

THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF NEWS PRODUCTION:
A CASE STUDY OF BBC RADIO AND TELEVISION NEWS.

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ABSTRACT

This is a case study in the microsociology of knowledge conducted in the London-based News Division of the British Broadcasting Corporation during 1972-3. The data was gathered by fieldwork in Broadcasting House and Television Centre.

The study falls into two parts. The first, after a review of relevant literature, presents a detailed account of those dimensions of the organisational milieu necessary for an understanding of broadcast news production. These are: the hierarchical control structure which determines policy for news coverage; the everyday production routines which structure "news" as an organisational product; the system of advanced planning through which news stories are identified. This section also locates the legitimising role played by the BBC's editorial philosophy and power structure, and considers implications of the broadcaster's conventional distinction between "news" and "current affairs".

The second part of the study develops the idea of news producers as constituting an epistemic community whose work skills, organisational location, and occupational knowledge give them a distinctive cognitive orientation. Newsmen's characterisation of their thought and practice as "professional" is analysed as a mode of conferring authority both upon the production process, and the product, "news". It is then argued that newsmen's primary framework of reference is the organisation,

within which they assert their complete autonomy from the audience, while at the same time asserting their unique capacity to determine its needs for news. Next, "impartiality" is analysed as a distinctive corporate conception drawn from a model of the political consensus represented by the major Parliamentary political parties, and is presented as illustrating the BBC's accommodation to the realities of State power. Newsmen's claim to be accurate is next considered. It is shown how they support their claim by pointing to empiricist methods of authentication. The specific character of these is demonstrated by showing how news production is heavily conditioned by the temporal imperatives of the daily news cycle. The study then concludes after considering newsmen's time-consciousness; their professionalism in this context is analysed as being in control of the pace of often unpredictable work.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

Each day "the news", mediated to us in various forms, provides a picture of the world we live in, a cartography of the social order. Each day's news emerges into the domain of public knowledge at predictable times in a regular cycle. The very regularity of its production, distribution and consumption places it among the rituals of everyday life: we are duly reminded of certain features of the social world.⁽¹⁾

Typically, when we think of "news" in contemporary society we think of information which is disseminated by the media of mass communication - by radio, television, newspapers, magazines - rather than by personalised face-to-face communication.⁽²⁾ News is an artifact, a commodity to be bought and sold. And on any given day those stories which are "in the news" are selected, produced and presented by men working collaboratively in a specialised kind of organisational context. The producers of news, newsmen, constitute a specific social category by virtue of their engagement in the production of this cultural product. The study reported in these pages examines how news is produced in one such contemporary organisational context, the News Division of the British Broadcasting Corporation (the BBC) which produces news for television and radio.

1. The scope of this study:

This study was conceived and executed in the awareness that similar undertakings, particularly in Britain, were quite rare. And now, at the time of writing, this would seem to be only the second book-length account of cultural production for the mass

media in this country.⁽³⁾ In contemporary debate, whether over the future of democracy, the decline of moral standards or the debasement of culture, it has become virtually mandatory to assign some kind of role and salience to the mass media.⁽⁴⁾ Television, the most recent mass medium to be accorded the status of cultural dominance, has become a particular object of scrutiny of late. And within the bounds of this interest, especial attention has begun to be paid to the fact that the mass media are instruments operated by groups of men. Within the past decade, particularly, sociologists in Britain and the United States have begun to investigate the work and thought of the "professional communicators" who influence the shaping of mass media content.⁽⁵⁾ The case study reported here is seen as a contribution to such a burgeoning research programme - one which aims at enhancing our understanding of the mediating role performed by contemporary mass communicators by setting their thought and practice in its organisational context.

The scope of what is said here is limited to what reasonably be explored in a case study of news production in Britain's largest broadcasting organisation. In keeping with a recognised distinction in media research⁽⁶⁾, in the sociology of literature⁽⁷⁾, and in general philosophy⁽⁸⁾, the analysis of the form and content of news as a product remains largely untouched, except where it is germane to the exposition in hand. There is another ground for this treatment which is not simply methodological. As there is a shortage of sociological appraisals of communicators at

work it seemed the best use of scarce resources to take advantage of the still rare opportunity to observe newsmen in their social setting through doing fieldwork and to concentrate on this to the exclusion of any other mode of analysis.⁽⁹⁾ The main thrust of this study, then, is ethnographic.⁽¹⁰⁾ Inasmuch as anything is said about the audiences for news⁽¹¹⁾, yet another distinctive area of research, it is in terms of the ways in which the newsmen studied conceptualise them, and orient their work in relation to them. This study is, furthermore, not attempting to make a contribution to the historical study of mass media organisations.⁽¹²⁾ Broadly speaking, it restricts itself to providing a detailed description and analysis of the nature of the practices and thought of BBC newsmen in their organisational setting as they were observed during fieldwork in 1972 and 1973. That is not to say that it has been conducted without an awareness of the history of mass communication, and notably, of British broadcasting; where pertinent, references have been made. From a historical standpoint the account offered here could be seen as providing qualitative data about, as it were, a "moment" in the history of news broadcasting in Britain. Given that the BBC is both one of the sacred cows, and aunt sallies, of British political and cultural life this would seem not to be without value. Particularly so as virtually none of the field data presented here have been elsewhere previously reproduced.⁽¹³⁾ The perspective taken, spelled out in this, and in the concluding chapter, attempts to synthesise some themes dealt with in more fragmentary fashion elsewhere. Inasmuch as any descriptive

account is at one and the same time an interpretation, a way of seeing, this study constitutes an attempt to persuade the reader to see what newsmen do, and how they think, in a particular light.

2. A perspective on the production of news:

This study contends that we can fruitfully consider newsmen as the socially organised producers of a certain kind of testimony about the nature of the social world. This kind of appraisal requires us to focus on their organisational practices and their occupational knowledge in order to understand how they go about producing their accounts of social reality. By producing news reports, newsmen impose meaning and structure upon events, and, in effect, exercise a power of definition as to what should be taken to be significant and real each day. Given that this is so, it seems appropriate to study news production from the standpoint of the sociology of knowledge.

The focus of the sociology of knowledge derives from the classic sociological concern with the relationships between thought and social structure, between cultural products and the social formations or milieux within which they are produced.⁽¹⁴⁾ Giving a summary statement of the main focus of this field of research, Robert Merton has observed that "A central point of agreement in all approaches to the sociology of knowledge is the thesis that thought has an existential basis."⁽¹⁵⁾ Bearing this in mind, we can treat the sociology of knowledge "as a particular frame of reference utilised with some consistency by sociologists."⁽¹⁶⁾ In a fairly recent formulation which draws

on this tradition in social thought, Berger and Luckmann have contended that "reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyse the process in which this occurs."⁽¹⁷⁾ If their shifting of the emphasis in the sociology of knowledge, away from the traditional study of intellectual thinking, and toward "whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society"⁽¹⁸⁾ is accepted, then newsmen and news would seem to provide an admirable focus for research. News is a product of social processes and news producers are occupationally engaged in what is manifestly a form of "reality construction." Being members of a "knowledge-oriented work community"⁽¹⁹⁾, they are in the business of making a kind of sense of the world, and in mediating these interpretations to a "general public." From the point of view of a society's members newsmen possess a form of specialised occupational knowledge.⁽²⁰⁾ It is this form of knowledge which is of central concern to this study.

An important qualification which must be borne in mind is that such an interpretation of the programme of the sociology of knowledge deals with the notion of everyday beliefs rather than the more rigorously defined notion of certain knowledge, in the sense of scientifically validated, and therefore justified, true beliefs.⁽²¹⁾

3. Towards a sociology of newsmen's occupational knowledge:

The systematic investigation of the contexts within which professional communicators construct their messages is only just beginning. A relevant focus for studies of news production has been the occupational milieu within which the production

process takes place. A news organisation can be distinguished from its encompassing media organisation by the editorial, "creative", function which it exclusively pursues.⁽²²⁾ The production contexts of other media outputs have been noted, equally relevantly, as foci for research.⁽²³⁾ In saying this, it should be borne in mind that the concept of "an organisation" is problematic in sociology, and, in general, the boundaries which are drawn in delimiting any study require, to some extent, a pragmatic justification.⁽²⁴⁾

From an outsider's perspective, Raymond Williams has observed, radio and television programmes "come to most people as acts of God. It is very difficult, without direct experience of their actual working to see them as products of men like ourselves."⁽²⁵⁾ This might well be true of the general experience of mass media products. Whether or not this is so, in effect there has been a growing move, in the hackneyed phrase, to "demystify" mass media production, by sociologists who have gone behind the scenes to describe and analyse the activities of media producers. Understandably, this has caused some resentment on the part of communicators themselves.⁽²⁶⁾

While mass media products have for some time been interpreted and debated in the context of a sociology of culture⁽²⁷⁾, it is held here that the growth in the study of mass media producers seems to provide an equally apt focus for a sociology of knowledge.⁽²⁸⁾ Such studies have considered the production of culture for the mass media in determinate settings. Typically their scope has been limited, taking as the object of study a news organisation

or other mass media production unit. Hence they are microsociological.⁽²⁹⁾ And central to such studies has been the analysis of mass communicators' thinking: their criteria of relevance (such as "news values"), their concepts of truth and authentication, current production ideas and medium-derived values, beliefs about the audiences which they are addressing. Taken together, these various types of ideas, values and beliefs can be interpreted as constituting, in Schutz's phrase, a "stock of knowledge."⁽³⁰⁾ As such belief-systems are located in micro-sociological settings, this suggested approach is most aptly characterised as providing a microsociology of newsmen's knowledge. This chapter, for the first time, organises the findings of previous studies in terms of this perspective.

4. Media "professionalism":

Contemporary mass media are operated by "professional communicators" who possess a specific knowledge and expertise.⁽³¹⁾ The study of such communicators' thought and practice introduces the notion of media "professionalism". As reported later in the field study, newsmen, like other communicators, characterise their activities and judgments in terms of their "professionalism". It is of the essence of such a claim that the knowledge and skills which are possessed are restricted to a particular group, thereby endowing it with a distinctive status.⁽³²⁾ As Friedson has observed "the profession claims to be the most reliable authority on the nature of the reality it deals with."⁽³³⁾ A critical issue arising from this claim is the question of the reliability of the applied expertise of the professional - what

the knowledgeable do with their knowledge.

In terms of some sociological criteria, by contrast with paradigms of professional organisation such as doctors and lawyers, it has been argued that groups such as journalists (and others engaged in mass media production) should more correctly be viewed as members of "occupational cultures" rather than of professions.⁽³⁴⁾ Journalism in particular has been portrayed as an "indeterminate and segmented occupation"⁽³⁵⁾ which, in Britain at least, is experiencing problems in "professionalisation".⁽³⁶⁾

While such observations are germane, they have by no means deterred the very common and persistent usage, by communicators, of the notion of media "professionalism". As later chapters show, it occupies great centrality in newsmen's descriptions and explanations of their work, and for this reason, possible sociological impurity notwithstanding, it has been retained here - but is used in its "inverted-commas" sense. Other studies have anyway noted the use of the notion of professionalism by media producers, particularly for the way in which it implies commitment to certain ideals, be they organisational or artistic.⁽³⁷⁾

Media "professionalism" as a particular type of self-description, or claim, is perhaps most usefully put into the general context of the important, and plausible, interpretation made by Johnson, who writes:

"We are, in part, engaged here in an analysis of professionalism as an ideology. Elements of the ideology are most forcibly and clearly expressed by those occupational groups 'making claims for professional status' and engaged in an ideological struggle."⁽³⁸⁾

"Professionalism", then, as we shall later see, is an important umbrella concept in the newsman's occupational ideology.

5. Occupational milieu and "the audience":

The mass media communicator's relationship to his "clients" has posed a particularly interesting and largely fruitful research issue. It has been noted that, definitionally, "Mass communication is directed toward a relatively large, homogeneous, and anonymous audience."⁽³⁹⁾ This relationship has, of necessity, focussed attention on the organisational framework of reference available to the communicator in the production situation. For, the size and bureaucratic structure of the media organisation means that without a direct, interactive relationship with those whom he is addressing, the communicator is forced to draw on data, images and concepts of "the audience", which are at hand, in the milieu. In keeping with the perspective of the sociology of knowledge mass media communicators can be seen, both in their occupational and organisational locations, as constituting what Holzner has termed "epistemic communities".⁽⁴⁰⁾

The concept of an epistemic community is of key importance for the development of the argument in this study. Elaborating, Holzner has suggested that "All members of such a community, in their capacity as members agree on the proper perspective for the construction of reality. In these communities the conditions of reliability and validity of reality constructs are known and the applicable standards shared."⁽⁴¹⁾ In this sort of analysis, media production units are just one type of work-setting which can be studied from the standpoint of how

specialised occupational knowledge is organised within it.

It is still relatively unusual to find examples of studies of specialised occupational knowledge which explicitly take a perspective deriving from the sociology of knowledge. So far it has not been specifically applied to the study of mass-media communicators and this study represents a first attempt at this approach. As one rare example of this orientation, taken in a quite unrelated research field, the sociology of medicine, one can cite Friedson's study of the medical profession.⁽⁴²⁾ There he demonstrates how a sociology of the clinical perspective can give insight into the definition, categorisation and treatment of illness. In similar vein, a sociology of newsmen's knowledge can reveal how they exercise the power to define the newsworthy event, and transform it into a "story".

In general, the structural separateness of the mass media communicator has given rise to a line of sociological questioning: namely, how can communicators take account of their relatively unknown audiences' needs, tastes, desires? Put differently: how is the public addressed by the communicator incorporated into the judgements made about the selection of content taken within the production context? The mass media communicator's mediating role is clearly heavily governed by current notions of professionalism.⁽⁴³⁾

There is common agreement that mass media communicators do in fact work with some conception of "the audience" which they are addressing.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Studies which have emphasised the organisational setting in which mass communication takes place have also emphasised its importance as a framework of reference.

Gieber's studies of reporters in California have indicated that readers' requirements play only a minor role in the determination of news content, and that the bureaucratic structure of the news organisation with its deadlines, policy, and supervision of performance constituted the most influential source of orientation.⁽⁴⁵⁾ And these observations have been supported by Judd who similarly noted the salience of editorial demands, and expressed the view that the reporter's news sources are part of the significant audience being addressed.⁽⁴⁶⁾ In a much-cited study of social control in the newsroom, Breed has also drawn attention to the dominance of the newsroom perspective in providing a framework of reference.⁽⁴⁷⁾ In a study of British specialist journalists, Tunstall has addressed the question of which notional grouping newsmen seem to be most aware of, and distinguished four of them, which, in order of importance are: other journalists, news sources, the "highly interested" audience, and the "total" audience.⁽⁴⁸⁾ A general point made by all of these studies is that the journalist has most contact with his own "epistemic community", that is, other journalists, or, alternatively, with his sources of news. The "total" or "mass" audience remains, therefore, an abstraction, made real, on occasion, by letters or telephone calls.

Such observations about newsmen are made about a more general structural fact - that mass media communicators are relatively isolated - and so it is not surprising that it has equal relevance for other production situations. Gans was one of the first in the field to comment on the importance of the

"creator's" audience image for the relationship between film-makers and the film audience, a theme also dealt with, at greater length, by Jarvie.⁽⁴⁹⁾ This notion has also been applied in a study of factual television producers, conducted by Blumler, who discerned two distinct styles in coverage of an election campaign - the sacerdotal and the pragmatic - each of which related to different images of the viewer.⁽⁵⁰⁾ In similar vein, in what is probably the most detailed account devoted to the question of which audience is relevant to the selection of content, Muriel Cantor's study of Hollywood television film-making distinguishes three "reference groups" relevant for her sample of producers.⁽⁵¹⁾ The television producers, who, in theory are meant to have final "creative" control over the content of their films are depicted as making their decisions in relation to constraints set by their television networks: "for the producer the network in its role as censor and filter for stories is a 'secondary audience'. When deciding the material for production he must keep the networks in mind."⁽⁵²⁾ Cantor has observed that when the producers in question considered their mass audience it was not in terms of a distinction between "how many?" and "what kind?"⁽⁵³⁾ and concludes that "the (mass) audience, because of its size and distance, may be the least important of the reference groups considered when content is selected."⁽⁵⁴⁾ By contrast, artistic decisions are made by reference to the production unit, and matters of taste decided in relation to the network's policy.

A reliance by mass communicators upon their milieux as sources of meaning and orientation would seem, on the evidence, to have brought with it a concomitant distancing from, and even devaluation of, the views held by the "mass audience". Studies note the belief that members of the audience who contact the communicator about his organisation's performance are viewed as "cranks"⁽⁵⁵⁾ or as "idiosyncratic"⁽⁵⁶⁾ in line with the apparently general conviction that "the bulk of audience reaction is from cranks, from the unstable, the hysterical and sick."⁽⁵⁷⁾ Elliott, drawing a radical conclusion from a case study of the production of a television documentary series, situates the relationship between the mass media communicator and the audience in the context of limits on communication which are structurally determined. He goes on to observe a tendency to simplify media content in order to hold the audience's attention "to establish a relationship between production and audience based on audience satisfaction rather than the communication of meaning."⁽⁵⁸⁾ Gans, discussing producers' beliefs in US television network news, notes the newsmen's desire to keep their audience's attention, expressed through the selection of pictures which stress drama and action.⁽⁵⁹⁾ This account is echoed by Epstein, who, studying the same milieu, cites the assumption that "'good pictures' are indispensable for 'holding audience interest'."⁽⁶⁰⁾

This broad sociological agreement in descriptions of the mass media production situation as one which enjoys little "feedback" from the mass audience, pushes into prominence the reliance which is placed by communicators on their stocks of occupational

knowledge, and the cognitive support afforded by their "epistemic communities".

6. Mediation as reconstruction of social reality:

The production of news, rather like the writing of history, involves the imposition of order and coherence, in brief, of meaning, upon events.⁽⁶¹⁾ Newsmen, like social scientists, are subjects confronting the phenomena of the social world, which are, to them, objects. The production of news is, in essence, a process of reconstruction: the observed social world is worked up into a kind of description in terms of an available structure of concepts, validated by available methods, and presented in available forms. Both newsmen and social scientists claim that such descriptions are "objective", that their pictures of the world are reliable.⁽⁶²⁾

In one influential model, first introduced into journalism research by White⁽⁶³⁾, the newsman has been portrayed as a "gatekeeper" who "sees to it (even though he may never be consciously aware of it) that the community shall hear as a fact only those events which (he) as the representative of his culture believes to be true." This gatekeeping metaphor has been widely applied in studies of both editors and reporters.⁽⁶⁴⁾ The basic notion is that the flow of news items has to pass through certain channels, and, that at certain points in these there will be selection stages at which items may be accepted or rejected on the basis of their "newsworthiness". Advocates of this approach have argued that it affords a basis for characterising the entire process of mass communication.⁽⁶⁵⁾ More narrowly, Gieber has proposed that the sociology of

journalism be constructed on the basis of this model.⁽⁶⁶⁾

A telling criticism of this view of journalistic activity is that it fails to stress the active features of "reality construction". As Tunstall has observed "The gatekeeper concept implies a processing rather than a gathering view of journalistic activity. It tends to take the flow of news as given..."⁽⁶⁷⁾

This criticism is a role-based one. The passivity of the model has its origins in an uncritical generalisation from the behaviour patterns of the wire editor (or "copy taster") to the whole range of journalistic behaviour. Wire editors are notoriously passive. While, at the other extreme, reporters, the news-gatherers, are quite manifestly active.

But the model fails more fundamentally. For at the logical extreme it implies an underlying epistemological model of the newsman as a passive perceiver who allows the stream of impressions to flood over him, a view which Popper has labelled "the bucket theory of knowledge".⁽⁶⁸⁾ This is, prima facie, an implausible model which does not square with the many available accounts of what journalists actually do. Newsmen operate with a stock of knowledge, or perspective, which provides a basis for the active imposition of categories. As Lippmann once remarked, "Without standardisation, without stereotypes, without routine judgements, without a fairly ruthless disregard of subtlety, the editor would soon die of excitement."⁽⁶⁹⁾ What has, therefore, to be emphasised is the creative part played by journalists in producing pictures of the world.⁽⁷⁰⁾

But while stressing the creativity implicit in mediating a version of reality underlines the fact that news, like other cultural products, is not simply some mimetic reflection of the social world, it is important to note the location of the news production processes within the context of a bureaucratic structure in which a pre-eminent concern is maintaining control of the output. Different news organisations have differing perceptions of the world, and seek to maintain them by controlling the selection and presentation of news stories.

Breed has posed this problem in terms of the newspaper publisher's need to secure and maintain conformity to his policy. His account has made salient the sociological issue of the nature of the organisational power-structure, by drawing attention to the tensions existing between the wider occupational ethics (stressing values such as objectivity, responsibility to the public, accuracy), and the organisational requirement to produce stories in line with editorial policy.⁽⁷¹⁾ Many of the subsequent small-scale newsroom studies, accepting Breed's problematic, have pursued the same lines. While in Breed's account conflict is ultimately "functionally" resolved, Stark draws a picture of acute conflict over policy in a California daily.⁽⁷²⁾ Conversely, Matejko, describing various Polish newspapers, paints a picture of smoothly functioning wholes.⁽⁷³⁾ Warner, also following Breed, but this time observing television network newsrooms, notes that the specific constraints on policy there emerge from the need for the organisations to satisfy the external political requirements laid down by the "Fairness Doctrine" in American broadcasting, rather than from the individual quirks of a publisher.⁽⁷⁴⁾

Like Breed, he also finds a pattern of socialisation and a widespread acceptance of the news "line" which solves the problems of conflict. In a study of Texan newspapermen, Sigelman finds that the assignment of reporters to particular stories, and the exercise of editorial power, are the ways in which control is achieved.⁽⁷⁵⁾ Unlike Breed, he found that there were no tensions between organisational demands and journalistic ethics.

The focus on social control within news organisations is important in drawing attention to the fact that, in the production of news, certain criteria are at work in shaping the content, and that these operate as relatively set parameters. The perspectives of the communicators are of interest in terms of the way in which they provide categories for the control of news material, for the imposition of meaning. Just as the "gatekeeper" model implied an underlying epistemology, so the activistic, or "creative", model implies one at the other logical pole, what Popper has called "the searchlight theory of knowledge".⁽⁷⁶⁾

The criteria of newsworthiness which supply the content of the newsman's perspective have been an object of considerable sociological interest, although they have proven difficult to elicit, as Hall has observed: "'News values' are one of the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society. All 'true journalists' are supposed to possess it (sic): few can or are willing to identify and define it. Journalists speak of 'the news' as if events select themselves."⁽⁷⁷⁾ In what would seem to be one of the most elaborate attempts to codify the criteria whereby newsmen structure their stories Galtung and Ruge⁽⁷⁸⁾ have drawn attention to the following: The frequency of news

production is hypothesised as significantly affecting the kind of event which is likely to become news: a discrete event such as a murder is far more likely to be taken up by a daily publication than the building of a dam. (The time-factor is indeed fundamental to an understanding of news production as the case study later makes clear). The amplitude of the event in question - its size or violence, for example - is relevant when considering its newsworthiness. Events which are unambiguous are likely to be preferred, because they are easier to notice. And those which are culturally proximate, or familiar, are more likely to be seen as meaningful. Events which are predictable, or consonant with newsmen's expectations, are likely to be selected. But the unexpected, or rare event can, and does, also make news. Once an event has been selected it is likely to "run" as a story for some time. And finally, the news which is produced is presented or "composed" in a way which tries to balance disparate elements, such as, for example, home versus foreign coverage. As specifically Western news values, Galtung and Ruge suggest that operating are: a concentration on elite nations and on elite individuals; personification (or concentration on the doings of people); and an emphasis on the negative aspects of events.

Studies by direct observation have not yet yielded data to support hypotheses of this range. Nevertheless, some of these factors have been noted. The study of newsmen manifests the characteristics of a programme in the microsociology of

knowledge most clearly when the problem of reality construction emerges as quite explicit. While in the gatekeeper and social control studies this concern remains somewhat implicit, for the most part numerous other studies do make it much more central.

In a pioneering examination of the relationships between the "televised event" and the happenings of the real world which it is claimed to portray, Kurt and Gladys Lang observed that they "could no longer believe that reportorial accuracy was intrinsic in the technical capabilities of television."⁽⁷⁴⁾ The Langs' significant contribution to the understanding of the mediated event emerged from their study of the MacArthur Day parades in Chicago in 1952. The televised version stressed a drama and heightened emotion on the streets which was quite at variance with the experiences of the spectators on the parade route, who, at best, caught only glimpses of the General. Television imposed its own frame, guided by the news judgements of the producers, who sought the visually interesting and dramatic scenes. The Langs' account showed clearly the importance of the cognitive and evaluative structure underlying the notion of télé-vérité, and observed more generally of the mass media that "television as well as radio and print always introduces some element of refraction into the actuality it conveys."⁽⁸⁰⁾ To interpret the world is, by this account, to change it.

Other studies, generally of television, have shared this central focus on how an occupational group operating a communicative technology perceives, and presents, a version of reality. Gans' researches amongst newsmen in the American news networks

led him to conclude that they transmit a middle-class version of reality seen in terms of their concept of American Man.⁽⁸¹⁾ This view, according to Gans, results from an image of what the audience wants, notions of what makes good television news, and "professional" news judgments about what is interesting and important.

In another study of network news in America, Epstein expressly takes as his central theme the issue of whether news is a "mirror of reality".⁽⁸²⁾ Epstein argues that if we accept this claim then we lose interest in the questions raised by selection and production processes, and pointing to the structural constraints on news production, notes how it is governed by a "set of internal rules and stable expectations" about what is likely to make news.⁽⁸³⁾ Like Gans, he concludes that newsmen produce a partial and selective version of what is happening in the world, and also points to news values as important determinants of these accounts. He identifies, after giving the most complete description of news organisation practices available from amongst the studies reviewed here, certain "needs" which present constraints for the newsmen. These are: the economics of commercial competition which poses budgetary limits, and requires high audiences for advertising purposes; the obligation to present "national" themes in the news; the political imperative of the Fairness Doctrine which enjoins the presentation of balanced accounts of opposing viewpoints.⁽⁸⁴⁾

Other American studies have also addressed the theme of the newsman's perception of social and political reality. Tuchman in a comparative study of a local television station and newspaper in New England considers news as a cultural product

which is actualised in terms of the expressive forms permitted by television and print.⁽⁸⁵⁾ As a cultural form television news unites certain visual conventions regarding what makes "interesting" television with "professional" definitions of objectivity. In a subsequent illuminating article, she further observes that newsmen, not unlike social scientists, employ the concept of objectivity in defence of their perceptions of events and the accounts they render of them. Newsmen deflect external attack by the employment of such "strategic rituals".⁽⁸⁶⁾ Altheide and Rasmussen, writing about two local television news stations in California, also discuss the newsman's perception of reality, and argue that what emerges from the production process is a "view of the social order" which is determined by the sources used, the positions explicitly or implicitly advocated, and presentational styles which enhance the standing of the "expert" and diminish that of "the man on the street". They conclude, somewhat unconvincingly, that "newswork may be conceived as official presentations of official versions of officially generated stories."⁽⁸⁷⁾

The underlying structure of concepts which "media professionals" use in presenting their accounts of events has also come in for detailed examination in Halloran, Elliott, and Murdock's case study of the 1968 anti-Vietnam War demonstration in London, which gives a detailed and well-documented analysis of how there was virtual unanimity amongst British newspaper and television news organisations that the demonstration was likely to be violent, and how this framework of expectations conditioned

the coverage and reporting of the event itself.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Blumler has also considered the question of the relationship between BBC television current affairs producers' values and the reporting of the events of the 1966 General Election campaign.⁽⁸⁹⁾

Noting that the production teams tended to ignore campaign speeches in favour of presenting other kinds of election material he located the reasons for this in the conception of the current affairs role in relation to the news of the day, concepts about audience interest and the constraints of the programme format. Once again, the milieu and the available perspective containing criteria of relevance have been shown as giving shape to a particular version of (political) reality.

It is not simply news which manifests these characteristics, although because the concept of news is closely associated with that of the factual description of the "real world", its producers have clearly been seen as providing a paradigm case for scrutiny of this sort. Elliott's study of the production of a documentary series conducted during 1968 - here again, a "factual" output - demonstrates the same concern: "the actions of...communicators...result in the creation of an image of social reality which contains both cognitive and evaluative elements."⁽⁹⁰⁾

7. A case study of news production:

The next nine chapters build on, and elaborate upon, the themes outlined in this introduction. When this study was first conceived there was only one sociological case study of news production in Britain available, and several short articles dealing with British media institutions.⁽⁹¹⁾ When the fieldwork was

approximately two-thirds complete, Elliott's study of television documentary production became available. And when it was quite complete, Epstein's account of the US news networks had just been published. These two studies are, to the best of my knowledge, the two most extended accounts of television production. Epstein's, in particular, provides a certain amount of cross-cultural and comparative interest, although it differs a good deal in its emphasis.

The rise of television in Britain has coincided with the decline of radio. Although, given audiences numbered in the millions, it remains, unquestionably, an important mass medium. This fact seems to have been ignored by sociologists, who are no less apt to follow fashion than journalists, although their mills grind more slowly. The cultural dominance of television has created a blind-spot: not one of the studies reviewed here has dealt with radio. But it is arguably the case that research which is just as revealing about the thought and practice of mass media communicators can be conducted in radio settings, as indeed has been the case here. While such material would be of a somewhat different order, it would nonetheless add to our knowledge of media men. In the present study radio news production was studied first. Its organisation is somewhat simpler than television, but the concepts held by its practitioners are, for the most part, no less complex. It is apparently the first time that a study of radio news production has been carried out in Britain.

I have deliberately included as much descriptive material as possible as so little is still available concerning the

production practices and beliefs of news producers. The order in which the material is presented is intended to ease the passage of a stranger through unfamiliar surroundings, and also reflects the orientation taken from the sociology of knowledge. The focus, in Chapters 2-6, is upon structural, organisational features of news production. And, in Chapters 7-10, I deal with those major categories of occupational knowledge and belief which emerged as significant during the fieldwork. As a matter of method, I have first sought to establish the significant boundaries of the epistemic community considered, then to consider the content of its belief-system.

These two modes of approach are also organised in terms of two broad strands of argument which will be familiar from the review of the literature presented above. On the one hand, broadly speaking, there have been studies which have mainly considered the organisational features of news production. And on the other, there have been those which have placed more emphasis on the dimensions of "professional" knowledge. Both of these types of analysis are presented here.

In order to understand how a specific "BBC" interpretation of the world emerges from the News Division, it is argued here, we have to focus on various features of organisational control. Chapter 2 considers the operations of the BBC's hierarchical system and its impact upon news production. In Chapters 3 and 4 there is a shift of focus to the everyday level of production in the newsroom. These chapters set out to show how organisational routines in the radio and television newsrooms structure the news bulletins which emerge as the eventual products of the News Division.

In doing so they emphasise the importance of the planning structure which lies behind the apparent spontaneity of "the news". Chapter 5 goes on to consider the editorial philosophy which legitimises the newsmen's activities, and which, it is argued, has a normative impact on the work of the News Division; it is an account which abstracts out the key elements of the organisational power structure. Chapter 6 is the last part of the argument about the way in which the organisation structures its product. It considers the way in which the newsmen situate themselves inside the Corporation, and how they have a distinctive conception of their status, their work, and their product, which has a profound influence on what is seen as constituting "news".

This last chapter provides a bridge between the discussion of the more purely organisational features of the study and the more cognitive, which are dealt with in Chapters 7-10. These chapters present an exploration of major categories utilised by the newsmen. The integrating idea is that of "professionalism", discussed above in the review of the literature. Chapter 7 is an extended account of how the newsmen use the notion of their professionalism in relation to the problem of uncertainty posed by addressing messages to a mass audience. In the terms discussed above, what is being considered is an important aspect of the occupational ideology. Chapter 8 moves on to consider the specific meaning given to the notion of "impartiality" in the broadcasting newsman's organisational culture. And Chapter 9 analyses the newsroom procedures for achieving "accuracy". Together these chapters present an argument about the way in which

newsmen use their media professionalism both to assert their authority and their independence from the lay audience, their clientele. Lastly, Chapter 10 takes up the role of time in news production, and examines the nature of newsmen's time concepts. This is a further feature of the argument from professionalism. I have drawn special attention to it as it attempts to present a new focus on news production. Time, while a dimension frequently alluded to in the literature, has rarely been dealt with at length. But it is a key feature in newsmen's occupational culture. The final chapter presents an overview of the study and its arguments.

CHAPTER 1: NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The concept of ritual in mind here is Durkheimian. In The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, (trans. Joseph Ward Swain), London, George Allen and Unwin, 1968, Durkheim wrote: "Everything is in representations whose only object can be to render the mythical past of the clan present to the mind. But the mythology of a group is the system of beliefs common to this group. The traditions whose memory it perpetuates express the way in which the society represents man and the world; it is a moral system and a cosmology as well as history. So the rite serves and can only serve to sustain the vitality of these beliefs, to keep them from being effaced from memory and, in sum, to revivify the most essential elements of the collective consciousness." (Emphasis added; p.375).

P.L. Berger has put this position in more contemporary language: "Religious ritual has been a crucial instrument of (the) process of 'reminding'. Again and again it 'makes present' to those who participate in it the fundamental reality definitions and their appropriate legitimations." See The Social Reality of Religion, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1973, p.49. News is undoubtedly a way of reminding us where we are, and when, a part of the system of orientation in our society. Warren Breed has considered news in this light in 'Mass Communication and Sociocultural Integration', Social Forces, 1958, pp. 109-116.

2. See Denis McQuail, Towards a Sociology of Mass Communications, London, Collier-MacMillan, 1969, p.7: "The mass media are directed towards large audiences. This follows from the application of a technology geared to mass production and wide dissemination, and from the economics of mass communication. The exact size of audience or readership group which gives rise to mass communication cannot be specified, but it must be large relative to audiences for other means of communication (for example a lecture or a theatre play) and large in relation to the number of communicators." For a brief sketch of communication patterns prior to the era of the "mass" media see Dallas Smythe, 'Some observations on Communications Theory', in Denis McQuail, (ed.), Sociology of Mass Communications, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1972, pp. 19-34.
3. The other is Philip Elliott's The Making of a Television Series: A Case Study in the Sociology of Culture, London, Constable, 1972. Another study dealing with similar themes, though less emphatically centred on the production process is J.D. Halloran, P. Elliott, G. Murdock, Demonstrations and Communication: A Case Study, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1970.
4. Works containing material bearing on these themes are too numerous to be cited. Relevant material is to be found, however, in the following: Bernard Berelson and Morris Janowitz, (eds.), Reader in Public Opinion and Communication,

New York, Free Press, 1966; Lewis Anthony Dexter and David Manning White, (eds.) People, Society and Mass Communications, New York, Free Press, 1964; Wilbur Schramm, (ed.), Mass Communications, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1960; Jeremy Tunstall, (ed.), Media Sociology, London, Constable, 1970; Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, (eds.) Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America, New York, Free Press, 1957, and also Mass Culture Revisited, New York, Van Nostrand, 1971; Denis McQuail, (ed.), op.cit., 1972. See also Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-class Life with special reference to publications and entertainments, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1968; Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1965, Communications, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1971 (rev. edn.), Television: Technology and Cultural Form, London, Fontana/Collins, 1974.

5. As the literature reviewed later in this chapter makes clear. For an overview of some of the writing in this field, and an argument for more research, see J.D. Halloran, 'Introduction - The Communicator in Mass Communication Research', in Paul Halmos, (ed.), The Sociology of Mass Media Communicators, The Sociological Review: Monograph No.13, 1969, pp. 5-21. Awareness of the centrality of the communicator's role is also evident in the 'Proposals for an international programme of communication research', UNESCO, COM/MD/20, Paris, 10 September, 1971.

6. Known in the trade as "Lasswell's Paradigm": "Who says What in Which Channel to Whom with What Effect?" See Harold Lasswell, 'The Structure and Function of Mass Communication in Society', in Berelson and Janowitz, (eds.), op.cit., 1966, pp. 178-190.
7. See, for example, Diana T. Laurenson and Alan Swingewood, The Sociology of Literature, London, 1972, esp.ch.1.
8. See, for example, K.R. Popper's essay, 'Epistemology without a knowing subject', in Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach, Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 106-152. Popper would see this entire enterprise as something of a waste of time: "We can learn more about production behaviour by studying the products themselves than we can learn about the products by studying production behaviour." (p.114).
9. Vast numbers of news content analyses have been produced over the years, as the back numbers of Journalism Quarterly and Public Opinion Quarterly testify (to mention but two major sources). A useful collection of studies is to be found in Stanley Cohen and Jock Young, The Manufacture of News: Deviance, Social Problems and the Mass Media, London, Constable, 1973. A helpful selected bibliography of various approaches to the study of media products is to be found in Marina de Camargo's 'Ideological analysis of the message: a bibliography', Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 3,

Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, Autumn 1972, pp. 123-141.

10. Claude Levi-Strauss gives the notion this meaning: "Ethnography... aims at recording as accurately as possible the respective modes of life of various groups." See 'Introduction: History and Anthropology' in his Structural Anthropology, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1972, pp. 1-27. The quotation is from p.2.
11. The "whom" in Lasswell's schema. This is another area of mass communications research in which vast quantities of data have been produced. Works cited in note 4 above contain relevant material.
12. Particularly as in the case of the BBC a voluminous history already exists, namely, Briggs' History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, to which more detailed reference is made below. In addition to this there are institutional accounts such as Burton Paulu's British Broadcasting in Transition, London, MacMillan, 1961. There are also a large number of "insider" accounts, some of which are referred to below.
13. Some slight overlap exists between Chapter 4 of this study, and Chapter 5 of Halloran et al., op.cit., 1970.

14. As most major sociologists have entered this field, there is, not surprisingly, a vast literature on the subject. Extracts from major writers are contained in James E. Curtis and John W. Petras, (eds.), The Sociology of Knowledge: A Reader, London, Duckworth, 1970, and in Gunter W. Remmling, (ed.), Towards the Sociology of Knowledge: Origin and Development of a Sociological Thought Style, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973. A recent overview of the subject is Peter Hamilton, Knowledge and Social Structure: An Introduction to the Classical Argument in the Sociology of Knowledge, London and Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974.
15. Robert K. Merton, 'The Sociology of Knowledge and Mass Communications', in Social Theory and Social Structure, New York, The Free Press, 1968, pp. 493-582. Quotation from p.516. It is worth noting that Merton is aware of the looseness of the concept of "knowledge" generally applied in this field - a point made below in the text. He writes, (pp. 494-5): "knowledge and thought are so loosely construed that they come to include almost all ideas and beliefs. At the core of the discipline, nevertheless, is a sociological interest in the social contexts of that knowledge which is more or less certified by systematic evidence. That is to say, the sociology of knowledge is most directly concerned with the intellectual products of experts, whether in science or philosophy, in economic or political thought." Certainly, I have gone beyond even this generous definition of what constitutes important intellectual activity. But it is not so much the type of expert which Merton cites that is significant, but rather the idea of "knowledge" being certified

by systematic evidence - i.e. of there being a production process which implies the application of epistemological criteria.

16. Curtis and Petras, op.cit., 1970, p.1.
17. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1971, p.13.
18. Ibid., p.15.
19. The phrase comes from Burkart Holzner, Reality Construction in Society, Cambridge Mass., Schenkman Publishing Co., Inc., 1968, p.126. See, especially, ch.9, 'The Social Organisation of Specialised Knowledge'.
20. Florian Znaniecki has made a significant statement concerning the sociology of occupations from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge: "In sociological studies of specialised persons, it is the connection between the individual and his social milieu which is the main object of interest; and his specialised activities are viewed with respect to the cultural setting in which they are performed." See Curtis and Petras, op.cit., 1970, ch.3, which contains pp.1-22 of The Social Role of the Man of Knowledge, New York, Columbia University Press, 1940. The quotation is from p.313. In the present study the concern is not so much with the connection between the individual and, in this case, the organisational milieu, as with the working group of newsmen. The newsmen are, in Znaniecki's phrase,

"participants in a system of knowledge", and it is this system which this study seeks to illuminate.

21. This point has been made by LC. Jarvie, Concepts and Society, London and Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972, p.137.
The present study is an attempt to explore newsmen's occupational knowledge, for which scientific status is certainly not claimed. However, there are some interesting points of comparison, as Chapter 9, below, points out.
22. A distinction made by Jeremy Tunstall, Journalists at Work: Specialist Correspondents: Their News Organisations, News Sources, and Competitor - Colleagues, London, Constable, 1971, p.6.
23. David Chaney, Processes of Mass Communication, London, MacMillan, 1972, pp. 59-60.
24. David Silverman, The Theory of Organisations: A Sociological Framework, London, Heinemann, 1971, ch.1.
25. Williams, op.cit., 1971, p.132.
26. See, for example, the rather vitriolic article by Grace Wyndham Goldie which followed the publication of Philip Elliott's study (op.cit., 1972), 'The Sociology of Television', The Listener, 19 October 1972.

27. See the works cited in note 4 above.
28. Herbert J. Gans makes a passing, undeveloped remark to this effect in "The Shaping of Mass Media Content: A Study of the News", expanded version of a paper presented at the 1966 meetings of the American Sociological Association, mimeographed, p.1. So does Halloran, op.cit., 1969, p.16.
29. On this notion see Georges Gurvitch, The Social Frameworks of Knowledge, (Trans. Kenneth Thompson), Oxford University Press, 1971. He seems to be one of the few major sociologists who seriously and explicitly considers the meaning and possibility of a microsociology of knowledge, asserting its essential link with wider concerns as "part of the dialectic between the partial and the global." The Microsociology of knowledge is presented as "not more than the study of relationships between particular groups and knowledge". (p.45ff.) In these terms the news organisation can be taken as a social framework, and the focus of interest is upon the newsmen who operate it and their occupational knowledge. Raymond Firth has also used the notion of microsociology which he sees as a distinguishing feature of the anthropological approach: "The anthropologist above all sees at first hand what people actually do. For this concentrated observation of small-unit behaviour, I have suggested the term micro-sociology." Elements of Social Organisation, London, Tavistock Publications, 1971, p.17.

30. Alfred Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, (Trans. George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert), London, Heinemann Educational Books, 1972, pp. 80-81. The idea has been further developed in the work of Berger and Luckmann, op.cit., 1971, pp. 56-61.
31. For a sociological interpretation of this concept see James W. Carey, 'The Communications Revolution and the Professional Communicator', in Halmos, (ed.), op.cit., 1969, pp. 23-38.
32. See, for example, Eliot Freidson, Profession of Medicine: A Study of the Sociology of Applied Knowledge, New York, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1971, p.377; he argues "that professions are best characterised as a type of occupation which has attained a special form of occupational organisation, in part by virtue of making a persuasive claim that it possesses special knowledge and ethicality." (emphasis added).
33. Ibid., p. 379.
34. This study has no need to enter the vexed issue of what the characteristics of "a profession" are, by comparison with those of other occupations which have not achieved professional standing. It seems to me to be at best a somewhat arid question, and here I would follow T.J. Johnson, who, in Professions and Power, London and Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1972, argues that "Professionalism arises where the tensions inherent in the producer-consumer relationship are controlled by means of an institutional framework based upon occupational authority. This form of control

occurs only where certain conditions exist, giving rise to common characteristics in organisation and practice." (p.51).

A conventional account is given in C. Turner and M.N. Hodge, 'Occupations and Professions' in J.A. Jackson, (ed.) Professions and Professionalisation, Cambridge University Press, 1970, pp.

19-50. The various areas considered are: the degree of substantive theory and technique; the degree of monopoly; the degree of external recognition; the degree of organisation.

From the point of view of this study it is not important whether journalists are a profession or not. What is important is the nature of their occupational knowledge, and their conception of what constitutes "media professionalism". These are considered below.

35. Tunstall op.cit., p.10. See also Chaney, op.cit., 1972, pp. 97-99, who similarly concludes that occupational subcultures are what we should be considering, rather than "true" professionalism.
36. Oliver Boyd-Barrett, 'Journalism Recruitment and Training: Problems in Professionalisation', in Tunstall, (ed.), op.cit., 1970, pp. 181-201.
37. See, for example, Muriel G. Cantor, The Hollywood TV Producer: His Work and His Audience, New York, Basic Books, 1971, ch.4, who argues that the TV producer's "professionalism" is defined pre-eminently in terms of commitment rather than "a body of theory, an association of colleagues, and a status supported by community

'recognition" (p.72) and that the main criterion of such professionalism is the "freedom to make decisions without control" (p.73). See also Tom Burns, 'Commitment and Career in the BBC' in McQuail, (ed.), op.cit., 1972, pp. 281-310. He writes of the "Corporate Professionalism" he encountered in the BBC that "There are needs of the concern which cannot be presented in a formal contractual understaking. These needs can only be met through the achievement of personal goals and the realisation of personal values which are consistent with those of the organisation, or rather through which the organisation's own ends and purposes are deployed. In the Corporation, where this has been done with very considerable success, one encounters a formidable hierarchy of ends to which individuals dedicate their occupational careers and to which they bring their whole intellectual and intuitive capacities." (p. 297).

38. T.J. Johnson, op.cit., 1972, p.57; emphasis added. See also Vernon K. Dibble, 'Occupations and Ideologies', American Journal of Sociology, 1962, pp. 229-241, reprinted in Curtis and Petras, (eds.), op.cit., pp. 434-451. Dibble considers the issue of how successfully ideas about occupations held by the members of those occupations are disseminated to the wider society. To the extent that newsmen have gained acceptance as the legitimate and competent judges of what makes news they have been successful in their ideological struggle.
39. Charles R. Wright, Mass Communication: A Sociological Perspective, New York, Random House, 1959, p.13. Also see Denis McQuail, op.cit., 1969, p.7.

40. Holzner, op.cit., 1968, ch.4, esp. pp. 69-84. "We are dealing here with those at least partially interlinked roles which are unified by a common epistemology and frame of reference, such as the scientific community, religious communities, work communities, some ideological movements and the like." (p. 69).
41. Ibid., p.69.
42. Freidson, op.cit., 1971.
43. See Halloran, op.cit., 1969, who gives an overview of models of the communicator-as-mediator.
44. See Raymond A. Bauer, 'The Communicator and his Audience', and Ithiel de Sola Pool and Irwin Shulman, 'Newsmen's fantasies, Audiences and Newswriting', respectively pp. 125-139 and 141-158, in Dexter and White, (eds.), op.cit., 1964.
45. See Walter Gieber, 'How the "Gatekeepers" view Local Civil Liberties News', Journalism Quarterly, 1960, pp. 199-205; Walter Gieber and Walter Johnson, 'The City Hall "Beat": A Study of Reporter and Source Roles', Journalism Quarterly, 1961, pp. 289-297; Walter Gieber, 'News is what Newspapermen Make it', in Dexter and White, (eds.), op.cit., 1964, pp. 173-180.
46. Robert P. Judd, 'The Newspaper Reporter in a Suburban City', Public Opinion Quarterly, 1961, pp. 35-42.
47. Warren Breed, 'Social Control in the Newsroom', Social Forces,

- 1955, pp. 326-335; reprinted in Wilbur Schramm, (ed.), op.cit., 1960, pp. 178-194.
48. Tunstall, op.cit., 1971, pp. 250-255.
49. Herbert J. Gans, 'The Creator-Audience Relationship in the Mass Media: An Analysis of Movie-Making', in Rosenberg and White, (eds.), op.cit., 1957, pp. 315-324. See also I.C. Jarvie, Towards a Sociology of the Cinema: A Comparative Essay on the Structure and Functioning of a Major Entertainment Industry, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.
50. Jay G. Blumler, 'Producers' Attitudes towards Television Coverage of an Election Campaign: A Case Study', in Halmos, op.cit., 1969, pp. 85-115; reprinted in Tunstall, (ed.), op.cit., 1970, pp. 411-438.
51. Cantor, op.cit., 1971, p.14.
52. Ibid., p. 119.
53. Ibid., p. 166.
54. Ibid., p. 184.
55. Herbert J. Gans, 'Broadcaster and Audience Values in the Mass Media: The Image of Man in American Television News', Trans-

- actions of the Sixth World Congress of Sociology, Evian,
4-11 September 1966, International Sociological Association,
1970, (Gans 1970a), p.10.
56. Cantor, op.cit., 1971, p. 165.
57. Stuart Hood, A Survey of Television, London, Heinemann, 1967,
p. 38.
58. Elliott, op.cit., 1972, pp. 151-2.
59. Gans, op.cit., 1970a, pp. 11-12.
60. Edward Jay Epstein: News From Nowhere: Television and the News,
New York, Random House, 1973, p. 147.
61. See Gordon Leff, History and Social Theory, London, The Merlin
Press, 1969, esp. Ch.2, 'History as Reconstruction'.
62. For accounts of the problem of objectivity in social science
see Alan Ryan, The Philosophy of the Social Sciences, London
and Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1970, esp. Ch.10; W.G. Runciman,
Social Science and Political Theory, Cambridge University Press,
1969, (2nd edn.), esp. Ch.1; Richard S. Rudner, Philosophy of
Social Science, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc.,
1966, esp. Ch.4.
63. David Manning White, "The Gatekeeper": A Case Study in the

'Selection of News', Journalism Quarterly, 1950, pp. 383-390; reprinted in Dexter and White, (eds.) op.cit., 1964, pp. 162-170. For a replication see Paul B. Snider, '"Mr. Gates" Revisited: A 1966 Version of the 1949 Case Study', Journalism Quarterly, 1968. For a critique, and development, of this model, which remains within the same tradition, see Abraham Z. Bass, 'Refining the "Gatekeeper" Concept: A UN Radio Case Study', Journalism Quarterly, 1969, pp. 69-72.

64. See for example, the studies cited in notes 45 and 46 above.
65. '"The Gatekeeper": A Memorandum', in Schramm, (ed.), op.cit., 1960, pp. 175-177.
66. Gieber, op.cit., 1964; and also Gieber, The Attributes of a Reporter's Role, undated, mimeographed.
67. Tunstall, op.cit., 1971, p.24.
68. Karl R. Popper, 'The Bucket and the Searchlight : Two Theories of Knowledge', in op.cit., 1972, pp. 341-361.
69. Walter Lippman, Public Opinion, New York, MacMillan, 1961, p. 352.
70. I have argued this at length in 'The Sociology of Knowledge and Newsmaking', Unpublished Paper read to the Mass Communications Study Group of the British Sociological Association on the 24 March 1972. See also Stuart Hall, 'A World at One with Itself',

New Society, 18 June 1970, who writes: "it needs to be asserted that news is a product, a human construction: a staple of that system of 'cultural production' (to use Theodor Adorno's phrase) we call the mass media" (p. 1056).

