a common stock of knowledge with our fellow men [and women]: we have access to the same 'maps of meanings'. Not only are we able to manipulate these 'maps of meaning' to understand events, but we have fundamental interests, values and concerns in common, which these maps embody or reflect.
>
> (Hall *et al*. 1978: 54–5)

It is this seemingly commonsensical belief that 'the consensus' is 'a basic feature of everyday life' that underpins journalistic efforts to codify unfamiliar, 'problematic' realities into familiar, comprehensible definitions about how the world works.

Of primary importance when distinguishing the newspaper's mode of address is its 'professional sense of the newsworthy', an aspect of its 'social personality' conditioned by various organizational, technical and commercial constraints, as well as by its conception of the likely opinions of its regular readers (its 'target audience'). It follows that individual newspapers, even those sharing a similar outlook, will inflect the same topic differently. As Hall *et al*. (1978) point out:

> The language employed will thus be the *newspaper's own version of the language of the public to whom it is principally addressed*: its version of the rhetoric, imagery and underlying common stock of knowledge which it assumes its audience shares and which thus forms the basis of the reciprocity of producer/reader.
>
> (Hall *et al*. 1978: 61)

This form of address, specific to each and every news organization, may thus be advantageously described as the newspaper's distinctive 'public idiom'.

Still, despite the apparent variations in this public language from one title to the next, Hall *et al*. (1978) maintain that it is almost always possible to discern in its usage the 'consensus of values' representing the ideological limits of 'reasonable opinion'. Given that this 'consensus of values' is broadly aligned with the interests of powerful voices which tend to be over-accessed by news organizations, Hall *et al*. (1978) contend that this process of reinflecting a news topic into a variant of public language similarly serves:

> to *translate into a public idiom the statements and viewpoints of the primary definers*. This translation of official viewpoints into a public idiom not only makes the former more 'available' to the uninitiated; it invests them with popular force and resonance, naturalising them within the horizon of understandings of the various publics.
>
> (Hall *et al*. 1978: 61)

In this way, then, the definitions, interpretations and inferences of the powerful are embedded, to varying degrees, into the 'everyday' language of the public. Newspapers, as Hall *et al*. (1978: 62) write, ' "take" the language of the public and, on each occasion, return it to them *inflected with dominant and consensual connotations*'.

In order to further critique this process of inflection, then, it is necessary to disrupt the very *naturalness* of the ideological codes embedded in the language of newspaper discourse. Such a line of inquiry will need to elucidate the conventionalized rules, strategies or devices which make it recognizable as a distinct genre of 'purely factual' narrative. In the case of a 'hard' news account, for example, it is possible to show that there are certain prescribed forms of narrative logic associated with the telling of a 'hard' news story which stand in contrast with those of 'soft' news stories (a good

journalist, as Bell (1991: 147) observes, 'gets good stories' or 'knows a good story', while a critical news editor asks: 'Is this really a story?' 'Where's the story in this?'). The 'hard' news account is similarly defined in opposition to other types of account, such as 'editorials' or 'leaders' which foreground matters of 'opinion'. This genre of discourse will narrativize the social world in a particular manner, that is, in a way which organizes 'the facts' within a distinctively hierarchical structure based on notions of newsworthiness.

   Potential readers of this 'hard' news newspaper account are likely to anticipate that it will provide them with a highly formalized construction of the social world. Formalized, that is, in the sense that the 'hard' news item, whether it appears in a tabloid or broadsheet newspaper, typically reinflects the following elements in distinctive ways:

- *Headline*: represents the principal topic or 'key fact' at stake in the account. To the extent that it is recognized as performing this function by the readers, it is likely to influence their interpretation of the account to follow. In this way, then, it helps to set down the ideological criteria by which the reader is to 'make sense' of what follows.
- *News lead*: typically the opening paragraph or two providing a summary or abstract of the account's essential 'peg' or 'hook' which projects, in turn, 'the story' in a particular direction or 'angle'. The five Ws and H (the who, what, where, when, why and how most pertinent to the event) will likely be in the lead or first paragraph; however, as Keeble (1994: 100) observes, 'the "why" factor is always more problematic.'
- *Narrative order and sequence*: the 'hard' news account almost always follows an 'inverted pyramid style' format. That is, beginning with the news lead, which presents the information deemed to be most 'newsworthy', the account proceeds to structure the remaining details in a descending order of discursive (and usually ideological) significance. By the latter stages of the account, the material being presented could – at least in principle – be dropped without affecting the narrative coherence or sense of the preceding paragraphs. These narrative strategies have become conventionalized to the point that departures from them are likely to disrupt the reader's expectations, yet there is nothing necessary or natural about the rules governing their (in historical terms, rather recent) deployment.
- *Vocabulary*: the regular usage of certain types of stylistic devices, including metaphors, jargon, euphemisms, puns and clichés, tends to characterize a newspaper's 'social personality', as well as its 'professional sense of the newsworthy'. The most marked contrasts are usually between the 'popular', tabloid press and the 'quality', broadsheet titles. In general, the former are usually much more colloquial in vocabulary and emotive in judgement (often to the point of being sensational in tone): 'A vocabulary of emotional arousal', Holland (1983: 85) writes, 'summons laughter, thrills, shocks, desire, on every page of the *Sun*.' The so-called serious newspapers, in contrast, use terms more likely to be regarded as

'un-emotive' or 'dispassionate', and thereby more consistent with an authoritative appeal to objectivity (see also D. Cameron 1996).

• *Forms of address*: the terms used to refer to, or identify, different news actors indicate a range of important features, including varying degrees of formality ('Tony' versus 'Prime Minister Blair'), the status or power to be attributed to the actor ('monster' or 'fiend' versus 'defendant' or 'alleged perpetrator') or the presumed relationship between the actor and the implied reader of the account (as noted below, made apparent in use of either personalized or impersonalized terms). In the case of the *Sun*, for example, its form of address is personal and direct; as Pursehouse (1991: 98) argues, it 'seeks a relationship with "folks" (not "toffs") and uses a voice of the everyday vernacular and direct "straight talking" to achieve this connection.' The form of address is associated, in turn, with speech of differing degrees of directness, ranging from words reported in quotation marks to those paraphrased by the journalist, thereby raising questions regarding relative truth-value or modality.

• *Transitivity and modality*: the terms chosen by a journalist to represent the relationship between actors and processes, that is, 'who (or what) does what to whom (or what)', are indicative of transitivity. The journalist's transitivity choices can take on an ideological significance, such as where questions of blame or responsibility are raised (see, for example, Clark's (1992) analysis of tabloid news coverage of rape attacks, showing how the victim (e.g. 'no-sex wife') is recurrently blamed for the crime and not her male attacker (e.g. 'hubby'); or Trew's (1979) analysis concerning responsibility for disturbances being attributed to 'strikers' or unions and not employers or the police; see also Fowler 1991; Montgomery 1995). Intertwined with relations of transitivity are those of modality, that is, the ways in which journalists convey judgements concerning the relative truthfulness (or not) of the propositions they are processing. The apparent 'objectivity' of a news account is enhanced to the extent that modal expressions are minimized, thereby encouraging the reader to believe that the journalist is a dispassionate relayer of facts (as opposed to a subjectively emotive person with opinions).

• *Relations of time*: looking beyond the stated place and time ('dateline') of a news account, it is possible to identify the time structure being imposed via the narrativization of the news event in question. 'Hard' news is a highly perishable commodity which is always in danger of becoming 'out of date'; consequently, such accounts usually contain an explicit temporal reference (such as 'yesterday') in the news lead. In marked contrast with other types of narratives, especially fictional ones, time in the 'hard' news account is typically represented in a non-linear manner. The account which respects a chronological ordering of the events it describes is a rare exception to a general rule which holds that 'effects' or 'outcomes' are prioritized over 'causes'. 'Perceived news value,' as Bell (1991: 153) writes, 'overturns temporal sequence and imposes an order completely at odds

with linear narrative point. It moves backwards and forwards in time, picking out different actions on each cycle.'

- *Relations of space*: interwoven with relations of time are those of space, the latter being represented in a series of ways in the 'hard' news account. Hallin (1986) usefully identifies five typical ways in which journalists refer to geographical locations (see also Brooker-Gross 1985; Chaney 1994). Specifically, place as authority (the 'here' identified in the account is often listed in the dateline; news gathered 'on the scene' is likely to be deemed to have greater credibility); place as actionable information (relatively rare in 'hard' news; much more likely to appear in 'Weekend', travel or real estate sections where readers are looking for such information in order to do something); place as social connection (through its construction of place, a newspaper can give readers a sense of participation in a distant event, thereby acting as a creator of community); place as setting (invitations to 'experience' the event through detailed descriptions of setting appear only infrequently in 'hard' news because they tend to be considered inappropriate for 'objective' reporting); and, finally, place as subject (the ways in which places themselves become 'news' are often ideologically charged, especially at the level of international politics).

- *Implied reader*: journalists construct news account against a backdrop of assumptions about the social world which they expect the readers to share. It follows that the journalist's orientation to the implied reader, or imagined community of readers, necessarily shapes the form and content of the account. Necessarily implicated in this projection of this ideal reader, who may bear little resemblance to the actual living and breathing reader, are an array of ideological presuppositions concerning relations of class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age and so forth. Brookes and Holbrook (1998) suggest, for example, that British tabloid news coverage of 'mad cow disease' consistently addressed women as housewives and mothers (evidently a typical feature where 'food scares' are concerned: see Fowler 1991, Allan 2002). Personal pronouns are almost always absent in the 'hard' news account, with the exception of the 'I' of an eyewitness or investigative item (this is in sharp contrast to the frequent use of 'we' on the editorial leader page when the newspaper assumes its public voice).

- *Closure*: the achievement of closure with respect to the 'hard' news account is always partial and contingent, that is, it is never fully realized. In narrative terms, the account typically comes to an end abruptly without formal markers signalling closure (in contrast with broadcast news). As noted above, the 'inverted pyramid style' format facilitates the work of the copy-editor, who trims the length of accounts, usually starting from the bottom, in relation to the size of the available 'news hole'. Narrative closure is successful when readers achieve a feeling of completeness, that is, a satisfactory sense that the account has processed an array of facts sufficient to make clear a reasonable and appropriate interpretation of the situation. Thus ideological closure may be said to have been accomplished where

> readers identify with this dominant interpretation ostensibly encouraged by the account, regarding it to be adequate and factually consistent – for the moment at least – with their personal understanding of the social world.

It is important to note that critical analyses of newspapers, whether tabloid or broadsheet, usually restrict their examinations to the characteristics of the news coverage being generated. This centring of news accounts as the primary focus of inquiry is at the expense of considerations of other forms of content, particularly those types more likely to be seen as mere diversions due to their perceived entertainment value. 'Insofar as acknowledgement is given to entertainment features in the press,' as Curran *et al.* (1980: 288) argue, 'this tends to be grudging and dismissive, as if such content detracts from the central political role and purpose of the press.' As they proceed to point out in their exploration of the non-current affairs sections of newspapers, it is precisely where content is promoted as being 'apolitical' (such as in the realms of human interest as it relates to sport, royalty, celebrities, gossip, competitions, astrology and so forth) that 'ideological significance is most successfully concealed and therefore demands most analysis' (Curran *et al.* 1980: 305). It is also relevant to note that this type of content is regularly disparaged by 'hard' news journalists who are more likely to express concerns over ideology in a different way, namely as a fear that the quality of reporting is being 'dumbed down' by these types of items in the name of boosting circulation figures.

Further studies of 'human interest' or 'soft' news have similarly highlighted how its apparent neutrality reinforces what might be termed the 'dominant political consensus' by encouraging and constraining readers to see events in particular ways. The implications which news coverage of sporting events has for discourses of popular culture, for example, has been the subject of critical attention (see Brookes 2002; Rowe 2004). Similarly, critiques of editorials or 'leaders', feature articles (including 'opposite editorial' or 'op ed' pages or 'backgrounders') and opinion columns have pinpointed a range of issues, including how the inclusion of this 'subjective', 'interpretative' material helps to underwrite the proclaimed 'objectivity' of 'hard' news accounts (see Trew 1979; Love and Morrison 1989; A. Bell 1991; Fowler 1991; Reah 1998). Cartoons have also been singled out for scrutiny, with several studies assessing how issues concerning, for example, 'the economy' (Emmison and McHoul 1987), national identity (Brookes 1990) and military conflicts (Aulich 1992), among others, have been subject to political caricature (see also Seymour-Ure 1975). Also of interest are 'letters to the editor', not least in terms of how the criteria of inclusion in play delimit the ideological boundaries of *legitimate* or *fair* comment (see Fairclough 1989; Tunstall 1996; Bromley 1998b; Wahl-Jorgensen 2002).

Another element of both 'quality' and 'popular' newspapers which similarly deserves more critical attention than it has received to date is the news photograph. Hall (1981: 232–4), in his analysis of news images, suggests that although editors may select a photograph in terms of its formal news values (such as impact, dramatic meaning, unusualness, controversy, and so forth), they are also simultaneously judging

how these values will be best treated or 'angled' so as to anchor the intended interpretation for the implied reader. News photographs proclaim the status of being 'literal visual-transcriptions' of the 'real world'; this when, as Hall contends:

> the choice of *this* moment of an event as against that, of *this* person rather than that, of *this* angle rather than any other, indeed, the selection of this photographed incident to represent a whole complex chain of events and meaning, is a highly ideological procedure. But, by appearing literally to reproduce the event as it *really* happened, news photos suppress their selective / interpretive / ideological function. They seek a warrant in that ever pre-given, neutral structure, which is beyond question, beyond interpretation: the 'real world'.
>
> (Hall 1981: 241)

News photographs, in this way, help to reinforce the newspaper's larger claim to be 'objective' in its representations of the social world. 'Photography is imbued with the appearance of objectively recorded reality,' writes Banks (1994: 119); 'consequently, editors often seek to use photographs to provide the stamp of objectivity to a news story.'

This appeal to 'objectivity' can be sustained, of course, only to the extent that the reader accepts the photograph as an unmediated image of actual events. What must be denied at all costs, as Taylor (1991: 10) argues, is that news images are 'intricately sewn into the web of rhetoric. They are never outside it, and always lend it the authority of witness' (see also Tagg 1988; K.E. Becker 1992; Hartley 1992, 1996; Kress and van Leeuwen 1998). Ostensibly grounded in the 'bedrock of truth', the photograph must naturalize its impossible claim to be making visible 'what really happened' as a neutral, 'historically instantaneous' (Hall 1981) record of reality. This process of naturalization, as Schwartz (1992: 107) maintains, is engendered in and through the conceptual rules or frameworks governing the professional practice of photojournalism: 'Conventions of framing, composition, lighting, and color or tonal value guide the translation of newsworthy subjects into the two-dimensional photographic image.' The array of representational devices employed by the photojournalist need to retain their apparent transparency, she argues, if the source of drama is to be located in the subject itself and not in the strategies invoked by the photographer. In her words: 'Photojournalism, cloaked in its mantle of objectivity, offers the viewer a vision of the world easily consumed and digested, while its naturalism perpetuates its legitimacy as an objective bearer of the news' (Schwartz 1992: 108).

The language of radio news

Perhaps the most striking feature of radio as a purveyor of news is the evanescent nature of its language, a quality which arguably accentuates the sense of immediacy

already heightened by its mode of address. Radio news is at its best when it is relaying 'breaking stories', that is, news which is 'happening now'. This capacity to 'scoop' or 'first' other news media is one of its primary advantages, while the brevity of its ephemeral reports is a key limitation. In terms of an actual word count, of course, the radio news item typically provides a mere fraction of the information contained, for example, in a newspaper account (see also Crook 1998). Nevertheless, as Crisell (1986) argues, radio provides the listener with an indexical sense of the news, that is, it can provide the voices, sounds, noises and so forth of the 'actuality' of the news event:

> On the radio we hear the noises of the news, or at least the informed view or the eyewitness account 'straight from the horse's mouth' and often on location – outdoors, over the telephone – that newspapers can only *report* in the bland medium of print, a medium bereft of the inflections, hesitations and emphases of the living voice which contribute so largely to meaning, and also less able to evoke the location in which the account was given.
>
> (Crisell 1986: 100, original emphasis)

The radio news item, he maintains, declares a direct connection with the listener; it establishes a sense of proximity to the 'world out there' with a degree of vividness impossible to capture in a printed news text.

It is this expressive impact of radio news language which engenders a unique set of issues. Chief among them is the concern that the radio newsworker's choice of descriptive words, together with the use of actuality sounds, will lead to an immoderate degree of persuasive influence being imposed on the listener. The selection and codification of news language, as Leitner (1983: 54) argues, has to be responsive to radio's institutional requirements of 'impartiality' and 'balance': 'Referring to one and the same event with the words *slaughter, murder, killing* or *assassination*, or to the same group of persons as *terrorists* or *freedom fighters*, may raise questions both of style (appropriateness) and fact.' In his study of BBC radio (and television) news production, Schlesinger (1987: 229–30) cites a corporation memorandum which defines the proper use of terms such as 'guerrillas', 'terrorists', 'raiders', 'gunmen' and 'commandos', in part by explicitly appealing to the newsworker's 'common sense'. In this context, he contends, the concept of 'impartiality' is 'worked out within a framework of socially endowed assumptions about consensus politics, national community and the parliamentary form of conflict-resolution' (Schlesinger 1987: 205).

Also at issue here is how the authoritativeness of this language is linked to the spoken accent associated with its delivery 'on air'. For many listeners in Britain, for example, 'BBC English' is virtually synonymous with received pronunciation or 'RP'. It has long been argued by corporation executives that the 'neutrality' of the newsreader, and with it the prestige of the newscast, is likely to be reinforced through the use of an RP accent (such is also the case, if arguably to a lesser extent, on National Public Radio in the USA). As Crisell (1986) writes:

> On the one hand RP is still commonly regarded as the badge of the well-educated, professionally successful or the socially privileged and therefore as the accent of 'those who know best, the most authoritative'. On the other hand, its universal intelligibility [throughout Britain] accords it the status of a 'non-accent': it minimizes the element of idiosyncrasy and even of 'personality' in the voice, for which reason the BBC has seldom allowed it to be replaced in the delivery of news or official announcements by the regional accents which are widely heard elsewhere on the networks.
>
> (Crisell 1986: 83)

Implicit to this projection of the newsreader's 'personality' at the level of enunciation, according to Crisell, is its indexical function as a purported guarantee of the 'impersonality' of the larger broadcasting institution (see also Lewis and Booth 1989; A. Bell 1991; Shingler and Wieringa 1998). That is to say, to the extent that 'editorial bias' is held to be embodied, literally, in the voice of the newsreader, the avowed 'objectivity' of the news organization itself will be preserved.

Related studies of radio interviews, whether occurring in newscasts or current affairs programmes, have similarly generated interesting insights into the characteristic rules or conventions of radio discourse (as have analyses of 'talk' and 'call-in' radio formats; see Hutchby 1991; Scannell 1991; Gibian 1997a, b). Several of these studies have looked beyond the interviewer's posing of questions to examine the communicative strategies she or he is likely to invoke in order to facilitate the interpretation of the interviewee's answers. By keeping the assumed needs of the implied listener in mind at all times, the interviewer manoeuvres to clarify points (often by summarizing, paraphrasing or reinforcing them through repetition) which might otherwise be too complex to be easily grasped. Issues of clarity with regard to style, tone, syntax and diction are directly linked to assumptions about what background knowledge or shared experiences the audience are imagined to possess. Similarly, it is the interviewer who is charged with the responsibility of adjudicating between contending truth-claims, of sorting out 'right' from 'wrong', in broad alignment with the implied listener's 'horizon of expectations' (Bakhtin 1981) *vis-à-vis* the speaking practices deemed appropriate to these factual genres of radio talk.

This line of inquiry is further developed in Fairclough's (1998) analysis of the early weekday morning *Today* programme broadcast on BBC Radio 4, arguably the most influential radio news programme in Britain due to its perceived impact on 'opinion leaders'. He suggests, for example, that interviewers in the course of their interaction with interviewees play a crucial role in rearticulating different discourses together, one implication of which is the reaffirmation of certain protocols of 'conversationalization'. Of particular significance is a 'lifeworld discourse', that is, the presenter's rendition of the 'discourse of ordinary people in ordinary life'. It is this discourse, he argues, which combines with an 'ethos of common sense' to construct, in turn, a basis against which the different viewpoints of the interviewees can be evaluated. This shift away from the 'authority' and 'distance' more traditionally associated with BBC newscasts,

Fairclough (1998: 160) maintains, 'appears to be a democratizing move, but it is at the same time an institutionally controlled democratization: the voices of ordinary people are "ventriloquized" rather than directly heard.'

A close reading of radio interview transcripts can help to identify the types of strategies typically employed by interviewers on programmes such as *Today*. The imposition of orderliness on these interactions, for example, may be shown to be a discursive accomplishment which relies on the cooperation of the interviewee to a remarkable degree. In extending Fairclough's argument concerning this strategic invocation of an ethos of 'common sense' to justify the disciplinary rules regulating these exchanges, it is important to recognize just how fraught these dynamics are with uncertainty, ambiguity and contradiction. Indeed, as Gibian (1997b) observes:

> In the verbal ebb and flow, we're very conscious of who has the floor, who asks the questions, who sets the vocabulary, the tone, the issues; who interrupts, who is silenced or excluded; who gains through the irrational attractions of style, charisma, voice quality, media training; who feels the strong pull of conformity and consensus, the fear of ostracization; and so on.
>
> (Gibian 1997b: 139–40)

These seemingly free-flowing 'exchanges' must be contained within the limits of 'impartiality' if the interviewer's 'neutralistic stance' is to be maintained, a task which requires considerable skill to achieve. Any damage inflicted upon this stance by interviewees, as Greatbatch (1998) contends, would lead to the interviewer being identified with a particular ideological position, a problem which would have to be verbally 'repaired' without delay. In this way, the 'normal bounds of acceptability' which both enable and constrain radio interview interactions are shown to require constant policing to ward off potential threats to their appropriation of 'common sense' (as is similarly the case with televisual interviews; see also Clayman 1991; S. Harris 1991; Roth 1998).

The textuality of television news

The 'moment' of the broadcast news text is clearly a fluid one; its meanings are dispersed in ways which analyses of actual newscasts as static constructs or artefacts cannot adequately address. Turning now to televisual news, of particular interest are the ways in which it seeks to implicate its audience in a specific relationship of spectatorship, ostensibly that of an unseen onlooker or witness. Televisual news claims to provide an up-to-the-minute (now) narrative which, in turn, projects for the viewers a particular place (here) from which they may 'make sense' of the significance of certain 'newsworthy' events for their daily lives. As Hall *et al*. (1976) point out:

> The facts must be arranged, in the course of programming, so as to present an intelligible 'story': hence the process of presentation will reflect the explanations

and interpretations which appear most plausible, credible or adequate to the broadcaster, his [or her] editorial team and the expert commentators he [or she] consults. Above all, the known facts of a situation must be translated into intelligible *audio-visual signs, organised as a discourse*. TV cannot transmit 'raw historical' events as such, to its audiences: it can only transmit pictures of, stories, informative talk or discussion about, the events it selectively treats.

(Hall *et al*. 1976: 65)

Accordingly, it is the codified definitions of reality which are regarded as the most 'natural', as the most representative of 'the world out there', that are actually the most ideological.

In order to unpack the conventionalized dynamics of these processes of representation, this section will provide a brief discussion of several pertinent aspects of British televisual newscasts. Specifically, a number of different opening sequences for BBC and ITN newscasts will be examined with an eye to identifying the more pronounced features characteristic of their respective modes of address. This schematic reading is advanced against the current of televisual 'flow' (R. Williams 1974), so to speak, in order to pinpoint, if in a necessarily partial and highly subjective manner, several conceptual issues for further, more rigorous examination.

Apparent across the range of the different BBC and ITN newscasts under consideration are several shared features:

- *Interruption*: the opening sequence, usually composed of a 15–20 second segment of brightly coloured computer-animated graphics, rapidly unfolds to a sharply ascending piece of theme music (the use of trumpets is typical). Its appearance announces the interruption of the flow of entertainment programming by signalling the imminent threat of potentially distressing information (most news, after all, is 'bad news').
- *Liveness*: the opening sequence helps to establish a sense of urgency and, in this way, anchors a declaration of immediacy for the newscast's larger claim to authoritativeness. The news is coming directly to you 'live'; its coverage of 'breaking news' is happening now (even though most of the content to follow will have been pre-recorded).
- *Time-space*: each of these segments privileges specific formulations of temporality (ticking clocks are used by both the BBC and ITN, which signal the up-to-the-minuteness of the news coverage) conjoined with those of spatiality (images of revolving globes spin to foreground an image of the British nation as defined by geography, in the case of the BBC; while for ITN's *News at Ten*, a London cityscape at night is slowly panned until the camera rests on a close-up of the clockface of the main parliamentary building, the apparent seat of political power).
- *Comprehensiveness*: implicit to this progressively narrowing focal dynamic

around time–space is an assertion of the comprehensiveness of the news coverage. The news, having been monitored from around the world, is being presented to 'us' from 'our' national perspective. That is, 'we' are located as an audience within the 'imagined community' (B. Anderson 1991) of the British nation.

- *Professionalism*: the final shot in the succession of graphic sequences (ostensibly sounded by the gong of Big Ben in the case of ITN) brings 'us' into the televisual studio, a pristine place of hard, polished surfaces (connotations of efficiency and objectivity) devoid of everyday, human (subjective) features. A central paradox of broadcast news, as Crisell (1986: 90–1) writes, 'is that if there is one thing more vital to it than a sense of authenticity, of proximity to the events themselves, it is a sense of clear-sighted detachment from them – of this authenticity being mediated through the remote, sterile atmosphere of the studio.'

The camera smoothly glides across the studio floor while, in the case of the *ITN Lunchtime News*, a male voice-over sternly intones: 'From the studios of ITN (.) the news (.) with Nicholas Owen and Julia Somerville.' Both newsreaders are situated behind a shared desk, calmly organizing their scripts. Serving as a backdrop for them is what appears to be a dimly lit (in cool blue light) newsroom, empty of people but complete with desks, computer equipment, and so forth. Similarly, for the *News at Ten*, as the male voice-over declares: 'From ITN (.) News at Ten (.) with Trevor McDonald', the newsreader appears in shot seated behind a desk, typing on an invisible keyboard with one hand as he collects a loose sheaf of papers with his other one (which is also holding a pen). Whether it is ITN or the BBC, it is the institution behind the newsreader which is responsible for producing the news; it is the very 'impersonality' of the institution which, in ideological terms, is to be preserved and reaffirmed by the 'personality' of the newsreader.

As a result, the mode of address utilized by the respective newsreaders at the outset of the newscast needs to appear to be 'dialogic' (Bakhtin 1981) in its formal appeal to the viewer's attention. This dialogic strategy of co-presence is to be achieved, in part, through the use of direct eye-contact with the camera (and thus with the imagined viewer being discursively inscribed). As Morse (1986: 62) observes, 'the impression of presence is created through the construction of a shared space, the impression of shared time, and signs that the speaking subject is speaking for himself [or herself], sincerely' (see also Hartley and Montgomery 1985; Marriott 1995; Tolson 1996; Morse 1998). The impersonally professional space of the studio is, in this way, personalized in the form of the newsreader who, using a language which establishes these temporal and spatial relations of co-presence with the viewer, reaffirms a sense of shared participation.

Nevertheless, these dialogic relations of co-presence are hierarchically structured. The *direct* address speech of the newsreader (note that the 'accessed voices' will be restricted to *indirect* speech and eye contact) represents the 'news voice' of the network: the newsreader stands in for an institution charged with the responsibility of

serving a public interest through the impartiality of its reporting. For this reason, these relations of co-presence need to be organized so as to underwrite the signifiers of facticity and journalistic prestige, as well as those of timeliness and immediacy.

In addition to the steady gaze of expressive eye contact, the visual display of the newsreader's authority is further individualized in terms of 'personality' (white males still predominate), as well as with regard to factors such as clothing (formal) and body language (brisk and measured). This conventionalized appeal to credibility is further enhanced through aural codes of a 'proper' accent (almost always received pronunciation) and tone (solemn and resolute). Such factors, then, not only may help to create the impression of personal integrity and trustworthiness, but also may ratify the authenticity of the newsreader's own commitment to upholding the truth-value of the newscast as being representative of her or his own experience and reliability. Personalized terms of address, such as 'good afternoon' or 'good evening', may similarly work to underscore the human embodiment of news values by newsreaders as they seemingly engage in a conversational discourse with the viewers.

The newsreader or 'news anchor', as Morse (1998: 42) observes, 'is a special kind of star supported by subdued sartorial and acting codes that convey "sincerity" '. Taken to an extreme, this can lead to 'Ken and Barbie journalism' where, as van Zoonen (1998) argues, the charge is made that physical attractiveness of the 'anchor team' is taking precedence over their competence as journalists. Also at issue here is the related trend, particularly pronounced in local news, of 'happy talk'. 'As the name suggests,' van Zoonen (1998: 40) writes, 'these are merry little dialogues between the anchors showing how much they like each other and how much they love their audiences.' The main purpose behind 'happy talk', according to her interviews with newsworkers, is 'to "people-ize" the news, as one news editor has put it, and to suggest that journalists and audiences are one big happy family.'

The immediacy of the implied discursive exchange is thus constrained by the need to project a sense of dialogue where there is only the decisive, if inclusionary, voice of the newsreader. As Stam (1983) writes:

> The newscaster's art consists of evoking the cool authority and faultless articulation of the written or memorised text while simultaneously 'naturalising' the written word to restore the appearance of spontaneous communication. Most of the newscast, in fact, consists of this scripted spontaneity: newscasters reading from teleprompters, correspondents reciting hastily-memorised notes, politicians delivering prepared speeches, commercial actors representing their roles. In each case, the appearance of fluency elicits respect while the trappings of spontaneity generate a feeling of unmediated communication.
>
> (Stam 1983: 28)

In play are a range of deictic features which anchor the articulation of time ('now', 'at this moment', 'currently', 'as we are speaking', 'ongoing' or 'today') to that of space

('here', 'this is where' or 'at Westminster this morning') such that the hierarchical relationship of identification for the intended viewer is further accentuated.

Contingent upon these relations of co-presence is what has been characterized as the regime of the 'fictive We'. That is, the mode of address employed by the newsreader, by emphasizing the individual and the familiar, encourages the viewer's complicity in upholding the hegemonic frame (see Stam 1983; Morse 1986, 1998; Holland 1987; Doane 1990; T. Wilson 1993). To the extent that the newsreader is seen to speak not only 'to us', but also 'for us' ('we' are all part of the 'consensus'), then 'we' are defined in opposition to 'them', namely those voices which do not share 'our' interests and thus are transgressive of the codified limits of common sense. As Stam (1983: 29) points out, there needs to be a certain 'calculated ambiguity of expression' if a diverse range of viewers are to identify with the truth-claims on offer: 'The rhetoric of network diplomacy, consequently, favours a kind of oracular understatement, cultivating ambiguity, triggering patent but deniable meanings, encouraging the most diverse groups, with contradictory ideologies and aspirations, to believe that the newscasters are not far from their own beliefs.' As a result, in attempting to authorize a preferred reading of the news event for 'us', the newsreader aims to frame the initial terms by which it is to be interpreted.

The rules of the hegemonic frame, while in principle polysemic (open to any possible interpretation), are typically inflected to encourage a relation of reciprocity between the viewers' and the newsreader's 'personal' sense of 'news values'. The voice-over of the newsreader, in seeking to specify 'what is at issue' in each of the headlined news stories, begins the work of organizing the news event into a preferred narrative structure for us. A brief example of news headlines, in this case from the BBC's *Nine O'Clock News* and ITN's *News at Ten*, broadcast on 27 November 1998:

Excerpt 1: BBC *Nine O'Clock News* (with Michael Burke)

[MB – newsreader] Britain's biggest car plant has been offered a deal to save it from closure	Head and shoulders shot of newsreader; over his right shoulder is a map of UK in Western Europe
thousands of Rover jobs will have to go at Longbridge (.) the rest will have to work more flexibly to give the factory a future	Shot from inside car plant
pleading for Pinochet (.) Chile's foreign minister comes to ask for the dictator's release	Shot of Chile's Foreign Minister on street with police escort
and the birds at risk if a British island joins the space race	Close-up of bird on beach
[opening sequence] Good evening (.) Rover car workers . . .	

Excerpt 2: ITN *News at Ten* (with Trevor McDonald)

	Opening sequence
[male voice-over] from ITN (.) News at Ten (.) with Trevor McDonald	
[TM – newsreader] Protests tonight as Chile makes Pinochet mercy plea	Shot of Chile's Foreign Minister on street with police escort
unions sacrifice jobs to save Rover plant	Shot from inside car plant
shares plummet as high flying bank chief quits	Shot of bank executive walking through office door
battle of the Brits in tennis' most lucrative tournament	Shot from tennis match
and (.) setting the standard (.) a new approach for night-club bouncers	Shot of night-club bouncer frisking customer outside door
Good evening (.) Chile sent its foreign minister to Britain today . . .	

Note: (.) symbolizes a pause of less than one second.

Words are thus aligned with images to affirm, and then reinforce, the interpellative appeals of the news voice and the strategy of visualization: viewers can 'see for themselves' a range of the elements constitutive of what journalists often call the five Ws and H (who, what, where, when, why and how) of the news lead. Moreover, as Doane (1990: 229) writes, 'the status of the image as indexical truth is not inconsequential – through it the "story" touches the ground of the real.' The extent to which these news headlines are made to 'touch the ground of the real' is thus dependent upon the degree to which hegemonic relations of reciprocity are established such that it is *obvious* to viewers that these are the most significant news events of the day for them to know about, and that it is *self-evident* how they are to be best understood.

Here it is also important not to overlook the larger performative task of these opening sequences for the newscast. That is to say, attention also needs to be directed to their dramatic role in attracting and maintaining the interest of the viewer and, moreover, the sense of reassurance they offer through their very repetition from one weekday to the next (a sharp contrast is provided by the headline of a news bulletin which suddenly 'interrupts' regular programming; see Doane 1990; Harrington 1998). News headlines seek to incorporate the extraordinary into the ordinary; the strangeness of the social world (and hence its potential newsworthiness) is to be mediated within the terms of the familiar. A news event can make sense to the viewers only if they are able to situate it in relation to a range of pre-existing 'maps of meaning' (Hall *et al*. 1978) or forms of cultural knowledge about the nature of society.

The framework of interpretation set down by the news headline thus not only tends to nominate precisely 'what is at issue' and how its significance is to be defined, but also must reaffirm the viewers' sense of what is consequential, or at least relevant, in

the context of their daily lives. The language utilized in these opening sequences, both verbal and visual, may therefore be analysed as one way in which the newscast indicates the normative limits of the sense of newsworthiness it attributes to its audience. Clearly, then, once a mode of inquiry elects to seize upon the embeddedness of the newscast in the now and here by prioritizing for critique precisely those elements which are usually ignored in analyses of this type, new aspects of the political struggle over the social relations of signification will be brought to the fore for further exploration.

'The obvious facts of the matter'

Over the course of this chapter's discussion, an attempt has been made to highlight a basis for future research efforts. It is with this aim in mind that I wish to suggest in this closing section that investigations into news discourse may advantageously extend the theoretical trajectory outlined above in a number of substantive ways. To briefly outline one such possibility, I would argue that the concept of hegemony needs to be elaborated much further than it has been to date in journalism studies. Specifically, in a manner which would better enable researchers to account more rigorously for the complex ways in which the news media, as key terrains of the ongoing political struggle over the right to define the 'reality' of public issues, operate to mediate the risks, threats and dangers engendered across the society they purport to describe.

This aim could be realized, in part, by focusing our analyses more directly on the indeterminacies or contradictions (the exceptions to the conventionalized rules) implicated in news discourse's preferred appropriations of 'the world out there'. Here I am suggesting that we need to be much more sensitive to the contingent nature of the representational strategies being used in news discourse. Attempts to demonstrate how these strategies are organized to disallow or 'rule out' alternative inflections of reality should, at the same time, seek to identify the extent to which the same strategies are being challenged, even transgressed, over time. Given that the *naturalization* of any truth-claim is always a matter of degree, it is crucial that analyses recognize the more subtle devices by which common sense has to be continuously revalidated as part of the reportorial performance, and thereby avoid a reliance upon rigid, zero-sum formulations of hegemony to sustain their theses.

Such an approach may enable us to identify much more precisely the nature of the processes by which this form of media discourse structures the public articulation of truth. Following Williams (1974: 130), who contends that the 'reality of determination is the setting of limits and the exertion of pressures, within which variable social practices are profoundly affected but never necessarily controlled', I would agree with those who argue that a much greater conceptual emphasis needs to be placed on how news conditions what counts as 'truth' in a given instance, and who has the right to define that truth. At the same time, though, equal attention needs to be given

to discerning the openings for different audience groups or 'interpretive communities' to potentially recast the terms by which 'truth' is defined in relation to their lived experiences of injustice and inequalities (once again, after Williams, determination is not a single force, but rather an exertion of continuous, but often unpredictable, pressures). Such a shift in focus would mean that research questions posed within a narrowly framed domination–opposition dynamic could be clarified through a much more fundamental interrogation of the very precepts informing the fluid configuration of facticity in the first place.

News discourse could thus be deconstructed not only through a critique of its projection of journalistic distance and 'impartiality', but also by resisting its movement toward closure around common-sense criteria of inclusion and exclusion. It follows that in addition to asking *whose* common sense is being defined by the news account as *factual*, we need to ask: by what representational strategies is the viewer being invited to 'fill in the gaps', or being encouraged to make the *appropriate, rational* inferences, in order to reaffirm journalistic procedures for handling contrary facts which are otherwise discrepant to the news frame? In my view, once this 'setting of limits' on the narrativization of meaning has been denaturalized to the point that the politics of its *naturalness* are rendered explicit, analyses may proceed to identify in news discourse the slippages, fissures and silences which together are always threatening to undermine its discursive authority. In other words, this type of research may be able to contribute to the empowerment of those counter-hegemonic voices seeking to contest the truth politics of news discourse, not least by helping to first disrupt and then expand the ideological parameters of 'the obvious facts of the matter'.

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NEWS, AUDIENCES AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Serious, careful, honest, journalism is essential, not because it is a guiding light but because it is a form of honourable behavior, involving the reporter and the reader.

(Martha Gellhorn, foreign news correspondent)

I have to believe that a better informed world is more civilised, more compassionate, more ready to act and to help. But I do not think it is my place to tell the audience what to do.

(Kate Adie, chief news correspondent of the BBC)

Pronouncements about how the 'average person' relates to the news media often invoke a continuum of sorts, one where the drowsily indifferent 'couch potatoes' are positioned at one end and the hyperactive 'news junkies' are at the other. Somewhere in between, it follows, is where most news consumers can be situated, particularly where televisual news is concerned (evidently the most popular source of news for people in countries such as Britain and the USA).

It is surprising to note how few news organizations in either country conduct regular, systematic research into who makes up their audience, a problem which parallels the insufficient number of investigations being undertaken within an academic context. A number of the studies which have been launched do point out, however, that care needs to be taken to avoid thinking of 'the news audience' at too abstract a level. Such a phrase, after all, defines people who may or may not actually choose to define themselves in this way and, in any case, risks transforming them into a fixed, rigid totality of individuals on the basis of only one aspect of their engagement with the media. Accordingly, just as the claim that journalists are participants, knowingly or not, in some sort of wilful conspiracy to encodify the dictates of a 'dominant ideology' in the newsroom may be safely dismissed, so may the corresponding assertion that news viewers, listeners and readers be regarded as passive, alienated dupes indoctrinated into a state of 'false consciousness'.

At issue for this chapter is the need to elucidate how the materiality of news culture is intimately imbricated in the varied realities of everyday experience. With this aim in mind, our attention first turns to a series of issues raised in critical investigations of newspaper (both broadsheet and tabloid, respectively) readership. In the course of mapping a number of the most salient features of this research terrain, particular attention is given to exploring the ways in which the cultural dynamics of newspaper reading are interwoven throughout the cultural fabric of our everyday realities. Next, analyses of the televisual news audience are centred for critique, in the first instance by drawing upon Hall's (1980) highly influential encoding–decoding model. This conceptual model is examined with an eye to its importance for investigating how televisual news discourses encourage the viewer to negotiate or 'decode' the fluidly contradictory dynamics of their 'preferred meanings' as being inferentially consistent with the dictates of 'common sense'. The ensuing discussion focuses on the need to situate the televisual newscast within the household in order to discern how the profuse flow of its sounds and images are negotiated by the viewer on an ordinary, 'lived' basis.