71. Breed, op.cit., 1955.
72. Rodney W. Stark, 'Policy and the Pros: An Organisational Analysis of a Metropolitan Newspaper', Berkeley Journal of Sociology, 1962, pp. 11-31.
73. Aleksander Matejko, 'Newspaper Staff as a Social System' in Tunstall, (ed.), 1970, pp. 168-180, reprinted from The Polish Sociological Bulletin, 1967, pp. 58-68.
74. Malcolm Warner, 'Organisational Context and Control of Policy in the Television Newsroom: A Participant Observation Study', British Journal of Sociology, 1971, pp. 293-294. See also Warner's other work: Malcolm Warner, 'American Television's Power Elite', New Society, 27 February 1969; 'Decision-making in American TV Political News' in Halmos, (ed.), op.cit., 1969, pp. 169-179; 'Decision-making in Network Television News', in Tunstall, (ed.), op.cit., 1970, pp. 158-167.
75. Lee Sigelman, 'Reporting the News: An Organisational Analysis', American Journal of Sociology, 1973, pp. 132-148.
76. Popper, op.cit., 1972.

77. Stuart Hall, 'The Determinations of News Photographs' in Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 3, Autumn 1972, p. 76.
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CHAPTER 2:
CONTROLLING THE NEWS

"In most countries the news department of a television organisation has such important implications, no management can afford dangerous 'mistakes' by junior employees." (1)

1. The focus on control:

The ways in which news outputs are controlled by their producing organisations has become a central focus of interest to students of the mass media. Largely, this is because the production of news takes place in a power political context. In various studies, news media and their operating personnel have been recognised as having the power to define issues, to "set the agenda" - in short, to devise a daily picture of the socio-political world. This theme is of obvious salience to political sociology. And in this light research has been conducted into the institutional settings in which news-gathering takes place, both in London⁽²⁾ and in Washington⁽³⁾, and, for example, into the influence of the elite press on foreign policy formation in the United States.⁽⁴⁾

In Britain, of late, a good deal of attention has been lavished on the broadcasting media, which, because of their vast audiences (especially in the case of television) are perceived as being of critical importance in shaping public opinion, and are

therefore seen as instruments of considerable social power. While this study focusses upon the daily transmission of news by Britain's largest broadcasting organisation, the passions aroused by broadcasting and broadcasters in the political arena have been perhaps at their most intense at the less frequent, and more highly-charged, General Election periods.⁽⁵⁾ The squabbles over the complex ritual of election broadcasting provides an insight into the endemically uneasy relationships between broadcasters and politicians. During recent election campaigns in Britain there have been disputes about the ways in which election issues should be portrayed, and, arising from this has been the question of the power of definition which lies in the hands of radio and television producers.

It is at this point that the findings of this present study begin to assume a certain relevance. The historical emergence of the "professional communicator", with a crucial role in the dissemination of interpretations of events and states of affairs in the social world, has raised the question of the manner in which this social power is to be wielded. Not surprisingly, curiosity has been aroused about the nature of production in those parts of what C. Wright Mills labelled the "cultural apparatus"⁽⁶⁾ which are known as the mass media of communication. What is the nature of mass media production practice?

In liberal-democratic states such as Britain, those few who operate the means of mass communication, the professional communicators, are required, in theory at least, to have a due sense of "social responsibility" about the exercise of their power. On this view, the mass communicator holds a kind of trusteeship for the general public. The performance of this role is legitimised

by what Brown has called a "mass media ideology"⁽⁷⁾, an account which both justifies and explains current production practice. Taking Western newsmen as the case in hand, it has been noted that they have, historically, developed codes of practice according to which they produce news which is impartial, objective, comprehensive, fair and accurate.⁽⁸⁾ The meaning of such concepts for the actors is perhaps best understood by studying the context of news production, and seeing how working newsmen's practices embody them. The role of these concepts in mass media ideologies has to be seen in relation to the systems of control operated by given news-producing organisations.

To take up, once again, the perspective outlined in the previous chapter: if we are to interpret newsmen working in organisations as a type of "epistemic community", then the role of the community's epistemic safeguards - its systems of thought and practice control - emerges as of central interest. In the BBC News Division an elaborate bureaucratic structure has been developed to effect cognitive and practical allegiance.

The study reported in the following chapters (several of which focus on the structures of control) is based on observations made at the level of routine, daily practice in the BBC's News Division. Amongst other themes, a persistent concern is with the illumination of the ways in which the visible structures of control operate. However, at one remove from what happens in the newsrooms and out in the field, there is an extensive, relatively invisible editorial structure which acts directly upon only a few of the most

senior newsmen in the News Division. Despite its relative privacy of operation, this structure has an undoubtedly large impact on the scope and direction of decision-making, and therefore, of news content.

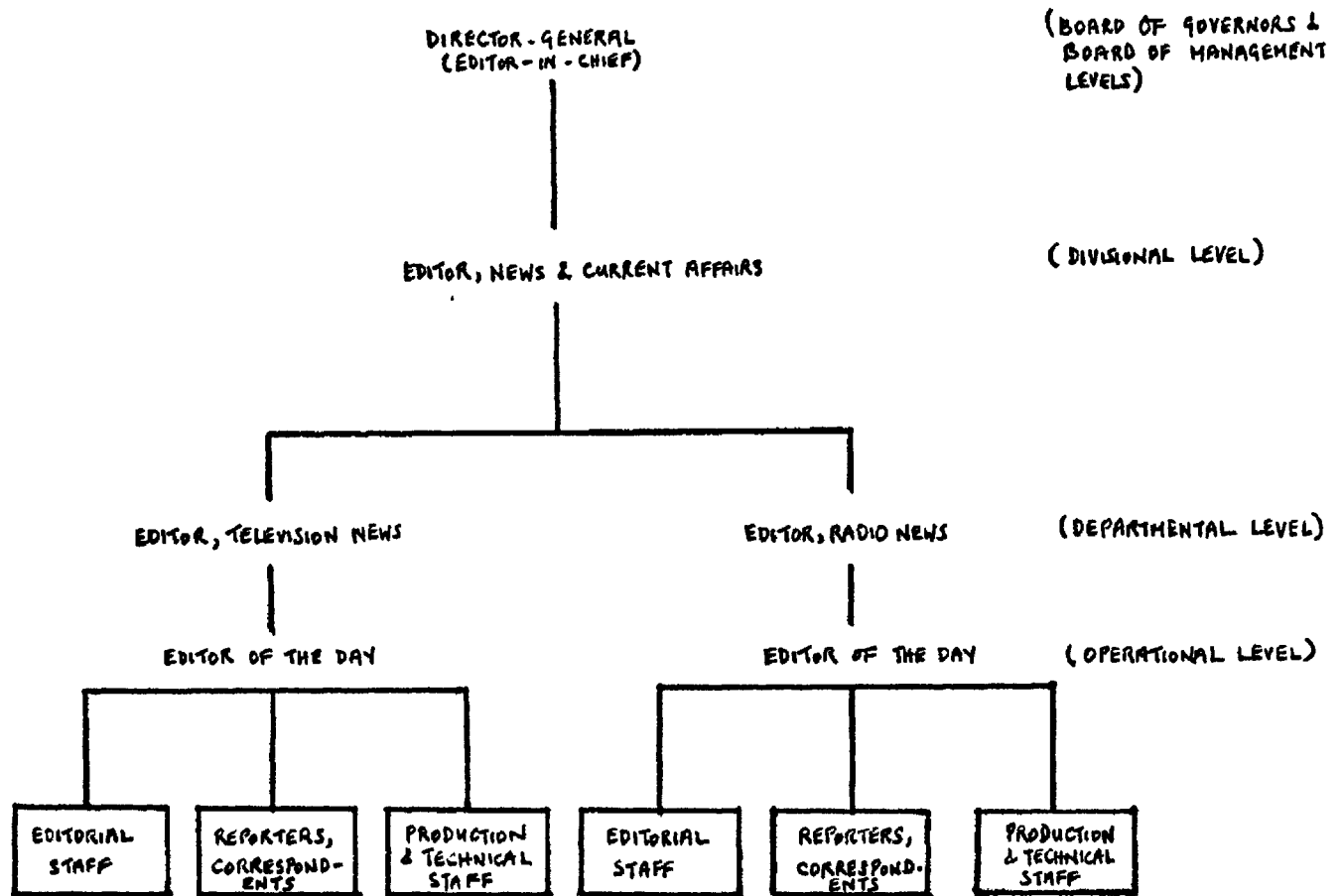
Before a discussion of the editorial hierarchy relevant for news production is embarked upon, a brief account of the formal, public, hierarchy needs to be given.

2. The BBC's Corporate Status:

The BBC Handbook states: "The BBC is a body corporate set up by Royal Charter and operating under licence. Its object is to provide a public service of broadcasting for general reception at home and overseas".⁽⁹⁾ Formally, like its commercial counterpart, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), the BBC is independent of the British government. It has been described as "not a Department of State, still less a creature of the executive."⁽¹⁰⁾ This account of the relationship between broadcasting and the State in Britain implies an acceptance of the claim to independence made by both the broadcasting authorities and the government. And this is probably the most widely, publicly accepted account. Critics have argued, however, that to assert the freedom of the public broadcasting services as free from state control is to present a "comforting, mythic view of British broadcasting".⁽¹¹⁾

Whatever the merits of this latter view, on a purely formal level, according to the BBC's Charter, the Board of Governors have been given, in one commentator's words, "paramount constitutional authority."⁽¹²⁾ The Pilkington Committee on Broadcasting, reporting

Figure 2.1: Hierarchical Organisation of the BBC News Division.



Note: This is a highly simplified representation of the Divisional Structure.

in 1960, noted that "It is for (the Governors) to judge what the public interest is, and it is for this that they are answerable."⁽¹³⁾ It is with the Governors, ultimately, that legal responsibility lies for any course of action pursued by the BBC. This position can lead to their bearing the brunt of pressures on the BBC resulting from decisions which have proved controversial. A classic and still often-cited instance is the Suez affair of 1956, which still plays an important role in Corporate thinking about the reality of the BBC's independent status. On that occasion, the BBC's Governors decided that the British government's war with Egypt was a controversial issue, and that therefore the Labour Opposition had the right to reply to a Prime Ministerial broadcast by Sir Anthony Eden. The BBC's Governors decided that the Prime Ministerial definition of the situation as a wartime one was not the sole acceptable one, and that an additional opinion ought to be broadcast.⁽¹⁴⁾

But the pragmatics of the fieldwork suggest that for an understanding of the editorial structure as it bears on news the relevant focus must lie elsewhere. (See Figure 2.1 for a schematic representation of the editorial structure).

3. The Director-General:

From the point of view of the decision-makers in the BBC's News Division, the Governors are not the key functionaries, despite their formal enshrinement at the top of the hierarchy. They are part-timers, meeting fortnightly under the Chairman, and the BBC's output is so extensive that their oversight meets practical limits. Such control as they do exercise is by "retrospective review" at their

meetings,⁽¹⁵⁾ in the general BBC pattern. Day-to-day executive power resides in the hands of the Director-General and the Board of Management. This Board meets weekly to consider all policy matters, and executive proposals are sent in the form of recommendations to the Governors. The Director-General is the BBC's "chief executive officer"⁽¹⁶⁾, and relevantly from the standpoint of this study, the BBC's "Editor-in-Chief".⁽¹⁷⁾ The exact relationship between the Director-General and the Chairman of the Board of Governors apparently varies according to the incumbents of these roles.⁽¹⁸⁾ What is unmistakable, however, according to the testimony of News Division editorial staff, is the degree to which they consider the "D-G" to be the editor. Enunciating this perspective, a former Director-General, Sir Hugh Greene, has written,

"inevitably it is, and always has been,
the Director-General of the BBC who
represents the BBC in the public eye and
creates the atmosphere of his time.
Governors come and Governors go: he goes
on for what may seem to him to be an eternity."⁽¹⁹⁾

In addition, he observed that

"no matter how responsible a Board may be
and no matter how often they meet and how
much interest they take, they cannot be
responsible for the day-to-day running of an
organisation. They must have a chief executive,
an editor; and that editor or chief executive
is me."⁽²⁰⁾

The exercise of this editorial power occurs in the context of a system of control which links the Director-General through a key subordinate, The Editor, News and Current Affairs (the "ENCA") to the departmental editors and through them to the working newsmen.

4. The "ENCA" meeting:

"The exercise of control is through a weekly meeting. All output groups are represented. To some extent it's a review, to some extent an exchange of information, an outlining of future plans, a discussion of these." (21)

Of special interest from the standpoint of this study is the relationship between the Director-General and the Editor, News and Current Affairs, who does not sit on the Board of Management, but has general oversight of news and current affairs broadcasting. Sir Hugh Greene, who was the first incumbent of this role, created in 1959 (and then called Director of News and Current Affairs), described it in these terms:

"My job as I saw it was to weld together the news and current affairs elements in radio and television so that they could carry out their respective functions against a background of shared policy and journalistic assumptions. I had to create an atmosphere in which journalistic enterprise and talent could flourish without any loss of reliability...Since that time events have proved over and over again the value of unified control in the BBC, and

also that one can be enterprising without loss of public confidence."⁽²²⁾

The Editor, News and Current Affairs has a special responsibility in editorial matters, acting on behalf of the Director-General, to whom he has direct access. This relationship is conducted at the top of a "logical pyramid"⁽²³⁾ of a formal responsibility for the production of news, which is a part of Lord Reith's inheritance to present-day BBC.⁽²⁴⁾ It is here where effective control of the news operation is exercised.

Every Friday morning there is a meeting chaired by the "ENCA", as he is known within the Corporation. As one informant put it: "He's the boss of the show in every sense of the word. He has editorial and administrative responsibility for the News Division." News and current affairs output, are, as one senior editor noted, with wry understatement, "somewhat troublesome". A former ENCA, Donald Edwards, has noted:

"There are headaches in political reporting. Labour people accuse us of being Tories. Conservatives consider us leftists. More recently both have called us a bunch of Liberals. Liberals consider we neglect them scandalously. From this I conclude we are reasonably impartial."⁽²⁵⁾

This flippant account conceals what is a permanent source of serious concern within both the BBC and ITV. Edwards goes on to mention pressure from other sources on the editors, from those concerned about the reporting of religion, "matters of taste and morality", crime,

delinquency. (26)

The central role of the "ENCA meeting" is to formulate approaches (there was a marked reluctance to use the word "policy") for dealing with these problems of news coverage. It has been observed that the "BBC's command structure is almost as labyrinthine as that of a Byzantine court". (27) And this description is notoriously applicable to the fragmented news and current affairs area. As Sir Hugh Greene observed, the role of the ENCA was designed to "pull together" the relatively uncoordinated efforts of the various news and current affairs production units. And the role of the weekly meeting is "to ensure a coordinated approach to individual things and major stories".

The Friday morning meetings bring together senior editors from the domestic radio and television services, amongst these are: The Editor, TV News; The Editor, Radio News; Heads of Talks and Current Affairs; Head of Home and Foreign Correspondents; the Political Editor; Head of Outside Broadcasts. The discussion deals with problems arising from news coverage, discusses pressures applied to the BBC, and is also a "critical analysis of broadcasting after the event".

The "ENCA meeting" was described as "a forum in which colleagues are informed and reactions given to programmes". The central role of the ENCA emerged clearly from the various accounts given: he gives "overall guidance on content" to the senior editors who are present. The practice is for minutes of these meetings to be taken which within the News Division are circulated only to the most senior news-room editors, the Editors of the Day, and Senior Duty Editors. As

an internal document points out:

"One of the Director-General's main instruments of communication on matters of editorial policy is the minuted record of the News and Current Affairs Meeting. These minutes are circulated to 150 addressees throughout the BBC. Nearly every person on the list has some degree of managerial or editorial responsibility for News and Current Affairs programmes. The minutes do not simply record decisions; they give full accounts of discussions of difficult editorial problems, so that those who read them may understand the factors which influenced the making of the decision in each case." (28)

The contents of these minutes are passed on by word of mouth through the newsroom; as one newsroom editor put it: "We have to pass on the thinking; we discuss it with the boys in the (BBC) Club and everything."

For the outsider, the content of the ENCA discussions is somewhat shrouded in obscurity. However, it was possible to elicit some information on this. One informant pointed out that "Naturally since 1968 the Northern Ireland coverage has occupied a great deal of time and space in the minutes". Another topic discussed on one occasion was the BBC's coverage of the Trident air-disaster in 1972. The meeting considered whether the BBC had been too quick in transmitting the story, and considered "the philosophical question of the broadcaster's responsibility in informing the public". On one specific occasion in 1973 the following topics were amongst those discussed: whether

it was worth the expense in covering the Watergate Affair, given that the USA was approaching a constitutional crisis: "There was a policy decision if you could call it that - it's expensive but let's cover it". The Political Editor had canvassed MP's to see what they thought about a programme called "A Question of Confidence" dealing with public attitudes to Parliament; at first MP's had been disgusted, but had later reassessed their attitudes. There had been a violent incident involving London schoolchildren, and it was asked whether the broadcasts should have mentioned that they were coloured; the "feeling was only if it were germane to the story". It had been decided to resist pressure from Scotland Yard to disclose someone's identity when this person had been promised anonymity.

After the ENCA meeting, a smaller group of people stays on to meet the BBC's Director-General for a further meeting. This group apparently comprises the ENCA, the Editors of Radio and TV News, the Head of Features Group and the Head of Talks and Current Affairs. The Director-General is given a resume of the discussions and is told the "sense of the meeting". Where there are "unresolved matters for his decision" he decides on what is to be done. There are discussions about particular programmes and as one editor put it, "DG says 'liked that; didn't like that; that was good; that was bad'. The policy emerges from that in the form of very broad tramlines". The Director-General apparently draws attention to areas of coverage which he thinks have been overlooked or overexposed, but, informants claimed, very rarely lays down "hard" prescriptions.

The internal document sums up the impact of the higher editorial structure in this way:

"From these two meetings, minuted by the Secretariat, general guidance and particular rules of conduct flow down through directorate and departmental meetings to the editorial conferences at which immediate programme decisions are constantly being made. Ideally this flow should be clear and uninterrupted, but in practice - of course - some channels occasionally get blocked. The BBC is not alone among large organisations in suffering occasionally from failures of communication between its upper and lower echelons."(29)

Despite the proviso about the occasional failure in communication with the lower ranks, the claim made for this system of control is extensive: that it provides the essential framework of reference for decision-making at the programme level. "Policy" evidently does exist, and the generation of quite specific prescriptions does take place.

This process of decision-making in the higher reaches of the organisation was described as a "collective learning from experience": "You can't leave crises until the end of the day. So you report back on it; there's a building up of knowledge about problems, about how to do the thing, if it happens again." The importance of regular meetings between the programme heads and the top executives is stressed. Sociologically, what occurs is a continual redefinition of appropriate meanings, and an establishment of the authoritative viewpoint by the legitimate sources of control, the Director-General, and his chief subordinate in the relevant area, the ENCA.

5. "Reference upwards" and editorial autonomy:

The BBC's Director-General is the acknowledged "Editor-in-Chief"⁽³⁰⁾ of the organisation. It is in this context that the following statement made by a very senior editor in Radio News should be interpreted:

"When there's a damn tricky area involved, say Northern Ireland, that's the tricky subject right now, I suppose decisions will go outside the news department. You'd take it to the Editor of News and Current Affairs. You'd speak about your intentions and give him a chance to object. If he couldn't deal with it it'd go to the Director-General. Can't think of an example where it has; there may have been one though".

This really gives a synoptic account of the procedure described above, where at times outside the established weekly meetings an editor can mobilise the collective wisdom if he feels uncertain about whether to include a particular story. A senior editor in TV News put a gloss on this account:

"There is a basic BBC policy of delegating responsibility to the lowest possible level. If you pick the right people you get broadly the right decisions. There are established areas where reference upwards is desirable and required. The onus is on the person to whom responsibility is delegated. A failure to refer upwards is a reflection on your own judgment. People grow

into the situation; they know when the
moment comes to take a second opinion."

On this account, then, the good BBC-man knows the exact limits of his own discretion. Consequently, the limits on editorial autonomy do not need to be explicitly codified; they are internalised through long exposure to the mores of the Corporation. One writer has referred to production in broadcasting as proceeding "largely 'on hunch' and by the light of the institutional ethos of (the) organisation".⁽³¹⁾ As the editor quoted above noted, "You know and get a feel where you ought to refer upwards". These observations are general and go beyond the scope of news production, as a former Controller of Programmes BBC-TV, Stuart Hood, has noted: "The BBC functions on a system of devolution."⁽³²⁾

It is possible, therefore, to note two features of the BBC editorial system. There is a system of well-legitimised imperative control, with the Director-General as ultimate arbiter when it comes to "difficult decisions". Linked into this there is a system of normative control where producers and editors have internalised "the BBC's way of doing things". Because, ideally, they know and accept, the limitations of their own autonomy, the imperative system only needs to come into operation as a matter of last resort. (This point receives more attention in Chapter 5, below). As Sir Hugh Greene, has noted,

"The only sure way of exercising control
is to proceed by persuasion and not by
written directives; by encouraging the
programme staff immediately responsible
to apply their judgments to particular
problems, within a framework of general
guidance."⁽³³⁾

But; Wedell has observed that this account leaves out the existence of the various producers' codes that have come into existence within the BBC and ITV.⁽³⁴⁾ There are, in fact, codes which apply to news and current affairs production within the BBC.⁽³⁵⁾ However, there is unceasing insistence on the editorial autonomy of the news staff, as is reported below. To the extent that the newsmen hold this belief the Corporation has been successful in its socialisation of personnel.

This chapter has, therefore, taken up the general problem of how news organisations are controlled. This question has been raised by those who see news media, especially broadcasting organisations as operating in a politically and morally sensitive environment. Applying this perspective to the BBC is evidently a fruitful undertaking, for the salience of control for the actors' perspective is revealed by the extensive and centralised editorial system currently operated in the Corporation in relation to news and current affairs coverage. The news producer's world is experienced as treacherous, and the tendency is therefore toward the exercise of control. The perspective is also illuminating from the standpoint of the micro-sociology of knowledge. Quite evidently, there is a constant attempt to create the basis for an epistemic community within the News Division, and within the Corporation generally. From the apex of the organisational structure there is a "flow of guidance and comment of all kinds (which) is plentiful and authoritative."⁽³⁶⁾ Through the careful dissemination of the "correct" cognitive orientation, practice is to be affected. This, at least, is the ideal.

The next two chapters move to the operational level of news production in the BBC's newsrooms, and describe the epistemic community at work.

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CHAPTER III:

RADIO NEWS

1. Introduction:

The previous chapter has demonstrated that the system of control relating to news and current affairs in the BBC stretches to the very top of the Corporation's hierarchy. There is a routine character to this mode of control: it takes place on a predictable weekly basis. The account made it clear that the nature of this control was such that it pre-eminently involved itself with "the broad tramlines" of policy. Within this framework of ideas, which is adjusted weekly if external circumstances warrant it, many decisions have to be made on a minute-to-minute basis. If the news of the moment waits for no man, it is certainly not going to await the detailed attention of the Director-General. Those rare cases where the DG's or ENCA's attention is immediately required are those in which decisions are "referred upwards", where the autonomy of the working editor is given over to those empowered to make the difficult decisions affecting the corporate interest.

While the BBC's editorial philosophy is one which stresses the autonomy of editors and producers, we must stand apart from this official account by examining the real impact of the structures of control. Apart from the weekly controls commented on earlier, there is a daily structure. The account of radio operations given below is one which sets the scene for the discussion of television practice in the following chapter. Although there are many links between radio and TV news - the ENCA meeting mentioned in the last

chapter being but one - they are organisationally distinct, especially for the vast majority of newsmen, who, unlike the top departmental executives, have no regular official liaison at all. An appreciation of this position was made by one newsman who said: "We could be two separate firms." Nevertheless, as the last chapter has shown, there is a considerable interest in speaking with one voice.

2. The "newsday" as a working day:

For the working newsman in the BBC's News Division the production of news takes place in daily cycles. Each passing day brings with it a crop of new "stories" and a necessity to refurbish - or "update" - the old ones thought fit enough to survive. Daily news production is best understood by seeing how its organisational structure is based on the principle of servicing a series of set output times during the "newsday". The newday, for the radio news department, constitutes a twenty-four hour cycle.⁽¹⁾

2.1. The "morning meeting":

Each weekday morning,⁽²⁾ at about 9.50 am, in a conference room on the third floor of Broadcasting House, senior newsmen in BBC Radio News meet for a discussion of the previous day's news bulletins, and to work out coverage for the coming day. These meetings⁽³⁾ are chaired by either the Editor, Radio News, or his deputy. These two editors are the managerial and executive heads of the Radio News Department. They have, it will be recalled, direct access to the Director-General and the Editor, News and Current Affairs on a regular weekly basis, and whenever else it should prove necessary.

This gathering - known within the News Department as "the morning meeting" - has a problem-solving character. As an exercise in pooling the collective wisdom of Radio News it draws together senior personnel from the newsroom, the planners of the news coverage, and such specialist correspondents as are available (see Figure 3.1 on p.82).

The Deputy Editor, Radio News, described the "morning meeting" this way:

"We take a brief look back, and also look forward, and ask: 'What should we lead with?' We try to plan the coverage for the day. Sometimes we look back and decide that we led with the wrong thing, and have a brief discussion."

The gathering is a turning-point between the new day and the old.

Each meeting follows a definite sequence of events. What is given below is a slightly 'idealised' version of an agenda which has a set of distinguishable phases:

09.50 a.m.: The Chairman asks whether there were any problems for the night editor. He makes some brief remarks on what he thinks of the previous day's output.

The Chairman's remarks are cast in the form of a critique. For example, on one occasion one newsroom man was singled out for praise for having obtained early details on the burning of the British Embassy in Dublin. On the negative side, there had been complaints about the BBC "overplaying" a story about the funerals of the thirteen people killed by British troops in Londonderry on "Bloody Sunday". One

newsman said: "Friend of mine thought it was the Coronation". After joining in the laughter the Chairman made the editorial point: "To be serious, that is the danger".

On another occasion, the Chairman asked the newsroom to tell the BBC correspondents in the USA covering the Democratic Party's Convention that their coverage was meeting approval: "We may say on the circuit⁽⁴⁾ that we're happy." But, at a different meeting, work by other reporters was criticised for "not making much impact."

The senior editors, therefore, act as a critical audience for the output of the department. As the Editor and Deputy Editor rarely enter the newsroom, in this way manifesting their respect for the autonomy of the Editor of the Day in charge of output, the morning meeting plays a very significant role in the system of indirect control. The dominant style is one of giving reactions to what has already been produced - "retrospective review" - rather than imperious directives about what ought to be done in the future.

However, this last point does need some elaboration, because instructions are given. It was particularly noticeable, in the case of Northern Ireland coverage, that the Chairman was at pains to indicate the relevant policy stance by invoking shared understandings. When the "Bloody Sunday" events were sub judice - being then under the consideration of the Widgery Tribunal - the Chairman made sure that everyone was aware of this fact by referring to a memorandum⁽⁵⁾ circulated the previous day: "Has everyone seen ENCA's note about Widgery?" Everyone had, although there was one aggrieved response: "(Lord) Carrington wasn't deterred from saying his piece in the Lords. It's wretched if Ministers are saying this and we're not allowed to." To which the Chairman replied, again making an editorial point, "I

think we should follow news and commonsense angles". On another occasion, when massive Protestant marches were due to be held to celebrate the Battle of the Boyne, the Chairman made a point of saying to the editor in charge of the news summaries:

"Roy - watch the summaries; you know; be bloody careful that it's the Belfast newsroom and not PA".

He was referring here to the standard BBC practice of not accepting any Press Association news agency reports on Northern Ireland until they have first been corroborated by the BBC newsroom in Belfast.⁽⁶⁾

09.55 am: The Editor of the Day discusses the likely stories of the day dealing first with home news, and then with foreign. There is an awareness of "news angles" and any logistical problems arising in obtaining particular reports. A particular concern is the deployment of available reporting staff, home and foreign.

After outstanding problems have been solved, and relevant criticisms made, the meeting deals with the day's forthcoming coverage. Responsible for each day's output is an "Editor of the Day" who is the dominant figure in the newsroom. (Details on this role are given below). As his task is to orchestrate the entire news operation in delivering news bulletins at requisite times he takes a leading role in discussing the prospective shape of the day's output.

The morning meeting does not convene with a blank agenda. Before it, for its consideration, it has a working document known as a "News Prospects" which has been compiled overnight by newsroom staff. (Details

on how this is done are given below). It is this document which is addressed by the Editor of the Day. The News Prospects lists home and foreign news stories, which, on the basis of prior intelligence, are thought to be of likely newsworthiness. It also gives information on the whereabouts of available reporting staff and times at which sound circuits are available for feeding reports into Broadcasting House from foreign and home correspondents, and reporters in various parts of the British Isles.

The Editor of the Day runs through the listed home news stories, which, as a rule, are far more numerous than the foreign; the latter are then discussed by the Head of Foreign Correspondents, or his Deputy. This stage of the meeting accomplishes two main tasks. Firstly, it is a collective evaluation of the available stories: the meeting decides what are to be the relevant "news angles". And secondly, it is greatly concerned with the logistics of newsgathering: whether reports and speeches can be scheduled so as to be available for use at bulletin times.

To give an example: on one occasion there was a brief discussion of an official report on "Privacy", published that day. The Editor of the Day and the Home Affairs correspondent within whose brief the story came, agreed that the theme of the radio report should be "the public interest". The story was seen as both attractive and significant; it had "James Bond aspects" concerning electronic "bugging" and snooping, and dealt with such practices as members of the public being given covert credit ratings. The Editor of the Day was quite clear that it made a good story and asked the correspondent to produce a report of not more than two and a half minutes' duration (a long report by radio news standards). The Chairman agreed: "It is good stuff".

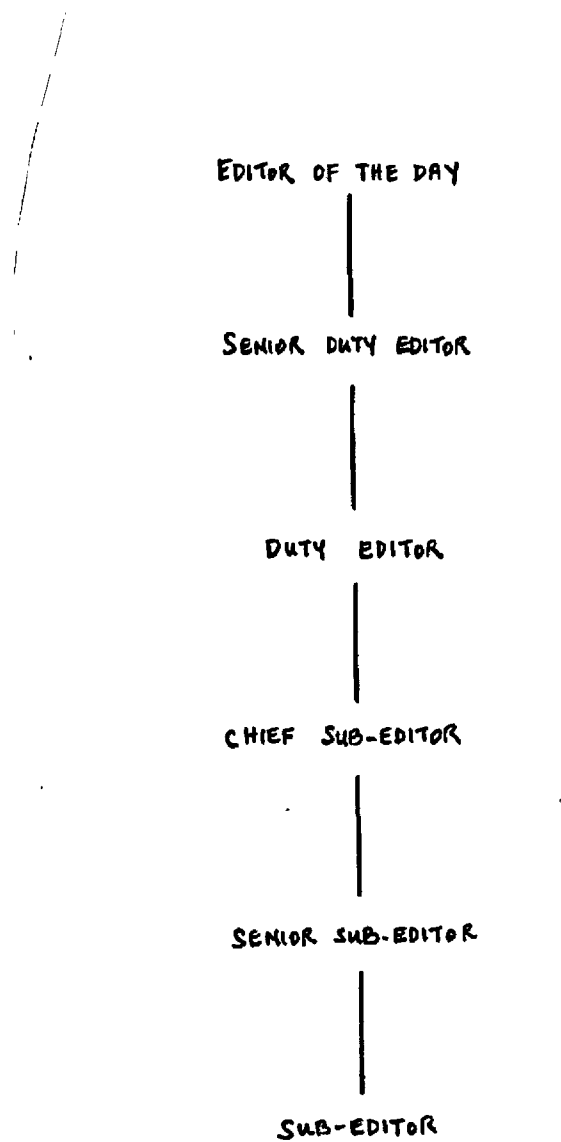
FIGURE 3.1.

ATTENDANCE AT THE "MORNING MEETING" AT BROADCASTING HOUSE

TITLE	ROLE IN INTERNAL COMMUNICATION
Editor/Dep. Editor	Chairman; link with ENCA and DG and the TV service.
Editor of the Day, Senior Duty Editor	operational responsibility in the newsroom; oversight of R4 desk. "looking forward".
Overnight Editor	-ditto-; "looking backward".
Duty Editor	oversight of the news bulletins and summaries on R's 1,2,3.
Asst. Ed., Intake) News Organiser)	oversight of deployment and logistics
Asst. Head. Forn. Correspondents	oversight of deployment/logistics for Foreign News Dept.
Foreign Duty Editor	-ditto-; and link with the newsroom
Specialist Corresps.	link with the newsgathering arm
Duty Newsreader	" " " final presentation

FIGURE 3.2.

THE EDITORIAL HIERARCHY AT PRODUCTION LEVEL



Agreement in such detail at such an early stage of the news day is not common; nevertheless the example illustrates explicitly the kind of evaluation most stories are given in the prevailing state of knowledge about relative news values at that time.

As the Editor of the Day is thinking in terms of his main Radio 4 news bulletins at 1 pm. and 6 pm., at that time of the morning, he sets deadlines for reports to be gathered. Where the time of the event is known in advance it is easy to see how it may be accommodated into the newsday schedules. The report on Privacy mentioned above was due for publication at 2.30 pm; the Editor of the Day knew, therefore, that he could not expect the correspondent's report until the 6.0. pm. bulletin.

10.00 am: Radio News and its sister service, Television News are linked over a sound circuit between Broadcasting House and Television Centre. The Chairman of the "morning meeting" at Radio News talks to his television opposite number about prospective coverage, and each tells the other what he might have 'missed'.

Although the Radio News and Television News departments are distinct autonomous units within the BBC, they are not without a whole network of links, and the contact which takes place before the new day's main coverage is particularly significant.

The Chairman of the respective meetings run through their News Prospects very rapidly by uttering a series of brief phrases: "Miners; Ulster; Abortion; Sudan; Pay; Teachers; Babies; Nairobi; Karachi; Copenhagen..." They are working from agendas which are practically

the same, and for the most part discussion is on the basis of shared knowledge about the attributes of the potential stories in question. If coverage is "routine" in the sense of not presenting what is seen as politically or morally sensitive material - and in most cases it is - then discussion is minimal. Occasionally, one service has the edge over the other: once, the Editor of the Day in Radio News, being an Ulsterman, had relevant knowledge of some of the ceremonial practices of the Orange Order. The sound link is also a way of co-ordinating logistical demands: Radio News will sometimes pass on sound recordings to Television, and vice versa.

The meeting has a somewhat ritualistic as well as a business-like flavour to it. Given the teleprinter connections between the two services very little information needs to be traded by word of mouth. However, speech is more rapid and less open to misinterpretation than an exchange of written information. The sound link is also consistent with the journalistic occupational culture's having a strong oral element. Personalised communication plays a role in reinforcing corporate solidarity, as well as the obviously important one of co-ordinating the utterances which emerge from the two separate services. The existence of the link is also a reminder of the fact that TV News was an offspring of the sound service.

The ritualistic element was made quite clear one morning when the Chairman at Radio News conducted his business with TV Centre over the telephone - of its nature a communication more private than public. The explanation lay in the fact that TV News was using a different conference room without a sound link.

10.10 - 10.15 am: The meeting begins to wind down, and becomes very informal. People leave without ceremony before its conclusion.

2.ii. Operational responsibility: the Editor of the Day:

If we are to follow the routines of production through the newsgathering operation from the perspectives of those at the centre of editorial decision-making, it is essential to look at the structure of the newsroom and its relationships to the newsgathering operation.

The BBC's "editorial philosophy" of vesting maximum responsibility in programme editors and producers has been commented on above. At the centre of the newsroom operations, with the responsibility for the production of the bulletins on any given day is an "Editor of the Day". The Radio newsroom operates a 24-hour cycle. This means that there is a two-shift system, one operating during the day (from 9 am. to 10.30 pm.), and the other during the night (10.30 pm. to 9 am.). A senior newsman is held responsible for each segment of time.⁽⁷⁾

In theory, on a given day, the Editor of the Day has full responsibility for deciding the content of radio news bulletins and summaries produced during his shift. While it is certainly true that the News Department pursues a policy of strong editorialism, we must remember that on any given day the scope of individual decision-making, although not subject to crude directives from above, is limited by the need to "refer upwards" in situations of doubt, and also operates within the constraints set by the prior identification of much of the newsworthy material for the day's output.

The role attributes of the Editor of the Day fit clearly into the control perspective outlined above. One senior and trustworthy newsman is given as complete an overview of newsroom and newsgathering activities as possible with the intention of securing an

output which is "reliable". For reporters out in the field, and editorial staff inside the building, the Editor of the Day is the legitimate authority figure who has the final say on the duration and content of their reports. The Deputy Editor, Radio News gave so much weight to the Editor of the Day's independence that he characterised the latter's choice of content as "a personal thing". While acknowledging, then, the constraints of the News Division's power structure beyond the newsroom, within the News Department, the Editor of the Day is seen, as someone put it, as "God for the day".

2.iii. Newsroom structure: an overview

It has been observed in another study that "It is difficult to represent the structure of ...BBC newsroom(s) diagrammatically because lines of authority, seniority and work flow from each other and are loosely drawn".⁽⁸⁾ This observation was made of television news production, but is equally applicable to the case of radio news, where the technology and the division of labour are far less elaborate. (This will be seen in the next chapter).

The BBC radio newsroom is divided into a number of distinct working groups, organised mainly on the desk principle, which has been derived from longstanding newspaper practice.⁽⁹⁾ (See Figure 3.3 on p.101).

(a) Outputs: The main channel for news output is Radio 4, and it is here that the main news effort is concentrated. For all other radio channels news outputs are produced by a separate desk. Within the newsroom the Radio 4 desk (known as the "bulletins desk") is thought of as "the big time", because it produces news for the largest audiences, and its bulletins are of the longest duration. The Radios 1, 2, and 3 desk (known as "the summaries desk") tends

to be thought of as "gathering up the loose ends" and as "something of a sideshow".

(b) Inputs: The newsgathering operation, which involves collation of foreign and home reporting on both a national and international scale, is co-ordinated from the "Intake" desk in the newsroom. There is also what amounts to a clearing-house for news both originated and required by BBC radio and television stations on a national, regional and local basis; this is known as the "General News Service" ("GNS" for short). Although this is both an input and output desk the main concern here is with how it contributes to daily routines.

2.iv. News production for Radio 4:

It has been pointed out above that in order to understand the daily routines of news production the pre-eminence of deadlines for the producers needs to be recognised. Daytime production (taken here to mean 10.30 am.- 10.20 pm.) for Radio 4 has to be organised in ways which allows it to hit the main output times of 1 pm., 6 pm., 10 pm. The pattern of work can, therefore, be seen as falling into a series of phases, each of which is delimited by the period of time between bulletins. Each of these bulletins lasts some 10-15 minutes and is composed of written copy read by the newsreader, "voice" reports by correspondents and reporters, and "actuality" (i.e. recorded sound of "events" taking place).

(a) Planning the bulletins:

The account which follows gives an ideal typical version of the processes leading to the transmission of one lunchtime news bulletin.

At about 10.30 every morning with the deliberations of the "morning meeting" behind him, the Editor of the Day takes his place at the Radio 4 desk and confronts the main problems of constructing

a bulletin for the lunchtime news. His central and recurrent concern is with the selection, ordering and treatment of news stories. Together with his chief subordinate, the Senior Duty Editor, who will also have attended the "morning meeting", the Editor of the Day is faced with making an assessment of stories likely to be used for the next bulletin.

On the basis of having discussed the News Prospects, of having read the morning newspapers, of sifting news agency copy, and of receiving "tip-offs" from the BBC correspondents, the two senior editors are able to draw up a "Provisional Running Order". What this amounts to is a list of news items ranked in a sequence which seems to the editors to make "good news sense". (In general they broadly agree in their news judgments, and where they do not the Editor of the Day has the last word.)

The editors do not therefore start with a blank sheet. By that time of the morning, coverage of several stories is already in train, having been arranged in advance by the Intake desk. The "running order" is expected to change as the morning wears on and new stories "break". The keystone of the bulletin is the "lead" story, which is equivalent to the main first-page story in a newspaper. When the editors have found a story which they think is sufficiently "newsworthy" to head the bulletin, they have a yardstick against which to evaluate the "newsworthiness" of others.

(b) The bulletin as a collective product:

As the Editor of the Day and the Senior Duty Editor draw up the provisional running order they allocate each story item to a sub-editor. There are some half a dozen sub-editors working on the main Radio 4 bulletins, and this means that each of them will generally contribute between two and four story items to the finished product.

Although, as noted above, there are problems in discussing the news-room hierarchy, there is a clear ranking system by grade, which is now discussed (see Figure 3.2 on p.83).

The Senior Duty Editor, is concerned with the detailed control of bulletin construction, by contrast with the Editor of the Day who has more to do with setting the main outlines and trying to realise his original conception. Between them they allocate the editorial responsibility for each story or news item to the sub-editors ("subs"). The Editor of the Day also plays an active role in the sub-editing process.

There is a well-understood status structure which is brought into play when stories are allocated which is based, primarily, on a pecking order determined by rank. The "lead" story of the day - or what at that time in the morning is thought will be the "lead" - is the responsibility of the Chief sub. The lead story is usually one which is thought to require a "sure hand" as it frequently is of immediate importance to the British audience: a political storm, an industrial dispute, the Northern Ireland situation. The allocation of such stories reflects the much-used newsman's maxim that "experience counts".

The remaining three or four subs are allocated the rest of the stories, with the Senior sub being given the next story down the running order. It should be remembered that as most bulletins are no longer than 15 minutes in duration a given sub is not likely to have editorial responsibility for more than three minutes' duration. An additional, though rather subordinate criterion for allocating stories to subs is on the basis of their particular interest in, or aptitude for, a particular subject. For example, those who are

particularly interested in sport or royalty will tend to be given those stories. Like the reporters, sub-editors are generalists, and although familiarity with certain kinds of story may build up through time, they are all in principle expected to cope with "any and every kind of news".

By this period of the newsday reporters will generally have been assigned to stories by the Intake desk. Any reporters who are available on "stand-by" - rarely more than two or three on any given day - are at the disposal of the Editor of the Day for any unforeseen stories which "break" before the bulletin is transmitted. The specialist correspondents, having their own "watching briefs" and acting in a senior consultative capacity, tend to select their own stories by arrangement with the Editor of the Day.

(c) The later phases of bulletin construction:

A news bulletin is a collectively-assembled product which depends upon the orchestration of a number of discrete skills. The Editor of the Day has the role of accomplishing this orchestration by transmission time. Once stories have been assigned a series of parallel selection processes are set in train. These are woven together in the hour before the bulletin goes out over the air, and sometimes even during transmission.

The sub-editing processes:

When a sub-editor is given responsibility for various stories he is, in virtue of this, given responsibility for a segment of time in the bulletin. This time slot is "filled" in various ways. According to current conventions of news production the forms taken by the content which is broadcast are these: written copy spoken by the newsreader; "voice" reports by correspondents and reporters; edited voices of interviewees or eyewitnesses; "actuality" sound (explosions, cheering, etc.).

The sub-editors have the responsibility for producing the relevant "mix" of these forms under the guidelines set out by the Editor of the Day. They have, therefore, various tasks: they write short items for the newsreader, based on news agency copy or other sources; they write the "cues" which introduce monologue reports or other "voices" used in the bulletins; they direct the cutting of audio tape by technical editors.

The detailed control of this sub-editing process lies in the hands of the Senior Duty Editor. He decides on the exact timing which a story merits and corrects all written copy before it is transmitted. He will also listen to tape-recordings which need editing and give indications as to how they ought to be dealt with. He also keeps an eye on any changes in stories which are notified by the reporting staff, or the news agencies, and alerts the subs to these in order to keep them "up to date".

The Editor of the Day, with responsibility for the whole newsroom's output, is meant to be detachedly above "the flow of paper". In fact, most of his energies go into the Radio 4 bulletins. He keeps a very active interest in the main stories and gives directions on editing them. For example, during an Orange Order march, which was felt likely to result in violence, the Editor of the Day took over the story from the Chief sub-editor.

The final editing stage prior to transmission (when sub-editing has been completed) is in the hands first of the Senior Duty Editor, and finally of the Editor of the Day. Jointly, they act as a fail-safe for the editorial process.

The Updating process:

The sub-editors make their selections, broadly speaking, from within a framework pre-set by the senior men who draw up the running

order, who, in their turn, have been influenced by discussions on the News Prospects at the "morning meeting".

However, while many news stories are predictable, many others are not, and they "break" in the time period available before the bulletin is due to go out over the air. This gives the editors time to arrange coverage. There are various ways in which they can become aware of these "new" stores, or of "developments" in, and ramifications of, the old. The BBC itself contains various sources which feed into the news-producing system. The BBC Monitoring Service at Caversham Park is often the first source to hear of sudden developments abroad - the death of President Nasser was first learned of in this way. BBC newsrooms around the United Kingdom can send messages on the teleprinters to the London newsroom - news of murders or fires, for example. Correspondents and reporters covering stories may telephone in with reassessments of their importance. In addition to all of these, by the time the running order is revised at about 12 noon, the early additions of the London evening papers are available and are carrying stories which might influence the Editor of the Day's final judgment.

Apart from these sources there are the news agencies, without whose services no news organisation could function adequately. On the foreign side the BBC subscribes to Reuter, Agence France Press, Associated Press, United Press International, and Tass. At home, although the BBC takes news from various agencies, the dominant source is the Press Association. With, on the estimate of the Deputy Editor, Radio News, nearly one million words pouring daily into the newsroom from the agencies, clearly a considerable sifting process has to take place.

One occupant of this sifting role is the "copy taster" who has to make the flow of agency tape manageable for the Senior Duty Editor. He is strategically placed opposite the two senior men. One copy taster with a touch of hyperbole described his job this way:

"All the news in the world comes into this tray.

I read it and discard 90%. 10% isn't an arbitrary figure you know: what's worthy of consideration, I offer."

The passing-on of 10% of the copy acts both as a goal and as a standard: it is important not to overburden the Senior Duty Editor, and the copy taster measures his efficiency by how well he is keeping the flow down.

Much of the selection of copy takes place within the framework of expectations about newsworthy stories which is embodied in the news prospects and the running order; in addition the copy taster orients himself to the selection of news stories by having heard the most recent morning bulletins and having read the most recent newspapers. Efficiency in selection is judged in terms of "experience", the development of a "news judgment" through time.

The updating process gives a dynamic structure to the production of bulletins. The Editor of the Day and the Senior Duty Editor have to take account of a constant flow of information, and make changes in the sub-editing process which will accommodate it. Reporting is also affected since new requests may go out to reporters already working on stories. The role of the copy taster is particularly important when it comes to changes of fact in stories in the immediate period before the bulletin is transmitted. He knows which subs are working on particular stories and can directly inform them himself or through the Senior Duty Editor. The updating process allows immediacy and accuracy to be maintained right up to transmission time.⁽¹⁰⁾

The hour before transmission:

By 12 noon, the Senior Duty Editor, after consulting with the Editor of the Day, will have drawn up a revised running order which expresses the basic intended shape of the 1 pm. bulletin; this new order is revisable in the light of any significant changes in existing stories, or the appearance of new ones which seem to have greater "news value". At this point of the production process there is still a good deal of flexibility in terms of arranging for fresh reports and making changes in emphasis. There is a built-in expectation of change.

The sub-editing process reaches its activity peak during the pre-transmission hour. By 12.30 pm. many of the scripts for the newsreader have been written and much of the tape editing finished. Several stories remain to be completed, however, and the updating process is continuous. At about this time the newsreader comes into the newsroom and begins to run through the scripts which have so far become available, and waits to familiarise himself with the rest as they begin to pour in during the next half hour.

Scripts go first to the Senior Duty Editor who makes any editorial corrections he sees fit, querying the use of language and grammar, and paying particular attention to the formulation of issues. He listens to incoming tapes and instructs the subs on how to cut them. The scripts then pass to the Editor of the Day who makes any further alterations he thinks are necessary before passing them on to the newsreader.

The Editor of the Day has a more or less precise knowledge of the duration of the available material at this point as he has added up the running times of the individual scripts and tape-recorded

"inserts". As bulletins are normally slightly "overset" (have too many stories for the available time slot) he needs to have his priorities clearly in mind so that he knows which stories he will eventually "drop" (leave out of the bulletin). This decision is deferred until the last possible moment in case there are shifts in the relative news value of particular stories.

The editors, while compiling the running order decide which stories merit "headlines". These tend to be written however, only in the last ten or fifteen minutes before transmission. Again, like the decision about what to "drop" the editors prefer to leave open their options about the final priorities and significances accorded various news items until the last possible moment. The headlines are written by either the Editor of the Day, the Senior Duty Editor or the Chief sub.

About two minutes before the time signal announces the start of the news bulletin the senior editors rush to the news studio to supervise its presentation.

Transmission:

News bulletins produced for Radio 4 have a duration, generally, of between 10 and 15 minutes. From the presentational point of view the individually edited and scripted items have to fit the conventions set by the existing format: the bulletin, as a collective product, has to display the characteristics of a unified one.

The role of the newsreader is a critical one: as the "anchorman" in presenting the series of items which makes up the bulletin he opens, intersperses, and concludes the series of items with his own voice. The Editor of the Day sits in the news studio next to the newsreader and passes news items to him. The transmission period, as the outcome

of all the work of the previous hours, is exceedingly tense. A major reason for this is that it is almost routinely expected that the existing order of news items will, in one way or another, be upset.

This was observed to happen on several occasions. To give one example: two minutes before one lunchtime bulletin the police rang the newsroom and requested some information to be left out of a murder story: a teenage girl had been stabbed to death, and they did not want the murder method to be disclosed while they were still conducting enquiries. The Editor of the Day agreed to meet this request, and this meant that alternative arrangements for the story had to be made, literally at the last moment, as the newsreader's script had already been written and a reporter had recorded a "voice piece". At two minutes past one the editor decided not to use the pre-recorded report, and asked the reporter to go into the studio "live" with the amended story. In the event, he did not have time to do this, and so the newsreader read a brief piece of scripted copy written in the newsroom.

There are other kinds of problems. There might be some fault in the tape-recordings used. And where reporters are covering stories which are "late" in terms of the set output times, there are anxieties during transmission that they will fail to "deliver" them. Observation indicated that it was a matter of course for tape-recordings and cues to be brought into the studio half way through the transmission, or later. The Editor of the Day, by overseeing the scripts handed to the newsreader exercises control of the bulletin up until the moment of transmission. If there is a sudden "news break" which is of importance, and it is difficult to alter the running order, this can be accommodated by the newsreader using phrases such as "we've just heard that...." or, "some late news...." at some convenient moment in the sequence.

2.v. Summary: the production process:

These last few pages have given an ideal-typical account of how a single bulletin is produced. The editorial practice of the Radio News Department emerges quite clearly. The operational responsibility for the output rests with the Editor of the Day who has an involvement with the details of bulletin production, as well as with its general oversight.

For an understanding of the practices followed through any given newsday we have to think in terms of the sequence of events outlined above being repeated in relation to each of the various output times which the desk has to meet.

2.vi. Other major⁽¹¹⁾ outputs:

(a) Radio 4:

The Radio 4 desk also produces, under quite a separate team, a series of mainly five-minute news bulletins. The team consists of a Chief sub-editor and two sub-editors. Its outputs differ in style and composition from the main bulletins discussed above: they are, in all but the most exceptional cases, bulletins which are written for "straight delivery" by the newsreader's voice alone. If any tape-recorded "inserts" are used it is only for a "really important story" and only one recording would be used in such cases. These bulletins first went on the air in July 1973, several months before the London commercial radio stations were opened, and the intention was, and is, to compete with them.

(b) The summaries desk:

"Bulletins" are distinguished from "summaries" by virtue of their duration. For the most part the summaries desk produces news summaries which have a duration of either one or two minutes; there are also six five-minute bulletins produced for Radio 3.

The desk is run by a Duty Editor, and staffed by a Chief sub-editor and two sub-editors. The Duty Editor comes into the newsroom with the same background knowledge as the Editor of the Day, having attended the "morning meeting", and being exposed to the same range of sources cited above.

By comparison with the main outputs on the Radio 4 desk the summaries desk is subjected to far "tighter" deadlines, but it has, because of the small team structure, a much simpler division of labour. The output (like that of the short Radio 4 bulletins) is simply written copy, with very occasional use of "voice" or "actuality". Because of the short duration of the summaries, an average of only 4 stories per broadcast is the norm; it is less problematic for the Duty Editor to decide a running order of four items than the four or five times as many which are required for the main bulletins.

Each summary is written by a different member of the team in rotation. The Chief sub has specific responsibility for writing the Radio 3 bulletins. The copy tasting function which is shared by the Duty Editor and Chief sub is fairly rudimentary, with copy either going into a "used" or an "unused" tray.

The dominance within the newsroom of the Editor of the Day is exercised in an indirect fashion when it comes to the work of the summaries desk. The Duty Editor exercises an apparent autonomy, as the Editor of the Day and he, although within shouting distance, rarely directly communicate. However, when it comes to deciding the choice and running order of the summaries, although a certain lee-way exists, the basic agenda is pre-set by the common assumptions obtaining in the newsroom. The Duty Editor (summaries) cannot remain unaware of the evaluations being made at the next desk. A major factor shaping the decision-making on the desk is the early discussion of the news

prospects. The outputs are checked by the Editor of the Day who reads a copy of the summaries, and indicates his approval or disapproval. The leeway which is accorded the summaries desk stems directly from the beliefs about the kind of audience which it is serving on Radios 1 and 2 and how it can best accomplish this; the Radio 3 bulletins are "lifted" and mainly "boiled down" versions of the Radio 4 outputs.

While there is, therefore, virtually no imperative control of the overt kind, normative control is strong. It is for this reason that the summaries desk see themselves as "free agents", who are, as one Duty Editor put it, "given little advice, not to say instruction."

3. News Intake: An Overview:

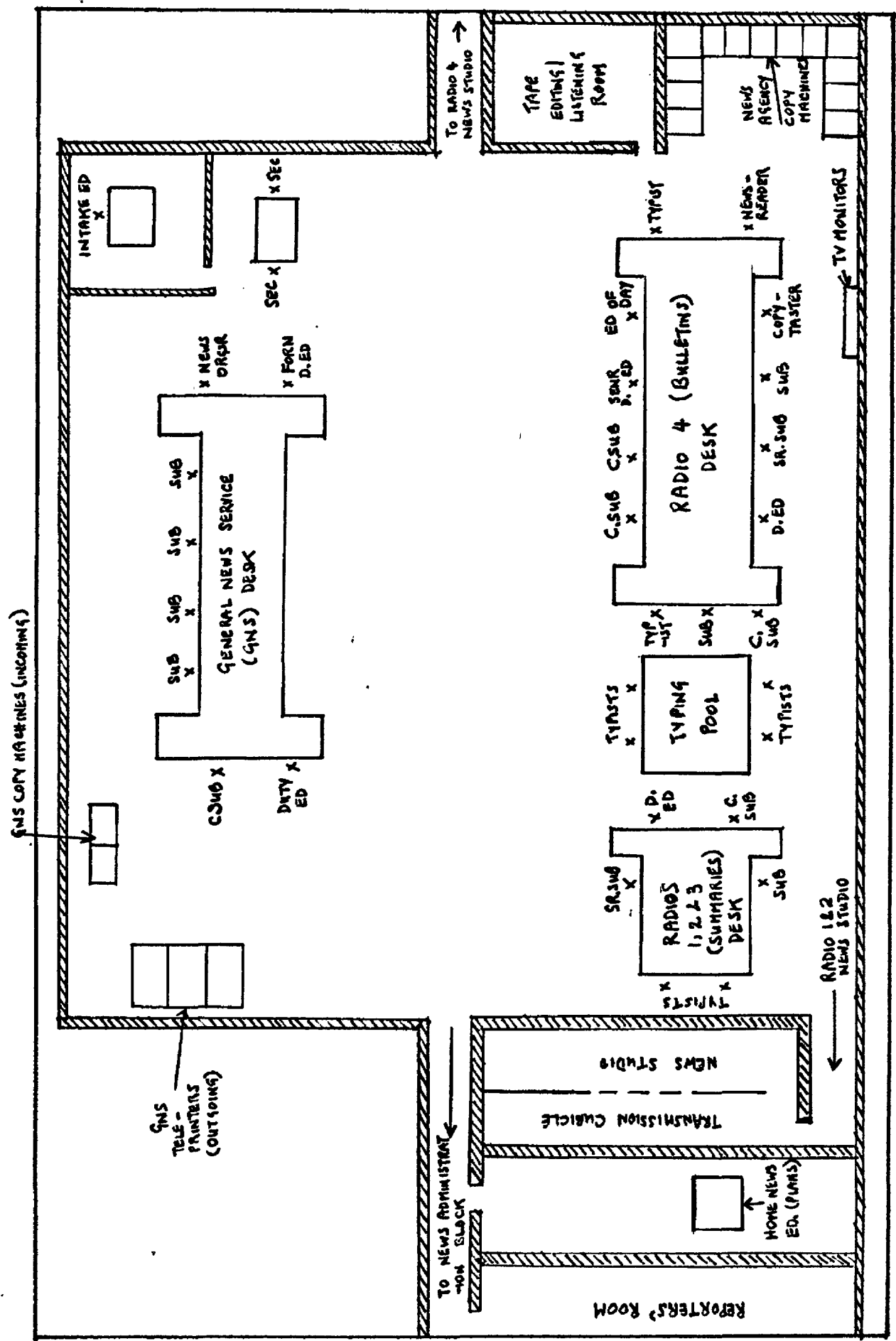
The account given of the routine practices of the newsroom has indicated the extent to which the news day begins with a structure of expectations about what is likely to make news. The production process itself represents but one element of the "behind-the-scenes" activities of the News Department. Extensive logistical arrangements have to be made for newsgathering to meet the deadlines posed by the output times. News Intake is the branch of the operation which makes these arrangements. It falls into two sections. One for "Home News" which is under the supervision of the Intake Editor, and the other for "Foreign News" which falls under the aegis of the Head of Home and Foreign Correspondents. There is a further relevant division of labour. On the home news side, there is both a daily intake and an advanced planning function; for foreign news the same division applies.

3.i. Daily Intake:

(a) Home news and the News Organiser:

The News Organiser is the intermediary between the newsroom and the reporting staff (including the Home Correspondents) "out on the

Figure 3.3: The Radio Newsroom.



road". He works under the instructions of the Editor of the Day passing new information to him, and relaying his instructions. Although the News Organiser works on the intake desk it is the attributes of his role rather than his positioning in a particular working group which are really instructive.

Producing the News Prospects: It was earlier pointed out that discussion at the "morning meeting" centred mainly on the information contained in the News Prospects. This document is compiled for 8 am. by the News Organiser on the overnight shift on the basis of various sources: there are BBC advanced planning documents (dealt with later) from which he selects stories relevant to the day; there is the Press Association Diary of expected events sent over the wires during the night; there are various public relations hand-outs sent to the BBC by government departments and other institutions and groups; the morning papers may provide a newsworthy "lead" which merits "following up"; the Foreign News Department provides information about the times of radio "hook-ups" with foreign correspondents. The sort of information provided is essential to the day's decision-making; news conferences, demonstrations, meetings between unions and employers, publication of government reports, House of Commons business, Royal comings and goings, sport, events abroad, and so on. These are the standard "diary stories". Foreknowledge of the timing of these events is of obvious importance to the Editor of the Day who knows whether to expect reports for the later bulletins at a time when he is already dealing with the earlier ones.

Logistics: The News Organiser is responsible for seeing that the reports which have been requested by the Editor of the Day are fed into the newsroom in good time for sub editing to take place. This is known within the newsroom as "organising the demands". An example

illustrates the kind of problem which can arise:

One weekday afternoon, the News Organiser had arranged for a report to be sent in to the newsroom from Aldershot about people charged with bombing the military barracks. The report was needed for the 6 o'clock bulletin. The sound engineer who had been sent with an Outside Broadcast unit had failed to turn up and the reporter was asking for advice. The News Organiser observed, "All your best plans go up the creek". He told the Editor of the Day, who was furious. At 5.15 pm. the News Organiser spoke to the reporter by telephone: "If something hasn't come up by 5.35 you'll have to do a phone piece." He advised the reporter which BBC extension to ask for and suggested "Protectively, do a phone piece now; do an updater later". The News Organiser had therefore "set up" or "fixed" an alternative channel of communication for the reporter. By 5.35 pm. that proved unnecessary as the engineer had arrived.

This example shows how the News Organiser provides a picture of newsgathering for the Editor of the Day, and how crucial the Intake function is to keeping newsgathering on schedule. There is also a more technical dimension to the role. The News Organiser liaises with the engineering branch on behalf of the newsroom; he also arranges for the required sound circuits to be booked.

Briefings: In addition to executing the decisions about deployment made by the Editor of the Day, the News Organiser keeps reporting staff alerted to developments in the stories which they are working on, using as a basis the latest news agency tape, or other sources. He also relays instructions from the Editor of the Day about the treatment of stories. A further aspect of controlling deployment is through co-ordinating reports filed by reporters on different aspects of the

same story: for example, on one occasion a reporter who was sent to the National Coal Board was asked to pursue the same line of questioning as one who had been sent to the National Union of Mineworkers.

Any information on stories thought interesting to the national newsroom by BBC local and regional newsrooms in the UK is cleared through the News Organiser, who, in turn passes it on to the Editor of the Day. A typical exchange of this kind ran as follows:

News organiser: "They've found the bodies of two young girls. (BBC) Newcastle believe this is murder. Age 11."

Copy taster: "Not a bad one."

Chief sub: "That's worth a headline: 'Two girls of eleven murdered' - that's surely worth a headline."

Editor of the Day: "Stick it next to the Baby Murder - we won't headline it until we know more about the circumstances."

The News Organiser is in frequent touch every day with the newsroom in Broadcasting House, Belfast, where he has an opposite number, with the two reporters normally posted in Belfast, the one in Londonderry, and the Dublin correspondent.

(b) Foreign News and the Foreign Duty Editor:

The Foreign Duty Editor is the "representative" of the Foreign News Department in the radio newsroom. In many respects his role is similar to that of the News Organiser.

Logistics and briefings: Just as reports have to be co-ordinated and scheduled to meet the output times for the home news content, the same applies to foreign correspondents' reports. The Foreign Duty Editor

works with a list of circuit bookings compiled by the Foreign News Department which gives the times at which correspondents will be making their reports available; some connections are used for routine discussions between the London newsroom and the correspondent in the field. The Foreign Duty Editor will also send requests for stories to correspondents if asked by the Editor of the Day. On one occasion fighting was reported between Uganda and Tanzania; the Foreign Duty Editor was asked to find reports reflecting "both sides of the story":

"We don't believe Uganda - so we also go to Dar-es-Salaam; you allow for the fact that it's also a party in the row; you do it to bring impartiality."

The Foreign Duty Editor controls and advises the foreign reporting staff from London. Contact is maintained through cables and telex as well as over the circuits.

The Foreign Duty Editor is important from the point of view of the foreign correspondent as he is the main regular point of contact "at home". As the correspondent is thought of as an expert interpreter of foreign events in his particular "patch" briefings tend, on the whole, to assume that he understands "what is wanted" for a domestic audience in Britain.⁽¹²⁾ One Foreign Duty Editor described the process of briefing this way:

"The story comes up, and we tell him what the main lines are. In the case of a highly trained correspondent, I say: 'One minute for the next bulletin' and he'll do it. Or he may state a particular interest (in the story). We give light guidance: we don't say 'We want such-and-such a line': we leave it to the chap on the spot - he's immersed in the story and we're guided by that."

We still exercise the editorial function".

There is, therefore, no doubt where the ultimate power lies, however gentlemanly the "negotiating" may be. The Foreign Duty Editor's role is important in giving the correspondent a sense of the relevance of his work for the home audience: he has "to represent London to the chap in the field, to tell him about the importance of the story, give him an idea of where he fits into the general pattern of broadcasting".

Keeping the Editor of the Day up to date:

Some of the Foreign Duty Editor's time is spent "copy tasting" reports from the various foreign news agencies, He is also supplied with teleprinted copy from the BBC's Monitoring Service at Caversham Park,⁽¹³⁾ which in effect, acts as an internal news service. As the Foreign Duty Editor is a specialist - quite often a correspondent retired from the field - he is expected to be sensitive to developments in foreign events in ways not expected of the copy taster who also scans the foreign news, and to "pull out" stories which are of likely news interest. Because of his background knowledge he is quite frequently called on to produce a "voice" report on a news event when covering material from the correspondent in the field is not available, or when a correspondent has not yet arrived on the scene.

The role performed by the Foreign Duty Editor is similar therefore in many respects to that of the News Organiser in that he is responsible for the minute to minute deployment of available newsgathering resources.

3.ii: Future planning for news intake:

In the account given so far, the News Prospects have been pointed to as being of central importance in planning the day's

coverage. But before the "morning meeting" takes place at the beginning of each newsday a good deal of the agenda has been set by prior stages in the planning process.

(a) The Home News Diary: The day before the News Prospects are drawn up by the overnight News Organiser a document called the Home News Diary is drawn up by the Home News Editor (Planning). It is this editor's task to make arrangements, one day ahead, for the deployment of reporters and for the collection of recorded material. It is estimated that 95% of these News Diary arrangements are embodied in the News Prospects the following morning, and that some 70% on average are finally used in the production of bulletins.⁽¹⁴⁾ A good deal of the news is, therefore, far from being the spontaneous, unanticipated event.

The sources used for the compilation of the News Diary are essentially the same as for the News Prospects, and therefore, the content of the two is substantially of the same kind. It contains a good deal of the sort of routine news event of which news organisations customarily are given good notice: the publication of Government reports and those of other institutions; meetings of bodies such as the TUC and CBI from which official statements might be expected to result; conferences of learned societies and pressure groups; official lunches; estimated arrival times of "personalities" at airports; locations of speeches to be given by government ministers, and the like.

To supplement this kind of material, which is mostly derivable from public relations hand-outs, the Home News Editor has various other sources to hand. He is forewarned on occasion by "outside contacts" cultivated by the BBC. He reads a wide range of newspapers, like everyone else in the News Department, and these offer

some early indications of likely developments and contain announcements of "events" such as demonstrations and mass rallies. The "media culture"⁽¹⁵⁾ is an important source of relevance. An additional source of information of the routine kind described above is the BBC's "Future Events Unit" which acts as a clearing-house for publicity hand-outs, distributing a regular list to the various news and current affairs teams.

On the basis of these sources the News Diary lists the events and the times of occurrence. Where the story, however routine, is almost certainly going to be newsworthy - for example a full meeting of the TUC general council at a time of industrial crisis - the Home News Editor arranges for a correspondent or a reporter to cover it; such arrangements can always be altered in the light of the following day's news developments. The pre-planning of coverage is known as "fixing": apart from the deployment of reporting staff, arrangements have to be made to send an Outside Broadcast Unit out, to book a circuit from the Post Office; additionally permission has to be obtained from the organisers of events to make recordings.

(b) Foreign News Planning:

Each Tuesday at 11 am. there is a "Foreign News Futures Meeting" lasting for about one hour. This is attended by the Editor and Deputy Editor of Radio News, the Head of Home and Foreign Correspondents, the Foreign Correspondents, the Foreign News Editors for the radio and television services, the Diplomatic Correspondent, an assistant editor, the Foreign Duty Editor, and a representative of the External Services. The futures listing of stories and deployment arrangements is run through by the Foreign News Editor (Radio), and like the

morning meetings this weekly one is a pooling of expertise and news judgment. The Editor, Radio News, has the final word in decisions.

The agenda of the meeting is set by the Foreign Futures notes, which, like the other news diaries discussed in this chapter sets out a number of stories which are expected to be of news interest. At a futures meeting on the 14th May 1974, one story seen as being of particular significance was the likely resignation of President Nixon over the Watergate Scandal. The notes read:

"The crisis is expected to reach a peak some time around May 21st when the televised hearings of the House judiciary committee begin....it is thought the hearings will take place on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays beginning at 1430BST.....Given the mass of material which has been unearthed in the last twelve months on which the committee will focus, many observers believe the judiciary committee hearings will be more sensational than the Ervin hearings."

This extract encapsulates the duality of concerns at the futures meeting. On the one hand there is a strong prior evaluation of which story is likely to be newsworthy, and why, and how it represents a development in a continuing story. And on the other hand there is a practical concern with its timing, as this will have obvious relevance for planning output. The futures list also noted that the Radio Newsroom and a correspondent in Washington "have already begun work on 'obit' material on Nixon." There is, therefore, a possibility of stockpiling material in the case of predictable stories, against the occurrence of the event.

To take a somewhat different example, another futures story concerned Ronald Biggs, one of the Great Train Robbers. The question was whether he would be extradited from Brazil to the UK or find refuge elsewhere. The Home Affairs correspondent was especially invited to attend the meeting to brief it on whether Scotland Yard had made any moves to capture Biggs; they had not. Next, the Diplomatic Correspondent advised the meeting that the Foreign Office had not received a reply to its Note from the Brazilian Government. The ramifications of the (April 1974) coup d'état in Portugal for its former territories were also seen as newsworthy; the futures notes read:

"Mozambique is emerging as the most interesting story area. (Our Southern African Correspondent) is remaining there for the time being and will be making a trip to Beira where there was White v. Black rioting at the weekend. He may then go on to Tanzania where an important Frelimo gathering is thought to be about to take place."

This story provoked a good deal of discussion. It was thought that the correspondent should not go to Tanzania because he might not then manage to return to Mozambique where the situation was unstable, and anyway, asked the Foreign News Editor, "Would they let him into Dar?" He went on to inform the meeting of the purpose of the Frelimo gathering: it was thought that there was likely to be a decision to move out of guerilla warfare and enter the political arena. The Head of Home and Foreign Correspondents wanted to know "What will we find out?" Was there any point in sending a correspondent? The Editor wanted to know how long the meeting would go on because they would

still have to cover the Mozambique situation. It was decided that the Frelimo meeting would be "fed by a stringer" (a non-staff reporter) and that the newsroom would write the necessary copy to be "voiced by the FDE" (Foreign Duty Editor). A correspondent who had just returned from Rhodesia was then asked to "fill in" the apparent reactions to the Portuguese coup d'état which he had found there. After citing his contacts and their reliability he summed up by saying that there was "increasing concern, though it's still a minority" (of Whites) who were anxious.

Foreign futures meetings, combine, then, logistical and evaluative concerns. Much of the comment centres on the performance of given men in the field, and such reports as they are likely to be filing. The meeting acts as a forum for pooling intelligence. One correspondent had established good relations with the Syrian authorities; another was due to send a report to the Editor on the constraints affecting reporting from Peking. They provide a basis on which to plan coverage for the coming fortnight.

4. Servicing Units:

4.1. The Department of Home and Foreign Correspondents:

Organisationally distinct from both the Radio News Department and the Television News Department is the Department of Home and Foreign Correspondents. It has been mentioned that home correspondents in the BBC, as specialists, have a distinctive standing amongst the reporting staff. All specialists and foreign correspondents in the News Division come under the general direction of the Head of Home and Foreign Correspondents. This department is based at Broadcasting House, a reminder of the days when radio was the dominant medium. All correspondents have a primary commitment to the News Division, although

a good deal of their work, notably in radio, is for current affairs programmes.

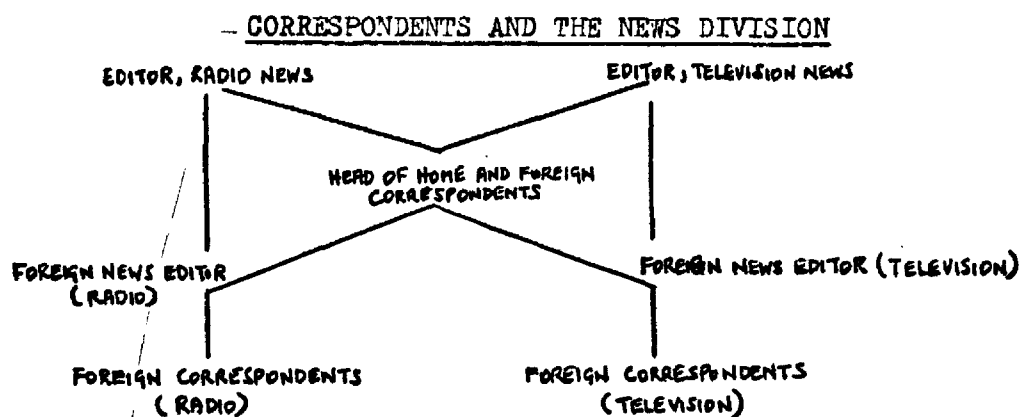
The Head of Home and Foreign Correspondents acts as an advisor to the Editors of Radio and Television News with respect to the general deployment of specialist staff (see Figure 3.4), an area which creates particular complexities when foreign assignments and postings are at issue. Until 1972 all correspondents were part of a single pool serving both radio and television outputs. Now, while they continue to report for both if circumstances so require, there are two fairly distinct groups of correspondents at home. For foreign news there are also distinctive assignments to one or other medium, but radio reports are very frequently used by Television News. The detailed management of deployment is in the hands of the Foreign News Editors, one at Radio News, the other at Television News. The Television News correspondents tend to be managed as a distinct team, with the Department of Home and Foreign Correspondents having a lesser say in their deployment. The technical requirements of television reporting led to the development of a distinct staff, and de facto day to day control is maintained at Television Centre.

(a) Home (specialist) correspondents: Like specialists in other news organisations the BBC home correspondents cover defined areas of news interest. These are listed in Figure 3.5. The role of the correspondent is seen as quite distinct from that of the reporter. Although correspondents do undertake "straight reporting", within the status structure of the News Division, home correspondents are identified as "experts". Non-specialist newsmen are advised to consult correspondents whenever a story they are working on falls into a relevant specialist area, and the senior editors ask them for advice at the various planning meetings. The Head of Home and Foreign Correspondents

said: "They're expected to generate their own stories; they assign themselves". This is by contrast to the 20 Radio News and 12 Television News reporters who are centrally assigned by the intake desk. The correspondent is expected to be able to tender general advice about his particular news field, as well as on specific stories.

(b) Foreign Correspondents: The BBC domestic services have 15 staff foreign correspondents posted abroad in various locations, and there are in addition 6 staff foreign correspondents working for the External Services who also provide despatches for the domestic ones. The BBC also has contractual arrangements with other correspondents who "string" for the BBC. These latter correspondents come under the direction of the Editor, External Services News who is in weekly contact with the Head of Home and Foreign Correspondents. Just as correspondents who are responsible either to Radio News or Television News provide both domestic and foreign news despatches for either service on request, similarly the External Services' correspondents meet requests made by the domestic services. Apart from the regular newsroom briefings by the Foreign Duty Editor which were noted earlier, correspondents have regular contact with London for discussions of longer term trends. Correspondents stationed in Europe have a regular weekly "hook-up" (irrespective of other contacts during the week) with the Head of Home and Foreign Correspondents, or the Foreign News Editors in Radio and Television News. There is also a daily briefing with the BBC bureau in the United States at 2.30 pm. Foreign News discussions on coverage are held twice each day in Broadcasting House: at 10.10 am. and 4.20 pm.

FIGURE 3.4.



4.ii. The BBC's General News Service:

"Our motto is: 'We get it, and they
can do what they like with it'"

(Intake Editor, Radio News)

The BBC works under competitive, or at least, duopolistic market conditions.⁽¹⁶⁾ A major criterion of efficiency in newsgathering is that of speed. One advantage of having a unified corporate structure lies in the possibility of operating a central clearing-house for information. BBC News is serviced in this way by what is described as "our own internal news agency". This is the General News Service (GNS), which is based in the radio newsroom and operates on principles similar to those of news agencies. There are two-way telex links between Broadcasting House in London and all of the GNS "customers" - the various news and current affairs units in both the radio and television services.

(a) Input and output: From the point of view of what is reported here the GNS is most significant as a part of the Intake function, although it also sends information out. As a part of News Intake it falls under the responsibilities of the Radio News Intake Editor.

(b) Clearing information: The GNS team is headed by a Duty Editor who is responsible for its routine output, and also for ensuring that any special requests made by one or other BBC "customer" are dealt

FIGURE 3.5.

BBC HOME CORRESPONDENTS IN NEWS DIVISION:

News Specialism	No. of Staff	Shared by both Services	Television Only	Radio Only
Politics and Parliament	7	Political Editor; Political Correspondent and 5 others		
Economics	2	Economics Correspondent		Economics Reporter
Industry	3		Industrial Correspondent	Industrial Correspondent Industrial Reporter
Home Affairs	2		Home Affairs Correspondent	Home Affairs Correspondent
Science	2		Science Correspondent	Science Correspondent
Aero-space and Defence		Aero-space & Defence Corr.		
Diplomatic and Court	2		Diplomatic Correspondent	Diplomatic & Court Corr.
Church Affairs	2			Church Affairs Correspondent
Agriculture	1			Agricultural Correspondent
TOTAL	20	9	4	8

FIGURE 3.6.

BBC STAFF FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS BASED OVERSEAS

Area	Country and City	No.	BBC Service		
			External	Radio	Television
<u>Europe</u>	USSR; Moscow	1		1	
	France; Paris	1		1	
(European)	Belgium; Brussels	1		1	
	Irish Rep; Dublin	1		1	
	W.Germany; Wiesbaden	1			1
	(Chief European) Belgium; Brussels	1		1	1
	Spain; Madrid	1	1		
	Austria; Vienna	1	1		
<u>North America</u>	USA; Washington	2		1	1
	USA; New York	1		1	
<u>South America</u>	Argentina; Buenos Aires	1	1		
<u>Middle East</u>	Lebanon; Beirut	2		1	1
	Cairo	1	1		
	Ankara	1	1		
<u>Far East</u>	Hong Kong	1			1
	Singapore	1	1		
	Japan; Tokyo	1		1	
<u>Southern Africa</u>	S.Africa; Johannesburg	1		1	
<u>Australasia</u>	Sydney	1		1	
TOTAL		21	6	11	5

with. In this way, news items of various kinds are directed through the desk according to the presumed interests of the audiences in question: these might be international, national, regional or local. The GNS has available to it all the agency - and BBC - originated news coming in to the output desks. The telex network is centrally co-ordinated by a computer and the sub-editors working on the desk code their copy so that it is automatically selected to meet both specific requests and general needs. If, for example, there is a House of Commons debate on steel, then the story will be cleared for all the steel-producing areas. If local "personalities" from the regions or localities served by BBC stations are in London, then information and sometimes interviews are channelled to the interested "customers".

(c) Desk organisation: As the desk is concerned with transmitting "relevant" news for internal BBC consumption a selection process necessarily has to take place; the Chief sub acts as the copy taster as well as sending out material himself. There are two subs, one of whom has responsibility for local radio and the other for regional radio and TV. The copy which is transmitted over the wires is generally news agency material (particularly Press Association) which is re-written "in radio style". This sort of wired copy is known as a "Rip 'n Read" as it is intended to be taken directly off the teleprinter at the destination newsroom and read over the air. The copy has to meet the deadlines of news production in the local and regional stations. As for the London newsroom, speed is one of the overriding values, although it is counterpointed by a stress on accuracy, or "reliability".

(d) "Beating the competition": The relationship between London and the other newsrooms is a reciprocal one: the benefits of speed and accuracy are intended to work both ways. While the BBC relies on a diversity of sources for its news coverage its greatest preference is for its own. In coverage of Britain, until the GNS network was established there was a heavy reliance on the Press Association's copy, which as it is wired to every major news organisation in the country, afforded the BBC no competitive advantage in "tip-offs". Now, according to the Deputy Editor, Radio News:

"We take a hell of a lot from local radio stations: it's really transformed our home news-gathering set-up, whereas we had to rely almost exclusively on PA (other than staff reporters and special correspondents). Outside the main cities, London and the South-East, local radio has taken over as our main supplier."

From the standpoint of national BBC radio and TV news it is important to have "the edge" over ITN and the London commercial radio stations, which, it is claimed, is provided by the GNS network.

For the Editor of the Day, and the News Organiser, the earlier the news of a story "breaks" the easier it is to accommodate it in the scheduled bulletin, and to "fix it" logistically. For example, it was once pointed out with a great deal of pride, that a story about the death of a miner, who had been knocked down by a lorry while picketing, had been sent in by Radio Leeds and "beat PA by ten minutes". Newsmen cite this sort of occurrence as a justification of the "professionalism" of their newsgathering system. The Editor of the Day is as a matter of course alerted to any such "newsbreaks".

As the GNS provides a wider service than for Radio News alone, in London it is on a loudspeaker hook-up to all radio and TV news and

current affairs programmes and executives in Broadcasting House, Television Centre and Bush House. Whenever a news item seems to be of sufficient importance to warrant a place, the Duty Editor makes a brief "newsflash"-like announcement over the tannoy system - "PA tell us that three miners were killed going down a shaft" - and then arranges for further details to be sent out over the teleprinters.

This chapter has described the organisational context within which the daily production of radio news takes place. Production is constrained by the need to deliver bulletins at pre-set times, and each bulletin emerges as the product of a complex process of co-ordination. Each morning, a framework of shared expectations is articulated in the editorial meeting which is subsequently modified as the newsday takes its course. The structure of control discussed in Chapter 2 is linked into the newsroom production level through the key role of the Editor of the Day. A parallel system operates at Television Centre, as the next chapter shows.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. As Chapter 4, below, points out, this is not so for Television News, which does not have a night desk.
2. The weekends are regarded as "slack" periods, or more in the parlance, as "slow newsdays". It is not thought necessary to have a fully-fledged planning meeting on Saturday and Sunday, although discussions concerning proposed arrangements for those days takes place during the week. The Editors of Radio and Television News, or their deputies, are, however, always "on call" during the weekend, and telephone the newsroom to "keep an eye on things". So, the substance of editorial control retains its impact, although its form is a little different.
3. These meetings have been described in Halloran et al., op.cit., 1970. The brief account given there is in accordance with that given here. I have given these meetings rather more attention in this study as they have such obvious importance for an understanding of the management of daily news production.
4. This refers to one of the daily radio circuits which links the London newsrooms to the BBC foreign correspondents in various newsgathering centres (such as Washington, Paris, Rome).
5. The full text of this read: "We should not publish views that the Tribunal will not discover the true facts. Nothing should be published which might prejudice the findings of the inquiry. Ask yourselves the question 'Is this piece of information something which Lord Widgery might want to hear as evidence from a witness?'

If so don't use it. Lord Widgery's present inquiry will not be concerned with events subsequent to 3rd January. In reporting any future incidents, including, e.g. Newry, avoid reference to comparisons with Londonderry on Bloody Sunday that might prejudice the inquiry." Memorandum from Editor, News and Current Affairs to all News and Current Affairs Editors, 2nd February 1972.

6. See below, Chapter 9.
7. There are two Assistant Editors in charge of the radio newsroom. Each of them works for a three-day period, during the daytime shift. Thus, one of the two occupies the editorial chair from Monday to Wednesday, the other from Thursday to Saturday. The night-shifts and Sundays are usually presided over by a Senior Duty Editor. This reflects the higher status accorded both daytime and weekday news in radio.
8. Halloran et al, op.cit., 1970, p.158.
9. See Tunstall, op.cit., 1970, p.29 for an ideal type of newspaper desk organisation.
10. This does give too neat a picture: there are, in fact, "late" news items which have to be dealt with after this point of the production cycle.
11. There are other, more minor ones, which would only clutter the account were they to be considered. For example, the Radio 4 desk produces the five-minute feature "Today's Papers" for The Today Programme.

12. John Crawley, former Foreign News Editor, BBC, currently Chief Assistant to the Director-General, has observed: "We want someone who shares our background to explain to us what is going on. And if we want somebody who shares our background, there is a danger in having a foreign correspondent abroad too long, whether he remains in one post or moves at intervals of a few years from one post to another. Home leave is important, and we supplement it in various ways by periods of consultation at home, by T.V. news courses, and by attachment for a spell of home duty, all of which brings the correspondent into close working contact with his colleagues and his audience."
The Work of a BBC Foreign Correspondent, BBC Lunch-time Lectures, Third Series - I, 14 October 1964, p.7; emphasis added.
13. Details concerning the monitoring service can be found in the BBC Handbook, 1972, pp. 109-110.
14. This estimate was given by the Home News Editor (Planning), BBC Radio News, and was endorsed by the Deputy Editor, Radio News.
15. See Philip Elliott, op.cit., 1972, p.62.
16. See Chapters 6 and 7 below.

CHAPTER IV:
TELEVISION NEWS

The previous chapter gave an account of how news is produced in the Radio News Department of the BBC. This chapter sets out to give a parallel account of production routines in Television News. What is aimed at here is a comparison which points out the distinctiveness of the different media, so, unless otherwise indicated, the account given above applies in equal measure here. It should be noted from the outset that the more complex technology in television has produced a concomitantly more complex organisational structure: to the outsider looking in it has (in the popular sense) a much more "bureaucratic" appearance than radio. The chapter on Radio News was presented first to give a yardstick for evaluating complexity.

1. The "newsday" as a working day:

While Radio News operates a 24-hour continuous cycle, in Television News the "newsday" begins at around 9 am. and ends at midnight. There is a simple explanation for the absence of an overnight news service: the output times do not necessitate it with the latest news going out at 11.30 pm. and the earliest at 12.55 pm. During the night the TV news operation is dependent upon the Radio News team to alert its news organiser to any sudden "news breaks".

1.1. The "morning meeting":

The weekday mornings at Television Centre's sixth floor begin in ways identical to those at Broadcasting House. As the previous chapter noted there is a link-up every morning between the two sister news services. At TV Centre the "morning meeting" is chaired by the Editor, Television News or his deputies. These editors are the executive and

managerial heads of the Television News Department and as in Radio News they have access to, and knowledge of, decisions made at a policy level.

Just as at Radio News the "morning meeting" at Television Centre has the function of marking the start of a new day and of pooling information and identifying potential problems. The sequence of events also follows a broadly similar pattern.

09.50 am: The Chairman opens discussion. The Home News Editor runs through the News Diary, and then the Foreign News Editor deals with the Foreign News Prospects.

The "morning meetings" at Television News are less apt to begin with a general discussion than at Radio News as there is no overnight coverage to be evaluated. The meeting nevertheless provides a forum for the exercise of editorial control before the locus of decision-making moves to the "shopfloor" level of newsroom practice. Editorial attitudes are made clear during the course of running through the "diary stories".

There is a difference of flavour and style between the radio and television editorial conferences. In television there is a pre-eminent concern with the "logistics", with what is often described as "the mechanics of the thing, getting the stuff in". Because television news has a far more complex technological base than radio the "morning meeting" is also much less of a purely journalistic gathering and brings in people with relevant technical expertise (see Figure 4.1 on p.127). To an outsider the mentioning of "satellite times" and "picture lines" abounds in discussions to an extent which makes problems of technique seem to dominate far more than the substantive news judgements which actuate the quest for pictures. One senior TV executive, comparing his problems with those of Radio News, observed:

"There is an important mechanical difference between the two. It is simply this - that TV news at its optimum working method (providing images of the event on the screen) uses much more complex equipment: it is also larger, more cumbersome and more obtrusive. The newspaper reporter is indistinguishable from the general public apart from his notebook and pencil. The radio reporter is also a single man with his own equipment. But a TV reporter will need a crew..... To do the job effectively you do need a certain amount of physical movement over varying distances in order to get the picture on the air. Compare this with radio: You can get a totally effective report through provided you can get to a phone anywhere in the world. Take the recent climbing tragedy in the Cairngorms. The radio reporter could give you the story over the phone; he needn't move very far towards you. The TV reporter on the other hand has far more difficulty: he has to get to the scene of the action with a crew; the film on which events have been recorded needs processing and developing, and in this case it had to be got to Edinburgh or Glasgow, and quickly. From there it could cover the majority of the distance electronically....."

This account gives clearly the grounds for the intrusiveness of logistic concerns.

Procedurally, there are few differences between the meetings at Broadcasting House and Television Centre. Firstly, the Home News

Editor conducts Television's morning meeting on the basis of the "News Diary"⁽¹⁾, which is a document listing the home news stories thought likely to be newsworthy.

Like Radio's News Prospects, the News Diary gives the whereabouts of reporters and crews and also the logistical arrangements made for the collection of news material later in the day. As the quotation from the senior editor indicates, these arrangements are complex, though, on the whole, less fraught with uncertainties when it comes to home reporting. Reporters and crews have to be assigned, Post Office lines have to be booked for pictures to be sent down for videotaping, all within schedules which allow the edited visual material to meet the output times.

As in Radio News discussion of the foreign stories follows that of likely home news; when the Home News Editor has finished, and comments made by all interested parties, the Foreign News Editor runs through the "Foreign News Prospects"⁽²⁾ which display a similar concern for newsworthiness, and logistical considerations. These "Prospects" give the locations of BBC film crews abroad and list film available from the news film agencies on the various stories. The times at which BBC reports or film from agencies becomes available is of key importance for the detailed planning of the day's bulletins. Pictures from abroad can either be flown in as film and collected by a despatch rider from London Airport, or transmitted to TV Centre via satellite for videotaping.

Key participants in the morning meeting are the two Editors of the Day at Television News; bulletins are broadcast on both BBC channels and each channel comes under the operational responsibility of an Editor of the Day with a role broadly similar to that of their counterpart at Radio News. Each editor works within differing time constraints, BBC-1 having more frequent outputs than BBC-2, and both having distinctive

FIGURE 4.1.

THE "MORNING MEETING" AT TELEVISION CENTRE

JOB TITLE:	ROLE IN INTERNAL COMMUNICATION
Editor/Dep. Editor	Chairman; link with ENCA and DG and the Radio Service
2 Editors of the Day	operational responsibility in the newsroom; oversight of BBC-1 and BBC-2 desks; 'looking forward'
2 Senior Duty Editors	operational control in newsroom
News Editor/Dep. News Editor	oversight of advanced planning, daily deployment and logistics
News organiser	link with reporting staff in the field
Foreign News Editor	oversight of advanced planning and logistics on foreign side
Foreign Duty Editor	link with newsroom, foreign correspondents
Senior TV Engineer	responsible for studio and engineering
Studio Director	responsible for "the production"
Senior Film Editor	link with cutting rooms, viewing suites
Videotape Editor	link with videotape suites
Stills organiser	link with graphics department

programme considerations to meet. The BBC-2 editor is far less subject to time pressures as his output comes right at the close of the newsday: the arrival of "late" stories therefore presents less of a problem and fixation for him. The meeting alerts the two programme editors to stories with news potential: "The train crash story may be worth watching; we can put voice on that if the pictures stand up".

10.00 am: Television News and Radio News are linked over the sound circuit, and an exchange of information takes place.

The previous chapter has already dealt with this point of contact between the two news services. An extensive degree of shared understanding is clearly demonstrated when the Chairman of the morning meeting at Radio News can run through a list such as this which remains unquestioned at Television Centre: "Lots of industrials: TUC, CBI; Docks Board. Chobham offer. BUA including redundancies. Race relations - decline in discrimination. Radio news trial special. Provisional IRA truce....Foreigners: New York Primary; Kissinger in Peking. Not much else." TV News: "We didn't find anything."

10.10-10.15 am: As at Radio News, the meeting begins to wind down, breaking up informally.

1.ii. Operational responsibility: the Editor of the Day:

The television newsroom operates on a newsday beginning roughly at 9 am. and ending a little before midnight. As in Radio News, a great deal is made of the fact that the decision-making power resides at the operational level, although once again this claim must be subject to the qualifications made in Chapter 2 above about the importance of "reference upwards" in standard BBC practice, and the structure of expectations embodied in the planning, discussed in Chapter 3. The

next chapter will deal in more detail with some of the implications of the newsroom power structure. In brief, it can be said at this point, that the "theory" of delegated editorial responsibility found in Radio News is identical with that in Television; as one senior news executive put it, "the Editor of the Day is responsible across the board." Within the limitations which have been pointed out, the Editors of the Day in Television News have at their disposal the entire range of Departmental resources.

1.iii. Newsroom Structure: An overview:

Like Radio News, the newsroom at Television Centre is organised on the desk principle (see Figure 4.2 on p. 142).

(a) Outputs: The main channel is BBC-1, which draws the largest of the audiences. After a five-minute news summary at 12.55 pm, the more major outputs of the day occur at 5.45 pm. and at 9.00 pm., with the latter bulletin, The Nine O'Clock News, being seen as the "flagship programme" of the Television News Department, and the direct competitor to ITN's News at Ten. There is also a five-minute late news summary. The other channel, BBC-2 carries only two news outputs, the main one being News Extra, a late-night news bulletin, which tends to be thought of as a programme appealing to a minority of informed people "really interested" in the news of the day.

(b) Inputs: The newsgathering organisation, as in Radio News, is coordinated by the "Intake" section of the news operation, which breaks down into both a foreign and a home news branch. The advanced planning section of "Intake" is also present in the newsroom.

1.iv. The Production of Television News:

Just as in Radio, the processes of news production have to be seen in relation to the output times which present the deadlines to the producers. The production of news for BBC-1 falls into a pattern of phases each of which is delimited by the period of time between bulletins. Whereas in Radio News the highest audiences are pulled in at 8 am. and 1 pm., the largest viewing figures for television news are those for The Nine O'Clock News. For the Editor of the Day on Channel 1 this represents the time at which the news producing effort has to "peak". That is not to say that the two earlier broadcasts are unimportant, but they are shorter and less laden with prestige.

For BBC-2 the main effort is directed towards the late-night News Extra. Televised news is, as a product, a more complex combination of elements than radio news: it is composed of scripts spoken by the newsreader which are written to film, videotape, still photographs, maps, diagrams and other visual symbols; it contains "on the spot" or studio reports from reporters and correspondents which may be edited film reports, or "live inserts".

The following is an ideal typical account of bulletin production:

(a) Planning the bulletins:

The outline account of Radio News production given in the previous chapter holds broadly good for Television as well. The account which is given follows the same phases.

Deciding the "running order": Once again the routine practices at Television Centre parallel those of Broadcasting House. At about 10.30 am. the Editors of the Day for each channel take their seats at their respective desks and confront the problems of bulletin construction. Their problems differ slightly: the BBC-1 Editor has to work out a provisional running order for the lunchtime news while at the same time thinking ahead

to the later and longer outputs; on BBC-2, with the exception of a short news summary at 19.30 pm.⁽³⁾ the Editor of the Day has the entire day ahead of him, and works with a rather different programme concept. Unlike Radio, however, it is standard practice in Television News for the Editor of the Day to have a "running in day": before his two-day shift at the desk he spends a day in familiarising himself in detail with proposed coverage worked out by advanced planning meetings which he himself has attended, and makes requests to the News Intake section to "set up" any other stories he thinks are likely to be newsworthy. As one senior news executive put it: "He doesn't simply shape the mass of the material, but he also has a hand in getting it in." This extra involvement stems from the overweening concern with the complexities of the logistics, and the greater organisational size of Television News, which has bred an apparent need for greater formality in planning when compared to radio.

Given this preparation, the Editor of the Day spends about half an hour in discussion with the Senior Duty Editor, his second-in-command, whose role was described in one interview as "seeing to the executing of decisions we make jointly. He keeps a detailed eye on the scripts, detailed supervision, briefing the subs." Bearing in mind all the available information about potential news stories drawn from the various sources, the two Senior Editors draw up a "Provisional Running Order". Once again, the central - and recurrent - concern can be seen to be with the interwoven processes of selection, ordering and treatment. As in radio production, the problem is one of finding a "lead" story around which to "build the programme"; a plaintive "Anything happening we can lead on?" is frequently heard in the newsroom. The editors will at this stage know that a good deal of previously determined

home and foreign coverage is already under way and due in for editing at various points of the day: "routine industrials", Northern Ireland coverage, Ministerial press conferences, and the like, are as a rule "set up" in advance by the Intake sections, and the arrival times of several foreign stories is known a day in advance. The morning's work begins, therefore, in relation to a partly-filled canvas.

Allocating stories: Practices identical to those which are followed in Radio News prevail. The Editor of the Day and Senior Duty Editor allocate sub-editorial responsibility to the editorial staff along the lines of the pecking order described in Chapter 3; the "lead" story consistently goes to the most senior "writer"⁽⁴⁾ on the desk. As indicated, much of the reporting strength has by this time been allocated, leaving some three or four general reporters available for deployment by the London newsroom; correspondents, as in Radio News, will tend to have decided on coverage in consultation with the Editor of the Day and the Intake desk.

(b) The later phases of bulletin construction: The television news bulletin is a collectively-assembled product which is rather more complex in organisation than that in radio news. The underlying principles of bulletin construction are the same however, consisting of a series of parallel selection processes which, ideally, are intended to mesh together in time for the transmission.

The sub-editing processes: The account has so far made it amply clear that television news obeys, in large measure, a pictorial imperative. The sub-editing processes reflect the distinctiveness of the medium. When the sub-editor is given responsibility for a specific time segment of the news bulletin, the "package" with which he fills it has rather different components from that in radio news. The copy-editing and writing process

remains the factor constant to both media, where the newsreader links together the discrete news items with the spoken word. However, the rest of the news material is selected from available videotape and film, or "live" material. In addition to this there are other visual resources: still photographs, graphs, diagrams all comprise part of the available repertoire.

As in radio production, the sub-editors work within guidelines set by the Editor of the Day, and the discipline imposed upon them by the nature of the news material. Their tasks fall into various categories: writing short items for the newsreader; writing "cues" which introduce reports or other recorded material; directing the cutting of film by technical film editors; directing the electronic editing of videotape by videotape editors.⁽⁵⁾

Again, as in radio, as one newsman put it, "the minutiae of detail are seen to by the Senior Duty Editor". He went on to note,

"All the copy goes to him. He makes suggestions about change and development. He keeps the subs supplied with up-to-date copy; he's the central clearing agency; he has to make sure that everyone knows what's happening - for example, changes in the running order."

The Editors of the Day, like their Radio News counterparts, oversee as many activities as they can, going with the sub-editors into the cutting rooms and videotape suites to supervise the selection of shots.⁽⁶⁾ The wide scope of these editorial activities can be illustrated by one observation from the field notes:

"There was a filmed interview from Scotland with Jimmy Reid (shipworkers' leader) and a representative of a US company (which was buying the bankrupt shipyard). Both the Editors of the Day were in the cutting room, the Chief sub, the film editor. They unanimously agreed that

a shot of the two men shaking hands would make "a good headline shot": it represented a mixture of programme considerations and the guts of the story as seen by them. Editor 1: "That could be an 'out'. I want it simple, quick, easy as possible. Where should we put the handshake?" (The Editor cut out the sub's discretion). "We'll have one minute forty of the interview in. It probably gives the flavour of what he thinks. Forty-five seconds of thingy, with a good handshake in between".

The sub-editing process in television is complicated by the fact that such a great deal of the work has to be done by technical editors under the direction of the journalistic newsroom staff. While there is also this technical dimension to editing sound tapes in radio production it is simpler because reports or "actuality inserts" can be directly slotted into the news-reader's script. In television production sound and visuals have to be related.⁽⁷⁾

The updating process: The concept of news has a symbiotic relation to the concept of change and so "updating" is integral to the production process. It takes two principal forms: the accommodation of "new facts" (changes, developments) in stories which will be kept in the running order; and the replacement of entire stories by "new" ones in line with the newsman's law of the survival of the newsworthiest. In the last chapter an account was given of ways in which the newsmen are apprised of new developments by sources internal to the BBC.

Each channel has its own copy taster who performs a role identical to the one at Broadcasting House, and they give an identical account of their activities: "I sort out the wheat from the chaff". This selection process takes place within a framework of expectations about the newsworthiness of stories likely to be transmitted:

P.S. How do you know what to look for?

Copy taster: "First there's the Diary: that's made up on the previous day. We watch out for tape on all of these things. There's the Foreign News Prospects, and I sort out the tape on the stories. It gives you an idea of what the stories will be. And I'm watching for new stories in addition."

The copy taster works within the existing definitions of the expected, and looks for the unexpected on the basis of his experience of "knowing what makes news". At Television News there is an additional visual dimension to the copy taster's selection (as in newspapers): he makes selections amongst agency wired "stills" (photographs). When any developments strike him as significant he tells the Senior Duty Editor or the Editor of the Day.

There are two other important sources of regular updating: as in Radio News both home and foreign intake keep up a flow of messages to the Editors of the Day. The Senior Duty Editor alerts the sub-editors concerned if this has not already been done by the copy taster or Intake.