Mapping the newspaper audience

Attempts to 'measure' the audience for a particular newspaper usually begin with its daily circulation figures. These figures provide an indication of each newspaper's relative share of the market, although distortions can creep in where copies have been given away for free or sold at a reduced price in order to give the numbers an upward boost. In any case, circulation is different from readership as more than one person typically reads a single copy of a given title. As a general rule, it is assumed in most industry calculations that between two and three people may be counted as readers per copy. Interestingly, according to Kent's (1994: 196) research, in Britain the so-called 'average person' spends about 20 minutes a day reading a newspaper (in contrast with about 3.8 hours a day watching television, and around 3 hours listening to the radio; see also Worcester 1998). Precisely how best to quantify a 'reading threshold' for a given newspaper, however, is itself hotly disputed. For some industry studies, 'reading' may simply refer to the availability of a newspaper in a household, for others it means that some of its pages have at least been scanned, while others define reading as a thorough engagement with its contents (the reader's recollection of which may then be assessed the next day).

The most typical methods employed to collect data about newspaper audiences are interviews, conducted either face-to-face or over the telephone, and opinion surveys, usually involving a questionnaire circulated via the post. In addition, newspapers will often survey their own readers by including a questionnaire for them to fill in and return, possibly in exchange for a chance to win a prize. A range of different groups have a direct interest in knowing more about the characteristics associated with a newspaper's readership. These groups include, in the first instance, the owners of the newspaper, its editors and marketing people. Readership data, as Brown (1994: 106)

argues, serve 'as evidence of the success (or otherwise) of attracting the size and profile of audience aimed for via a particular policy on editorial contents and their treatment'. In the second instance, groups which also have a vital stake in acquiring information about a newspaper's readers include advertising agencies, market research organizations and, of course, potential advertisers.

It is almost always the case that the price listed on the front page of a British 'quality' broadsheet newspaper generates only a relatively small share (usually about one-third) of the revenue necessary for the title to meet the costs of publication. The principal source of revenue is the sale of advertising space; the number of advertisements sold determines the size of the 'news hole', not the other way around. Newsworkers are all too aware of the status of the newspaper as a commodity, the financial success of which depends on attracting the type of readers of interest to specific advertisers (several of the tabloid titles, in contrast, depend primarily on sales revenue because their readers are less 'desirable' in marketing terms). In light of the demands of advertisers, then, it is not surprising that the 'upmarket' broadsheet's projection of an 'average' or 'typical' reader is likely to prefigure a middle-class, educated male who is middle-aged and interested in public affairs. It is precisely this type of person whom many advertisers would define as their 'target audience', hence their aspiration to purchase the attention of this reader being sold by the 'serious' press.

Beyond these types of generalized assumptions, however, most newsworkers actually know very little about their readership, and tend to be highly sceptical of claims made on the basis of market research (see also Tunstall 1996; Lewis 2001). After some 40 years as a newspaper journalist in Britain, Alastair Hetherington (1985: 37–8) maintains that 'very few journalists have more than a hazy personal view of their public'. He supports his point with quotations from a number of reporters:

> Oh, we're writing for the editor of course. He's the audience.

> My wife, she's the critic.

> Will it get people talking over the breakfast table or in the pub? That's what I ask myself.

> If I like it, that's the only quotient I put on it. I reckon that I'm an average reader.

Analyses based on interviews with newsworkers recurrently suggest that forms of direct audience feedback, such as letters and telephone calls, have only a limited impact on the newsworker's rudimentary impressions of their readers (see also A. Bell 1991: 87–90). Indeed, these types of respondents evidently tend to be dismissed as being 'atypical' or 'unrepresentative' due to a general conviction among newsworkers that 'the bulk of audience reaction is from cranks, the unstable, the hysterical and the sick' (cited in Schlesinger 1987: 108; see Ericson *et al*. 1987: 193–6; Bromley 1998b).

Nevertheless, there appears to be a growing trend in the British 'quality' press, encouraged by the Press Complaints Commission among others, to regularly print 'corrections' and 'apologies' with 'due prominence' when warranted (a longstanding

practice for their US equivalents). An example of the latter was published in the 5 June 1998 edition of *The Independent* following the unfortunate juxtaposition of the previous day's main headline (concerning a high-speed train derailment in Germany) with an advertisement's headline at the bottom of the same page. Both headlines appeared in large print (using red ink in the case of the bank advertisement) and were spread across the width of the front page:

DISASTER AT 125 MPH: 80 DEAD
MORE BODIES FOUND BEHIND BANK TILL

The Independent subsequently printed the following apology, also on the front page:

Apology. We ran an advertisement for [name of the bank] on the front page of yesterday's edition which should have been withdrawn given the nature of our main front-page story. We apologise for any distress caused.

It goes without saying, of course, that distressed readers will be less inclined to be happy consumers of advertisers' messages. For this and related reasons, a number of the national dailies have also taken the further step of appointing a newspaper ombudsperson to investigate readers' concerns on their behalf. Similarly growing in prominence is the practice of ensuring a 'right to reply' to help rectify harmful inaccuracies. Such developments run counter to what *The Guardian*'s ombudsperson, Ian Mayes (1998), calls 'the culture of concealment' slowly changing among newspapers. This culture, he argues, 'urges journalists never to admit mistakes, to dismiss those who complain as cranks, and – however often we call for accountability in others – to remain unaccountable ourselves' (Mayes 1998: S2, 2).

Academic studies of newspaper readerships have been undertaken via an extensive array of conceptual and methodological approaches, some of which entail extremely complex sociopsychological models in their attempts to quantify 'audience behaviour'. Of particular interest in my view, however, are those investigations which have sought to explore the actual ways in which readers engage with their newspapers as an ordinary part of everyday life. Bausinger's (1984) work, for example, attempts to identify several of the rituals associated with newspaper reading in the household (in this case in Germany). This study suggests that these rituals may be rendered more clearly visible when their very 'normality' is disrupted, as in a situation where a newspaper has not been published and therefore not delivered as usual in the morning.

Under these circumstances the newspaper publishers receive a great number of telephone calls, which they gladly register as proof of the importance of their products. This is certainly not wrong, but is this a question of the missing content of the newspaper, or isn't it rather that one misses the newspaper itself? . . . [R]eading it proves that the breakfast-time world is still in order – hence the newspaper is a mark of confirmation, and that will surely have an effect on both its content and its structure.

(Bausinger 1984: 344)

It follows, he argues, that the day-to-day use of newspapers needs to be set in relation to that of other media (especially radio and television), as well as 'non-media conditions', in order to account for the highly selective ways in which people relate to any one medium.

Bausinger (1984: 349–50) then proceeds to characterize newspaper reading not as an 'isolated, individual process', but rather as a 'collective process' typically transpiring 'in the context of the family, friends, colleagues'. The contents of newspapers, like those of other media, are 'materials for conversation', the precise meaning of which is the subject of discursive interaction among readers (see also B. Anderson 1991; Hartley 1996). Clearly, then, as he rightly points out: 'A bit of wild thinking is needed to catch and describe this complex world in all its rational irrationality' (Bausinger 1984: 351).

Sceptical laughter? Reading the tabloids

Critical investigations of newspaper audiences typically focus on the 'quality' end of the market, that is, on the 'respectable' daily broadsheets of national prominence. The reason for this tendency, in part, is because these publications are usually deemed to have the greatest impact across society, especially in terms of their influence on the governmental sphere. Studies of the 'tabloid', 'popular' or 'mass consumption' press are growing in prominence, however, as increasing numbers of researchers seek to realign their analyses so as to address journalism as a form of popular culture. In Britain, daily tabloid titles like the *Sun* (about 3.8 million circulation) or the *Mirror* (about 2.5 million circulation), for example, secure far greater circulation figures than do their elite rivals, such as *The Times* (about 0.8 million circulation) or *The Guardian* (about 0.4 million circulation). Additional points of comparison include differences in their respective size, news values, mode of address, language (both written and visual), readership and price, all of which inform distinct strategies of representation.

If more than one tabloid editor prefers to use the phrase 'un-popular press' to describe the 'quality' titles, for some members of the latter the tabloids symbolize journalism sunk to its lowest depths. To be called 'the greatest tabloid journalist of all time', media commentator Clive James once remarked, is 'tantamount to calling a man the greatest salesman of sticky sweets in the history of dentistry' (cited in Stephens 1988: 113). In any case, there is little dispute that the ways in which the popular newspapers treat matters of public concern stand in marked contrast with the 'serious', 'high-minded' reporting of the 'qualities'. As Sparks (1992) argues:

> the popular press embeds a form of immediacy and totality in its handling of public issues. In particular, this immediacy of explanation is achieved by means of a direct appeal to personal experience. The popular conception of the personal becomes the explanatory framework within which the social order is presented as transparent . . . [T]he 'personal' obliterates the 'political' as an explanatory factor for human behaviour.
>
> (Sparks 1992: 39–40)

This overemphasis on the 'personal' as it is defined in relation to the immediate issues of daily life leads Sparks to maintain, in turn, that readers of tabloid newspapers are being denied the means to recognize the structural basis of power relations in society as a totality. News which is highly personalized in its representations of reality makes it that much more difficult for readers to identify means of articulating their resistance to these power relations.

This view is only partly shared by Fiske (1992), who outlines an alternative stance by drawing attention to further distinctions between 'official' and 'tabloid' news as they have developed in the USA (examples of the latter he cites include the *Weekly World News* and the *National Enquirer*). 'Official' news, in his view, prefigures a top-down definition of information based on convictions regarding 'what the people ought to know for a liberal democracy to function properly' (Fiske 1992: 49). That is to say, official news promotes a certain form of knowledge, one which is largely defined in relation to public sphere events, by matters of policy, and not by the particularities of everyday life. 'The social reality it produces', Fiske (1992: 49) contends, 'is the habitat of the masculine, educated middle class, the habitat that is congenial to the various alliances formed by the power-bloc in white patriarchal capitalist societies.' Significantly, this type of knowledge produces what he calls a 'believing subject', that is, a reader who generally accepts its claims as being self-evidently true. It is at this level, then, that its difference from tabloid news is most apparent.

> The last thing that tabloid journalism produces is a believing subject. One of its most characteristic tones of voice is that of a sceptical laughter which offers the pleasures of disbelief, the pleasures of not being taken in. This popular pleasure of 'seeing through' them (whoever constitutes the powerful *them* of the moment) is the historical result of centuries of subordination which the people have not allowed to develop into subjection.
>
> (Fiske 1992: 49)

Where official news accounts normalize rational definitions of reality through appeals to 'objectivity', tabloid journalism subverts the very idea of rationality.

Examples of headlines taken from various weekly US 'supermarket tabloids' included in a study conducted by Hogshire (1997) support this latter point all too clearly:

SEX-CHANGE WOMAN MAKES SELF PREGNANT! . . . Scientists confirm 'first of a kind' case

(*Sun*)

JOHN LENNON IS ALIVE! Electrifying recent photo

(*Sun*)

FAMILY CLAIMS 500-lb. SPACE ALIEN RAIDED THEIR REFRIGERATOR!

(*Weekly World News*)

DOLLY THE CLONED SHEEP KILLS A LAMB – AND EATS IT!

(*Weekly World News*)

Not only is 'objective' journalism's appeal to value-free, neutral information disrupted, but also the very ideological disciplines regulating what counts as 'truth' are being flagrantly transposed. For news to be pleasurable, and thus popular, Fiske (1992: 57) suggests, it needs to provoke conversation: 'it is by taking up and recirculating the issues of news orally that the people construct aspects of the public sphere as relevant to their own.' The apparent irrelevance of much 'official' (or 'top-down') news for many readers is thus directly linked to its repression of alternative or oppositional knowledges. 'Unlike official news,' Fiske (1992: 52) maintains, 'popular news makes no attempt to smooth out contradictions in its discourse; indeed it exploits them, for unresolved contradictions are central to popular culture.' It is this contradictoriness, he argues, which the 'ordinary' reader can identify with as being consistent with their daily experience of trying to cope with inequalities of power: 'Knowing when to dissemble and go along with the system and when not to is a crucial tactic of everyday life' (Fiske 1992: 53; see also Connell 1992; Gripsrud 1992).

In her study *For Enquiring Minds: A Cultural Study of Supermarket Tabloids*, Bird (1992) similarly refuses to dismiss tabloid news as trivial 'trash', arguing instead that researchers need to understand why it is the case that millions of readers across the USA 'find a valued place for the papers in their lives'. It was with this end in mind that she arranged to place a notice in the *Examiner* inviting readers to share with her their experience of reading it and other tabloids, such as the *National Enquirer*, the *Weekly World News*, the *Globe*, the *Sun* and the *Star*. Fifteen members of this self-selected group (114 letters were received), as well as one other person, were then interviewed. Bird is quick to acknowledge that her respondents did not constitute a scientifically representative sample, yet believes that they were nevertheless reasonably close to the 'typical buyers' envisaged by the *Examiner*'s staff: that is, 'mostly white, predominantly female, and middle-aged or older' (Bird 1992: 113). Interestingly, few of these respondents use the word 'tabloid' to refer to publications like the *Examiner*, generally preferring terms like 'paper', 'magazine' or an affectionate 'tabs'. The style of the tabloids tends to be described as 'fun', 'exciting', 'newsy', 'interesting' or 'gossipy'.

Although most of Bird's respondents consider the news stories to be well researched and verified, none of them accept everything presented on the pages of their tabloid as being true (Bird 1992: 121–2). That said, some find pleasure in assuming an 'as if' stance, playing along with the item's truth-claims to see how far their own willingness to believe can be stretched. Most readers, however, appear content to 'pick and choose' what they believe according to their existing interests and beliefs, with only a small minority of 'self-conscious' or 'ironic' readers stated that these 'sleazy' and 'vulgar' titles were an enjoyable kind of 'slumming' (Bird 1992: 118). Apparent across the range of responses is a perception that the tabloids provide a means to counter the constant flow of 'bad news' being presented in 'proper' newspapers and television newscasts. As Bird writes:

> an important element in their readings is indeed a form of resistance to dominant values – an awareness, for example, that they 'should' be reading about news and

current affairs but find these studies boring and irrelevant. The perception that tabloids offer 'untold stories' about anything from government waste to a movie star's romance is important to them because it suggests some sense of knowing and control over things that are really out of control.

(Bird 1992: 204–5)

Still, as she quickly points out, the sense of pleasure derived from a feeling of control is very different from actually having control and, moreover, 'resistance is not subversion'. Bird suggests that tabloids, as an endless 'source of laughs', help readers 'cope with their lives and feel good about themselves, but they do not give them power to change their lives' (see the following chapters for a discussion of the related gender and racial issues).

The word 'tabloid', as noted previously, signifies a very different meaning in a British context. The vast majority of readers in Britain purchase their newspaper in a tabloid format; there are currently five national daily tabloid titles being published: the *Sun, Mirror, Daily Mail, Express* and *Star*. Although these titles share certain characteristics with their weekly US namesakes (including common ownership in the case of those titles controlled by Rupert Murdoch's companies), none would consider regularly publishing the types of stories identified by the headlines listed above. The one national daily publication which might be so inclined, the *Daily Sport*, is not generally regarded to be a newspaper. Instead, these five tabloids provide – to varying degrees of depth – 'straight' news coverage of public affairs, although each arguably places a premium on entertaining, as opposed to informing, the reader. Their preferred modes of address draw on distinctive styles of language (everyday vernacular, direct 'straight talking') and presentation (snappy headlines, provocative photographs, visually compelling forms of layout) so as to enhance their popular appeal. As several analyses have documented, however, their 'light and breezy' news items can often be shown to anchor, in hegemonic terms, an array of prejudices (sexist, racist, homophobic, xenophobic and so forth) as being synonymous with 'public opinion' or 'what our readers think' (see Curran *et al*. 1980; Dahlgren and Sparks 1991, 1992; Engel 1996; Franklin 1997; Stephenson and Bromley 1998; see also Lewis 2001).

Notable among the small number of studies conducted with British tabloid readers to date is Pursehouse's (1991) analysis of interview data gathered with regular readers of the *Sun*. This study, although somewhat preliminary in that it is based on only thirteen in-depth interviews (the people chosen were deemed to fulfil the 'ideal reader role' set down by the title), furnishes a series of intriguing insights into *how* this the most popular of Britain's dailies may be typically negotiated by its readers. By encouraging his interviewees to discuss their routine use of the newspaper in the context of their own personal lives, Pursehouse is able to situate the activity of *Sun* reading in relation to work and domestic arrangements. In both spheres, he suggests, the tabloid offers a 'temporary respite' of sorts from the monotony of labour, an important form of distraction from specific tasks requiring concentration. As a

resource, the *Sun* can be used as a shared talking point with others or, alternatively, as a site of 'private' leisure space in order to avoid such interactions. One thing it is not, however, is a reliable source of fair or balanced reporting. In the words of three of the interviewees, for example:

> I find a lot of pleasure in the way that a lot of The *Sun* articles are written . . . I read a story like – like the classic 'Freddie Starr Ate My Hamster' and nobody in their right mind is goin' to believe that – but as a piece of journalism to me it's – it's fun.
>
> (Julie)

> I watch the news on telly: so you get it straight.
>
> (Ian)

> I usually see the news once a day . . . it's a truer report.
>
> (Helen)

Far from being 'passively acquiescent' or 'misguided' about the truth-value of the tabloid's news coverage, then, most of these readers simply claim to look to television for their 'real news'.

Important aspects of the *Sun*'s popular appeal identified by this group of inter-viewees evidently include its humour, 'street credible' sociability and simplifying 'common sense'. As Pursehouse (1991: 121–2) observes: 'It gains credibility, almost becomes friends with readers, through appearing to "talk the same language".' The basis of this 'friendship', he argues, is on the grounds of 'a shared joke', although much of what counts as the *Sun*'s 'fun persona' is gender-specific in that the tabloid typically positions itself as 'one of the lads' (indeed this 'humour', as Holland (1998: 26) writes, can 'all too easily harden into malice and the sexual fun into a leery, sneery soft misogyny'; see also Chapter 6). At the same time, forms of ethnocentrism are recurrently discernible in its projection of whiteness as a norm in its 'humour' (see Chapter 7). Not surprisingly, however, the tabloid claims for itself an apolitical status, one consistent with its appeals to the 'down-to-earth' qualities of its 'fun-loving' readers who take pleasure in photographs of top-less female models on 'Page Three', 'saucy' and scandalous tales, the problem pages, and so forth.

According to Pursehouse (1991), the tabloid characteristically rejects 'politics' in favour of 'entertainment', leading him to suggest:

> [In] some ways the horoscopes, crosswords, cartoons, sport pages and television chat say the most about The *Sun*'s politics. It is a world of 'entertainment', consumerism, easy self-pleasure, rather than social concerns or active, productive contributions to society . . . *The Sun* [during the period of the interviews] was able to turn far-reaching 'public', ideological values into accessible personal stories . . . Above all, *The Sun* was involved in the apparent depoliticising of politics itself

and public life, turning all into individual issues, personalities and choices . . . as larger senses of social groups were denied or fragmented.

(Pursehouse 1991: 125)

This language of depoliticization was implicitly reaffirmed by many of the interviewees, as indicated in quoted statements such as: 'Oh I don't like politics' (Sam), 'I am not a political animal' (Julie) or '[politics] don't interest me' (Jackie). Comments such as these are evidence for Pursehouse of the success the *Sun* enjoys in making 'ordinary' its most entrenched cultural assumptions in a way which enables them to be taken up and lived by its readers as being consistent with a seemingly apolitical self-identity.

'Decoding' television news

Turning our attention now to the televisual news audience, it is advantageous to retain this important commitment to investigating the complex ways this medium is actually used by individuals in their day-to-day lives. As has been argued in Chapter 4, the televisual news account, far from simply 'reflecting' the reality of an event, actually works to construct a codified definition of what should count as the reality of the event. It follows that this dynamic, if inchoate, process of mediation is accomplished in ideological terms, but not simply at the level of televisual news as a discrete text. By focusing on how this text is consumed or 'decoded', the fluidly contingent conditions under which it is negotiated as 'meaningful' will be centred for analysis.

In seeking to address the moment of viewing or 'decoding' televisual news, it is crucial to recognize how the production or 'encoding' of the actual news accounts structures the hegemonic rules by which social reality is to be negotiated by the news audience. To clarify how analyses may best discern the extent to which the codes of televisual news discourse are embedded in relations of hegemony, many researchers have drawn on a conceptual model introduced by Hall (1980) at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. The encoding–decoding model, as it was quickly dubbed at the time, remains to this day the singularly most influential attempt to come to terms with these issues within cultural and media studies (see Seiter *et al.* 1989; McGuigan 1992; Morley 1992; Ang 1996; Allan 1998a; Langer 1998; see also Hall 1994). By situating televisual news discourse in relation to the variable conditions of its encoding and decoding within the continually evolving limits of common sense, these critical modes of inquiry provide us with a far more dynamic understanding of meaning production than those efforts which treat it as an object in isolation, removed from its ideological context.

It follows, according to Hall, that while the encoding and decoding of the televisual news message are differentiated moments (that is, they are not perfectly symmetrical or transparent), they are related to one another by the social relations of the communicative

process as a whole (Hall 1980: 130). Before this form of discourse can have an effect, however, it needs to be appropriated as a personally relevant discourse by the televisual viewer, that is, it has to be 'meaningfully decoded'. It is this set of decoded meanings which 'influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences' (Hall 1980: 130). The ideological form of the message thus occupies a privileged position *vis-à-vis* the determinate moments of encoding and decoding. These moments each possess their own specific modality and 'conditions of existence', for while their respective articulation is necessary to the communicative process, the moment of encoding cannot 'guarantee' that of decoding. That is to say, the moments of encoding and decoding are 'relatively autonomous': they are inextricably bound up with one another, but there will be highly varied degrees of symmetry ('understanding' and 'misunderstanding') between the encoder-producer and the decoder-receiver.

Hall outlines three hypothetical positions (derived, in part, from Parkin 1973) from which decodings may be constructed. These 'ideal-typical' reading positions, all of which are available at the moment of decoding, may be distinguished as follows with regard to televisual news.

1   When the viewer of a televisual news account decodes its message in alignment with its encoding, the viewer is occupying the 'dominant-hegemonic position'. From this position, Hall argues, the 'authoritative', 'impartial' and 'professional' signification of the news event is being accepted as perfectly obvious or natural. The compliant viewer, operating inside the dominant subjectivity that the news account confers, thereby reproduces the hegemonic 'definition of the situation' in ideological terms.

2   In what Hall characterizes as the 'negotiated position', the viewer understands the preferred definition being mobilized by the televisual news account, but does not relate to it as being self-evidently 'obvious' or 'natural'. Although viewers recognize its general legitimacy as a factual report, certain discrepancies, contradictions or 'exceptions to the rule' within their own (personal) situational context are identified. The news account is seen to be encouraging one interpretation over and above other, more appropriate possibilities.

3   The final reading position is that which is consistent with an 'oppositional' code. That is to say, the viewer apprehends the logic of the dominant-hegemonic position in such a manner that the authority of its definition is directly challenged. Hall offers the example of a viewer who follows 'a debate on the need to limit wages but "reads" every mention of the "national interest" as "class interest" ' (1980: 138). In this way, the dominant code has been reinflected within a resistant, counter-hegemonic framework of reference.

Here it is important to note that these 'ideal-typical' reading positions are being marked for purposes of analytical clarity, and that they are not to be conflated with

actual empirical or lived positions. In other words, researchers have recognized the need to try to interrogate the precepts underpinning the rather abstract neatness of these decoding positionalities. The viewer's engagement with an actual televisual newscast is likely to engender a complex range of (often contradictory) positionalities as the activity of negotiating meaning is always contingent upon the particular social relations of signification in operation (see Corner 1980; Wren-Lewis 1983; Philo 1990; Lewis 1991; Morley 1992; Moores 1993; Silverstone 1994; Scannell 1996, 1998; Richardson 1998).

Despite the rather abstract nature of its postulates, the encoding–decoding model allows for the issue of textual determination to be addressed as a fluidly heterogeneous process without, at the same time, losing sight of the ways in which it is embedded in relations of power. The status of the televisual news viewer is not reduced to that of a victim of false consciousness (one who passively acquiesces to the dictates of a domin-ant ideology being imposed via the text), nor is it to be celebrated such that the viewer is to be accorded with an ability to identify freely with multiple interpretations of the text in a wildly immaterial fashion. Instead, by situating this dynamic activity as a negotiated process within certain conditional, but always changing, parameters, the encoding–decoding model succeeds in highlighting a spectrum of potential positions to be occupied, however fleetingly, in a determinant manner.

Central to the encoding–decoding model, then, is a recognition that the codification of meaning in televisual news discourse is necessarily constitutive of a particular politics of signification. What is at stake is the need to clear the conceptual space necessary for the investigation of the specific cultural relations at work in the dis-cursive legitimation of certain hegemonic definitions of reality. From this vantage point, the communicative strategies utilized in televisual news to construct a sense of the very taken-for-grantedness of hegemony may be shown to be structuring 'in dominance' what is, at least in principle, a polysemic text. More to the point, once it is acknowledged that the full range of meanings potentially associated with a given message do not exist 'equally' (true polysemy), then new questions arise as to why particular meanings are being preferred over other possibilities. The ideological dynamics of hegemony may therefore be explicated, at least in part, through an examination of the integration of televisual news into everyday routines within the household. For a news narrative to be 'read' as an impartial reflection of 'the world out there', its explanations of the social world need to be aligned with the lived experiences of its assumed audiences.

Critical efforts to document arguments of this type in relation to the decoding of televisual news discourse have utilized the research strategies of ethnography to con-siderable advantage. Evidence drawn from these ethnographic accounts often suggests that how people watch televisual news is much less determined by the actual content of the newscast than it is conditioned by the social relations of its consumption. In tracing the contours of the social contexts of viewing characteristic of domestic life in the household, the varied social uses to which televisual news is put have been examined in

association with the (usually unspoken) rules by which the very 'normality' of everyday life is defined and reproduced.

The everydayness of news

In attempting to situate television news within the habits, rituals and taken-for-granted routines of everyday life, Silverstone's (1994) research makes a significant conceptual contribution. In examining the rhythmic ordering of the day's activities, he argues, it is necessary to discern the (often mundane) practices in and through which people sustain a personal sense of continuity from one day to the next. He points out that this feeling of constancy, of confidence in the stability of the world around us, is an important aspect of what Giddens (1990) has described as the project of 'ontological security' (see also McGuigan 1999).

Shaping a viewer's engagement with television, it follows, may be a deeply felt need for continuity as a kind of defence against the fears, worries or threats typically associated with an increasingly stressful world. Silverstone (1994: 16) suggests that of the various genres of programming on television, it is the news which most clearly demonstrates 'the dialectical articulation of anxiety and security'. It is precisely this dialectical tension between televisual news's creation of apprehension and its narrative resolution which encourages the viewer to find in the newscast a sense of reassurance. This sense of reassurance, as Silverstone (1994) proceeds to elaborate, is more closely tied to the form of the news programme than to the items within it:

> Reassurance is not provided only, of course, in the content of reporting. On the contrary. Yet the levels of anxiety that could be raised (and of course may well be either inevitably or deliberately raised) are ameliorated both in terms of the structure of the news as a programme (the tidying of papers, mutual smiles and silent chat following a 'human interest' story complete news bulletins, except under exceptional circumstance of crisis or catastrophe, all over the world), and in terms of its reliability and frequency.
>
> (Silverstone 1994: 16–17)

The embeddedness of television news in the cultures of everyday life thus corresponds to the structured regularity of its ritualized 'flow' (R. Williams 1974) of information (see also Allan 1997b). More than that, however, the daily repetition of its preferred ways of mediating society's risks and dangers generates a comforting sense of familiarity and predictability. Consequently, it is the combination of these factors which, according to Silverstone, underpins the creation and maintenance of the viewer's sense of well-being and trustful attachment to the world beyond the television screen.

To further develop this line of inquiry, the scheduling of newscasts over the course of the day is deserving of critical attention. Several researchers have argued that these structures presuppose a representative domestic pattern within the household

(current sub-genres being variations of breakfast news, lunchtime news, early evening news or suppertime news, the evening news, late-night news, and so forth). This inscription of television's institutional basis in its programming protocols is also revealed in the strategies employed to build and hold an audience throughout the day. Paterson's (1990: 31–2) discussion of the scheduler's lexicon identifies several of the key formulations in play, including 'inheritance factor' (a programme which follows a particularly popular one is likely to inherit a proportion of that audience), 'pre-echo' (people tuning into a programme often watch the end of the preceding one, and thus may be encouraged to watch it in future) and 'hammocking' or 'tent-poling' (a less popular programme is placed between two popular ones in order to benefit from inheritance and pre-echo), among others. Newscasts thus provide the scheduler with a means to facilitate the structuration of programming flow, namely by serving as points of transition in the routines of daily life and between different genres of entertainment (see also R. Williams 1986 [1984]; Scannell 1996; Harrington 1998; Langer 1998).

Morse (1986) illustrates some of the potential implications of these dynamics for those people who work both inside and outside of the household when she writes:

> Morning and prime time news occur at key thresholds in the day between work and leisure. Morning news precedes the transit from the privacy of the home, where one kind of reality prevails, to the realm of work, a reality with entirely different roles, hierarchies and rules. Morning news can be used as an alarm and pacing device to speed the viewer/auditor into the rhythms of the work world; the news, however lightly attended, may also orient her/him in social reality . . . In contrast, the evening news has a more hierarchical 'work' structure in its anchor–reporter relations, and the set, dress and demeanour of the news personalities are from the world of work and its imposed roles . . . The evening news is a mixed form . . . which aids the transition between one reality and another – between the attentiveness demanded by the world of work and the relaxation promoted by the TV fare of prime time drama and entertainment and the exhaustion of work.
>
> (Morse 1986: 74–5)

A number of these themes are echoed in Hjarvard's (1994) account of how news programmes perform a ritual function: by tying together the different elements of the schedule, news 'provides variation as well as continuity'. The privileged status of the news as a 'reality-oriented genre' tends to be exploited by schedulers: 'the openness of the news structure creates the impression that the earlier reported events continue in a parallel time, but "behind" the screen while we watch other programmes' (Hjarvard 1994: 314). This is an illusion, he argues, 'since social reality is not made up by a limited number of events, but by an infinite number of social interactions', and yet it is an illusion which has arisen because 'the reports of events have already been initiated as *continuous stories*' (Hjarvard 1994: 314).

In attempting to better understand the gendered dynamics of decoding, researchers

have recognized the necessity of investigating the actual ways in which women and men relate to televisual news, respectively. In an early study, entitled 'Housewives and the mass media', Hobson (1980) examines how a range of factors inform a sexual division of household labour which, in turn, conditions a gender-specificity with regard to programming preferences. Her female interviewees (young working-class mothers of small children) revealed a tendency to demarcate televisual news into a 'masculine' domain.

> There is an *active* choice of programmes which are understood to constitute the 'woman's world', coupled with a complete *rejection* of programmes which are presenting the 'man's world' [predominantly news, current affairs, 'scientific' and documentary programmes]. However, there is also an acceptance that the 'real' or 'man's world' is important, and the 'right' of their husbands to watch these programmes is respected: but it is not a world with which the women in this study wanted to concern themselves. In fact, the 'world', in terms of what is constructed as of 'news' value, is seen as both alien and hostile to the values of women.
>
> (Hobson 1980: 109)

The social world, as represented in news discourse, is generally seen by the women in this study to be 'depressing' and 'boring'. Still, Hobson (1980: 111) points out that 'the importance of accepted "news values" is recognised, and although their own world is seen as more interesting and relevant to them, it is also seen as secondary in rank to the "real" or "masculine" world' (see also Feuer 1986; A. Gray 1992; and also see Fiske's (1987: 308) critique of televisual news as 'masculine soap opera').

Morley (1986), in his study entitled *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*, reaffirms the general trajectory of Hobson's findings. Employing a qualitative, interview-based research strategy, Morley collected material from 18 inner London familial ('white', primarily working and lower middle class) households. Overall, Morley is able to suggest that once a distinction is made between 'viewing' and 'viewing attentively and with enjoyment', it is possible to discern a marked gendering of people's engagement with televisual news. Regarding programme type preference, Morley writes:

> My respondents displayed a notable consistency in this area, whereby masculinity was primarily identified with a strong preference for 'factual' programmes . . . and femininity identified with a preference for fictional programmes . . . Moreover the exceptions to this rule (where the wife prefers 'factual programmes', etc.), are themselves systematic. This occurs only where the wife, by virtue of educational background, is in the dominant position in terms of cultural capital.
>
> (Morley 1986: 162–3)

By accentuating this sense of the lived nature of the televisual news experience, Morley demonstrates why this medium needs to be located as an integral part of everyday life

in the household and as such acknowledged as one of several sites of contestation. Televisual news, as his work and that of Hobson illustrates, can be the object of a micropolitics of domestic power, the material nature of which may be shaped by the hierarchical dictates of familial ideology.

'How come they call it news if it's always the same?' is a rather intriguing question posed by a child in a *New Yorker* magazine cartoon (cited in Silverstone 1994: 16). Somewhat curiously given the amount of public debate concerning the possible 'effects' of television on young minds, investigations into children's engagement with televisual news in the household are few and far between. Much of the available research tends to suggest that televisual news (and current affairs) programmes are unlikely to be watched by children by choice. That is to say, typically they watch because that is what happens to be on at the time (who holds the 'remote control' or the 'zapper' is a question of power) or because they are under pressure to do so by their parents and teachers (or indirectly by their peer groups). Newscasts are generally seen to be lacking the qualities which those programmes actually popular with children possess to attract and hold their attention. Indeed, some research suggests that children are likely to consider televisual news to be 'too serious' and 'boring', and that when they do watch it they often find it both difficult to follow and emotionally unsettling.

Several pertinent issues are raised in this regard in a major study conducted by Sheldon (1998) with children between 5 and 12 years of age in Australia. Specifically, her study drew upon findings from both exploratory focus group discussions (29 groups in total, involving 225 children) and a quantitative opinion survey of 1602 children across 54 primary schools. These findings were then set in relation to data derived from interviews with parents (a matched sample of 517 mothers and fathers). It is interesting to note that in this study parents identified news and current affairs as being the types of programmes most likely to upset their children in this 5–12 age range. Responses cited by Sheldon (1998: 82–3) include:

> The news scenes, like the Somalia footage or children starving or if she sees guns on TV she'll cover her eyes – even documentaries with animals dying.
>
> (mother, 35–44 years)

> Current affairs stuff worries her, when she sees kids being hurt or older people being bashed or robbed – basically any injustices. Most of the stuff that upsets her is seen on the news. Any factual real life stuff.
>
> (father, 35–44 years)

The majority of the children taking part in the study (92 per cent) indicated that they watch the news, typically citing reasons such as personal interest (36 per cent) and a desire to find out what had happened that day (25 per cent). A common point of concern expressed was the impact of news imagery:

> We usually get our tea when the news is on and therefore I don't like watching it when all the blood and guts and that sort of stuff is on when you are eating.
>
> (Carlo, Grade 3/4)

Still, this study reports that the children generally felt that the news should be telling people what was taking place in the world.

> They need to show it because that is what happened and they are just showing what happened.
>
> (Alicia, Grade 5/6)

Overall, Sheldon (1998: 91) found that representations of violence were a major cause of concern for children, particularly for girls more so than boys, although 'for both sexes, "real life" television, as it is presented in news and current affairs programmes, was much more disturbing than fictional or fantasy violence'.

The day-to-day negotiation of televisual news by an older group of young people, mainly in the 14–18 age range, is one aspect of Gillespie's (1995) ethnographic study of media consumption. The subjects of her study are young people of Punjabi family background living in Southall, West London, evidently the largest South Asian community outside the Indian subcontinent. In focusing on how they engage with television as part of their everyday lives, Gillespie pays particular attention to issues of age, ethnicity and identity. An array of rich insights are produced into the domestic rituals of news viewing in families where teenagers often play a vital role in translating newscasts for their parents and grandparents. While most of the teenage informants in this study find it difficult to either understand Punjabi radio broadcasts or to read the Punjabi press (their parents' key points of reference), they are generally much better able to discuss news in English than their older family members.

This competence with televisual news helps them to acquire status as an adult. 'No matter how boring they find particular bulletins,' writes Gillespie (1995: 109), 'great significance is attached to TV news as a genre, because it is seen as an invitation to the world of adult affairs.' In the words of one of her informants:

> *Sangita*: 'You feel kind of grown up when you talk about the news, you know, it's serious, and you have to take some things seriously, but a lot of the time we just muck about, laugh and joke so talking about news is a way of growing up.'

By assuming this special responsibility as an interpreter, the teenagers are made to engage directly with a form of televisual discourse they typically regard as being both adult and middle class.

> *Pervinder*: 'By watching the news, your parents know that you've gone through a stage, that you can talk in an adult way, you watch them talking about the news in an adult way and then you begin to fit in you don't seem like a child any more . . . they treat you as a *chust* kid, you know, grown up.'

Herjinder: '. . . when you watch the news you get amazed at all the big words they use but you get a sense of how they are supposed to be used and that gives you another approach it sort of helps you to express yourself.'

In addition to vocabulary, accent and speech patterns, other factors which Gillespie (1995: 111) identifies as impeding the teenager's comprehension included the news-casts' authoritative mode of address, class-specific assumptions about background knowledge, and the duration and degree of detail used in the reports. Still, she points out that with their growing skills in translation, these teenagers are able to acquire fuller knowledge of the social world beyond certain cultural and linguistic barriers (see also Buckingham 1997; Barnhurst 1998; Barker 1999; Tester 2001).

A number of the underlying aspects of these approaches to the news audience are clarified through an innovative framework developed in the work of Jensen (1986, 1995). Here data were gathered through interviews with various individuals living in a metropolitan area of the north-eastern United States concerning their negotiation of televisual news in the household. In taking issue with the claim that the very process of watching televisual news may be properly conceived of as a politically oppositional activity in and by itself, Jensen argues that counter-hegemonic decod-ings are not in themselves a concrete materialization of political power. 'Resistance', he argues, 'is always resistance by someone, to something, for a purpose, and in a context' (Jensen 1995: 76). It follows that in addition to questioning whether or not the 'preferred meanings' of the newscast are accepted (or not) by the viewer, atten-tion needs to turn to consider the designated social uses of this genre of discourse and how they have evolved over time. Equally important, as well, are the changing forms of its actual relevance to viewers in terms of their lived experience of the everyday.

Briefly, Jensen (1995) identifies four general types of 'uses' which the viewers in his study ascribed to televisual news in terms of its significance for their daily lives.

First, televisual news has *contextual uses*, that is, the (usually gendered) roles and routines of ongoing activities in the household, especially with regard to domestic labour, are often partially structured by news viewing. The daily rhythms associated with news times, he argues, have become *naturalized*: 'There are no arguments [among the respondents], for example, that the evening news might be scheduled differently, fitting news to everyday life rather than vice versa' (Jensen 1995: 81).

Second, there are *informational uses* of televisual news for the viewers, particularly in their roles as 'consumer, employee, and, above all, as citizen and voter'. Here Jensen (1995: 84–5) discerns a tension in the interview material from his respondents between 'the active and public uses that are associated with the news genre in a political per-spective and . . . its more limited practical relevance for audiences in terms of "keeping up" with issues for the purpose of conversation or voting in political elections.' One respondent, identified only as a 'printer', is quoted by Jensen as making a typical statement about the opportunity for political participation:

> Well, I can vote. As far as taking any further, I don't know. I guess the opportunity will have to arise. Being, you know, I feel I'm just the average person out here.
>
> (Jensen 1995: 84)

Third, the implications of this tension for the social definition of news are even more pronounced with respect to what Jensen calls the *legitimizing uses* of televisual news. His interview material indicates that the political relevance of news to the viewer may be characterized in terms of the twin concepts of control and distance: 'The news may give its audience a sense of control over events in the world which would otherwise appear as distant . . . it is the *feeling* of control which is crucial, even if "you can't do anything about it" ' (Jensen 1995: 85). To the degree that televisual news is seen by the viewer to offer a 'generalized sense of community', then, it is equally likely to be considered to be an adequate forum for the articulation of public issues (see also Dahlgren and Sparks 1991, 1992; McLaughlin 1993, 1998; Garnham 1994; Corner 1995; Dahlgren 1995; Hartley 1996; Allan 1997a; Moeller 1999; Philo 1999; Tester 2001).