Rehearsals: By an hour before the transmission, the Editor of the Day has available to him a fairly clear idea of the running order he intends to follow. The pre-transmission hour is the period during which the various selection processes begin to bind together: the bulk of film and videotape editing is completed, the individual pages of the news-reader's script are compiled according to the anticipated order. Editing and scripting do, however, continue right up to, and occasionally beyond, the commencement of transmission.

The major difference at this stage of the production process between radio and television news lies in the more limited flexibility of the latter. The constraints derive from purely technological factors. Whereas

the "run-through" at Radio News is simply an informal reading, by the newsreader, of the available scripted material, and a familiarisation with where tape-recorded inserts come in the sequence of news items, at Television Centre a much more elaborate set of procedures is gone through.

Half an hour before the bulletin is due to be transmitted there is a studio rehearsal on the basis of the existing script and visual content. The studio director assigned to the news for the channel in question works through the anticipated sequence. He tests the range of visual sources which are fed into the news bulletin to see if they are in working order. For example, film has to be laced in reels for the telecine machines (a device which converts film pictures into electronic pictures), but it has to be in a sequence which follows the script. The director has to test whether "live" sources - for example an outside broadcast unit, or the BBC television studio at Westminster - are in working order, and can be expected to function when later fed into the bulletin. Camera movements are practiced to see if they fit into the split-second timing of the script. The newsreader is alerted to the cues he might expect.⁽⁸⁾ This kind of preparation means that the possibility of making major changes in the running order is circumscribed. As one Editor of the Day observed: "The bulletin is changeable while on the air, but you have to balance the desirability of last-minute change against practicability. You can't drop and change with absolute freedom. There mayn't be time for me to run through the story. There are technical limitations: it's not sure that you can get everything in time."

Transmission: A news broadcast, while a complex, collective product, has to be presented as a unified one. Once again the "anchoring" role of the newsreader is crucial. Whereas in Radio News production arrangements are relatively simple, those for television are

complex. The transmission is directed from a studio, the production decisions taken by the Editor of the Day being executed by a studio director. There is a more complex interplay of roles in an atmosphere of refined tension. In addition to the expectation that some new story might "break" and pose problems for the running order, there is the attendant anxiety that there are many potential technical hitches which could affect the timing of the transmission and leave a "hole". For example, many reports are in the form of "live injects" from a distant source, reliant therefore upon satellites or land lines which are subject to technical failure. Film stories have to be laced into reels and occasionally breakages occur, or incorrect sequences are put together.

The structure of a television news transmission is much more formal than a radio news broadcast. The newsreader sits in a studio separated from the gallery where direction takes place by a glass partition. He has an earpiece through which he receives instructions from the studio director. The Editor of the Day cannot wander in and alter the running order: the very existence of the camera in the studio rules out such easy behaviour. The studio director is responsible for "the production". He has to see that the scripted bulletin is followed: that film appears when required, videotapes are run at the right moment, stills, graphics and captions are all in line with the plan.

As in Radio News, part of the tension arises from the expectation that there will be changes. At the start of the transmission a clock is started which counts down the minutes and seconds available to the newslot. This symbolises the drama of TV transmission. It is routinely the case that bulletins are "overset", that there are too many stories for the available duration, and this means that "drops" will have to

take place. Bulletins are "overset" because this gives the Editor of the Day a wider option for later selections:

"A lot comes in between 6.30 and 7.30. You have to make sure there's enough there. On six major stories we haven't got material: it has to come from the US and the regions. Four are vt - there could be a technical hitch, so there could be a four minute hole. I like to reassure myself we have enough. There has to be a balance between not creating overwork and having too little. You don't want too much to fall down. The theory is that you choose at 7.30 what fits the pattern best, and then make your choice. Everything should be in by then".

(Editor of the Day, BBC-2)

The Editor of the Day and the studio director work in tandem at transmission. The editor makes decisions about content which the director executes; throughout the transmission the editor and the Senior Duty Editor remain obsessed with the timing. Terse instructions flow from the Editor of the Day to the director: "Drop 14 Dublin, First words 15 slightly changed. 63 docks out; we don't want docks". As in radio news, though less directly because of the intervening organisational and technological complexity, the Editor of the Day exercises control over the detail of the bulletin's content. During the last minutes of the pre-transmission period and during the transmission itself the need for control expresses itself in terms of a fixation with duration:

"the sheer pressure of time takes over. If you want to drop 1 minute 34 seconds then you look for a story of that size and out it goes. You'd only keep it if

it was really important - and sometimes not then."

(Senior Duty Editor, Television News).

Changes occur not only through "dropping" existing stories, but also by bringing in late "newsbreaks", as in radio news. There is "updating" during transmission if there are no technical problems: on one occasion, for example, nineteen minutes through The Nine O'Clock News, agency tape was brought in which stated that 1 more person was known to have died in a Paris air crash. This was duly included in the bulletin.

Briefings and post-mortem: By contrast with radio news, a quite distinctive feature of television news practice is the formal briefing. Each output desk has its own news conferences at various points of the newsday. It was noted at the beginning of this chapter that there was a great deal more formal consultation in television news than at radio. At the morning meeting the attendance is representative of many different classes of expertise relevant to television production. The same applies to newsroom briefings.

The frequency of the briefings is determined by the number of outputs on each channel. They bring together the editorial staff on each desk, the Foreign Duty Editor and News Organiser, the studio director and his assistant, and the technical staff concerned with the range of visual inputs: namely, a film editor, a video-tape editor, an engineer, graphics and stills assistants. Both desks hold such a meeting at about 11.00 am. It is of greater importance on the BBC-1 desk which has an early bulletin to produce at 12.55 pm. Although, as relatively little reporting that is visually "interesting" has been done by lunchtime, this bulletin is not seen as professionally very significant. At 12.30 pm., a post mortem is

held on this bulletin on the BBC-1 desk, which shades into a planning meeting for the next bulletin at 5.45 pm. As the intake operation "delivers" more visual material later in the day, the Editor of the Day also keeps in mind his later bulletin at 9.00 pm. A parallel planning meeting is also in progress at around this time on the BBC-2 desk. This meeting is particularly important as there is now much firmer advanced information available about what film, videotape and "live" inputs will be available for use later in the day. The flavour of these meetings is captured in this extract from the field notes:

Editor of the Day: "Alright - docks is the lead. We should have an interview. Have they finished the mass meeting?"

Chief Sub: "Yes".

Editor of the Day: "Then we'll assume we have an interview....

Rail: let's do industrial disputes: Harland and Wolff; we've established that there's library film. A still and film for vision.

....Shall we go abroad now? Hijack? Vietnam?

Leave space for that Belfast vt. There's the Eurovision so we mightn't need a still.

Vietnam: vision map, vt. We might get film for the 9 o'clock. US Primaries: vt, stills, wiping. The mine?"

Senior Duty Editor: "We've got a nice still."

General News Service Announcement: "Vietnam talks suspended."

Editor of the Day: "Possible vision".

The structure of the meeting is suggested by the form of interactions recorded above. It is largely dominated by the Editor of the Day who basically states the stories to be covered, and having determined their

order and visual treatment after quite minimal consultation with his colleagues, he dictates the running order to the Senior Duty Editor who simply writes it all down. There is some variation in personal style. Nevertheless, the power of ultimate decision rests in the hands of the Editor of the Day who states the sense of the meeting, even though he might invite comment. This is a further instance of the exercise of ... powers legitimised by the concept of editorial responsibility.

The editor consults the available staff in cases where specific production or technical problems seem likely, for example, regarding the booking of land lines or whether "library" (archive) film is available. "Orders" are placed with the stills and graphics assistants, and sub-editors are briefed on their stories. The meeting lasts between twenty minutes and half an hour.

Such meetings recur after each subsequent output on BBC-1. There is a further post mortem after the 5.45 pm. bulletin at which the running order is rearranged, stories are dropped or altered, and a snap assessment is given of the production as a whole. The Editor of the Day is informed by the News Organiser, and the Foreign Duty Editor, of any developments on the intake side which are likely to affect the next bulletin, The Nine O'Clock News.

The 6 pm. briefing also lasts between twenty minutes and half an hour, and follows the same principles as the previous one. Finally, the last meeting takes place at 9.25 pm. to plan the "late news" which is generally an "edited down" version of The Nine O'Clock News.

As the BBC-2 desk has the entire day before producing its output, the pace of consultation, as of work, tends to be more leisurely. After the early afternoon meeting, there is a further one at about 2.30 pm. which lasts half an hour, during which amendments are made to the existing running order in line with changed preferences. There is further

The floor plan is divided into several main sections:

- Top Section:** Features a large rectangular area labeled "TO NEWS STUDIOS" with an arrow pointing right. Below this is a "DUTY ED" station.
- Left Section:** Contains a "NEWS AGENCY COPY MACHINES" area. Below it is a "PLANNING UNIT" with a "TV CAMERA" icon. Further down is an "INTAKE DESK" with "TV MONITORS" and "X LINES BOOKING ASST.". Below the intake desk is a "NEWS FILM UNIT" with "X SEC" and "X SEC" stations, and a "NEWS ADMIN. BLOCK" with an arrow pointing left.
- Center Section:** Contains two large desks labeled "BBC-1" and "BBC-2". Each desk has "TV MONITORS" on either side. The BBC-1 desk has stations for "NEWSREADERS COPY-TASTER", "X SNR D. ED", "X NEWS TRANSM. ASST", "X STILL ASST", and "X TYPIST". The BBC-2 desk has stations for "COPY-TASTER", "X ED OF DAY", "X SNR D. ED", "X NEWS TRANSM. ASST", "X STILL ASST", and "X TYPIST".
- Right Section:** Contains a "STILLS DEPT." with an "AUTO-COPY" machine. Below it is a "FOREIGN NEWS TRAFFIC CUBICLE". At the bottom right is a "REPORTERS' ROOM" with "X SEC" and "X SEC" stations, and a "NEWS ADMIN. BLOCK" with an arrow pointing left.
- Bottom Section:** Contains a "NEWS ADMIN. BLOCK" with an arrow pointing left, and a "NEWS FILM UNIT" with "X SEC" and "X SEC" stations.

discussion about one hour before the five-minute news summary transmitted at 7.30 pm., but as this is simply a written bulletin with the newsreader in vision, major technical discussions about visual inputs are not necessary. A further briefing takes place an hour or so before News Extra is transmitted at about 11.00 pm.

In sum, communication is formalised at certain stages of the production process, the aim being to bring together the disparate operational groups in order to establish common understandings. The linchpin of this procedure is the Editor of the Day who sets out the division of labour, story sequence and treatment; the Senior Duty Editor has responsibility for oversight of the details right up to the moment of transmission.

1.v. Summary: This account, in parallel with that of the radio operation, is meant to outline the main features of the newsroom production processes. The distinctiveness of the two output groups lies not only in the pattern of work but in the differing programme concepts employed in shaping the content of the news.

2. News Intake: An overview:

The logistical arrangements made in television news parallel in detail those in radio news. The News Editor has overall supervision of the "Home News" side and the Foreign News Editor that of "Foreign News". There are also daily and advanced planning functions for each branch.

2.i. Daily Intake:

"Intake offers ideas and gets knowledge of things that are happening. Its responsible for getting film into the building". (New Editor, Television News).

2.i.a) Home News: the News Organiser and Film Operations Organiser:

In television news the news organiser plays an identical role to that of his radio counterpart: a link-man between reporting staff and the newsroom who keeps both the Editor of the Day and reporting crews up to date. One News Organiser described his role as "similar to a news editor on a newspaper; it's non-creative, getting the film in". Television's specific visual needs have created an additional intake role: the News Organiser's work is paralleled by that of a film operations organiser who has specific responsibility for the deployment of camera crews in line with the News Organiser's instructions, seeing that they are provided with the requisite facilities: cameras, lighting and sound equipment, and so forth.

Producing the News Diary: The clear importance of the "diary" for the discussions held at the morning meeting and the construction of running orders has been commented upon. As the television news operation ceases at midnight, unlike that at Broadcasting House, the News Diary is prepared during the later hours of each evening. The sources used are identical to those at Broadcasting House, the News Organiser drawing on an earlier planning document. A specific feature of the television diary is its reference to visual treatment of stories required - whether for example film should be shot "mute" (silently) or with combined sound and picture - and its selection of stories of visual interest. The times at which visual material becomes available is of clear importance to the planning of running orders.

Logistics: The News Organiser has to try and "deliver" reports at times which suit the needs of the two Editors of the Day. On the one hand, this requires him to "fix" times and locations as demands are made in line with developing stories. And on the other, he keeps in constant radio or telephone contact with reporting crews to keep

the Editors of the Day informed of any likely problems. For example, on one occasion a reporter out on assignment telephoned the news organiser to tell him that his story about a shooting incident at the army barracks at Aldershot had turned out to be a "bum steer" (or "non-event"). The story was removed from the running order.

Briefings: In addition to executing decisions about deployment news organisers have to manage, as one of them put it, "the idiosyncrasies of reporters". As in radio news there is a briefing dimension to the role, with the news organiser relaying instructions from the Editors of the Day or using his own news judgement. The news organiser keeps up with the requirements of the desks both through brief informal exchanges with the editors and by attendance at briefings.

2.i.(b) Foreign news and the Foreign Duty Editor:

Here again there are detailed similarities between the radio and television roles. The Foreign Duty Editor is responsible for the day's foreign news intake.

Logistics and briefings: The Foreign Duty Editor maintains contact with the foreign correspondents on a regular basis in ways similar to his Broadcasting House counterpart. He begins the newsday with the Foreign News Prospects available to him, which has been drawn up by the Foreign News Department the previous day. A revised version of the prospects is issued at about 2 pm. to take account of any changes in availability. Discussions with correspondents relay news judgements and establish arrival times for film and videotape inputs:

"Get what you can mute and we'll get voice pieces, or send tapes if possible. Wait - cover the first big court appearance. Yesterday we used in excess of a minute - big lead story. You didn't actually ship anything then?"

(Foreign Duty Editor, to Middle East Correspondent).

One of the Foreign Duty Editor's routine tasks is to sit in on the daily Eurovision newsfilm exchange. At this exchange each Eurovision member "offers" available film stories to the international network which are "accepted" by those finding them interesting. He is also in touch with Visnews, an international newsfilm agency partly owned by the BBC which supplies it with a great deal of film. Decisions about the use of satellites or long-distance sound and picture circuits are taken by the Editors of the Day, as they are expensive. The Foreign Duty Editor is also aware of which radio despatches are being sent to Broadcasting House and Bush House: when TV News cannot obtain film from a particular correspondent they quite frequently use his "voice" and a still photograph in the bulletin, so this is an additional useful input.

Frequent complexities have to be overcome in arranging for the collection of film and videotape. On one occasion, TV News was taking some film from the CBS network of fighting in Vietnam, by satellite. The cost of this "multilateral" was being shared with other Eurovision members who did not also want the spoken commentary, which was in English. The Foreign Duty Editor had to find a way of obtaining commentary without incurring the expense of a "unilateral" satellite. He decided to have it sent by a sound circuit which was cheaper. This operation was arranged with Broadcasting House. Sound and pictures arrived separately at TV Centre: the CBS film arriving by satellite, and the commentary by sound circuit from Hong Kong.

2.ii. Future planning for news intake:

Lying behind the structure of daily intake is a set of procedures designed to pin-point news stories from the longer-term perspective.

The Advanced Diary: In Radio News there is a planning editor working at least "one day ahead", and the same practice obtains at TV News. The News Organiser (Planning) makes arrangements for deployment and recording which are subsequently incorporated into the next day's News Diary. On Fridays a three-day advanced diary is worked out by the News Organiser (Planning) who is not on a weekend shift. The News Organiser (Planning) uses the same kinds of sources as his counterpart at Radio News, the Home News Editor (Planning): newspapers, public relations hand-outs, the BBC's News Information service, telephone calls from the public and so forth. The planners at Broadcasting House and Television Centre are in frequent contact with each other. The News Organiser (Planning) is a "fixer" who often encounters special problems in obtaining access for recordings to be made:

"The big problem is with government departments - trying to get coverage. If a Minister is speaking then we particularly want to know if it's related to a crisis. The Secretary for Trade and Industry is talking at a packaging exhibition. I expect he'll have something to say. I'll phone his department and find out what he's doing, what his programme is. You can't find out what it's all about even on the morning sometimes. It's alright if it's print or radio, but in TV you have to set it up. Some departments aren't interested in TV's needs; they're living in the days of archaic Victoriana. You can't just light every politician without knowing whether it will be worth while: there are the expenses of allocating a crew let alone the film footage".

The advanced planning unit is, like daily intake, more complex than that at radio news. The News Organiser's work is paralleled by that of a Film Operations Organiser (Planning) and a Film Operations Manager, who together are responsible for arranging the rotas of film crews and equipment.

The Deputy Home News Editor heads the planning unit and arranges coverage of "the bigger stories". The unit is part of the wider News Intake section run by the Home News Editor.

Futures Diaries: In the background to the moment-to-moment decision-making in the newsroom, and the day to day pattern of the planning unit, are weekly meetings which tend to pre-shape a good deal of any newsday's coverage. Editorial conferences known as "futures meetings", dealing separately with home and foreign news, are held, one after the other, every Thursday.

The Foreign Futures Meeting: This meeting begins at 10.30 pm. and lasts for about one hour. It is attended by the Editor, TV News, the Deputy Editor, the Foreign News Editor, Assistant Foreign News Editor, the five Assistant Editors (who act as Editors of the Day), and the Foreign Duty Editors. The agenda is provided by the Foreign News Department run by the Foreign News Editor, and it consists of a list of stories envisaged for transmission within the next month. The list is categorised into continents and sub-continents, and within each of these sections are listed stories being pursued or of likely interest. The Foreign News Editor described the meeting as a way "for us to estimate interest among the Editors (of the Day)- we wouldn't do anything without that". Foreign news coverage is very expensive; the underlying cost constraint, which is not very apparent at the level of newsroom routines, emerges in discussion at futures meetings: "We estimate the news interest, and then whether it makes economic sense". (Foreign News Editor).

The futures meeting bears a great similarity to other News Department meetings. The Foreign News Editor runs through the list establishing whether Editors of the Day are "sold" on given stories. The Editor, TV News is the ultimate arbiter of coverage at this meeting. The matters which are routinely dealt with fall into two main categories; which are

fused in practice, these are: assessment for "news interest", and logistics. Some stories are rejected as "not interesting" on various grounds. At one meeting a proposed story about popular resorts in the South of France being ruined by developers was greeted with no enthusiasm; similarly a story about hotels being overbooked in Spain causing inconvenience to British tourists was rejected because it was the "usual thing". Another rejected proposal was that of:

"A Kurdish journalist (who) has asked if we would be interested in sending a reporter and camera team to look at the situation there. The prospect of further fighting is very real as the Kurds are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the failure of Baghdad to honour the agreement on autonomy...."(9)

It was immediately asked whether this was "propaganda". Who was the journalist acting for? Was the struggle coming to "anything"? The Foreign News Editor noted that it had "not been looked at for some years". The Editor said: "I want something definitive. I'm not grabbed by it as background". In response to the Foreign News Editor who thought that they might perhaps make a "special" of it, the Editor said he thought they ought to wait, and in the meantime they could try and "sell" the idea to the Current Affairs programmes Midweek or Panorama.

There is, in addition, a great deal of concern with logistical arrangements for the collection of film and the disposition of crews. In some countries there are problems in gaining access for TV crews: a crew wishing to enter Mozambique in July 1973, "to establish the truth"(9) about a massacre there, had to await a clearance from Lisbon. A royal trip to the Soviet Union gave an opportunity for sending in a camera crew.

Some news stories are "stockpiled" against the occurrence of an event. An interview with the former French Prime Minister, M. Couve de Murville, was conducted by the Paris correspondent on 11 July 1973 in anticipation of a French nuclear test on Bastille Day, July 14th:

"This, with a piece to camera, is intended to be used as part of a film package incorporating French Defence Ministry footage of the nuclear force".⁽⁹⁾

In the event, the nuclear device was exploded on July 21st, a week later than expected; the interview was used in the evening news bulletin on BBC-1, and the following day, at more length, the "voices" were used by the radio Current Affairs programme The World This Weekend.

The cost factor enters greatly into decisions about foreign news coverage. For example, film of the royal visit to the USSR was to be "shipped out" (flown) rather than sent by satellite, as this was cheaper. There was also concern at this meeting about the continuing "Watergate Affair" and the costs it entailed: "Some day we won't have to use the satellite". Film of a shipwreck in the Pacific was seen as not so urgent as to require "satelliting".

The Home News Futures Meeting: Shortly after the conclusion of the foreign futures meeting the home futures meeting begins. It is attended by the Editor, TV News, the Deputy Editor, the Home News Editor and his Deputy, the five assistant Editors, and the News Organiser (Planning). The agenda on this occasion is compiled by News Intake and is called the Weekly Futures List. This list is divided into six distinct categories which indicate stable expectations of what is likely to make news: Ulster; Political; Industrial and Economic; General; Sport; Others.

The pattern of interaction is very similar to the preceding meeting. The Home News Editor runs through the futures list for the next seven days, makes his own comments and tries to "sell" the stories to the Assis-

tant Editors who will be on duty on those days. The content of the discussion is a mixture of news judgement and logistical talk, although by comparison with foreign news coverage the technicalities of home "fixing" tend to be less of a problem. The list contains details of advanced arrangements made with the BBC's regional newsrooms for sending pictures over video circuits for recording in London. Indeed, as in all television news discussions the "picture merit" of proposed stories is a highly salient factor. The "hard news" (political and industrial/economic) stories are not as a rule seen as being of great visual interest, as many of them include "arrival shots" of politicians and other national leaders, or take the form of interviews included in a correspondent's report. These, therefore, tend to be discussed in terms of their "straight" news value and implications, although a pictorial angle is sought where possible. For example, when Dr. Caetano, the then Portuguese Prime Minister, was expected in London on an official visit, the Editor noted the possibility of "interesting" footage: "Rent-a-demo will turn up".

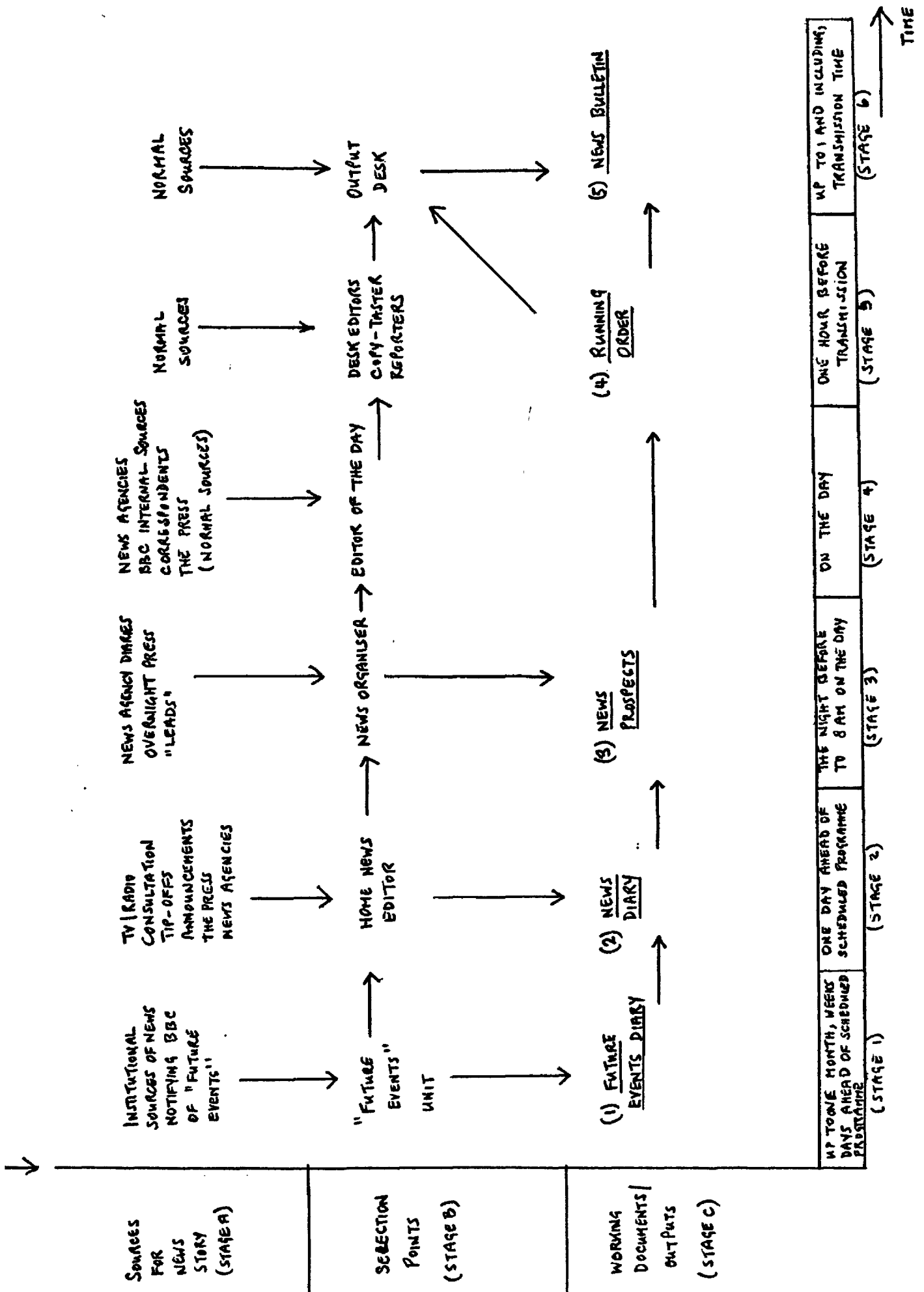
The cost issue is part of these discussions, though home news coverage is less expensive than foreign. Given that deployment is guided by the futures lists, intake editors, stressing the fact they are spending public money, attempt to make assessments which will, on the whole, not "fall down". Given the problems of predicting a week ahead, when the news of the day cannot be known in detail, due to the shifting scale of news values, a high proportion of diary items eventually does go into the bulletins. According to the Home News Editor, between three-quarters and eighty percent. This figure is related to the cost factor and a desire to keep "wastage" in film footage and deployment low.

This chapter, and the previous one, have described the two parallel news production systems (radio and television) in the BBC's News Division. Certain general features of those systems are apparent. It is possible to distinguish between the daily production routines and the planning structure. The daily production routines are hierarchically controlled: the Editor of the Day acts as the final arbiter in operational level decision-making. He represents a link in the chain of authority which stretches through the Departmental Editor to, eventually, the Director-General. The planning structure also acts as a mode of control. It creates agendas which express agreed organisational priorities. Thus, a kind of map is provided for the editorial staff which helps them to assess the news of the day. Behind the decisions made within the period of the newday are those prior choices made by those who operate the planning structure.

Decision-making in the News Division occurs in the context of a power structure. This power-structure is underpinned, legitimised, by an editorial philosophy. The next chapter goes on to examine this.

Figure 4.3: Planning and Selection Leading to a News Bulletin - a Schema.

(Based on the diagram on p.64 of Philip Elliott's The Making of a Television Series)



NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. The slight variations in name - News Diary, News Prospects - do not indicate any distinction in purpose or content. At the BBC's External Services, based in Bush House, London, the document in question is called the Morning Diary.
2. Another minor detail: these are contained in a separate document, unlike those at Radio News.
3. During late 1974 this slot became the Newsday programme, featuring a long interview with a prominent figure, and lasts for fifteen minutes rather than five. This is produced by a Current Affairs unit.
4. In Television News, by comparison with Radio News, the sub-editorial staff tend more frequently to describe themselves as "writers" or "scriptwriters", although this usage is officially blessed in the other service, as well.
5. For a neat brief account see Halloran et al., op.cit., 1970, pp. 157-161.
6. Ibid., p. 179, where this active conception of the editorial role has also been noted.
7. For a helpful technical discussion see Desmond Davis, The Grammar of Television Production, (revised by John Elliott), London, Barrie and Rockliff, 1969, (2nd edn.). There is also considerable detail of

this kind in Tuchman, op.cit., 1969, ch.3.

8. These procedures are quite common to television production. They are, for example, standard practice at ITN as well. See Robin Day, Television: A Personal Report, London, Hutchinson, 1961, pp. 83-87.
9. Quotation from Foreign Futures Diary (Television News), Thursday, 12 July 1973. This passage draws on data gathered at that meeting.

CHAPTER FIVE:

THE BBC EDITORIAL PHILOSOPHY

"Experience will probably prevail in editorial meetings"

(Current Affairs Editor, Radio).

1. Introduction:

The last two chapters have demonstrated the way in which the editorial structure of the newsroom is designed to maximise control of the output, both in broad shape and in close detail. The Editor of the Day and the Senior Duty Editor work in tandem to secure a "responsible" approach to the news stories of the day. The moment to moment control exercised in the newsroom has to be seen in the context of the weekly system of review outlined in Chapter 2.

In general, newsroom power structures fit into the perspective of the sociology of knowledge outlined in the introduction. As Holzner has observed, at a formal level: "The establishment of shared frames of reference characteristic of epistemic communities is a delicate process. There is not only the requirement of value congruency among the participants but moreover the need for power arrangements in the exchanges of the interaction process which sustain the shared perspective once it is established, or influence its acceptance in the first place."⁽¹⁾

In the specific case of the News Division, the "theory" of editorial responsibility contains a sophisticated awareness of how this mandate to decide fits into the constraints posed by the broader BBC power structure. On the one hand the Editor of the Day is the legitimate embodiment on the "shop floor" of the authorised decision-making hierarchy, and even if newsmen do not like this style of exercising power they know they have to address their problems to him.

But on the other hand he stands at the point of articulation between the generally - known world of the newsroom and those structures of power in the corporation which remain generally invisible, the subject mainly of vague gossip.⁽²⁾

2. Limits on editorial autonomy:

While the working definition of power in the newsroom means that the Editor of the Day is accorded the status of "God for the day", the perception of power shifts as one moves up the hierarchy. In practice, as the quotations in Chapter 2 indicate, the limitations on editorial power are known by the competent because they have internalised them: they "refer upwards". If they fail to act "responsibly" in this sense, then there is a clear response, as pointed out by the Deputy Editor, Radio News:

"You leave people basically to get on with the job, and don't do much more than to slip in when there are complications. You occasionally interfere to the point of saying 'I wouldn't do that'. For example, on Monday at 6 o'clock there was a report about Nigeria packed with clichés, rather gory blood and guts. The Editor went in and said 'I wouldn't run that again'. This ties up with responsibility. Some 'papers would happily run that. We don't want to thrust the blood and guts at them."

In this situation, the Editor was acting as the arbiter of "good taste", an area over which all broadcasters are sensitive. The Editor, Radio News said that he expected Editors of the Day to refer to him if they had "any worries"; areas where requests for guidance might be ex-

pected were Ireland, which was "difficult"; stories dealing with the BBC's politics; stories involving legal problems; stories about violence. Editors of the Day are also expected to trim their sails when cost factors have to be considered; as a senior executive in Television News put it:

"All the major decisions, especially financial commitments, would be referred. For example, sending a reporter and crew to Karachi means the commitment of several thousand pounds. The initiative would come from the Editor of the Day, or another assistant editor who'll take on a later shift and is planning his news diary. There are meetings on prospects and deployment decisions of this scale - there wouldn't be only the air fare for the men concerned, and the hotel costs, but also the job of moving a lot of heavy equipment: you can imagine what that will cost in excess baggage. Within the UK deployment is much more a day by day and hour by hour affair in the hands of the Editor of the Day".

These are, however, marginal cases. Although the guidelines which determine "reference upwards" are elusive, they are nevertheless well understood for the most part. This is particularly so when news items which have a "politically or morally sensitive" bearing are in consideration: at these moments the practices embodying maxims of corporate prudence are most evident. On such occasions the mere presence in the newsroom of the Editor or Deputy Editor signifies the importance attached to "reliability". These visits are very rare. For a particular Northern Ireland story, the Editor, Radio News came for a moment into the newsroom and asked, "All alright?" Editor of the Day: "Yes - apart from another hooded body".

2.1. Running the news machine: the editorial perspective:

Editors of the Day, being given a broad brief, are apt to stress their independence of action, yet they are also very aware that they are entrusted with the role of producing an output which is consistent through time, "reliable" in terms defined by Corporate wisdom and indistinguishable from that of their fellows. One Editor of the Day in Radio News described the job in the following way: it was not possible to supervise everything, but he would give "overall policy guidance with tricky stories - the controversial ones - Northern Ireland, where carrying stories might result in crowds going out simply because they heard something on the BBC. In that story with the German guy eating the English nurse the guy here carries the can. If necessary you can refer it upwards. The Editor or the Deputy Editor will ring this morning or later in the day⁽³⁾ - just to keep themselves informed. We can ring them at any time - but it happens very rarely: we're usually in a better position to assess and take decisions."

The same editor went on to describe the corrective function exercised by the Editor, Radio News:

"He doesn't interfere very much - he let's us get on with the job. He's fairly receptive; he usually notices the weak spots, and that gives us a different light on what we're doing: you're pushing a story too hard, crowding out others".

Editors stress their autonomy by pointing to the fact that it is they who make the decisions, as the observer can see. One Editor of the Day disparaged any suggestion that pressures were applied:

"Lots are convinced that the bosses say 'Do that', that the Chairman and the DG are looking over your shoulder. We make mistakes but we try and look at everything object-

ively. But the human element comes in."

On quite a separate occasion another editor stressed that this operational reality, as he experienced it, invalidated criticisms that a premeditated censorship existed. BBC News was not, as many people seemed to think, a "high-powered committee sitting back and reviewing things", but rather "a group of half-educated journalists" who did their work under pressure: "You have to remember the conditions under which decisions are made". While this last view is a somewhat deviant one for laying such stress on the fallibility of the news producers it nonetheless works defensively in stressing the pragmatic, and hence uninterfered in, side of the activity: "It's a last-minute rush. There's no conspiracy".

One example of editorial self-limitation serves to indicate how "reference upwards" operates in the hectic context of newsroom decision-making: one Editor of the Day put a note aside for the incoming editor due to take over the night shift: "O'Connell interview: not to be used until you've contacted (The Editor)". He proffered an explanation of this action: "We don't carry IRA interviews. We must check to clear it. We do use it if it's newsworthy. We can't do it on our own initiative: it's a protection for ourselves; we don't get that many". The IRA had called off their cease-fire and were going to explain why at a news conference due that night. The Dublin correspondent had requested permission to tape-record it, and it was (and is) BBC policy not to use interviews with IRA figures, other than "After the most serious consideration, (so) that the BBC should be seen clearly to be opposed to the indiscriminate terrorist methods of the extremists."⁽⁴⁾ As for the UDA, he said: "There's no embargo as such; we don't chase them. They don't tell us not to if it's newsworthy. It's not for us to give them a platform - as long as it's not propaganda. If it was an extreme UDA story

I would ring up (the Editor) and say that I plan to run this". It is worth noting in this context that both the Editor and Deputy Editor, Radio News pointed out: "One of us is reachable at all times" and "The Editor of the Day can ring at any time of the day or night". The top men project a constant awareness of their duties and responsibilities in ensuring the reliability of the news outputs. The control system is a constant background factor in thinking at the operational level. Apart from the legitimacy conferred upon them by the editorial system, Editors of the Day have the additional advantage of foreknowledge of much of the coverage through their involvement in the planning system. They are, in addition, privy to the contents of the "ENCA minutes" which they disseminate informally and judiciously in the milieu of the BBC Club. This longer view of the operation affords them a strategic advantage in the newsroom in defining problematic issues and situations. The advantages of such prior intelligence in enhancing the authority of operational-level decisions is clearly recognised in an internal editorial policy document:

"The News and Current Affairs meeting, because it is attended by senior representatives of every department concerned with journalistic output throughout the BBC, and because the Director-General himself contributes to the discussions, provides an excellent vantage point from which to make that kind of comprehensive review of balance and fairness".⁽⁵⁾

As an organisational strategy, the operation of the shift system, with its staggered replacement of personnel, ensures that by and large safety comes first: one of the two top men on the desk is always in a position to brief his incoming fellow on the latest nuances, so that he does not "come in cold".

Because of the stress on editorial responsibility editors share in the general feeling that it is "their programme" which is being produced. And undoubtedly, the corporate stress on safety first gives added force to their feelings of possessiveness: they are culpable if the standards set by the Corporation through its policy-makers are not satisfied.⁽⁶⁾ Editorial soundness in this regard is identified by the notion of "consistency": for example, at one morning meeting one part of the output was criticised for sounding too idiosyncratic; the Editor of the Day explained: "It mustn't be obvious that someone different is doing it every shift". But there is another aspect to editorial possessiveness about the programme which is in subtle contradiction to the pursuit of consistency. Many newsmen remarked that they could tell who was sitting in the editorial chair on any given shift; there were hints which could be picked up from the ordering of the news items, occasionally from their selection, treatment or the language employed. So within the context of the house style there are variations enough for editorial identities to be sniffed out by insiders. This quite minor point is very revealing of both the stamp and scope of editorial authority: the neutralisation of individuality is incomplete, and in a way which is bound to enhance the status of the editorial system for insiders.

2.ii. Staffing the news machine: the view from below:

The concept of editorial responsibility as practiced in the News Departments places the Editor of the Day at the junction of a series of converging processes: newsgathering and sub-editing are conceived of as servicing the programme concept which he sketches out. Clearly, as the Editor of the Day's activities expand they infringe the more on those spheres of action which the various kinds of newsmen try to keep autonomous. One senior intake man in television described the system as "brutally selfish".

The power structure initially impinges upon the sub-editors and reporters in terms of the work they are given to do. At its most basic level the determination of work is seen as "the allocation of a sub/reporter to a story". There is relatively little scope for choice by the individual. One sub-editor in Television News described the "negotiations" over work this way:

"You do moan strategically rather than tactically. You accept you're doing what you're doing for the day. The pecking order's quite a nice thing in a way. The bum story is given to the junior sub. If he's covering a Royal visit, and the Queen's shot for example, the story stays with the same guy. It happens quite often and gives you a boost: the dull but obligatory story jumping up."

The rewards, on this account, come from the inherent element of surprise contained in the news of the day; you can never tell what will happen next. The ethos of the sub-editors as a working group seemed, to some extent, expressed by one "writer": "I'm a sub: bottom of the heap".

All the news staff ultimately take their instructions from the Editor of the Day or his second-in-command; problems are therefore "naturally" referred as intended by the creators of the system. As one Chief sub-editor said, when talking about the need to "refer": "The Editor of the Day does know what's happening". The dominance of the editor may be resented, but is accorded unmistakable recognition:

"The Editor of the Day is the man in charge of the channel; the kingpin."

"The Editor of the Day has a roving commission: he's all over the place".

Indeed, because the Editor of the Day sets his own brief to such an extent, ambiguities creep into his exact relationship with his chief subordinate, the Senior Duty Editor. This is experienced as troublesome by the newsmen who like to have briefs which are fully authorised:

"They're two bodies you're never sure about: their areas expand and contract according to the interests of the editor".

This problem of ambiguity is one which particularly affects the sub-editors who work very much under the control of the Senior Duty Editor. Reporters, newsreaders and production staff relate directly to the "top man".

Given this kind of texture to the relationships it is not surprising that those sub-editors and reporters who do not like the system describe it in mechanistic terms, using terms such as "a news juggernaut", "ossified procedures" and "working to a fairly rigid formula". Reporters and sub-editors try to increase their autonomy by bargaining over time allowed to "their" stories; these exchanges illustrate what happens:

Editor of the Day: "That sounds interesting we might use
a little bit of that".

Radio Reporter: "How little a bit?"

Editor of the Day (TV): "I'd much prefer a shorter version.
I would like it to be a minute".

Economics Correspondent: "I can tighten it up a bit".

Exchanges of this sort vary with the personal style of the Editor of the Day; some are harsh:

"I don't like you using that phrase. I want that line out"
others are polite:

"I wouldn't say '1.1 per cent: I'd rather say 'just over
one per cent'".

It should be noted that the underlying authoritarianism of the editorial system is most apparent on the desks with the greatest work pressure: the BBC-1 desk and the Radio 4 desk, both of whose outputs are perceived as the most significant because they attract the largest audiences. In the case of the Radio summaries desk and the BBC-2 desk there was less of a sense of bearing the Corporation's news image so heavily, and a more collaborative style of work. A Chief sub-editor in Radio News who had considerable experience in both media observed that "editors particularly at TV Centre have a fear of delegation and loss of control. They feel they have to put their stamp on the detail of the bulletin: it turns you into a mechanic. They set too much of a brief." An extreme example of control by the Editor of the Day was observed on one occasion at Radio News. The Editor of the Day had identified a story about demonstrations in Ulster as particularly sensitive; it was the "lead" and he took over virtually the entire writing and editing work from the Chief sub-editor. One sub acidly remarked: "You see X taking over? - he always gets very hung up on Northern Ireland stories. He's dictating word for word - it's very annoying."

Whereas from the editorial perspective the best kind of sub-editor is one who is "accurate", from the sub-editorial point of view the worst kind of editor is the one who is "pedantic". One Senior Duty Editor in television noted that the Editor of the Day who was most resented was the one who was not able to delegate, who had "to oversee every detail". This kind of editorial trespass, though legitimated by the values of the system, infringes the newsmen's autonomy in the way it hurts most: it implies that he lacks sufficient "responsibility" to be able to make sound judgements.

A coda to the view from below: the "woman's story":

Women in the newsrooms, apart from being an insignificant numerical component of the staff,⁽⁷⁾ appeared to feel that there was a special

category of story reserved for them: the "soft story". Women, on the whole saw themselves as discriminated against, their advancement being held in abeyance in the expectation that they would go away and "have babies", that they were not committed to a career. There was a general feeling that women "have to prove themselves":

"The only woman who got on here looked like a man.

There's a legendary story about her news sense:

the Russians were exploding a bomb, all she said was "Where are the pictures?"

and,

"I hope you won't think I'm stupid, but they're anti-female. If you look around here you'll find all the women are typists: (on this shift) there's one woman sub and one woman film editor, and there's no chance of a woman making the editor's seat".

The feeling that "male chauvinism" was strong was borne out frequently during observation, which gave strong support to the accounts of relative deprivation related by women on the news staff. There were complaints of explicit and implicit discrimination along these lines:

"Since I'm the only girl here they always send me stories on abortions".

Many examples of masculine attitudes germane to the allocating of women's stories as part of the status system in the newsroom could be given. These attitudes were, at the time of observation, very deeply ingrained: commenting on a new political reporter, one Editor of the Day said that her voice was not "authoritative enough for Parliament". His Chief Sub agreed: "She's OK for battered wives". "That's right - Women's Lib."

This picture is quite in keeping with the findings of a recent (1971) report⁽⁸⁾ on the career prospects of women in the BBC. In the context

of finding that women were generally at a disadvantage in this regard, News and Current Affairs were singled out as amongst the areas in which women had not done well. The beliefs present then were consonant with those found in the present study:

"Hard news gathering is considered to be a man's job
- not only in radio and television, but also in newspapers."(9)

(This idea has been expressed in slightly different language by a senior news official, who has observed, according to newsroom folklore, that:

"A good reporter needs to have a pair of balls".)

"It is argued by men, that 'the audience' would not like a woman newscaster or reporter on television, particularly for political or economic items, or for distressing items".(10)

It is noticeable, at the time of writing, that there have been changes, if not in newsroom attitudes, then at least in recruitment policies. There are woman reporters working both in radio and television news, and one reporter has acted as presenter on the BBC-2 news programme News Extra; in addition, BBC Radio News has begun to make use of a woman newsreader.

3. Journalists and non-journalists: the location of legitimacy:

The BBC's editorial philosophy is made manifest in the newsroom context through the dominance of the Editor of the Day. Just as "reference upwards" implies an ultimate concentration of editorial power at the top, equally it implies a devolved and circumscribed editorial power which is diffused to the sub-editorial and reportorial levels. Taken collectively, the journalists of the News Departments stand as the arbiters of the content of the news. This is reflected in their relationships to the non-journalists who service the news operation. To draw an analogy with a different context

of work: non-journalists relate to journalists in ways similar to the relationships between "paramedical" staff and physicians. The news judgement has primary status, just as "the tasks performed by paramedical workers tend to assist rather than replace the focal tasks of diagnosis and treatment."⁽¹¹⁾

These relationships, while fundamentally the same in each of the media, do differ in specific organisational detail.

3.i. Radio News:

As production techniques in radio are far simpler than those of television, technical intermediaries "intrude" far less in the process of assembling bulletins for transmission. The Editor of the Day performs what in other outputs would be the role of "producer": he decides not only upon editorial content but also upon style, format, and last-minute changes. The news bulletins are serviced by a pool of technical officers known as Production Operations Assistants (POA's). A rigid theoretical distinction is made between technique and content: technical officers play no role in the determination of the content of the news broadcasts. This division is slightly softened by the advisory role which the POA can play: "We can only say that something isn't of good broadcasting standards". At the margin, then, where there is no threat to the newsman's expertise, no "news point" to be made, the technical officer can proffer advice about how the broadcast might be better realised. It is clear that at this point there is something of a clash of craft values. The technical and engineering branches of the BBC have had an historic concern with "good broadcasting", whereas newsmen have typically been more interested in transmitting the news quickly. As Peter Black has noted of the early newsmen:

"They always wanted to do more than they were allowed,
and begged the engineers for a recording apparatus that

would record adequate sound and could be fitted into the back of an ordinary car instead of the seven-ton truck that now accompanied the laundry van. The skirmish was as old as broadcasting itself, between engineers who put sound reproduction first and the newsmen for whom what mattered was to get the story on the air fast and presumably first."⁽¹²⁾

While the engineering and operations staff might well resent their position, they recognise the legitimacy of the newsmen's claim to determine the content. And because of the special nature of the news - its need for "immediacy" - they accept that the standards of good broadcasting, which ideally require the best possible sound reproduction, must to some extent go by the board.

This is to put the position at its most negative: that some engineering and operations staff do not like working for the News Department because they feel they are "selling out" on their skills. There are those, however, who do accept the constraints more willingly. And amongst these non-journalists there is an internalisation of newsmen's values to the detriment of their own. Thus for example, one technical editor said:

"Time's the big factor. We're less fussy with news tapes because of the speed".

While the implication here is that "less fussiness" or mere "adequacy" falls far short of "good broadcasting", this point is nevertheless made from within the newsman's perspective.

Some engineers have rubbed shoulders with the newsmen for so long that they have developed a considerable "feel" or "news sense". One veteran sound engineer told how he had helped a new reporter, who was raw in his understanding, to transmit a quick report from a radio car. Another example of the positive contribution engineers can make came from a reporter

who observed that at "set piece" news conferences or political speeches the engineer while making his recording "has quite often learned to mark quite interesting passages". It can clearly be helpful for the reporter if the distinction between technique and content is not rigorously applied, in situations where the engineer can exercise a judgement informed with "news sense". This is a departure from the alternative role conception of the technical expert who is sensitive solely to gaps in "continuity" and fluctuations in sound levels.

Because of the structure of the editorial system, the primary colouration in everyone's thinking is forced into the newsman's mould. The power structure of news production is defined very clearly for newly-inducted members of the journalistic staff: during a production training session for news trainees, one trainee said she had been "overruled by the POA". The trainer pounced on this admission, and delivered a homily about how one could not say to the Editor that one had been overruled: if something went out over the air, you alone had to take responsibility.

3.ii. Television News:

As Chapter 3 made clear, the "mechanics" of television production are very intrusive. While, as in Radio News, the Editor of the Day has a "producer's" role, he cannot simply walk into the studio and present the newsreader with his script. Transmissions require skilled direction. Bulletins are transmitted under the supervision of a Studio Director. The relationship between the Editor of the Day and the Studio Director was described by a senior news executive:

"The man who puts it on the air is in charge of transmission.
He's working to plans/scripts provided by other people.
He's operationally in control. The editor will make changes
but will not issue commands other than through the studio

director; he executes his orders through the Studio Director".

The Studio Director acts as an arm of the Editor of the Day: he orchestrates the transmission in line with the detailed production instructions embodied in the scripts. One Studio Director described his role in terms of the constraints posed by the power structure:

"The editor decides what he wants and the order; the director tries to make it work".

The greatest scope for autonomous action comes when "something goes wrong":

"In an emergency you must have knowledge of the importance of stories. If there's an early OB or a film break you have to make instantaneous decisions. It's based on editorial judgement; the proviso is that you're pretty certain that this is what the editor would want. In half the programmes you put out a mix that's not on the script. The editor lays down the guidelines: what should be - the rest is to try and make it happen, or the next best thing."

This account recognises the legitimacy of the editors, and, in parallel with that given in Radio News, the need to adopt the criteria of news judgement rather than optimal televisual values. As bulletins are rehearsed, and the Studio Director is responsible for the operational readiness of the entire range of sources (OB units, videotape machines, telecine machines, cameras, sound tapes, and so forth) his hopes of a "smooth production" lie in making as few alterations as possible to the script. However, in news production, upsets to the running order are "natural" and expected; one Studio Director noted:

"The worst time is when there's a pre-set programme, and a major story breaks ten minutes before. The thing collapses and you don't have time."

This production perspective was endorsed by a News Transmissions Assistant, who is responsible for timing the individual items and keeping the Studio Director informed of any dangers to the sequence:

"There's not much sympathy between production and editorial staff: they don't know what it is to bring a script 3 seconds before you're going out."

But the writ of the Editor of the Day runs further than this: there is yet a further perspective which has to be taken account of in discussing editorial legitimacy. The news studio is manned by engineering and operations staff (cameramen, sound men, vision mixers, engineers) who work under the instructions of the Studio Director, which in turn reflect the demands made by the Editor of the Day. Control of the studio technical facilities lies with the Senior Television Engineer (S.Tel.E), one of whom defined his relationship to the editorial system thus: from his operational point of view, "the Studio Director is in overall command". A commonly accepted definition among technical staff was given by one S.Tel.E:

"The editors say what goes in; the directors say how it should be done; we actually do the thing - that's us".

So, while the editorial power over content is recognised, from the studio perspective, the director is the most significant other:

"We're responsible for technical matters, not content. The director will try to warn us if anything is going wrong. We will try and set up alternatives if the link fails - then we have the alternative means of communication."

This highly complex interlocking of roles and competences is seen from the newsman's perspective as servicing the transmission of the bulletins. The editorial perspective is the dominant one.

However, the account must, once again be qualified. The Studio Director, while far from being the Editor of the Day's co-equal, can if he chooses, make a contribution to the selection of visual content, though it does tend to be of a rather marginal kind; as one Duty Editor said:

"The amount of the contribution made by the Studio Director depends on him. It depends whether he wants to be just a machine putting out film."

This slight blurring of demarcations is equally evident in other spheres of the news operation. Film editors, as pointed out in Chapter 3, cut film to editorial instructions from journalists. Yet like the veteran sound engineers in Radio, there are those who have an interest in news which complements their purely filmic skill. For example, when on one occasion, the Editor of the Day was viewing incoming agency film with the Chief Film Editor (who recommended a particular story) he said half-jokingly,

"If a splended chap like you says it's a good story,
I'll take it."

The Editor, Radio News, formerly a television journalist, stressed that if technical staff wanted to make comments then he would always take note. They were "another listener or viewer". He had found in TV that the reaction of technicians in the gallery to a programme was an indicator of its success: if they went quiet you had done well, whereas if they kept talking a lot "you knew you'd made a cock-up".

Similarly, for reporters out on the road, as one of them put it, "a friendly association with the cameraman is a sine qua non." While the

presence on screen of the television reporter gives the story journalistic credibility in the traditional sense, the cameraman is his effective co-equal in realising a news story which has a distinctive televisual interest. In the days of the Television Newsreel in the late 1940's and early 1950's the cameraman was, in effect, the reporter.⁽¹³⁾ The Editor, Television News made the point that good cameramen had to be "bloody good journalists because they're making a journalist's judgment". Television reporters made it clear that the "news sense" of the cameraman was critical for them, and this was a crucial ground for their preferences for specific working partners:

"Some crews instinctively cotton on. The chemistry's right. With others it's a drudge. The best camera teams, in terms of visual stuff, are the best to work with: they have good news sense in terms of pictures. X...Y...knows a great deal about Northern Ireland. He reads around alot. He likes to know about the country he's going to."

And,

"The best cameraman will switch on before you've started."

The importance of creating effective crews was underlined by a Film Operations Organiser, a former cameraman himself,

"Some you get on with; some not. There's a little friction, sometimes disagreements over seeing the story in a different light. Say an articulated lorry has crashed: the cameraman thinks - first thing, get the film. The reporter's first thought may be to talk to the driver. A big part of my job is putting people together who'll harmonise."

It is important to note, however, that in the event of disagreements, the legitimate journalistic power of directing the camera crews is in the hands of the reporter, who is responsible for the newsfilm sent in, just as editorial power is exercised in the cutting rooms.⁽¹⁴⁾

This chapter has shown how the BBC's editorial "philosophy" is embodied in the range of perspectives which are brought to bear on the job of producing news. The legitimacy of the centralised control system is unquestioned, and for the majority of newsmen (those at operational level) its impact is experienced in relation to the role of the Editor of the Day. Adjustments of autonomy in decision-making are continual, and consequent upon the wide-ranging brief for editorial "interference" accorded the Editor of the Day.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. Holzner, op.cit., 1968, p.69.
2. For example, one Senior sub-editor came closest to knowing the contents of the ENCA minutes when he was, illicitly, shown them on the train home from work by one Editor of the Day.
3. This discussion took place on a Sunday when the normal practice of having a morning meeting does not take place.
4. Quotation from Principles and Practice, op.cit., p.15.
5. Ibid., p.21.
6. By comparison one might note the "quality control" function ascribed to the TV producers studied by Muriel Cantor, op.cit., 1971, p.111.
7. On any given newsroom shift most of the women were typists. There were, at most, two or three female sub-editors, and towards the end of the fieldwork two women reporters were appointed by Television News. Production assistants and technical officers - rather than producers proper - tended frequently to be female.
8. See Isobel Allen, 'Women in the BBC', Part 3 of the P.E.P. Report, Women in Top Jobs: Four Studies of Achievement, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1971. My own observations were made at a time when I was unaware of the existence of this study.

9. Ibid., p.186.
10. Ibid., p.187.
11. Eliot Freidson, op.cit., 1971, pp. 48-50.
12. Peter Black, The Biggest Aspidistra in the World, BBC, 1972, p.73; emphases added.
13. See Harold Cox, 'The Television Newsreel', in Paul Rotha, (ed.), Television in the Making, London, the Focal Press, 1956, pp. 84-94.
14. David Altheide, argues that too little has been made of the clashing perspectives ("relevancies") of reporters and film cameramen, and that the final product is an outcome of negotiation. This is correct. But in an organisation such as BBC-TV News, the Corporate ideology concerning editorial responsibility is crucial in determining the bounds of such negotiation. See his 'Organisational Constraints on Newswork', Unpublished Draft Chapter, Ph.D. thesis, University of California-San Diego, October 1973.

CHAPTER SIX:
COMPETITION WITHIN A DUOPOLY

The primary focus of this study is on the organisational milieu within which just one of the Corporation's diverse products is assembled: that of "the news". Previous chapters have outlined the production processes which lead up to the transmission of news bulletins. But the organisational world within which "news" is produced, although a very large and significant one within the Corporation, constitutes a distinctive sub-culture. This is particularly apparent when newsmen define and distinguish their role and ideas in relation to a proximate, but distinct, class of Corporate product: "Current Affairs".

1. News and Current Affairs:

In Chapter 2, the role of the Editor, News and Current Affairs was shown to be very significant in ensuring consistency in and control of the Corporation's outputs. The weekly review meetings, attended by heads of various News and Current Affairs groups are part of a central managerial strategy. The BBC Handbook bears eloquent testimony to the diversity of current affairs, features and documentary groups, which produce programmes falling into what was euphemistically described as the "touchy areas" of wide public interest: politics and morals. The account which follows is mainly restricted to the ways in which newsmen in the Radio and Television News Departments perceive their role within the broader context of the Corporation's News and Current Affairs-producing structure.

2. The image of "the News":

Within the News Departments, "The News" is widely seen, as one newsman expressed it, as "a battleship for the whole image". The Deputy Editor,

Radio News expressed a collectively-held belief when he said:

"To be quite frank we've got a pretty arrogant self-conception. People here genuinely think that they're bloody important. They think that the News Department is the BBC, since whenever there's a fuss it's the news by which the Corporation is judged. I can fairly say that we regard it as the most important department; even if there's a brilliant play on we think that it's what we do that really matters."

This strategic conception of the News as a centrally important and prestigious feature of Corporate output was also reflected in this statement by a senior intake man in Television News:

"The power of journalism is central to the BBC."

It is when the focus shifts to what is conventionally defined as television or radio journalism that a finer discrimination between "news" and other outputs is made. "The News" stands foremost in newsmen's rankings of output; they perceive it as the Corporation's "front page", given that what the BBC produces can be expressed in terms of newspaper categories.

A former Editor, News and Current Affairs, Donald Edwards, has written:

"Of course, there is an important minority of people who are interested in political news. The BBC, while catering for mass tastes, has also a duty to minority interests. As a public service we have a duty to Parliament. There is not enough space to do much in our news bulletins. So as well as our front page, we have so to speak our inside pages."⁽¹⁾

The conception is, therefore, one which is officially endorsed, a part of the public account which the Corporation's theorists give to the world outside.

From the newsman's perspective the most closely related output is "daily current affairs". This is discriminated from "hard news" by a number of criteria, tabulated on the next page (Figure 6.1). While it is admitted that, at the margin, the two kinds of product shade into each other, the fact that the separation is not simply conceptual, but one institutionalised in the form of distinctive production teams, creates a social reality which cannot be ignored. In sociological terms, a "reification" has taken place. Just how much this is so was brought home during fieldwork: in the course of a discussion with News trainees learning how to produce programmes, there were remarks passed about "trying to abolish the news/current affairs distinction". They had found it "very difficult" to do this. The very fact that such failed revisionist thinking should be admitted is an indication of the persuasive power of present arrangements within the Corporation.

The newsman's occupational culture is one within which competition is esteemed. There are two linked ways in which newsmen in broadcasting, as in print, compete with each other: "speed" and "exclusiveness". To be speedy is to "beat the competition" by being "first out" with a news story.⁽²⁾ Being "exclusive" (or, in language which seems slightly dated, "scooping") is also closely tied to speed: it involves finding an "angle" on a story before anyone else, or identifying a source of testimony which no-one else has thought of. The news and current affairs producers of the BBC are not only pitted in competition with their formal rivals, the commercial companies, but also compete amongst themselves. This competition can take on some bizarre aspects.

2.1. The Radio News perspective:

"Bulletin" and "Sequence": Radio News has to be discussed separately from Television News in this context because its relationship to current

Figure 6.1: ATTRIBUTES OF "NEWS" AND "CURRENT AFFAIRS"
IN NEWSROOM THINKING

<u>News</u>	<u>Current Affairs</u>
is presented in "bulletin" form, notably in radio, and in those TV broadcasts of 15 minutes or less.	is presented in "programme" form or in "sequences" (radio)
is "hard"; it gives you the facts (only)	picks up, or follows, a news story; it assumes the facts are known by the public
is like the front page of a newspaper; it has to give all the "big stories of the day"	is more like a magazine, or feature page articles; it provides interpretation, gives "background"
is objective, impartial, "straight", factual	is more prone to comment, or opinionated, seeks out angles
tells you simply <u>what</u> happened	tells you <u>how</u> and <u>why</u> something happened
is "hard" - immediate highly topical	is topical, but not necessarily tied to <u>today's</u> events
is concise, short of space because obliged to give the day's news	has more time (space), is less concise, expands
is the most purely informative	is more entertaining, (possibly) educative.

affairs production is somewhat different. As pointed out in Chapter 3, the news outputs on Radio 4 are seen as the most significant in the News Department. Under the BBC's scheme, Broadcasting in the Seventies,⁽³⁾ the Radio 4 channel was to be organised in terms of "four main news and magazine periods-breakfast time, lunchtime, early evening, and late evening". From the News Department's point of view the crucial phrase is "news and magazine". In terms of the conception outlined by the controllers many of the news outputs are slotted into current affairs programmes, or "sequences", as they are known. Thus, the early morning bulletins at 7 am. and at 8 pm. are a distinct part of the Today Programme, the main lunchtime bulletin at 1 pm. runs for the first ten minutes of The World at One; the bulletin at 10 pm. fits into the first thirteen or so minutes of The World Tonight. This leaves the News Department with long - and therefore prestigious - bulletins of its' "own" only at 6 pm. and 11 pm.

There is a conflict implicit in this situation; it takes the form of a "politics of the time slot":

"On The World Tonight we're getting twelve minutes, and we're pushing for fifteen, and it looks as though it will stay frozen at thirteen. The programme tends to resent the encroachment of the news part. So we have two bulletins a day which are just news: otherwise we're just grace and favour creatures - we're allowed part of the programmes".

(Editor of the Day, Radio News).

One observed occasion gives some indication of the degree of competition which exists: the presenter of The World Tonight came into the newsroom for a brief, informal chat with the Editor of the Day. When he had left the Senior Duty Editor gleefully remarked:

"Do you know what Edwin did last night? Got an extra minute out of them, and ran to 14.50!"

Editor of the Day: "That's the way to do it".

While pushing for extra seconds is one aspect of the rivalry in Radio News and Current Affairs a more prevalent form of one-upmanship is the hoarding of interviews. As one old-hand Radio Current Affairs man said:

"We are in competition, pursuing the same kind of stuff, and hold each other in utter contempt".

While this utterance is more extreme than most, the operational separation does in fact force this kind of outlook on the various production teams. There is a curious practice in the newsroom: whenever the news bulletin part of a programme has been transmitted, and the current affairs section begins, the newsroom loudspeakers are turned off, and the broadcast ignored. On one occasion a Current Affairs man asked:

"Do they still switch off the sequence after they've heard the bulletin".

When told that they did he shook his head wisely and said:

"It's done at their own risk and peril - The World at One will create news at its best."

On the other hand a World at One producer observed that if they ever discovered that the news bulletin's "leads" had changed then it was "only accidental".

The news and current affairs teams work separately under their own editorial direction. During the fieldwork period there was virtually no observed operational liaison. In 1973, The World at One began to send a representative to the "morning meeting", and this was a development from the previous state of having no formal contact at all. All the "sequences" are aware of the priorities sketched out by the News Prospects, and it is normal practice for the editor of each one to have a brief discussion with the Editor of the Day; this is not seen, however, as a formal obligatory consultation. There is a good pragmatic reason why relatively little overt

consultation occurs: the various programme teams can listen to each other. And, although the "sequence" is so ostentatiously switched off in the newsroom, one or other sub-editor is normally detailed to listen for any interesting interviews.

Inside the newsroom the Radio 4 bulletins are thought of as having a quite independent identity; one sub-editor summed up this perspective:

"We think of it as a bulletin always - not as a programme. We don't think at all about The World at One. Half the time we don't know what they're going to do until we hear it. We do our bit and they do theirs' quite separately."

The lack of co-ordination in production leads to routine duplication in reporting arrangements. Radio News controls the pool of twenty general reporters, out of which about half are "attached" or "loaned" to the daily current affairs programmes. However, once a reporter is attached he comes under the instructions of the individual programmes own editor. A Radio News reporter described the result of this:

"You often find that there's a World at One reporter on the scene when you get there. Neither of you knows the other's going to be there; nor does the desk."

On the other hand, where this duplication is absent, there is another source of tension:

"Reporters have various customers to satisfy. We've got one in Dublin covering the Dail, but since the next bulletin is at 6 o'clock he sees to (the) PM (programme at five o'clock) first. This puts a lot of pressure on reporters who have to write separate pieces for the sequences and the news bulletins."

(Editor of the Day, Radio News).

Understandably, the role of the News Organiser is, to a certain degree, seen as one of "shielding the reporters from the sequences."

As the largest audiences for Radio News transmissions listen in during the day, not surprisingly, of the various daily current affairs sequences, The World at One-PM team is identified as the main rival which makes simultaneous demands on shared facilities. It is described in grandiloquent terms typical in the BBC, though more suited to feudal times, as "a group of robber barons" or a "powerful empire".⁽⁴⁾ One Senior sub talked of the battles to control the sound circuits through which reports are fed in for editing:

"You get trouble between us and the sequences. It's a tussle as to who comes first. I suppose it's a matter of which is harder. News is more important and should come up first. Sometimes we're beaten by The World at One. It can get very sticky - we had a flaming row after."

The Radio News Department is, however, assured of its place in the BBC's scheme of things. As one Radio Talks producer, far away from the scenes of battle, observed, "the news is the most continuous output, and the (audience) figures show that listening falls off from the end of the bulletin part of the programme as it moves into the current affairs section". (This is so: see Appendix 2 on p.391).

Given that "the news" is conceived of as providing the nation's basic and most reliable diet of information, newsmen are apt to see the current affairs role as rather residual:

"We see the sequences as reacting to the news. If we play something big on occasion they might not follow up. They mightn't react, and they might say 'That's complete as it is.'"

(Deputy Editor, Radio News).

If the current affairs men "tend to follow up" or "give a longer examination in depth", as the then Head of Journalists' Training put it, it would be reasonable to expect them to define the newsworthy story very much in relation to each day's news output. This is broadly what happens. Fieldwork in The World at One office indicated that the production team began the news day with the same agenda, the News Prospects, as the newsroom editors. The editorial conference drew up its guidelines both in relation to the anticipated news output and to that of other current affairs sequences. Each programme has its own distinctive "formula" or production concept, on the basis of which the programme is "built", and it is through these nuances of style and treatment that they proclaim their separate identities.

In the World at One office, quite unlike the newsroom just a few yards away down the corridor, the "news/current affairs" distinction was raised as problematic. By contrast, an Editor of the Day in the newsroom, while admitting there were difficulties, did not see these as very central:

"The distinction exists in the mind of the BBC and not in fact; it's the way the media does the thing. Heath getting up in the House of Commons - that's news, what's comment? At the extremes the distinction holds. I suppose it varies. It's a question of suiting the customer - giving him ten minutes of hard news without the chat. People don't want to wait all that time for the information - half an hour for their football scores. They don't want all the ins and outs."

This representative newsroom view indicates why the newsmen do not worry unduly about the distinction between news and current affairs. They feel they have a stable audience, and though they are not so unsophisticated as to see themselves as absolutely divided in kind from "the sequences" they are in the strategically advantageous position of defining the "hard" news stories of the day. The "sequences" have to take these stories and embellish them, or find entirely different stories and new approaches, or "angles", which have not been exhausted by the reports in "the news". Because the strategic power of definition in the newsroom poses current affairs programmes with the problem of carving out an identity, the production team in The World at One office seemed more aware of the way in which an arbitrary institutional distinction affects the character of work. The key figures in the programme team, including the Editor and main presenter felt that the distinction was just conventional, the latter musing hopefully, "If you blew up the BBC and started afresh...."

2.ii. The Television News Perspective:

Television News is not symbiotically linked to the various Current Affairs groups, which unlike their radio counterparts have quite separate facilities, and are "totally divorced" as one correspondent put it. Television news bulletins, or programmes, are products of the News Department alone; on a normal newsday there is considerable uncertainty about what the daily current affairs units are doing:

"We only have the vaguest idea of what Panorama and 24 Hours are going to do. There's an element, with a daily programme, of competition."

(Senior Duty Editor, Television News).

"They (outsiders) don't realise what a big organisation this is, and that so many people are doing their own thing. You can ring up and say 'this is the BBC' and they'll say 'we've just spoken to the BBC' - and you find out it was Panorama or 24-Hours".

(Foreign Duty Editor, Television News).

According to the News Organiser (Planning) at Television News, the current affairs programmes are always eager to get the News Diary. 24 Hours (now defunct) it was said, used to go to the lengths of sending a taxi from Lime Grove, where the Current Affairs group works, to Television Centre. The television newsman's concept of the role played by "current affairs" in relation to "news" is the same as that of his radio counterpart:

"Basically the distinction is this: our job in news is providing the public with a service of factual information about the day's events, with such explanation as is required to understand and make use of the factual information. The job of current affairs is to amplify this service, but more importantly to offer a range of information and informed opinion on current events."

(Chief Assistant to Editor, TV News).

The current affairs function again moves from the obligatory "hard" to the more optionally "soft" kind of story. And it is clear from available evidence that there is a reciprocal perspective in BBC current affairs circles. Commenting on the coverage of the 1966 General Election Campaign, Jay Blumler has noted that "There was a strong feeling that the obligation to report campaign events, as such, fell principally on the News Division and that the task of current affairs programming was to go forward from the news, not to repeat it. In addition, a fear was expressed that the compilers of the news bulletins were in a position to 'pinch the best OB material', leaving

only more dull passages for 24 Hours to present later."⁽⁵⁾

If the main means of monitoring radio current affairs programmes for newsmen is by listening to them, then once again, the Television News context provides a parallel practice: they watch the programmes. The desire for exclusivity is manifestly serious as the following two incidents illustrate. A Duty Editor on the BBC-2 desk had attempted to arrange an exclusive interview, by the BBC's Chief Correspondent in Washington, with some of the leading actors in the "Watergate Affair". He found that the correspondent could not do what he wanted. The following day, the Foreign News Editor came over to the BBC-2 desk to tell the Editor of the Day that the correspondent had conducted the interview in question, but that this had been secured by the current affairs programme, Midweek. There was a great deal of annoyance at this; the correspondent should not be doing this without permission, it was argued, and they had put up the ideas anyway. The Foreign News Editor successfully "negotiated" for "free access" to the video-tape in question. On the same occasion, the Editor of the Day decided to drop an item about an Indian boy "guru" from his bulletin because the current affairs magazine programme Nationwide had covered it. News Organisers tell of occasions on which they have kept sources from the current affairs programmes, and of other times when they have been at the receiving end of this treatment.

Television newsmen, while not having to live in such direct and uneasy proximity with current affairs as their fellows at Broadcasting House, do also indulge in the politics of the time slot. One reporter posed it in these terms:

"Say we're 25 minutes, going on half an hour. We would like extra time. We could cope with 35 to 40 minutes. There is a battle with current affairs. There are separate departments, but there's no linked time or studios. We're

out to get as much as possible. (The Editor) is pushing for it. He's cynical: he wants to get more news".

The extension of The Nine O'Clock News from twenty minutes to twenty-five minutes in 1972 was seen as one of the outcomes of this battle. The Times observed:

"For several years BBC Television News has been growing increasingly ambitious and increasingly powerful in terms of personnel and share of the budget....Even a 20-minute bulletin raises difficulties of duplication and overlap for late-night current affairs programmes...."(6)

3). "Specials": collaboration:

In both Radio and Television News there are occasions when collaborative ventures are mounted between the normally discrete units. That such occasions should be seen as worthy of mention gives some insight into the "naturalness" with which the separation is viewed inside the BBC; the 1972 BBC Handbook notes:

"For some major events, News combined with Current Affairs Group: Apollo missions set a pattern also applicable on Budget Day, for instance....The appraisal of the McKay murder investigation, the appearance in News bulletins of Current Affairs-produced material from Pakistan, the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference and from the Middle East, as well as the important regional newsroom contributions to Nationwide, emphasised the move towards co-operation between News and Current Affairs which was noted last year.

In radio, too, News and Current Affairs Editors worked

together to bring the listener the latest news
and discussion of the topics of the day in unified
programmes." (7)

While the writer of this account takes evident pleasure from the fact of co-operation, the categories "news" and "current affairs" retain their conceptual and institutional separateness. The other main occasion on which such collaboration takes place is during a General Election campaign.

Two major implications of the "news/current affairs" distinction have emerged. Firstly, the acceptance and persistence of these definitions within the Corporation is an important source of orientation for the newsmen: if "the news" is the "front page" then it is quite clear that their activities are given high priority. The residual status which they accord "current affairs" is an index to their thinking about their own status within the Corporation.

And secondly, there is a cultural implication as well: the justifying account of "news - as-front-page" and "current affairs -as-amplification" provides producers with different ways of doing their work. There are distinctive contents, formats and styles associated with the different categories of output. This is particularly important when we examine the ways newsmen conceive of their relationships to "the audience". This is explored in the following chapter.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Edwards, op.cit., 1964, p.5. See also the BBC Handbook, 1973, p.51:
"The heart of Radio 4 is its news programmes. The network carries the proud responsibility of being the BBC's main channel for national news and comment."
2. For a revealing account of this kind of battle in the newspaper world see 'Insight', The Sunday Times, 14 April, 1974, which describes the competition between the Daily Express and the Daily Mail over who should lead in revealing the involvements of some prominent Labour Party members in the "Land Deals Affair".
3. Broadcasting in the Seventies: The BBC's Plan for Network Radio and non-Metropolitan Broadcasting, BBC, 1969.
4. This is not unusual. David Attenborough, Director of Programmes, BBC-TV, has said: "The BBC is a collection of small empires". See Joan Bakewell and Nicholas Garnham, The New Priesthood: British Television Today, London, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1970, p.247. Also see Michael Davie, The Observer Review, 19 March, 26 March, 2 April, 1972 which makes several references to the "barons of the box".
5. Blumler, op.cit., p. 108; emphasis added.
6. Chris Dunkley, The Times, 23 February 1971.
7. BBC Handbook, 1972, p.70.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

PROFESSIONALISM AND THE AUDIENCE

"We want a large audience because we think what
we're doing is good".

(Editor, Radio News).

1. Introduction:

It is a commonplace in the literature on mass communication that the communicator, ensconced in the complex production units of large organisations, has little direct contact with the audiences or publics which he is addressing. Indeed, this social distance is often taken as one of the defining characteristics of mass communication as such.⁽¹⁾ Tom Burns has observed of the BBC, that, in common with other large organisations, its personnel have "created a private world out of an occupational milieu".⁽²⁾ This study has so far outlined the organisational structure of the News Departments. This micro-world inhabited by newsmen constitutes a sub-culture within the Corporation, and is also part of the wider occupational culture of the journalistic world. "News" produced by these Departments accords with certain concepts of what is newsworthy and is presented in terms of formats regarded as stylistically valid. In Chapter 1, where main themes in the literature were identified, the criteria of choice relating to form and content were noted as relevant to the issue of "professionalism" in the media.⁽³⁾ This "professionalism" was seen as linked with the "problem of the audience". The focus of this chapter is on the relationship between newsmen's conception of their professionalism and how it is used in relating their work to "the news consumers" outside the organisation. It considers how they use their professionalism as a means of asserting their autonomy.⁽⁴⁾

2. Some aspects of the occupational milieu:

"We should never cease to think of ourselves as primarily servants of the public. All our enterprises must satisfy the test: will it serve the public better? It is not for us to embark on some new way of doing things merely because we think it would be more exciting, or satisfying, or diverting. We must be aware of becoming slaves of arbitrary changes in fashion, or of becoming a cosy group, so engrossed with our own technique, that we forget to ask ourselves: what do our listeners think? We must never reduce our contributions to broadcasting to the level of journalists talking to and for other journalists."⁽⁵⁾

Despite these injunctions to keep an open mind, urged on newsmen in one of the official guidebooks available to them, the way their world is constructed requires them to take their primary orientation towards their world from the "media culture" of which they are a part. Philip Elliott⁽⁶⁾ has used this phrase in discussing the shared meanings and conceptual frameworks available to mass communicators. When it is specifically applied to the world of news producers, it is found that a striking feature of their "professionalism" consists in an immersion in as wide as possible a range of media products as a part of "keeping up with what's going on."⁽⁷⁾ Jeremy Tunstall has described this kind of practice as a part of newsmen's "search procedures", and this kind of label is consistent with the observed practices of the Intake and Planning structures described above. The commitment to monitoring the news is encouraged by the News Departments as one of the desired qualities sought in "the man for the job" whose "general knowledge"

"needs to be a good deal wider than that of the majority of listeners. The good sub-editor keeps himself abreast of what is happening: he is able to relate to its background any story he may be given to handle. He listens to news bulletins and current affairs programmes on his off-duty as well as his duty days and he reads newspapers and magazines". (8)

This normative ideal does not, of course, apply simply to sub-editors, but embraces all staff. A Television News reporter, asked "What does being a general reporter mean?" replied,

"That you can do anything. Your standard of general knowledge is very high. You're expected to know the state of play in any country. I read all the newspapers and have really good general knowledge."

The committed, dutiful newsman has no "days off". This is an important part of the newsroom ethic, and examples of such commitment were plentiful. A Duty Editor in Radio News complained that when he was abroad on holiday he found that the BBC's World Service broadcasts failed to give adequate information to keep up with the nuances of events in Britain. An Editor the Day, going into more detail on the significance of this practice noted,

"You spend an awful lot of time being saturated in the news. Even my six-year old child talks news. People come to dinner and ask things. You have to read constantly - that's the only way you can make snap judgements."

He also noted that even on holiday you had to be aware of "developments" in stories, and this was achieved by "reading papers on the beach" or

listening to the radio. On one occasion he had been away when Lord Snowdon was ennobled; he had come back into the newsroom and when he asked "Who's Lord Snowdon?" everyone had stared. This example illuminates the close relationship between being "professional" and an immersion in newsworthy facts.

When newsmen work their shifts they tend to view them as enclosed slabs of time during which stories have to be exhaustively discussed. While reporters and correspondents tend to follow through a given story each newsday, and this represents an intense immersion in the detail, the newsroom chat is broader, and encompasses the range of significant stories of the day. Part of the work ethic is to eat and drink news: in the BBC Club news angles are examined over a pint; and when newsmen find the pressure great, they tend to spend their lunch hours or supper-times at the desk, with both their sandwiches and their copy in front of them.

It is not surprising, given this kind of milieu, that newsmen need to be warned against becoming a "cosy group". The structure of work, organised as it is in terms of deadlines at regular junctures in the newsday, imposes strictures which make the satisfaction of the Corporation's demands pre-eminent.

It is also not surprising given this kind of work situation, implicated as it is in the wider "media culture", that the newsman should see the fact that he has "kept up with the news" as legitimising his exercise of power in deciding what has "news value".⁽⁹⁾ It has frequently been noted that there are difficulties encountered by newsmen when they try to explain the nature of these criteria. But undoubtedly the concept of news value is "of key importance....as the basis of such occupational autonomy as journalists enjoy....."⁽¹⁰⁾

The accretion of "experience", then, through both intensive and extensive exposure to "news" and the media culture, is an important part of the way in which newsmen both describe and justify their competence to decide what makes news. Reinforcing this justifying account for their autonomy, one which is common to all journalists, there is the specific BBC "theory" about the responsibility of the broadcaster.⁽¹¹⁾ The editorial system is designed to maximise choice to the point at which difficult marginal cases are encountered. Given these powerful forces encouraging a sense of independence how do the newsmen cope with the reminder to be good public servants above all else?

3. Audiences:

One clear answer to this question is that the newsman's sense of independence is tempered by an awareness of the outside world, of "what the audience thinks". At least, the newsman believes that he knows what the public desires. A very significant audience, discussed in the next chapter, is the political audience. The maintenance of formal independence from governments is achieved by trying to produce programmes acceptable in terms of the kind of "objectivity" defined by this audience. Here is one link between internal routines and the world outside the newsrooms. A further criterion of judgement is provided by that very monitoring of the media culture which newsmen use as a plank in their argument from "professionalism". As one editor put it:

"The interesting thing is that pragmatically there's never any doubt: we'll all (all media) go for the same thing. We keep a careful check on what we lead and on what ITN leads."

From this standpoint, it is but a movement of degree into the general awareness of the competitive structure of broadcasting within which news

has to be produced. Success in competitiveness is measured by the resourcefulness shown by the newsman's peers in other organisations, and by the extent to which the "mass audience" can be "hooked".

3.1. The Duopoly: Audiences for broadcast news in Britain must make their choices of what they want to see and hear from among products offered by a duopoly. While the BBC's original inspiration lay in public service, since the passage of the first Television Act in 1954 it has had to face competition from commercial television. And in 1973 the first legally-sanctioned commercial radio stations went on the air. The creation of the present duopoly changed the rules of the game. The competitive broadcasting system, it has been noted, has a "unitary character" in which the "differences are less significant than the common basic assumptions on which both systems are grounded".⁽¹²⁾ Competitive assumptions are built into the everyday practices of the BBC; there exists what Epstein has termed an "economic logic" to the way in which broadcasting is conducted.⁽¹³⁾

The duopoly is frequently characterised simply in terms of "a battle of the ratings". This battle is in large measure a product of the conviction in BBC circles that "If the BBC gets less than about half the television audience, Parliament may not give it enough money."⁽¹⁴⁾ It has been pointed out that in 1959 the BBC had only 32 per cent of the national audience, and from that point, serious competition, defined in terms of the BBC's submission to "the tyranny of the ratings", followed.⁽¹⁵⁾ Various techniques are employed to ensure "channel loyalty", particularly during the peak viewing hours of 7 pm. to 10 pm. Although these do not need to detain us here, they include "hooking" audience interest at the beginning of this peak period so that the run of programmes is subject to the "inheritance factor" - a passing on of audiences from one programme to the next. An additional scheduling tactic, relying on audience inertia is "pre-echo", where the

assumption is that audiences will turn, at an early stage of the evening, to the channel on which the main programme they wish to watch is situated. A keen awareness of this state of affairs is present in the News Departments, as elsewhere in the BBC. It could hardly be otherwise given the abounding number of frank public utterances there are on this subject; Huw Wheldon, Managing Director of BBC-TV, has summed up the position before the BBC took the tyranny of the ratings seriously:

"In a word, seriously diminishing audiences put the very financial foundation of the BBC at risk".⁽¹⁶⁾

Elaborating on a major strand in broadcasting history from the breaking of the monopoly, he has gone on to say:

"What the BBC then had to do during the Fifties and Sixties was to get back from the frightening and slippery slope of a 70/30 ratio in Commercial's favour, and achieve a position of at least rough parity. The central competitive instrument was the way in which programmes were scheduled."⁽¹⁶⁾

It is axiomatic, then, that this "rough parity" must be maintained in order to avoid problems with politicians and the public over whether the Corporation's revenue from the sale of the broadcast receiving licence is adequately justified.⁽¹⁷⁾

Newsmen occupy a distinctive organisational milieu within a Corporation geared to competitive production. There are various ways in which this external situation is given an institutionalised reality.

3.ii. Audience Research:

Routine Research: Certain kinds of information are routinely provided for the News Departments by the BBC's Audience Research Department, a unit servicing the entire Corporation. Audience research in the BBC pre-

dates the competitive era, and it has been rightly pointed out that the existence of such research is "bound to inject an element of ambiguity into the determination of programme content".⁽¹⁸⁾ In the terms outlined at the beginning of this chapter, a tension is set up between the professionalism of the communicator with its implied autonomy, and the meeting of apparent audience demands and desires, with their implications for limiting autonomy.

The Editors of the News Departments are sent the statistics on daily audience size and composition which is a part of the general service to all programmes known as the Daily Audience Barometer, described as the "BBC's equivalent of the box office". There is keen interest, even an obsession, with this kind of figure throughout broadcasting.⁽¹⁹⁾ News broadcasting is in one way exempt from great upswings and downswings: its very regularity has given it an established place lacked by more occasional outputs. But this does not mean that there is any the less of an obsession about how "the competition" is doing. In the assistant editors' room at Television Centre there is a large wallchart which traces the relative fortunes of BBC's Nine O'Clock News and ITN's News at Ten. A close monitoring of the "other side" takes place to the extent of drawing up a "comparison list" which sets out respective news judgements as reflected in the running orders. A senior editor in Television News, asked if the pressure of ITN's competition was felt, replied:

"The spur of competition rather. We ask 'why' and 'how' about their output. We are very conscious of what they produce. Not in a ratings sense simply - though we don't ignore these - but rather the comparative coverage of particular stories. There is also the question of priority - who gets on the air first."

There is, then, in addition, a qualitative appraisal, a casting of the professional eye over the other man's product. The Deputy Editor, Television

News, was expressing a common view when he observed "ITN's very prestigious and very good". At Broadcasting House, too, the Radio News Department sees ITN as "the competition", although the advent of commercial radio has brought a more direct opponent. A memorandum from the Deputy Editor, Radio News to the newsroom staff, serves to indicate the way in which a competitive consciousness is both embedded in the minutiae of deployment procedures and related to a general belief about how a "professional" news organisation conducts itself:

"No serious news organisation can afford to ignore competitors. We must monitor News at Ten. This duty is normally that of the sub 3 on the rota. If he is tied up on the 10 o'clock R4 bulletin it must be allocated to one of the two subs on duty at that time on GNS." (20)

Special surveys: A further, irregular source of information for programme producers is the special survey undertaken on request by the Audience Research Department. Three such major surveys have been made of the audiences for both radio and television News (including ITN). (21) One major theme dealt with by all the surveys is "the standing of the news services", and the differing results published in 1957, 1962 and 1971 provide interesting insights into the shifts in the public image of BBC News in relation to ITN.

The central point emerging from the reports is that when the News Departments think about themselves and their standing they are compelled to situate themselves in relation to ITN as the primary "competitor-colleague" (22), and to a lesser degree, in relation to the press. At any rate, the relevant universe in which the BBC is judged is that of the media culture.

"In 1957 BBC-Radio, and in 1962 BBC-TV, were by far the most frequently nominated as 'the main source of news'. In 1970....BBC-TV no longer held the lead over ITN, radio, and the newspapers, in the numbers nominating it as their main source of news. Whereas in 1962, 38% said it was their main source as against 20% for ITN and 33% for the newspapers, in 1970 only 28% said so, similar numbers choosing ITN and the press. As in 1962, BBC radio proved to be the main source of news for only a minority (14% now, 17% then)."(23)

According to the surveys there has also been a diminution in the BBC's rating for presenting news interestingly:

"Whereas in 1962 more than twice as many people chose BBC-TV as chose ITN (46% compared with 21%), in 1970 they were chosen by approximately equal numbers."(24)

In an area of "standing" crucially important in the BBC, that of accuracy and trustworthiness, the 1970 survey found that BBC-TV still "proved a clear leader".(25) The results of this survey provide evidence for an explanation of the belief, often encountered in the News Departments, that the BBC has somehow a "special relationship" with the British public. The Editor, Radio News said, "We're lucky. We still have the trust of a substantial part of the audience. Perhaps less than used to be the case, but people are more cynical these days." He pointed out, as did a number of other newsmen during fieldwork, that at times of crisis or of great public concern, that BBC Radio News figures rose, as did those for Television News, and in the latter case more than those of ITN. This rise in "the figures", is widely seen in the News Division as reflecting a widespread belief amongst the audience that the BBC, in the words of the Editor,

Radio News, "Desperately, honestly wants to get as close to the truth as it can".

The findings of the special surveys are not generally disseminated amongst the News Departments. The reason for this given by the Editor, Radio News was that they did not provide "sufficiently clear conclusions to be of help". A view echoed by the Editor, Television News, who thought they were "not particularly useful", as they were "not practical". If they had been distributed it would have seemed that their contents were "vitally important" and this would have been misleading. He had no worries or objections, however, concerning the distribution of the findings, he said.

Other sources of information: The News Departments have other, non-routine, indications of "what the audience thinks". The Deputy Editor, Radio News said that, in a standard week, audience reaction yielded about 30 letters. The Editor, Television News thought there might be some twenty per week which "required answers". There are also some half a dozen telephone calls made daily to the newsrooms. These reactions mostly fall into the category of "complaints" which, said the Editor, Television News, was "not a vastly useful response". Asked what sort of audience research material is made regularly available the Deputy Editor, Radio News confirmed that is was,

"Not much more than the figures. There's nothing in detail on listener reaction; audience research is too expensive."

Among the newsmen the awareness of audience figures seemed pre-eminent. In keeping with the News Departments' assured self-image noted in the previous chapter, an Editor of the Day in Radio News observed:

"All the audience peaks on Radio 4 are at news times. By any standards, news is the most important output, and it's not accorded recognition."

There is less awareness, however, of audience reaction in the newsrooms and among reporters, as letters go directly to the senior editors for handling. Synopses of their contents are only sporadically made available. The Editor, Radio News said that this was done when listeners made "valid points" which ought to be known about. For most of the newsmen, the sources of evidence about the audience which constitute "objective" evidence for any beliefs they might hold about the audiences are the synopses of letters and telephone calls, and these are noted as coming "from a particular type of person, one who feels strongly, a small minority" as the Editor, Radio News put it. Images of the audience are also built up from private interactions, and in the case of reporting staff through interaction with sources. There are occasional newspaper criticisms of the news output, though because it is so routine, critics find other media outputs more worthwhile.⁽²⁶⁾ Occasional letters to newspapers and the Radio Times also provide information about what some members of the audience think. This relative insulation from the world is widely acknowledged at the operational level:

"There's no direct feedback; there're only letters and calls and these are usually cranky".

"All you're left with ultimately is a feel".

Sociologists have perceived this situation, where the mass communicator operates in conditions of uncertainty about his audience,⁽²⁷⁾ as a "problem". Observation suggests that it is not experienced as a problem in the news-producing context because there are both beliefs and routine strategies available for coping with the social distance between communicator and audience.

4. Routinising production for an audience:

Herbert Gans, reporting on a study of newsmen in the United States

television news networks, emphasises their ignorance of the audiences they are addressing:

"Television broadcasters know little about their audience. Although the networks which employ them conduct studies of the characteristics of the audience, its viewing patterns and program preferences, news broadcasters rarely see these, and have no desire to see them. They are presenting the news, not trying to satisfy an audience, and the less they know of the audience, the more attention they can pay to the news".⁽²⁸⁾

Gans has pinpointed the professional attitude, and there was a great deal of evidence in the BBC newsrooms to suggest considerable similarity with this. Most of the data collected on newsmen's conceptions of the audience had to be elicited in interviews or discussions. The fact of its not being volunteered is of some significance. It is reasonable to assume that if newsmen were acutely and pressingly aware of the audiences to whom their work is transmitted more remarks would have been passed. The answer lies in the way in which production routines embody assumptions about audiences: there is not a "problem" in the way sociologists have presented it. "The audience" is part of a routinised way of life.

For those who have exposure as "names" or "faces", that is, the reporters and newsreaders, a form of feedback comes through people stopping them in public places, and telling them what they think about particular items. Newsreaders particularly, who in fact have no editorial role at all, complain of being saddled with responsibility for the entire output. But sometimes this kind of reaction from the public is not even in terms of specific criticisms about the bulletins, but merely confirms that

someone, somewhere, is watching or listening:

"People that you know will come up to you and say,
'We heard you yesterday! Don't know what it was
you were saying though. But we heard you.'"

(Reporter, Radio News).

When it comes to thinking about the kind of news most relevant to "the audience" newsmen exercise their news judgement rather than going out and seeking specific information about the composition, wants or tastes of those with whom they are communicating. In this context making a news judgement is thinking about the audience because the presumption is that the professional's selections are those which meet the desires of those who are being addressed. This brings us to an important belief underlying the routines of selection.

4.1. "Audience interest": Newsmen customarily reply to questions about news judgement by saying that they select either what is "important" or "interesting". There are two different strands in the argument from professionalism here. To talk about the public's "interest" is the newsman's way of saying that he is selecting news in line with what he believes the public to want. Newsmen do not doubt that they know what is wanted. For the sociologist there is a "problem" here: how can newsmen ascribe defined interests to diverse groups in society, something for everyone, and from these derive prescriptions for action?

The answer lies in the related notions of professionalism, commitment, and experience. It is a circular argument: because of skills in discrimination deriving from his immersion in the world of news the newsman is best placed to discern what is interesting - an explanation which provides no independent criteria. It is in this context that we have to see the audience as issuing imperatives to the newsmen: it has rhetorical force

rather than descriptive accuracy.

When newsmen explain particular choices of news item by reference to audience "interest" the logic is one of justification as well as of explanation. There are rules of thumb defining what is of interest, or what is not. In one particular case the notion of public "interest" has achieved the informally codified status of a more or less firm "rule" concerning disasters. "McLurg's Law", so the tale is told, originated in the BBC External Services at Bush House. It lays down scales of relative newsworthiness for disasters: if crashes occur far away, say in Asia, they are not as newsworthy as if they occur in Europe; and they achieve paramount value if they occur at home, preferably in the Greater London area. It is not only crashes, but also natural disasters of any conceivable kind which are subsumed under the "law". A subsidiary clause relates to skin colour and cultural proximity: the following death tolls, in two individual variants, are of roughly equal news value:

"One thousand wogs, fifty frogs, one Briton".

"One European is worth twenty-eight Chinese, or
perhaps 2 Welsh miners worth one thousand Pakistanis".⁽²⁹⁾

The "law" is usually propounded in the context of a joking situation, but as one newsman remarked, "It's a joke that's relevant. It's dictated by the facts". An Editor of the Day gave a succinct explanation of the rationale behind McLurg's Law:

"It's a question of the impact on people. A coach overturned in India the other day and sixty or seventy people were drowned, but I ignored it. An Indian airliner crash would rate it - it's more exciting".

In view of the apparent fact that national news services are first and foremost concerned with items of domestic interest the existence of such a "rule" is not surprising.

This particular example - "foreign human interest" - splits beliefs about audience interest into two component parts, foreign stories and human interest stories. It is a general conviction in the News Departments that "foreign news is hard to sell", that there is little interest for it amongst the British public:

"The EEC's grinding on like the mills of God, and when I was in Vietnam a while ago I could never interest people. It was a quiet period - there were a thousand casualties a day. Nobody cared; they'd heard it all before - you couldn't tell them anything new".

(Diplomatic Correspondent, Television News).

A TV reporter quoted "the old news editor's maxim: one home story is worth five foreign". In a similar vein, a Chief sub-editor in Radio News thought that the British public was not very "internationally-minded". They were bored with the "Watergate Affair". That was why "Good dramatic home stories are needed".

The "human interest" story is something of a catch-all category. One component of the category is the "disaster story". Here again the notion of impact is invoked. When newsmen are asked why so many 'plane and train crashes make the bulletins, the answer frequently given is that it accords with the audience's desires:

"It's not just a ghoulish streak; the general public do feel themselves involved. They can identify with these. The landslide in Hong Kong doesn't involve them so much. It's far away. The public see themselves in it - it's a talking point".

(Foreign Duty Editor, Television News).

To take another example, that of murders. On one occasion the Editor of the Day selected a story about two young girls being murdered; it was interesting to the public, he said, because it related to family life:

"Two eleven year old girls - that's news; young girls alone are always getting murdered on the way home, or leaving home".

Another kind of story seen as linked to family interest is that of the "baby-snatch"; a television reporter who had covered a celebrated case gave a detailed account of why the public was likely to be interested:

"Every mother, or grandmother, would identify with that story. It's the sort of thing that happens. A mother gets taken short six weeks after being pregnant and has to go to the toilet. She knows she shouldn't leave the baby on its own, but she does, and then it's gone. It's a six week old baby - tiny, new. The fact she needed medicine added extra pathos".

Stories which involve British Royalty also fall into this human interest category. When the Duke of Norfolk's retirement from stewardship of one of the racetracks was announced, the television sub-editor writing about the story justified coverage by saying "the story is of general interest; there's a nostalgic element". On another occasion, at a futures meeting, it was decided to obtain pictures of the Queen at a Highland dance; newsworthy, as one newsman said, because "they'll show what she's wearing; she'll twirl her knicks around decorously".

At the basis of the ascription of "interest" lies a model of the newsman-as-audience:

"I can only take what goes on in my own home as an indicator of interest. There was a great thing about the Prices and Incomes Board folding up, but everyone

was bored. But when there was an item about typhoid-carriers, we had a half-hour discussion. We're supposed to be an informative medium, but we've got to entertain the public. This is more obvious with the style of news now".

(Sub-editor, Radio News).

The newsmen see themselves as in a position to take on the attributes of the "audience role" in respect of standards, taste and comprehension. As noted above, the news judgement is merged in practice with the question "What does the public want or expect to see or hear?" The news-producing milieu fosters the belief that newsmen are audience members, albeit of a specialised kind, because of the normative pressure to immerse themselves in media outputs. And if the newsman is an audience member, then his family serves the function of being the "typical" audience group, and for some, this is an important source of response:

"I'm really writing for myself and the wife. Otherwise you'd think of that 18 million viewers (sic). The wife's my hardest critic, by the way; always saying, 'Why did you do that?'"

(Chief sub-editor, Television News).

Gans has observed that US newsmen also take their personal lives and experiences as a model for what will interest the audience:

"Their wives, friends and neighbours talk to them about the program offering criticism and suggestions. Although the broadcaster rarely alters his actions as a result, these contacts do give him one image of the audience."(30)

This account once again crystallises an essential attribute of professionalism in the newsrooms. There is a certain need for strategies to cope with the ambiguity of affirming on the one hand that "audience interest" is, in the last resort, the final arbiter of what is included in the bulletins, and on the other maintaining the autonomous stance. It can be resolved this way:

P.S. Is the news geared to the audience?

"We prefer to use our own intelligence. The basis is 'What is going to appeal to the majority of people?' For example, chess has become news. We make adjustments according to the fluctuations of interest in a given story".

(News Editor, Television News).

The newsmen remain the controllers, the definers of news value, although a statement such as this appears to make the audience all-powerful; once more, those with news judgement are the perceivers of fluctuations in interest. Not all newsmen feel bound to advance such arguments in defence of their professionalism, and some occupy a frankly agnostic position arguing that pragmatically they seem to be producing the right sort of thing. (31)

"You wouldn't want to know what the audience wants - it might tie your hands too much".

(Editor of the Day, Radio News).

The explicit argument which would be forwarded to support this position is couched in terms of the professionalism of the communicator: it is far better to know little since untrammelled judgement may then be exercised on behalf of the public. Naturally, it is admitted that on occasion this judgement can be imperfect:

"In the end it's professional judgement and we're not always right".

(News Organiser, Television News).

"No matter what you do, you bore some of the people some of the time".

(Foreign Duty Editor, Television News).

The latter variant shifts the onus onto the audience to some extent. Generally though, the appeal to professionalism reduces the tensions inherent in knowing relatively little about those who are being addressed and yet having to construct satisfactory messages to them.

Should the problem of the audience arise in the sociologists sense it is always in the very practical circumstances of coping with routines. For example, when, as in news production, the outputs are frequent, one problem which faces newsmen is that of knowing when a story is so widely diffused that it should no longer be included in the bulletins. Underlying this problem is the extent to which assumptions about the scope of the audience's knowledge about a particular story can reasonably be made. This state of affairs particularly obtains in Radio News where outputs are more frequent than in television. A Duty Editor at the Radio News summaries desk posed the issue this way:

"We ask 'When do people know about it?' That's how we judge when a lead story is played out".

But this tells only what sort of judgement is exercised and not the basis on which it is made. Since on any given day editors cannot know what their audiences know, the answer has to be derived from "news nose" or "professional" judgement. In this way not knowing what audience does in fact know is not a problematic state of affairs: it is resolved by making certain, possibly very plausible, assumptions about its state of knowledge. An Editor of the Day, asked whether such assumptions were made, replied:

"Yes. Take the example of the Irish shootings.
When we talk about the burning of the embassy we
have to get in a reference to last Sunday's events.
We don't talk about it as though it didn't happen.
We know the audience knows about it."

In newsman's terms, this is the problem of providing adequate "background". Because of the pressure of deadlines and the shortage of time available and, in addition to this, the concept of news-as-front-page, the routine practice is to keep such "background" to a minimum. There is also an impetus to change stories, "to ring the changes" which derives from newsmen's values rather than any independently-informed appraisal of what the audience wants or needs: "We're always looking for new stories, minute to minute". Observation in the newsroom suggested that the impetus for change came partly from boredom with a given story after a long newswday: immersion in the detail seems to make editors convinced that the public is somehow equally familiar and equally bored. A Chief sub-editor in Television News gave a clear description of how these assumptions about audience knowledge become embodied in the production routines:

"You work on the assumption that the public do read newspapers, they do listen to the radio. You forget explanation. It becomes, after a few days, 'The Container Dispute, 'Northern Ireland', 'The Common Market': (the issue) becomes a side heading, and then you go into the day's news. I don't know what people expect."

The channel for which news is produced provides one rather vague discriminant which is sometimes cited when talking about interested publics. Here is one way in which what Walter Lippmann so aptly called the "phantom public" can be made more real. In Television News, the BBC-1 outputs are seen as the main news output as they attract the largest audiences. The

BBC-1 team has therefore to produce "the national news", one which has the broadest possible basis of appeal. This influences the selections made: BBC-1 is seen as needing to give a comprehensive coverage, whereas for the late-night programme News Extra on BBC-2, the newsmen can take it for granted that its audience will be au fait with the news of the day leaving it free to present more "background".

"We expand the important story of the day with ramifications using experts with personal knowledge. We go for a totally different set of stories which are reduced on (BBC) 1, which are news in themselves, the vaguely scientific, social story which needs exposure and time. We pull together the strands on international stories, comparing them."