Finally, Jensen pinpoints the *diversional uses* of televisual news as discussed by his respondents, namely the variety of its visual pleasures for the viewer. The designated social uses for news, while generally defined by the respondents as distinct from those of entertainment, nevertheless share with them several important features. In particular, the 'holding power' of the visual narrative is deemed to be significant. The respondents attached salience not only to the visuals of the news events, which were seen as communicating 'a sense of experiential immediacy' (words such as 'pleasing', 'enjoyable', 'easy', 'vivid' and 'exciting' are used by the respondents), but also to the actual performance of the news. In the case of newsreaders, for example, both journalistic competence and personal appeal are stressed, while other respondents emphasized the appeal of 'nice, trivial information'.

Together, Jensen's four types of 'uses' suggest that although individuals make their own sense of what the political significance of the news is for them, their perceptions are constrained by the ways in which what counts as 'politics' is being represented.

> The reception of television news, accordingly, can be seen as an agent of *hegemony* which serves to reassert the limits of the political imagination . . . [E]ven though the social production of meaning may be seen as a process in which the prevailing definition of reality can be challenged and revised, the conditions of that process are established within particular historical and institutional frameworks of communication. The polysemy of mass media discourses is only a political potential, and the oppositional decoding of mass communication is not yet a manifestation of political power.
>
> (Jensen 1995: 90)

From this perspective, it follows that new research strategies need to be adopted so as to further explore the extent to which televisual news discourse operates to 'reassert the limits of the political imagination' through the lived conditions of the everyday (see

also Hagen 1994; Tester 1994). After all, as Jensen (1995: 77) contends: 'If audiences do not perceive news as a specific resource for political awareness and action, then, arguably, the legitimacy of the political process and its institutions is called into question.'

Conclusion

These explorations of the everydayness of news culture provide us with a rich starting point for further research. By engaging with the apparent 'normality' of how readers, listeners and viewers 'make sense' of the news, we are better able to look beyond the fixed text–audience dichotomy indicative of so much previous research on news audiences.

   Moreover, it has been shown that by situating the lived materiality of news culture within an evaluative context, we can begin to discern a conceptual pathway through, on the one hand, a deterministic model of the audience as passive onlookers whose thinking is controlled by a 'dominant ideology' and, on the other hand, a model which celebrates an active audience free to pick-and-choose any possible interpretation from a news text in an indeterminate manner. As we have seen, an alternative approach which recognizes the need to investigate people's deeply engrained habits of interacting with news discourses as part of their lived experience of the everyday, resists a rigid analytical separation of news discourse from the conditions of its decoding. In its place is a conceptual commitment to interrogating the fluidly contradictory cultural relations of textual negotiation in all of their attendant complexities. The materiality of news discourse, it follows, is made 'real' within certain variable yet determinant limits. That is to say, it is contingent upon the embodied experience of power relations as they traverse the contested terrain of ordinary culture.

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6 THE GENDERED REALITIES OF JOURNALISM

> For the women of my age, it is interesting to us that we now have an accusation that we are only where we are because we are women. For a long time we were told we couldn't be anywhere because we were women.
>
> (Cokie Roberts of **ABC News**)

> Writing about numbers of planes shot down and military hardware is the 'soft' option male journalists often go for, because it is easier and less taxing to one's emotional being.
>
> (Anne Sebba, British journalist)

Over one hundred years ago, a British trade newspaper published a rather telling news item on the growing prominence of women reporters. This July 1889 account announced the 'invasion of Fleet Street's sanctity [by] journalistic damsels everywhere taking their place at the reporters' table, or hurrying up to the offices about midnight with their "copy" – chiefly Society news' (cited in Hunter 1992: 688). If, from the vantage point of today, the use of this type of language to describe the work of female newsworkers is so anachronistic as to be almost amusing, this is not to deny that many of the gendered inequalities it inadvertently identifies are still with us.

   Neatly pinpointed in this quotation are a number of themes which will inform this chapter. In the first instance, for example, there is the notion of female journalists *invading the sanctity* of the newsroom – today it is still a predominantly male domain of work, the dynamics of which are largely shaped by patriarchal norms, values and traditions. Recurrently it is the case, as several of the studies to be discussed document, that women are being denied an equal place at the *reporters' table*. Similarly, the pejorative connotations of the phrase *journalistic damsels*, echoes of which are arguably discernible in the use of quotation marks around the word *copy*, highlight sexist assumptions about women's professional capacities as journalists. These assumptions, moreover, appear to correspond with a hierarchical division between the

'hard' news (serious and important) to be covered by male journalists and, in marked contrast, the *Society* or 'soft' news (trivial and insignificant) reported by female journalists. There is little doubt, of course, which type of news is to be understood as being consistent with the ethos of *Fleet Street*, and which type threatens its proclaimed journalistic integrity.

Turning to the early days of televisual news broadcasting in Britain, the ways in which appeals to 'journalistic integrity' were similarly gendered are all too apparent. The first woman to read the news regularly on national television (as noted in Chapter 2) was Barbara Mandell for Independent Television News, who began presenting the midday bulletin on 23 September 1955. Evidently it was Mandell's 'pleasant good looks, open manner and mellifluous voice' which Aidan Crawley, the first editor of ITN, thought made her particularly suited to newscasting (Purser 1998; see also Crawley 1988; Hayward 1998). Given the small audience that the noon bulletin attracted, however, cost-cutting measures meant that it was the first to be dropped from the news schedule in January 1956. It was not long before Mandell reappeared on the screen, however, this time introducing items as part of a 'domestic segment'. The painted set used as the backdrop for her presentation assumes a particular significance in ideological terms given that it depicted a household kitchen – until, reportedly, viewers complained about the unwashed dishes. As Geoffrey Cox, the next editor of ITN, would later remember: 'Her scripts were always very clear . . . and with a nice touch when that was needed. On screen she was not very assertive . . . nor was she a political person. But she had a very good voice' (cited in Purser 1998). Eventually Mandell returned to newscasting, if only briefly, when she was asked to present the Sunday evening bulletins. According to Cox's recollections: 'To put a woman in charge of a main bulletin in those days, I feared, would be seen as a gimmick.'

It would not be until 1960 before a BBC national televisual newscast regularly featured a female newsreader. Nan Winton briefly assumed this role on Sunday's 9:00 pm programme. As she later stated:

> I didn't realise what a revolutionary thing it was . . . I didn't have any trouble from the press or from the public, it was the editorial staff who were a bit dodgy, men in their middle years who'd come from Fleet Street . . . they certainly were a bit ambivalent about me. They were very, very serious about the News. It was a very serious business.
>
> (cited in Thumim 1998: 97)

These insights find an echo, as Thumim (1998) proceeds to show, in the words of Stuart Hood, a senior member of the BBC's directorate at the time:

> I thought it would be rather nice to have a woman news reader on television. Now this was greeted with alarm and dismay and resistance by my editors. The thought that a woman could be the conveyor of truth and authority on the television screen was something they just couldn't imagine, couldn't accept.
>
> (cited in Thumim 1998: 97)

This situation would improve only very slowly as the norms of televisual news were being consolidated institutionally (Angela Rippon became the BBC's first regular female newsreader in 1975; Anna Ford joined ITN's *News at Ten* in 1978). Although it is possible to identify several interventions to enhance the profile of women on television, as Thumim (1998: 102) maintains, it was the case that 'more often than not these foundered on the rocks of convention and prejudice, being perceived, in the event, as *unsuitable, distracting*, with insufficient *gravitas*.'

Today the day-to-day news culture of most newspaper and broadcast organizations is still being defined in predominantly male terms. While there has been a dramatic increase in the number of women securing jobs in journalism, white middle-class men continue to occupy the vast majority of positions of power throughout the sector. Women are still not being promoted to senior decision-making posts in proportion to the overall role they play in the profession. At a time when news organizations are facing ever-more intensive (and increasingly globalized) forms of competition, and when female readers, listeners and viewers remain elusive as ever, the costs of this failure to treat women fairly in the journalistic workplace continue to mount.

Feminist critiques of objectivity

To clarify several of the key issues at stake in this chapter's discussion, our attention turns in the first instance to the gender politics of 'objective' reporting. While critical researchers have succeeded in documenting the means by which journalists reproduce a professionalized news culture in their day-to-day activities, insufficient attention has been granted to the question of how gender relations shape these (largely unspoken) norms of reportage. In what ways, researchers may proceed to ask, do these professional norms centre the predispositions, 'habits of mind' and attitudes of white, middle-class male journalists? In other words, why is it usually the case that these journalists' 'instinctive' judgements about the 'credibility' or 'expertise' of news sources lead, in turn, to such a small portion of the accessed voices being those of women? Moreover, to what extent do male journalists regard their female colleagues as 'deviating' from these norms in their approaches to validating 'objective' truth-claims?

To be an 'impartial' reporter, as has been argued in previous chapters, means being socialized into obeying certain rituals of naming, describing and framing realities, even if 'objectivity' is self-reflexively posited as an ideal never to be entirely realized in practice. Feminist researchers have sought to intervene in the ongoing debates about news 'objectivity' from a variety of different vantage points. A principal point of contention concerns the gendering of the dominant discourses of truth being mobilized by journalists, that is, the extent to which a 'gender bias' is discernible in the ritualized practices of 'objective' news reporting. Here three distinct modes of inquiry may be briefly sketched as follows:

- *Neutrality position*: for some feminists seeking to uphold 'objectivity' as a journalistic ideal, the problem is one of male norms, values and beliefs being allowed to subjectively distort 'what really took place'. Good reporting, they maintain, is gender-neutral reporting. Advocates of this position call for journalists to observe a rigorous adherence to systematized methods of gathering and processing 'concrete facts' dispassionately so as to ensure that news accounts are strictly 'impartial'. The 'truth' of the 'real world' is to be discovered through these facts; 'gender biased' journalism can thus be avoided so long as news accounts accurately reflect reality.
- *Balance position*: other feminists have sought to highlight the gender-specificity of 'objectivity', that is, the essential distinctions between female and male apprehensions of reality derivative of sexual difference. In their view, only women are justified in speaking for women as a social group: personal experience, it follows, stands as the arbiter of 'truth'. Using a language of 'balance', they contend that 'objectivity' is primarily a matter of ensuring that male values are counterpoised by female ones in a given news account (or range thereof). This is to be achieved by news organizations employing equal numbers of male and female journalists, as well as through changes in newswork practices (such as ensuring that a representative selection of female voices are accessed as news sources).
- *Counter position*: a further position adopted by some feminists is marked by a resolve to effectively jettison the concept of 'objectivity' altogether due to its perceived complicity in legitimizing patriarchal hegemony. In their view, this concept prefigures a dichotomy between the knower and the known which is untenable: facts cannot be separated out from their ideological, and hence gendered, conditions of production. Moreover, they argue, the imposition of this false dichotomy is further masculinized to the extent that it obviates the experiences of women as being 'outside' the realm of what are proclaimed to be universally valid standards of reason, logic and rationality. What counts as 'truth' in a given instance is determined by who has the power to define reality.

It is evident from these differing positions, situated as they are among a myriad of alternative ones, that the relationship between discourses of 'objectivity' and gender relations is politically charged. Feminist efforts committed to deconstructing this relationship have sought to render problematic the often subtle, taken-for-granted strategies in and through which journalists, knowingly or not, routinely define 'what counts as reality' in alignment with patriarchal renderings of the social world.

This reference to defining 'reality' resonates with a diverse range of feminist critiques of Enlightenment thought, in general, and masculinist definitions of truth, in particular. The final declaration of truth under relations of patriarchy, many of these critiques contend, is imposed upon women by men as a means to legitimize diverse forms of oppression. The invocation of a monologic truth is masculinized to the extent that (predominantly white, elite) men's orientations to 'the world of facts' are accepted

as the most *appropriate* vantage points from which the immutable truth of reality is to be revealed. Taken for granted in this masculinist epistemology is the presupposition that reality may be assumed to be a *given* (it exists 'out there'), and that as such it constitutes the standard by which truth and falsity are to be impartially measured. Once it is resolved that there is one, absolute Truth, then the 'search for objectivity' becomes essential if the ideal of abstract, universal knowledge is to be realised. Male hegemony is thus contingent upon the displacement of counter-hegemonic, namely feminist, discourses as being complicit in the 'distortion' or misrepresentation of reality.

A key point of contention for a range of feminist interventions, therefore, has been the (often tacit) masculine/feminine dichotomy prefigured in androcentric definitions of knowledge. More specifically, the gendered basis of this hierarchical dichotomy has been shown to be dependent upon a separation of the knower (subject) from the known (object). This separation naturalizes, to varying degrees, a series of dualisms whereby 'masculine' discourses about reality (held to be objective, rational, abstract, coherent, unitary and active) are discursively privileged over 'feminine' ones (posited as subjective, irrational, emotional, partial, fragmented and passive). Implied in this dynamic is the precept that 'feminine knowledge' is to be understood as being inferior to 'masculine truth' and, as such, is to be recognized as constituting its Other. This conflation of the masculine with the rational, and the feminine with the irrational, serves to sanction the exclusion of women's truth-claims as falling outside the pre-scribed parameters of reason (reason is deemed to both represent and embody truth). It is only 'logical', on these grounds, that women are to be denied the authoritative status of 'objective knower'.

Not surprisingly, then, the appeal to 'objectivity' becomes a defensive strategy, one which assists the journalist in countering charges of sexism (as well as those of racism, among others) being levelled at specific instances of reporting. A journalism genuinely committed to impartiality, its adherents insist, cannot be sexist. So long as the appropriate procedural rules are followed, 'tangible facts' will be separated out from the values expressed through partisan argument and opinion; indeed, it is the task of the 'good' reporter to ensure that this segregation is achieved. Consequently, the jour-nalist's invocation of 'objectivity' may be analysed as an androcentric instance of def-initional power to the extent that it ex-nominates (places beyond 'common sense') those truth-claims which do not adhere to masculinist assumptions about the social world.

Macho culture of newswork

In attempting to prioritize for discussion the 'objective' journalist's claim of referential transparency, this issue of how relations of patriarchy inform the 'discipline of object-ivity' as a seemingly apolitical ('gender-neutral') normative ideal is critical. Such a problematic avoids many of the familiar pitfalls of the 'objectivity' versus 'bias' debate as it has developed in various studies of news discourse. At stake, in my view, is the

need to recentre the problem of representation in a way which overcomes the limitations of those approaches which, on the one hand, consider news language to be 'value-neutral', and those approaches which, on the other hand, treat it as being inescapably determined by patriarchal values. Such an approach, I want to suggest, entails a commitment to exploring the multiplicity of (en)gendered orientations *encouraged*, but not compelled, by a news account's inflection of truth.

In order to secure a politicized understanding of news discourse as an (en)gendered construction, then, attention needs to address the newsroom as a site of power. More specifically, the intricate ways in which the ontological hierarchies of gender relations shape the journalist's everyday, routine methods of processing 'reality' need to be unravelled. In attempting to examine the ways in which gender is embedded in the work routines of the newsroom, Steiner (1998) poses a series of vital questions:

> Do reporters' perceptions enter into their work, for example, in their definitions of newsworthiness, choice of assignments, approaches to sources, or ethical decision-making? What have been the power relations operating in the production of news work? Who has helped whom? Who provided encouragement and mentoring? What are the consequences of working with stubborn colleagues or dictatorial editors? What about sexual harassment in the newsroom? Or being underpaid, or underappreciated, or underutilized? Or being positioned as the token woman on staff?
>
> (Steiner 1998: 145–6)

Answers to questions such as these are anything but straightforward, particularly when the 'gender issue' is typically defined in exclusively female terms. That is to say, the dictates of male-centred reporting dynamics are only rarely problematized *vis-à-vis* questions of 'maleness' or 'masculinity'; instead, they are much more likely to be regarded as simply being consistent with institutional norms (see also Croteau and Hoynes 1992; Allan 1998b). In the words of one male journalist writing for *The Independent*: 'The way papers are produced may have changed dramatically in the last decade – green screens replacing eyeshades and metal spikes – but a macho culture still reigns in the nation's newsrooms' (R. Brown 1997: 3).

Studies of British news organizations recurrently show that the vast majority of senior decision makers are men, with most estimates placing the number at higher than 80 per cent (see Dougary 1994; Tunstall 1996; Christmas 1997). A research study conducted by MORI Online for Women in Journalism (WIJ), which interviewed a random survey of 537 national newspaper and magazine journalists by telephone in the autumn of 1997, suggests that most female journalists earn less than male journalists of the same age (Women in Journalism 1998; see also Viner 1998). Moreover, as these women age, and have children, they typically lose a significant degree of status within news organizations compared to that enjoyed by their male colleagues. Findings concerning their respective perceptions and personal experiences of sexual discrimination are telling (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2).

Table 6.1 Do you think it is more difficult for capable women journalists to get ahead in their careers (by comparison with capable men journalists), or not?

	All				Newspapers				Magazines			
	Men no kids	*Women no kids*	*Men with kids*	*Women with kids*	*Men no kids*	*Women no kids*	*Men with kids*	*Women with kids*	*Men no kids*	*Women no kids*	*Men with kids*	*Women with kids*
Yes	34%	50%	24%	51%	33%	45%	11%	70%	35%	52%	42%	42%
No	61%	43%	70%	36%	63%	46%	84%	25%	60%	43%	52%	42%

Source: Women in Journalism 1998

Table 6.2 Have you had personal experience, or knowledge, of women being the victims of prejudice in the newsroom?

	All		Newspapers		Magazines	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Yes	28%	51%	29%	63%	26%	48%
No	71%	48%	71%	35%	72%	52%

	All				Newspapers				Magazines			
	Men no kids	Women no kids	Men with kids	Women with kids	Men no kids	Women no kids	Men with kids	Women with kids	Men no kids	Women no kids	Men with kids	Women with kids
Yes	35%	52%	19%	50%	40%	69%	18%	57%	30%	49%	19%	46%
No	64%	48%	81%	48%	60%	30%	82%	39%	67%	51%	81%	52%

These findings suggest, for example, that 70 per cent of the women newspaper journalists surveyed who have children believe that it is more difficult for capable women journalists to get ahead in their careers, compared with 11 per cent of men with children who agree that this was the case. Moreover, women working on newspapers were much more likely to have had personal experience or knowledge of sexual discrimination against women in the newsroom (63 per cent) than did the men (29 per cent; thereby indicating that 71 per cent claimed not to have any such knowledge) in this survey.

Similar patterns are evident in the news organizations of other countries. In the case of the USA, the 1990s have seen women's presence in the newsroom increase to about one-third of the journalistic workforce, and yet they are still routinely denied the opportunity to compete fairly for a senior position. Drawing on a range of statistical studies, Lafky (1993: 90) suggests that there has been very little progress since the mid-1980s when 'only 6 per cent of the top newspaper jobs and 25 per cent of the middle management newspaper jobs were held by women' (see also Stewart 1997). If the invisible barrier or 'glass ceiling' impeding the advancement of women in the profession has been weakened by affirmative action programmes, it nevertheless remains largely intact. Progress *is* being made, however, if all too slowly. Televisual newscaster Cokie Roberts of ABC News, speaking during an interview on CNN's *Larry King Live*, described her own experience:

> Well, pre-affirmative action, when I was looking for jobs early on, people said, out loud and without any hesitation, 'We don't hire women to do that. We will not hire women to deliver the news. Their voices are not authoritative. We don't hire women as writers. Men would have to work for them, and we can't have that.' It was overt, and nobody was even embarrassed about it.
>
> (transcript in Braver 1997)

Similarly, Jane Pauley, a newscaster with NBC News, had this to say in the same interview:

> when I got my job at WISH-TV in Indianapolis, the news director interviewed 30, 50, 100, whatever, women, because he had to find a woman. It was FCC [Federal Communications Commission] license renewal time in that newsroom, and there were no women in the newsroom, there were none . . . I don't know whether it was a quota, but that's why they were looking for a [female reporter].
>
> (transcript in Braver 1997)

The success of these two journalists notwithstanding, an adequate degree of diversity in the newsroom is a long way from being realized. 'How can you have a democracy and a free press,' asks newspaper columnist Barbara Reynolds, 'when 95 percent of all the decisions made in the media are made by white males?' (cited in Altschull 1995: 185; see also Foote 1992; Bradley 1998).

Van Zoonen (1998: 34), drawing upon her own research into the Dutch news media

as well as a survey of an international range of studies conducted since the early 1980s, identifies the following recurrent inequalities:

- daily journalism, whether it is print or broadcasting, is dominated by men
- the higher up the hierarchy or the more prestigious a particular medium or section is, the less likely it is to find women
- women tend to work in areas of journalism that can be considered an extension of their domestic responsibilities and their socially assigned qualities of care, nurturing and humanity
- regardless of difference in years of experience, education level and other socio-economic factors, women are paid less for the same work.

Underpinning these inequalities, she argues, are discriminatory recruitment procedures stemming from sexist attitudes among key decision makers in the news production process. As Skidmore (1998: 207) suggests in light of the evidence that she has gathered among British newsworkers, 'male dominance in journalism has produced a macho culture of newsgathering – aggressive and domineering but also one of male camaraderie and "bonding" – which excludes women' (see also Sebba 1994).

Female journalists working in this predominantly male environment, according to much of the available feminist research in a range of national contexts, are regularly pressured to adopt masculinized forms of reporting which some find to be inconsistent with their own professional identity and thus alienating (there can also be, as Santos (1997: 123) argues, a professionally driven tendency 'to write white'). As would be anticipated given this situation, and as has been documented by feminist researchers, the interests of female journalists as participants in defining the organization's news agenda often encounter considerable resistance from male colleagues. Not only are they likely to find themselves being assigned 'soft' news assignments, customarily deemed by their male colleagues to be of lesser importance, but also they have to live up to what van Zoonen (1998) characterizes as a 'double requirement'. That is to say, women reporters are often compelled to demonstrate that they can be 'good' journalists while still being 'real', 'truly feminine' women. In the Netherlands, van Zoonen maintains:

> many female journalists feel that they are primarily judged as women; they are subject to ongoing comments on their looks and they have to regularly confront friendly heterosexual invitations or unfriendly sexual harassment. Playing the game of heterosexual romance means that women will lose their prestige as professional journalists. But women who ignore it, or worse – criticize it – will not be accepted by their male colleagues as real women; instead they are seen as bitches, viragos or – the worst – 'feminists'.
>
> (van Zoonen 1998: 37)

These kinds of tensions can be particularly evident where 'old boys' networks are in operation within the organization and, as is often the case, at the level of news sources (see also Alwood 1996; Ross 2001).

Investigations into the gender politics of sourcing information highlight the extent to which news accounts continue to privilege the truth-claims of male sources and spokespersons. Despite the growing numbers of female politicians, public officials and other professionals, van Zoonen (1998: 35) argues, it is overwhelmingly the case that the sources journalists choose to include in their accounts are male. These choices are seen to be 'reflecting the personal networks of male journalists rather than being a representation of actual gender divisions among sources' (van Zoonen 1998: 35–6). This systemic under-representation of women as news actors and as expert sources (as well as their limited appearance as reporters) needs to be contextualized in relation to the patterns of discrimination they encounter across the (mutually determining) 'public' and 'private' spheres (McLaughlin 1993; Fraser 1994; see also Allan 1997a). When women's voices are actualized in news accounts, as Holland (1987) points out:

> it tends to be either as an anonymous example of uninformed public opinion, as housewife, consumer, neighbour, or as mother, sister, wife of the man in the news, or as victim – of crime, disaster, political policy. Thus not only do they speak less frequently, but they tend to speak as passive reactors and witnesses to public events rather than as participants in those events.
>
> (Holland 1987: 138–9)

A further pertinent aspect of this issue, as Kitzinger (1998) argues, concerns how journalists are themselves judged in relation to source dynamics. In her interviews with British journalists, she found that 'although both male and female journalists used their "gut feelings" in judging source credibility, some female journalists claimed that their "gut feelings" were dismissed by male editors as "subjective" or "biased".' This when, at the same time, 'their male colleague's "gut feelings" were seen to constitute "common sense" or "professional instinct" '(Kitzinger 1998: 198).

In light of issues such as these, then, it is apparent that these norms of reportage need to be contextualized in relation to longstanding institutional power differentials within the journalistic workplace (where they tend to be all too readily defended with reference to a work ethos consistent with masculinized 'traditions' and 'customs'). Most newsrooms appear to be characterized by a gendered division between 'hard' news (such as economics, politics, government and crime) reporters, who tend to be men, and 'features' reporters, who are more likely, at least in relative terms, to be women. This division, far from correlating with the 'natural competencies' of individual male and female reporters ('men are better suited for the cut-and-thrust of hard news'), is frequently indicative of a sexual division of labour in the journalist's own household. Female reporters are more likely to experience a 'double-day' of work, one where they perform a disproportionate share of domestic (especially child care) responsibilities, than do their 'more professionally committed' male colleagues (see Lafky 1993; van Zoonen 1994; Lont 1995; see also Adam 1995). These forms of labour are somewhat easier to manage in relation to the more regularized, structured and predictable hours associated with features reporting.

Some feminists make the additional point that sexualized divisions of newswork are also embedded in the reporting process at the level of narrative modes of address. 'Even when women select the same news content as men,' according to Linda Christmas (1997: 3), a journalist with over 30 years of experience in newspaper and televisual news, 'they write it in a different manner.' In her view:

> Women want news that is 'relevant', news you can 'identify with', news that is explained in terms of their lives. Issues therefore are 'personalised', or 'humanised' in order that the reader understands the relevance. This move recognises: that women prefer to communicate with the reader; they put readers' needs above those of policy-makers and other providers of news; that women tend to be more 'people' oriented rather than issue orientated; that women place greater importance on seeing news 'in context' rather than in isolation; and that women like to explain the consequences of events.
>
> (Christmas 1997: 3)

Following this line of argument, then, several feminists have called for further research to be undertaken into the means by which news is being distorted by a 'male bias'. That is, they seek to draw attention to how certain masculinized practices of reporting are being mobilized, intentionally or not, to justify the entrenchment of patriarchal news values at the expense of female-centred ones. The androcentric imperatives of journalism are discernible not only in definitions of newsworthiness, they argue, but also in the ruthless competition to be first with the news (so as to 'scoop' rivals), an over-reliance on male sources, and a fetishization of facts for their own sake (typically presented outside of their social, and therefore gendered, context).

At this level, and in light of the developments described above, new investigations are focusing on the changing nature of women's occupational status within news organizations. It is a shared conviction among many female journalists (as well as their academic counterparts) that the increased presence of women in the newsroom will necessarily encourage substantive changes in newswork practices. Women, some feminists argue, are more inclined than men to endorse informal, non-hierarchical management structures and to support collectively based decision-making processes. One example which appears to illustrate this point concerns Karla Garrett Harshaw, one of the very few African American daily newspaper editors in the USA. She maintains that she would never have advanced to her current position had she followed the advice of her white male supervisors:

> At the time that I was expressing interest in middle management – I wanted to become an assistant city editor – one upper level manager was pretty candid about telling me that I didn't fit the image of a newsroom manager. One of the things he said was that I laughed a lot, people liked me and that my general personality was very different from people who were in middle management. If you looked around

the newsroom at the people who were in middle management, they were young white males . . . I was energized by that conversation.

<div align="right">(cited in Stewart 1997: 69)</div>

These types of developments need to be set in relation to current trends in the 'downsizing' of news organizations, however, as the number of journalists they employ are often being 'trimmed back' just as women are beginning to make serious inroads into management. 'Many journalists of color', Stewart (1997: 85–6) observes, 'feel that the shutdowns and cutbacks have a more adverse effect on minorities, especially minority women, because when layoffs occur the most recently hired workers are generally terminated.'

In terms of news content, more female reporters arguably means that the lines between 'hard' and 'soft' news will continue to blur, leading to a news agenda defined more closely with strong 'human interest' angles. At the same time, however, other researchers have questioned the extent to which arguments such as these can be supported as a general rule. Many are sceptical of the claim that there is a 'woman's perspective' which female journalists inevitably bring to their reporting. Many of these feminists have initiated a conceptual shift in order to look beyond notions such as 'male bias', a term they suggest prefigures the possibility of 'non-bias' and with it 'gender-neutrality'. From this vantage point, the notion of 'male bias' is an idealistic formulation and, as such, is untenable from a perspective aiming to explicate the lived negotiation of gender relations within contested matrices of power. In their view, there are no essential categories of 'maleness' and 'femaleness' which male and female journalists (or their readers) occupy, respectively. 'The most difficult question for women', writes Arthurs (1994: 83), 'is how to transform [media] institutions in a way that will give a voice to their aspirations and experiences without falling back on an unchanging and undifferentiated definition of what it means to be female.'

Critical analyses, I want to propose, may proceed to engage in the difficult task of deconstructing the prevailing norms of newswork so as to pinpoint the ways in which the 'macho culture' of the newsroom (and 'in the field') is reproduced on a day-to-day basis. The enduring salience of discourses of 'objectivity', it follows, needs to be understood within these (sometimes hostile) occupational contexts. For it is at the level of the everyday, in the ordinary and often mundane activities of processing 'raw facts', that certain types of news values, information gathering techniques and styles of presentation inform not only the construction of truth but also its narration in androcentric terms.

Gender politics of representation

Feminist and gender-sensitive forms of textual analysis have long been concerned with how women are portrayed in news media discourses, much of this work employing the

notion of 'stereotypes' to advantage. Stereotypes are typically defined in this type of research as consisting of 'standardized mental pictures' which provide sexist judgements about women such that their subordinate status within a male-dominated society is symbolically reinforced. Consequently, a journalist's deployment of these stereotypes, far from being harmless, trivial or 'just a bit of fun', is instead seen to be contributing to the ideological reproduction of patriarchal social relations. Demands to reform these types of stereotypical practices in journalism have tended to centre on the need to make news texts more 'accurate' or 'true to real life' in their depiction of women's experiences. At the same time, other feminists have sought to radically extend this notion of 'stereotyping' so as to highlight the fluidly contradictory, and often contested, cultural dynamics underpinning their ideological purchase. Much of this work has initiated a conceptual shift to elaborate the attendant issues of representation in terms of the hegemonic gendering of news as a masculinized form of discourse.

In Britain, one particularly salient controversy over the representation of women is the case of the 'topless' female models routinely displayed on Page Three of the tabloid newspaper, the *Sun* (easily the best-selling daily title in Britain). The *Sun*'s 'Page Three principle', as Holland (1983, 1998) describes it, is one aspect of the tabloid's relentless pursuit of 'pleasure'. This invitation to the reader to partake in the celebratory enjoyment on offer through its photographs, layout, language and mode of address is all too clearly gendered around heterosexual male privilege. As Holland (1983: 85) writes:

> A purveyor of pleasures, an organiser of your pleasures, my pleasures . . . But are they my pleasures? Am I not, rather, repelled by those pleasures called on by the *Sun*, by its appeal to a trivial sexuality, by its insults to the female body, by its jokes at the expense of women, its flippancy . . . To put it bluntly, I know the *Sun* does not want me. The *Sun* does not want spoilsports, killjoys, those who are not prepared to join in the high jinks, the sauciness, to allow a flirty encounter to brighten their day.
>
> (Holland 1983: 85)

Only true '*Sun*-lovers' can appreciate the Page Three 'girls', 'those luscious ladies you drool over at breakfast' (the use of 'you' here, as Holland suggests, separates out from the audience those 'men who share the joke'). 'Page Three dominates the meaning of "woman" in the *Sun*,' according to Holland (1983: 93), 'and women readers must cope with this meaning.' This type of imagery addresses a female audience, she argues, in part through the *Sun*'s conviction that the Page Three principle is embodied in all women: 'It is part of the *Sun*'s discourse on female sexuality which invites sexual enjoyment, sexual freedom and active participation in heterosexual activity' (1983: 93; see also Stratford 1992).

The *Sun*'s construction of a 'willing and eager female sexuality' across its pages, Holland contends, represents a constant struggle to define and contain a cultural politics of sexual identity. To contextualize the ideological appeals mobilized by the *Sun* in historical terms, the tabloid needs to be situated as part of a stridently rightward,

pro-Thatcherite movement associated with Kelvin MacKenzie who took over the editorship in 1981. 'The central image of the semi-naked "nice girl" and her welcoming smile', she writes, 'was developed as a politics of disengagement' (1998: 25). To illustrate this point, Holland (1998: 26) proceeds to quote from an item, captioned 'Page Three is good for you', published alongside a Page Three photograph in 1984:

> P3's titillating tit-bits are just what the doctor ordered – as a tonic against all the world's gloomy news. Research has shown that the *Sun*'s famous glamour pictures are a vital bit of cheer for readers depressed by strikes, deaths and disasters.
>
> (Holland 1998: 26)

Evidence of this 'research' takes the form of this quotation attributed to 'A London psychologist' in the item:

> When you think how gloomy and threatening most of the news has been lately – strikes, assassinations, hijacks, starving millions and the falling pound – you need Page Three as a shot in the arm. I am sure the *Sun*'s famous beauties are a vital safely valve for the country's men when things in general seem to be getting out of hand.

It is at the level of Page Three that the *Sun* arguably seeks to dictate the terms by which issues of sexuality and lifestyle are to be normalized most clearly. Holland (1998) uses the phrase 'intemperate abuse' to characterize the *Sun*'s language of representation in this regard. 'In the daily mosaic of the newspaper,' she writes, 'the image of the sexy woman continues to be laid against female demons like single mothers, lesbian teachers and ugly women' (1998: 26; here the participation of some female journalists in the apparent 'laddish' culture at the tabloid is similarly relevant. For example, it was the Woman's Editor, Wendy Henry, who reportedly shouted the word 'Gotcha!' when the news came in over the teleprinter that an Argentine warship had been sunk by a British submarine during the Falklands/Malvinas conflict, the word later being used as the infamous headline for the story: Engel 1996: 274; see also Chippendale and Horrie 1992).

In the case of 'supermarket tabloids' in the USA, studies suggest that their representations of women almost always reaffirm patriarchal definitions of 'femininity' (needless to say, feminists – or 'women's libbers' as they are invariably called in these titles – are typically portrayed as constituting a threat to 'decent folk'). Still, as Bird (1992) argues, it is important to note that women are at least present in tabloid news to a far greater extent than they are in so-called 'mainstream' news discourse. Although this enhanced degree of presence is understandable given that the readership for these types of tabloids is predominantly female, it is surprising that it has not led to a greater range of representations being mobilized. Instead, the dominant news values in play present what Bird describes as a 'distinctly conservative picture of women', albeit one which leaves at least some space for negotiation around the borders. More specifically, according to her examination of tabloid content, Bird's study contends that:

marriage and children are of prime importance – tabloid heroines are not success-
ful career women but women who make unusual marriages and succeed as
mothers. Villains, on the other hand, are women (and men) who disrupt the
family ideal. Celebrities are often seen as hopelessly pursuing the quest for a
perfect marriage and family; perennial favorites . . . will never be truly happy until
they find the perfect mate.

<div align="right">(Bird 1992: 76–7)</div>

In so doing, the tabloids attribute a positive value to many aspects of daily life, particu-
larly nurturing and personal relationships, typically devalued elsewhere in the news
media due to their identification as being 'feminine'.

In seeking to contextualize these insights in relation to the findings gathered via her
readership study, Bird maintains that the ways in which her female respondents actively
insert tabloid narratives into their lives are directly linked to this affirmation of familial
ideology. These respondents evidently place a high value on the tabloids due to the
validation they offer for their concerns for family and interpersonal relations. This is
the case, she suggests, even though 'many had lived or were living very difficult lives,
victims of spouse abuse, lack of money, and the generalized oppression of being
an "old-fashioned housewife" ' (Bird 1992: 208). She proceeds to suggest that these
tabloids help their female readers to feel better about themselves, to cope more effect-
ively with daily experiences of inequality. This sense of pleasure and comfort is not to
be confused, however, with a project of empowerment to actually help readers to
change their lives. Rather, this type of publication, in Bird's (1992: 209) words, 'charms
its readers and beckons them into a world where life is dangerous and exciting. But
when the journey is done, it soothes them with reassurances that, be it ever so humble,
there really is no place like home.'

Returning to the so-called 'serious', 'objective' news media in both Britain and the
USA, it is fair to say that instances of blatantly sexist reporting typically appear far less
frequently than they do in places such as the 'scandal sheets'. As some critics have
argued, however, the forms of sexism associated with the 'quality end of the market'
can be all the more insidious for being communicated inferentially as opposed to
explicitly. My reading of British newspaper and broadcast news suggests that invoca-
tions of reality asserted by men may be shown consistently, but not exclusively, to
command the available discursive terrain over those advanced by women. The boundar-
ies demarcating this terrain are fluid and yet contingent, that is, while they undergo
constant changes in alignment with the diverse pressures (hegemonic and counter-
hegemonic) brought to bear upon them, they will remain hierarchically grounded in
conditions of dominance so long as patriarchal truth-claims are deemed to correspond
with 'the real world'.

This patriarchal inflection of truth, far from occurring in a wildly indeterminate
manner, takes place within what is a discursive economy of Otherness where women's
experiences are recurrently effaced, trivialized or marginalized. This despite the codes

of 'objective' reporting which dictate, as noted above, that such evaluations should not take place on the basis of gender; rather, 'the facts must be allowed to speak for themselves'. Significantly, however, the gendered-specificity of these codes is all too often apparent, for example, in the newsworker's use of

- generic pronouns such as 'he' to refer to both male and female news actors, or in phrases where 'public opinion' is reduced to 'the views of the man on the street'
- an explicit marking of gender when the news actor is female (e.g. 'the female judge' as opposed to 'the judge')
- the use of gendered descriptive terms (a woman's age, physical appearance and marital status are much more likely to be seen as relevant than they will be for men)
- male-centred naming strategies ('wife', 'girlfriend', 'mistress').

Due, in part, to these types of codified practices, women are regularly depicted as passive, and sexualized, agents to be defined in relation to an active male news actor (see also Rakow and Kranich 1991; Cameron 1992; Clark 1992; Mills 1995; Hartley 1998).

Discursive practices such as these invite, to varying degrees, the reader to adopt a textually preferred, that is, masculinized, reading position as being inferentially consistent with 'objectivity'. The oft-repeated dictum that 'hard news requires hard newsmen' simultaneously prefigures a male reader as the projected norm. Crucial questions may therefore be raised regarding the range of presumptions about 'the audience' being operationalized as 'common sense' in the language of the news account. By asking: 'who is the implied reader of this account?' the subtle (or, for the British tabloid press, often not so subtle) discursive strategies by which the account's assumed audience is situated in gendered (and frequently explicitly racialized) terms may be disrupted. In the case of British newspaper discourse, for example, a reader typified as male is likely to be positioned as being primarily interested in public affairs (the realms of business, government and sport), while the assumed female reader tends to be positioned as being more interested in personally 'private' or domestic concerns, such as health, 'relationships', fashion, 'beauty' and child care. In many ways, then, the news account's ascription of different attributes and interests to its male and female readers, respectively, directly corresponds with the patriarchal (as well as class-specific and ethnocentric) rationales underpinning the 'pursuit of objectivity'.

Still, many newspaper commentators are now pointing to what they claim is a growing **'feminization' of the news**. News organizations, they argue, are becoming ever more inclined to attract female readers, often due to the influence of advertisers. While the subject of much debate among journalists, it would appear that the rising importance of women as a distinct audience group in demographic terms is helping to dissolve this 'hard' versus 'soft' news dichotomy. So-called 'women's issues', once almost entirely restricted to the 'women's page' or its equivalent because they were deemed by male newsworkers to be 'trivial', 'light-weight' or, at best, 'human interest' stories, are

increasingly finding their way onto the 'hard' news agenda. Whether or not this shift will be sustained, and what long-term impact (if any) it will have on the prevailing 'macho culture' in the newsroom discussed above, remains to be seen. As will become apparent in the next section, researchers committed to investigating news coverage of male acts of violence against women, for example, have every reason to be sceptical.

(En)gendering violence in the news

Reports of male violence being perpetrated against women have appeared in the news on a routine basis since the emergence of popular newspapers in the nineteenth century. In both Britain and the USA, as noted in Chapter 1, it was the emergence of a popular press in the nineteenth century which ushered in fresh types of news values. These newspapers placed a particular emphasis on luridly sensational crime stories, frequently attempting to regale their readers with news stories revolving around sex and violence (see Chibnall 1977; Schudson 1978; Carter and Thompson 1997; Carter and Weaver 2003).