(Editor of the Day, BBC-2).

The programme concept is in part determined by the image of the audience as:

"more 'intellectual', more informed, and prepared to sit through a half-hour news presentation."

(Foreign Duty Editor, Television News).

Similarly, for radio newsmen discrimination can be made in terms of the channels for which news is produced. Radio 4, it has been noted, is, as "the big time" output, one which is directed at the audience "really interested" in news. The aim here is comprehensiveness, as on BBC-1. By contrast the audiences listening to Radios 1 and 2 are perceived, in the words of one Duty Editor, as composed of "people listening to pop who don't want the finer details." This view affects the approach to newswriting:

"Generally speaking, the story is kept short. It's literally the bare bones. We keep it fairly simple without patronising, without going into the jargon used in the Parliamentary Report."

In its turn, the Radio 3 audience is seen as more interested in "cultural stuff, artists and composers dying".

These classifications are vague, telling very little about actual audience wants. But they are, and this is crucial, serviceable in the sense that they provide an orientation and presumptive touchstone with the world outside.

4.ii. Obligatory coverage: news as a public service:

"You've got a duty, if they're talking about something - you've got to supply them with information to let them talk sense."

(Senior sub-editor, Radio News).

"It worries us quite a lot if there are a lot of complaints or attacks - and it's not just by isolated individuals. We take it seriously when there're a lot. We think about things; we're sensitive to criticism. You're bound to get certain complaints. For instance, I could've predicted that people'd say George Best is getting too much attention. We don't worry if it's an isolated nutty person, but we do if it's a steady flow."

(Deputy Editor, Radio News).

The last section has indicated how, despite their lack of an immediate and concrete relationship to the broadcasting audience, radio and television newsmen nevertheless find an adequate number of sources of orientation through beliefs and strategies deriving from the concept of "audience

interest". There is a distinctive set of beliefs which, this time, derives from the BBC's Charter obligations to inform, educate and entertain the public which finances it. The duty to inform is invoked particularly in times of crisis such as the General Strike of 1926, the Second World War, and the Suez Affair of 1956. More recently, Northern Ireland coverage has fallen into this category. In this context of belief a further strand in the notion of professionalism is to be found in a sense specific to the Corporation: the note was sounded in the quotation from the News Guide at the very beginning of this chapter, as it is in this statement by the Deputy Editor, Radio News:

"There's a fair number of letters which say: 'Stop telling us about Northern Ireland. The Irish are bloody foreigners, and nothing to do with us. Tell us more about home stuff.' Our reply is: 'Sorry, we don't like it either, but it's damned important, and we've got to tell people about it.'"

In this formulation the BBC professional is governed by an imperative of what it is proper for a concerned and responsible newsman to do; the "public service" element is incorporated into the corpus of knowledge relevant to news judgement. The imperative may not always be an agreeable one but it must be obeyed, even if the audience protests. Northern Ireland was frequently mentioned in this connexion:

"Take Ulster: we've got a duty to do a daily round-up. Though there might be a small explosion - we mustn't be complacent and say 'There's another one', if it's something affecting us all."

(Reporter, Television News).

Other stories were also justified in terms of the duty to the audience:

"We did a three-minute piece on the Bangladesh abortions. I thought that was an interesting story. 24 Hours did a very similar piece to ours, but their audience is about two million. ITN didn't cover it. One consideration in covering it was that ours is a ten million audience (sic). Something of that importance deserves to be seen by more than two million."

(Editor of the Day, Television News).

The importance of the News is perceived in terms of an audience size which confers obligations, particularly when a monitoring of the media culture indicates an absence of competing coverage. An additional argument is that high costs of TV production ought not to be a deterrent to covering stories right up to the limits of the budget:

"We can't think, for instance, that we won't go and cover something because we can't afford it. Take Watergate: that's our financial Golgotha. It's crucifying us in terms of back-up costs, satellites. We've practically taken over a local TV station in Washington who're doing little else but work for us. In budgetary terms we should have stopped coverage a fortnight ago. It's a major constitutional crisis in the United States. We unequivocally have to cover it."

(Deputy Editor, Television News).

These "mandatory" stories rely on news judgement, and differ somewhat from the News Guide's list of categories of "public service information" pure and simple, which are identified in terms of their "immediate concern

to sizeable sections of listeners": The Weather, The Financial Times Index, Cancelled Events, Special (official) Messages, SOS Messages, Thames Flood Warnings and Public Transport Alterations and Power Cuts.⁽³²⁾ Taking the last example, in the fieldwork period during the electricity, gas and railway workers' strikes of 1972 and 1973, BBC bulletins contained detailed information of considerable interest to travellers and power users. A Radio News reporter covering the electricity workers' strike in 1972 observed:

"The BBC is a public service as well as a news media (sic). We would be leaving people to wonder if we don't say anything."

The public service argument, although distinctive, clearly has points of contact with assumptions about news interest amongst the audience. It is not always personally agreeable for newsmen to cover certain stories, but they perceive their duty to do so as originating from the audience's independent desires:

"I'm just arranging a one-minute wrap-up of the One Thousand Guineas. I'm not a betting man myself, but I know that a lot of people will be interested."

(Home News Editor, Radio News).

"There are some things which I wouldn't want to put in. I'm not interested in football; it's a bloody obligation. But the public's interested so we should be carrying the bloody thing."

(Editor of the Day, Television News).

The picture is one of a caring communicator who has to cover a wide range of stories: from crises to football matches. It becomes a duty, using this argument, to present any, and all, the news, however unpalatable, but it cannot be presented in certain ways. Part of the BBC newsman's

duty is to reach the requisite degree of professional competence to be able to present the horrifying event with tact and "good taste". For example, one Editor of the Day in the television newsroom rebuked a sub-editor for using the phrase "garotted on a wire", in a Northern Ireland story, substituting "a young man found strangled". Similarly, when it is assumed that many children will be watching television news, at 5.45 pm, the so-called "kiddies' charter" operates and scenes deemed likely to be distressing are omitted from bulletins. One editor excluded pictures of Vietnam fighting from this bulletin on the ground that they were "a bit meaty for the 5.45". The Editor, Television News spoke of "the unwritten, loosish rule that for the quarter-to-six we go easy. We don't show peasants being beaten to death or public executions." The News Guide devotes a special paragraph to the meaning of good taste:

"It means having a decent respect for our listeners. We do not forget that we are guests in our listeners' homes. We, therefore, behave as good guests; we do not abuse the hospitality of our hosts by wilfully shocking, hurting or offending them. That is why we accept a number of self-denying ordinances; we do our best not to cause any listener unnecessary anxiety, shock or mental suffering, any parent of young children needless embarrassment or offence (in reporting crimes for instance). There are times when the dictates of news and "good taste" appear to pull in opposite directions; we learn to live with such tensions."⁽³³⁾

What is at stake is the Corporate image as a responsible and responsive source. As the above quotation indicates, there is a tension between the

two strands of professionalism discussed here: news value has, ideally, to be tempered by public service ideals.

4.iii. A model for comprehensibility:

Broadcasters have to present their output in ways which they anticipate will be understood by the audiences which they are addressing. Trainee journalists in BBC News were told by their chief instructor to bear in mind "the Sheffield bus-driver's wife" as the kind of person who would have to be able to understand whatever they produced. The role played by such an image is to serve as a reminder, as an institutionalised caution to be lucid.⁽³⁴⁾ Once again, underlying this is the notion of the newsman as the representative recipient of messages:

"Our strength and weakness is that we take it that if we can understand it, then so can the public.

At times we get carried away. We sometimes think that certain forms of words are understood when they are not, and it's just a sort of journalistic shorthand."

(Chief sub-editor, Television News).

The 1971 Audience Research Department report, noting that 69% of interviewees considered BBC-TV News as "always clearly worded" pointed out,

"even if listeners do regard the bulletins as clearly worded, this constitutes no proof that they were, in fact comprehensible. Research in this area which has been widespread abroad, could usefully be undertaken in this country."⁽³⁵⁾

This sort of problem is more acute in the case of broadcasting, which by definition reaches a global audience, than in the case of newspapers or magazines which have clear profiles of their readerships. As with

other aspects of the selection process, the choice of vocabulary is routinised, with internal definitions of what constitutes "clarity" available in the newsrooms. Obscurities in reports and written stories are meant to be removed in the process of passing through the editorial system. Part of the newsreader's role is to act as everyman by checking the scripts and seeing that he can understand everything; one radio newsreader described himself as:

"a middle man, not a specialist, a gatherer or writer. We have to protect the public from the specialists - it's good that we're not journalists. We have to understand the news straight away if its been successfully compiled. I'm an intermediary between the listener and the producer."

Achieving clarity is a particularly intense obsession amongst broadcasters generally, and is a value related to the specific problems of non -print media such as radio and television. Outsiders are told countless times that "there's no going back" in broadcasting: the message has to be understood immediately or not at all. News programmes are transmitted as a series of items in a defined time slot. A frequent comparison is made with newspapers: there, a reader can return to a point which has eluded him; in television and radio the "impact" has to be simultaneous with the audience's act of perception. The News Guide derives from this constraint the necessary style:

"there is no room in radio news for complexity, vagueness, ambiguity, obscurity. We must know what we want to say. And we must say it with directness, simplicity and precision."(36)

There is a related assumption that the audience's attention can be held only with a certain kind of stimulation. It is in this sort of context

that this remark, made by an Editor of the Day in Television News, should be evaluated:

"We do put some things in simply because they are pictures. If there was a three or four minute speech, you'd want a good picture story to revive flagging interest."

The concept of clarity is related to beliefs about the presentational forms best suited to effective communication with the audience. (37)

5. Programme Concepts:

There is a certain ambivalence in newsmen's beliefs. On the one hand they stress their autonomy, and the self-sufficiency of their milieu, yet on the other they are aware of how this has to be tempered to meet competitive realities. The number of viewers or listeners attracted, or retained, by broadcasts remains, while not the final yardstick in decision-making, at least a very significant one.

Newsmen have to produce news in presentational formats, or "packages" as they are called, which appear to satisfy their audiences. There are, of necessity, direct links between programme concepts and practice, and assumptions made about the psychology of the audience. There is a desire to communicate in an optimal way. But optimality is professionally defined by the producers.

This point can be highlighted by a discussion of the programme concepts available to the producers. In both News Departments, broadcasts are constructed in accordance with what at, any one time, amounts to a "production formula": that is, a relatively set and stable way of selecting, ordering, treating, and presenting news. A central concept which is of relevance is that of "actuality": the notion that the TV camera or the microphone can act as vehicles which convey the "reality" of the event

they are transmitting.⁽³⁸⁾ When newsmen talk of actuality they have in mind the realising of news stories in ways which have the maximum impact on the audience because the medium is being used in the best possible way: "the story tells itself".⁽³⁹⁾

Within the News Departments there are "theories" concerning the use of actuality which justify existing practice. In the case of TV the relevant notion is that of "picture value" and in radio that of "natural sound". In both services the importance of "on the spot reporting" is linked to these notions, and is seen as a viable technique because of its impact on the audience.

5.1. An underlying programme concept:

The study of organisational procedures has shown that the production process involves a progressive narrowing of options as stories are fitted into "slots". Here it is apposite to consider some aspects of the programme concept viewed from the standpoint of the newsman's beliefs about its relevance for the audiences which he is addressing.

The Editor of the Day, in his "producer" role, is responsible for "building the programme", for realising, in terms as near ideal as possible, the conception embodied in the final "running order". The running order contains what one newsman aptly called a "hidden skeleton": it embodies ordered selections with prescriptions about how these should be treated. It was pointed out that the running order is subject to progressive modification as the newsday continues. Editors stressed that the order chosen for radio and TV bulletins did not follow a strict ranking of "importance" in terms of "straight news value":

"I write stories, firstly in a rough notional order of importance, and then I take each one and see where they hang together. You try to draw a balance between

the order of importance on the one hand and coherence on the other. No bulletin could be based entirely on the order of importance: it would be absurd. You try to make it look like a designed programme rather than an accident."

(Editor of the Day, Television News).

There is an underlying "aesthetic" appraisal as to how a well-constructed programme looks or sounds. Another Editor of the Day made explicit the link between this programme concept and the interest which had to be retained in the audience, which is in turn linked to the goal of maintaining audience size:

Field Note: "You had to have an idea of the programme: it was like a 'contour map' with peaks and troughs; there has to be a 'backbone', a 'dramatic concept'. 'You have to keep the interest moving: it's no good doing a flat two-dimensional newspaper - you have to give presentation (some thought)'".

While both of these quotations are from television newsmen, the same basic notions apply in thinking about radio news. An Editor of the Day observed:

"You don't want the bulletin to be a succession of jumps. You don't want voice pieces all to come together. You put foreign stories together in a small group. But all these tidy arrangements can be destroyed at a moment's notice - that's part of the attraction of the job."

Radio and television do, however, need to be discussed separately as they employ distinct modes of actuality, each "appropriate" to the given medium.

5.ii. Television actuality: saying it with pictures:

Moving pictures are, for the TV newsman, a form of "actuality", a medium through which "reality" can be genuinely and authentically captured and presented. There is a conventional wisdom concerning the role and significance of pictures for television news programmes:

"Being TV, we want to put film to it (the story)
if possible."

(News Editor, Television News).

"I suppose the main difference (between radio and TV) is that being a visual media (sic) we have to fit some sort of picture with what is going out, even if it's only a still, or a quarter screen overlay.....If there are floods in the Sahara you have to show a picture."

(Senior TV Engineer, Television News).

"TV is pictures. It feeds on them. It must always have them. There can be silence on the screen: no words, no music, no sound effects: but there must be pictures. This is the first datum that all TV journalists have to come to terms with."⁽⁴⁰⁾

Optimum television news coverage is defined in terms of obedience to a pictorial imperative. It is the moving pictures of events which are felt able to convey the truth in a way best suited to the medium. Filmed, videotaped or "live" accounts are the optimal modes of presentation available to the TV journalist. The remarks cited above make this clear. A former Editor of ITN, Sir Geoffrey Cox, has spelled out with clarity the sort of production concept with which his news organisation has worked, one which differs only in nuances from that encountered at the BBC; writing about "picture value" he has noted that:

"The most obvious way in which TV is a strong news medium is its ability to depict on the screen an event exactly as it happens, or as it happened.....Where natural sound of the event is available the impact is even more effective."⁽⁴¹⁾

This expresses the basic belief that television is a medium which does not interfere in what it transmits and that "live" TV is the most pure-from-the-source form. The telling criticisms of this view have already been noted.⁽⁴²⁾ Nevertheless, it is still widely held, and has been expressed even more poetically by Kenneth Adam, a former Director of Television, BBC:

"The event without reconstruction, or editing, or interference - this, putting sound with picture, is the unique quality of television transmission; because it is the transmission of experience. News is no longer what it has always been, something heard or seen or reported upon after it has happened. News is not then, it is now. After President Kennedy was killed, while millions watched, all the old definitions went by the board. Truth is not only stranger but stronger than fiction."⁽⁴³⁾

The second-best concept: If "live" dramatic television and the "good film story" represent television at its best, anything which is not realised in those terms falls into the category of second-best, or worse. Sir Geoffrey Cox, expressing the ITN view, has said:

"There is no doubt that in TV, as in the popular press, when you have the pictures that tell the story you must give them the space to do their

job, even if the other news has to be boiled down to headlines."⁽⁴⁴⁾

On this view then, it is held that "picture value" should be used as a selection criterion for deciding what counts as the news of the day. While this is clearly a view also obtaining at the BBC, senior newsmen were careful to stress the "responsibility" which governs selections.

The second-best presentational mode which comes in for most opprobrium from newsmen is that of the "talking head"; this is the dismissive phrase used in the TV world to describe a person "in vision" (on the screen) who is, in one way or another, speaking to camera. Thus, for example, news-readers addressing the public are "talking heads", as are people who are interviewed or are giving speeches. Robin Day has described this presentational technique as "what TV professionals tend to regard as a second hand and a second class way of presenting issues."⁽⁴⁵⁾ The idea, therefore of transmitting an entire news bulletin in terms of "talking heads" is seen by newsmen as,

"a waste of opportunity. It is what Madison Avenue men call 'radio with a light to read by'. The picture adds nothing: indeed it may subtract, in the sense that it distracts. If the special talent of TV is to be exploited, the pictures and the words must reinforce each other. The watcher must see what he is hearing about, and hear what he is seeing."⁽⁴⁶⁾

This kind of view contains an implicit theory of the informational success of a visual as opposed to a purely auditory medium. The disapproval of what is seen as a shoddy form of presentation is often expressed in terms of that pliable notion of "professionalism", encountered in so many other contexts. To commit the sin of "thinking radio" is to have less than the requisite consideration necessary for the goal of maintaining audience

interest. To bore is to run the risk of people switching off, or even, far worse, switching channels. At yet another level it is not "keeping" the audience which matters at all, but rather respecting a value which has become part of what defines the technically sweet programme. Sir Geoffrey Cox, while acknowledging that diagrams, stills, maps and other graphics are useful presentational aids, significantly ranks them lower than moving pictures. He also notes the limits of optimal television when it comes to presenting a "situationer", or scene-setting story, from locations such as conferences:

"This is a story which the cameras cannot tell, and for which TV is forced back on what is virtually a radio report with the reporter in vision."⁽⁴⁷⁾

Such reports, he observes, have to be kept "short and pointed" to retain the viewers' attention.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The comparison with radio, again, is not fortuitous and expresses definitively the view held by TV newsmen that the repertoire available to them which is distinctively televisual has to be used. To judge by the evidence provided by the special Audience Research reports commissioned by the News Departments, there indeed is a desire amongst the viewing public for film stories, though it is doubtful whether such a generous inference as to the general psychology of attention can be made on this basis:

"Adults were asked to say whether they would like film to be shown more or less often, presumably in place of stories read by the newsreader or spoken by special correspondents.....a little under a third were content with things as they are, but (predictably) nearly all the rest (59%) would like film 'more often' or 'a lot more often'."⁽⁴⁸⁾

The distinctiveness of the televisual concept of news is illuminated

by this example. In July 1973, one TV bulletin carried the story of a father in an American town threatening to kill his child with a knife. There were dramatic pictures of the police closing in, and ultimately rescuing the child, watched by crowds on the pavements. In strict "news value" terms a story of this category - "American small-town crime" - would be of minimal interest to journalists producing news for a British public. One can note in relation to the choice these judgements expressed by a copy taster in BBC Radio News:

"You discard most of the foreign immediately. About 15% of all copy is about minor incidents in the Middle East. Another 15% is from the States: murders and things like that which are commonplace."

As the commonplace does not typically make news, clearly there was some other criterion at work in the selection of this story: namely, picture value.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Questioned about this specific story, the Deputy Editor, TV News, agreed with this assessment: "It was bizarre, out of the ordinary. There was danger." However, like other newsmen in TV News, he was at pains to stress an awareness of the "dangers":

"We're always on our guard about running a story because there are good pictures. But it's wrong to think we choose things just because of this: for example, the other day we led with the Pound and the IMF....Again, in the case of the baby snatch we did that by interviews. I'm not denigrating wall-paper film since frequently it does convey the feel of the story; it heightens public awareness. Radio can't convey the feel of five hundred police tramping around Bristol. And it can't show the empty prams outside all the shops in Bristol. There's not one mother who leaves

her child outside. On the other side there are strict picture stories: there's the 'end of the bulletin story'".

By this account, then, there is something of a tension between news values proper and picture value. Whereas, on the one hand, news judgement tells the newsmen that a given story is "important" and deserves to have prominence, on the other, they recognise that the "best" story from the point of view of using the qualities of the medium might be a different one. During the fieldwork in Television News, many of the newsmen referred to the danger of giving "too much play to the pictures", and of forgetting the "real story" which they are meant to illustrate. To allay any doubts on the part of the observer, the News Editor noted, in much the same vein as the Deputy Editor: "We always go for the big story, even if we haven't got the pictures". This statement encapsulates the ambivalence.

In fairness, however, it must be noted that to be aware of the need for the technique, is also, for some, to admit the awareness of when it fails to communicate effectively the true nature of the issue or events in question. The issue mentioned most frequently was Northern Ireland.

"Lots has been done on Northern Ireland, but the impact hasn't come across."

(Senior Duty Editor, Television News).

One television reporter said that he had been subjected to "culture shock" on first arriving in Ireland, and that he did not see how anyone who had not directly experienced the situation could grasp it: "The population over here (in Britain) doesn't accept it as a real situation."

Robin Day has written about the limitations of concentrating on pictures from a standpoint accurately reflecting the unease also found amongst several television newsmen:

"The insatiable appetite of television for vivid, action-packed pictures has wide and profound implications. It means that television has a built-in tendency to present issues solely or mainly in terms of their immediately visible results. Wars on television are seen almost exclusively in terms of casualties and combat, as in the case of Vietnam, the first television war. Or as in the Biafran rebellion, in terms of the starving children who were seen with sickening regularity on our television screens." (50)

5.iii. Television presentation:

During the fieldwork period a major change in the format of the BBC-1 Nine O'Clock News was instituted. (51) The change in this case involved the bulletin gaining an extra five minutes in length and presentation by two newsreaders rather than just one. A further innovative stroke was the use of a projection of the television newsroom as background to the newsreaders at the beginning and end of the bulletin.

It might be supposed that such extensive changes, with their internal implications of extra work and learning of new techniques might have been the product of wide canvassing within the Television News Department, and of extensive audience research, given that there were external implications regarding audience size. Neither of these courses of action appears to have been taken. In discussions with newsmen, prior to the change in November 1973, there was considerable vagueness about the date on which the "new bulletin" would commence. While it was known some months beforehand that there were to be two newsreaders and that the newsroom projection would be used it was indicative that the plans were described by newsmen as "cloaked in total

secrecy". According to the Audience Research Department, no research whatsoever is normally conducted in respect of format changes; these are "generated by individual departments: they'd have very strong ideas about this". No research on the likely audience reaction to the changeover to two-man presentation and the new format was conducted. It was pointed out that when ITN began to use two-man presentation in 1967 "we knew the figures went up soon after they started using them."

According to senior editors the new format was very much the Editor's idea. The Editor confirmed this, saying that he had been "bored with studio sets" and that the new format had seemed "the only appropriate thing". He had held discussions only with the most senior newsroom editors and the engineers as the change was "a bit irrelevant to the rest (of the staff)." There is apparently an expectation that new Editors "shake things up" and there were mixed feelings about the value of this particular change. The plan was effected about one and a half years after the Editor took his chair. The Deputy Editor, Television News confirmed the Audience Research Department's account: "As far as the new format goes we didn't seek the audience. We never even rationalised our thinking here. The old format had outlived its usefulness and needed loosening up. It was (the Editor's) idea - he was determined. There was resistance to it in TV News - some Assistant Editors didn't like the thought". Enlarging on the thinking behind the changes, the Deputy Editor said:

"We felt we needed a facelift anyway. There's the BBC image of the old maiden Aunt who'd bought good clothes at one time and can't afford to buy up-to-date gear. We wanted to go away from the straightforward and factual approach. The audience is much more sophisticated."

The picture emerging from this is that the format change was an innovative gesture made in conditions of surprising uncertainty as far

as the audience was concerned. Newsmen were very concerned to "set the record straight" on the issue of two-man presentation: they had not, they stressed "lifted" the idea from ITN; they appealed to history: the BBC-2 programme Newsroom had employed the technique in the 'Sixties "but no-one remembers that now". The change-over appears to have been an exercise of editorial power in the grand style based on the presumption that if the new format would not attract viewers it would nonetheless not lose any. According to the Editor there was an initial "heavy body of complaint" from viewers which had eventually slackened.

5.iv. Radio actuality: hearing it as it happens:

As the special Audience Research Department reports indicated, Radio News has suffered a considerable decline in its pulling power. This picture is consistent with the general decline of radio audience sizes since the introduction of television. By 1970, to retrieve sagging fortunes a more drastic "facelift" had been instituted for the medium - in line with the controversial plan Broadcasting in the Seventies.⁽⁵²⁾ In 1970, Radio News acquired a new Editor, and the changes introduced by him were far-reaching. In fact, two years later, when the fieldwork began, they were still a matter of heated dispute in the newsroom.

The core of the dispute was about the role of "voice" in the major news bulletins on Radio 4. A "voice piece" is a "live" or tape-recorded report spoken by a reporter or correspondent. The words spoken by the newsreader do not fall into this category. The voices of "people in the news" are categorised as "actuality", not "voice"; "natural sounds" such as gunfire, explosions, rioting, and so forth, are also classed as "actuality". In the "voice" dispute both "actuality" and "voice" were at issue.

BBC Radio News has traditionally given a key role to the newsreader. A former newsreader, Alvar Lidell, has written of the traditional concept of this role:

"....the point is that the newsreader was not meant to obtrude: his brief was to be the vocal equivalent of newspaper print leaving the listener (like a man reading his Times) to form his own impressions."⁽⁵³⁾

At the time the new Editor came into the Radio News Department a slight departure was being made from this tradition with the "very rare" inclusion of voice or actuality in the news bulletins.

The Editor decided to make a final break with the notion of "vocal print", and to use more "voice pieces" in the news bulletin, which he regarded as anyway "moving in that direction". The newsreader role was therefore to be curtailed from that of speaking the entire bulletin to that of an "anchorman" linking together discrete reporter-spoken pieces. The news bulletin therefore moved towards, what in radio terms had traditionally been a current affairs format, long practiced in programmes such as Radio Newsreel and From Our Own Correspondent.

The Editor pointed out in interview that the idea was not in fact "all that new-fangled"; there had been occasional uses of actuality in "hard" news bulletins in the 1930's, and War Report⁽⁵⁴⁾ had made extensive use of the "new" techniques. Implied by this change was not just an alteration in the newsreader role, but also one in the nature of work for the newsroom sub-editors. Until then the job had involved a good deal of writing; its emphasis was now to change much more to one of editing magnetic tape. Apart from this, reporters, being given prominence, became more prestigious: from being a "subs' bulletin" the output switched to being a "reporters' bulletin". In the newsroom, this was seen as a direct

consequence of the Editor's having been a reporter himself. The Editor confirmed that his having once been a reporter was a significant element in his thinking.

The changes were resisted, but unsuccessfully. Various "early retirements" resulted, and there were also a number of leap-frogging promotions for younger sub-editors who endorsed the theories of the new régime. The new orthodoxy is summed up in an internal history⁽⁵⁵⁾ written in 1970:

"And so into the Seventies under a new Editor Radio News....With his advent, a new emphasis was quickly put in bulletins on "live" and recorded on-the-spot coverage - which to radio, he felt strongly, was as pictures are to Television News, and often more vivid and authoritative than the conventional sub-edited story. The number of "inserts" has varied, naturally, according to the day's events; the average for a 15-minute bulletin is put at six. Change is always resisted, but on this occasion some listeners had a legitimate complaint - that editors did not always take intelligibility into account in putting on the air, say, a voice piece from a distant part of the world. The point was taken and suitable instruction given."

While during the fieldwork the new format was an established part of routine practice, resentments were still strong. The "voice" coup was seen as so extreme that even outside the immediately interested context of the newsroom it had become a BBC talking point. One Radio Talks producer said, in conversation, that when the new Editor, Radio

News, had taken his chair he had ordered "an immediate quota of five voice pieces per bulletin irrespective of content." The Editor's version was that he had issued an instruction along these lines: it seemed to him that radio had to demonstrate its particular abilities, namely its speed, and capacity for using voices. He had therefore notified his staff that he would regard 3 or 4 reports or actuality inserts as "the norm in a ten-minute bulletin". He had made the proviso, however, that the material had to be "good enough" for broadcasting. It seemed generally accepted that the Editor had been abrasive in his dealings with the newsroom staff; he had been regarded as very successful in building up the BBC-2 Television News programme Newsroom, and had been brought in to effect change.

The "voice issue" can be interpreted as a dispute over competing definitions of professionalism. The time-honoured ways of presenting (and producing) news were overthrown. Identification with the programme concepts of the new regime became critical for those who wanted self-advancement: these, therefore, became the professional ways of producing news. One Editor of the Day who, as a promotee was a beneficiary of the change, observed:

"One time news was what the newsreader told you; he told you what x was saying. I'm in favour of voice. It takes longer but you can actually hear x saying whatever it is. You want sounds, voices, people. It's more honest. It's the reporting business of taking the listener or reader as close to the event as you can get. Ideally you want to let people witness the riots with him. You send, as it were, a representative. It seems meaningless to transpose a reader between the representative and his audience. There are too many hands to pass through. This way it's only second-hand,

and you get the atmosphere and spirit."

"The audience" is used in this argument as a stick with which to beat opponents. Detractors were equally inclined to justify their standpoint by pointing to the incomprehensibility of the product when viewed from an external position. The use of "voice" was talked of as "debased coinage", "conning the public", "garbled mush". The Editor, taking up this point, noted that he had received many letters complaining about the use of voices, although he could not be sure what proportion of the public was represented by these. He had, as a matter of policy, retained the newsreader-read bulletin on Radio 3 in order to provide an alternative service, and he referred complainants to this facility.

There was however, a good deal of cynicism about the way the changed policy ought to be pursued in practice. The official line, presented in the extract from the internal history, is that the use of "voice" has to be justified on journalistic grounds. An official memorandum from the Editor, Radio News stresses that there is no "quota" of inserts into bulletins:

"our only standards are journalistic, broadcasting ones. Ask yourself 'Is this the best way to tell the story?'"(56)

This position was made more specific by the Intake Editor:

"We try to get to someone very important who's saying something important in his own voice, if possible. We may have to do this at his doorstep, at dinners, at an airport. It's better to get Robert Carr actually talking about the strike rather than having someone else telling us what he said - you can get the intonation better."

On this account, the use of "voice"/"actuality" ought to be sparing, and subordinate to the news judgements which define stories as important. There was ample evidence, however, that the new approach had become formularistic, that the means had become the end. In short, that a goal displacement had occurred. Editors felt that they had to use "voice pieces" or they were failing in their professionalism. For example, on one occasion an Editor of the Day remarked that he only had "Three voice pieces. For a 15-minute bulletin we need about nine voice pieces". Another Editor of the Day said simply that the use of "actuality clips is now a formula". By the end of the fieldwork period, in mid-1973, it seemed as though the issue had become less potent. A Radio News reporter observed:

"Initially, there was a strong inclination to use voice because that was the policy: I feel it was overdone. We've begun to find a better balance."

Although the innovative stroke in this case was more far-reaching than at Television News, there are nevertheless some illuminating parallels. Firstly, the introduction of "voice" on a grand scale appears to have been an exercise of editorial prerogative which affected the subsequent power structure of the newsroom. The Great Change, as one sub-editor called it, was identified with one man, and the realignments in the newsroom seen as contingent upon his actions. Secondly, the issue was internally debated in terms of "professionalism" and the impact of format changes on the public. In Television News, the new image was defined by the Editor alone. The professional exercise of judgement about what constitutes desirable and acceptable change was similarly restricted to the Editor in Radio News. Although detractors expressed concern about the comprehensibility of the new format, the Audience Research Department confirmed that no studies had been carried out by it as to its likely effect.

The Editor also confirmed that there had been no audience research. He had not felt that it was necessary. Having come into Radio News from television he was keenly aware that "radio's distinct advantage, sound" was not being used in the same way as television's advantage, pictures. He thought that sound was interesting, and that to "engage a person's ear you have to vary the sound." You could not take a cavalier attitude and say that what was being done would suffice, and that it was of no interest whether or not people listened. There was a duty to make sure that people did listen and become better informed. The new, professional notion of how Radio News ought to be broadcast was justified by uniting both a pragmatic, "audience-interest" argument and a sacerdotal, "public-service" one.

This chapter has shown the heavy reliance placed by newsmen upon their occupational milieu as a source of orientation. Ideas about acceptable ways of producing news which are au courant can be both dignified and defended by using the concept of professionalism. So far, the stress has been upon the way in which newsmen can use the claim to be professional to maintain, even expand, areas of autonomy in relation to the audience, their clientèle. But one crucial element in their conception of professionalism is highly restrictive in its impact upon their work. This is the commitment to "impartiality", which is the subject of the next chapter.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See Charles R. Wright, op.cit., 1959, p.59, and Denis McQuail, op.cit., 1969, p.9. While it is true that the communicator-audience relationship is one which implies social distance, it is important to note that this is a general feature of producer-consumer relationships. Johnson, op.cit., 1972 has observed (p.41) that: "Dependence upon the skills of others has the effect of reducing the common area of shared experience and knowledge and increases social distance: for the inescapable consequence of specialisation in the production of goods and services is unspecialisation in consumption. This consequence flows from the crystallisation and development of all specialised occupations."
2. Tom Burns, 'Public Service and Private World' in Halmos, (ed.), op.cit., 1969. Quotation from p.73.
3. See Burns, op.cit., 1972.
4. Johnson, op.cit., 1972, has noted the general "structure of uncertainty" in producer-consumer relationships which derives from the social distance between them. But, he also notes, the indeterminacy of the relationship creates the potential for autonomy and that "Power relationships will determine whether uncertainty is reduced at the expense of producer or consumer." (p.41). He goes on to observe - here making a point of considerable relevance for the sociology of knowledge - that: "A significant element in producing variations in the degree of uncertainty, and therefore the potentialities of autonomy is the esoteric character of the

knowledge applied by the specialist." (p.42; emphasis added).

Here enters the possibility of mystification - and demystification.

5. News Guide, op.cit., p.77.
6. Philip Elliott, op.cit., 1972.
7. A practice also observed by Tunstall, op.cit., 1971, p.156.
8. News Guide, op.cit., p.14; emphasis added.
9. Perhaps we can draw some kind of analogy with the dance musician as described by Howard S. Becker, Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance, New York, The Free Press, 1963: "The musician is conceived of as an artist who possess a mysterious artistic gift setting him apart from all other people. Possessing this gift, he should be free from control by outsiders who lack it. The gift is not something which can be acquired through education; the outsider, therefore, can never become a member of the group. A trombone player said, "You can't teach a guy to have a beat. If he hasn't got it you can't teach it to him." (pp. 85-6). There is more than a passing resemblance here with the more absolutist exponents of the esotericism of "news nose". Newsmen, on this view, are said to be able to smell a story or not. As such, the exercise of news judgement becomes an exercise of powers conferred by instinct, rather than the product of a process of socialisation.
10. Halloran, et.al., op.cit., 1970, p.149.

11. See Roger Brown, op.cit., 1969, passim.
12. E.G. Wedell, op.cit., 1968, p.51.
13. Epstein, op.cit., 1973, ch.3.
14. Special Correspondent, 'Television: The Rivals' Progress, 5':
Wooring Viewers by the multi-million', The Times, 3 December, 1965.
15. See Bakewell and Garnham, op.cit., 1970, pp. 191-205.
16. The Listener, 13 May 1971.
17. The BBC's sources of finance are "the revenue from the issue of
broadcast receiving licences" for the domestic services and a
"Grant-in-Aid from the Treasury" for the External Services.
(BBC Handbook, 1974, p.280).

Given that audience sizes are important, it is interesting that the BBC and ITV use different methods to calculate them. In the BBC's "continuous Survey of Listening and Viewing, a sample of the population is interviewed every day. Each day's 'sample' consists of 2,250 persons, so selected as to be representative of the entire population....in terms of geographical distribution, ages, sex, and social class." (Ibid., p.325). Some 70,000 people are interviewed each month, totalling some 800,000 per annum.

The ITV ratings system has information provided by "an independent research organisation, Audits of Great Britain Ltd. (AGB) through the Joint Industry Committee for Television Advertising Research (JICTAR) which is responsible for the service. Automatic electronic meters

are attached to the television sets in a representative sample of 2,650 ITV hours throughout the United Kingdom. These meters record on a minute-by-minute basis whether the receiver is switched on, and if so, to what station it is tuned...." ITV, 1974, Guide to Independent Television, London, IBA, 1974.

18. See Wedell, op.cit., 1968, pp. 223-242. Quotation from p.235.
19. Burns, op.cit., 1969, tells vividly in his essay of the gloom experienced in one drama series when the audience figures experienced a downturn. "The shock of a reported A.R. figure of 63 for a programme in a series which had touched 75 was enough to disrupt the first hour or two of rehearsal of a subsequent production. Very little work was done. The atmosphere of dejection deepened with every new arrival. Clusters formed round the leading actors, the floor manager, and the assistant floor manager, with the producer circulating between them and the telephone. The whole assembly was, in fact, engaged in a more preoccupying task than rehearsal for the next show: the search for a reassuring explanation. It was found eventually in the concurrence of a sports film on the commercial network.....For a sociologist it was like watching the whole practice of medicine being reduced to the use of the thermometer." (pp. 71-72). More generally, Wedell, op.cit., 1968, p.235, has observed: "There is no doubt that the arrival of competition increased the importance of A.R., and more particularly, of its quantitative aspect. The daily chart comparing BBC-1 and ITV audiences tended to become a, if not the, vital document in the determination of programme schedules."
20. Memorandum, Deputy Editor, Radio News to News Staff, 23 January, 1973.

21. These are: (i) The News: A Study of News Listening and Viewing and of the Public's Attitude towards the BBC News Service, BBC Audience Research Report, June 1957; (ii) News Broadcasting in 1962: A Study of News Listening and Viewing and of Public Attitudes Towards News Broadcasts, BBC Audience Research Report, October 1962; (iii) News Broadcasting and the Public in 1970: A Study of News Bulletin Audiences and of the Public's Attitudes towards News Broadcasts, BBC Audience Research Report, August 1971.
22. Tunstall, op.cit., 1971, p.7, uses this concept when talking about individual specialist journalists: "Competitor-Colleague as a concept is more specific than the many varieties of 'reference group'. Newsgatherers acquire merely some of their values from the group; the competitor-colleague group is operationally defined as a group of journalists each employed full-time by one of the 23 national news organisations covering a single specific news source area. From this group the specialist receives regular, usually daily, acts of competitive (and co-operative behaviour)." This concept seems equally applicable on the broader, organisational level.
23. BBC Audience Research, op.cit., 1971, p.10, para. 26.
24. Ibid., p.10, para. 28.
25. Ibid., p.11, para. 29.
26. See, for example, Peter Lennon, The Sunday Times Review, 11 March 1973. He comments there that news reporters should let their cameras do

more of the work and not overdo the "piece to camera". Other relevant examples are: Jeremy Murray-Brown, 'Unshacking the TV Reporter', New Society, 27 May 1965, who argues for the abolition of the News/Current Affairs distinction in television reporting; Val Arnold-Forster's radio review ('Punditry') in The Guardian, 17 August 1974, which points out the advantage of radio's speed in news reporting; and Jonathan Raban, "TV News: not so much a programme....", Radio Times, 19-25 October 1974, which points out how television news style is derived from the newsreels and sound radio.

27. See the interesting essay by Denis McQuail, 'Uncertainty about the audience and the organisation of mass communications', in Halmos, op.cit., 1969, pp. 75-84. The uncertainty imposed by the structure of mass communication is a specific instance of the general problem of uncertainty in producer-consumer relationships referred to in Note 4 above. As I argue below, addressing the audience, according to my observations, is not so much a problem, more part of a routinised way of life.
28. Gans, op.cit., 1970a, p.9.
29. Galtung and Ruge, op.cit., 1970, p.289, have identified this "law" in their content analysis: "The lower the rank of the nation, the more negative the news from that nation will be."
30. Gans, op.cit., 1970a, p.9.
31. Blumler, op.cit., 1969, p.100, has pointed to the distinction he

observed, in the BBC Current Affairs Group, between the "sacerdotal" and the "pragmatic" approaches.

32. News Guide, op.cit., pp. 63-68.

33. Ibid., p.6.

34. And such images are not just limited to the BBC. Ed Murrow of CBS told his reporters during World War II that they should "Talk to be understood by the truck driver while not insulting the professor's intelligence". Quoted in Anthony Smith, 'The Phantom Audience', New Society, 23 November 1972.

35. BBC Audience Research, op.cit., 1971, p.17, para. 49.

36. News Guide, op.cit., p.7.

37. For completeness' sake the one unelicited incident in which concern for the audience was observed during the field period must be presented. The industrial correspondent in Television News asked of the newsroom at large: "Do you think they'll understand 'obduracy'?" It was thought that they would.

38. See Kurt and Gladys Lang, op.cit., 1968, esp. ch.8, for a critique.

39. Philip Elliott op.cit., 1972 has observed in his study of documentary production, that "the concern in this process seemed to be not with simpler and so more effective communication of meaning, but with simplification in order to ensure that audience attention was not lost." (p. 151).

40. John Whale, The Half-Shut Eye: Television and Politics in Britain and America, London, MacMillan, 1969, p.19.
41. Sir Geoffrey Cox, 'News Presentation in Britain', in A.William Blum and Roger Manvell, (eds.), The Progress of Television: An Anglo-American Survey, London and New York, The Focal Press, 1967, pp. 132-133.
42. See Chapter 1 above. The chapters dealing with the production process (3,4) have amply demonstrated the extent to which news is an artefact.
43. Kenneth Adam, 'The BBC's Duty to Society', II, The Listener,
24 June 1965.
44. Cox, op.cit., 1967, p.133.
45. Robin Day, 'Troubled Reflections of a TV Journalist', Encounter,
May 1970, p.79.
46. Whale, op.cit., 1969, p.24; emphases added. It should be noted that he and Robin Day, op.cit., 1961, are amongst the most thoughtful and critical of the writers who have written "insider" accounts. For a critique of American television news see Robert MacNeil, The People Machine: The Influence of Television on American Politics, London, Eyre and Spottiswood, 1970, esp. Part I.
47. Cox, op.cit., 1967, p.135; emphasis added.
48. BBC Audience Research, op.cit., 1971, p.16, para. 45.

49. To give a further example of this point: on 20 January 1974, both the BBC and ITN showed film of the demolition of two power station cooling towers. The pictures were visually "interesting". They showed the stations collapsing within six seconds of explosive charges being ignited. The story could only be justified on its visual merits, its "picture value". It was not covered by Radio News. But The Guardian of the following day made a back-page-centre photo story of it, head-lined "Collapse of Stout Party".
50. Day, op.cit., 1970, p.80.
51. Tunstall, op.cit., 1971, p.254, has noted the importance of such face-lifts in news organisations.
52. op.cit., 1969.
53. Alvar Lidell, 'Here is the News', The Listener, (BBC Jubilee Number), 2 November 1972.
54. See Briggs, op.cit., 1970, for details of these broadcasts.
55. Donald McInnes, News by Radio, BBC, 1970,(mimeographed), p.10.
56. Memorandum, Editor, Radio News to News Staff, 9 March 1972.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

IMPARTIALITY

"The BBC thinks of balance and impartiality mainly in terms of political parties. Perhaps that is because political parties have stop-watches at the ready, in the hands of officials who are ready to cry 'bias' whenever they can see a party advantage in doing so. But the virtue of impartiality should be exercised between other opposites and shades of opinion".

Aerial, The BBC Staff Magazine⁽¹⁾

1. Introduction:

It has been observed that there are a number of virtues or values invoked in characterising a socially responsible press. Accounts of newsmen's ideology, advanced to legitimise their activities, contain a whole repertoire of terms: objectivity, impartiality, balance, responsibility, fairness, freedom from bias.⁽²⁾ These concepts constitute a "family". While there are distinctive meanings to be ascribed to each of them, what is of interest here is their total justifying role when invoked in the ordinary discourse of newsmen. For the most part they are quite interchangeable, arising, as they do, in similar contexts.

The central concept current in the BBC repertoire is that of "impartiality"; it is one also given a central importance in thinking in British commercial television.⁽³⁾ There are problems of a philosophical kind attached to claiming an objective stance when appraising the social world. But newsmen in broadcasting set limits to their definitions of objectivity (or impartiality). As the quotation at

the head of this chapter notes, "political parties" provide the range of key institutions within which impartiality is defined in domestic coverage. Foreign news coverage, tending on the whole, to have less direct bearing on domestic politics, lacks the same "obligatory" character, although the BBC prizes its international reputation for honesty.

The concept of impartiality can be "operationalised": there is a balancing off between competing definitions of problems, differing claims about what is the truth. Newsmen assert that political impartiality has been maintained when pressures and complaints from right and left of the political spectrum are received in more or less equal measure.⁽⁴⁾ What emerges from the various sociological accounts of broadcast news organisations, is that the awareness of the political audience, and its power to affect the future of the organisation, is institutionalised in the production routines.⁽⁵⁾ The achievement of impartial coverage is asserted when certain formulae or "rituals" are observed which embody the organisational response to the exterior structures of political power.⁽⁶⁾

While it is acknowledged that the concept of impartiality as enunciated in the BBC has a wide ranging application, the primary or paradigmatic meaning emerges in considering it in relation to the institutional forces of British political life. This chapter sets out to show that the doctrine of impartial coverage does not present a problem inside the news departments in most situations of reporting political activity, because the routines are so well-established, and beliefs so well-legitimised. It then goes on to observe that even in a situation where the doctrine has been abandoned, the legitimacy of this move seems to have created at worst, passing problems, and the

new definitions have been embodied in routine production practice.

2. National politics and the BBC:

The BBC has many links with the parliamentary political process. Various arrangements obtain between the BBC and the main political parties determining the conduct of Parliamentary broadcasting, Party Political Broadcasts, Ministerial Broadcasts, Budget and General Election Broadcasts.⁽⁷⁾ The established political institutions of the nation are assured a regular place in broadcasting output. The BBC Handbook notes that "the BBC takes steps to ensure that in radio and television a fair balance over a period is maintained between appearances in programmes by Members of Parliament of the political party in power and appearances by Members of parties in opposition."⁽⁸⁾ Impartiality is tied up with the definition of what constitutes acceptable political behaviour in this country:

"...it mainly operates in regard to political formations which while divided on many issues are nevertheless part of a basic, underlying consensus....Impartiality and objectivity in this sense, stop at the point where political consensus itself ends...."⁽⁹⁾

As was pointed out in Chapter 2, broadcasting in the United Kingdom exists in a context defined by the holders of political power, the "reserve powers" of government lying in the background as a reminder of the relationship between broadcasting and the state. While, for example, during World War II the BBC never lost its formal independence from the British government, and indeed that was a significant propaganda point, it was, nonetheless, subject to the wartime information policy, and worked within a "frame set not by itself but by the Ministry of Information".⁽¹⁰⁾

As a point of comparison, one might note that in France the government has quite overtly interfered in the conduct of broadcasting by the "professionals". The President-Director-General of ORTF, the French national broadcasting organisation, has been a party political appointee. Interference has taken place to the extent of the President and Prime Minister insisting on speeches being broadcast irrespective of their news value.⁽¹¹⁾

In Britain, where struggles have occurred with government at various points in the BBC's history, these are officially seen as having had no adverse effect on its independence, which in the words of the News Guide "is a principle that has been challenged at critical times in the nation's history, at the time of the General Strike in 1926, at the time of Suez in 1956, over the question of Northern Ireland in 1972. It has survived."⁽¹²⁾ This account, at least inasmuch as it relates to the first and last of these occasions has not been universally accepted. Hood has argued, for example, that the BBC's conduct under Reith, in reporting the General Strike, constituted an out-and-out acceptance of the State's definition of the situation, rather than an "independent" stance.⁽¹³⁾ And, in similar vein, there has been a good deal of criticism of broadcasters' uncritical approach to the reporting of the Northern Ireland crisis.⁽¹⁴⁾ The primary concern here, however, is with the internal role of the BBC's doctrine, inasmuch as observation yields insights into it, rather than with actual performance as reflections of the concept, which is perhaps better judged by content analyses.⁽¹⁵⁾

The BBC's definition of impartiality has two distinctive strands. One concerns "editorialising": the BBC is obliged by the terms of a "Prescribing Memorandum" from the relevant Minister of the Crown "to refrain from expressing its own opinion on current affairs or on matters of public policy."⁽¹⁶⁾ This prescription, much the same as the one

applying to commercial television as laid down by the Television Act 1964, sets broadcasting in a distinctive position amongst the various media. As the Handbook notes, "newspapers are at liberty to editorialise on any subject they choose." The second strand is linked to the first:

"For the BBC to take sides in any controversial issue would in any case be contrary to its own long-established policy of impartiality - a policy, which unlike the rule on editorialising, has always been self-imposed. The essence of impartiality is balance, and this element, so important to the proper handling of controversial subjects, in fact helps the BBC to carry out its obligation to avoid expressions of editorial opinion. Careful attention to balance is one way by which the BBC seeks to ensure that it cannot be justly identified as a supporter of any particular 'line'." (17)

The important word here is "justly": the test of a good ideology lies in the degree to which it can ward off attacks on its conceptual basis. The BBC's performance has been unceasingly attacked from both right and left throughout its life, as Briggs' history testifies. Nevertheless, the doctrine of impartiality-through-balance has continued to flourish. At the basis of the notion of a balanced programme are two "general principles:- first, that different tastes should be catered for, and second, that different views should be expressed." (18) It is the latter principle which concerns us here. The crude test of balance lies in the minutes, hours and seconds allocated distinctive viewpoints in matters of controversy. As was noted in the opening quotation, "political parties have stop-watches at the ready". One well-known Labour politician even has his own tape-recorder, informants said,

which he uses to test the way in which his interviews have been edited. Standard practice in matters of political controversy is to invite representatives of "both sides", as it is in the coverage of industrial affairs, and other categories of newsworthy event. The stop-watches are flourished most ostentatiously during General Elections when detailed arrangements for "party politicals" are made on a proportionate basis with parties with 50 or more candidates up for election.⁽¹⁹⁾ The notion of balance is not currently seen as requiring every programme to contain views both pro and con:

"Balance within the single programme is not sought after religiously on every occasion, but only where the circumstances, and the nature of the issue being discussed are deemed to call for it. The identification of these circumstances is a matter for careful editorial judgement."⁽²⁰⁾

This dispensation clearly allows the broadcasters greater freedom of manoeuvre in any given programme, although the overall restrictions deriving from the political structure oblige them to "spread" the range of opposing views in a series of programmes. Such decisions are emphasised as being part of the broadcaster's responsibility. Again, a similar position obtains in commercial television.⁽²¹⁾ News bulletins, of particular interest to this study, are described as "manifestly dependent on the uncontrolled succession of events which make the news", and as therefore exempt from the rule altogether: "A government runs into a series of political disasters. Too bad! (an editor) does not have to stretch news values to seek out and include some political successes which will offset them."⁽²²⁾ Here again, however, ad hocery occurs with a dispensation from the dispensation: "It is at times of acute crisis or great national emotion the long-

term notion of balance will not do. Fairness must be seen to be achieved in a single programme." This is a particularly important reservation when it comes to Ulster coverage, as is noted later. There is, in this "theorising", a curious mélange both of realpolitik and an insistence on the independence of the broadcaster. Necessity is turned into a virtue when it is "stressed that the policy of impartiality is closely bound up with the independent status of the BBC. Without genuine independence, it is difficult, if not impossible, for broadcasters to maintain the highest standards of truthfulness and impartiality."⁽²³⁾ Impartiality, which is defined in terms initially deriving from external circumstances is appropriated, and becomes an independent public service obligation, rather than a recipe for survival. If political realities set broadcasting in the context of the consensus on means (if not ends) provided by the established and legitimate institutions, there is also an interlocking moral consensus:

"There are some respects in which the BBC is not, and does not feel obliged to appear, neutral; it is not neutral as between truth and untruth, justice and injustice, freedom and slavery, compassion and cruelty, tolerance and intolerance (including racial tolerance). This is an important reservation, but not one which detracts from the BBC's overall determination to be impartial."⁽²⁴⁾

This consensual stance has been given a more frankly moral and political content in this statement by Norman Swallow, a veteran BBC producer:

"A foreign visitor to Britain or the USA, who for a few months regularly watched television's coverage

of public affairs, might justifiably conclude that their combined television organisations shared a common and positive viewpoint on many of the major issues of the day. They are apparently anti-Fascist, anti-Communist, opposed to racial intolerance and violent crime, highly critical of the governments of the USSR, Communist China, Cuba, Spain, Portugal, South Africa, and Eastern Europe, Christian (especially in Britain) but tolerant of agnostics, friendly towards surviving monarchies, hostile to most social and political cranks, suspicious of professional politicians (but nevertheless enticing them into their studios as often as possible), and supporters of 'the wind of change' so long as it never reaches gale force."⁽²⁵⁾

This rather lengthy account drawn from the canons of official, and quasi-official, BBC doctrine is essential in providing an ideal yardstick for the evaluation of thought and practice. The concept of impartiality is crucial in legitimising the output, and is embodied in routine practice in various ways. There is an inherent tension between the underlying reserve powers of the government and the broadcaster's claim to independent thought and action. More broadly, definitions of what are acceptable views are coloured by those views which are represented in the House of Commons. The impartiality family of concepts is used to defend the autonomy which remains once the necessities of political power are accepted. Given those constraints, broadcasters are free to exercise their professional judgment.

"You have to keep your standards. You can't be objective but you have to fight for the other man's right to say the other thing."

(Senior Duty Editor, Television News).

3. Impartiality as professionalism:

In deciding what makes news, newsmen give expression to their professionalism. In broadcasting, the way in which it is presented is limited by need to balance opinions. The News Guide, quoting from a BBC document, sets out an ideal approach in these words:

"The object is to state the news of the day accurately, fairly, soberly, and impersonally... The Ullswater Committee (on broadcasting) laid down as a cardinal principle that the BBC's news should be 'a fair selection of items impartially presented'. In making its selection, the BBC applies the sole test of news value."⁽²⁶⁾

The internal, corporate definitions stress the independent power of selection, in line with news value. But news values, it has frequently been observed, have a latent, inarticulable character, being taken for granted, part of the air that's breathed. The obligation to be impartial provides in some ways a less elusive concept for the sociologist. While these past few pages have dwelt on the semantics of the official credo, observation makes it clear that the issue is not one solely of abstract ideals but also of operational practice. There are various strategies available to newsmen for achieving coverage which satisfies them as being impartial. If "holding the ring fairly in matters of public controversy"⁽²⁷⁾ is to be accepted as a genuine description of broadcasters' performances, they have to be seen and heard to be fair to avoid attack from "either

side" of the political fence. It is essential therefore to be able to give conflicting points of view in broadcasts. A senior editor in Television News underlined the fact that at times there might be less than complete control of "balance":

"Let's just suppose - and I'm not suggesting for one minute this would happen - that Mr. Maudling and Mr. Faulkner are rather cross with us. They might say that they're not available (to discuss the Northern Ireland situation). This sort of thing can, has, and does happen. There are occasions when people make conditions, such as, the full interview must be shown, or that they want to see the edited version before it goes out."

The editor went on to say that such pressure was always resisted. There are ways of dealing with the threat of an "empty chair". If a live or recorded interview is refused then newsmen might choose to go to the cuttings or film libraries and find alternative ways of presenting absent parties' views. There are also linguistic signals which are used to withhold endorsement from particular accounts when they might seem to be in doubt, such as "according to reports from....." "the so-and-so claims", "it is alleged that....." Underlying these is the belief that the provision of such signals should be an integral part of giving the public "the facts". The facts, it is assumed, speak for themselves, and the audience can make up its mind on that basis. This is the journalistic equivalent to the scientific notion of "providing the data". Newsmen allow similar durations to opposing speakers to put their cases in interviews or edited extracts from speeches. Another variant, again, occurs when the reporter takes on a devil's advocate role, putting oppositional questions to an interviewee.

This last point brings up the importance of public image of the personnel who man the news-producing operation. The intention is to provide a news service which is perceived as impartial by the bulk of its audience. Current practice at the BBC and at ITN preserves the anonymity of the processors, who, unlike their current affairs and documentary counterparts, remain uncredited at the end of the programme. The news is not any man's news, and the absence of credits confers an image of consistency absent from the personal statement of views which sometimes emerges in a documentary.⁽²⁸⁾ Taking this sort of perspective on the output means that the only visible vehicles of integrity are the news programmes' front men, the newsreaders and reporting staff who appear in sound and vision. As Erving Goffman has put it,

"Within the walls of a social establishment we find a team of performers who co-operate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation.....We often find a division into back region, where the performance is prepared, and front region, where the performance is presented."⁽²⁹⁾

The BBC has had a long-standing concern for the performers' role.⁽³⁰⁾ The newsreader, in particular, is conceived of as incarnating the integrity and authoritativeness of the BBC's news output. One newsreader summed up the corporate view:

P.S. You presumably have strong beliefs about various issues, and that some things are right or wrong. You nevertheless have to suppress these feelings. How do you cope with this sort of thing?

Television Newsreader: "You don't show anything. You learn early on that if you're going to be accurate there's no room for allowing personal feelings to come into it. You tend not to take sides on major issues either publicly or privately. You get used to this. I've found no conflict. You have to keep a very high standard: you mustn't become associated with a given side."

BBC newsreaders tend still to be polished performers first and foremost, although, since November 1972 the Nine O'Clock News has been jointly presented by a former reporter and a newsreader in tandem, and the BBC-2 news programmes have tended mainly to use former, and sometimes active, reporters as presenters. Radio News remains unchanged, being read by a staff newsreader. The public image of the BBC newsreader was at its peak of importance during the Second World War when the BBC served as a key unifying force in the nation.⁽³¹⁾

Modification in the stylistic attributes of the newsreader role came with the appearance of ITN in 1955. Robin Day has written of this contrast that,

"Unlike a BBC newsreader the ITN newscaster was to share in the writing and presentation of the news. He was to be a reporter and not an announcer..... The newscaster was to be personally involved in assembling the news. His function was a journalist's function, not that of a human reading machine or a television equivalent of the printing press."⁽³²⁾

But underlying the ITN conception was an aim held in common with that of the BBC: that of winning confidence through the authoritativeness of its anchormen. In keeping with this goal, the BBC's audience research

has shown some concern with the public's image of newsreaders and presenters. The results indicate a very high rate of recognition among the general public for both BBC and ITN newsreaders (included in the surveys) "and the highest number of attributions of those adjectives which (there can be little doubt) were used in a complimentary sense."⁽³³⁾ A similar concern is evident about perceptions of the performance of reporters. The same piece of research on 33 front men of various kinds reported that "the adjective 'biased' was not widely attributed to any of the individuals" and "that 'reliable' was commonly regarded as an attribute of most of the 33 individuals".⁽³⁴⁾ Reporters are very aware of the importance of presenting the right sort of image: "The BBC reporters are supposed to be free of bias." (Radio News reporter).

4. Impartiality and the production process:

Any discussion of the ways in which the concept of impartiality is employed needs to be related to the organisational context sketched out in earlier chapters. Stuart Hood, in an apt phrase, has referred to the BBC's control system as "self-regulating machinery".⁽³⁵⁾ It was earlier pointed out that the operational role of Editors of the Day contained a strong component of "making the output safe". Given the political circumstances defining the concept of impartiality, the editorial role is critically important to this discussion. The editorial system is ideally conceived of as a fail-safe device, with so many checks and balances built into organisational practice that the biases or prejudices of any given individual are cancelled out, annulled, and rendered indiscernible in the final output. This, anyway, presupposes that any individual is so unprofessional as to let his personal standpoint emerge. An Editor of the Day, describing the way the "machine" looks from the top, noted,

"In the newsroom there's a fair mixture of people from left and right on any given day. If anyone tried to bend things he'd be out like a shot. It's more than the job's worth. It's easy to see if it's been slanted. I can't remember a case. It's so easy to spot, it couldn't get through so many checks. It could only get through at senior level - it would have to be the people at the top here."

It is inconceivable that an Editor of the Day could be anything less than a safe man, with the Corporation's desire for "responsible and impartial" coverage firmly accepted as an ideal. Making the machine correct itself to all "representative points of view" is a central attribute of the editorial role, and this is realistically appraised in the newsrooms:

"If you had personal convictions and wanted to show Heath up for the shit he was, you couldn't do it effectively on TV: say you allowed only a little time for his speech, and longer for the Opposition, or you edited his speech to make it show up in an unfavourable light, the ass.ed. would say 'What the hell's this?' Come off it!"

(Sub-editor, Television News).

The editorial system in the BBC, as in other news organisations, operates as a mode of cognitive control, which through its legitimate imperatives, acts as a supplementary force to that of the socialisation of personnel into impartiality, which is now discussed.

5. The Normative Content of the Professional Attitude:

From observation it would appear that the BBC News Departments have greatly succeeded in the socialisation of their personnel into corporate ways of thinking. This remark by a Duty Editor in Television News sums up the fusion between newsmen's conception of being professional and the dictates of impartiality: "Balance has acceptance as a principle - it's almost a condition of employment." Rather, it is a condition of employment, and very few of those interviewed expressed serious doubts about either its operation or its rationale.

It has been pointed out that there are two ideal typical images of journalistic activity in Western societies: that of committed and that of neutral journalism.⁽³⁶⁾ The BBC is, by its own official account, an organisation, which, being corporately disengaged, requires personal disengagement from its staff when they deal with the issues reported in the news. The argument runs thus: the news service is one which has to satisfy the entire nation; it must therefore eschew commitment to "either side" in a conflict. Staff members have to internalise this rule so that beliefs do not affect performances in organisationally unacceptable ways.

Impartiality is one of the components of the concept of professionalism as interpreted in the News Departments. It is frequently pointed out by newsmen that "both sides" of every question are treated with equal detachment and scepticism, and all that is done is to present competing viewpoints, leaving "the public to make up its own mind":

"....if broadcasting is to reflect the nation,
we must include matters in dispute. We must
communicate the views of others, however distaste-
ful or embarrassing they may be to some. This is
our duty as honest reporters.

The public is entitled to the truth as interpreted by all sides - and so, on behalf of the public, we put probing, searching questions to Cabinet Ministers, railways chiefs, industrial bosses - all 'them who push us around'. The public have not the opportunity of putting the questions themselves. We do it for them."⁽³⁷⁾

The official account, given here by a former Editor, News and Current Affairs, is almost invariably echoed within the News Departments. A Television News reporter observed of the Northern Ireland situation: "The newsmen are the only people who know both sides. People know we're trying to do a fair job, and we'd only get hurt except by accident - except as far as the hooligan element is concerned. They recognise that we're doing a job for them." Since the newsmen claim this ability to be impartial is part of their skill, there is an important natural corollary, that any one of them would tell substantially the same story when confronted with the same set of facts. The personnel, as honest reporters, are a guarantee of the impartiality of the news output, the argument runs.⁽³⁸⁾ And that is because they have absorbed the correct approach by meeting, through time, practical problems posed for the Corporation.

Quite a number of newsmen went out of their way to cite occasions on which they experienced conflicts between personal beliefs and the dictates of impartiality, stressing that there could only be one way in which to resolve these. A television sub editor said that he had been assigned to a story dealing with the indiscriminate killing of whales: "I went and told it simply, despite the fact that I feel strongly about it. Let the public make up its own mind." A correspondent observed:

"I'm prejudiced because deep down I agree with comprehensive education rather than selective. I know the idealistic Labour solutions but they wouldn't work. Your basic ground-root attitude begins to infect you if your aren't careful."

He went on, however, to nullify this admission by saying: "I'm not taking an a priori position. I have attitudes but I'm traditional - I just want to tell the facts." Another example is provided by a senior executive in Television News who noted:

"On the crusade thing - we have a charter obligation not to express opinions. But people do hold opinions. If I could I'd start a crusade right now against the Common Market."

Sociologists studying news organisations have demonstrated a great deal of interest in this question of conformity of belief, and as indicated in Chapter 1, the socialisation and control of newsmen has been a pervasive theme in the literature. One test of the success of socialisation lies in the degree to which known deviant views can be tolerated. A good indication comes from observations made in Television News. A fairly senior intake executive variously described one reporter as "A Bolshie" and another as "a creeping fascist". Yet, the executive said, he would have complete confidence in assigning either of them to controversial stories in which their own political sympathies might be expected to emerge. And he would do this because he knew they could be expected to be "professional" in their treatment of the news. He added:

"In fact when we have an anti-police boy, we tend to put him on police demo's. By Christ he's trying so hard to be impartial he's right. Put a fascist boy on say a Notting Hill community

job. He really is objective - really gives them a hard time. But he comes up with an impartial approach."⁽³⁹⁾

There is, here, part of an answer to the problem of impartiality viewed from the perspective of the controllers: one man is as good as the next whatever his personal beliefs provided he acts according to the canons of impartial reportage. But to say this is not to say enough about what newsmen seem truly to believe. One of the two television reporters in question indicated his views in these words:

"....I insist I am able, and I think it's one of the skills of a reporter, to be a complete schizophrenic. I can have strong political views, and do have, in some quarters. But when the camera is on they do not come into play. Sometimes in journalism you get someone who is unable to do that: it swiftly shows itself, and he very quickly becomes known as someone who is unreliable...."

"Schizophrenia" is a revealing term. There are, as it were, two co-existing structures of belief, even of identity: the personal and committed, and the Corporate and detached. Furthermore, it did not seem that those who held committed views felt that the Corporation's doctrines somehow violated their integrity. What was seen as honest and as authentic was the espousal of a professionalism partly defined in terms of impartiality. A startling indication of the way in which this bifurcation of belief is an integral part of newsmen's thought emerged in a related though distinct area of professional beliefs, that of news judgement. One reporter had a sophisticated awareness of organisational shortcomings as he saw them:

"The problem is the degree to which any report can be fitted into some conceptual framework. The fundamental drive of news is to get there, and bring back a report on what happened. You have to report why ideally...."

This observation was made one morning over a drink in the BBC Club. Later that day, when the reporter was out on assignment, active rather than reflective, he went through a list of the questions which he would be asking people at the scene of the incident, and then remarked:

"You learn these things through practice. It's difficult to teach people what news is: no-one has a clear idea."

Professional intuitionism in the afternoon vies with the detached rationalism of the morning. Although not a strict analogy to reportorial schizophrenia over impartiality, this example does indicate the kind of oscillation which occurs between expressions of personal belief in private situations of an analytical kind, and the invocation of professional mystique necessary for a satisfactory performance on the job.

The mechanics of professional impartiality becomes as much a part of the fabric of everyday news production as making the decisions on the basis of news values:

"You have to form opinions, though you're not allowed to express them. I don't think they come out."

(Reporter, Television News).

"No-one is ever biased or unfair....not leftish. You know there's going to be a quick and articulate reaction from the right - the exception is giving the establishment-conservative view. You unconsciously put the pro's and con's - it's an unconscious

technique."

(Sub-editor, Television News).

A former BBC Current Affairs Editor, Anthony Smith, has spoken of this approach as "the transmutation of balance into a kind of allegory of life."⁽⁴⁰⁾ Because newsmen know what constitutes an impartially told story in just the same way as they know what is newsworthy, the sociologist's problem, just as in the case of the audience, presents them with few practical difficulties. Once the story has been identified the "unconscious technique" is applied to it, although it has constantly been argued, less than fairly.

The implication of this interpretation is that while a few newsmen may have strongly-held beliefs which they are not permitted to express in the Corporation's outputs, this does not pose a problem either for them or for the controllers. For the deviant there is an honourable way of excising their own convictions: the stance of impartiality is construed as virtuous and therefore as professional. And the "self-regulating machinery" takes care of what normative constraints leave untouched. It must be said that very few newsmen, prudently it may well be, did venture strong political opinions during the course of fieldwork. In this, the findings reported here, are, admittedly impressionistically, in full support of Epstein's in the US networks.⁽⁴¹⁾ Most newsmen seem genuinely to believe in the Corporation's formula for achieving impartiality, and in its public duties in this regard. One trainee expressed his beliefs with some fervour:

"If it came to it, I wouldn't write about my views - it would be what happened rather than a conscious decision. I believe that people writing are doing it objectively and are proud of it."

In the case of one newsreader, commitment to the doctrine of impartiality went so far as to preclude his feeling that he could legitimately have any sort of political involvement "outside": held this intensely, as one reporter phrased it, it is a "total attitude".

6. A problem case: Northern Ireland:

"If you're reporting the facts it's alright -
there's no need to worry about censorship."

(News Organiser, Television News).

There are, the Handbook says, certain things about which the BBC cannot remain neutral. If the political content of impartiality is defined in terms of the established forces of left and right in Britain, there is an additional, consensual, moral content:

"Aman who speaks in favour of racial intolerance
cannot have the same rights as the man who condemns
it."

(Sir Hugh Greene, former Director-General of the BBC)

"We are not impartial about everything....we are
not impartial about crime."

(Lord Hill, former Chairman of the BBC)⁽⁴²⁾

"We are also not impartial about crimes. We do
not balance the pros and cons of murder, for
instance. We have extended that moral view to
race hatred. We are not impartial about anti-
semitism. We do not allow Jew-baiters at our
microphone."

(Donald Edwards, former Editor, News & Current Affairs)⁽⁴³⁾

The official spokesmen of the BBC have defined, in statements such as these, the moral content of the BBC standpoint, one which is meant to

be embodied in programme practice. There is one other expressly acknowledged special case, which does not fall under the otherwise all-embracing concept of impartiality: the coverage of the Northern Ireland crisis, which was frequently referred to as "the biggest home news story since the war".

The field study was begun in January 1972 at a time when the BBC and commercial TV were subjected to extreme pressure from the British government, and other groups, over the reporting of the Ulster situation. In the background to reporting and editing practice in the BBC lay a major dispute, running from late December 1971 until mid-January 1972, between the government and the Corporation of a kind which had not been seen since the Suez Affair of 1956.

Earlier, in October 1971, the ITA had banned the screening of a documentary on Irish politics, South of the Border, on the grounds of its being a "sensitive" subject. The ITA had not seen the documentary in question, and Lord Aylestone, its Chairman, and a former Labour chief whip, was reported as saying that the programme was "aiding and abetting the enemy".⁽⁴⁴⁾ This occurrence brought into the open a debate about censorship in the broadcast media, with radio and television staff holding meetings to discuss the reporting of the Ulster situation and to reflect anxiously on the policy of the broadcasting organisations at this time.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The general public also became aware, for the first time, of the code of conduct governing reporting practice. One report, for example, presented details of BBC procedures, which were encountered also during observation, and are reported on later:

"Both television networks and BBC radio, for instance try to avoid presenting direct expressions of violence in situations of acute communal tension.

The BBC allows reporters to base their reports on information from IRA sources, where this is reliable, but permission for a direct interview with an IRA member must be sought in advance from the Editor of News and Current Affairs, Mr. Desmond Taylor. He would consult the Director-General, Mr. Charles Curran, before agreeing.....

The BBC sees this sort of restriction as part of normal editorial control in a huge organisation - the reference upwards of important decisions. But its practical effect, according to some news reporters, is to discourage investigation into the political background and limit reporting to superficial events..

Another BBC rule is that coverage of Northern Ireland must be checked in advance with Mr. Waldo McGuire, the BBC's regional controller there. He has a suspensory veto subject to Mr. Taylor."⁽⁴⁶⁾

The government's definition of the situation came from Mr. Christopher Chataway, Minister for Posts and Telecommunications, who, in a speech made on 21 November 1971, said that broadcasters were not required to strike an even balance between the IRA and the Ulster government, or between the Army and the terrorists.⁽⁴⁷⁾ He went on to say: "Nobody wants propaganda substituted for truthful reporting. At the other extreme, it would be just as obnoxious to have the soldier and the murderer treated like the employer and the trade unionist - as if they were moral equals."

This very significant statement was in effect a dispensation from the normal rules of balance. It was, in any case, a somewhat late one, as

press reports indicate that within the BBC it had been decided to forbid, or ban, interviews with any member of the IRA without the permission of the Director-General, and that this had not been granted since April 1971.⁽⁴⁸⁾

Mr. Chataway's definition was espoused by the Chairman of the BBC, Lord Hill, who informed the Home Secretary, Mr. Reginald Maudling that "As between the British army and the gunmen, the BBC is not, and cannot be impartial."⁽⁴⁹⁾ Lord Hill also defended the BBC's editorial practice to Mr. Maudling, informing him that the "BBC already undertakes a scrupulous editorial watch on all levels". This provides some of the necessary background to an understanding of the details (reported later) of thinking and practice in relation to Northern Ireland coverage.

A further significant background factor was the major dispute between BBC and government referred to earlier. While this is not as directly germane to the discussion of newsroom editorial practice, it is nevertheless enlightening. It arose over the BBC's proposal in December 1971 to mount a two-and-a-half hour long current affairs programme on the Irish problem, variously termed a "tribunal" or "inquisition", which created a furore amongst Conservative and Unionist circles. The BBC proposed a forum of eight politicians, drawn from "a very wide spectrum of Irish views", each of whom was to be questioned by a "tribunal" or panel of three eminent public figures. The British Government and Opposition were also to contribute their views, and a minister from the Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont was to be one of the eight politicians.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Mr. Maudling and Mr. Faulkner refused, in the event, to co-operate in this plan on various grounds: that it lacked political balance, including too many anti-internment speakers, that the BBC had set itself a quasi-judicial function, that the programme would inflame passions in Ulster. The most significant issue from the standpoint of this chapter is the attack on "balance", which the programme's opponents made. The BBC's justification of the

programme in reply was a classic statement of its concept of impartiality:

"The basic aim is not to reach conclusions but to place before the British public fairly and fully the issues in dispute and the conflicting views on the various possible solutions. The BBC believes such a programme to be in the public interest, and the suppression of views, however unpopular, would be both unwise and dangerous."⁽⁵¹⁾

In the event, no representative of the IRA was invited to appear in the programme, and the Stormont government remained unrepresented, though this was certainly not by design.

It was inevitable, given this background of uneasy tension between broadcasters and politicians, that one interest in the field study should be in establishing the importance of the rules governing Northern Ireland coverage, and also to attempt an assessment of how they were evaluated by the news producers. It must be said, in keeping with what was earlier reported, relatively little was said against the official doctrine, although, as the past few pages have made clear, "impartiality" in its normal sense does not apply in the Ulster situation. It must also be noted that there appeared to be a certain reticence when Northern Ireland was mentioned. This may well have been a prudential tactic on the part of those interviewed. In early 1972, a senior editor indicated that there was an attitude of safety-first:

"People are a lot more nervous, they come down the corridor much more often than usual to make sure they're getting things right. The general caution has increased."

The broad impression was that there was general support for the official view. Several reporters and editors indicated disagreement "off the record"

but they were definitely in the minority. There was evidence that some senior executives were unhappy with the public stance of non-impartiality taken by the BBC, as setting a bad precedent. This was the one area in which any genuine illumination of newsmen's thinking was difficult to achieve.

There are a number of Northern Ireland "ground rules" in the News Guide⁽⁵²⁾ which support the accounts which emerged in the press, these provide an explicit though partial codification of practice current in 1972, although there have been frequent updatings, and new tacit understandings, in addition to these:

- " 1. News staff sent to Northern Ireland work through Controller Northern Ireland and News Editor Northern Ireland; they must be consulted.
2. No news agency report from Northern Ireland should be used without checking with Belfast newsroom first.
3. The IRA must not be interviewed without prior authority from ENCA. There can be no question of doing the interview first and seeking permission for broadcast afterwards.
4. Recordings of broadcasts by illegal radios must not be used without reference to ENCA. (This applies to any illegal radio, not just those in Northern Ireland).
5. We should not report bomb scares concerning BBC buildings for the obvious reason that such reports would encourage hoaxers or people who wished to disrupt BBC output. (This too does not apply only to Northern Ireland)."

Rules 1 to 4 set Northern Ireland coverage into the special category of coverage where "reference upwards" is a part of the routine news producing practice - unlike any other area of news output. Rule 1 establishes the significance of the controllers on the spot for newsmen working in Northern

Ireland, and Rule 2 makes them salient for newsmen working in the national newsrooms. The Northern Ireland newsroom becomes a guarantor of the factual accuracy of reports; the organisation finds its own way thereby of legitimating its output and maximising certainties. By Rule 3 recorded or live interviews with IRA sources are specifically identified as lying beyond the pale of routine inclusion into BBC bulletins, and this is supplemented by Rule 4 which equally rules out any unsanctioned use of "voice".

The ground rules were updated to take account also of the Protestant UDA. The Deputy Editor, Radio News said (1973) that in this case "there's the same ground-rule that the reporter must get permission if he's going to tape it. To have the chap talking is liable to stir up the other community." He did make the distinction between the legal status of the IRA and UDA: the former being an organisation banned in Northern Ireland. This is a distinction made also by reporters and newsroom editors. The Deputy Editor also pointed out that exemptions from the non-interview rule would occur in some situations such as the IRA announcing a truce between it and the British army:

"According to the ground-rules reporters can talk to whoever they like. But we make a distinction between that and recording an interview. We've drawn the line that before doing that they must get the authority of the ENCA, who's the joint overseer of radio and TV news. Then it starts coming down the scale. Sometimes, not very often, we've said, 'Yes, go ahead'. Where there's a good news reason for doing so."

There appeared to be general acceptance of these rules. Compliance

with them was, of necessity, total:

"You don't do an interview with anybody representing one side or the other without clearing it first. You may go and talk to someone for an hour, and then you're told that you can't use it. It causes far more trouble if it's done and not used, because then you're accused of suppression or censorship: 'The bloody BBC came round here, and I gave them an hour, and then they didn't use a minute of it'. You'd get trouble from the UVF or the IRA. You can see there's an actual need for it."

(Reporter, Television News).

"We're not explicitly or specifically told to stay off a story. BBC policy varies with the situation. It's a standing rule that we do not interview the IRA on tape without prior reference to the ENCA who probably gets in touch with DG. This now extends to the UDA - that's rough justice. There are not really instructions. Occasionally you're told to handle with care, to check out the facts. It's a hot potato politically. You balance by getting the views of so-and-so. It's a precaution so you can't be attacked in Parliament or the press for presenting a one-sided picture of the situation."

(Reporter, Television News).

These accounts accept the higher rationality of the controllers, and are careful of how the Corporation might look to outsiders. They justify the exclusion of recordings on the ground that were they to be made, and then excluded, that this would smack of censorship, so they are therefore

not made, and do not therefore constitute censorship. Provided both Protestant and Roman Catholic "extremists" are excluded from the scope of broadcastable material, balance is achieved. It is arguable that such standpoints have the smack of auto-censure, as was suggested by the criticisms emerging in press reports. Certainly, the fact that the higher reaches of the power structure are now routinely part of the framework of reference for reportorial decisions implies diminished responsibility for the ultimate output on the part of the BBC's news gatherers. One television reporter indicated how the power structure could be experienced as oppressive:

"As far as the IRA goes we're fighting a war, and they never get representation except by ENCA's special order. You need a prior permit for an interview. You don't put it up obviously or you're a trendy lefty backing the IRA; so you don't bother without a cast-iron excuse. That's the centralisation: if they released the IRA for interview they would show their true colours one way or another. The mechanism is such they'd say there was no ban, but that you just need to get permission."

A denial of such a sense of constraint has come from a reporter who has gone on the record on two occasions in the BBC weekly journal, The Listener, in what could be interpreted as an exercise in apologetics, to argue that he had not found himself "overwhelmed by any sense of a corporate doctrine of what it might be permissible to report. Events press far too urgently for that."⁽⁵³⁾ In attacking those who criticised the BBC's record, the second article takes up the point about an atmosphere

encouraging auto-censure, replying that "It needs to be insisted.... that no system of censorship exists." Rather, it is argued, that the unique circumstances of the Northern Ireland coverage, with its implications for violence on the streets, has become subject "to a tightening of editorial control: that means in practice that editors edit, which one has always understood was what they were paid to do."⁽⁵⁴⁾ Clearly the problem is one of deciding whether a tighter editorial system shades into one of censorship. The Editor, Radio News emphatically denied that there was any sort of ban, drawing a distinction between a refusal to allow interviews and the need to "refer". All that can be reported here is a broad and apparently willing compliance with the existing ground-rules, which have become part of the news-producing routines.

The BBC's policy on Northern Ireland coverage has to be set in the context of what it offers as a broader justification: namely, that broadcasting media, having both immediacy and impact, have a special responsibility not to exacerbate tensions, particularly in a society so fraught with communal strife as the Province. The News Guide elaborates on this underlying standpoint:

"Never before has the BBC had to face the immense difficulties of reporting large-scale and continuing violence and political upheaval within the United Kingdom. The people caught up in these events are our listeners. They can hear or see, within a very short time, our news reports of situations of which they have personal knowledge, or in which they may have been personally involved. As Editor News and Current Affairs put it: 'We are not working on a story about Patagonian Indians but about a place where the BBC's output reaches into every home!'"⁽⁵⁵⁾

It is common within the newsrooms to attribute a great deal of power to the effects of news bulletins. Part of the justification for the current waiving of impartiality, in terms of not broadcasting "extremists' voices", therefore, is that any other kind of coverage would very likely result in worse bloodshed. It is, anyway, sometimes argued that excluding Protestant and Roman Catholic extremists approximates to a kind of impartiality.

The coverage is set in the philosophical context of the responsibility of broadcasting, the public service strand in the BBC concept of professionalism. One journalistic value underlying such responsible journalism is that of "accuracy", dealt with in more detail in the next chapter. One Editor of the Day elaborated on the importance of avoiding the "careless word". A mistake had been made one day in a news summary: Protestants were holding a rally in Londonderry, and, instead of writing that they were marching alongside the Bogside, the Chief sub had written they were marching into the Bogside. This had led, said the Editor of the Day, to a great flare-up of violence in which Protestant and Roman Catholics fought each other. On a lesser scale there had been the "late story" at the end of the six o'clock bulletin one day: there was trouble at the block of flats in Belfast and it was said that one side had initiated the attack when it was really the other way around: "People came out of the flats and started breaking the other lots' windows." Where people are so intimately involved in the events, it is argued, it is of critical importance for the newsmen to be accurate, not only to forestall violence, but also to maintain their general credibility amongst the audiences they are addressing.

The duty to be credible is perceived as linked with the duty not to be manipulated. While this is a general journalistic problem, in the context of Northern Ireland coverage, one justification for treating

IRA and UDA statements with additional wariness is the view that they are "simply propagandists", as the Editor, Radio News phrased it. It was equally widely felt that the BBC could not "simply trot out the Army line", although morally the forces of law and order are seen as doing their duty. A trainee summed up his problems in reporting about Northern Ireland:

"It is difficult to discern the truth. You have to assess the relative merits of the Army's version as against the local people's version."

The effects of news bulletins are judged in the context of trying not to create conditions for violent behaviour. There seemed to be a distinction between the communities in Northern Ireland and the extremists. In the interest of avoiding communal tension, the impartiality doctrine might at times apply. The following description (from the field notes) by one Editor of the Day gives the main elements of this way of thinking:

"He had been on duty on Bloody Sunday; it had started quietly. By the evening the interviews were coming in; he'd had to make snap judgements about what to use in the six o'clock bulletin; you took the thing or you didn't, and you did, 'because it was all happening.' 'By ten o'clock they were all talking'; they had given as accurate an account as possible, and equal space. Everyone had got a 'good run', even if it was three minutes. They had ended up with twelve minutes on Londonderry and 'we wrapped up the rest in three minutes. There was absolutely no criticism of it from outside; and it

was generally acknowledged that we were fair.' He had told the reporters not to use any 'emotional phrases'. Not 'the troops came in with guns blazing', but rather 'the troops opened fire'. It was all coming in at the last minute, and were assessing things on that basis: they had a right to have a say because their version might be the right one."

This account of the coverage of the most serious clash between the British Army and Roman Catholics is couched in terms of the classic definition of impartiality. The newsman's professional expertise is realised in his use of non-emotive descriptions and the granting of equal time to alternative accounts. Newsmen resented any implication that they were biased towards one or other community, particularly as the job of reporters and editors in Northern Ireland is physically hazardous, and they were genuinely convinced they were doing their best. The attitude towards complaints of bias was instructively illustrated on one occasion in the Radio Newsroom. A Duty Editor who had taken a telephone call approached the Editor of the Day in a state of great annoyance:

"Some bloody woman rang up and accused us of being biased towards the RC's. So I told her you were an Ulster Protestant."

The Editor of the Day pointed to the Senior Duty Editor, and observed, "And a Welsh Presbyterian!"

Impartiality was thus made flesh. The editors were asserting that the personnel themselves were the guarantors of truth. For if a Protestant could produce news seeming to favour Roman Catholics, how could there possibly be anything in what the critic had said? The output and the production process were therefore vindicated.

The concept of "impartiality" held in the BBC is a variant of the concept of "objectivity" which is generally held in the journalistic occupational culture. The particular significance of the broadcaster's concept lies in its direct derivation from constraints imposed by the State. There is a further concept which is extensively used by newsmen in claiming a factual status for their output. This is "accuracy", which is now considered.

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3. See ITA, News and Current Affairs Programmes, (Confidential) Consultation, January 1972, ch.4.
4. A point also noted by Gans, op.cit., 1966, p.6, in his observations on American network news organisations.
5. Epstein, op.cit., 1973, ch.2, gives a detailed account of this in the context of American news broadcasting. On the BBC, see Krishan Kumar, 'Holding the middle ground: the BBC, the public, and the professional broadcaster', European Consortium for Political Research, Strasbourg, 29 March - 2 April 1974.
6. Tuchman, op.cit., 1972, makes this point.
7. BBC Handbook, 1974, pp. 256-259.
8. Ibid., p. 257.
9. Ralph Miliband, The State in Capitalist Society, London, Weidenfeld Nicolson, pp. 223-4.

10. See volume three of Asa Briggs' History, The War of Words, London, OUP, 1970. Quotation from p. 329.
11. For an account of recent practice in France see Roland Cayrol, 'L'ORTF face aux élections de mars 1973', Une étude d'observation du service politique de la première chaîne de télévision française. European Consortium for Political Research, Strasbourg, 29 March - 2 April 1974.
12. News Guide, op.cit., p.5.
13. Hood, op.cit., 1972, pp. 414-5.
14. See, for example, Anthony Smith, 'Television Coverage of Northern Ireland', Index, vol.1, no.2, Summer 1972, pp. 15-32; also, Raymond Williams, 'The Question of Ulster', The Listener, 13 January 1972.
15. Such as, for example, the ACTT Television Commission's One Week. A survey of television coverage of union and industrial affairs in the week January 8-14, 1971. Other examples of recent work are John Downing, '"Class" and "Race" in the British News Media', paper presented to the BSA Mass Communications Study Group, December 1971; and David Morley, 'Industrial conflict and the mass media', Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1974.
16. BBC Handbook, 1972, p. 166.
17. Ibid, p.168.

18. Briggs, op.cit., 1961, p.55.
19. Here again, recent practice in France provides a point of contrast. The doctrine of impartiality in routine reporting is applied in terms of a tripartite distinction: government, majority, opposition. Each of these categories is given one-third of available time. As, in practice, government and majority stand for the same policies, routine reporting is therefore heavily, and quite overtly, weighted. During election periods, however, impartiality is interpreted as requiring exact, and equal, durations for both government and opposition to put their cases. This, according to Cayrol, op.cit., 1974, was the picture until recently. Compare the account of British arrangements given in the BBC Handbook, 1974, p.258.
20. BBC Handbook, 1972, p.168; emphasis added.
21. ITA Consultation, op.cit., 1972, ch.4; see also ITV 1974, op.cit., pp. 6-7.
22. The quotations are from the BBC Handbook, 1972, p.168, and from Aerial, op.cit., 1973.
23. BBC Handbook, 1972, p. 168.
24. Ibid., p. 169.
25. Norman Swallow, Factual Television, London and New York, The Focal Press, 1966, pp. 19-20.

26. News Guide, op.cit., p. 3.
27. ITA Consultation, op.cit., 1972, ch.4.
28. See Rosalind Brunt, 'The Spectacular World of Whicker', Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 3, Autumn 1972.
29. Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Harmondsworth, The Penguin Press, 1971, p. 231.
30. See Kumar, op.cit., 1974.
31. For a celebrated example of newsreading phlegm see Briggs, op.cit., 1970, p. 295.
32. Robin Day, op.cit., 1961, p. 50.
33. Audience Research Department, Audience Research Report VR/71/15, BBC, 22 February 1971, p.4. See also Audience Research, op.cit., 1971, pp. 20-21.
34. Ibid., p.4.
35. Hood, op.cit., 1972, p.419.
36. John W.C. Johnstone, Edward J. Slawski, and William D. Bowman, 'The Professional Values of American Newsmen', Public Opinion Quarterly, Winter 1972-73.

37. Edwards, op.cit., 1964, p.12.
38. Indeed, as Epstein, op.cit., 1973, observes, the news as a product is structurally determined. Changing the personnel changes nothing as work is done according to constraints which face all newsmen, whatever their political sympathies. If they want to keep their job they produce "impartial news".
39. This quotation, and the next, come from transcripts of interviews with BBC newsmen which were conducted by Dr John Downing of Thames Polytechnic. He very kindly made them available to me.
40. Anthony Smith, 'Internal Pressures in Broadcasting', paper given to the Fourth Symposium on Broadcasting Policy, Manchester, 1972.
41. Epstein, op.cit., 1973, ch.7.
42. Both of these quotations come from Lord Hill of Luton, 'Freedoms of the Communicators', Speech to the Guild of British Newspaper Editors, Scarborough, 27 April 1968, p.8.
43. Edwards, op.cit., 1964, p.11.
44. The Guardian, 2 November 1971; The Sunday Times, 7 November 1971.
45. The Guardian, 23 November, 1971.
46. The Observer, 21 November 1971; a similar account is given in Seven Days, 1 December 1971.

47. The Sunday Times, The Observer, 21 November 1971.
48. The Guardian, 23 November 1971; Seven Days, 1 December 1971.
49. New Statesman, 31 December 1971.
50. This entire "affair" was covered extensively by the British press, beginning with a Daily Telegraph report on 24 December 1971. The account above draws on The Guardian, The Sunday Times, and The Observer up to 9 January 1972.
51. Quoted from The Guardian, 29 December 1971.
52. News Guide, op.cit., p.38.
53. Martin Bell, 'Views', The Listener, 6 January 1972.
54. Martin Bell, 'Reporting Ulster', The Listener, 5 October 1972.
55. News Guide, op.cit., p.38.

CHAPTER NINE:

BEING ACCURATE

1. Introduction:

In what seems a perceptive formulation, Gans has written of journalists as conducting "an alternative kind of social research."⁽¹⁾ If this is so, then as the last chapter has made clear, such "research" is conducted from within a framework of certain guiding ideas, "impartiality" being one of them. "Accuracy" is another. When newsmen claim that they are giving an accurate account they are asking their audiences to believe what they are told. As an epistemic community, the newsmen are, in effect, claiming authoritativeness, by saying that their reports are true. A question which arises, therefore, is "What sorts of procedure do newsmen follow which satisfy them that such a claim is well-founded?"

This question is best answered in terms of a scientific analogy: we can say that newsmen are claiming to follow such practices as provide well-authenticated data for the public. Pursuing this analogy further, it seems plausible to note the similarity between the production of news bulletins, and, for example, that of social scientific reports. In considering the latter production process, Cicourel has surveyed the range of sociological methods, seeing them as posing a problem from the epistemological point of view. Taking the sceptical position that the foundations of social knowledge are rather shaky, he has suggested that we should view each individual research method as affording us "a pragmatic means of attaining some form of knowledge about the social world."⁽²⁾ It seems that Gans' insight might well be developed in this direction. What is suggested here is that newsmen's authentication procedures can be usefully appraised in relation to the range of research methods

(participant observation, interviewing, content analysis, and so forth). As described below, the testability criteria of newsmen might well seem rough-and-ready by scientific standards. But, in principle, as Galtung⁽³⁾ has noted, journalists are engaged in obtaining data in a manner which can be compared with that of social scientists. The newsman's claim to public credibility, based upon the accuracy of news bulletins can, therefore, be evaluated in the context of a more general scepticism about the credibility of social scientific research itself.

As Chapters 3 and 4 have shown, the production of news takes place in the temporal framework set by the newsday. Scientific production works with quite a different time horizon. Yet there is a similarity of structure. For, this study began with the proposal of studying newsmen as an epistemic community, and this affords a clear basis for comparisons with one model of scientific practice.

This model stresses the communal nature, the sociological basis, of scientific production.⁽⁴⁾ In over-simplified form the model looks like this: the scientist can be seen as a kind of craftsman engaged in the production of valid data. These data are judged by criteria held in common by the particular scientific community of which he is a member. These data are refined into information which is used as evidence in an argument leading to a particular conclusion. These various steps, which lead up to the final "research report", are subtly intertwined. What is important, however, from the standpoint of what is being argued here, is that scientific knowledge can be conceived of "as the product of a social endeavour extending through time."⁽⁵⁾ So can news. Judgements of "adequacy" (rather than of "certainty") which are made by the scientific community are presented through concepts such as the "soundness", "reliability", and "relevance" of reports. In this way the epistemic community of

scientists acts as a "quality control"⁽⁶⁾. Chapters 2-4 described the operation of the quality control function in the news organisation. In the scientific production model, a further set of criteria - those concerning value - plays a crucial role in the selection of those problems which are to be investigated. The "methods" through which investigations are conducted are largely learned through socialisation, and therefore are not, on the whole, fully codified. A final research report, once it has become publicly available, has to be authenticated by the academically authoritative before it can be regarded as of "factual" status. The process of authentication proceeds over quite lengthy periods of time.

By contrast, as mentioned above, the kind of news production described in this study is oriented towards daily cycles. The production of news does not involve systematic hypothesis construction, differing in this respect from scientific production. But newsmen do make claims about the factual status of news. As an epistemic community, like scientists, they claim to be telling the truth about reality. There is a further point of comparison. Newsmen's "search procedures", as Tunstall⁽⁷⁾ has called them, differ in kind, but not it would seem, in principle, from the more reputable scientific "research methods". Newsmen point to an adherence to the right procedures as guaranteeing - to the greatest possible degree - the accuracy (or truth) of the reports they construct. In this they are displaying a consciousness not unlike that of, say, the social scientist who describes his methodology.

The argument of this chapter builds upon the observations so far made concerning the constraining influences of organisational structure and the orientations embodied in newsmen's knowledge. As members of an epistemic community newsmen, by definition, share an epistemology of sorts.

This, it is suggested below, can be characterised philosophically as a variant of empiricist scepticism. The production of news is governed by exceedingly precise temporal cycles. So, when newsmen operate their criteria for testing the "facts" they are constrained by organisationally-generated deadlines. The newsmen's concept of accuracy must be evaluated in this context. How its operational meaning becomes explicit in the production process itself is now described.

2. The Importance of Accuracy for the BBC:

The BBC lays a great deal of stress on its international reputation for being an honest, independent purveyor of news. Being impartial is one strand in this account, and being accurate is another, related one. Briggs' history of the BBC makes frequent mention of the stress on accuracy. In a general assessment he observes that "Between 1927 and 1939 the BBC established its reputation as the most honest purveyor of news in the world: it was a reputation which was to stand it in good stead when war broke out."⁽⁸⁾ And, writing about the war years, he observes that "in general, the BBC built up its European audience and reputation on the candid presentation of the same basic news to all countries."⁽⁹⁾ The truth of such claims is not the issue here. Their relevance for the discussion lies in the way in which the historic Corporate self-image of honesty is part of the tradition of thinking within the News Departments. The concern is with the meaning of honesty and accuracy in the newsrooms.

Certainly, it is central to the newsmen's conception of their relationship to their audiences. It is no hazardous generalisation to say that purveyors of information, be they propagandists, advertisers, or newsmen, want their accounts of the way the world is constructed to be

believed. It is vitally important to them that their audiences should see them as credible sources of information. Within the BBC newsrooms, and more widely afield in the Corporation no doubt, the issue of credibility is a matter of obsessional interest, and it manifests itself in the particular emphasis the newsmen lay on the "accuracy" of their reporting.⁽¹⁰⁾ The audience research reports mentioned in Chapter 7, reflected a concern with the BBC image in respect of its accuracy and trustworthiness, and the 1971 report found that respondents accorded the BBC the highest ratings amongst British media in these respects.⁽¹¹⁾ The BBC Handbooks reflect the Corporation's concern with its international reputation for veracity, viewed in the context of the Cold War.⁽¹²⁾ The former Chairman of the BBC, Lord Hill, has talked of "the role envisaged for us by Charles Curran (The Director -General) as 'the decent men of international broadcasting' whose words can be believed."⁽¹³⁾

The importance of accuracy to the Corporate profile is further demonstrated in this memorandum from the Deputy Editor, Radio News to his staff:

"Corrections: We increase, rather than reduce, our credibility, if we admit our mistakes."⁽¹⁴⁾

The News Guide expands somewhat on this theme, elucidating the Corporate standpoint on the matter of "inaccuracy":

"The problem of the reliability of sources is particularly acute in the case of the national newsroom which still relies to a large extent on material produced by the news agencies. These have high professional standards. But they themselves rely on the efforts of hosts of individuals, not all of equal capacity or reliability. Consequently they are far from infallible. In the case of

the agencies who supply us with foreign news - Reuters, Associated Press, United Press, and Agence France Press - their very multiplicity provides its own precaution against error: four parallel accounts of the same event. In the case of home news, there is only one home news agency - the Press Association. This means that, in many instances, we must put our trust in one - and only one - account of an event; there is no other agency report against which to check it.

.....The only protection against the hazards of inaccuracy and misreporting is for the staff of every newsroom to maintain an attitude of critical vigilance towards every news item that comes their way. It is dangerous to take anything on trust, even from a source that seems impeccable. This does not mean that we cannot broadcast anything until we have cast-iron guarantees of its accuracy; it is impossible to check everything. But the emergence of even the slightest suggestion of a doubt should be taken as a warning signal. "When in doubt, leave out", remains good advice. So does "Check it now, tomorrow may be too late."⁽¹⁵⁾

This "official" statement of a central problem area for newsmen lends support to the earlier suggestion that it is fruitful to look at newsmen as sceptics and empiricists. Several points emerge from it:

1. The centrality of the problem of evaluating testimony.
2. The undesirability of relying on sources which do not operate the same reporting practices as the Corporation.

3. The belief that where there is more than one source that one is likely to be closer to the truth. This should be interpreted in terms of the degree of support advanced for various truth claims.
4. The emphasis on "critical vigilance" which expresses an attitude of philosophical scepticism.

During the course of fieldwork, it became very apparent that BBC newsmen fully accepted this appraisal of the way in which they should confront the problem of knowledge. A whole cognitive orientation is therefore embodied in editorial practice.

3. Speed vs accuracy: a tension in news production:

Accuracy, a respect for "the facts", is a basic and historic journalistic value. An additional, but often countervailing, value is that of "fast news" or "immediacy": broadcast news has to be transmitted as quickly as possible, at specific output times within the context of the newsday. One way in which newsmen evaluate their competitive standing in the media world is by the speed with which they "break" a story. Within the BBC, this potential clash of the values of immediacy and accuracy is identified as one giving rise to especial concern. In the corporately cautious news judgement of the BBC, haste which leads to a loss of credibility is to be avoided. Newsmen therefore report that they need to be particularly careful in this respect: to be accurate - even if late - is to act in the best traditions of public service. Expounding upon this stance, the former Editor, News and Current Affairs, Donald Edwards has written:

"Sometimes we get hold of a piece of news which we know would interest the audience, but we are not absolutely certain of its accuracy. We have

to hold it put while we check. It is agony
to a newsman to miss a bulletin, but reliability
and accuracy are more important than speed.....
It is not enough to interest the public. You
have to be trusted."⁽¹⁶⁾

The tension is a basic one, and gives us an insight into the way in which a norm of media competition, and an organisationally-derived imperative of what constitutes journalistic integrity, may conflict.⁽¹⁷⁾ Authentication - or, in newsmen's terms, "checking the facts" - means waiting. In a context where the pace of output is rigidly governed by a certain number of time slots, holding back a story until "confirmation" comes through means that the competition may beat you to the draw.

The BBC's News Guide is uncompromising in the way it defines the Corporate ideal as,

..."One-hundred-per-cent accuracy at all times. But news bulletins are prepared by people, and people are fallible. So the achievement of our ideal must remain forever beyond our grasp. Nevertheless, we do all in our power in striving towards it. We take nothing on trust; we check, and, if necessary, double-check."⁽¹⁸⁾

An evangelism which is tinged with realism, it would appear. The Guide is also unequivocal about which way decisions should go in cases of doubt:

"If after checking as far as you can, you still have doubts about something, then leave it out.
And never sacrifice accuracy for speed. Bulletin times wait for no man, and you must get used to

working under pressure. But it is better to leave something out of a story altogether than to let it be broadcast unverified."⁽¹⁹⁾

Returning to the newsmen's implicit philosophical attitude we might characterise their position as a form of scepticism. As is noted below, doubts concerning certain news items may be lessened by using certain kinds of routine testing procedure. Within the organisation, there is a "stock of knowledge" about the reliability of certain sources of information which is routinely deployed whenever problems arise.

Newsmen, as is well-known, are faced constantly by the problem of meeting deadlines. Their evaluation of sources has to be seen in this context. The outline account which follows is written from the perspective of newsroom personnel, rather than that of newsgatherers.