In the context of her historical overview of the growth of sex crime coverage in the USA, Benedict (1992) examines several instances of pertinent newspaper coverage. Of particular relevance, she observes, are the sexist (and frequently racist) assumptions underpinning the news language typically being used to represent these crimes. More specifically, her evidence indicates that US newspapers, to varying degrees, habitually draw upon two types of narratives which serve to reinforce a certain rape 'mythology' which is highly dangerous. These two narratives, in Benedict's (1992) words, tend to assume the following form:

> The 'Vamp' version: *The woman, by her looks, behavior or generally loose moral-*
> *ity, drove the man to such extremes of lust that he was compelled to commit the*
> *crime.*
> The 'Virgin' version: *The man, a depraved and perverted monster, sullied the*
> *innocent victim, who is now a martyr to the flaws of society.*
>
> (Benedict 1992: 23)

Both of these narratives, she argues, are harmful both to the survivors of a rape attack and to public understanding of this type of event. 'The vamp version', according to Benedict (1992: 24), 'is destructive because it blames the victim of the crime instead of the perpetrator.' The virgin version is similarly destructive in her view because 'it perpetuates the idea that women can be only Madonnas or whores, paints women dishonestly, and relies on portraying the suspects as inhuman monsters' (Benedict 1992: 24).

To the extent that these narratives are imposed (often unconsciously) by journalists on the sex crimes they cover, Benedict contends, certain rape myths will be validated. Examples of these rape myths she identifies include 'rape is sex', 'the assailant is

motivated by lust', 'the assailant is perverted or crazy', 'the assailant is usually black or lower class', 'women provoke rape', 'women deserve rape', 'only "loose" women are victimised', 'a sexual attack sullies the victim', 'rape is a punishment for past deeds' and 'women cry rape for revenge'. It is precisely these kinds of rape myths which, in her view, force journalists to represent survivors of sex crimes in accordance with the false images generated by the two news narratives outlined above. 'As long as the rape myths hold sway,' Benedict (1992: 24) writes, 'journalists are going to continue to be faced with the excruciating choice between painting victims as virgins or vamps – a choice between lies.'

Further evidence to support this line of inquiry may be found in Meyers's (1997) examination of how local journalists report male violence against women in Atlanta, Georgia, a city with one of the highest homicide rates in the USA. Echoing Benedict's (1992) argument briefly sketched above, she similarly maintains that news representations of female survivors of male violence typically polarize around a culturally defined 'virgin-whore' or 'good girl–bad girl' dichotomy which conceals the gendered patterns of domination and control endemic to social structures. Indeed, on the basis of her textual analysis of the reporting of anti-women violence on the pages of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, as well as the televisual news coverage aired on the city's network affiliates, Meyers (1997) goes so far as to state:

> By perpetuating male supremacist ideology and the myths, stereotypes, and assumptions that underlie it, the news ultimately encourages violence against women. News reports of women as victims of sexist violence act as both a warning to women and a form of social control that outlines the boundaries of acceptable behavior and the forms of retribution they can expect for transgression . . . [T]he vulnerability of women is a given and, linked to questions of complicity, remains lurking in the shadows of representation. Was she where she shouldn't have been? Did she fail to take precautions – to lock a door, to arrange for security? Did she do something to provoke the attack?
>
> (Meyers 1997: 9)

The findings Meyers draws from her textual analysis of anti-women news coverage lead her to suggest, in turn, that the conventional forms of news presentation associated with these crimes are actually harmful to the interests of all women (see also Weaver 1998). News reports which blame victims instead of treating them with respect contribute to the reinforcement of prejudice at a societal level, she argues, while the humiliation, guilt or anguish they cause to the women involved is almost never acknowledged.

The material Meyers gathers through in-depth interviews held with eight reporters and one editor working in the Atlanta metropolitan area concerning how they go about processing news about sex crimes is similarly illuminating. Given that these journalists are confronted with a relatively large number of acts of violence to potentially cover, Meyers was interested to know about the standards of newsworthiness being applied.

Although differences in emphasis are recognizable between the individual interviewee's respective experiences in newspaper, radio and televisual journalism, it quickly becomes apparent that a 'hierarchy of crime' exists within reporting. At the top of this hierarchy is murder, considered to be the most serious of crimes and, as such, usually generating the largest share of coverage. 'If somebody's shot and they don't die, then it's not a story,' explained one of Meyers's (1997: 90) respondents. 'That sounds cold, but that's just the way it works.'

Significantly, however, these interviews also suggest that domestic violence, even when it leads to battering, rape or a murder being committed, is often considered to be non-newsworthy due to its very ordinariness as part of everyday life. In the words of one television reporter: 'If someone gets shot on a street corner and it turns out to be a domestic argument, the chances of that making the air are slim' (Meyers 1997: 90). This reliance on extraordinariness as a guiding principle of newsworthiness, Meyers (1997: 98–9) argues, means that violence against women is likely to be ignored by journalists unless there is something 'quirky' about it or it has an 'unusual twist' (see also Pritchard and Hughes 1997; Carter 1998; Kitzinger 1998; Macdonald 1998; McLaughlin 1998; Skidmore 1998; Wykes 1998; Carter and Weaver 2003).

One of the most systemic studies of sex crime reporting conducted in Britain is that of Soothill and Walby (1991), who examined a range of examples over 40 years of newspaper coverage. Briefly, this investigation identifies four sets of issues which the authors consider to be particularly salient.

First, *seeking the sensational*: the focus of the popular press on the sensational (as opposed to the ordinary) leads to the construction of the sex beast, the sex fiend or the sex monster as the major theme in the coverage of sex crime. The national press, according to Soothill and Walby (1991: 35), 'will retain interest in a case only if there is scope for the construction of a sex fiend who continues to wreak havoc on a community.' Often the coverage of the police search for the perpetrator is written to generate the excitement of 'the chase', hence the greater likelihood that an attack will be reported where the assailant was not previously known by the victim (1991: 146). For this and related reasons, 'the construction of a sex fiend helps to sell newspapers' (1991: 35).

Second, *producing a cascade effect*: during the trial for a sex offender, the authors argue, the popular press frequently resorts to the deliberate use of distortion and exaggeration in order to maintain the momentum for public attention. This type of coverage can have a particularly harmful 'cascade effect', forcefully overflowing on to all of those people connected with the crime, no matter how remotely. Many of these people may suffer dramatic consequences in their own personal lives due to this kind of publicity. As Soothill and Walby (1991: 148) write: 'There seem to be no limits to the extent that the popular press will seek to provide background material to titillate their readership.'

Third, *embracing a narrow definition of sex crime*: while news reporting of sex crimes is extensive, only a very small number of cases receive sustained coverage. The

news media, due to a variety of reasons (not least of which is their conception of their readership's 'boredom threshold' where sex crimes are concerned; on journalists' 'child abuse fatigue', see Kitzinger 1998; Skidmore 1998), place a selective emphasis on 'unconventional' types of attack in preference to the more 'customary' ones. As a result, there is a subsequent narrowing of what counts as a 'legitimate' sex crime worthy of journalistic attention. For example, Soothill and Walby (1991: 148) contend that 'the message consistently comes across that the only "real" rape or "real" sexual assault is committed by a stranger.' News media interest narrows still further after the offender has been convicted and imprisoned, with only the most notorious criminals receiving coverage.

Fourth, *information and explanation*: efforts by journalists at both 'quality' and popular newspapers to look beyond specific events to address the larger social context within which sex crimes take place are, at best, minimal. This study similarly suggests that event-centred news coverage obscures the pervasive nature of sex crimes across society. In the absence of proper analyses of the causes of these crimes, the reader is provided with very little by way of useful information to effect change. 'When law changes on sex crime are being proposed in Parliament,' Soothill and Walby (1991: 149) note as one example, 'the general approach of the media is essentially of two kinds – trivialise or ignore the debate.' They suggest that although better informed accounts are often written by women columnists, much remains to be done to progressively transform those areas of the newspaper which have a greater impact. This study by Soothill and Walby (1991) thus usefully pinpoints a range of issues which challenge the very assumptions underpinning journalistic configurations of 'normality' where the reporting of sex crimes are concerned.

Several of these issues have recently been taken up by researchers similarly committed to examining the ways in which the news media contribute to the ideological normalization of male violence against women. Carter's (1998: 231) study of 850 pertinent news accounts drawn from the British tabloid press, for example, leads her to argue that much of this coverage encourages readers to believe that sexual violence is a 'natural', seemingly inevitable part of ordinary experience in modern society. It is this formulation of ordinariness, she maintains, that prompts journalists to seek out ever-more spectacular incidents of 'femicide' to retain their readership. The implications of which, as Carter writes, are profound:

> This daily diet of representations of the most brutal forms of sexual violence constructs the world outside as well as inside the front door as highly dangerous places for women and girls, one in which sex crimes have become an ordinary, taken-for-granted feature of everyday life.
>
> (Carter 1998: 231)

To denaturalize the gender politics of news coverage of male violence, then, is to centre questions of power. Kitzinger's (1998) analysis of news reporting strategies involved in the coverage of 'false memory syndrome' (a medical condition supposed to affect how

adults recall memories of abuse as children) highlights, among other concerns, the ways in which anti-feminist discourses shape the gendered criteria of source credibility. A related study by Skidmore (1998), which takes as its focus news coverage of child sex abuse, documents the resistance of male journalists to attend to this issue and the ways in which their female colleagues' attempts to place it on the 'hard' news agenda are routinely undermined as a result (see also Wykes 1998, Critcher 2003).

To further illustrate the need to repoliticize the sense of normality associated with acts of male violence, our attention turns to a specific instance of reporting – a front page story which appeared in the 12 June 1998 edition of the *Daily Mail*, often described as 'mid-market' in its appeal and in its mode of address:

WIFE WHOSE AFFAIR LED TO PRISON FOR HER HUSBAND

THIS is the woman whose love affair led to a seven-year jail sentence for her husband yesterday.

City broker Julien [B] had come home unexpectedly to find his wife partially clothed on the settee of their living room with her lover, company owner David [N].

As Mr [N] fled, [B] used one of the shoes he left behind to batter his wife Wendy. She was left with a fractured skull and two brain clots and spent ten days in intensive care.

Despite her serious injuries, Mrs [B] pleaded for her husband to be spared prison when he appeared in court yesterday. She said: 'I still love him and I think we have a chance of making a go of it'.

But in a decision which infuriated [B]'s family and left the unfaithful wife sobbing, Judge [BW] QC said the attack was so serious that it had to be punished by prison.

FULL STORY: PAGE FIVE

Source: Daily Mail, 12 June 1998, page 1; surnames reduced to first letter to conceal identity

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This news account provides a startling illustration of how a female victim of a brutal act of male violence can find herself being blamed for the crime (she is pictured to one side of the account). In both its headline and the opening sentence, this account seeks to establish a direct causal linkage between a woman's 'love affair' and a jail sentence imposed on her husband, the attacker. Such a formulation of blame, in my view, serves to implicitly suggest that the perpetrator of the assault, Julien B, is not actually responsible for his actions. Rather, this account appears to encourage the inference that Wendy B is deserving of her injuries because of the hurt the discovery of the affair caused her husband.

Further aspects of the account which also appear to impute guilt for the attack on to its victim include the terms used to describe the news actors themselves. In the

course of the narrative, for example, the male news actors are defined in relation to their public identities ('city broker' in the case of Julien B and 'company owner' for David N), while the victim of the assault is described in turn as 'wife', 'woman', 'Wendy', 'Mrs B' and 'unfaithful wife'. This use of terms ensures that Wendy B is identified strictly in terms of her relationship to Julien B. Such a strategy arguably works to reinforce the (unspoken) dictates of familial ideology to the point that their transgression warrants male violence as a legitimate response. These ideological tensions are similarly discernible, at least in my reading, in the final paragraph of the account. Here Wendy B, despite the emphasis on her marital status, is posited as being outside of the familial dynamic: 'decision which infuriated [B's] family and left the unfaithful wife sobbing'. Precisely who constitutes a member of '[B's] family' is not disclosed in the account; instead, it informs the reader (again, implicitly) that Wendy B is to be positioned as a non-family member due to an alleged sexual encounter with someone other than her husband.

It is only possible to speculate, of course, as to why this violent assault received front page treatment in the *Daily Mail*. Part of the reason may have to do with the fact that the survivor of the attack is both white and evidently middle class, two factors which according to the available research suggest that the crime would be more likely to be considered journalistically important. Moreover, as one of the newsworkers interviewed by Meyers (1997) suggested, albeit in a very different context, violent attacks 'are more common in lower-income strata and I guess you don't expect it in the idyllic suburbs. And so when something like it happens, it's out of place. And things that are out of place, in essence, are news' (Meyers 1997: 96). In any case, however, further research is clearly required in order to better discern the extent to which instances of news coverage such as this one in the *Daily Mail* are shaping the boundaries of the larger discursive field within which public policy-making decisions concerning these issues are being debated. In the absence of adequate legal measures to enhance the protection of women from male violence, particularly in the household, the need for far more responsible forms of reporting grows more urgent every day.

To bring this chapter to a close, then, it is important to recognize that although women have made crucial gains in the field of news reporting which have fundamentally altered the types of sexist dynamics which once characterized the profession, much remains to be done. Journalist Anne Sebba (1994: 10) is not alone when she looks forward to the day when 'women reporters are working in sufficient numbers that they are no longer judged by their looks, their personalities or their private lives and when we, the audience, are able to absorb merely the news they are reporting.' Much hope for the future rests with the significant numbers of women now entering the profession: occupational figures for countries such as Britain and the USA show that we are currently witnessing a steady rise in the relative share of positions being secured by young women reporters. Still, it is important to bear in mind a point that Arthurs (1994: 100) makes in her discussion of the British media industry: 'More women in the

industry is not enough: there need to be more women with a politicised understanding of the ways in which women's subordination is currently reproduced, and with the will to change it.'

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7 | 'US AND THEM': RACISM IN THE NEWS

> The overarching challenge is to rid our journalism of any vestige of an 'us and them' attitude, of an unspoken regard of any community or group as 'others' . . . The long-hallowed cult of journalistic 'objectivity' has too often been a veneer for what is essentially a predominating white male point of view in our news culture.
>
> (John Phillip Santos, US journalist)

The word 'race' is one of the most politically charged in the journalistic vocabulary. Aptly characterized as one of modern society's 'rawest nerves', race is a cultural construction embedded in hierarchical relations of power. News media representations of race in 'Western' countries, one study after the next suggests, are recurrently framed within the boundaries of dominant white cultural attitudes. Instances where news coverage looks beyond 'blood, bullets and sound-bites', to borrow US journalist Sig Gissler's phrase, are few and far between. 'From birth to death,' Gissler (1997: 105) writes, 'race is with us, defining, dividing, distorting.'

Many of these studies suggest that news reporting devoted to race-related issues is more than likely to be as sensational and superficial as it is politically dangerous. This exigency is apparent not only in tabloid news formats, usually the most blatant when it comes to exhibiting racial prejudice, but also in the types of coverage ordinarily situated at the so-called 'quality' end of the news spectrum. As Indarjit Singh (1998), a British journalist, observes:

> What passes for news has to be geared to demand, and sadly the way to profit lies in pandering to baser human instincts and prejudices. It is this that leads newspapers, for example, to carrying banner headlines: 'Asian landlord evicts tenant for eating beef' while on an inside page there is a much smaller item reporting an earthquake in which more than 5,000 people have died.
>
> (Singh 1998: 74)

This pandering to prejudice is clearly at odds with any notion of journalistic

professionalism, let alone 'impartial', socially responsible reporting. Such forms of discrimination, moreover, obscure the decisive ways in which the news media shape what counts as a community's 'way of life', and with it the inclusionary ('us') and exclusionary ('them') notions of 'belonging' which encourage only some people to feel 'at home' in that community.

It is this cultural division between 'us and them' precisely as it is affirmed, transformed and contested across the terrain of the news media which serves as the point of departure for this chapter's discussion.

Naturalizing racism

In attempting to elucidate the extent to which the media construct and reproduce ideologies of racism, Hall (1990) calls attention to the specific practices in and through which certain racist assumptions are reaffirmed in discursive terms as a matter of course. The question of race, he argues, is routinely defined on the basis of what may be described as a racist 'common sense' that is pervasive in British society. It is this taken-for-granted, 'naturalized' world of common sense that makes the ideologies of racism virtually disappear. 'Since (like gender) race appears to be "given" by Nature,' Hall (1990: 9) contends, 'racism is one of the most profoundly "naturalised" of existing ideologies.' In order to denaturalize these discourses of race, it is the largely unspoken – and frequently unconsciously held – images, premises and explanations governing the interpretation of 'reality' which need to be rendered problematic. By drawing upon certain types of strategies to 'make sense' of the social world, Hall (1990: 11) maintains, the media 'construct for us a definition of what *race* is, what meaning the imagery of race carries, and what the "problem of race" is understood to be.' That is to say, they 'help to classify out the world in terms of the categories of race.'

It is the ideological limits associated with different discourses of race which Hall insists need to be acknowledged, a recognition which signals a conceptual break from those views which hold that there is a singular, uniformly racist conception of the world in operation across the media. As he writes:

> The media are not only a powerful source of ideas about race. They are also one place where these ideas are articulated, worked on, transformed and elaborated . . . It would be simple and convenient if all the media were simply the ventriloquists of a unified and racist 'ruling class' conception of the world. But neither a unifiedly conspiratorial media nor indeed a unified racist 'ruling class' exist in anything like that simple way.
>
> (Hall 1990: 11–12)

In moving beyond notions of conspiracy, Hall is rejecting the idea that the media are racist simply because there are racist people working behind the scenes to present the world in such terms. Even where this is the case, what matters most are the organiza-

tional norms, structures and practices which condition what is represented and how. 'What defines how the media function', Hall (1990: 20) argues, 'is the result of a set of complex, often contradictory, social relations; not the personal inclinations of its members.' To engage with the power of this discourse, it follows, it is necessary to recognize its capacity to constrain what can, and cannot, be said about issues of race and ethnicity.

This naturalization of racism, while fluid and contradictory, is a longstanding feature of cultural modernity. As such, it can be difficult to denaturalize the ideological purchase of its 'common sense'. In order to better distinguish the 'vocabulary', 'syntax' and 'grammar' of race on which the media draw, then, Hall proceeds to make a crucial distinction between two types of racism:

- *'Overt' racism*: Hall uses this term to refer to those occasions where favourable media coverage is granted to what are explicitly or openly racist positions and arguments. Such coverage is more likely to appear in the right-wing newspaper press than on televisual news, he argues, in part because of the regulative requirement to be 'impartial' imposed on the latter institutions.
- *'Inferential' racism*: here Hall is referring those seemingly naturalized representations of situations where racist premises or propositions are being inscribed in the media coverage as a set of unquestioned assumptions. These representations 'enable racist statements to be formulated without ever bringing into awareness the racist predicates on which the statements are grounded' (Hall 1990: 13).

Open or overt racism, as Hall argues, consistently finds expression on the pages of the popular or tabloid press, among other places. Not only do these newspapers, to varying degrees, circulate and popularize openly racist ideas, but also they actively legitimize their public expression via a populist mode of address. 'Racism,' he writes, 'becomes "acceptable" – and thus, not too longer after, "true" – just common sense: what everyone knows and is openly saying' (1990: 13). Inferential racism, in contrast, is even more widespread in the British media. Indeed, according to Hall, it may be regarded as being 'in many ways more insidious because it is largely *invisible* even to those who formulate the world in its terms (Hall 1990: 13; see also Hartmann and Husband 1974; Braham 1982; Gordon and Rosenberg 1989; Searle 1989; Jordan and Weedon 1995; Mullan 1996; Ferguson 1998; Gabriel 1998; Ross 1998).

Examples of how this formulation of the social world can invoke a cultural division between 'us and them' continue to be all too abundant on the pages of British newspapers. Although some commentators argue that instances of overt racism are declining in number as titles such as the *Sun* and the *Mirror* slowly move 'upmarket', others suggest that the imperatives of inferential racism continue to be a salient feature of much reporting. The editorial leader associated with the main front page item on the 25 May 1998 edition of the *Sun* might be seen as an example:

THIS LITTLE PIGGY IS A RACIST
Cops seize mum's display for upsetting Muslims

As the item unfolds, it becomes apparent that the news event centres around a woman, Nancy B, whose collection of porcelain pigs (which she had displayed in a window facing the street) has been seized by the police following formal complaints ostensibly lodged by some of her Muslim neighbours, who deemed the display to be racially offensive. A number of discursive strategies are employed throughout the item, which seem to leave little doubt that the reader is being invited to identify with the 'ANGRY mum', also described as 'Patriotic Nancy'. Still, the reporting at least makes an attempt at journalistic balance when towards the end of the item it shifts perspective to include a hint of diversity in opinion among 'local Muslims'. That is, following several quotations attributed to angry neighbours, it is reported that 'one Muslim said: "Although I found it offensive, it was not obvious racism. She does not deserve all this abuse".'

It is left to the *Sun*'s editorial page for what could be seen as a more explicitly discriminatory rendering of the event to be heard:

THE SUN SAYS

Pig headed
WATCH out, bigots about.

That's the sign that should go up in Leicester.
Racial and religious intolerance are rearing their ugly heads.
   Not among the whites – among the local Asian Muslims.
   They complain that a collection of ceramic pigs in a house window is racially offensive.
   That's daft. But not as ridiculous as the police going round to the house and seizing the pottery pigs as 'evidence'.

Culture
What will the Pig Squad do next: shut down Tescos for selling bacon?
   The unbending attitude of militant Muslims who think they have a right to to [sic] *impose their culture in a Christian country is frightening.*
   There has to be give and take if we are all to get on together.
   But it seems **WE** give and **THEY** take.
   This does nothing for racial harmony. It just makes Muslims look mean-minded – which the vast majority are not.
   This country is very easy-going and accepting of its new citizens.
   But pigs will fly before we put up with this kind of nonsense.

Source: Sun, 25 May 1998, p. 8; original emphasis

It seems that the implied reader of this editorial, in my view, is clearly being invited to infer that to be of 'this country' is to be a white Christian. The 'we' versus 'they' dichotomy it constructs is evidently consistent with a racialized rendering of cultural identity, one which might be seen to hold the following organizing oppositions in ideological tension:

'the whites'	v	'local Asian Muslims'
'we'	v	'pig headed', 'bigots'
tolerant	v	'racial and religious intolerance'
reasonable	v	'daft'
'give and take'	v	'unbending attitude'
'Christian country'	v	'impose their culture'
'racial harmony'	v	'Militant Muslims'
'WE give'	v	'THEY take'
'very easy-going and accepting'	v	'frightening'
sense	v	'nonsense'

Further oppositions are similarly apparent, of course, but this short list pinpoints some of the ways in which they can reinforce one another so as to discursively anchor a preferred inflection of Muslim identity as a foreign 'Other' (see also Hafez 2000; Karim 2000). The 'we' projected by the editorial's mode of address finds its racialized definition in opposition to a 'they' positioned as being 'outside' of the imagined community of *Sun* readers.

Overt instances of racism do not appear frequently on the pages of the so-called 'serious', 'quality' broadsheet newspapers in Britain, particularly so in a politically centre-left title like *The Guardian*. Nevertheless, a brief comparison of two news headlines concerned with racial discrimination in the realm of sport, published almost 30 years apart, is telling:

MAY A CLUB REFUSE NEGRO?
The Supreme Court (USA) has reserved its decision whether a swimming and tennis club . . . was entitled to discriminate against Negro members.
(*The Guardian*, 15 October 1969)

This news headline appears strangely anachronistic from the vantage point of today due to its use of the term 'Negro' (the news item is cited in Hartmann and Husband 1974: 135). The extent to which this term was ideologically naturalized for *The Guardian* readers in 1969 is open to question, of course, but it is certainly doubtful that it could appear in a current edition of the newspaper without sparking a surprised reaction by today's reader. Compare it, then, with an item which appeared in 1998:

WHITE CLUBS FEAR ETHNIC CRICKETERS
A cricketing apartheid is being created with black and Asian cricketers being ostracised by white clubs because they are perceived as too competitive and aggressive.
(*The Guardian*, 8 May 1998)

This news headline, in contrast with the first one, may appear to some readers as being harmless enough, avoiding as it does the use of a term as powerfully resonant as 'Negro'. Similarly, it identifies the cricket clubs in question as being 'white', something which is simply taken-for-granted in the first news item's account of the swimming and tennis club. Nevertheless, neatly encapsulated in this headline is the racist presupposition that to be 'white' is not to be 'ethnic'. That is to say, it is being inferentially assumed in the headline that ethnicity does not encompass whiteness: only other, non-white people can be members of an ethnic group. Whiteness thus becomes naturalized as a non-raced norm against which ethnicity is measured.

A further illustration of several of these dynamics may be found in Hartley's (1992) discussion of 'Wedom' and 'Theydom' as they pertain to news representations of Aboriginal communities in Australia (see also Hartley 1996). In describing the ways in which news discourse is organized around strategies of inclusion and exclusion, he proceeds to show how the 'we' of Australian citizenship typically mobilized in news items rules out as 'foreign' those who are deemed not to belong. Journalists, he argues, routinely categorize Aboriginal people and their actions as being constitutive of a 'they', a process realized in and through a number of different reporting practices. Here it is possible to draw out from Hartley's discussion five particularly salient issues associated with these practices:

- *Balance*: Aboriginal people, according to Hartley (1992: 207), tend to be exempted from the conventionalized notions of journalistic balance which would otherwise apply: 'there are not "two sides" to an Aboriginal story – not two *Aboriginal* sides, that is, only an Aboriginal side and a "balance" supplied by, for instance, police, welfare, legal or governmental authorities.'
- *Naming*: news photographs of Aboriginal people 'are routinely printed without name captions; they are representative of their race, not of their persons, even in so-called positive human interest stories' (1992: 207, 209). In sharp contrast, Hartley argues, scrupulous care is taken to identify those people who are located from within what he refers to as the domain of 'Wedom'.
- *Identity*: journalists habitually situate Aboriginal people within the confines of a Theydom where their personal identities are exclusively defined as consisting in being 'unlike us' in Wedom. By this negative logic, Aborigines are characterized as a unified group whose individual members are 'all the same'. Attendant difficulties include 'recognizing internal differences in the overall Aboriginal community, not distinguishing between traditional and urban Aborigines, or between different geographical, political and other positions among them' (1992: 209).
- *Citizenship*: 'Aborigines who are stereotyped as outsiders or as tribal,' Hartley (1992: 209) writes, 'cannot be seen as citizens with rights.' It is much more likely for Aboriginal people to appear in news accounts as welfare recipients or criminals. Consequently, 'a spokesperson who insists on the citizenship or the rights

of Aborigines, as opposed to conforming to welfare or corrective stereotypes, is likely to be represented in the news as an extremist' (1992: 209).

- *Access*: only rarely is it the case, Hartley contends, that Aboriginal people are asked for their opinion by journalists, or provided with the opportunity 'to represent themselves in the media with their own agenda of newsworthy issues or their own debates about possible solutions to problems they can identify for themselves' (1992: 209). Exceptions to the routine restrictions placed on news access typically occur where verisimilitude is required to support the predetermined 'line' of the news story.

These types of reporting practices, with the strategies of inclusion and exclusion which they entail, have in Hartley's view become naturalized to the point of virtually being 'common sense' among many Australian journalists. To the extent that a potential news story concerning Aboriginal people can be made to conform to existing 'definitions of the situation', he argues, its chances of receiving coverage improve significantly. That is to say, he writes, 'if the story represents Aborigines as "they" rather than as "we", and makes sense of them as in need of protection, correction or welfare, and not in terms of what they may wish to say and do for themselves' (Hartley 1992: 210).

Turning to the United States, Entman's (1997: 29) research into television news production suggests that despite the efforts of journalists to portray the news 'objectively', the choices they make when reporting the day's events appear to 'feed racial stereotypes' (see also Entman 1990, 1992). The rise of entertainment values, he contends, is leading to sensationalist forms of news coverage which have the effect of encouraging white hostility toward minority groups such as African Americans. Local televisual news, in particular, 'paints a picture of blacks as violent and threatening toward whites, self-interested and demanding toward the body politic – continually causing problems for the law-abiding, tax-paying majority' (Entman 1997: 29). Far from informing their audiences about the realities of racial discrimination, televisual newscasts are contributing to a climate of fear between the dominant 'ingroup' (whites) and the 'outgroup' (blacks) across society. Pressures to make the news entertaining are making it even more difficult for social issues, such as urban poverty and its causes, to be covered in sufficient depth. Indeed, Entman (1997: 29) is of the view that what is increasingly superficial reporting 'may also be making urban America less governable, deepening the chasm of misunderstanding and distrust between blacks and whites' (see also Reeves and Campbell 1994; Campbell 1995; Gandy 1998; Jacobs 2000; Newkirk 2000).

African Americans, according to Les Payne of *Newsday* magazine, are 'disproportionately included in negative coverage – as prostitutes, drug dealers, welfare recipients, second-story men, unwed mothers'. As he observes: 'It's a strange place, this black world the media project' (cited in Dates and Pease 1997: 79). The cultural politics of 'us and them' suffuse the construction of news discourse in ways which help to create and reinforce the fears of what are predominantly white audiences toward other ethnic groups. In order to render problematic the narrative conventions which sustain

different forms of racism, it is necessary to disrupt the taken-for-granted assumptions about 'race' which inform what counts as journalistic 'common sense'. As an editor of the *Times-Picayune* in Louisiana points out: 'We don't realize how much our newspapers reflect one point of view – the white point of view' (cited in Gissler 1997: 111). Meanwhile, at the *Sun* in Baltimore, one white reporter comments: 'Minority reporters call our news meetings the "Pale Male Club" ' (cited in Shipler 1998). The intricate, often subtle ways in which white perspectives shape the framing of news reports concerning race-related issues can have a profound effect on public attitudes to racial discrimination (as well as on those of government policy makers), an effect which an otherwise conscientious white newsworker might never have intended.

Wilson and Gutiérrez (1995) highlight the importance of placing these changing dynamics within a historical perspective. Specifically, they identify five developmental phases, the first four of which they suggest have been commonly experienced by people of colour confronted with white news organizations in the course of US history:

- *Exclusionary phase*: a sustained refusal to acknowledge the initial social presence of people of colour in news media reports contributed to their exclusion from the outset as visible members of 'mainstream' society. 'For that reason,' Wilson and Gutiérrez (1995: 153) write, 'racial exclusion in news set the course followed by the other phases of non-Whites' treatment in the news. It was a course of alienation between Whites and non-Whites.'
- *Threatening-issue phase*: recurrently it is the case that the first appearances of non-white cultural groups in news media reports are directly linked to a perception of the group as posing a threat to the established social order. Beginning with the characterization of Native American Indians in the colonial and early national press as 'savages' endangering 'civilized' whites, successive minority groups have been transformed into objects of fear.
- *Confrontation phase*: almost always following closely behind the above phase is a social confrontation between the non-white group and the white population, the news coverage of which is typically framed within an 'us versus them' perspective. The response may be violent in nature, examples of which cited by Wilson and Gutiérrez (1995: 155) are 'the Indian wars of the westward expansion, the Mexican War, or the lynchings of Blacks in the South, Mexicans in the Southwest and Asians in the West,' or it may culminate in legislative action (segregation laws, peace treaties, immigration laws, and so forth). Further outcomes include the race riots which 'dominate the news with a historical consistency that has involved virtually every non-White racial group' (1995: 155).
- *Stereotypical selection phase*: the need to restore social order in the aftermath of these types of confrontation entails a shift in news coverage so as to facilitate the transition into a post-conflict period. News reportage, according to Wilson and Gutiérrez, necessarily adapts so as to ensure that white people's apprehensions where people of colour are concerned can be effectively 'neutralized'. Journalists,

by selectively drawing on stereotypical images in their news stories, accomplish two objectives: '(a) The general audience is reassured that non-Whites are still "in their place" (i.e., the reservation, ghetto, etc.) and (b) those who escape their designated place are not a threat to society because they manifest the same values and ambitions as the dominant culture and overcome the deficits of their home communities' (1995: 157).

- *Multiracial coverage phase*: the antithesis of the exclusionary phase, multiracial news coverage promotes social understanding. 'At present this phase is still largely a vision,' Wilson and Gutiérrez (1995: 158) maintain, 'but it is within the grasp of a society determined to include all Americans in the quest for social and economic equality' (1995: 158). This type of news will be reported from a perspective where the 'us' being invoked is made to represent all citizens, thereby ensuring that people of colour are represented on equal terms with white people. Unwarranted fears based on prejudices will be alleviated, the authors suggest, as the last vestiges of racism are finally removed from the 'gatekeeper ranks'.

These different phases, while usefully differentiated in this way, are necessarily interconnected. It is similarly important to note that the boundaries between them are relatively fluid and, moreover, inevitably contested as the ideological struggles transpiring over the news media unfold in complex, and contradictory, ways.

Reporting law and order

Questions of 'law and order' are central to many of the news media discourses in circulation around issues of 'race'. Many of these issues were thrown into sharp relief in the USA when a number of cities witnessed social upheaval in the form of 'race riots' during the 1960s. One of the first to take place occurred in Harlem, New York, during the summer of 1964, followed by another in the 'black ghetto' of Watts in Los Angeles during August 1965 (34 people died and almost 1000 were injured). Further racial conflicts erupted over the next two summers, eventually leading President Lyndon B. Johnson to launch a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to investigate the causes of the tensions in 1967. Released in March 1968, the Kerner Commission report, as it was called after Governor Otto Kerner of Illinois who headed the inquiry, declared that the country was effectively dividing into two societies, 'one black, one white, separate and unequal'. The report expressed its indictment of the news media's complicity in exacerbating racial conflicts in clear language:

> Our fundamental criticism is that the news media have failed to analyze and report adequately on racial problems in the United States and, as a related matter, to meet the Negro's legitimate expectations of journalism . . . The media write and report from the standpoint of a white man's world . . . Slights and indignities are part of the Negro's daily life, and many of them come from what he now calls the 'white press' – a press that repeatedly, if unconsciously, reflects the biases, the

paternalism, the indifference of white America. This may be understandable, but it is not excusable in an institution that has the mission to inform and educate the whole of our society.

(cited in Dennis 1997: xix)

On 4 April, just weeks after the Kerner Commission report was published, the main leader of the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr, was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. News coverage of the assassination, like that of the racial conflicts which ensued, powerfully underscored the extent to which the bigotry of segregationists was being processed within the 'common-sense' frameworks of news narratives.

Many of the points raised in the Kerner Commission's appraisal of the news media continue to be all too relevant today. This is not to deny that genuine progress has been made, rather it is to acknowledge that much more remains to be done. Standing in the way of the kinds of reforms which might have otherwise been achievable over these past decades, many researchers argue, have been the discourses on 'race' being articulated by politically right-wing voices. The Reagan and Bush administrations, like the Thatcher and Major governments in Britain, consistently played the 'race card' to electoral advantage at a number of different levels. At stake was the mobilization of a hegemonic project whereby a racist 'common sense' could be developed and sustained in the interests of white privilege. Tenets of what Hall (1988) cogently characterized as 'authoritarian populism' with regard to Thatcherism were being actively reinscribed as part of the reactionary rhetoric of the New and Religious Right from the early days of Reaganism (both of which continue to wield significant influence today). The 'quality of American life' as previously enjoyed by white, middle and upper-class males was under threat, according to this rhetoric, and those deserving of the blame included, among others, ethnic minority (especially black and Latino) groups, feminists, gays and lesbians, single mothers, poor people and 'illegal immigrants' (H. Gray 1995; see also Rakow and Kranich 1991; Reeves and Campbell 1994; Shah and Thornton 1994; Kellner 1995; Fiske 1996, Rodriguez 1999).

Televisual news, in particular, played a central role in what Herman Gray (1995) describes as the consolidation of a 'conservative cultural and political hegemonic bloc'. The types of images being inflected from one newscast to the next, he argues, routinely depicted blackness as a sign of otherness to 'the very idea of America':

As a sign of this otherness, blackness was constructed along a continuum ranging from menace on one end to immorality on the other, with irresponsibility located somewhere in the middle. Only through such appeals to menace and irresponsibility, framed and presented in television news through figures of black male gang members, black male criminality, crumbling black families, black welfare cheats, black female crack users, and black teen pregnancy, could such claims on America (and its image of middle-class, heterosexual, masculine whiteness) find resonance within the discourse of traditional values.

(H. Gray 1995: 17)

Televisual news, which throughout this period became increasingly reliant on factors such as immediacy, brevity, drama and conceptual simplicity, made a decisive contribution to an ideological shift around discourses of 'race' and 'morality'. The limits of 'popular common sense' were being redrawn in ways which consistently defined members of ethnic minorities as deviants, dependants and threats. 'If television news was to be believed,' Gray (1995: 34) writes, 'these mostly black and brown people seemed to commit more crime, have more babies, use more drugs, and be more incompetent with respect to individual and civic responsibility and indifferent with respect to their obligations.'

This discursive construction of a black/white dualism as a threat to social stability and public morality is most readily discernible in news coverage of crime-related incidents. A number of studies have been conducted which document the degree to which crimes committed by African Americans, particularly those including a sexual element, receive a disproportionate amount of coverage than would otherwise be expected were the suspect in question white. Underlying much of this reporting, Fiske (1996: 80) argues, is an entrenched white hysteria about 'the power of the black male body', a body which by its very presence is depicted as constituting a sexualized racial danger to the 'fragility of the white social order' (see also Benedict 1992; Jordan and Weedon 1995). Controversies in the 1990s which highlighted these white fears about black male bodies being 'out of control' include:

- Allegations of sexual harassment against Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas by former colleague Anita Hill during his televised Senate confirmation hearings in 1991 (see Garber 1993; Fiske 1996).
- The conviction of heavyweight boxer Mike Tyson for the 'date rape' of a young woman, at the time a beauty pageant contestant, in 1992 (see Lule 1995; Rowe 2004).
- The 'riots' which erupted in Los Angeles in 1992 following the announcement of the 'not guilty' verdicts in the court case of the white police officers videotaped brutally beating the black motorist Rodney King (see Nichols 1994; Swenson 1995; Hunt 1997; van Loon 1997; Alexander and Jacobs 1998; H. Gray 1998).
- A police investigation into allegations of child sexual abuse against pop singer Michael Jackson in 1993 (see Hinerman 1998).
- The televised murder trial of former athlete, televisual sports commentator and film actor Orenthal James ('OJ') Simpson following the June 1994 fatal stabbing of his ex-partner Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman (see Shipp 1994; McKay and Smith 1995; Morrison and Lacour 1997; McLaughlin 1998).

In the case of these and other such media figures of the 1990s, it is possible to identify, after Fiske (1996: 256), the ways in which the mediated identity of black men is racialized, sexualized and, whether found guilty or not, criminalized (see also Campbell 1995; Pritchard and Hughes 1997). Typically suffusing this kind of news coverage is

what Fiske calls 'dislocated racism'; that is to say, racism may be considered to be dislocated 'when it is apparently to be found only in the behaviors of a racial minority and never in those of the white power structure' (Fiske 1996: 272; see also Dyer 1997). To the extent that so-called 'race neutral' news reporting naturalizes the racelessness of whiteness in hegemonic terms, then, it is actually working to reproduce the dominant position of the white majority within a racially divided society.

In order for this racial hierarchy to be reaffirmed as 'common sense', however, the hegemonic construction of whiteness must undergo constant renewal lest its ideological premises lose their popular saliency. It is this insight into the partial, contingent nature of such forms of hegemony that informs the collective project behind Hall *et al*.'s (1978) ground-breaking book *Policing the Crisis*. Briefly, their investigation documents how 'mugging' was 'discovered' by the British news media in the early 1970s as 'a frightening new strain of crime', one to be blamed primarily on young, black West Indian males living in the inner city. In the course of mapping the part played by the news media in the ensuing ideological rupture, a rupture which led to severe state interventions 'in the interests of law and order', the appearance of a *crisis of hegemony* is identified. In their words:

> A crisis of hegemony marks a moment of profound rupture in the political and economic life of a society, an accumulation of contradictions. If in moments of 'hegemony' everything works spontaneously so as to sustain and enforce a particular form of class domination while rendering the basis of that social authority invisible through the mechanisms of the production of consent, then moments when the equilibrium of consent is disturbed, or where the contending class forces are so nearly balanced that neither can achieve that sway from which a resolution to the crisis can be promulgated, are moments *when the whole basis of political leadership and cultural authority becomes exposed and contested*.
>
> (Hall *et al*. 1978: 217)

The subsequent creation of a 'moral panic' across the field of the news media, in particular the daily press, contributed to a reconfiguration of 'the public consensus about crime' along far more authoritarian, and explicitly racist, lines. A recurrent feature of the news reports examined is that 'mugging' is unquestioningly identified with black youth living in 'crime prone' urban 'trouble spots', and that this is a 'new problem' requiring 'proper policing'.

Crime control agencies, in seeking to secure popular approval amongst the white majority for more coercive 'get tough' measures (for example, the length of sentences for 'petty street crime' rose dramatically), had much to gain by having the news media accept their definition of a 'mugging epidemic'. Hall *et al*. (1978) examine a variety of the strategies employed, to varying degrees, by the daily press to reinflect the language of crisis being generated by these agencies. This focus on how certain frameworks of interpretation were set in motion allows them to show, in turn, how the racialized limits for much of the political debate about what constituted this 'breakdown of

public morality' and who was to blame for it (and, moreover, which measures would be necessary to end the crisis) were established. Particular attention is thus given to the means by which news organizations routinely reproduce the social definitions of the powerful largely – but not entirely – at the expense of those definitions advanced by oppositional or counter-hegemonic voices. In practice, this meant that the resultant news coverage consistently failed to contextualize 'mugging' in relation to conditions of economic deprivation, out of which crime arises, electing instead to promote 'the all too intelligible syntax of race [so as to affix] a false enemy: the black mugger' (Hall *et al*. 1978: 395).

The news media's stigmatization of young black people living in economically depressed areas became even more pronounced over the course of the 1980s. Daily press representations of the 'riots' which took place in Britain in the summer of 1981, beginning in Southall in West London before moving on to other cities, form the basis of a study by Hansen and Murdock (1985). Their conception of news as a 'field of continual conflict in which competing discourses struggle for publicity and legitimacy' leads them to draw attention to the ideological conflicts, such as those over 'English-ness', played out in the press. More specifically, it is shown that Britain's indigenous black population is defined by right-wing voices in politics, such as that of then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, as well as in the press coverage, 'as an inherently alien presence which threatens "our" national culture and traditional way of life' (Hansen and Murdock 1985: 233). Moreover, this study documents how 'racist stereotypes of blacks as "naturally" less rational and controlled than whites have fused with older images of the inner city as an "internal colony" to produce a particularly potent image of threat' (1985: 233). Much of this news coverage, the authors contend, exhibited a mode of address structured around interlocked oppositions between 'us' (decent cit-izens, the police, and the voices of the newspapers) against 'them' ('thieves', 'looters', 'thugs', 'yobs', 'madmen', 'hooligans', 'wild mob of youths', 'demons' and 'ghouls'). In this way, not only were the 'rioters' separated out from the community as an external enemy, but also the social factors underlying their actions were ostensibly depoliticized by being attributed to 'natural' forces or to the 'nature' of the people involved (Hansen and Murdock 1985: 248–9; see also Fowler 1991).

Cottle (1993, 1994), in his investigation of televisual news coverage of the 'Handsworth riots' of 1985, identifies the 'competing repertoires of preferred terms' used by journalists and their sources to define the contested realities of inner city disorder. Even the term 'riot' itself, he points out, tends to position the event in ques-tion as a problem of criminality to be confronted by the 'forces of law and order'. In sharp contrast, the use of terms such as 'rebellion' or 'uprising' shift the semantic field, according to Cottle (1993: 164), 'to that of the purposeful action of a united group, who, reacting against an oppressive social order, collectively react against the problem which is now perceived to be an illegitimate state of social exclusion and oppression.' Accordingly, the interpretative frameworks being mobilized in and through journalistic vocabulary (words and images) may be read as encouraging certain definitions of the

situation over alternative ones. In his analysis of representations of 'race' in relation to the explanations being advanced for the disturbances, Cottle shows how references to the structural causes of the conflicts (including social deprivation and the acute levels of inner city unemployment) found only limited expression in the news coverage. 'What is worse,' he argues, 'when issues of racism have been raised these have centred on the minority ethnic communities themselves – once again localizing the problem to a question of intra-community rivalry' (Cottle 1993: 184; see also van Dijk 1991; Jacobs 2000; Wykes 2001; Law 2002).

The focus in the next section shifts from news media constructions of ethnic minorities in order to examine how racism similarly informs the journalistic projection of an external enemy 'Other' at times of war. First, though, it is advantageous to briefly consider one instance of how these types of dynamics can continue to inform representations of national identity long after the cessation of wartime hostilities. Following the public controversy concerning tabloid newspaper coverage of the Euro '96 football tournament, several of Britain's tabloid editors were forced to characterize a number of the otherwise unspoken assumptions they hold about their readers' sense of 'patriotism' as it pertains to a former enemy. Specifically, the editors' statements were in response to the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) which had been asked to adjudicate on some 300 complaints made by members of the public regarding tabloid news items about England's football match with Germany (see Report no. 35, July–September 1996). The general tone of the coverage may be briefly illustrated with three typical front-page headlines:

ACHTUNG!
SURRENDER
For you Fritz, ze Euro 96 Championship is over

(*Daily Mirror*)

LET'S BLITZ FRITZ

(*Sun*)

HERR WE GO – Bring on the Krauts

(*Daily Star*)

The editor of the *Daily Mirror* responded to the PCC inquiry by insisting that the treatment of the lead-up to the England versus Germany game had been intended as 'humorous' and 'entertaining' and not 'overly jingoistic' (this when an editorial leader, headlined 'Mirror declares football war on Germany', was also published on the front page). The *Sun*'s editor conceded that the newspaper's 'Let's Blitz Fritz' headline might have been jingoistic, but strongly rejected the claim that it was either xenophobic or racist: 'we think our coverage was, if robust, intended to bolster national pride and was good-natured.' At the *Daily Star*, the editor defended the use of such 'jokes' by declaring that they were 'good-natured, tongue-in-cheek, and designed to raise a smile. They

were in the best tradition of the down-to-earth humour that has been a mainstay of our culture for centuries.'

In each case, the editors apologized for any offence given to their readers while, at the same time, adamantly contending that they were not in violation of Clause 15 of the PCC Code with regard to the publication of prejudicial and pejorative references. It was their shared view that this clause relates only to individuals and, therefore, could not be deemed applicable where causing offence to 'whole nations' was concerned.

The enemy 'Other': journalism in wartime

The complex ways in which the news media project a sense of 'us', a collective 'we' which is explicitly or tacitly mobilized in opposition to a 'them', find daily expression in news accounts concerned with 'the nation'. There can be no 'national we', as Billig (1995) points out, without a 'foreign other', a dynamic which in his view prefigures an 'ideological consciousness of nationhood'. Widely diffused as simply a matter of common sense, this 'nationalized syntax of hegemony' is evoked by newsworkers claiming to speak to and for the nation as a homeland or 'imagined community' (B. Anderson 1991) made up of 'people like us'. Billig observes that the appearance of such representations of 'the nation', for example in the 'Home News', 'European News' and 'Foreign News' divisions mapped by a newspaper, is so pervasive as to be almost banal. And yet, the effectivity of these routine, everyday representations can be deadly, especially at times of state crises leading to war. 'At regular, but intermittent intervals,' he writes, 'the crisis occurs, and the moral aura of nationalism is invoked: heads will be nodded, flags waved and tanks will roll' (Billig 1995: 4; see also Wallis and Baran 1990; G. Reeves 1993; Herman and McChesney 1997; van Ginneken 1998).

The racist underpinnings of certain journalistic renderings of the enemy 'Other' are frequently reinflected via a language of 'national pride, honour and duty' with its corresponding appeals to loyalty and allegiance. A number of studies concerned with news media coverage of the Vietnam War, for example, document how the familiar tenets of 'objectivity' were recurrently recast in favour of a 'patriotic' reportorial stance. In this way, for example, 'our peace offensive' could be effectively counterpoised against the barbarous hostility of a primitive, dehumanized enemy whose activities needed to be 'neutralized'. Racism, journalist Phillip Knightley (1982: 354) observes, 'became a patriotic virtue. All Vietnamese became "dinks", "slopes", "slants", or "gooks", and the only good one was a dead one. So the Americans killed them when it was clear that they were Vietcong.' And, he adds, 'they killed them when it was clear they were not Vietcong.' In 1967, recalling his time spent reporting on the conflict, journalist James Cameron similarly spoke to these racist precepts in a forceful way:

I had been to Hanoi, and returned obsessed with the notion that I had no professional justification left if I did not at least try to make the point that North Viet

Nam, despite all Washington arguments to the contrary, was inhabited by human beings . . . and that to destroy their country and their lives with high explosives and petroleum jelly was no way to cure them of their defects . . . This conclusion, when expressed in printed or television journalism, was generally held to be, if not downright mischievous, then certainly non-objective, within the terms of reference of a newspaper man, on the grounds that it was proclaimed as a point of view . . . To this of course there could be no answer whatsoever, except that objectivity in some circumstances is both meaningless and impossible.

(Cameron 1997 [1967]: 172)

And, he might have added, often lethal for those people who fall outside of the ideological limits legitimized by its reportorial norms and conventions during wartime. 'Objective' accounts, like carefully edited televisual images, tended to – in the words of another military correspondent – 'make acceptable something which in reality was quite unacceptable' (cited in Royle 1987: 209).

This point is similarly taken up by journalist John Pilger (1998) in his assessment of newswork in Vietnam, in particular how reporters failed to accurately depict the racist nature of the conflict as he witnessed it. At the same time, he contends that those commentators who claim that journalists were to blame for 'losing the war' because of their criticisms of the military's treatment of the Vietnamese (televisual reporters are usually cited as the principal culprits) are subscribing to a myth. In Pilger's words:

In my experience, most journalists had no objection to the 'noble crusade', only to the wisdom of its tactics and the competence of its executors. The war was almost never reported as an all-out American assault on the Vietnamese people, regardless of whether they were communist or non-communist, northerners or southerners; for that was the truth. Instead the war was represented as a gladiators' contest between 'good' teams and 'bad' teams . . . Not surprisingly, this version excluded the fact that the Americans had killed tens of thousands of their South Vietnamese 'allies' and had levelled about half their forests, poisoned their environment and forced millions of them to leave their homes.

(Pilger 1998: 560)

It was only as the points of disagreement between members of the US political and military elite became more publicly salient, often characterized as a battle of opinion between pro-war 'hawks' and anti-war 'doves', that more critical forms of reporting began to emerge to test the limits of the slowly fragmenting elite consensus (see also Gitlin 1980; Hallin 1986, 1994; Royle 1987; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Cumings 1992; P. Young and Jesser 1997). Nevertheless, the key militarist imperatives shaping the racialized projection of the Vietnamese people as a less than human enemy were still largely intact even after the last of the US ground troops had been withdrawn by the spring of 1973.

Rhetorical appeals to a national identity under threat from an enemy Other evidently informed the decision made by Argentine General Leopoldo Galtieri to order an invasion of the British dependencies of South Georgia and the Falkland Islands, or the Islas Malvinas as they are known in Argentina, through the use of armed force on 2 April 1982. The response in Britain by politicians such as then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher similarly evoked a principle of nationhood portrayed as being in grave danger. Having 'learned the lessons of Vietnam' where the news media purportedly encouraged opposition to the war to ferment, British officials wasted no time in mobilizing a propaganda campaign designed to ensure that the 'true nature' of the otherwise faceless Argentine enemy would be sympathetically relayed via the news coverage. The types of strategies they employed included:

- The selection of 'accredited' British journalists (all male) covering the conflict was limited to 28, all of whom were transported to the area by the navy so that their activities could be monitored by military 'minders'.
- Journalists relied almost entirely on officials for their information, their access to the fighting being strictly controlled both formally and informally. They were also forced to 'pool' their copy and photographs in order to facilitate military censorship. Any effort to include the word 'censored' on filmed reports was itself censored.
- Satellite facilities were denied, thereby making it impossible for journalists to transmit filmed images of the conflict for television and newspapers except via returning ships (a delay of at least three weeks given the distance of 8000 miles, which meant that much of what was still heavily censored coverage did not appear in Britain until well after the final cease-fire).
- Journalists were routinely given false statements or 'disinformation' to report by their 'handlers', allegedly in the hope of confusing the enemy. Ministry of Defence press officers sought to ensure priority was given to 'good news' so as to 'help morale at home'; the British public, many of them argued, are interested only in 'victories'.
- The constant threat of being removed from the **'pool' system** for engaging in any form of critical reporting (deemed 'uncooperative' and therefore contrary to the 'national interest') led to severe forms of self-censorship being practised by the journalists.

Strategies such as these helped to anchor, in ideological terms, the larger public opinion offensive being orchestrated by the British government which characterized the conflict as a decisive battle between good ('us') and evil ('them'). 'The patriotic imperative so deeply rooted in the dominant political and media culture,' writes Keeble (1997: 30), 'together with journalistic self-censorship and the hyper-jingoism and crude enemy baiting of the pops [popular press], all served to transform new militarism into spectator sport.' The effect of which, he adds, was that what was being packaged as a 'largely bloodless' war could be 'consumed as a form of entertainment' (see also Barnett 1984; Glasgow University Media Group 1985; Aulich 1992).

In order to lend legitimacy to the British intervention, the neo-imperialistic configuration of the 'Argies' (a term popularized by the *Sun*) as a new enemy was crucial. For *The Times*, the Argentine invasion was 'an incontrovertibly evil act', hence its declaration that 'we' were 'All Falklanders Now'. Across the spectrum of the newspaper press, although to a lesser extent on the pages of the *Daily Mirror* and *The Guardian*, the Argentine people were depicted in savage terms. Front page headlines published by the *Sun* included 'STICK IT UP YOUR JUNTA' and, perhaps most infamous of all, 'GOTCHA!' on 4 May 1982. The latter account detailed in triumphal terms how the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano* had been torpedoed and sunk with more than 1200 sailors on board. The tabloid's editor at the time, Kelvin MacKenzie, fearful that he had gone too far as early reports of the casualties began to appear, elected to change the headline after the first edition to 'DID 1,200 ARGIES DROWN?' This sentiment was evidently not shared by the *Sun*'s proprietor, Rupert Murdoch, who reportedly said to MacKenzie about the 'GOTCHA!' headline: 'I wouldn't have pulled it if I were you. Seemed like a bloody good headline to me' (cited in Engel 1996: 274). Critics of this kind of belligerence, including Labour leader Michael Foot, who called on the Prime Minister to end 'the hysterical bloodlust' disgracing British journalism, were routinely labelled as 'appeasers', 'fainthearts' and 'traitors' (even the 'patriotism' of the BBC was called into question by critics angry that its current affairs coverage was in their view 'defeatist' and 'pro-enemy': R. Harris 1983; Royle 1987; P. Young and Jesser 1997).

In October of the following year the US invasion of the small Caribbean island of Grenada took place, an opportunity for its military to put into practice several of the 'media management strategies' (exclusion, containment and manipulation) enforced by British officials in the Falklands. There followed throughout the rest of the 1980s and into the 1990s an extensive array of enemy Others who were held by the US news media to personify a pernicious threat to 'our interests'. Included among those being demonized were 'mad dog' Mu'amar Gadaffi of Libya (US warplanes began bombing 'military installations' in April 1986), 'evil, drug-running dictator' General Manuel Noriega of Panama (President George Bush ordered troops in 'Operation Just Cause' to overthrow Noriega's government in December 1989) and, most powerfully of all, the 'new Hitler', Saddam Hussein of Iraq. If among some British politicians the Falklands War had 'laid to rest the ghost of Suez', for President Bush the Persian Gulf War had 'freed America from the memory of Vietnam'. The 'Vietnam syndrome', he claimed, had been 'kicked once and for all' (see P.M. Taylor 1992; Jeffords and Rabinovitz 1994; Keeble 1997; Wolfsfeld 1997, Carruthers 2000, McLaughlin 2002).

Numerous studies of the news coverage of the Persian Gulf War have scrutinized, among other things, the military jargon reinflected by many of the journalists involved ('surgical strikes', 'smart bombs', 'friendly fire', 'acceptable losses' and so forth). One of the possible effects of this apparent willingness to reprocess the military's preferred definitions of the situation, it has been argued, is that the reality of the conflict was effectively 'sanitized' for news audiences. Cumings (1992), in his book *War and Television*, makes the point succinctly:

> Remember the Gulf War? Or was that last season's hit show? The Gulf War was a war fought to demolish a memory, but it was also a war that produced no memory. It was our first 'television war': not blood and guts spilled in living color on the living room rug, not the transparent, objective immediacy of the all-seeing eye . . . but a radically distanced, technically controlled, eminently 'cool' postmodern optic which, in the doing, became an instrument of the war itself.
>
> (Cumings 1992: 103)

Evidently displaced from this postmodern optic is the loss of human life. Drawing on different sources, Taylor (1998: 160) suggests that current estimates are that 'there were 266 American dead (105 before the war began); forty-seven British dead (the single largest group being killed by US "friendly" fire); two French dead; one Italian dead; twenty-nine Saudis dead; nine Egyptians dead; six United Arab Emirates dead.' Several Israeli civilians were also killed by Iraqi missile attacks (as well as by US military attempts to shoot them down).

In sharp contrast with these estimates, however, is the absence of comprehensive figures for the number of Iraqi people who perished. In part due to the refusal of the US Defense Intelligence Agency, among others, to fully divulge its calculations, precise figures have not been made public. US General Norman Schwarzkopf, leader of the UN alliance, has been quoted as stating: 'We must have killed 100,000', while French officials have placed their estimate at 200,000 Iraqi troops killed (J. Taylor 1998; see also Jeffords and Rabinovitz 1994). Civilian casualties, due to factors such as the aerial bombardments, the collapse of the urban infrastructure (and with it the spread of disease), as well as the UN economic embargo, have been placed at well over the 1 million mark by different international research surveys. Perhaps as many as twice that number were turned into refugees, of whom tens of thousands are thought to have died. Consistent with a military language where cities are called 'soft targets' and dead civilians 'collateral damage', the Iraqi people being slaughtered were recurrently described using terms such as 'animals' and 'beasts'. News management in the Gulf War, as Knightley (1991: 5) argues, had at its core 'a deliberate attempt by the authorities to alter public perception of the nature of war itself, particularly the fact that civilians die in war.'

This depersonalization of the Iraqi victims of the war (one Harvard University study, according to Keeble (1997: 153), 'estimated that 46,900 children under five died in Iraq between January and August 1991') was made possible in part through a willingness on the part of most journalists to follow a news agenda set down for them by military officials. An overview of the types of terms used by the British press to report on the war, as compiled by the *Guardian Weekly* (Figure 7.1), pinpoints how a racialized 'us and them' frequently underpinned some journalists' choice of descriptive terms.

The ideological tensions discernible in these discursive oppositions indicate the limits of identity formation as it pertains to 'us and them'. The cultural dynamics of racism, intertwined as they are with those of class and patriarchy, assume a *naturalness*

Figure 7.1 Mad dogs and Englishmen

The following terms have all been used by the British press to report on the war in the Persian Gulf

By *The Guardian Weekly*

They have	**We have**
A war machine	Army, Navy and Air Force
Censorship	Reporting guidelines
Propaganda	Press briefings
They	**We**
Destroy	Take out
Destroy	Suppress
Kill	Eliminate
Kill	Neutralise
Kill	Decapitate
Cower in their foxholes	Dig in
They launch	**We launch**
Sneak missiles attacks	First strikes
Without provocation	Pre-emptively
Their men are . . .	**Our men are . . .**
Troops	Boys
Hordes	Lads
They are . . .	**Our boys are . . .**
Brainwashed	Professional
Paper tigers	Lionhearted
Cowardly	Cautious
Desperate	Confident
Cornered	Heroes
Cannon fodder	Dare devils
Bastards of Baghdad	Young knights of the skies
Blindly obedient	Loyal
Mad dogs	Desert rats
Ruthless	Resolute
Fanatical	Brave
Their boys are motivated by	**Our boys are motivated by**
Fear of Saddam	Old-fashioned sense of duty
Their boys	**Our boys**
Cower in concrete bunkers	Fly into the jaws of hell
Iraq ships are	**Our ships are**
A navy	An armada
Iraqi non-retaliation is	**Israeli non-retaliation is**
Blundering/Cowardly	An act of great statesmanship
Their missiles are . . .	**Our missiles are . . .**
Aging duds (rhymes with Scuds)	Like Luke Skywalker zapping Darth Vader

Figure 7.1 continued

Their missiles cause . . .	**Our missiles cause . . .**
Civilian casualties	Collateral damage
They . . .	**We . . .**
Fire wildly at anything	Precision bomb
Their PoWs are . . .	**Our PoWs are . . .**
Overgrown schoolchildren	Gallant boys
Saddam Hussein is . . .	**George Bush is . . .**
Demented	At peace with himself
Defiant	Resolute
An evil tyrant	Statesmanlike
A crackpot monster	Assured
Their planes . . .	**Our planes . . .**
Are shot out of the sky	Suffer a high rate of attrition
Are zapped	Fail to return from missions

Source: The Guardian Weekly reprinted in *Globe and Mail* 23 February 1991: D5

which is contingent upon ruling out counter-hegemonic voices (such as anti-war pro-
test groups, but also those of Arab women and men seeking to resist racist stereotypes)
as illegitimate. 'We can kill thousands,' wrote the British historian E.P. Thompson
(1980: 51), 'because we have first learned to call them "enemy". Wars commence in the
culture first of all and we kill each other in euphemisms and abstractions long before
the first missiles have been launched' (see also M. Bell (1995, 1998) on the distinction he
makes between **'bystanders' journalism'** and a **'journalism of attachment'**).

In turning to the ongoing conflict in Iraq, attention focuses on how Al-Jazeera,
the Arabic news network, reported on the casualites of warfare. In the course
of challenging the more 'sanitized' representations of the conflict prevailing on televi-
sion newscasts in the West, the network simultaneously recast several assumptions
underpinning certain familiar conventions of war reporting.

Al-Jazeera and the sanitization of war

Often described as the 'CNN of the Arab World', Al-Jazeera (which means 'an island'
in Arabic) is arguably the region's most influential news organization (see El-Nawawy
and Iskandar 2003). Launched in the Qatari capital, Doha, in 1996, the 24-hour satel-
lite television network attracts an audience currently estimated to be about 35 million
regular viewers, making it the most widely watched Arab news channel.[1]

Available free of charge throughout much of the Arab world, it is typically a pay-
television channel in Europe and North America. Although backed financially by the
government of Qatar, Al-Jazeera's journalists consistently maintain that their editorial
freedom is not compromised as a result. That said, the network's status as an

independent voice in the Arab world, encapsulated in its slogan 'The opinion and the other opinion', is frequently called into question by its many critics. For some, the network's commitment to providing news coverage from an Arab perspective means that it is ideologically compromised, and as such biased against the US and Israel. Other critics, in contrast, have denounced Al-Jazeera for being a Zionist tool, while still others insist that it is little more than a front for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In any case, above dispute is the fact that its news coverage has recurrently placed a considerable strain on Qatar's relations with other countries in the region, including Bahrain, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, where the network's offices have been closed on different occasions.

No stranger to controversy, Al-Jazeera came to prominence across the global media-scape in the aftermath of the dreadful events of September 11, 2001, due to its decision to broadcast taped messages attributed to Osama bin Laden (see also Zelizer and Allan 2002; el-Nawawy and Iskandar 2003; Thussu and Freedman 2003). News organizations around the world paid considerable sums to air edited excerpts, much to the consternation of US officials – not least National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, who demanded of television network executives that they 'exercise judgment' (i.e., censorship) in re-broadcasting the messages. Interestingly, most of the considerable traffic to the network's site (www.aljazeera.net) at the time was from the US, despite the fact that its content was entirely in Arabic. During the subsequent 'War on Terror' in Afghanistan, attention was once again directed at Al-Jazeera's role in making available reports of the conflict that challenged the preferred definitions of reality set down by military officials. For this reason alone, further controversy erupted in November 2001 when a US 'smart' bomb destroyed the network's Kabul offices. Intense speculation ensued that the offices had been deliberately destroyed. For example, Nik Gowing, a presenter on BBC World, stated afterwards that Al-Jazeera's only crime was 'bearing witness' to events that the US officials would prefer it did not see. In demanding that the Pentagon be called to account, he pointed out that when the presence of journalists is 'inconvenient' they risk becoming 'legitimate targets' in the eyes of the military – a charge promptly denied, as one would expect, by a Pentagon spokesperson (see Wells 2001).

Following the start of 'Operation Iraqi Freedom,' subscriber numbers surged dramatically in response to the intense demand for alternative insights into the conflict. The number of subscribers to the channel in Europe, it was claimed at the time, effectively doubled once the war was underway. The depth of its reporting was recurrently singled out for praise – or condemnation – depending on conflicting perceptions of the relative legitimacy of the war. In addition to reporting from Central Command in Qatar, four of Al-Jazeera's reporters were 'embedded' with the US and British military forces. In the main, however, the network ensured that most of its journalists roamed more freely. Together they covered the breadth of Iraq, including areas where Western journalists did not venture. The Al-Jazeera television crews remained in Baghdad throughout the conflict, as well as in other major battlegrounds such as Basra, Mosul and in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq.

Not surprisingly, a very different kind of coverage ensued. Tarik Kafala (2003), a BBC News Online reporter, identified a case in point. 'When Western journalists outside Basra were speculating about an uprising on the basis of coalition briefings,' he observed, 'Al-Jazeera's correspondent inside the city was reporting firsthand that "the streets are very calm and there are no indications of violence or riots".' This type of disjuncture between the network's reporting and that of its Western rivals attracted considerable comment. US Secretary of State Colin Powell, for example, criticized the coverage, contending that it 'magnifies the minor successes of the (Iraqi) regime and tends to portray our efforts in a negative light' (cited in Delio 2003). For others, however, it was the very extent to which Al-Jazeera's reporting called into question the more 'sanitized' representations of the conflict that made its presence so important – both on their television screens and, increasingly, on their personal computers (see Gubash 2003).

Prior to the launch of Al-Jazeera's Website, Arabic speakers were typically most interested in CNN.com (www.arabic.cnn.com) when looking for news online. Since the September 11 attacks, however, the page views for the Arabic-language site operated by Al-Jazeera reportedly grew from about 700,000 a day to 3 million, with more than 40 per cent of visitors logging on from the US (Ostrom 2003). Indeed, at the outbreak of hostilities in Iraq, aljazeera.net was widely recognized as receiving the most 'hits' of any Arabic site in the world. Of critical significance here was its commitment to pushing back the boundaries of Western definitions of 'objective' journalism so as to help give voice to contrary definitions of the world. In the case of the conflict in Iraq, this meant those of the Iraqi people themselves – victims, in the eyes of the network, both of Saddam Hussein's regime and the invasion of US and UK forces to destroy it.

By including in its reports what were frequently horrific images of civilian casualties, Al-Jazeera re-inflected familiar notions of 'balanced' reporting. It was precisely these images, in the view of Faisal Bodi (2003), a senior editor for aljazeera.net, that made Al-Jazeera 'the most sought-after news resource in the world'. In his words:

> I do not mean to brag – people are turning to us simply because the Western media coverage has been so poor. For although Doha is just a 15-minute drive from central command, the view of events from here could not be more different. Of all the major global networks, al-Jazeera has been alone in proceeding from the premise that this war should be viewed as an illegal enterprise. It has broadcast the horror of the bombing campaign, the blown-out brains, the blood-spattered pavements, the screaming infants and the corpses. Its team of on-the-ground, unembedded correspondents has provided a corrective to the official line that the campaign is, barring occasional resistance, going to plan.
>
> (Bodi 2003)

At no time was this difference in news values cast in sharper relief than on 23 March, the night Al-Jazeera broadcast footage of US casualties, as well as Iraqi television's interviews with five US prisoners of war. Al-Jazeera's decision to air the interviews was

promptly denounced by US Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, who alleged that it was a violation of the Geneva Convention protecting prisoners of war. In reply, the network's London bureau chief, Yosri Fouda, argued that Western news reports were being constrained to the extent that they failed to provide accurate coverage. Regarding the Geneva Convention, he insisted that a double standard was being invoked. 'We and other broadcasters were not criticised for showing pictures of Iraqi dead and captured,' he stated, 'or those famous pictures from Guantanamo Bay' (cited in Kafala 2003).

The more heated the ensuing furore became, of course, the more news headlines it generated around the world. The very images deemed by Western news organizations to be too disturbing to screen were being actively sought out by vast numbers of people via online news sites. According to figures compiled by popular search engines, such as Google, Lycos and AltaVista, the term 'Al-Jazeera' was quickly becoming one of the most searched-for topics on the Web. Figures for the week in question indicated that the term 'Al-Jazeera' (and variant spellings) was the term that showed the greatest increase on Google, while Lycos reported that it was the top search term, with three times more searches than 'sex' (a perennial favourite with Web surfers). For Karl Gregory of AltaVista, the popularity of Al-Jazeera's online sites was clear evidence of 'people branching out beyond their normal sources of news' (*BBC News Online*, 1 April 2003). The decision taken at Al-Jazeera to broadcast the images, as well as to display them online, was justified by its spokesperson, Jihad Ballout, as being consistent with its journalistic ethos of reporting the war as it was being fought on the ground. In his words: 'We didn't make the pictures – the pictures are there. It's a facet of the war. Our duty is to show the war from all angles' (cited in Whitaker 2003).

In the opinion of others, however, the network had become a mouthpiece for Iraqi propaganda. Citing the images, some military officials began ignoring questions from Al-Jazeera's reporters at briefings. At the same time, two of the network's financial reporters were evicted from the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (Nasdaq would follow suit, citing 'Al-Jazeera's recent conduct during the war' as the reason), their press credentials revoked. It was in cyberspace, however, that the backlash registered most decisively as various pro-war individuals and groups made clear their intent to make Al-Jazeera a target of retaliation. News sites of all descriptions are always vulnerable to attack from hackers – typically involving little more than Webpage defacements and graffiti – but those directed at Al-Jazeera's sites were remarkably vicious.

The 'electronic onslaught', as aptly characterized by one Internet commentator, began on 25 March, the same day the English-language site, www.english.aljazeera.net, was launched. Two days later, hackers 'crashed' both sites, effectively forcing them offline by a 'denial of service', or DOS, attack. This type of attack aims to close down a targeted site by overwhelming the associated server with so much meaningless data that it can no longer handle legitimate traffic. Few sites have sufficient resources, such as the necessary bandwidth, to withstand millions of simultaneous page impressions. Such was certainly the case with both Al-Jazeera sites. The English-language site was disabled virtually from the outset, while its Arabic-language counterpart struggled

– with only limited success – to hold up against the storm. Efforts to restore the sites, which reportedly included re-aligning them with servers in France, encountered fierce resistance by repeated hack attacks. 'We come up for five or ten minutes,' stated Salah AlSeddiqi, IT manager at Al-Jazeera, 'and then the attacks bring us down again' (cited in Roberts 2003).

The relative ease with which the Al-Jazeera site was effectively silenced was startling, even for many online commentators at the time. Some proceeded to argue that the attacks on the sites represented the future of political protest, the virtual equivalent of burning books containing heretic viewpoints. By this type of logic, any site providing news or information which called into question the legitimacy of a military campaign could be perceived, in turn, as constituting a threat to the war effort. Hacking thus becomes an insidious form of censorship. Summing up the crisis engendered by the hacking attacks, Hafez Mirazi, the network's Washington bureau chief, commented: 'This is very typical of what Al-Jazeera has been through in the Arab world and in many authoritarian regimes. It's just sad that the U.S. and U.S. institutions didn't deal with us any differently than the Iraqi regime did' (cited in Carlson 2003).

'Writing white': ethnic minorities and newswork

One of the many features currently shared by both British and US news organizations is that the newsworkers they employ are predominantly white and male. In the case of British newspaper organizations, a recent attempt to produce statistics suggests that reporters from ethnic minorities make up a mere fraction of 1 per cent of the journalistic workforce (Ainley 1998; see also Gordon and Rosenberg 1989). The need for far greater diversity is apparent in the televisual newsroom as well, where evidence indicates that the growing presence of ethnic minority reporters in front of the camera does not correspond, in relative terms, with the situation behind the scenes. Recommendations for improving news organizations' sensitivity to race-related matters advanced by parliamentary committees and reports (such as the last Royal Commission on the Press), like the guidelines set down by bodies such as the Press Complaints Commission or the National Union of Journalists, are laudable in intent but inadequate in practice (see Ross 1998).

The situation in the USA is only marginally more encouraging. In 1968, when the aforementioned report of the Kerner Commission was being released, fewer than 1 per cent of US journalists were African American (de Uriarte 1997: 146). Not surprisingly, the report demanded that news organizations 'bring more Black people into journalism' in order to improve the quality of reporting. Since the mid-1960s, some progress has been made, although not nearly enough. As former *New York Times* correspondent and Pulitzer Prize winner David K. Shipler (1998) observes, the rate of change has not been sufficient and, even worse, appears to be slowing down. Using statistics from the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), he points out that 'the

representation of blacks on news staffs has stagnated at a low plateau of under 6 percent [and] blacks moving into managerial ranks remain too scarce to be counted as a reform completed.' He maintains that ASNE's data, which were collected in 1996, also shows that only 11.5 per cent of newsroom staff are members of an ethnic minority (primarily defined as African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Americans) at a time when they make up 26 per cent of the US population (see also Lafky 1993; Stewart 1997). 'Newsrooms,' Shipler writes, 'are not hermetically sealed against the prejudices that play perniciously just beneath the surface of American life.'

As a number of researchers are quick to point out, however, greater diversity in the news organization does not automatically translate into more diverse forms of news coverage. 'Instead,' de Uriarte (1997: 146) argues, 'minorities in the newsroom still find themselves confronting the bulwark of objectivity that excluded minority perception shaped by minority realities.' That is to say, when the news media view the social world they do so through a 'prism of hegemony', one guided by the notion of journalistic 'objectivity' which 'has long been white and largely remains so today' (de Uriarte 1997: 144). Accordingly, to achieve the aim of a truly integrated newsroom will require a far more profound change than that associated with affirmative action initiatives alone. If it is the case, as she suggests, that it is in 'the contemporary newsroom where "qualified" minorities almost uniformly are perceived to be those who are least disruptive to the newsroom culture, including its ideology of objectivity', then the whiteness of objectivity must be fundamentally recast if a greater diversity of voices are to be heard (see also Santos 1997).

Journalist Ellis Cose (1997: 3) reaffirms this point from a different angle when he poses the question: 'Is objectivity (or even fairness) possible when dealing with people from different racial groups and cultural backgrounds?' Moreover, he asks: 'Does "getting it right" mean anything more virtuous than conforming to prevailing prejudice?' The ways in which racist presuppositions are implicated in the routinized practices of news production, from the news values in operation to 'gut instincts' about source credibility, are often difficult to identify let alone reverse. Efforts intended to disrupt the ideological purchase of 'objective' reporting practices are likely to meet considerable resistance in the white dominated newsroom. 'Operating under the strictures of "objectivity" and facing conflicting expectations and uncertainties,' Entman (1990: 343) contends, 'journalists are neither authorized nor eager to engage in such exercises.' Important insights in this regard are also provided by Sig Gissler, a former editor of the *Milwaukee Journal*, who observes:

It's easier to cover racial stories in the conventional superficial manner and keep a lid on feelings. In newsrooms, race is usually discussed warily. Black reporters, for example, are often reluctant to speak up for fear of being tagged whiners. Meanwhile, white reporters bite their tongues for fear of being labeled racists, the most scalding epithet in the news business today.

(Gissler 1997: 110–11)

For minority journalists struggling to adopt to what de Uriarte (1997: 147) aptly describes as 'the hegemonic newsroom culture', the pressures to conform are considerable. It is a 'sad fact', she writes, that 'minorities are often hired for their ability to fit in rather than for their ability to provide new or diverse voices' (see also Quiroga 1997; Wong 1997).

This pressure to 'fit in' is nowhere more pronounced than at the level of the news organization's economic imperatives. 'Minority staff', according to Gandy (1997: 42), 'may challenge the selection and framing of stories about race in ways that conflict with market-oriented strategies suggested by a newspaper's consultants.' It is this market orientation which explains, in part, why journalists continue to devote a disproportionate degree of attention to the lives of the white and the wealthy. All of the major news organizations, as Hacker (1997: 74) points out, have predominantly white audiences, a 'bottom line' which 'black employees are expected to understand and appreciate.' Regardless of the type of news event being processed, it follows, news accounts 'must be pitched to white readers, in ways whites can square with their preconceptions and perceptions' (Hacker 1997: 72; see also Newkirk 2000). These types of tensions indicative of the drive to make the news palatable to white readers and viewers need to be denaturalized at every level. 'For journalists of color,' argues journalist John Phillip Santos (1997: 123), 'it means resisting the professionally driven tendency, as one *Seattle Times* reporter termed it, "to write white", which he described as employing "a certain language, a certain code".'

It is precisely this kind of resistance which is at the heart of Hall's (1990) call for the development of an 'anti-racist common sense'. In seeking to intervene in the realm of news culture with the aim of closing the painful gap between 'us and them', every effort must be made to take up his challenge 'to undermine, deconstruct and question the unquestioned racist assumptions on which so much of media practice is grounded' (Hall 1990: 8). At stake is the urgent task of identifying and then subverting the prejudicial, discriminatory logics which together are blocking the emergence of the forms of 'multiracial coverage' envisaged by Wilson and Gutiérrez (1995) above. In contributing to the perpetuation of this language of 'us and them', the news media, as Gandy (1997: 37) writes, 'have made us see the world as a mean and dangerous place', and thereby 'diminished the quality of our lives'. Moreover, he continues, 'to the extent that they have emphasized the ways in which the distribution of social and economic risks breaks down along racial lines, they have helped to tear us apart'.

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Note

1 This section about Al-Jazeera draws on Allan, S. (2004) 'The Culture of Distance: Online Reporting of the Iraq War' in S. Allan and B. Zelizer (eds) *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*. London and New York: Routledge.

8 | J O U R N A L I S M   O N   T H E   W E B :
S E P T E M B E R   1 1   A N D   T H E   W A R   I N   I R A Q

To practice random acts of journalism, you don't need a big-league publication
with a slick Website behind you. All you need is a computer, an Internet connection,
and an ability to perform some of the tricks of the trade: report what you observe,
analyze events in a meaningful way, but most of all, just be fair and tell the truth, as
you and your sources see it.

<div align="right">(J.D. Lasica, online journalist)</div>

Actually too tired, scared and burnt-out to write anything. Yes, we did go out again
to see what was hit. Yes, everything just hurts . . . I can't stand the TV or the lies on
the news any more. No good news wherever you look.

<div align="right">(Salman Pax, the Baghdad Blogger)</div>

Bold declarations about the importance of journalism for modern democracy, typically
expressed with the sorts of rhetorical flourishes first heard in the early days of the
newspaper, are sounding increasingly anachronistic in the brave new world of the
Internet. Familiar appeals to journalism's traditional role or mission, its social
responsibilities *vis-à-vis* a citizenry actively engaging with the pressing issues of the
day, appear to have lost much of their purchase. Public criticism – if not outright
cynicism – about the quality of the news reporting provided by mainstream media
institutions is widespread. Journalists themselves are more often than not seen to be
troubled, some quietly lamenting the lost traditions of a once-proud profession, others
loudly resisting market-driven obsessions with 'bottom line' profitability. Journalism's
commitment to championing the public interest, many of them fear, is being replaced
with a cheap and tawdry celebration of what interests the public.

   It almost goes without saying, of course, that these types of concerns about repor-
torial integrity are as old as journalism itself. What is striking from the vantage point
of today, however, is the extent to which competing projections about the very future
of journalism – encouraging or otherwise – recurrently revolve around a shared

perception. That is to say, there appears to be a growing awareness that what is going to count as journalism in the years to come is being decisively reconfigured, at this very moment, by the rise of the network society, to use Castells's (2001) evocative phrase. In his view, we are witnessing the emergence of a new form of capitalism – characterized as much by its globalizing reach as by its flexible adaptability to change – that is actively re-writing the imperatives of time, space and distance around the globe (see also Volkmer 2002; Urry 2003; Hassan 2004). While it is currently difficult to discern precisely what the implications of this new form of capitalism will be for journalism, there is little doubt that a key promise of the 'digital revolution', namely to enhance the knowledge and participation of citizens in their own governance, is under threat.

The use of information by the powerful and privileged as a means to reinforce, even exacerbate, the structures of the 'digital divide' is well documented. In my view, however, insufficient attention has been devoted to examining online journalism in this context, especially with regard to its potential for shaping democratic deliberation and debate across what are ever more globalized public spheres. Accordingly, this chapter shall take as its focus the evolving forms and practices of online reporting, both with regard to the major news Websites, but also to various alternative forms of reporting. Few would dispute that television is the news medium of choice for most people when a breaking story is unfolding, but there is little doubt amongst commentators that the relative size of online news audiences is growing rapidly. 'Viewers first turn to television in part because TV's strength is the delivery of a narrative story line. That's what people are looking for when an event like this first begins to unfold', argues Kinsey Wilson, Vice President and Editor-in-Chief of USAToday.com. 'Eventually, though, television starts to loop back on itself and repeats the narrative over and over again' (cited in Outing 2003). It is at this point, as he suggests, that a key advantage of online news comes to the fore: 'The best sites can move quickly to develop a story in multiple directions, add depth and detail, and give readers their own pathways to explore.'

It is this latter consideration, that is, the ways in which the Internet affords the user with the opportunity to engage with news, information and commentary from afar, that is of particular interest here. In the next section, we shall briefly examine the rise of the Internet as a news source, so as to provide a historical context to the ensuing discussion. Next, the chapter investigates, firstly, the online reporting of the tragic events of September 11 and, secondly, the use of warblogs in covering the war in Iraq. Attention focuses throughout on the ways in which online reporting provides spaces for alternative types of reporting, a process that is shown to be uneven, contingent and frequently the site of intense resistance.[1]

News on the Internet

The history of the Internet as a news provider is more often than not portrayed as a series of distinct milestones, each one of which is typically shown to revolve around the

arrival of a particular technology-driven form or technique. While there is much to be gained by way of the types of insights this approach generates, there is always the danger that such milestones appear to be self-contained, isolated events. This when the stuff of history, as we all know, is far messier than such an approach might suggest. In the discussion which follows, I will necessarily dwell on certain formative instances, but I wish to emphasize from the outset that each of them needs to be seen as being indicative of a complex – and always contradictory – array of imperatives. To the extent that it is possible to discern the contours of these imperatives, especially with respect to the dynamics which imbue their logics, it is likely that they will be more apparent in retrospect than they were at the time. That said, though, from the vantage point of today, it is also more difficult to appreciate the socially contingent, frequently contested nature of their lived negotiation. Resisted at all costs must be any sense of inevitability where these formative processes are concerned.

One seemingly straightforward way to begin this kind of brief historical account would be to identify the arrival of the first news site on the global scene. Disputes continue to unfold, however, regarding which Website deserves to be acknowledged in such a way, with different interested parties each staking their respective claim. This controversy stems primarily from disagreements over how best to define what constitutes a news site as distinct from other, related types of sites. Much of the early, experimental work was conducted by newspaper companies placing their news reports online, thereby blurring – some might say remediating – traditional categories. Such definitional matters will not be settled here, but in my view it is worth drawing attention to the efforts of the Canadian national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*. In 1979, it began publishing both in print and electronically on the same day, and also provided online access to a full text commercial database that included every story it had published over the previous two years. Whether or not the *Globe and Mail* is correct to claim recognition for these innovations as being world firsts – as it does on its Webpages – depends, of course, on the criteria being agreed upon. In the US, a collaborative effort between the *Columbus Dispatch* and CompuServe arguably produced the country's first online newspaper in July of 1980. Here it is important to acknowledge, however, how few people at the time would have anticipated that the electronic edition of the daily would be read by people sitting in front of a personal computer in their own homes. 'In that pre-IBM PC era', as Chip Brown (1999) remarked, 'CompuServe had all of 3,600 subscribers, so the circulation was necessarily limited.'

By 1988, there were 10 newspapers online in Canada, and about 60 in the US (the first online newspaper in the UK, the *Electronic Telegraph*, appeared in November 1994). Essentially, an online newspaper was little more than an electronic archive of the printed edition, and something of a challenge to navigate. Most PC users, Paul Bonner (1989) pointed out in *PC Computing* magazine in 1989, 'find that their first encounter with a network such as CompuServe, MCI, or GEnie is like a trip to the Dark Ages'. Logging on, he observed, meant entering a 'world of dense, misleading menu trees, vague prompts, and unforgiving command structures'. Journalist and academic John

Naughton (1999) has vivid memories of these early days in a British context. 'For decades,' he writes, 'the Net was below the radar of mainstream journalism – its practitioners didn't even know of its existence. When I used to tell newspaper colleagues that I'd been using e-mail from home since 1975, they would make placatory noises and check the route to the nearest exit' (1999: 30). It was around 1995, he recalls, that the situation began to change, when 'the conventional media realised something was up'. Precisely what was up, of course, was anything but clear. He observes:

> At first the Net was treated as a kind of low-status weirdo craze, akin perhaps to CB radio and the use of metal-detectors. Then it became the agent of Satan, a conduit for pornography, political extremism and subversion. Next it was the Great White Hope of Western capitalism, a magical combination of shopping mall and superhighway which would enable us to make purchases without leaving our recliners. Then it was the cosmic failure because it turned out that Internet commerce was – shock! horror! – *insecure*. And so it went, and goes, on, an endless recycling of myths from newspaper clippings, ignorance, prejudice, fear, intellectual sloth and plain, ornery malice.
>
> (Naughton 1999: 30)

Interestingly, Naughton proceeds to note the irony that the hostility some print journalists have directed toward the Internet is very similar to that which their 1950s counterparts aimed at the early television newscasts. 'Then, as now, the first instinct was to rubbish and undermine the intruder', he comments. 'Television news, said the newspapers, would be vulgar and sensational. There would be fewer words in an entire thirty-minute news bulletin than in half a page of *The Times*. And so on' (1999: 31). A further line of attack was to challenge the credibility of the Internet as a news provider, typically by characterizing online sites as being inherently untrustworthy – and lacking in the objectivity, professionalism and independence members of the public expected. It was only when it became apparent that people were turning to the Internet for their 'hot' or 'breaking' news, despite such dire warnings, that newspapers began, ever so reluctantly, to rethink their relationship to their Internet rivals.

Early indications of the potential online reporting might one day realize in this regard included, for example, news flashes about earthquakes in California, home of the fledgling software industry. First in 1989 in San Francisco, but more substantively in Northridge (20 miles west-northwest of Los Angeles) on 17 January 1994, 'the global computer network buzzed into action', to quote from an Associated Press wire service report (AP, 18 January 1994). One early user – evidently a Prodigy subscriber with a wireless modem – alerted the world about the predawn earthquake before mainstream media broke the news. Within 20 minutes of the incident, users began offering firsthand accounts of their experiences, including descriptions of the destruction they had witnessed. Others relayed information updates gleaned from the television and radio news coverage to hastily configured newsgroups. While distant users sent e-mail enquiring about the well-being of relatives, local people with long-distance telephone

connections offered to make calls on behalf of those temporarily denied the service in the quake area. Some even offered to help organize rescue operations. For journalist Jon Katz (1994), writing later the same year, this electronic response suggested that 'a new news medium' had been born. 'No information structure has ever been able to do anything remotely like it', he argued, seeing in this activity a basis to project an optimistic appraisal of what he termed 'the new information culture'.

Other commentators, as one would expect, were less convinced by this 'network of computer networks' increasingly being called 'the Internet' in news reports. Paul Andrews (1995), writing in the *Seattle Times*, argued that when 'the traditional information infrastructure is disrupted – jammed phone lines, power outages, wrecked highways in the case of the quakes and government censorship in the [then Soviet Union] coup – the Internet shines.' On such occasions, when the Internet is 'the only game in town', it acquires 'far more legitimacy, substance and credibility' than would be the case otherwise. Indeed, in his view, when the Internet must compete with other media, it is promptly revealed to be 'a noisy and cumbersome sideshow', effectively little more than 'the haunt of amateurs, poseurs and incompetents'. For those sharing this line of argument, real journalism did not take place on the Internet. And yet, as Naughton (1999) observed above, it was in 1995 that the situation began to change. Indeed, historical accounts often state that this was the year that users in the US 'fell in love' with the Internet or, more to the point, the World Wide Web. If the Web was in effect three years old by then, its presence was slowly becoming a reality for increasing numbers of people due to the popular take-up of online services (the Microsoft Network or MSN was launched in July, and had acquired over 500,000 subscribers by the end of the year) using Netscape's refashioned browser software. Now it was possible to click a mouse to access information on a computer database directly on the Web, as opposed to typing addresses such as 'Telnet 192.101.82.300' to retrieve it from the Internet. The release of Microsoft's Windows 95 operating system in August was front-page news around the world, a clear sign that personal computing was becoming increasingly mainstream.

In 1995, news Websites were typically little more than repositories of reports previously published elsewhere. In the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing on 19 April that year, however, the role of the Internet in creating spaces for information to circulate was widely hailed as a landmark moment in online history. Worthy of particular attention at the time was the immediacy of the news coverage, as well as its volume and breadth. Minutes after the bombing, journalists and their editors at online news services were rushing to post whatever information they could about the tragedy. 'Within an hour of the blast,' stated Beth Copeland, Deputy Managing Editor at *Newsday Direct*, 'we had a locator map of Oklahoma City, the latest AP [Associated Press] story, [and] a graphic talking about various types of bombs used in terrorist attacks' (cited in Agrawal 1995). Elsewhere on the Web, and in a manner reminiscent of the earthquakes discussed above, eyewitnesses posted their descriptions of the excavation scene, often with heart-rending details. Others transcribed news reports, especially

with regard to the disaster relief work underway. Listings of survivors, and the hospitals treating them (complete with telephone contact details), similarly began to appear. For people anxious to contact relatives but unable to get through on long-distance telephone lines, some Oklahoma City residents offered to make local calls for them. Discussion forums called newsgroups appeared, where people gave expression to their rage, others to their grief, while still others offered emergency aid for victims. Such was also the case with online chat rooms, where several Internet Service Providers (ISPs) opened multiple rooms dedicated to discussions about the bombing. CompuServe's Daphne Kent described the chat rooms she visited as the most emotional she had seen, apparently due to the fact children had been killed and 'it could have happened anywhere' (cited in Haring 1995).

As quickly as it could manage, the *Oklahoma City Daily* began to post related stories, as did local television station KFOR, 'where people could query station staff about events and inquire about the station's progress in getting word out to the rest of the broadcast media' (Oakes 1995). ISPs, such as America Online, created repositories devoted to the bombing, making available news feeds from the wire services. Prodigy and AT&T Interchange also offered their members news coverage of ongoing developments (as did CompuServe, although not on the first day). Evidently within three hours of the explosion, *Newsday Direct* users were able to ask questions of an expert, author and retired Navy Seal Richard Marcinko, on the service's bulletin boards (Agrawal 1995). For many of the newspapers with an online presence, such as *The New York Times* with its @times site or *The Chicago Tribune*'s Chicago Online, it would be near the end of the day before a pertinent story was posted. Few offered much by way of provision for unfolding news events beyond copy taken from the wire services, preferring instead to post the daily's news items once they had been published. News photographs were particularly rare. The site associated with *The San Jose Mercury News*, along with that operated by *Time* magazine, were amongst the very few able to post photographs. ABC News made a video clip available to users of its service on America Online, although it apparently took 11 minutes to download what was a grainy, postage-stamp-size 15-second clip, even with the fastest modem connection available (Agrawal 1995). Beginning the next day the amount of online coverage improved, with some news sites also allowing users to access archived stories on terrorism, militia groups and related topics.

In the aftermath of the national crisis engendered by the Oklahoma City bombing, advocates of the Internet insisted that it had proved itself to be an indispensable news and information resource. Critics, in sharp contrast, were sceptical about the value of news sites, arguing that they were slow to react, and in the main offered news that was otherwise available in evening newspapers or on television. Others pointed to technical glitches, observing that several of the major news sites had ground to a halt because they were overwhelmed with demand in the hours when they would have been especially valuable (Andrews 1995). Nevertheless, analyses of Internet traffic in the first two weeks after the bombing discerned dramatic increases in the 'hits' registered by online

news sites. 'Broadcast is no longer the only medium for breaking news', stated Bruce Siceloff, editor at NandOnet, the online service of *The News and Observer* in Raleigh, North Carolina. 'We didn't have to stop a press to replate', he added, 'There were no deadlines. No readers who lost out because they got an early edition. . . . Like CNN and radio, we can and did break and update and expand the story on a minute's notice – numerous times in a single hour' (cited in Agrawal 1995). According to Siceloff's figures, the weekly count of hits for the NandOnet site grew by about 300,000 a week for the first two weeks, reaching 2.37 million hits for the week that ended 30 April. Of particular interest to users, he argued, was the wealth of information from primary sources available online (such as the University of Oklahoma's student newspaper, the White House, relief agencies, pro- and anti-militia groups, and so forth), its instant availability, and also the opportunity to interact (Agrawal 1995).

For those in the newspaper industry, it was becoming increasingly obvious that they would not be able to compete with their electronic rival where breaking news was concerned. This was particularly so at a time of crisis, when people's need for information to provide context to rapidly unfolding events was of paramount importance. As Chris Oakes (1995) wrote at the time of the bombing, information is the lifeblood of the Internet. 'Information in the form of raw news, opinion, condolence and all else that spews from connected humans when their world goes haywire. Perhaps more than any Web use, this Internet response to a national tragedy presages what the future of online will be.' Over the next few years, evidence to support this claim would be found in the online reporting of a number of tragic events, such as the TWA 800 crash, the Heaven's Gate mass suicide, and the death of Princess Diana, amongst others (see also Borden and Harvey 1998; Hall 2001; Pavlik 2001; Gunter 2003; Kawamoto 2003). It would be a fateful day in September 2001, however, which would decisively recast the emergent forms, strategies and conventions of online news.

Reporting September 11

Less than ten minutes after the first passenger plane struck the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, eyewitness accounts began to appear on the World Wide Web (Langfield 2002). People were desperate to put into words what they had seen, to share their experiences, even when they defied comprehension. Following closely behind were the major news sites – such as CNN.com, MSNBC.com, ABCNews.com, CBSnews.com and FoxNews.com in the US – with their respective journalists scrambling to post information as quickly as they could gather it from bewildered sources. As the crisis unfolded, however, most of these sites were so besieged by user demand that they became virtually inaccessible. If the day before these sites had been counting their 'hits' in the hundreds of thousands per hour, suddenly they were experiencing millions of such hits. Online news managers, like their mainstream news counterparts, were caught completely off-guard by breaking developments of this speed and

magnitude. MSNBC.com, for example, reportedly registered as many as 400,000 people hitting its pages simultaneously. In the case of CNN.com, 9 million page views were made per hour that morning. Whereas some 14 million page views would be ordinarily made over the course of an entire day, about 162 million views were made that day (Outing 2001b). Each of the other major news sites could be reached only sporadically as efforts mounted to ward off the danger of the Internet infrastructure undergoing a complete 'congestion collapse'.

Few online journalists would dispute the claim that television led the way in covering the attacks during the early hours. The dramatic footage of crashing jetliners was indeed such that individuals with access to television were much less likely to turn to the Internet than those who were deskbound, such as office workers. Online news sites, painfully aware of their users' frustrations, struggled to make the best of a desperate situation. In the early hours of the crisis, efforts to cope with the huge upsurge in traffic were varied and met with limited success. Several news sites responded by removing from their Webpages any image-intensive graphics, such as banners, photographs and advertising content, so as to facilitate access. Further strategies to improve the capacity of Websites to respond included expanding the amount of bandwidth available, bringing additional computer servers online, suspending user registration processes and temporarily turning off traffic-tracking software (Outing 2001a; Robins 2001). The *New York Times* site even dispensed with its famous masthead to help streamline the loading process.

Still, for those restricted to their computers for information, the response time of some major news sites – if and when they actually loaded – must have seemed painfully slow. In light of these and related difficulties associated with accessing these news sites, many users were forced to look elsewhere on the Internet for information about breaking developments. Those turning to the Websites associated with the wire services, such as Associated Press (AP) and Reuters.com, also encountered similar technical difficulties, however. News sites offering links to less well-known news sources – such as the *Drudge Report* (www.drudgereport.com) – were typically less burdened with Web traffic. Such was also the case with 'specialty' news sites, such as those associated with business publications. The *Wall Street Journal*, its main office evacuated due to its proximity to the World Trade Center, made its Website free of charge for the day. The stock markets having closed, Bloomberg.com, a financial news site, posted continuing updates while assessing the possible implications of the events for futures trading and interest rates. Meanwhile, news portals, namely sites which offer readers a range of links to newspaper and trade publications, also stepped into the breach. One such portal, Newshub (www.newshub.com), reportedly performed consistently throughout the day, offering information updates every 15 minutes (Wendland 2001).

Accordingly, in the near-absence of the major online news sites, definitions of what qualified as a 'news' site were being dramatically recast by the crisis. Operators of several non-news sites promptly reoriented them so as to make information available as it emerged. Such sites included the satirical site Fark.com ('It's not news, it's Fark'),

ordinarily devoted to bizarre and offbeat news stories, which provided links for straight reporting of breaking developments. Several 'techie' or community-news sites, such as Slashdot.org ('News for Nerds. Stuff that matters'), similarly provided ad hoc portals for news, background information and discussion. Staff working at Scripting.com, a site for technical discussions of Web programming, set to work redistributing news items otherwise inaccessible at their original news site (Glasner 2001). From one site to the next, individuals were responding to the crisis by doing what they could to make whatever information they had available to other members of the online community. In so doing, they not only challenged traditional definitions of 'news', they also opened up for reappraisal the issue of who could be counted as a 'journalist' (see also Allan 2002).

Citizen-produced coverage

Across the Webscape on September 11, hundreds of Websites were being rapidly refashioned as the day wore on. Many ordinary people felt compelled to post their eyewitness accounts, personal photographs, interpretations and analyses. Such 'citizen-produced coverage', to use a term frequently heard, was being produced by people who were transforming into 'amateur newsies', or instant reporters, photojournalists and opinion columnists. Their contributions to 'personal journalism', or 'do-it-yourself reporting', appeared from diverse locations, so diverse as to make judgements about their accuracy difficult if not impossible. These types of personal news items were forwarded via e-mail many times over by people who did not actually know the original writer or photographer. As John Pavlik of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism has since pointed out, some of the first-person reporting was 'seriously flawed'. Still, he maintains, 'people will learn that there's a lot of other voices out there. That was the promise of the Web in the first place and maybe this was one of the first examples of it being fulfilled' (cited in Langfield 2002).

   The contrast between citizen-produced coverage and mainstream reporting was stark. Worthy of particular attention here was the role played by Weblogs in helping to facilitate the circulation of this form of coverage. A Weblog is a personal 'log' or journal of the Web, usually updated on a daily basis, and typically thick with clickable hyperlinks to other items available elsewhere on the Web that the author (called a 'Weblogger', or 'blogger' for short) considers worth viewing. 'Most of the amateur content', as Kahney (2001b) has observed, 'would be inaccessible, or at least hard to find, if not for many of the Web's outstanding weblogs, which function as "portals" to personal content.' Managers of these Weblogs spent September 11 rapidly linking together any available accounts or photographs from 'amateur', 'guerrilla' or 'DIY' (do it yourself) journalists onto their respective sites. 'Some people cope by hearing and distributing information in a crisis', wrote the owner of one popular Weblog. 'I'm one of those people, I guess. Makes me feel like I'm doing something useful for those that can't do anything' (cited in Kahney 2001a).

In stretching the boundaries of what counted as journalism, so-called 'personal journalists' and their Webloggers together threw into sharp relief the reportorial conventions of mainstream journalism. The Webloggers, as online researcher Mindy McAdams has pointed out, 'illustrated how news sources are not restricted to what we think of as the traditional news media'. Indeed, she adds, the 'man-on-the street interview is now authored by the man on the street and self-published, including his pictures' (cited in Raphael 2001). The significance of these interventions was not lost on full-time journalists, of course, as many of them turned to Weblogs with interest. Indeed, for many of them, Weblogs were suddenly worthy of recognition as legitimate news sources. Just as television newscasts occasionally drew upon so-called 'amateur' video footage to supplement their reports, the mainstream news sites began instigating a similar type of practice. Moreover, some mainstream journalists entered Internet chat rooms, requesting contact from people with eyewitness accounts or those willing to discuss efforts to reach relatives in New York City or at the Pentagon. Many such journalists worked for newspapers producing an extra edition that afternoon, and so wanted to supplement news items with local takes or angles on the events (Runett 2001).

The dynamics of interactivity became increasingly significant for the major news sites over the course of the day. Several of these sites moved quickly to make space for their readers' firsthand accounts and photographs (even video-footage in some cases) produced at one of the scenes. These items from survivors, in the words of one *New York Times* reporter, were 'social history in its rawest, tear-stained form' (LiCalzi O'Connell 2001). At the same time, bulletin boards enabled readers to post their experiences of what they had witnessed. WashingtonPost.com, which led with the Pentagon story, placed on its opening page: 'Reporter's Query: How were you affected by today's events? E-mail your story and please include your name and phone number', followed by an e-mail address (cited in Langfield 2001). Calm, level-headed descriptions were being set alongside deeply emotional outbursts. Many of these boards, like the chat rooms, intermixed words of comfort and condolence with those of prejudice and harassment.

Among the first of the major news sites to host their own online chat room was ABCNews.com, where message titles reportedly included: 'Pray for America', 'Why? Oh Why?' and 'Nuke the Middle East' (Wendland 2001). Users were also given the opportunity to discuss issues with invited experts on a diverse number of topics. Question and Answer (Q&A) discussions were held, as were 'roundtable' online discussions. 'Shaken, raw and vulnerable, we all want – no, NEED – our opinions on the matter to be heard', wrote Benedetti (2001), a *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reporter. 'And with the Net', she added, 'there is someone to listen, whether it's in some chat room, bulletin board, or at the receiving end of an endlessly forwarded e-mail.' Describing her hunger for information in the days following the attacks as insatiable, she found the sheer volume of material on the Internet to be a comfort of sorts. 'It's as though if I comb through enough Web pages, sift through the right chat rooms, click on the right e-mail, I might somehow find some semblance of an answer to this ugly mess.'

The richness of the accounts made available that day by 'personal' or 'amateur' journalists was extraordinary (even when allowing for those lapses where inaccuracies – accidental in some cases, deliberate in others – crept into accounts). Still fresh in many people's minds are the haunting stories and images of these eyewitnesses, some expressed in heart-rending detail, that fell outside the boundaries of journalism traditionally defined. The rapid and extensive circulation of this form of reporting across the Webscape has meant that the human consequences of this crisis have arguably received far more extensive expression than would have otherwise been the case.

Searching for answers

Mainstream news coverage devoted to the tragedy of September 11 and its immediate aftermath tended to address the basic questions of 'who?', 'what?', 'where?', 'when?' and 'how?' consistent with good reporting practice. Missing from much of this coverage, however, was a sustained engagement with the question, 'why?' In looking for responses to this latter question, the limitations indicative of so much press and broadcast reporting become particularly clear (see also Zelizer and Allan 2002).

Criticisms of the mainstream news coverage have been sharp and to the point, yet few people have sought to intervene to effect change. One pertinent example of how pressure can be brought to bear via the Internet, however, was an e-mailed petition circulated by communication scholars criticizing the immediate post-September 11 coverage. Over 250 professors and graduate students from 23 countries signed their names to a call for 'responsible journalism', which was then e-mailed to senior producers and executives at all of the major US broadcast networks in early October. The petition, organized by Professor Robert Huesca (2001) at the Communications Department at Trinity College in San Antonio, Texas, called on journalists to take the following steps in their reporting:

- Expand and balance the range of information sources beyond current and former U.S. military and government officials to include domestic and international academics, think tank analysts, and civic leaders.
- Seek diverse and contrasting perspectives, including ethnic and gender diversity, that will broaden and deepen discussions regarding potential courses of action in response to this tragedy.
- Incorporate historical, cultural, and religious dimensions into interviews and reports whenever possible, rather than treating them as discrete topics isolated from routine reporting.
- Expose audiences to the research, practices, and guidance of the large body of scholars and practitioners of peace studies.
- Select language and images that most dispassionately and accurately describe events and conditions; avoid routinely adopting the terms and interpretations of officials into breaking and continuing news portrayals.

- Limit the repetition of extreme images of destruction, violence, pain, and suffering, and balance them with routine examples of cooperation, reconstruction, and reconciliation.
- Reassign employees to non-editorial responsibilities if they have conflicts of interest with current policy discussions. This would include former employment in key government agencies and family relationships to high-ranking government officials.

These proposed steps were intended to counter what were regarded to be serious limitations associated with much of the reporting in the immediate aftermath of the crisis. 'We are most troubled', Huesca argued, 'by the singular and relentless use of the "war" metaphor to describe the attack and potential responses, and the near-exclusive reliance on current and former government and military officials to interpret events.' Evidently the majority of the signatories had responded within three days of the petition being issued, a response Huesca considered to be unprecedented in terms of scope and intensity.

Perhaps not surprisingly in this context, September 11 saw far greater numbers of people in the US turning to foreign or international sites than was typical prior to the tragedy. The British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) news site (news.bbc.co.uk) reportedly received the greatest share of 'hits' from US users looking abroad. The Corporation's new media editor-in-chief, Mike Smartt, stated:

> People appear to be increasingly turning to the web for their breaking news. It's the biggest story since the second world war. We decided to clear everything off the front page, which we've never done before and concentrate all our journalists on the story. We work hand in hand with the broadcast teams but don't wait for them to report the facts. It works both ways. [. . .] Most important to us were the audio and video elements. It was among the most dramatic news footage anyone has ever seen. The ability to put all that on the web for people to watch over again set us apart.
>
> (cited in the *Guardian*, 17 September, 2001)

Nevertheless, the BBC site, likes its US counterparts (as well as those in countries elsewhere around the globe), was unable to cope with the traffic to its servers at times. 'Hits' numbered into the millions, a level of demand engendering constant transmission problems. Streamlining the site's contents helped, but it remained a struggle for staff to maintain a presence online. Also in London, Philippa Edward, commercial director at Independent Television News (ITN) New Media, stated: 'More than 30 per cent of our traffic comes from the US, and people were sidestepping US sites to come to us, which was gratifying' (cited in the *Guardian*, 17 September, 2001).

US readers were similarly turning to other countries' online newspaper sites as well. In the case of the British broadsheet newspaper the *Guardian*, for example, its ombudsperson, Ian Mayes (2001a, 2001b), reported that letters sent to the editor almost doubled in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, with well over 600 arriving on both September 13 and 14. The majority of these letters arrived by e-mail, offering prompt

responses to the newspaper's coverage. According to Mayes, a large number of the letters (but apparently still a minority) were highly critical of some of the views being expressed. 'The e-mail response,' Mayes (2001a) pointed out, 'has provided a graphic reminder that writers in the *Guardian* no longer address only a generally sympathetic domestic constituency.' This wider audience, it seems, is less likely to share the newspaper's centre-left political orientation than its regular British readership. Some readers expressed their objections to particular articles using strong language, particularly where they felt that they were intrusive, insensitive or anti-American (a few, Mayes noted, went so far as to threaten a given journalist with torture and mutilation). In contrast, many of those readers writing to make appreciative remarks, stated that it was the breadth of coverage which attracted them to the *Guardian* Website. 'I hope the *Guardian* will continue to provide a forum for different opinions and world views,' one British reader wrote, adding: 'It is important to keep channels of communication and understanding open.'

Of particular importance to these readers, Mayes (2001a) maintained, is the space devoted to alternative viewpoints on the *Guardian*'s pages. Especially pertinent here is the inclusion of voices from the Muslim world, a distinctive feature of the news coverage when it is compared with that available in other countries. To support this observation, Mayes (2001b) offered several quotations from letters written by US readers to the Website:

'I am an American who fears, more than any terrorist, the apparently fierce determination among many Americans to remain ignorant about what lay behind this tragedy . . .'

(reader from Massachusetts)

'You have somehow escaped the biases of the American press . . .'

(reader from Hawaii)

'You help me sift through the smoke and soot fanned by America's media, their shrill jingoism, and [help me] to preserve my sanity'

(reader from New York)

'Most of the US media tends to be rather shallow . . . word of mouth has a fair number of people who work for the film studios here perusing your site'

(reader from Los Angeles)

'I live in a very small town [. . .], surrounded by radical fundamentalism. There is absolutely no one here to talk with about such modern ideas and interpretations'

(reader from Kentucky)

Evidently Mayes has examined a sufficient number of similar e-mails to deem these responses reasonably representative. He estimates that there are more than half a million regular readers of the *Guardian* Website in the US alone, a number believed to

have been significantly enhanced there – as well as in other countries – by the dramatic increase in demand for news and analysis after September 11. It is in relation to this growing international readership that he quotes the *Guardian*'s editor, Alan Rusbridger, as stating: 'Many Arabs and Muslims are astonished at what they read. I love that thought.' Moreover, Rusbridger comments, 'I suppose that once you are aware of this international dimension you can't help but think a little more internationally and be a little less anglocentric' (cited in Mayes 2001b).

Blogging the war in Iraq

For many Internet commentators, the US-led attack on Iraq represented the 'coming of age' of the Internet as a news medium. Regularly singled out for attention was the role of high-speed, broadband Internet access, not least its capacity to enable news sites to offer users live video and audio reports, multimedia slideshows, animated graphics, interactive maps, and so forth. The rapid rise in the number of users availing themselves of the technology – over 70 million people in the US at the time – meant that providers could further enhance existing types of digital reportage accordingly (Kirkpatrick 2003). Moreover, other commentators pointed to the ways in which online news was consolidating its position as a primary news source. Of significance here, for example, was the extent to which users, especially office workers unable to watch television in the workplace, were relying on the Internet for up-to-the-minute news of breaking developments. Research conducted during the first six days of the war by the Pew Internet & American Life Project (2003) indicated that 56 per cent of online users in the US had turned to news sites for reports about the conflict. 'More than half the people who are online are getting their news online – that's never happened before,' Lee Rainie, the project's director, maintained. 'It's another milestone moment for online news' (cited in Weaver 2003).

So-called 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' began on 19 March 2003 as the US-led military forces initiated air strikes on leadership 'targets of opportunity' in Baghdad. From the moment news of the first attacks broke, Internet traffic to online news services surged dramatically. More people than ever, according to companies monitoring Internet traffic such as Hitwise, Nielsen Net Ratings, and the like, were surfing the Internet for news and information. In Britain, that day saw the level of traffic to the *Guardian* newspaper's website soar by nearly 30 per cent to around 4.5 million impressions. According to Hitwise research, the *Guardian*'s site was the leading online newspaper service with a 7.26 per cent share of the market, followed by *FT.com* (5.17 per cent), the *Sun* (3.05 per cent), *The Times* (2.86 per cent), the *Telegraph* (2.24 per cent) and the *Independent* (1.51 per cent). Of the non-print sites, the British Broadcasting Corporation's stand-alone news site was ranked highest with a 4.69 per cent share. Evidently traffic to this BBC site was up by 30 to 40 per cent for the day, a level of demand which appeared to have caused the service to repeatedly 'crash' in the early hours (see Timms

2003). Over the course of the days to follow, people going online during office hours appeared to be largely responsible for the surge in traffic to news sites. Many were seeking out alternative news sources, as well as wanting particular types of perspectives about the factors underpinning the conflict. 'These figures show the desire of British surfers to get a real range of informed opinion on the war,' argued Tom Ewing, a Nielsen Net Ratings analyst. 'This shows where the internet comes into its own when fast-moving news stories are involved' (cited by *BBC Online*, 15 April 2003).

In the US, Yahoo.com reported that in the first hour following President George W. Bush's announcement that the conflict had started, traffic levels to its site were three times higher. The volume of traffic to its news section jumped 600 per cent the next day (Thursday, 20 March) and again the day after. The sites associated with different television networks proved particularly popular. On the Thursday, CNN.com evidently secured the highest figures for all news sites with 9 million visitors, followed by MSNBC with 6.8 million (about half of the visitors for both sites were accessing them from their workplaces). Other news sites witnessing a significant rise in demand that day included Foxnews.com (77 per cent increase), Washingtonpost.com (29 per cent increase) and USAToday.com (17 per cent). 'Without a doubt,' stated Daniel E. Hess of ComScore, 'people are glued to their Web browsers for virtually minute-by-minute updates of the war as it unfolds' (cited in Walker 2003; see also Richtel 2003). Evidently ComScore's measurement of traffic patterns for that Thursday suggested that world-wide traffic to major news sites was 70 per cent higher than the daily average over the previous four weeks. Several news sites responded to the sudden influx of demand by temporarily removing advertising from their home pages so as to improve download times. All in all, most news sites in the US were able to bear the strain of sharp 'spikes' in activity, showing little by way of the 'performance degradation' that was all too typical for the same sites on September 11, 2001 (see Allan 2002).

For many members of the public concerned enough about the crisis to look beyond the confines of the mainstream reporting on offer (see Allan and Zelizer 2004), online news sites were providing vitally important alternative sources of news. Evidence garnered from some Internet track monitoring companies suggests that there was a dramatic increase in the numbers of users turning to international news sites around the globe. 'The new war in Iraq has made world news sources far more important,' online writer Stephen Gilliard argued. 'While not all news sources are reliable, there is such a gap between the way Americans see the world and the way other people do that it is invaluable to use these resources' (cited in Kahney 2003). If it was frequently difficult for users to judge whether any given source was sufficiently trustworthy, the sheer diversity of the perspectives available online enabled people to supplement their understanding of alternative, even opposing points of view. In addition to international sites, however, an altogether different type of site has similarly attracted a remarkable degree of attention. Specifically, news-oriented Weblogs were rapidly achieving wide-spread public salience, being heralded as a new interactive form of participatory reporting, commentary and analysis of breaking news. Indeed, by the time of the

formal declaration of the invasion, the term 'blog' was rapidly being appropriated into the everyday language of journalism.

Weblogs (blogs for short), as noted above, may be characterized as diaries or journals written by individuals with Net access who are in possession of the necessary software publishing tools (such as those provided by sites such as Blogger.com) to establish an online presence. Most bloggers pull together their resources from a diverse array of other sites, thereby situating a given news event within a larger context, and illuminating multiple dimensions of its elements. The apparent facts or claims being collected are usually time-stamped and placed in reverse-chronological order as the blog is updated, making it easier for readers to follow its ongoing narrative. Customarily the sources of the blogger's information are acknowledged explicitly, with the accompanying hyperlink enabling the user to negotiate a network of cross-references from one blog to the next, or to other types of sites altogether. In principle, the facts or claims presented in any one blog can be subjected to the relentless double-checking of users, some of whom may be even better informed about the events in question than the initial blogger. Any attempt by a blogger to present a partisan assertion as an impartial statement of fact is likely to be promptly recognized as such by other users.

Many news bloggers – a small minority compared to the number of ordinary netizens involved overall – consider themselves to be 'personal' journalists, intent on transgressing the border between 'professional' and 'amateur' reporting. By acting as 'unofficial' news sources on the Web, these blogs link together information and opinion which supplements – or, in the eyes of some advocates, supplants – the coverage provided by 'official' news outlets. The potential of blogs in this regard was widely recognized during the tragic events of September 11, 2001, as discussed above. 'The Weblog world before September 11 was mostly inward-looking – mostly tech people talking about tech things,' Glenn Harlan Reynolds of the blog InstaPundit.com observed. 'After 9/11, we got a whole generation of Weblogs that were outward looking' (cited in Gallagher 2002).

Significantly, in the weeks following the atrocity, a new type of blog began to emerge, described by its proponents as a 'warblog'. Taking as their focus the proclaimed 'War on Terror', these blogs devoted particular attention to the perceived shortcomings of the mainstream news media with regard to their responsibility to inform the public about possible risks, threats and dangers. Warbloggers were divided, as one might expect, between those who favoured US and UK military intervention in the Middle East, and those who did not. In both cases, however, an emphasis was placed on documenting sufficient evidence to demonstrate the basis for their dissatisfaction with what they deemed to be the apparent biases of the mainstream news coverage of the ensuing conflict in Afghanistan. For pro-war bloggers, a 'liberal bias' was detectable in much mainstream journalism, leading them to call into question the patriotism of well-known reporters and news organizations. In sharp contrast, bloggers opposed to the war were equally convinced that mainstream journalism, with its over-reliance on sources from the Bush administration, the Pentagon and other military

sources, pro-war think tanks, and so forth, was failing to provide fair and balanced coverage. Many were able to show, with little difficulty, how voices of dissent were being routinely marginalized, when they were even acknowledged at all. For warbloggers of either persuasion, then, it was desperately important to seek out alternative sources of information from across the web in order to buttress their preferred perspective.

Few of these online sources originated in Afghanistan, however, due to the severity of the official restrictions imposed on journalists, as well as because of the limited availability of telecommunications services (an average of two telephones per 1000 people). Accordingly, for many in the blogging communities, it was the US-led invasion of Iraq that proved to be the 'breakthrough' for this grass-roots movement. Steven Levy (2003), writing in a *Newsweek* Web exclusive, suggested that blogs 'finally found their moment' as bombs were dropped on the city of Baghdad. The formal initiation of hostilities, he maintained, and 'the frustratingly variegated nature of this particular conflict, called for two things: an easy-to-parse overview for news junkies who wanted information from all sides, and a personal insight that bypassed the sanitizing Cuisinart of big-media news editing.' In Levy's view, blogs were able to 'deliver on both counts'. Adopting a similar line of argument were those who pointed to the success of blogs in attracting attention, especially that of individuals largely indifferent to mainstream reporting (here young people are frequently mentioned), by virtue of their shared intimacy. 'I think that sort of clarity of voice and immediacy is more possible on Weblogs than in any print media,' argued Dean Allen of textism.com. 'I can't think of another broadcast medium that has such a potential for directness. Someone reporting live from the battlefield for CNN can't come close' (cited in Allemang 2003). Commenting on this type of 'horizontal' communication, Glenn Harlan Reynolds (2003) of Instapundit.com noted wryly that 'the term "correspondent" is reverting to its original meaning of "one who corresponds," rather than the more recent one of "well-paid microphone-holder with good hair".'

While it is difficult to generalize, most warbloggers posting from Iraq seemed motivated to share their eyewitness experiences of the conflict so as to counterbalance mainstream news media coverage. The work of CNN correspondent Kevin Sites was a case in point. In addition to filing his television reports, Sites wrote 'behind the scenes' features for CNN.com, all the while maintaining a multimedia blog. Published on his own site, Sites' blog provided his personal commentary about the events he was witnessing from one day to the next, along with various photographs and audio reports that he prepared. Perhaps in light of the media attention Sites' blog received, however, CNN ask him to suspend it on Friday, 21 March 2003. A spokesperson for the network stated at the time that covering war 'is a full-time job and we've asked Kevin to concentrate only on that for the time being' (cited in Kurtz 2003). Sites agreed to stop blogging, later explaining that 'CNN was signing my checks at the time and sent me to Iraq. Although I felt the blog was a separate and independent journalistic enterprise, they did not' (www.kevinsites.net). Reactions from other bloggers were swift. CNN's

response, according to Steven Levy (2003) of *Newsweek*, 'was seen in the Blogosphere as one more sign that the media dinosaurs are determined to stamp out this subversive new form of reporting.'[2]

In contrast, MSNBC's support for blogging meant that three warblogs were focused on war coverage at the height of the conflict. 'Weblogs are journalism,' argued Joan Connell, one of the site's executive producers. 'They can be used to great effect in reporting an unfolding story and keeping readers informed' (cited in Mernit 2003). Nevertheless, while she does not share CNN's stance that blogs lack a sufficiently 'structured approach to presenting the news', she does believe that there is a necessary role for an editor in the process. In her words: 'Unlike many Weblogs, whose posts go from the mind of the writer straight into the "blogosphere", MSNBC's Weblogs are edited. Our editors scrutinize our Weblogs for accuracy, fairness and balance, just as they would any news story' (cited in Mernit 2003). Not all bloggers on the front lines were associated with a major news organization, however. Many worked as a 'sojo' or 'solo journalist', writing and editing their own copy for both online and print or broadcast media. Being almost constantly on the move meant relying on mobile technologies, such as a notebook computer and digital camera, or even a videophone and minisatellite dish. Still, for these bloggers, their relative freedom of movement enabled them to pursue the stories which mattered most to them – and the readers of their warblog. Herein lay the popularity of the warblogs amongst users, which in the opinion of journalist Bryony Gordon (2003) was hardly surprising: 'if a television reporter's movements aren't subject to Iraqi restrictions, then his [or her] report is likely to be monitored by the Allied Forces. Devoid of such regulations, the internet is thriving.'

Freelancer Christopher Allbritton had announced his intention to be the Web's first independent war correspondent in the months leading up to the invasion. His blog, titled Back to Iraq. 2.0 (www.back-to-iraq.com), called upon readers to help contribute to the financial support necessary to fund his travel and expenses in Iraqi Kurdistan. 'It's a marketplace of ideas,' he maintained, 'and those who are awarded credibility by their readers will prosper' (cited in Warner 2003). Support was such that his expenses were met by some 320 donors, allowing him to file daily stories from the country using a borrowed notebook computer and a rented satellite phone. As his blog's daily readership grew to upwards of 25,000, he became accustomed to receiving e-mails which posed questions and suggested story leads, while others provided useful links to online materials. 'My reporting created a connection between the readers and me,' Allbritton (2003) later observed, 'and they trusted me to bring them an unfettered view of what I was seeing and hearing.' This involvement on the part of his readers in shaping his reporting worked to improve its quality, in his view, each one of them effectively serving as an editor. 'One of the great things about the blogosphere,' he maintained, 'is that there's built-in fact-checking.' Given that so many people will 'swarm' over posts, 'generally the truth of the matter will come out' (cited in Glaser 2003).[3]

Precisely what counts as truth in a war zone, of course, is very much in the eye of the beholder. Above dispute, in the view of many commentators, was that some of the best

eyewitness reporting being conducted was that attributed to the warblog of 'Salam Pax' (a playful pseudonym derived from the Arabic and Latin words for peace), a 29-year-old architect living in middle-class suburban Baghdad. Indeed, of the various English-language warblogs posted by Iraqis, none attracted a greater following than Salam's *Where is Raed?* (dear_raed.blogspot.com), which had begun to appear in September 2002. His motivation for blogging was later explained as a desire to keep in touch with his friend Raed, who had moved to study in Jordan. In the months leading up to the initial 'decapitation attack', to use his turn of phrase, the blog contained material ranging from personal – and frequently humorous – descriptions of everyday life, to angry criticisms of the events around him. It was to his astonishment, however, that he discovered that the international blogging community had attracted such intense attention to his site. As word about *Where is Raed?* spread via other blogs, e-mail, online discussion groups, and mainstream news media accounts, it began to regularly top the lists of popular blogs as the conflict unfolded. For Salam, this attention brought with it the danger that he would be identified – a risk likely to lead to his arrest, possibly followed by a death sentence. At the same time, speculation over the identity of the Baghdad Blogger – and whether or not *Dear Raed* was actually authentic – was intensifying. Some critics claimed that it was an elaborate hoax, others insisted it was the work of Iraqi officials, while still others maintained that a sinister CIA disinformation campaign was behind it. Salam responded to sceptics on 21 March, writing: 'please stop sending emails asking if I were for real, don't belive [sic] it? then don't read it.' Moreover, he added, 'I am not anybody's propaganda ploy, well except my own' (cited in BBC News Online, 25 March 2003).

Enraged by both Saddam Hussein's Baathist dictatorship and George W. Bush's motivations for the invasion, Salam documented life on the ground in Baghdad before and after the bombs began to drop. This was 'embedded' reporting of a very different order, effectively demonstrating the potential of blogging as an alternative means of war reporting. His warblog entry for 23 March, 8:30 pm, was typically vivid:

> Today's (and last night's) shock attacks didn't come from airplanes but rather from the airwaves. The images al-Jazeera are broadcasting are beyond any description. [. . .] This war is starting to show its ugly face to the world. [. . .] People (and I bet 'allied forces') were expecting things to be much easier. There are no waving masses of people welcoming the Americans, nor are they surrendering by the thousands. People are doing what all of us are doing – sitting in their homes hoping that a bomb doesn't fall on them and keeping their doors shut.
>
> Salam (Pax), dear_raed.blogspot.com

Salam's posts offered readers a stronger sense of immediacy, an emotional feel for life on the ground, than more traditional news sites. For John Allemang (2003), writing in *The Globe and Mail*, 'what makes his diary so affecting is the way it achieves an easy intimacy that eludes the one-size-fits-all coverage of Baghdad's besieged residents.' As Salam himself would later reflect, 'I was telling everybody who was reading the weblog

where the bombs fell, what happened [. . .] what the streets looked like.' While acknowledging that the risks involved meant that he considered his actions to be somewhat 'foolish' in retrospect, nevertheless he added: 'it felt for me important. It is just somebody should be telling this because journalists weren't' (cited in Church 2003).

The digital divide

Any bold declaration that online journalism will abolish once and for all what Raymond Williams (1982) aptly called the 'culture of distance' will invite a more considered response, once it is situated in relation to the sorts of developments discussed above. As has been made apparent, however, these emergent forms of journalism have the capacity to bring to bear alternative perspectives, contexts and ideological diversity to war reporting, providing users with the means to connect with distant voices otherwise being marginalized, if not silenced altogether, from across the globe. In the words of US journalist Paul Andrews (2003), 'media coverage of the war that most Americans saw was so jingoistic and administration-friendly as to proscribe any sense of impartiality or balance,' hence the importance of the insights provided by the likes of Salam Pax. This 'pseudonymous blogger's reports from Iraq,' Andrews believed, 'took on more credibility than established media institutions.' This point is echoed by Toby Dodge (2003), who argued that Salam managed to post far more perceptive dispatches than those written by 'the crowds of well-resourced international journalists sitting in the air-conditioned comfort of five star hotels.' Communicating to the world using a personal computer with unreliable Internet access, he reported 'the traumas and more importantly the opinions of Iraqis as they faced the uncertainty of violent regime change.'

   Celebratory claims about the 'global village' engendered by online journalism ring hollow, especially when it is acknowledged that the majority of the world's population have never even made a telephone call, let along logged on to a computer. To understand the digital divide, Castells (2001) argues, involves more than measuring the number of Internet connections. Of profound importance is the need to attend to the consequences of being connected or not in the first place. The Internet, he points out, 'is the technological tool and organizational form that distributes information power, knowledge generation and networking capacity in all realms of activity' (2001: 269; see also Hassan 2004). As a result, he adds, to be 'disconnected, or superficially connected, to the Internet is tantamount to marginalization in the global, networked system. Development without the Internet would be the equivalent of industrialization without electricity in the industrial era' (2001: 269). Precisely how the dynamics of differential access unfold in different social contexts around the world is very much a question of possessing the capacity – or not – to adapt to the speed of change. The imperatives of global communication are being decisively recast by a myriad of competing interests, posing acute difficulties for the very legitimacy of governing institutions from one

country to the next. Until the digital divide is overcome, Castells maintains, it will threaten to engulf these institutions in a series of political crises. Here again, he makes a key point for our purposes, namely that as the Internet 'becomes the pervasive infrastructure of our lives, who owns and controls access to this infrastructure becomes an essential battle for freedom' (2001: 269).

To close, in my view efforts to understand precisely what is at stake in this 'battle for freedom' across the digital divide must necessarily account for the ways in which the news media are shaping democratic deliberation and debate across the globe. Online journalism, I would argue, has the potential to bring to bear alternative perspectives, context and ideological diversity to its reporting, providing users with the means to hear distant voices otherwise being marginalized, if not silenced altogether, across the network society. Much work remains to be done, however, to develop this potential to help counter the forms and processes of social exclusion endemic to the digital divide. Of the obstacles in the path of this kind of development, perhaps the most challenging concern the ownership of the major news sites themselves. Even a glance at the companies behind the major US sites, for example – such as AOL Time Warner, General Electric Co., Microsoft, Walt Disney Co. and Viacom – makes it obvious that what counts as 'news' will be severely constrained within the limits of corporate culture. At the same time, additional factors include the growing standardization of online formats, which threatens to stifle innovation; the influence of advertising in restricting the range of links on offer; and the ideologically narrow (if all too familiar) conceptions of news values and source credibility in operation, amongst others. Hence the urgent need, in my view, to envisage new forms of online journalism which recognize, as a fundamental priority, its social responsibilities to those who lack even the most basic communicative resources to participate in its ongoing redefinition.

Further reading

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Notes

1 This chapter draws, in part, on Allan, S. (2002a) 'Reweaving the Internet: Online News of September 11', in B. Zelizer and S. Allan (eds) *Journalism After September 11*. London and New York: Routledge; Allan, S. (2003) 'Mediating Citizenship: Online Journalism and the Public Sphere', *Development*, 46(1): 30–40; Allan, S. (2004) 'The Culture of Distance: Online Reporting of the Iraq War' in S. Allan and B. Zelizer (eds) *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*. London and New York: Routledge. Allan, S. and Matheson, D. (2004) 'Online Journalism in the Information Age', *Knowledge, Work and Society*, Volume 1, No. 3.

2 Kevin Sites, currently working as a freelance journalist, is on-assignment in Iraq with MSNBC, who are allowing him to maintain his personal (non-affiliated) blog. Evidently, MSNBC set down 'a few understandable stipulations', which he describes in his blog as: '1) I'm here because NBC News has hired me to be here, therefore the observations and experiences in Iraq that I relate to you in this blog would probably not happen without them. 2) They have the right of first refusal on anything that I write that relates to this assignment. That means I run it by them and if they want it they will publish it on MSNBC.COM. It will be republished here. 3) If it's something they're not interested in or not directly related to an assignment they've paid me to do – it can appear here first. I think that's fair and bypasses any of the editorial oversight and ownership issues that we encountered in the first run of kevinsites.net.'

3 An example of the 'corrective power' of the medium's interactivity, to use Allbritton's (2003) phrase, revolved around Robert Fisk's report in *The Independent* newspaper of an incident where a bomb exploded in a crowded Baghdad marketplace, killing many individuals in the vicinity. In the report in question, Fisk cites the Western numerals painted on a metal fragment found nearby. According to Welch (2003), 'Australian blogger Tim Blair, a free-lance journalist, reprinted the partial numbers and asked his military-knowledgeable readers for insight. Within twenty-four hours, more than a dozen readers with specialized knowledge (retired Air Force, former Naval Air Systems Command employees, others) had written in describing the weapon (U.S. high-speed antiradiation missile), manufacturer (Raytheon), launch point (F–16), and dozens of other minute details not seen in press accounts days and weeks later. Their conclusion, much as it pained them to say so: Fisk was probably right.'

9 'GOOD JOURNALISM IS POPULAR CULTURE'

Good journalism *is* popular culture, but popular culture that stretches and informs its consumers rather than that which appeals to the ever descending lowest common denominator. If, by popular culture, we mean expressions of thought or feeling that require no work of those who consume them, then decent popular journalism is finished. What is happening today, unfortunately, is that the lowest form of popular culture – lack of information, misinformation, disinformation, and a contempt for the truth or the reality of most people's lives – has overrun real journalism.

(Carl Bernstein, investigative journalist)

Our media, which should be informing us, are instead turning out the light and joining the stampede from reality in the blind and mad pursuit of commercial advantage, of profit without honour. The culture of celebrity, like an army of ants, has colonized the news pages both tabloid and broadsheet. That raises the question: when Armageddon threatens, isn't it time – even past time – to work out what, in the sum of things, is the relative news value of a weather person's love life or a footballer's grazed eyebrow?

(Martin Bell, former BBC war correspondent)

As will be apparent from the first of the two quotations above, this concluding chapter takes its title from a highly controversial intervention into debates about journalistic practice initiated by one of the most famous reporters in the world, Carl Bernstein. His name, along with that of his former colleague Bob Woodward, is for many people synonymous with the phrase 'investigative reporting'. These were the two reporters who broke the 'Watergate' story on the pages of the *Washington Post*, thereby sparking an investigation into one of the most significant political scandals in United States history. Together with their sources, one of the most important of which was identified only as 'deep throat', they exposed a range of illegal activities being conducted in the highest echelons of the US government. Their news reports, produced under extremely

difficult circumstances, set in motion a chain of events which eventually led to the resignation of a disgraced President Richard Nixon under threat of imminent impeachment on 9 August 1974. Bernstein and Woodward proceeded to write a book about their experiences, entitled *All the President's Men*, which was subsequently turned into a critically acclaimed Hollywood film of the same title.

Almost two decades after these momentous events, Bernstein (1992) offered several reflections on post-Watergate journalism to the readers of *The New Republic* magazine in an essay entitled 'The idiot culture'. In sharp, incisive terms, he pinpoints a series of ongoing developments which together appear to be threatening the integrity of what he calls 'real journalism'. Where principled reporting typically relies on 'shoe leather', 'common sense' and a 'respect for the truth', he argues, what currently passes as journalism is regularly failing its audience in many crucial respects. In Bernstein's words:

> increasingly the America rendered today in the American media is illusionary and delusionary – disfigured, unreal, disconnected from the true context of our lives. In covering actually existing American life, the media – weekly, daily, hourly – break new ground in getting it wrong. The coverage is distorted by celebrity and the worship of celebrity; by the reduction of news to gossip, which is the lowest form of news; by sensationalism, which is always a turning away from a society's real condition; and by a political and social discourse that we – the press, the media, the politicians, *and* the people – are turning into a sewer.
>
> (Bernstein 1992: 22)

It is Bernstein's perception that there is an alarming degree of arrogance among journalism's practitioners, attributable in part to a persistent failure to engage in self-reflexive scrutiny where their social obligations are concerned. Particularly troubling are the implications of what is a growing emphasis on 'speed and quantity' at the expense of 'thoroughness and quality', let alone 'accuracy and context'. 'The pressure to compete, the fear that somebody else will make the splash first,' he observes, 'creates a frenzied environment in which a blizzard of information is presented and serious questions may not be raised' (Bernstein 1992: 24). Even in those rare instances where such questions are posed, he argues, only seldomly do they engender the considered, thoughtful reporting they deserve.

Accordingly, as the types of reporting Bernstein holds to be indicative of 'real journalism' recede, a 'sleazoid info-tainment culture' is slowly becoming entrenched as the norm. The once clear division between the 'serious' and the 'popular' newspaper press, for example, is now increasingly being blurred. Such is also the case between talk show programmes, such as the *Oprah Winfrey Show, Donahue* or *Geraldo*, and news programmes, such as *60 Minutes* or *Nightline*, where differences in their news values are often virtually indistinguishable (see also Sholle 1993; Lull and Hinerman 1997; Shattuc 1997; Langer 1998; Dovey 2000; Ellis 2000; Glynn 2000; Kellner 2003). To the extent that it is possible to speak of news agendas when using a language of 'info-tainment', he suggests that there is a direct correlation between the rise of these

Figure 9.1
Source: Chris Priestly in *The Independent* 25 September 1998

'Donahue-Geraldo-Oprah freak shows' and the more recently emergent forms of 'trash journalism'. As Bernstein (1992) declares:

> In this new culture of journalistic titillation, we teach our readers and our viewers that the trivial is significant, that the lurid and the loopy are more important than real news. We do not serve our readers and viewers, we pander to them. And we condescend to them, giving them what we think they want and what we calculate will sell and boost ratings and readership. Many of them, sadly, seem to justify our condescension, and to kindle at the trash. Still, it is the role of journalists to challenge people, not merely to amuse them.
>
> (Bernstein 1992: 24–5)

Hence the fear expressed by Bernstein that journalists are contributing to the formation of an 'idiot culture', one which is rendered distinct from popular culture by its

obsession with 'the weird and the stupid and the coarse'. The USA, it follows, is gradually being transformed into a 'talk-show nation', where 'public discourse is reduced to ranting and raving and posturing.' At a time when 'good journalism' is 'the exception and not the rule', he contends, searching questions need to be asked about the responsibilities of the news media *vis-à-vis* the public interest (see also Charity 1995; Merritt 1995; Rosen 1999 on one response, namely '**public journalism**').

Many of these points strike an equally powerful resonance in other national contexts. In France, for example, the highly influential sociologist Pierre Bourdieu recently found himself at the centre of a heated public controversy following two lectures he delivered concerning the current state of journalism via the television station of the Collège de France (chosen so as to bypass network control). The lectures were subsequently developed into a short book which became a surprise best-seller in France. Publicity for Bourdieu's intervention was provided, if not with that precise intention in mind, by several journalists furious with his characterization of their profession and its alleged failings. There followed a series of (often acrimonious) exchanges between Bourdieu and his critics which appeared, among other places, on the pages of the monthly journal *Le Monde diplomatique* (see also Marlière 1998). Several interesting insights into the nature of the dispute are provided in the 'Prologue' to the English-language edition of the book, published as *On Television and Journalism* (Bourdieu 1998).

Over the course of these lectures, Bourdieu (1998: 2) sought to show how what he terms the 'journalistic field', for him a 'microcosm with its own laws', 'produces and imposes on the public a very particular vision of the political field, a vision that is grounded in the very structure of the journalistic field and in journalists' specific interests produced in and by that field.' Any form of serious political commentary, he argues, is consistently losing out to those forms of news discourse which give priority to simply entertaining the viewer, listener or reader. In-depth current affairs interviews on television, for example, are routinely being transformed into 'mindless talk show chatter' between 'approved' (that is to say, 'safe') speakers willing to participate in what are largely staged 'exchanges'. This relentless search for the sensational and the spectacular, he argues, ensures that an undue emphasis is placed on certain types of dramatic events which are simple to cover. As Bourdieu (1998) elaborates:

> To justify this policy of demagogic simplification (which is absolutely and utterly contrary to the democratic goal of informing or educating people by interesting them), journalists point to the public's expectations. But in fact they are projecting onto the public their own inclinations and their own views. Because they're so afraid of being boring, they opt for confrontations over debates, prefer polemics over rigorous argument, and in general, do whatever they can to promote conflict.
>
> (Bourdieu 1998: 3–4)

It follows that individuals seeking to secure access to what he terms 'public space', particularly politicians, have little choice but to adapt to the demands of the journalistic field. Journalists effectively control who can be recognized as a public figure, a

process shaped by their perception of who or what is 'interesting', 'exceptional' or 'catchy' *for them*, that is, from the position they occupy in this space. 'In short,' Bourdieu (1998: 51) argues, 'the focus is on those things which are apt to arouse curiosity but require no analysis, especially in the political sphere.'

In suggesting that the journalistic field possesses a relative degree of autonomy from other fields of cultural production, such as the juridical, literary, artistic or scientific fields, Bourdieu is attempting to move beyond any explanation of its characteristics which points exclusively to economic factors. As important as these factors are in shaping what is reported and how, he is aiming to identify the social conditions underpinning journalism as a collective activity which 'smoothes over things, brings them into line, and depoliticizes them' to the 'level of anecdote and scandal'. If sensational news equals market success, then professional standards cannot help but be influenced by audience ratings in a detrimental way. 'Everybody knows the "law" that if a newspaper or other news vehicle wants to reach a broad public,' he writes, 'it has to dispense with sharp edges and anything that might divide or exclude readers.' In other words, he adds: 'It must attempt to be inoffensive, not to "offend anyone", and it must never bring up problems – or, if it does, problems that don't pose any problems' (Bourdieu 1998: 44). Hence despite the fierce relations of competition which exist between different news organizations, the quest for exclusivity (or 'scoops') recurrently yields coverage which is as uniform as it is banal. Consequently, he argues, once the decisive impact of the journalistic field upon other fields is taken into consideration, the current extent of public disenchantment with politics is hardly surprising.

In Britain, it is similarly possible to map the growing prominence of these types of arguments across the public sphere, not least in the forums of debate created by journalists who are more often than not finding themselves on the defensive. One need not agree with every aspect of the arguments advanced above to recognize, as of course many journalists do, that the types of news values once associated with 'serious reporting' are being dramatically recast (see MacGregor 1997; Petley 1997; Aldridge 1998; Bromley 1998a; Curran and Park 2000; McNair 2000; Barnett and Gaber 2001; Keeble 2001; Allan 2002; Cottle 2003a, 2003b; Corner and Pels 2003; Hargreaves 2003; Campbell 2004). In the words of an editorial leader in *The Economist*, the features of a 'modern paradox' are becoming ever more pronounced:

> in this age of globalisation, news is much more parochial than in the days when communications from abroad ticked slowly across the world by telegraph. And here is another [paradox]: that in this information age, newspapers which used to be full of politics and economics are thick with stars and sport.
>
> (*The Economist*, 4 July 1998: 13)

Recent trends in journalism, at least from the vantage point of *The Economist*, suggest that news is 'moving away from foreign affairs towards domestic concerns; away from politics towards human-interest stories; away from issues to people.' The principal explanation cited for these trends is the rapidly growing array of specialist information

sources (as 'rolling' news on television, such as BBC News 24 and Sky News, proliferate, publishing costs drop, and the Internet expands) becoming available as competition between increasingly market-sensitive news organizations accelerates. It is significant, however, that the editorial leader goes on to reassure its readers that at the end of the day there is little cause for concern: 'People absorb what interests them: if news is too worthy, it goes in one ear and out the other.'

Ratings, profits and relevance

Howard Beale, sometimes described as 'the grand old man of news', was the UBS television network's lead anchor for the evening newscast. He often spoke of his commitment to journalistic integrity, and how he had learned his craft in the company of such luminaries as Edward R. Murrow in the early days of broadcasting. Times were changing, however, and the audience ratings for his newscast had started to slip. A once healthy 28 per cent share of the audience declined to a 22 per cent share over recent years, before slowly spiralling downwards to a 12 per cent share. The network's executives, all too aware of the implications for advertising revenue, made the decision that changes would have to be introduced. The president of the News Division dutifully informed Beale that he was fired, effective in two weeks' time.

During the evening newscast the next day, Beale turned to the camera and made the following announcement:

> Ladies and gentlemen, I would like at this moment to announce that I will be retiring from this program in two weeks' time because of poor ratings. Since this show was the only thing I had going for me in my life, I have decided to kill myself. I'm gonna blow my brains out right on this program a week from today. Tune in next Tuesday. That should give the public relations people a week to promote the show. We ought to get a hell of a rating out of that – a fifty share, easy.

Chaos broke loose, beginning in the television studio (where Beale was literally removed from his newsdesk), but soon spreading across the country as viewers reacted. Beale found himself at the centre of a media storm, while the network's switchboard was deluged with angry calls. The ensuing crisis was compounded for network executives, however, by the fact that with the prospect of watching an on-air suicide in the offing, the newscast's audience share had surged upwards. Beale's request to be allowed back on the air, so as to bid farewell to the viewers in a more dignified manner, was granted. He quickly seized the opportunity, however, to unleash a furious tirade. Speaking to reporters afterwards, he declared: 'Every day, five days a week, for fifteen years, I've been sitting behind the desk, the dispassionate pundit, reporting with seemly detachment the daily parade of lunacies that constitute the news and just once I wanted to say what I really felt.'

For network executives struggling to justify the continued existence of a news

division to shareholders upset about the annual $33 million deficit it incurred (evidently the division produced 'the lowest rate of return' on their investment), the dramatic increase in ratings generated by Beale's newfound notoriety had to be maintained. In order to capitalise on it, they offered him his own show, where he could speak his mind freely. Beale accepted, promptly becoming 'the mad prophet of the airwaves' for the network. Infuriated by the state of current affairs, such as the economy, inflation and the oil crisis, he challenged and provoked his viewers in equal measure. During one show, he issued them a command: 'I want you to get up right now, sit up, go to your windows, open them and stick your head out and yell – "I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore!" ' Over the course of the shows that followed, he targeted a wide range of social concerns, not least the influence of television itself. 'Television is not the truth,' he declared, [it is an] amusement park. Television is a circus, a carnival, a travelling troupe of acrobats, storytellers, dancers, singers, jugglers, side-show freaks, lion tamers and football players. We're in the boredom-killing business.' Unfortunately, if all too predictably, Beale himself eventually became boring to viewers, whose attention drifted away in favour of more entertaining distractions on the rival networks. The steady decline in ratings forced the hand of anxious executives, who arranged to have Beale assassinated – during a live broadcast, naturally enough – in a desperate effort to preserve the network's profitability.

The story of Howard Beale is a fictional one, fortunately enough, having been memorably depicted in the film *Network* (1976). Nominated for ten Academy Awards, winning four of them, writer Paddy Chayefsky's treatment of 'the hollow, lurid waste-land of television journalism' (to borrow one film reviewer's apt turn of phrase) attracted considerable public interest at the time. Watching it today, however, its critique resonates even more deeply. *Network*, as the discussion above suggests, is remarkably prescient in its anticipation of the problems that currently beset television journalism. In the US – the film is set in New York – the main three television networks are owned by multinational corporations, all of which have their primary interests invested in areas outside of journalism. ABC News is owned by the Walt Disney Company, CBS News is part of Viacom, and NBC News is controlled by General Electric. In the mid-1970s, when *Network* appeared in cinemas, these three networks' newscasts reached more than 70 per cent of the audience. Today, it frequently falls below 30 per cent – indeed, as Barkin (2003) points out, 'it is not at all unusual for the combined network rating for the three newscasts to be less that that of the 1970s CBS by itself' (2003: 4). This state of decline is attributable to a number of different factors, each of which – to varying degrees – has undermined the traditional conceptions of prestige and public service once associated with national newscasts. 'In the golden age – the 1970s – the network really regarded the news division as the jewels in the crown,' Av Westin, a former vice president of ABC news, has observed. 'Now all of that is gone. The bottom line has become the paramount consideration, not the editorial line' (cited in *Boston Globe*, 2 March 2002).

The logic of the corporate balance sheet dictates that a television network can make

significantly more money by trimming news budgets, even eliminating them altogether wherever possible. It is precisely this bottom-line-driven logic which recently threatened one of the most distinguished newscasts in the US, namely ABC News's programme 'Nightline' anchored by Ted Koppel.[1] In March of 2002, rumours emerged that ABC had made a strong bid to lure David Letterman, the host of the rival CBS network's 'Late Show', to occupy the 'Nightline' timeslot. It was envisaged that 'Late Show', with its frantic mix of Letterman's celebrity interviews with comedic material, including 'stupid pet tricks' and 'top-10 lists', would prove to be much more popular with the right sort of viewers. That is to say, while both 'Nightline' and 'Late Show' garnered about four million viewers a night, respectively, the latter programme secured a younger audience profile, which tends to be more attractive to advertisers. Of particular interest to advertisers are people of ages 18 to 34, who are judged to be much more likely to be seeking out entertainment, as opposed to news and information, especially at that time of day. More to the point, however, because these younger viewers have yet to make their 'brand choices', to use the language of product marketing, their 'eyeballs' are more lucrative than those of older viewers (who are less open to persuasion where advertised brands are concerned).

Evidently, the death knell for 'Nightline', one of the most celebrated news programmes in US broadcast history, had been sounded. News staffers expressed their outrage. 'People are enormously upset,' stated one ABC News employee. 'This just came out of the blue. We're stunned' (*Washington Post*, 2 March 2002). In the absence of an official announcement from ABC News, much was made in press reports of various anonymous statements attributed to the network's executives. At stake for the network, it seemed, were the usual concerns about ratings and profits. Moreover, though, one executive had been widely quoted as stating: 'The relevancy of *Nightline* just is not there anymore.' Koppel (2002), in a response published in the *New York Times*, refuted these claims. 'Conservatively speaking,' he wrote, ' "Nightline" has earned well over half a billion dollars for a succession of corporate owners over the years. The program continues to be profitable to this day.' Regarding the allegation about relevancy, Koppel was blunt. '[I]n these times,' he argued, 'the regular and thoughtful analysis of national and foreign policy is more essential than ever.' Clearly angered, he added that 'it is, at best, inappropriate and, at worst, malicious to describe what my colleagues and I are doing as lacking relevance.' In the days to follow, claims and counter-claims continued to circulate, until Letterman announced on 11 March 2002 that he would be keeping his talk show at CBS, at least for the time being.

The thorny issue of 'relevancy' continues to linger, however. This controversy over the future of 'Nightline' had transpired some six months after the September 11 atrocities, the very time when national news organizations were insisting that significant changes were under way to enhance and reinvigorate national and international news coverage (see Zelizer and Allan 2002). The fact that ABC was 'even considering taking aim at "Nightline" was seen as an ominous sign inside the news division,' as Rutengberg and Carter (2002) observed at the time. Indeed, they contend, it was

perceived to be 'the latest of a number of slights and the most striking indication yet that the network's parent, the Walt Disney Company, would not hesitate to cut back on news to improve its balance sheet.' In the aftermath of the 'Nightline' crisis, many news commentators were wondering aloud whether television news on the national networks was on the verge of extinction. Several pointed to the overall decline of audience trends for network news programmes (especially, as noted above, in the case of younger viewers), suggesting that the 'writing was on the wall'. Others in a similar vein cited the proliferation of 24-hour cable and satellite news channels – namely CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC, respectively – for their impact on ratings. Still others maintained that the expansion of Web-based news sites was to blame for drawing potential viewers away from the networks. In any case, 'Nightline' was judged to be in a precarious situation – in the words of *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd (2002), it remained 'a lonely holdout with a strong commitment to journalistic principles.'

Nowhere are the journalistic principles of television news thrown into sharper relief than where the interests of public service collide with the private ones of shareholders. To the extent that the news agenda is determined by its potential for generating advertising revenue, newscasts will consistently prioritise stories revolving around crime, celebrity and 'lifestyle issues' over and above (expensive, less 'ratings-efficient') international stories. Martin Bell (2003), recently retired from the BBC after more than 30 years in journalism, is in little doubt that television news is on a downward trajectory. He contends that all too frequently it 'serves us less as a window on the world than as a barrier to it. Its screen is only a screen in the original sense – something that blocks our view of what lies on the other side of it' (2003: 6). Deserving of being singled out for particular criticism, Bell believes, are the rolling, 24-hour news services. They have special responsibilities, he writes, which are defined by F-words:

> They aim to be first and fastest with the news. Their nature, too often, is to be fearful, feverish, frenzied, frantic, frail, false and fallible. Some mistakes are bound to be made, as they always have been, by journalists seeking to discover the truth in the fog of breaking news; but those mistakes do not have to be as *systemic* as they have become in the rolling news business, when rumour masquerades as fact, and networks compete wildly with each other to get their speculation in first.
>
> (Bell 2003: 71; emphasis in original)

Bell is particularly troubled where the reporting of terrorism is concerned, but believes the point can be made more widely. In calling for a measure of self-criticism amongst journalists, as well as a code of practice (long overdue, in his opinion), he proceeds to issue an appeal for a return to first principles. The test of excellence, he argues, is not 'We got it first!' but rather 'We got it right!' (2003: 71; see also Robinson 2002).

More often than not, this incessant drive to be the first to break the story can mean that due care and accuracy are sacrificed in the heat of the moment. Turning to the ongoing crisis in Iraq, for example, a wide array of commentators have expressed their alarm about this drive for immediacy for its own sake, not least with regard to the

implications for reportorial standards. Former BBC director general Greg Dyke effect-ively focused public attention on this problem in April, 2003. Speaking at a journalism conference in London, he addressed the challenges confronting television news. 'We must temper the drama and competition of live, rolling news with the considered journalism and analysis people need to make sense of events,' he argued (BBC News Online, 24 April 2003). More than that, however, Dyke added: 'Commercial pressures may tempt others to follow the Fox News formula of gung-ho patriotism but for the BBC this would be a terrible mistake.' In acknowledging that Fox New's partisan pro-Bush stance had helped it to overtake CNN in average daily viewer ratings, he insisted that such 'unquestioning' support for the White House was typical of the other US broadcast news media during the conflict. In a fragmented marketplace, he argued, no news operation was sufficiently strong or brave enough to stand up to government or military officials. Attempts to mix flag-waving patriotism with journalism, he feared, would inevitably undermine television news's credibility in the eyes of the public. 'Essential to the success of any news organisation,' he stated, 'is holding the trust of its audiences.'

Figure 9.2
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Celebrities, tabloidization and infotainment

'If it bleeds,' the old saying goes, 'it leads.' This succinct – and, it has to be said, rather tactless – declaration of news values has long been associated with certain disreputable practices held to be characteristic of 'tabloid' journalism.[2] Today, increasing numbers of critics believe that a process of convergence is underway, one where certain 'populist' preoccupations – by definition, vulgar, trivial, and 'down-market' in style and (lack of) substance – can be blamed for blurring the once distinct-ive standards of 'quality' reporting. Many of these critics contend that this process will necessarily lead to 'bite-size McNugget journalism,' to use the BBC's Andrew

Marr's apt turn of phrase, and with it a 'dumbing down' effect. Some go even further, arguing that it is intensifying to the point that journalism's traditional social responsibilities are looking increasingly anachronistic in a world of 'reality-based' infotainment.

Several pressing concerns raised by this apparent convergence are pinpointed in Franklin's (1997) use of the term 'newszak'. Specifically, he employs it to characterize what he considers to be a growing tendency in British journalism to retreat from investigative, 'hard' news reporting in favour of ever 'softer', 'lighter' stories. The editorial priorities of journalism, he maintains, are being fundamentally realigned in accordance with the dictates of the marketplace:

> Entertainment has superseded the provision of information; human interest has supplanted the public interest; measured judgement has succumbed to sensationalism; the trivial has triumphed over the weighty; the intimate relationships of celebrities from soap operas, the world of sport or the royal family are judged more 'newsworthy' than the reporting of significant issues and events of international consequence. Traditional news values have been undermined by new values; 'infotainment' is rampant.
>
> (Franklin 1997: 4)

For Franklin, this transformation has profound implications for public information and democracy. 'Newszak', he writes, 'understands news as a product designed and "processed" for a particular market and delivered in increasingly homogenous "snippets" which make only modest demands on the audience'(1997: 4–5). Given the intensification of market pressures to compete over these audiences – as well as to attract advertisers interested in reaching them – the increasing prevalence of tabloid journalism, Franklin maintains, is hardly surprising. Moreover, to the extent that 'news is converted into entertainment,' it follows that there will be a corresponding decline in the availability of other kinds of news, not least foreign, parliamentary and investigative reporting. In a regulatory climate where market-driven journalism is fast becoming the norm, he adds, newszak 'will flourish without restraint' (1997: 231; see also Dahlgren and Sparks 1992; Bird 1997; Lull and Hinerman 1997; Krajicek 1998; Stephenson and Bromley 1998; Berry 2000; Thompson 2000; Turner, Bonner and Marshall 2000; Barnett and Gaber 2001; Bird 2002; Gitlin 2002; Corner and Pels 2003; Couldry 2003; Schudson 2003).

Of the various 'populist' preoccupations informing tabloid news values, the growing influence of 'human-interest journalism' about celebrities is easily one of the most conspicuous. The origins of this form of news coverage can be traced at least as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, although arguably today's 'culture of celebrity' consolidated its more rudimentary features in journalistic terms shortly after the arrival of television (see Marshall 1997; Gabler 1998; Rojek 2001; Ponce de Leon 2002). In this regard, the perceptive insights of historian Daniel J. Boorstin's (1961) classic study, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, continue to warrant close

attention. Written at a time when social critics were raising the alarm about what they perceived to be a crisis in standards and values in public life, Boorstin's commentary struck a chord across the political spectrum. Then, as now, fears were being expressed about the seemingly fabricated, inauthentic, frequently alienating nature of modern societies – or, in Boorstin's words, 'the thicket of unreality which stands between us and the facts of life' (1961: 3). Journalism, together with political rhetoric, advertising, public relations, and the like, deserved to be criticized in his view for being complicit in the 'making of illusions which flood our experience'. More and more of this experience, he argues, actually consists of what he terms 'pseudo-events,' that is, highly contrived occurrences taking place to satisfy the public demand for startling important, vividly intriguing news. In a world where 'the shadow has become the substance,' media celebrations of 'celebrity news', in particular, were figuring all too prominently.

'The celebrity,' Boorstin observes, 'is a person who is known for his [or her] well-knownness'(1961: 57). In order to unravel this apparent tautology, he suggests that the celebrity needs to be recognized as being, in effect, a human pseudo-event, someone whose persona is 'fabricated on purpose to satisfy our exaggerated expectations of human greatness' (1961: 58). To clarify what is at stake here, it is necessary to define what constitutes a pseudo-event in more detail. For Boorstin, it is a happening that possesses the following characteristics:

(1) It is not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted or incited it. Typically, it is not a train wreck or an earthquake, but an interview.

(2) It is planted primarily (not always exclusively) for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced. Therefore, its occurrence is arranged for the convenience of the reporting or reproducing media. Its success is measured by how widely it is reported. Time relations in it are commonly fictitious or factitious; the announcement is given out in advance 'for future release' and written as if the event has occurred in the past. The question, 'Is it real?' is less important than, 'Is it newsworthy?'

(3) Its relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous. Its interest arises largely from this very ambiguity. Concerning a pseudo-event the question, 'What does it mean?' has a new dimension. While the news interest in a train wreck is in *what* happened and in the real consequences, the interest in an interview is always, in a sense, in *whether* it really happened and in what might have been the motives. Did the statement really mean what it said? Without some of this ambiguity a pseudo-event cannot be very interesting.

(4) Usually it is intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The hotel's thirtieth anniversary celebration, by saying that the hotel is a distinguished institution, actually makes it one.

(Boorstin 1961: 11–12)

Once the 'machinery of information' has clicked into gear (reporters, like press agents,

being vital cogs), the celebrity – in all likelihood 'notorious for their notoriety' – becomes an entertaining distraction for audiences. The public lives of individual celebrities may transpire in the blink of an eye, but journalism's penchant for the 'packaged' news of pseudo-events is ceaseless. 'In the democracy of pseudo-events,' he writes, 'anyone can become a celebrity, if only he [or she] can get into the news and stay there' (1961: 60).

The 'rising tide of pseudo events,' it follows, washes away the traditional distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' news. News events become little more than 'dramatic performances' (from interviews to news conferences, 'leaks', and self-promoting stunts) where everyone aims to follow their 'prepared script'. For journalists struggling to 'manufacture' news, the 'geometric progression' of one pseudo-event to the next is welcome, their very ritualisation making reportorial tasks easier to handle. In other words, and here Boorstin makes one of his most biting remarks, 'Freedom of the Press' is often 'a euphemism for the prerogative of reporters to produce their synthetic commodity' (1961: 29). Amongst the few exceptions to this general rule, he maintains, is the reporting of crime. 'The world of crime,' he writes, 'is a last refuge of the authentic, uncorrupted spontaneous event' (1961: 254). Crimes, in the main, are not pseudo-events, given that they are only rarely committed for the purpose of being reported. Accordingly, in a society where the 'degradation of public tastes to the trivial and the unserious' is everywhere to see, he believes that this quest for spontaneity is vital. It is this same quest which partly explains, in his view, 'our morbid interest in the private lives, in personal gossip, and in the sexual indiscretions of public figures' (1961: 255). While most of the public actions of celebrities (including, of course, certain 'star' journalists) are contrived, occasionally there are moments where something happens that has not been prepared in advance for public display. Such moments are eagerly seized upon, Boorstin suggests, because of 'our desperate hunger for the spontaneous, for the non-pseudo-event' (1961: 254).

Boorstin's study has been largely neglected in news and journalism research to date, which is one of the reasons I have dwelt upon it here. While some of its more philosophical propositions have informed the work of cultural theorists, not least that of Marshall McLuhan and Jean Baudrillard, respectively, much more could be done to further elaborate upon its insights. Several researchers have taken some important steps in this direction, however, engaging with what they call the 'tabloidization' of journalism. While few of them acknowledge Boorstin's work directly, it is often possible to discern in the course of their analyses a complementary mode of enquiry.

In using the term 'tabloidization', attention is typically drawn to a perceived realignment of 'serious' (factual, worthy, respectable, upmarket) conceptions of news values with those associated with the 'tabloid' (sensational, superficial, prurient, downmarket) press. This shift in priorities, and its negative impact on informed coverage of public affairs, is said to be most readily discernible at the level of content, format and design in newspapers, but also – even more worryingly in the eyes of some – news broadcasting. Moreover, while this apparent trend is arguably most pronounced

in the US news media (Alger 1998; Schechter 1999; Glynn 2000; Bird 2002; Grochowski 2002), critical research suggests that it can be shown to be gaining momentum as it circulates around the globe. Studies of tabloidization have also focused on the news media in Australia (Langer 1998; Turner 1999); Britain (Bromley and Tumber 1997; Barnett 1998; Bromley 1998a; McNair 1998, 2000; Dovey 2000; Winston 2002); China (Huang 2001); Germany (Esser 1999); Scandinavia (Djupsund and Carlson 1998); and southern Europe (Machin and Papatheoderou 2002), amongst other national contexts (see also Sparks and Tulloch 2002 for pertinent essays on Germany, Hungary, Japan, and Mexico, in addition to the US and UK).

Critics contend that processes of 'tabloidization', to the extent that they erode 'serious', 'principled' journalistic criteria of newsworthiness, threaten to undermine the integrity of the 'quality' end of news reporting spectrum. In addition to the conflation of 'hard' and 'soft' news agendas, and with it the privileging of scandal, gossip, celebrity and sports over and above politics and economics, 'information' is said to be merging with 'entertainment' into an 'infotainment' muddle. Much is made, therefore, of how editorial commentary (features and opinion columns) appears to be flourishing at the expense of 'proper' reporting. These critics observe that it is evidently much more 'cost effective' to hire someone to sit at their desk and wax philosophical about the pressing issues of the day, as opposed to employing journalists to actually investigate what is happening. Quality reporting requires sufficient financial investment, but also time, effort and specialized knowledge, amongst other human resources. Comment may not be free, but facts are without doubt much more expensive – to re-inflect C.P. Scott's well-known declaration (see p. 7 this volume). Simon Hoggart (2003), who writes for Scott's *Guardian* today, is scathing in his criticism. 'The point about the tabs,' he argues, 'is that they don't regard facts as having their own integrity. Instead they are treated like grains of wheat, puffed full of air, coated with sugar, and served up for breakfast in a brightly coloured box.' Moreover, in his view, the 'tabloids have, deep down, a serious contempt for their readers, who are seen as simple souls, ready to believe what they are told.'

Hoggart is one of many critics from within journalistic circles who take strong exception with this tendency to embrace a tabloid-driven ethos – one where truth, he adds, tends to be reduced to 'what you can get away with' (see also Hoggart 1995). Interestingly, however, where some academic critics adopt a similar position, even using a language of 'moral panic' to describe the dangers of tabloidization, others are more inclined to be circumspect. Tabloidization, as Gripsrud (2000) points out, is something of a tabloid term itself, being more akin to a journalistic buzzword than a scholarly concept (2000: 285). In calling for a more nuanced understanding of the forms and processes in question, he argues that a 'degree of "tabloidization" is not always a bad thing. It takes, if not all sorts, then at least many sorts of journalism to make a democratic media system work as it should' (2000: 299). Arguing in a similar vein is Langer (1998), who affirms the general line of criticism outlined above while, at the same time, making a case for the 'other news' (tabloid journalism's so-called

'trivialities') to be given careful scrutiny on their own terms. Turner (1999) adopts a related stance, but wishes to 'jettison the category of tabloidization as too baggy, imprecise and value-laden to be of any use' (1999: 70). In acknowledging that many of the fears expressed about 'tabloidization' are grounded in an elitist hostility toward popular culture itself, he nevertheless believes that more specialised forms of critique are required to engage with the attendant complexities (see also Barnett 1998, Glynn 2000; Holland 2001; Sonwalkar 2002; McGuigan 2004). Still, it is in the course of his analysis of the ways in which 'tabloidization' pinpoints how the personal and the private are emphasized over and above the public and the structural that Sparks (2000) makes the case for its heuristic value. '[F]or all its faults and imprecisions,' he remarks, 'tabloidization' is 'a category that, properly used, catches some of the key elements of that reformulation' (2000: 36).

How best, then, to contextualize the processes frequently attributed to 'tabloidization' within the larger imperatives shaping journalism today? Worthy of close attention in this regard is the Project for Excellence in Journalism's report *The State of the News Media 2004*, intended to be the first of an annual initiative to 'take stock of American journalism' by investigating contemporary trends.[3] Specifically, the report's researchers collected data across eight media sectors (network, local and cable television, respectively, as well as newspapers, magazines, the Internet, radio and 'ethnic/alternative' news media) so as to examine issues concerning editorial content, audiences, economics, ownership, newsroom investment, and public attitudes. Overall, their findings suggest to them that journalism in the US is currently 'in the middle of an epochal transformation,' effectively caught between the competing dynamics of fragmentation and convergence:

> While audiences are fragmenting, we have greater capacity than ever to come together as a nation in an instant – for September 11th, the Super Bowl or watching soldiers live on the battlefield in Iraq. While Americans are turning to more and varied sources for news, the media they're consuming increasingly tend to be owned by a few giant conglomerates competing to cover what seem to be at any moment only a handful of major stories.
>
> (Pew Report 2004: 4)

Perhaps not surprisingly, the report indicates that corporate profits have typically increased, or at least held firm, while investment at the level of the newsroom is being scaled-back. In general terms, public trust in news sources appears to be in a marked state of decline, with the availability of 'trivial, one-sided and false' news and information increasing. Evidently some people are better informed than they have been in the past (the role of the Internet in making available primary sources is cited, for example), while others are more inclined to be captivated by the 'sensational and the diverting.' Still others prefer a 'journalism of affirmation', where they are drawn to news which largely reinforces their preconceived views of the world. It similarly points out that people are better placed to be proactive with the news than before, not least because of

ongoing innovations in media interactivity. Still, there can be little doubt that this dichotomous push-pull of fragmentation and convergence sometimes means that journalism is being lead in conflicting directions.

Indeed, it is in focusing on what is at stake for journalism in this current period of 'epochal transformation' that the report makes its most significant contribution. The authors maintain that the traditional role of the journalist as intermediary, editor, verifier and synthesizer is weakening at precisely the same time that public demand for the journalist to be a referee, watchdog and interpreter is becoming evermore apparent (Pew Report 2004: 5). To help clarify the nature of the imperatives involved, the report usefully documents eight overarching trends, each of which is deserving of careful scrutiny. Briefly, these cross-media trends are identified as follows:

A growing number of news outlets are chasing a relatively static or even shrinking audience for news. Most sectors of the US news media, the report's data indicate, are seeing their audience decline, placing ever greater pressures on revenues and profits. Exceptions to this trend, however, are online, ethnic minority (such as Spanish-language newspapers) and 'alternative' news media. 'All three of these growing sectors share the same strength,' the report states, namely 'the opportunity for audiences to select tailored content, and in the case of the Internet, to do so on demand' (Pew Report 2004: 5).

Much of the new investment in journalism today – much of the information revolution generally – is in disseminating the news, not in collecting it. At issue here are cutbacks in the newsroom, which are said to be taking place in most of the eight sectors examined. The cutbacks pertain to the number of staff employed, as well as with regard to the time they have to gather and report the news. 'While there are exceptions,' the authors write, 'in general journalists face real pressures trying to maintain quality' (2004: 5). Investments in news gathering are not keeping pace, it seems, with corporate profits.

In many parts of the news media, we are increasingly getting the raw elements of news as the end product. As one would anticipate, the report acknowledges that this is particularly evident where 24-hour news media are concerned. 'In cable [such as Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC] and online,' it states, 'there is a tendency toward a jumbled, chaotic, partial quality in some reports, without much synthesis or even the ordering of the information' (2004: 5). Cable news is similarly singled out for the repetitive nature of its programming, frequently broadcast without the benefit of meaningful updating. Indeed, the report's content analysis suggests that typically only 5 per cent of cable updates include new information.

Journalistic standards now vary even inside a single news organization. Here the report is seeking to pinpoint the ways in which individual companies aim to deliver to advertisers an audience for news across different programmes, products and platforms. 'To do so,' the report states, 'some are varying their news agenda, their rules on separating advertising from news, and even their ethical standards' (2004: 5). Standards differ, for example, between a network newscast, its prime time magazine or its

morning show (or with regard to the intermingling of news and advertising on some newspaper Websites, if not in print edition). Moreover, the report adds, this concern 'also may reinforce the public perception evident in various polls that the news media lack professionalism and are motivated by financial and self-aggrandizing motives rather than the public interest' (2004: 5–6).

Without investing in building new audiences, the long-term scenario for many traditional news outlets seems problematic. In making this point, the report seeks to highlight the extent to which maintaining profitability, in the eyes of the companies involved, means maintaining a focus on costs. The authors suggest that their study 'shows general increases in journalist workload, declines in numbers of reporters, shrinking space in newscasts to make more room for ads and promotions, and in various ways that are measurable, thinning product' (2004: 6). Hence their queries about long-term implications, not least whether a news organization can keep increasing the charges made to advertisers when they are delivering a smaller audience to them? (and when, moreover, the effects of cost-cutting may actually accelerate the rate of audience decline).

Convergence seems more inevitable and potentially less threatening to journalists than it may have seemed a few years ago. In making this assertion, the report's authors are suggesting that online journalism is likely to converge with older media, rather than replace them. Pointing to their reading of audience trends, the authors state: 'we are heading toward a situation, especially at the national level, in which institutions that were once in different media, such as CBS and the *Washington Post*, will be direct competitors on a single primary field of battle – online' (2004: 6). In declaring themselves to be excited by the possibilities such a scenario may engender, the authors cite, in particular, 'the potential of new audiences, new ways of storytelling, more immediacy, and more citizen involvement.'

The biggest question mark may not be technological but economic. Bearing in mind the optimism signalled by the previous point, here the authors acknowledge that the 'bigger issue' might be financial in nature. In the event that online journalism is less successful in revenue generation, the 'economic foundation for newsgathering' may be less solid than that associated with television and newspapers. '[T]he move to the web,' the authors observe, 'may lead to a general decline in the scope and quality of American journalism, not because the medium isn't suited for news, but because it isn't suited to the kind of profits that underwrite newsgathering' (2004: 6).

Those who would manipulate the press and public appear to be gaining leverage over the journalists who cover them. Regarding this, the last of the eight trends, the report underscores several pertinent factors. In addition to simple supply and demand, where news outlet competition produces what the authors characterize as 'a seller's market for information,' workloads are also a factor. Constraints placed on workloads mean, in turn, that news stories will likely contain fewer sources – a point the authors support with reference to their content analysis of 24-hour-news outlets. 'The increased leverage enjoyed by news sources,' they write, 'already encouraged a new

kind of checkbook journalism in 2003, as seen in the controversies over TV networks trying to secure interviews with singer Michael Jackson and soldier Jessica Lynch' (2004: 6).

In looking across these eight trends, then, the report's authors have discerned some cause for optimism, most notably with regard to the prospects of online journalism, morning news programmes, and ethnic minority or other 'alternative' sources of news. In the main, however, the general direction for older media is much less encouraging, with serious concerns being raised about their long-term viability. In the meantime, the implications for quality journalism are stark. Figures provided by the report show that the current level of investment in newsgathering amongst most of these older outlets is down. In something of a vicious circle, this disinvestment arguably corresponds to the falling viewer and circulation figures, which in turn translate into further cutbacks in the newsroom. Examples cited include: 'one-third fewer network TV correspondents than in 1985; 2,200 fewer people at newspapers than in 1990; a drop of 44 per cent in full-time radio newsroom employees between 1994 and 2001', and so forth. 'Trust in journalism has been declining for a generation', the Project's Director, Tom Rosenstiel, stated in a press release when the report was published. 'This study suggests one reason is that news media are locked in a vicious cycle. As audiences fragment, newsrooms are cut back, which further erodes public trust.'

In the age of 24/7 news, answers to the question of how best to halt this erosion in public trust are proving increasingly elusive. The issues raised in the Project's report on the US scene are all too pertinent in other national contexts, especially where news organizations are facing ever greater competition (due, in no small part, to 'market-friendly' regulatory authorities) for ever smaller news audiences. Public trust, from one society to the next, will be directly linked to the relative degree of diversity, account-ability and responsibility in evidence across the journalistic sphere. After all, as philosopher Onora O'Neill (2002) asks: 'If we can't trust what the press report, how can we tell whether to trust those on whom they report?'

Strategies for change

To declare that journalism is in a state of crisis, some commentators maintain, risks overstating the severity of these developments. Frequently taking a broad historical perspective, they make the argument that these types of debates about reportorial integrity are as old as journalism itself. Even if it is true that the gap between news and entertainment is narrowing (which they dispute), it does not necessarily follow in their view that there is a corresponding 'dumbing-down' of news content. Rather, they insist, the criteria being used to judge standards of 'quality' are quickly becoming out of date. Where some critics hold journalists responsible for pandering to populist prejudices, a number of these commentators are of the view that news values are undergoing a process of democratization. They believe that people want 'news you can

use', that is, news which speaks directly to their personal experiences of daily life, as opposed to news content driven by the interests of politicians and other 'talking heads'. The resultant 'tabloidization' of international news coverage, they suggest, thus has as much to do with an enhanced concern with local issues as it does with ever sharper 'efficiency cuts' in the financial budgets of news organizations.

A further type of response, as journalist Ian Hargreaves (2003) points out, is that which enquires, typically with a world-weary expression: 'crisis, what crisis?' Shortly thereafter the assertion is usually made that journalism's standards have always been under attack and, moreover, that the fiercer the attacks, the healthier journalism must be. However, this kind of insouciance, Hargreaves believes, cannot deny that 'the public has a right to expect that journalists will take seriously the responsibilities that come with their privileges' (2003: 17). Accordingly, in his view, journalists should welcome 'the new mood of interrogation about their values, standards and professional practices', for they have much to gain. At stake, of course, is public trust in journalism itself, something which requires constant reaffirmation. While Hargreaves – rather optimistically in my opinion – largely puts his faith in 'market mechanisms' to do 'the job of sorting out the trustworthy from the unreliable', nevertheless he does acknowledge that journalists have to be honest, accountable and willing to submit themselves to public scrutiny. The alternative, he warns, is all too dangerous. Should the 'time-constrained citizen' proceed to 'note the unreliability of much news and switch off, settling for a quiet life, away from the information storm', then the very freedom of the press will be called into question (2003: 266; see also Stevenson 2003). There is little doubt in his mind that journalism will have to 're-absorb the values of democracy into its own self-conduct' so as better ensure an adequately informed, and thus empowered, citizenry.

Precisely what role can journalism play, then, in efforts to establish a citizen's democracy? It is precisely this question which is at the heart of Herbert J. Gans's (2003) *Democracy and the News*. Building on his evaluative assessment of current debates about the news media's social responsibilities, he proceeds to outline the basis for a 'blueprint for action' to bring about a revival of democracy. For Gans, citizen's democracy is that 'form of representative government that maximizes the political responsibilities, rights, and most important, the public decision making of citizens without imparing the function of the economic and political system' (2003: 113). It follows, then, that to help bring about an enlarged role for the citizenry in its own governance, journalists must be better attuned to the needs of their audience in how they report the news. Accordingly, Gans makes several suggestions – some of which, he readily admits, are more feasible than others – to begin the work of figuring out how best to effect change.

The first proposal is called *User-Friendly News*. Journalists, in Gans's view, must find new ways to persuade audiences to take an active interest in the news, especially where the reporting of political and economic issues is concerned. Journalists need to make the news more user-friendly while, at the same time, expanding their

definitions of what counts as news so as to create space for types of coverage that audiences consider to be significant. 'If journalists wish to understand audience needs,' he writes, 'they must know more about topics such as how and why people "use" the news.' Moreover, they need to better appreciate 'what various kinds of news mean in their lives, what the audience is doing when it is "keeping up" with the news, and when it is most engaged with the story' (2003: 92). It follows, then, that further efforts will have to be undertaken to bring journalists and audience members together so as to enhance their understanding of one another's perceptions of issues such as the framing of events, the criteria of newsworthiness, and inaccuracies in the news.

Localizing National and International News. Working on the assumption that most people are more interested in local rather than national or international news (except where events of major significance are concerned), Gans suggests that journalists 'localize' their reporting. To clarify, he is proposing that international and national news be turned 'into local stories by reporting the effects, implications, and impacts of what happens in the larger world for the local community' (2003: 94). Such a strategy, he believes, will make news from distant places appear to be more relevant – and therefore user-friendly – for audience members. To the extent that journalists can learn more about the indirect consequences of faraway events for local residents (which is likely to entail drawing upon a wider range of sources of expertise), the resultant news coverage will become more meaningful in the everyday lives of news audiences.

Participatory News. Conventional forms of news coverage, as Gans observes, tend to be top-down in perspective. That is to say, an emphasis is typically placed on news from – and about – public officials, with the viewpoints of ordinary citizens seldom represented. In the interest of balance, then, Gans argues that space be made for 'participatory news' as well, by which he means 'news designed to provide direct or indirect aid to citizens who wish to participate or know how others are participating' in politics (2003: 95). Journalists, it follows, must make a greater effort to encourage members of the public to become involved, not least by treating the perspectives of citizens and public officials as being of equal relevance and importance. Participatory journalism, Gans maintains, is 'citizen oriented, taking a political, and when necessary, adversarial, view of the citizen-official relationship' (2003: 98–99).

Explanatory Journalism. In contrast with traditional forms of journalism, which typically focus on the 'who', 'what', 'where', 'when' and 'how' of a news story, explanatory journalism places a priority on 'why' questions. It does so for two purposes, according to Gans. First, 'to help people understand what is happening to them and the country, and to identify the reasons for and the causes of what is happening' (2003: 99). Second, so as to 'provide explanatory information about conditions that citizens want to eliminate, helping them to understand what reforms and structural changes must be undertaken' (2003: 99). In making the case for explanatory journalism, Gans also contends that it can strengthen 'watchdog journalism' by enhancing investigatory modes of reporting. Still, he acknowledges, it is difficult to do, is time-consuming (and therefore expensive), and requires finding sources with suf-

ficient expertise to help 'dig for causes'. Its importance is likely to become evermore pronounced, however, as the world becomes more interdependent.

Opinions and 'News Opinions'. Where some would insist that journalists should simply 'stick to the facts', Gans adopts the opposite position. The news media, in his view, should include more opinions, for two reasons. First, he writes, 'opinions are desirable when journalists who have done a lot of legwork develop informed opinions, and these ought to be shared with the news audience' (2003: 101). Such opinions are best described as 'news opinions', however, so as to distinguish them from 'generalist' opinions. The inclusion of news opinions, being informed by an expertise derived from the necessary legwork of fact-finding, will alert audiences to the journalist's personal judgement in their reportage – a judgement otherwise obscured by the dictates of objectivity. Gans's second reason for the inclusion of opinions is that they are often being inserted anyway, but in a manner which implicitly aligns them with what are ostensibly facts. 'When journalists write about what the "American people" want or what the "public" thinks, and say so without any empirical evidence, they are only offering their own opinion – and turning it into an imagined national consensus at the same time' (2003: 101). Far better, then, to turn implicit opinions into explicit ones.

Multiperspectival News. In an ideal situation, Gans believes, news would make available all possible perspectives on a given phenomenon. In practice, however, multi-perspectival 'means making a place in the news for presently unrepresented viewpoints, unreported facts, and unrepresented, or rarely reported, parts of the population' (2003: 103). In other words, then, this approach to news is the 'bottoms-up corrective for the mostly top-down perspectives of the news media' discussed above. Journalism from below, so to speak, would speak to the interests of those who face prejudice from powerful elites, whether on the basis of their class, gender, ethnicity or other, related factors. 'As always,' Gans observes, 'the poor have the greatest need for news about the world they live in, and for news that respects them and their perspectives on the world' (2003: 103). The quickest way to make the news media more representative, it follows, would be to employ journalists from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. While female journalists are increasingly able to break through the 'glass ceiling' of news organizations, current recruitment methods and criteria of merit continue to discriminate on the basis of class and ethnicity. Good intentions in this regard, he adds, are clearly not working.

Other News Formats. Conventional formats for 'straight' news, whether those associated with newspapers or broadcast journalism, have proven remarkably stable over time – too stable, in the opinion of Gans. He welcomes the prospect of change, especially if experimentation in different formats will help arrest the current decline in news audience figures. Competing news media might 'pool' news stories of ordinary events, for example, so as to reserve resources for producing different kinds of coverage of more unusual types of stories. More radical changes might include incorporating elements of humour, satire and commentary alongside the 'straight' news. Such an approach might have a particular appeal for younger audiences, he suggests. Further,

'news fiction' might be used to advantage. Here Gans has in mind fictional treatments or docudramas of topics in the news. For all of its faults, he remarks, television's *The West Wing* has 'acquainted its viewers with White House politics in ways that the news media do not.' Nevertheless, he adds, 'these viewers might learn even more if a White House correspondent commented on each installment immediately afterwards and explained what the show's writers got right and wrong' (2003: 107). In any case, he contends, news fiction has the potential to entice people to take a greater interest in 'real news' by entertaining them in the process.

Two further proposals, already hinted at above, round out Gans's agenda for change. *New Tasks and New Journalists* revolves around his conviction that new forms of journalistic expertise need to be generated (see also Adam 2001; Zelizer 2004). Most news, he points out, is gathered by 'generalists'. These 'all-purpose reporters' cover 'so many different topics that they often lack the background knowledge – or the time to acquire it – to ask the most significant or telling questions of their sources' (2003: 108). Such expertise comes at a price, of course, which leads to Gans's final proposal, *Paying for Better News*. 'If the news is as central to democracy as journalists argue,' he writes, 'then more needs to be spent so that its impact is maximized' (2003: 109). Not surprisingly, Gans is sceptical about the likelihood of capitalist owners and shareholders accepting lower profits, just as he is doubtful that governmental regulatory bodies will intervene to advance the public interest in this regard. Alternative possibilities, however, might include the use of tax incentives, or other forms of public subsidy, to encourage the necessary investment in improving the news. Even direct government funding, heresy in places like the US, deserves to be considered, in Gans's view. Even more radically, national news media might be created as utilities – either on a non-profit or limited-profit basis – so as to reach audiences currently all but ignored by other news media.

Each one of these proposals speaks to a pressing concern that demands precisely this type of imaginative engagement. Gans is to be commended, in my opinion, for thinking outside the box. While some of these proposals are clearly more practicable than others, there can be little doubt that their active consideration will help to reinvigorate familiar debates about how best to improve the quality of journalism today. Here it is important to bear in mind, though, the extent to which the news media will resist any form of change which calls into question their influence. An analysis of the structural factors which constrain, even preclude certain kinds of innovation, will promptly discern how the exercise of corporate power places severe limits on what can be achieved at any given juncture. While Gans signals his awareness of these limits, especially where he addresses the imperatives of profit maximization directly, he nevertheless remains optimistic about the opportunities for reform. And it is 'reform' of the current system, in his view, which is at stake. His conception of citizen's democracy, as noted above, is one which will not 'impair' the 'function of the economic and political system.'

Therein lies the rub, however, for those who are committed to a progressive politic that seeks to do more than curb the ideological excesses of the current system. Reform is insufficient in and by itself, they would contend, when the sort of democratic ideal

envisaged by Gans actually demands a far more fundamental restructuring of the distribution of economic, political and cultural power within society. Where journalism possesses the potential to help facilitate processes of democratic governance, not least with respect to holding those in positions of power publicly accountable for their actions, more typically it serves to lend legitimacy to the inequalities endemic to modern societies. Democracy requires a far more robust exchange of viewpoints, and a journalism up to the challenge of giving them vigorous expression. As this chapter has shown, new forms of dialogue about journalism's future need to be fostered, particularly where the decline in public trust is concerned. Perfunctory prescriptions for reform, for tinkering with the existing system of checks and balances, are not enough; for journalism to be democratized in ways consistent with the public interest, structural change is required. 'The creation of an independent press,' as Carey (2002) argues, 'will require both judicial and legislative action so that journalism can earn enough profit to make it attractive but release it as well from slavish dependence on the laws of the market' (2002: 89). Journalism's commitment to public service, in other words, must take priority over profits. This means, he adds, that 'the press may have to rely on a democratic state to create the conditions necessary for a democratic press to flourish and for journalists to be restored to their proper role as orchestrators of the conversation of a democratic culture.'

Points of departure

In bringing this discussion to a close, I wish to highlight a set of pressing issues which in my view deserve much more critical attention than they have typically received to date. Accordingly, briefly outlined below are a range of questions revolving around a specific aspect of the changing nature of news culture, each of which is intended to bring to the fore conceptual concerns for further discussion and debate.

*   What does 'freedom of the press' mean today? Given that most definitions focus on the constraints placed by governments on the right to express ideas, opinions and information, what impact are the changing dynamics of news media ownership (particularly with respect to the growing degree of concentration, conglomeration and globalization) having on these same 'freedoms'? Is news slowly turning into a commodity like any other, its value to be measured primarily in terms of 'bottom-line' profitability? If so, would it be practicable, or even desirable, to regulate news content (for example, by imposing on newspapers the same 'impartiality' constraints placed on broadcasters)?
*   Is the notion of a 'public sphere' still viable and, if so, how can journalism best fulfil its social responsibilities? Is it the case that only 'free markets' (and 'market-friendly' regulatory regimes) ensure diversity of expression and open public debate? Or, alternatively, are critics such as Habermas (1989) correct to argue that the commercialization of mass communication networks has virtually displaced

'rational-critical debate' into the realm of cultural consumption, thereby trans-forming active citizens into indifferent consumers? In what ways will journalism have to change in order to enhance civic participation in government, and thereby help to close what is clearly a widening gap between those with 'information capital' and those without it?

- If, by definition, it is impossible for journalists to be completely 'objective', then should they not abandon the pretence of being 'un-biased' altogether? If so, what sort of normative language should replace these familiar concepts? Is it enough for journalists to try to be 'balanced' and 'fair', or should they adopt new approaches to writing news which explicitly mark the constructed nature of each account's codes and conventions? How might a collective decision to relinquish the language of 'objectivity' empower, or possibly disempower, various social groups attempting to contest certain forms of news coverage?

- How does 'truth' relate to 'fact'? Do journalists, as some of them argue, have a fundamental obligation to determining 'the truth' of any given situation? Or is it their task to secure the best available definition of the truth, thereby conceding that absolute truth does not exist? Then again, would it be advantageous for journalists to dispense with the notion of truth altogether in favour of concentrat-ing strictly on matters of fact? In any case, how best to lay bare the gendered (male), racialized (white) and class specific (middle- and upper-class) conventions underpinning many of the more entrenched journalistic discourses of truth?

- In what ways must journalistic institutions change to first arrest and then reverse the current decline of audience figures for both newspapers and television news, especially with respect to young people? While some journalists and critics are charging that the division between 'news' and 'entertainment' is becoming dan-gerously blurred, what form should a truly popular journalism take? At what point does 'serious' news reporting end and 'infotainment' begin? For those commentators opposed to market-driven journalism, by what criteria should the 'quality' of news media representations be appropriately judged?

- Is journalism a profession and, if so, does it need a formal code of ethics? In what ways do the current practices broadly regarded as being constitutive of 'profes-sional' reporting serve to include certain voices and exclude alternative ones? How do these (often tacit) judgements about 'professionalism' inform the hiring and promotion of men and women within news organizations? Moreover, how do they shape the routine strategies by which journalists handle different sources when processing news accounts? Might professional status unduly restrict or even control how journalists go about their work, or would it enhance their relative autonomy from managerial influence within a news organization?

- How best to realize the potential of the Internet as a news source? In what ways will the forms and practices of online journalism have to develop in order to further enhance its reportorial integrity? How to overcome the obstacles in the path of this kind of development, such as corporate ownership of major news

sites, the growing standardization of online formats, the influence of advertising on content, and the ideologically narrow (if all too familiar) conceptions of news values and source credibility in operation, amongst others? Moreover, how might online journalism help to counter the forms of social exclusion endemic to the global network society? That is to say, how might it contribute to the creation of progressive forms of citizenship across the digital divide?

Overall, then, this brief sketch of several particularly salient issues (located, as they are, among an array of others) illuminates some of the key features of the ongoing debates I have considered to be central to this book's analytical and strategic agendas. In electing to conclude by outlining them in this rather provocative fashion, it has been my intention to help establish several possible points of departure for future critical explorations of news culture. It goes without saying, of course, that I hope this book will prove to be of some use in these explorations.

Further reading

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Notes

1 The history of 'Nightline' can be traced to a special programme, called 'America Held Hostage', launched on 8 November 1979. Conceived by the former president of ABC News, Roone Arledge, it covered the daily events surrounding the seizure of US Embassy staff in Tehran by Iranian militants. In March of the following year, the programme's anchor, Ted Koppel, announced that it would continue under the name 'Nightline'. Here it is also worth noting that the current 'ratings winner' of the timeslot in question is comedian Jay Leno's 'Tonight Show' on the NBC network (see also Rutenberg, and Schiesel 2002).

2 The word 'tabloid', it needs to be noted, does not signal a particular approach to journalism. While it still finds its definition in opposition to the broadsheet newspaper in size and format terms, a number of the latter (most recently *The Independent* and *The Times* in Britain, for example) now appear simultaneously in tabloid editions. Moreover, certain prestigious newspapers, such as *Le Monde*, have long appeared in a tabloid format.

3 The Project for Excellence in Journalism is an institute affiliated with the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, New York. Funding for the study was provided by the Pew Charitable Trusts. A copy of the report (over 500 pages in print) is available online, at: http://www.stateofthemedia.org/

GLOSSARY

ABC News: the news division of Capital Cities/American Broadcasting Company based in New York, owned by the Walt Disney Company since 1995. One of the four major news networks, along with **CBS, NBC** and **Fox** in the USA.

Audience: in news broadcasting, the total number of people attending to a particular newscast; statistical figures concerning the size and composition of the audience are often quantified in relation to class, gender, age, occupation, region and so forth. Several recent research studies suggest that the audience for newscasts in both Britain and the USA is in a state of decline, particularly among young people.

BBC News: the British Broadcasting Corporation is a public service (state-owned, non-commercial) broadcasting network composed of both televisual and radio stations. The first regular General News Bulletin was broadcast on the BBC radio network from London on 23 December 1923. The first fully fledged (for the time) televisual newscast, *News and Newsreel*, appeared on 5 July 1954.

Bias: see **objectivity and bias**.

Broadsheet: see **tabloid and tabloidization**.

Bystanders' journalism: former BBC journalist Martin Bell's (1998: 15–16) description of so-called 'objective' war reporting, that is, reporting that is concerned 'more with the circumstances of wars – military formations, tactics, strategies and weapons systems – than with the people who provoke them, the people who fight them and the people who suffer from them' (see **journalism of attachment**).

Calcutt Committee: a committee appointed by the British Conservative government, headed by lawyer David Calcutt, to examine media intrusion and privacy issues. Reports released in 1990 and 1993 assessed the case for press self-regulation on a voluntary basis against the merits of statutory press regulation. It recommended the establishment of the **PCC**.

CBS News: the news division of the Columbia Broadcasting System Television Network based in New York, owned by Westinghouse since 1995.

Cheque-book journalism: a term used to describe the payment of money to individuals for the exclusive right to publish their account or testimony concerning a news event, such as a

court trial. The practice is widely condemned by politicians and lawyers, among others, particularly where it is feared that it will pervert the course of justice. The **PCC** has proposed safeguards, but as of yet not a ban, on such payments.

Circulation: in the case of newspapers, the total sales figures for a given title over a specific period of time; to be distinguished from **readership**, which refers to the total number of people who actually read a copy of the title in question during this period.

CNN: Cable News Network, an international news satellite television channel founded in 1980 by Ted Turner in Atlanta, Georgia, USA; owned by Time Warner since 1995.

DA-Notices (formerly D-Notices):   Defence Advisory Notices are distributed by the British security services to the news media on those occasions where they are seeking to ensure that information they consider to be of a sensitive nature *vis-à-vis* national security is not published or broadcast. Although it is a voluntary system without legal force, pressures can be brought upon journalists to encourage cooperation.

Digital news services: televisual signals are compressed through digitalization so as to improve clarity of image and sound while, at the same time, creating broadcasting space (terrestrial and satellite) for multiple new channels. The eventual convergence of television and computer interactive technologies in the household may allow viewers to selectively construct newscasts in accordance with their personal preferences and interests.

Docu-soaps: a term used (along with 'docudrama') to refer to a form of 'fly-on-the-wall' televisual documentary which exhibits some of the characteristics of soap opera narrative. British examples include *Driving School, Hotel, Holiday Reps, Airport, Airline, Superstore, The Clampers* and *Lakesiders*.

Doorstepping: a journalistic practice whereby an individual 'in the news' is surprised by an encounter with an inquisitive reporter waiting at the door, the hope being that he or she will be shocked into making a revelatory statement. Often used to lend a news account a greater sense of drama. Some news organizations (such as the BBC) explicitly forbid the practice, except as a last resort, due to concerns about people's right to privacy.

ENG: an acronym for Electronic News Gathering, referring to the production of sound and visual news reports 'in the field' which are then transmitted back to the studio via telephone links, transmitter vans or portable satellite link-ups.

Fairness Doctrine: a principle (no longer formally upheld by the **FCC**) which holds that a radio or televisual station must provide equal time for different points of view to be advanced with regard to a controversial public issue.

FCC: the Federal Communications Commission was established in 1934 by the US government as an independent agency to license and regulate communication by radio, wire and cable. Today it also regulates radio and television stations. It does not possess the authority to censor news content.

Feminization of the news: a term used to describe an apparent shift underway in some news organizations, in part as a response to pressures from advertisers, to better attract female audiences. This process of feminization may entail dissolving what can otherwise be a rigid division between 'hard' (fact-based) and 'soft' (interpretation-based) news values. Moreover, any pretence of journalistic 'objectivity' is likely to be abandoned as the reporter's subjective (and thus gendered) experience of the world is acknowledged.

Fleet Street: a term derived from the old Fleet River which runs through an area of London which was the home of most of Britain's major national newspapers until the 1980s.

Although the titles are now dispersed to other parts of the city, most notably London Docklands, Battersea and Kensington, the term is still commonly used to describe the national press.

Fly-on-the-wall: see **docu-soaps**.

Fourth Estate: a term widely attributed to eighteenth-century British Whig politician Edmund Burke (1729–97) to describe the press; in his view, the role of the press in society had assumed a greater importance than the other three 'Estates' (the church, the judiciary and the commons) of the time.

Fox News: the news division of the Fox Broadcasting Company, the fourth largest televisual network in the USA, controlled by Rupert Murdoch's News International since 1992.

Impartiality: since the BBC was transformed from a private company to a public body under a royal charter in 1927, its news programmes have been required to be politically impartial over a period of time. In contrast, the Television Act 1954 which authorized the launch of ITN contained a clause demanding that 'due impartiality' be demonstrated within each individual news programme via a 'proper balance' of views. Among newsworkers, the term 'impartiality' is generally used interchangeably with **objectivity**.

Infotainment: a term used to describe a genre of text where information and entertainment values are made to converge in an effort to attract as wide an audience as possible.

Internet news services: recent years have seen a proliferation of specialist news channels available on the Internet, including BBC News online and MSNBC (a joint venture between Microsoft Corp. and NBC News) in the USA.

ITC: the Independent Television Commission licenses and regulates the commercially funded independent programme companies (ITV, Channels 4 and 5, and licensed cable or satellite) in Britain, including the makers of ITN. Its remit includes matters relevant to journalism such as impartiality, privacy, terrorism and broadcasting during elections.

ITN: Independent Television News is the single news supplier to the ITV Network (Channels 3, 4 and 5), a situation enforced by the **ITC** due to concerns that a 'free market' in commercial news might lead to diminished quality.

Journalism of attachment: a term coined by veteran BBC foreign correspondent Martin Bell in 1995 as part of a controversial argument against what he called **bystanders' journalism**. Bell believes that the war journalist should not attempt to stand neutrally between 'good and evil, right and wrong, aggressor and victim'. A journalism of attachment, he maintains, is a 'journalism which cares as well as knows'; that is to say, 'engaged' journalism takes sides by assuming an advocacy role (see M. Bell 1995, 1998).

Leak: an unauthorized (or, at least, ostensibly so) release of confidential information to the news media.

Lobby briefings: lobby journalists are provided with privileged access to official sources of information and comment by government spokespersons, typically on a non-attributable basis ('inside sources say . . .'). In Britain, the system dated back to the 1880s, and was often used by politicians to considerable advantage in shaping the news agenda. In November 1997, however, the Labour government moved to formally place lobby briefings 'on the record' (along similar lines to the US custom) for the 120 accredited lobby correspondents.

Market-driven journalism: in this form of journalism, judgements about news content are made on the basis of considerations of news as a saleable commodity, as opposed to giving priority to professional judgements about news quality or the integrity of the reporting.

National Union of Journalists: the NUJ is the main trade union representing all news and editorial sectors of the media in Britain. It upholds its own code of conduct concerning reportorial standards, and actively campaigns for better working conditions for journalists (as well as for freedom of information and against censorship).

NBC News: the news division of the National Broadcasting Company based in New York, owned by General Electric Company since it purchased the former parent company, the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), in 1986.

News management: the activities or tactics associated with individuals or groups, including government officials, public relations consultants and activist or lobbying organizations, attempting to secure what they consider to be positive or favourable news coverage.

Newsgroup: a newsgroup is a virtual discussion group or forum situated on the Internet; it consists of 'postings' or individual messages submitted electronically from other Internet users interested in engaging in a dialogue about a particular issue or topic.

Newsreel: a compilation onto one film reel of various reports of news events, frequently from around the world; presented to cinema goers in Britain and the USA beginning in about 1910 and lasting until televisual newscasts were fully established in the 1950s.

Objectivity and bias: underlying the charge of news 'bias' is the (often unspoken) assumption that it is actually possible for journalists to attain complete detachment, objectivity and neutrality in their reporting. Some journalists acknowledge the difficulties (both practical and philosophical) associated with any claim to being fully 'objective', choosing instead to use a language of 'fairness' and 'balance'. See also **impartiality**.

Ownership: issues regarding news media ownership may be identified at four different, yet often interrelated, levels of concern. First, the issue of *concentration*, that is, the relative degree of diversity among the owners of companies in the media sector; second, the issue of *cross-media* ownership, such as where one company might hold, for example, both newspapers and televisual stations, thereby raising potential conflicts of interest; third, the issue of *conglomeration*, that is, where through a process of merger or takeover a news organization becomes part of a company with financial stakes outside of the media sector (once again, potential conflicts of interest are likely to arise); and fourth, the issue of *globalization* where a news organization becomes part of an international company engaged in competition with other such companies in a range of different national markets.

PCC: the British Press Complaints Commission, set up in 1991 following a recommendation made by the **Calcutt Committee**, investigates complaints made about the contents of newspapers and magazines, as well as the activities of news organizations. In addition to offering advice on ethical matters, it upholds a (voluntary) code of practice which defines acceptable standards of journalistic conduct.

Pool system: the organization of journalists into groups or 'pools', such as during electoral campaigns or at times of war, by government officials seeking to control their access to information.

Public or **civic journalism**: an emerging form of journalism, particularly in North America, which renders explicit the aim of socially responsible reporting by seeking to empower community-based groups to shape what gets covered and how. 'Newspapers', its advocates argue, 'exist so that people can participate in an effective public life, and if people aren't participating or politics isn't effective, then newspapers have somehow failed' (Charity 1995; Merritt 1995).

Public interest defence: journalists accused of disclosing information unlawfully, such as where official secrets are concerned, may plead in a court of law that they were acting to provide the public with material about which it had a legitimate right to know (to be distinguished from what the public might simply be interested in knowing about).

Radio Authority: the statutory body set up by the Broadcasting Act 1990 to plan frequencies, award licences and regulate commercial radio stations in Britain. It maintains an obligatory code of practice which covers news programmes.

Readership: see **circulation**.

Reality-based television: an ostensibly factual genre of televisual programme which loosely follows the tenets of **tabloidization** to boost popular appeal; examples include *Hard Copy, A Current Affair, Rescue 911* (in the USA) or *Rescue 999* (in the UK), *Real TV, Crimewatch* and *Police, Camera, Action.*

Rolling news: so-called 'rolling news' refers to televisual news networks broadcasting around the clock, such as BBC News 24 and CNN. Some critics charge that the demands of immediacy are such that foreign news journalists, in particular, are less inclined to engage in investigative reporting in the field. Rather, once an appropriately 'authentic' backdrop has been secured for a 'live shot', such journalists are often reduced to reading news copy largely written for them by producers (drawing on news agencies, state officials, and so forth) back in the studio.

Sky News: the news division of BSkyB Television, controlled by Rupert Murdoch's News International, is available on satellite, cable and digital services in Britain. It was launched in 1989 as Europe's first 24-hour **rolling news** channel.

Sound-bite: a term associated with both radio and televisual news referring to the inclusion of direct speech from a source, such as a politician, in a news item. Studies of electoral campaign coverage in the early 1990s suggested that the length of the average sound-bite had shrunk dramatically since the 1960s, to the detriment of in-depth reporting. This problem has since been addressed, to varying degrees, by news organizations in Britain and the USA.

Spin doctors: a turn of phrase, often employed critically, to describe people whose job it is to present a certain person (such as a politician) or policy in the best possible light *vis-à-vis* the news media. To 'spin' a story is to emphasize its positive aspects at the expense of those aspects which might potentially harm certain interests if they were reported 'straight'. It is the task of the journalist to recognize 'spin' for what it is so as to avoid reproducing it as fact.

Tabloid and tabloidization: the word 'tabloid' typically refers to the size of a vertically folded newspaper, that is, about one-half the size of a horizontally folded 'broadsheet' title. Although 'serious' tabloid titles do exist, in Britain and the USA they tend to be associated with more sensationalist, human interest driven forms of news coverage. **Tabloidization** is usually used in a pejorative sense to refer to the 'popularizing' or 'softening' of the 'hard' news values, content and formats (including those of broadcast news) indicative of more 'high-minded' forms of journalism, thereby raising issues of professional commitment and journalistic integrity in the eyes of critics.

Vox pops or **streeters**: both terms refer to public or popular opinion as represented through brief journalistic interviews with people passing by on the street (*vox populi* is Latin for 'voice of the people').

Will to facticity: once it is recognized that the truly 'objective' news account is an impossibility, critical attention may turn to the strategies and devices used by journalists to lend to their accounts a factual status. Given that this factual status can never be entirely realized, the notion of a 'will to facticity' (Allan 1995, 1998b) pinpoints the necessarily provisional and contingent nature of any such journalistic appeal to truth.

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News Culture

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Stuart Allan is Reader at the University of West of England, Bristol. His previous books include *Media, Risk and Science* (Open University Press, 2002), *Journalism After September 11* (2002), and *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (2004).

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