4. Evaluating sources:

"The good sub develops antennae. He can spot it when things're wrong. It's important to know your agencies."

(Editor of the Day, Radio News).

"There is one yardstick for news coverage: check and check again. Once a source becomes suspect it will no longer be trusted."

(News Organiser, Radio News).

When information comes into the newsroom, it is evaluated by certain rules of thumb. Like much else in journalism, decisions about the authenticity of certain stories are described in terms of "instinct" or "experience". The evaluation of stories falls into the general rubric of "news judgement": just as newsmen have to assess the "news value"

of a story, they have to be able to assess its "weight". The recipe knowledge in the BBC national newsrooms takes the following forms:

News Agencies:

Reuter is uniformly spoken of as the "quality" foreign news source, and it is preferred to UPI and AP. Its staff are spoken of as "men you can trust." Probably one factor which reinforces these views is the BBC's special relationship with the agency: it has a liaison officer in the Reuter offices who relays special requests for "follow ups" of stories.

Of the two American agencies, AP seems to be the slightly more favoured by newsroom wisdom. With its rival, UPI, it is usually spoken of as "good on America" or "good for colour". UPI seems also to be thought of as "slick", which in BBC newsroom parlance is not a term of approbation. Talking about the American agencies one editor said, "You could use them as an 'unconfirmed report', but not as an actual fact."

The other international agency received in the newsrooms is AFP.⁽²⁰⁾ The newsmen were suspicious of the link between this agency and the French government. It was accepted as "good on France" but otherwise unreliable. The newsmen made a specific point of saying it was under government control, thereby revealing one criterion of what constitutes "reliability".

On the domestic side PA is the dominant British agency. It is the staple source of copy for the newsroom scriptwriters, and of tip-off and diary material for intake and reporting staff. It was described as "reliable", if slightly "slow". As a matter of policy its Northern Ireland reports are never used on their own, but always have to be checked out with BBC-men on the spot.

Until relatively recently the BBC newsrooms operated what was known as "the two-agency rule". This rule prescribed that no report should be treated as adequately confirmed unless it had appeared independently on the tape of two news agencies. This rule has been somewhat relaxed of

late as doubt can be conveyed by certain well-tried formulae, such as, "Reports are coming in that....".

Newsfilm agencies:

Television has a consuming need for pictures. But not all the filming required by TV news can be done by its own crews. This is particularly true of foreign newsfilm where the cost of sending crews abroad is prohibitive unless the story is judged particularly newsworthy. Visnews is the principal agency for foreign news film. It has a "full contract" with the BBC, which in newsman's terms places it in a more favourable standing than "stringer" or free-lance work. Regularity of association, as in the case of Reuter, is important in establishing trust. One member of BBC-TV's foreign news staff put the BBC's relationship to Visnews like this: "They ring us to ask what are our priorities. They send a list, and it's decided what to ask for. We're almost cousins, and they're partly financed by us."

Additionally, there are many sources of international newsfilm "offers". Among the range of foreign news organisations, the US network CBS is most frequently mentioned as a source, "but it is not", as one newsman put it, "quite as close as Visnews". The third US network ABC is also occasionally used, but it was said that normally NBC and CBS materials suffice. As far as Eurovision goes, no particular preferences apparently exist.

The BBC's own internal sources:

For an organisation which exhibits the degree of Corporate caution encountered in the BBC, one strategy for making certain that reports fit the internally-defined criteria of truth and reliability is that of expanding the internal news network.

The BBC has done precisely this in the case of its home coverage. The BBC's General News Service, based at Broadcasting House in the Radio newsroom, is described as "the BBC's own internal news agency". It acts as a clearing house between the London newsrooms and regional and local

stations. As a matter of policy the BBC has developed its local and regional centres as extensions of its metropolitan newsgathering branch. Information received through its own staff is accepted as accurate without question.

The internal news agency therefore gives two advantages which bear directly on the concerns noted at the beginning of this chapter. It has the standing within the newsrooms of being reliable testimony, pre-tested by BBC Staff, and it is also fast news, as it is unmediated by any outside agency. The tension between speed and accuracy is therefore resolved in this way.

The BBC's monitoring of international broadcasts is an additional important source. It is used as early "tip-off" material where important developments abroad seem to be foreshadowed or actually occur. Whatever is filtered through the BBC monitoring station is "taken on trust" in the newsrooms. Examples of early tip-offs, given by one copy-taster, were the announcement of Beria's death over Moscow Radio, and that of President Nasser's death over Cairo Radio. The latter was received at 7.22 pm. one evening and went out as the "lead" story in the 7.30 pm. TV bulletin.

As noted in the last chapter, Northern Ireland coverage presents a particular problem for any news organisation which purports to present unbiased reports. There are ground rules governing Northern Ireland coverage, which are particularly good examples of Corporate caution. It was noted earlier that PA reports routinely provide the basis of most domestic news copy. But in the case of Northern Ireland, PA reports are never accepted as accurate until confirmation has been received from the BBC newsroom in Belfast. The ground-rule covering this point was quoted in the last chapter.

Similarly, when it comes to assessing particular sources, the IRA are identified a priori as a suspect source of information, as propagandists.

These ground-rules have enormous salience in the newsrooms. For example, one Editor of the Day said, "We run the principle that we check with Belfast - we won't put out anything controversial." Another typical utterance was, "We take as a fact stuff from Belfast. It's thoroughly checked."

Specialists:

The evaluation of news stories - in the sense of making explicit interpretations - is in the hands of the BBC's specialist correspondents. They have a consultative role. Where problems of assessment arise the correspondents' specialist knowledge is used to test the authenticity of various accounts.

In the case of foreign news, the foreign correspondent has the status of being "the man on the spot". Even if he is not physically present, his knowledge of the particular area in which a news story "breaks" is viewed from a corporate perspective as relevant expertise; as the former Foreign News Editor of the BBC wrote:

"A good correspondent will report as much as he can at first hand, but he must rely to a varying extent on what is reported to him, by news agencies, by radio, and newspaper reports - in short, by other journalists. What he can do, and must do, is to sift and check these reports by his own knowledge, and by his own further enquiries."⁽²¹⁾

It is not without significance that a stress is placed upon the primacy of the first-hand account. It is regarded as a way of minimising inaccuracies. Paralleling this on a philosophical plane is the empiricists' emphasis on the direct experiencing of sense-data by the perceiving subject. The newsmen see themselves as the honest cooks of raw data which can then be experienced

at second-hand by the consumers of the outputs. The trustworthiness of the personnel is the guarantee of the reliability of the product. And it is in line with this belief that the News Guide stresses the importance of the consultative role:

"Any major story in an area covered by a specialist correspondent, eg. education, should always be referred to that correspondent.

"On foreign stories, your first contact is the Foreign Duty Editor in the newsroom. The BBC External Services at Bush House has a host of experts in its language services covering most foreign countries." (22)

The phenomenologist Alfred Schutz has discussed the importance of the interlocking relevances between those who provide information and those who receive it. His remarks on the "eyewitness" account afford a precise insight into the meaning of "our own correspondent" in the BBC newsrooms:

"My belief in his report is based on the fact that the reported event occurred within the world within his reach. This belief presupposes, furthermore, a certain conformity of my system of relevances with that of the eyewitness." (23)

The following quotations from fairly senior editors are indicative of the importance which this internally-available expertise is accorded:

"The correspondent is to some extent an ambassador. He is educated in the significance of events. They have a kind of knowledge peculiar to themselves - they have an informed opinion, and they know about TV technique."

(Foreign News Editor, Television News).

"The correspondent has a peculiar intimacy with the subject. You know things for yourself: you're the

encyclopaedia. You don't have to go and look at one."

(News Editor, Television News).

"Having your own man there cuts down the risk of ambiguity. There's a long way between the event and its final report. Foreign correspondents have the function of interpreting the significance of events. They cover such vast territories they couldn't possibly witness everything at first hand."

(Editor of the Day, Radio News).

P.S. "What is the point of having your own man in the field?"

"You'll have somebody working for you, and you know that you can trust every word that he says. There's a disadvantage if you're relying on a stringer or an agency. If we've got our own man we believe him without corroboration. They know the sort of information we're looking for - exactly what we want. There's also the prestige of having our man: it means something to the informed public that there are BBC representatives all over the world."

(Foreign Duty Editor, Television News).

The general points which can be made on the basis of evidence such as this are as follows:

The man on the spot, whether for domestic or foreign reporting, has the status of an eyewitness. An eyewitness to a particular event is one who best satisfies the empiricist criteria of news gathering: our man was out there, saw this, spoke to so-and-so, sends back actuality from the scene, and so on. The reporter can also act as a reliable tip-off man about newsbreaks - e.g. about the occurrence of an illegal provisional

IRA news conference, a political storm brewing, etc. The correspondent has the status of an expert: he is, in virtue of that status, expected to know the various points of view on a given issue, he is expected to know who to contact and how to deal with them. Having an expert to give testimony is the next best thing to having an eye-witness who is also an expert. For example, during a sterling crisis, the Editor of the Day said quite simply "Dominick (the Economics Correspondent) will tell us". Expertise adds, in the newsman's expression, "weight" to a particular story. Merely mentioning "Our Political Editor" is within the newsroom perceived as a way of endorsing the report. In other words, his testimony, or his assessment of others' testimony, is one which is informed by the operational criteria of authentication of the organisation. The correspondent as eye-witness, or as organisational representative is viewed from an editorial perspective as a self-authenticating source. As one TV reporter put it succinctly, "We can package the deal the way they want it. We know the commodity required. The BBC has a world-wide reputation: people have to be able to trust the product entirely - so it can't be meretricious or tendentious. We have no editorial viewpoint by Charter". This "lack" of an editorial viewpoint includes an individual acceptance of the need for corporate caution in evaluating the truth of various claims.

Broadcasting your own correspondent's report as well-authenticated fact, or as reliable testimony, implies that it has the status of truth. Every time the organisation does this it endorses the standing of its reporters. Where these facts are accepted by the audiences for news the organisational reputation stands secure. Where the facts and interpretations are challenged some sort of response has to be devised. It is a broadcaster's axiom that once something has gone out over the air it cannot be recalled. If it comes to the worst a particular item can be apologised for. It is part of the structure of public communication as interpreted by the BBC that the occupier of the

mediating role takes responsibility for that which is mediated. Responsibility is therefore defined in terms of an honest empiricism which makes use of the best kind of empiricists. In the BBC's conception it has a national obligation to be the source which can be trusted, and therefore it must eschew speculation and sensationalism.

Summarising, it is clear that the rapid time-cycle within which news judgement has to be exercised fosters the development of evidential rules of thumb. These take the shape of nuggets of newsroom wisdom about which sources are to be trusted. As copy comes into the newsroom there are rapid ways of authenticating it by cross-checking among the various accounts. An important short-cut is taken by using the various BBC correspondents and news-filtering agencies.

5. Some stock problems:

The News Guide identifies some potential sources of "inaccuracy" which it is important to note, as they illustrate the terms in which the newsman defines the concept of "accuracy".⁽²⁴⁾ The account is supported by field observations.

- i. Editorial staff are urged to make sure that when someone's views are quoted it constitutes an accurate account of his views. Attribution is a part of news producing routines as "personalisation" is so prevalent in Western news practice.⁽²⁵⁾
- ii. Newsmen should be sure that people really are dead when they are reported as being dead. Suggested checking procedures are ringing up hospitals, doctors, undertakers, the bereaved's family. They are cautioned to be wary of those with a "macabre" sense of humour. Calls from "members of the public" (as opposed to, one infers, institutional sources) need "independent confirmation". Observation suggests that this caution is particularly relevant. It is

common practice in news organisations to keep "obits" in readiness for timely and untimely deaths of prominent persons. If the organisation makes a mistake, "You can" as one editor put it, "'Kill' the story - but it doesn't let you off the hook for killing the person." Obituaries are a source of macabre humour. One conversation recorded ran like this:

Chief film editor: "Derek has Noel Coward next to die".

Editor of the Day: "Yes. I'd've liked to do the obit. There's some nice stills; not very much film on Coward."

iii. Particular care is needed in checking certain classes of "fact":

a. names. The Guide notes, "Nothing can more effectively undermine public confidence in a radio news service than an apparent inability "to get the name right."

The audience-orientation of the producers emerges very clearly here. Corporate caution is tied up with the preservation of credibility outside the newsrooms.

b. figures: The Guide cautions: "It is easy to accept at second-hand some rather wild assessments of height, distances, size, weight, etc."

An example of this kind of concern for detail was noted during fieldwork in the Radio Newsroom. The Editor of the Day decided that a story about some gas mains blowing up in Bradford was of interest. He wanted to know how far Bradford was from Leeds. At his request a sub-editor consulted The Gazetteer of the British Isles, and came up with the answer, "nine miles west".

On a different occasion a further example of the newsman's concern with accuracy was given by another Editor of the Day:

"We need an accurate assessment of crowds. The police⁽²⁶⁾ are useful. We're careful over estimating the size of

crowds. If it's not reliable we put the figure on someone - 'the organisers say'."

A general rule, the editor said, is that where there are three or four differing figures, the average is taken.

c. Newsmen are urged to check geographical statements in order not to "wound local pride".

d. The Guide continues, "Also in need of checking are pieces of historical information of the "Queen Elizabeth slept here variety". Sometimes they are no more than pieces of local lore, faithfully perpetuated from generation to generation, but lacking any firm foundation in fact."

e. Size: A last specific point which is made in the Guide is, "Beware too, of such phrases as "the biggest", "the heaviest", and so on. Unless they can be verified, it is better to avoid them...It may be more prudent - if less inspiring - to content ourselves with saying "one of the biggest" or "what is said to be the biggest".

This injunction is also one of some importance. According to news values the size of a phenomenon is one of the factors which makes for news "interest". For example, during one planning discussion observed in TV news, talk centred on the size of some new dockyards to be opened - "the biggest in the country". If the news point which the story makes is not to be defeated, then the claim must be substantiated by acceptable sources.

6. Case Instances:

Taking an empiricist approach implies a kind of sceptical attitude to verifying facts which is demonstrated through the testability criteria

which have to be satisfied. For newsmen, as was indicated earlier, a basic mode of testing is through the consonance, or disagreement, of several eye-witness accounts. Short of this, mediated accounts via "reliable sources" are the next best thing.

In the instance which follows, it is suggested that it is plausible to interpret the pooling of information which takes place in the news organisation in the course of assessing the authenticity of stories, as a kind of "organised scepticism".

There are limits to the degree of scepticism to be found in the BBC News Division, of course. Implicit in a radical scepticism is the determined effort to discover new facts which confirm or disconfirm propositions which are in doubt. The BBC's posture of "impartiality" inhibits investigation in news broadcasting proper, as opposed to in Current Affairs or features, and it was frequently pointed out that this was not the News Departments' role. The primary conception of news is that it does a "reflective job" on existing legitimate views in the social order. The professional yardsticks are broadly satisfied by obtaining an adequate number of views to be reflected, as indicated in the discussion of "impartiality".

i. The Mozambique Story:

This principle - known as "balanced coverage" was exemplified, as were the criteria for accuracy, in the instance which follows. On 10 July 1973, The Times (a newspaper thought "reliable") broke what briefly came to be a celebrated story, although since then it has been almost totally forgotten. On the front page of the newspaper was an account by a Roman Catholic priest, Father Adrian Hastings, which alleged that Portuguese troops had massacred innocent villagers at a place called Wiriyamu in Tete Province, Mozambique. The sort of scepticism which this story met with on that day in Television News is illustrative of truth criteria which newsmen use to evaluate stories, and relates to the account which has so far been given.

The first occasion on which an attitude was taken toward the story, on a collective basis, by senior editors of TV News, was at the morning meeting.

The Deputy Editor, who was in the chair, set the tone of the meeting when he observed that the story was "too well orchestrated". His reason for saying this (criterion 1) was that Father Hastings' article had appeared in the week prior to a long-arranged visit to Britain by Dr. Marcello Caetano, the then Portuguese Prime Minister. The timing of the article, therefore rendered it suspect: it could hardly be coincidental, which implied it was a deliberate bid for publicity to discredit the visit.

All the senior editors attending this meeting displayed a similar degree of scepticism. The Deputy News Editor thought that "the left wing were waiting for this". (Criterion 2). This criterion placed the story in the slot "campaign to embarrass the government". Another participant observed that the story was "facile". But the most consistent theme was the evaluation of the story in terms of its timing: the way it had broken the week before the visit was a good ground for disbelieving this piece of testimony.

The Deputy Editor said "someone must know" about the truth of the matter; until that information was made available they were to be cautious. "It's all too pat". Criterion (2) came up again when one of the Editors of the Day asked "This priest what's his background?" The Deputy News Editor was concerned that he might be a "left-wing militant, or possibly a militant over Catholic rights". This move can be interpreted as an attempt to dig out the ideological motivations for the priest's story and thereby to set him into some recognisable slot.

The next step was that of confronting the problems of treatment which the story posed. Who could be used as sources? There was the Portuguese Socialist leader, Dr. Soares, who would be giving a news conference in London that day, in French. But, observed the News Editor, "there's no way of

checking" the claims: the alleged massacre had taken place in a village which was not on the map. Another criterion (3) emerged: to authenticate claims a spatial location was needed. Because the newsmen did not at that stage know where the village was, the site of the incident lacked "visibility" and threw the priest's account into further doubt. Over the sound link between Television Centre and Broadcasting House, Radio News gave the information that an additional source was available. The Director of Information of the Portuguese Government was due to arrive in London. The Deputy Editor observed: "That'll redress the balance a bit. We're trying the Lisbon end." (Criterion 4) Within several minutes of the problem's being discussed for the first time its treatment in programme terms was being sketched out in the conventional manner: if in doubt, give a balanced account. There was now an opposing viewpoint, and a reporter was to be sent to Lisbon in order to find out the official view there. Quite spontaneously, the Deputy Editor chairing the Radio News morning meeting observed "The timing's a bit odd", displaying a shared criterion (1). He went on to say that the Radio News angle was "trading on the possibility of an Opposition censure motion". This remark pointed up the awareness that the incident was going to be controversial in terms of British domestic politics. In terms of the constraint of political impartiality this meant careful handling. There was now a domestic angle as well as an international conflict of claims. Wariness of the complications of party politics was evident: "Why is Father Hastings at this lunch at Transport House?" The Deputy Editor said in conclusion, "Let's report it as it happens". This apparently vacuous remark was basically urging the editors to be cautious.

In the newsroom, in the early morning lull, the "Portuguese Massacre Story" as it was now known, was a topic of conversation. The Editor of the Day on channel 1 wanted to know "Does the place exist?" A reporter

answered: "There's only one way to find out - and that's to go there." This indicates a further criterion (5) of assessment. The eye-witness account from a reliable source is taken to be a certain way of apprehending the truth. The Editor of the Day, briefing the Chief sub-editor who was to handle the story said: "The BBC doesn't take a stand. At the moment we're between belief and disbelief." This was an instruction to handle the story with caution, putting into effect what had amounted to being a policy decision taken at the morning meeting. The Deputy Editor was present for some time in the newsroom, as was the News Editor. This was an unusual event, as both are senior executives concerned with the managerial side rather than day-to-day operations. It was an indication of crisis, as much play is given to the editorial philosophy of the output editor's responsibility. It can be interpreted in terms of the need to pool professional wisdom. Even more unusual was the detailed discussion between the Deputy Editor and the Editor of the Day. They were both acutely aware that the story had domestic political ramifications.

By 10.55 am. the Editor of the Day was thinking in visual terms. More information had come into the newsroom about the village where the massacre was alleged to have taken place, over the agency tapes. It was now apparently the case that the village was called Williamo, not Wiriyamu, as villages in that region changed their names with the advent of a new headman. The Editor of the Day said to the Chief sub-editor: "We could probably get a map going. We can put the names of two places on the map - it's between them. Be careful who you quote: our man in Dar-es-Salaam has spoken to the FRELIMO commander". In newsman's terms the story was "hardening up" factually: it was situated in space as well as in time, and there were sources available to put both sides of the case.

The Deputy Editor was still in the newsroom. He observed: "We don't believe it or disbelieve it. Father Hastings or the Portuguese." The

official attitude was defined as scepticism, where balanced treatment had to be given to each side. The early criteria of evaluation were still being reiterated: the timing of the article being taken as central. The Editor of the Day said: "The source isn't a left-wing trendy". The News Editor said to me: "We're trying to get at something like the truth. We'll have an interview with the (Portuguese) Embassy about their version of what did or didn't happen. We'll go at it in a straightforward way." The timing of the report was talked of as "kindergarten primer stuff". The Deputy Editor said to me: "It might sound silly, but we've got a vested interest in the truth. We have to keep an open mind on it."

Towards lunchtime both Editors of the Day (Channels 1 and 2) were watching the ITN news programme First Report on which the Portuguese Ambassador to Britain was being interviewed. Here was a further piece of testimony. One of them observed that although the timing was "obviously set up" this did not mean that the story was not true. By six o'clock, after two bulletins had been produced, he still felt that it was "arguable both ways".

The basic guidelines for treatment had been set out early on, throwing into relief routine modes of appraisal. On the following day, at a foreign news planning meeting, senior editors decided to apply for a visa for the South Africa correspondent. It was observed, "The whole story smells". In domestic news terms, the story was about the elaborate precautions taken to protect Dr. Caetano, and the political storm between opponents of his visit (notably the Labour Party) and the Conservative Government. At a home news planning meeting the same morning the Editor, Television News, laid down the angle to be followed: "We'll look at the security story and keep an eye on the political side."

One further incident relevant in demonstrating the criteria of evidence employed by newsmen in this particular instance was observed. The Editor

of the Day for Channel 2 had received, two days after the "Massacre Story" first broke, an offer from Father Hastings of some film showing Portuguese troops burning down a village. It was previewed in a cutting room. It was rejected as not having news value on the following grounds: (a) it was four years old; (b) similar film had been shown the previous day by the current affairs programme, Midweek, and the sequences available in this case were not of good technical quality, having been shot by an amateur; (c) there were no dead bodies. This last criterion meant that, in the editor's view, the film could have no direct bearing on the issue of whether massacres had taken place (Criterion 6). The editor thought it common knowledge that villages were burned down in the Portuguese territories. The other two points have to do with the "freshness" of the evidence: it was not adequately up-to-date, and had in any case been scooped the previous day.

By a curious irony, this editorial judgement became in itself a smallish news story. At 7.34 pm. a PA "snapfull" brought the news to the News Extra desk that the BBC had turned down Father Hasting's film. The Deputy Editor who was "around" in the newsroom asked the Editor of the Day to telephone the Press Association and explain why the film had been rejected. By 7.40 pm. an explanation had been set in motion specifying that the film had been rejected on grounds of news value. This was reported by some newspapers the following day. The Editor of the Day observed to me that "it wasn't just corpses that were missing", but that the film had had nothing to do with the massacre. What is revealing about his news judgement is that he did not see it in terms of adding to contextual knowledge of conditions in Mozambique, but rather in relation to the immediate story of the day.

To summarise the criteria of evidence emerging from this account:

1. The timing of a controversial story is important: newsmen do not like to think that they are being manipulated.

2. The source of origin of such a story is important: if it can be pinned down as ideologically-inspired then this is of assistance in knowing how to treat it.
3. The degree to which a definite observable location can be cited is an important factor in the story's credibility. This allows an eye-witness to check details.
4. In order to give a "balanced" account, newsmen must have an alternative, in this case, opposing, viewpoint available.
5. Reinforcing (3)- observable location-it is important to have eye-witness accounts: Father Hasting's report was not an eye-witness account but rather based upon others' reports.
6. The directness of the evidence is important: the film was rejected because it was judged irrelevant to the specific claims which had been made.

(ii) A Northern Ireland Story:

One morning, two minutes after the 7.0 am. news bulletin had been transmitted, the newsroom received a complaint about the content of the bulletin. It came from the Public Relations Officer of the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr. William Whitelaw. The reporter's contribution from Belfast had contained a reference to an explosion at a public house "a few miles beyond Belfast airport". The PRO suggested that as the airport was a well-known target and a sensitive area that the report could be rephrased to give the location more exactly. The night editor became concerned that the report might be "dragging in" the airport unnecessarily. From an editing point of view, he observed, "We can't take it out without doing the whole piece again." In discussion, the night editor and the News Organiser, who was very familiar with Belfast, decided that the reporter had not given a clear enough location of the bombing. The News Organiser

estimated that the pub was "about 14 miles out" (-side of Belfast). There had been two separate bomb incidents, one of which had been in the city centre. This therefore provided a point of contrast with the other bomb. The night editor said: "I should have seen that before it went out". The Chief sub added: "It's important to the story that people are going to pubs outside Belfast". The night editor concurred, saying, "It makes it (the story) seem silly. People (there) know where Crumlin is." The Chief sub set the incident in context for my benefit: "We must have gospel-like accuracy; every detail must be right if possible." At 7.53 pm. the request went to the reporter to "do a re-write" with more detail concerning the exact location of the two pubs; Belfast airport was not to be mentioned.

The newsman's claim to authoritativeness is one which has to be seen against the background of the time-pressures on news production. Given that news shares one characteristic of the scientific report as "the product of a social endeavour extending through time", the methods used to test the "facts" are far less elaborate. Newsmen, do, nevertheless, operate with a kind of collective epistemology, which has here been labelled "empiricism in a hurry". This hurriedness brings us to the next chapter, which concerns itself with the issue of time-consciousness in the newsman's occupational culture.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. Gans, op.cit., 1966, p.2.
2. Aaron V. Cicourel, Method and Measurement in Sociology, New York, Free Press of Glencoe, 1964, p.38; emphasis added.
3. Johan Galtung, Theory and Methods of Social Research, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 1967. There he sees the ideal type of journalism as dealing with few variables and one 'unit' (i.e. human being or human product). See Chapter 1, Table 1.2.1, p.15.
4. See J.R. Ravetz, Scientific Knowledge and its Social Problems, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1973, especially Part II. Ravetz's model of scientific production, in grossly oversimplified form, has been used as the basis for the following paragraph. His emphasis on the sociological features of the scientific community is essentially Kuhnian. See Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, University of Chicago Press, 1970, 2nd ed.
5. Ravetz, op.cit., 1973, p.156.
6. Ibid., p.128.
7. Tunstall, op.cit., 1971, p.26.
8. Briggs, op.cit., 1965, p.153.
9. Asa Briggs, op.cit., 1970, p.180.

10. This peculiarly BBC-like trait was noted by Halloran et al.,
op.cit., 1970, p.185.
11. Audience Research, op.cit., 1971, pp. 11-12.
12. See for example, BBC Handbook, 1972, pp. 20-23.
13. Lord Hill of Luton, 'Into the 'Seventies. Some aspects of Broadcasting
in the next decade, Leeds University, 19 March 1969, p.9.
14. Memorandum, Deputy Editor, Radio News to News Staff, 3 January 1973.
15. News Guide, op.cit., pp. 23-24.
16. Edwards, op.cit., 1964, pp. 6,7.
17. See Tunstall, op.cit., 1971, p. 207, and ch.6, passim.
18. News Guide, op.cit., p.6.
19. Ibid., p.18; emphasis added.
20. This applies only to the Radio newsroom, But "important" reports
are forwarded to the Television newsroom by the internal news service
(the "GNS"-see Chapter 3).
21. Crawley, op.cit., 1964, p.5.

22. News Guide, op.cit., p.61.
23. Alfred Schutz, 'The Well-informed Citizen: An Essay on the Social Distribution of Knowledge', in Collected Papers, II: Studies in Social Theory, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1964, p.132.
24. News Guide, op.cit., pp. 23-27; the following points in the text are based on these pages.
25. See Galtung and Ruge, op.cit., 1970, who draw attention to this point.
26. Halloran et al, op.cit., 1970, p.185, note the same view of the police as a reliable source.

CHAPTER TEN:

TIME AND THE NEWSMAN

"Of all the pressures operating on the editor of a morning or evening newspaper the heaviest is the shortage of time. There are too many stories and articles to read, too many people to see, too many telephone calls to make."

(Charles Wintour, Editor of the London Evening Standard).⁽¹⁾

"The BBC issues us all with stop-watches when we start the job."

(Radio News Reporter).

1. Introduction:

The discussion, below, of time concepts in the BBC's News Division follows naturally from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge taken throughout this study. It represents a further step in the analysis of the newsmen's belief-system. This data is presented in the hope that a systematic and extended treatment will go some way toward making more central what seems to have been seen as a rather peripheral feature of newsmen's work.⁽²⁾ My interest in newsmen's time concepts was aroused during the course of fieldwork, when it struck me that they represented a highly distinctive element in the newsman's approach to the world. This represents a fairly pragmatic ground for presenting such a discussion. There is, more importantly, a good theoretical one. As Gurvitch has observed:

"The multiplicity of social time is a central problem of the sociology of knowledge. In this branch of sociology, the different kinds, forms and systems of knowledge are in functional correlation to their surrounding social frameworks. This raises the question of the ways to grasp intuitively, perceive, symbolise and know time in the different frameworks."⁽³⁾

Thus, while the newsmen's temporal system has its own peculiarities, these are of central interest for a microsociology of their occupational knowledge. The discussion which follows is also, more generally, intended as a contribution to the sociology of temporal systems.

Sorokin and Merton, in the course of some general observations about social time, have noted the crucial role which is played by temporal systems in "providing means for synchronising and co-ordinating the activities and observations of the constituents of groups."⁽⁴⁾

Certain occupational groups in an industrial society - notably those which operate communication and transportation systems - manifest an exceptional degree of temporal precision in their working lives. Thus newsmen, as will shortly be made clear, are members of what could be termed a stop-watch culture. And so, for example, are railwaymen, who exhibit a similarly extreme time-consciousness.⁽⁵⁾

The refined awareness of duration possessed by the members of these groups can be seen as an exemplary case of the fixation in Western culture with the passage of hours, minutes and seconds.⁽⁶⁾ Both communication and transportation systems have to exceedingly exact in their scheduling. The fixation with timing which this constraint imposes on their operators can be easily understood by members of a culture whose activities are, in general, closely regulated by the clock. If, indeed, Moore is right

in saying that "the clock is surely the crucial machine of an industrial civilisation"⁽⁷⁾, then it is simply a case of the less clock-conscious observing the more clock-conscious. The common denominator is a familiarity with abstract time-reckoning.⁽⁸⁾

Thus, newsmen's extreme time-consciousness will be understandable, if perhaps somewhat surprising, to members of our culture. To members of other cultures, newsmen's thought and behaviour would undoubtedly appear curious and alien, if not pathological. But that is to do no more than set it into the general context of the relative singularity of the Western approach to time-reckoning. There seems to be wide agreement that this singularity has a good deal to do with the introduction of methods of industrial production, which subject the labour-force to time-discipline, and eventually bring about a radical shift in time-consciousness.⁽⁹⁾

By comparison, in some cultures, as anthropological accounts testify, seconds, minutes, and hours are periods so inconsequential that they receive no recognition in terms of those cultures' time concepts. This is not least because the members of such cultures do not possess either the clocks, or the know-how about clocks, with which to measure them.⁽¹⁰⁾ In the absence of clocks, time cannot be conceived of as an abstract, progressive flow. Vansina has noted the additional point that "Peoples without writing do not have any units of time based on the concepts of mathematical physics. They divide time according to standards of measurement based on ecological or sociological data."⁽¹¹⁾

To point to such contrasts is to emphasise the specific nature of the case in hand. For the newsman, the day is not divided up according to the crowing of the cock, the position of the sun, or the routines

imposed by a cattle-clock. It has, rather, the structure of a "newsday": that is, a very precisely demarcated period of time, the character of which derives from a set of deadlines. Newsmen are, in Lyman and Scott's words, on a fast "time track"⁽¹²⁾. This track winds its way through a regular cycle of activities whose pace is governed by the occurrence of deadlines. Time is of such importance in the analysis of the newsman's occupational culture that it cannot simply be accorded a residual status. Rather, as Moore has phrased it, we should conceive of time as "a variable highly relevant to the ordering of activities."⁽¹³⁾

In the light of these observations, this chapter goes on to discuss some major concepts relevant for an understanding of the newsman's temporal system. This is simply to highlight a persistent theme which so far has remained relatively implicit. Chapter 9, for example, demonstrated how the newsman's conception of accuracy can be illuminatingly analysed in relation to the daily cyclical routines of the newsroom. In Chapter 8, "impartiality" was shown to be a concept which finds its practical expression through the allocation of equal time-slots to competing views. Earlier still, in Chapters 2-4, when concentrating on organisational structure rather than concepts, I showed how hierarchical controls are routinely activated at various intervals (minute-to-minute, hourly, daily, weekly) in a production system which is geared to a high frequency of output. Clearly, the temporal dimension is important.

2. Some key concepts:

"Today's news" as a cyclical concept:

The basic idea contained in talking about "today's news" is that one can somehow take the day as a unit of meaning. To put this slightly differently, what is implicitly being proposed by the news producers is that we should look at occurrences within the temporal horizon demarcated

by our concept of a "day", and that we should view these as acquiring coherence because they have occurred and/or are reported within the confines of this period of time. And further, "yesterday's news" and "tomorrow's news" have had, or will have, exactly this same formal character, in turn, of marking out limits of meaningfulness. "Today's news" is, then, an integrating concept reapplied on a cyclical basis every twenty-four hours.

Cyclical time is usually theoretically juxtaposed with linear time.⁽¹⁴⁾ It is argued here that to understand the nature of news it is fruitful to focus on cyclical time, for it tells us a great deal about the organisational structure of news production, in which the fundamental orientation is toward a daily cycle.

It is in relation to the notion of the cycle that we should judge the perishability of the news story.⁽¹⁵⁾ Everyday behaviour suggests that the newspaper (let alone the broadcast bulletin) is regarded as a highly perishable commodity. One has but to note how quickly it is discarded. News very rapidly becomes old, and it is in this context that one of the meanings of "hardness" emerges. The "completely hard news approach" stresses that events have happened today, tonight, this afternoon.

"Immediacy": the "hot" news ideal:

It is in the context of this emphasis on reporting/covering events occurring within the "newsday" (ie, the basic cycle of daily news) that we should interpret the notion of "immediacy". This is a temporal concept which refers to the time which has elapsed between the occurrence of an event and its public reporting as a news story. It therefore refers to "the speed of coverage". The extreme instance of immediacy is that of "live" broadcasting: in this case, the TV camera or the radio car is

at the scene of the newsworthy event, and the report is transmitted "instantly" ("immediately") to the viewer or listener via the news organisation. Obviously, the extreme concept of immediacy is fostered by the availability of our current technology. By comparison with broadcasting, newspapers are not immediate (although they can accommodate changes in successive editions), and, as between radio and television, the simpler technology of the former makes immediacy a more easily attainable ideal. The more immediate one is, the "hotter" the news; the less immediate, the "colder".

The "time slot" as a goal and a constraint:

Every newsday has within its temporal limits a number of "time slots". A "time slot" is a temporal period which is discrete and demarcated. In the case of broadcast news those time slots which are set aside solely for the transmission of news are called "bulletin times".

A "slot", then, is a kind of "opening" in the broadcasting day which has a specific purpose assigned to it within the organisation. Since the existence of these slots is public knowledge (available in newspapers, The TV Times, and The Radio Times) there is a public expectation among the audience for a certain kind of content to be found in them. From the point of view of the news producers, the main problem posed by the existence of the slot is that it has to be "filled" with news. In this sense, the slot can be said to present them with a goal. On the other hand, the producers may find that they are "overset" (i.e., that they have too much news for the slot available to them). In such situations the slot is experienced as a constraint, for it is in the nature of time slots not to be flexible in normal circumstances, as they are the product of complex intra-organisational negotiations regarding scheduling. As transmissions are strictly timed, we can see that the time slot has the "formal" character of setting limits to the form and content of the news bulletin. (16)

In order to understand how the organisation of news production is structured in relation to the existing time slots we have to see the newsday as divided by the slots into a series of periods in which the nature of the work assumes a certain character. To see that the slots carve up the day for the newsmen allows us to relate this formal structuring to their everyday experience of news production and their conceptions of it.

"Victim" or "controller": a polarity in the subjective experience of news-production activity:

In direct logical relation to the question of whether the time slot is experienced as a goal or as a constraint there are two basic and opposed attitudes in the news-producing contexts which cut across all ranks and all the different tasks: this is the polar opposition of the victim to the controller.

To elucidate: newsmen often talk about the unpredictability of news, of not knowing what is going to come about next. The attitude seems to be that the business of news production is one in which there has to be a continual revision of one's expectations, because the unforeseen lies around the corner. The newsman is therefore a victim: he cannot know what will happen in the next minute because news is full of potential change and surprise. Where he is coping with uncertainty about what news is available before the next time-slot, he perceives himself as the servant of a capricious reality. On the other hand, where planning has been successful (in the sense that a story has been "set up" - i.e. coverage has been arranged) the producers are in the position of being controllers: the content of the next time slot is ascertained in the short run, even if it should later be upset before transmission.⁽¹⁷⁾

There is an additional point of theoretical significance which emerges from seeing news production in terms of this polarity. The critique of Chapter 1 pointed out the inadequacy of the "gatekeeper model". The account given below suggests a possible reason for its prevalence and plausibility: namely, the dominance of "victim rhetoric" implies that the newsman really is passive. There is an additional point to be made in relation to Tunstall's distinction⁽¹⁸⁾. He presents the two ideal typical postures of news production as those of the "gatherer" and the "processor". These are role-based concepts which derive from the distinctive task-orientations of reporters and editors. The victim/controller dimension transcends this distinction: accounts in the passive mode are given by "gatherers", and in the active mode by "processors". There seems, therefore, to be something basic about these postures which are assumed by all newsmen, regardless of their tasks.

3. The time element in professionalism:

"Time is the ultimate straightjacket".

(Radio Current Affairs Producer).

"There's the feeling that if it's just happened
it might be important."

(Sub-editor, Television News).

"More and more events are being transmitted instantaneously, direct and 'live'. This is the ultimate in news coverage, the real thing, seeing it happen as it happens."

(Robin Day).⁽¹⁹⁾

i) Immediacy and "the competition":

One thing which newsmen generally seem to be very conscious of is

the competitive position of their organisation in relation to other purveyors of news. To give adequate coverage does not, in the BBC, just mean beating the next man to the story. Other elements are involved, such as "balance", breadth of coverage, good taste, pictorial and auditory variety, standards of "good broadcasting quality" and so on. But, as was pointed out in the introductory section, the concept of immediacy is of great relevance in the organisational context. If you are to be immediate then you must have a "fast news service" at your disposal. To this end the BBC has developed its own internal news agency as a rapid clearing-house for news items from all over Britain, has a developed network of local and regional stations which can rapidly feed stories to London, and has the unique advantage of the External Services monitoring section as a "tip-off" source of sudden developments abroad (see Chapter 3).

As the quotations at the head of this section suggest, a concern with time is at the centre of the newsman's notion of his own professionalism, and the immediate is "the ultimate". For a true professional, the tensions which the pursuit of immediacy imposes on his subjective experience have not only to be borne but also willingly embraced:

"It's not really a news programme unless you have things up to date. You can have to rush through a story at 7.15 with 15 minutes to go before it's on the air, and you take the flimsy as a late script straight off the stencil. You have to be extra careful when you're in a rush."

(Sub-editor, Television News).

"It's part of the professional side - you have to build up to a certain excitement for the deadlines

without getting too edgy."

(Foreign Duty Editor, Television News).

Tension and excitement are at the core of this professional experience.

As immediacy is so central to news production as presently conceived, it provides newsmen with a standard of logistical "success". The importance of this proposition was brought home to me during fieldwork in 1972. There had been, in the classic news story mode, a dramatic aircrash in the London area. BBC-TV News had received an early "tip-off" about this occurrence and had managed to send a film crew to the scene of the tragedy. The main competitor, ITN, did not arrive at the scene of the crash as quickly, and the BBC team therefore "scooped" them. It is in this context that we should interpret the following remarks and construe them as immensely revealing both of the dominant attitude to time in news production and, more generally, of news values:

"Professionally speaking, we were pleased that we were on the scene ahead of ITN, and got the film when the 'plane was starting to catch fireWhen you've got news you should give it at it's earliest. You can't know all the contingencies."

(News Editor, Television News).

This view was evidently endorsed at the highest level within TV News, for, pinned on the noticeboard in the newsroom, was a memorandum from the Editor, TV News, which congratulated the film crew in question,

"on our extremely successful effort to get the Trident crash story to the screen. We gave a fuller and speedier news service than any other."(20)

From a professional viewpoint, this success in coverage was assessed in terms of a competitive competence based on speedy reactions:

"ITN had no early coverage at all."

(Foreign Duty Editor, Television News).

"We had to pull out the stops to beat ITN."

(Duty Editor, Television News).

Competitiveness is not just limited to fighting ITN. Within the BBC many tales are told of fights between News Division and the various Current Affairs programmes (as pointed out in Chapter 5). To give a few examples: a Radio Current Affairs producer told of programmes which would try to keep sources from the News so that they could interview them exclusively themselves, credit going to those who put the "voice" on the air first. Not only is there rivalry between "the sequences" (Current Affairs programmes) and the News, but also among the sequences themselves. In television quarters the same sort of tale is told. A News Organiser said that the Current Affairs programme 24 Hours had tried to withhold a source necessary to the News people. Eventually they had managed to secure the interview they wanted. This sort of internal competition centres on who can secure sources ("people in the news") most quickly, and who can generate an "interesting angle" first.

ii) Logistics and quick reactions:

"There's no use in getting a story unless you can get it back, and on the air. Decisions to send crews abroad are largely influenced by our ability to get it back - and in reasonable time."

(Chief Assistant to Editor, Television News).

If logistical success is defined in terms of pipping the other man at the post, then failure is manifest in having too much perishable news on your hands at the end of the day. As pointed out earlier, the expectation of immediacy is based on the logistical/technological possibility of a rapid response to a new story. We can therefore interpret much of the logistical effort in terms of trying to "beat the clock" (bulletin time). Our attention necessarily focusses on the relationship between the "todayness" of the news and the organisational structure in which production takes place. For, it is from an examination of the specific arrangements made for the collection and processing of news that the dominant attitude to time emerges.

Chapters 3 and 4 have reported extensively on the logistical arrangements made in Radio and Television News. Not only do there have to be many alternative lines of communication and modes of rapid news collection and editing, but there also has to be foresight in identifying likely "future events". It is therefore relevant to note the elaborate planning structure. To plan news coverage requires the "fixing" or "setting up" of interviews, obtaining filming/recording permission, and so on, by the News Organisers, based upon foreknowledge. In practical terms this means that arrangements are made for the collection of news items in good time for the slot: circuits and picture lines are booked to this effect and reflect advanced expectations regarding news items. Other ways of collecting news film rapidly are through the use of trains, aircraft and despatch riders. Radio is at an advantage in almost all circumstances, for as it is sound which has to be collected, rather simpler technical arrangements can be made. Television news has to contend with the bulkiness of its equipment, and a minimum of three

men per film crew.

From this outline account, it can be seen that planning for coverage is part of an attempt to secure certainty in coverage for particular time slots. The obvious worry is that a story or source will "fall down" (i.e., cease to be available for use). This problem of whether news items are going to be early or late is experienced as part of the natural refractoriness of the news. For the operation to be able to meet the requirement of filling the slot various "stand-by" arrangements are often made:

"When we have a live inject from the regions or the House of Commons Studio on a really important story, we always have a stand-by, and cover against the lines going down. So, then we can say: 'I'm sorry - we don't seem to be able to get.....'"

(Foreign Duty Editor, Television News).

Given, then, that the problem of filling the slot is always there, newsmen make use of a kind of substitutability principle. Suppose, for instance, that some film from abroad should be impounded by censors (as happened during the Indo-Pakistan War in 1971), or that a videotape machine fails, and there is little time before transmission. Should the Editor of the Day wish to use the same news item, he would have to cast around for a different visual form: a "still" (photograph) could be used rather than "action footage": "library film"⁽²²⁾ could possibly be found which might bear on the story in question; the "talking head" of the newsreader, or of a correspondent, could be used to "fill in" in some sub-optimal sort of way (because "vision" or "actuality" is best). Thus, the mobilisation of the range of logistical

and stylistic alternatives is part and parcel of the production process, and what is available at any time is going to affect the style and content of programmes.

There is a further area in which time and logistics are related. One thing which Editors of the Day have in mind is the likelihood of "getting a story in" in time. It is in these terms (partly) that they consider whether the coverage is "worth it". The cost aspect of coverage was rarely mentioned during fieldwork, but it lies behind logistic considerations. Certainly, it is difficult to assess the worth of coverage, and the professional answer, in part, is to look to timeliness. One can therefore note a kind of pay-off between time and cost.

The concern with the timing of news collection is reflected in the moment to moment working patterns of the editorial staff. To give an example: planning meetings are held throughout the day with a particular output time in mind. One sub-editor described the function of these almost entirely in temporal terms:

"The Editor of the Day gives a rough time
for the story. You discuss how to deal with
it. Establish the time film is coming in so
you know whether it's in time for the programme."

Timeliness is tied up with the practical details of the newsman's work whether he is in the field or in the newsroom: the "pulling together" of the programme prior to the output time depends on knowing what is going to be available, whether the slot can be filled, and how.

4. "Time-value" and some practical implications:

It is evident from what has been said that time is a crucial variable in the production of broadcast news. Since the time slot has to be filled

with a series of items there have to be some guidelines for evaluating what will be utilised. Such decisions concern the newsworthiness of a story. This ties up with the role of time in news production as it is on the basis of news values that a "time-value" is accorded individual news items or linked sequences of items. What is meant by "time-value" is the duration accorded to each distinct unit within the time slot. These units are what the newsmen call "stories".

The time-value of individual news items becomes most salient in the hour before bulletin time, when the final decisions about the shape of the programme are being taken. But it would be wrong to emphasise this point to the exclusion of the concern with duration throughout all aspects of the working practices. What follows are examples of the way in which time-valuing is intimately bound up with the production process.

i. Saving seconds:

"Some editors are berserk about lengths: three seconds are better than eight."

(Sub-editor, Television News).

The duration of a story in a bulletin is publicly available evidence of the importance accorded it by the editors.⁽²³⁾ The knowledge that the slot cannot generally be exceeded forces the Editor of the Day to express his news judgement in terms of fairly rigid directives to his subordinates (both editorial and reportorial): thus, he might ask for "A one-minute piece on the industrial situation" or "Twenty-two seconds on the Queen". Because of the overall uncertainty about how much material will be available (i.e. how long it will last) the editor always faces the problem of having too much, or too little, content:

"We're generally 2 to 3 minutes overset. We try to drop before we're on the air."

(Editor of the Day, Television News).

The limit imposed by the slot is vividly present, and frequently the continual uncertainty forces last-second cuts during transmission, since it is always possible "something will turn up".⁽²⁴⁾

Instructions to sub-editors and reporters to make sure that their individual "pieces" do not exceed certain lengths bring about a process of slot-displacement. Editorial instructions set a time framework for the newsman, and make the approach to his own particular contribution one which is governed by the temporal imperative. The common experience of working within a "tight" constraint derives in each instance from the knowledge that his own "piece" is a part of the available time-slot, and that to exceed or fall below it prejudices the balance of the bulletin. This slot-displacement operates as a mode of control in the newsroom: individual work is constrained by prior editorial decisions made in relation to the available time slot.

In practice not all stories remain statically assigned the same limit: if an item is accorded more importance then the duration increases, and if less the duration decreases. These movements of expansion and contraction within the newsman's direct experience of his "own" story contribute to the belief that news qua news is unpredictable.

ii. Weighing gold:

The News Guide notes the constraint presented by the time slot and its effects on the nature of work:

"A further discipline placed on radio news style by the nature of the medium is that of compression. Time for news on the air is limited. Given ten minutes, we consider ourselves lucky. Often we have to make do with five.....we have no room for the unnecessary word, the long explanation, the purely

ornamental flourish. Each sentence, each word, must be made to count. We learn to handle words as if they were gold....."(25)

Since the time slot imposes constraints for both writers and reporters and since this has to be taken account of in every piece of work done, a rule of thumb has been evolved for timing copy which is common both to television and radio. A sub-editor gave this account:

"You use the technique of writing three words per line for the script. I find that even when I'm writing normally I write three words to the line - it's become so much of a habit. Subs have to write out a shot list: they work on the basis of three words per second. So, assuming you're showing 30 seconds of film on Harold Wilson you will have to write 90 words to cover it."

The assumption underlying all news writing is that the newsreader's pace of delivery will be a steady, standard rate of three-words-per-second. This sort of criterion might seem ludicrously crude especially when one compares it with the sophistication of television "hardware", but it is, in fact, the basis for every bulletin heard and seen.

Again, one can see how the time slot operates in an intimate and personal way as a control on individual output: the three-words-per-second rule derives directly from the need to be economical. The practical importance of this rule was underlined on one occasion in the television newsroom. One newsreader was vociferously criticised for being "hard to write for" as he would go and alter his pace through-

out the bulletin, thereby "throwing out" the timing of the entire programme, and making a nervous wreck of the studio director. What this sort of incident brings home is the collective nature of the effort and how reliant a smooth production is on accurate timing.

iii. Seconds and status:

"You get angry about the butchering: they
hack you about desperately savagely."

(Television Reporter).

The tie-up between the story allocated to a newsman and his estimation of his own status was noted earlier. A "good story" will go to those high in the pecking order: the professional apogee, the "lead story" of the day, the one which heads the "running order", will go to the most senior writer, and the reportorial pickings more often than not to specialist correspondents. The prestige element is not conditioned solely by "how far down the running order" it comes, but also by its duration. The longer the duration the greater the possibility of bringing into play more of the newsman's skills in piecing together narrative, background, good "shots" and "actuality". For newsmen the making of a well-edited "package" permits a feeling of craftsmanship which is denied them when they are "writing over wallpaper film."

Underlying this status component in the duration allowed is an acceptance of the fact that the legitimate exercise of the editorial blue pencil is fundamental to the working of the system. If the reporter's deathless prose is severely truncated when it reaches the air it would be less than professional to do more than grumble. Because the immediate might well push out the already-known (if it is newsworthy enough) news production is seen as intrinsically subject to vagaries of

this sort, and to cope with them is to be professional:

"The only satisfaction is with a late story.

It's a satisfying job if you get it on time."

(Copy-taster, Television News).

This keeping of a grip on "new developments" is further instance of how immediacy as a value affects the work practices.

iv) Slots and excuses:

"We have to adjust ourselves to the imperative of having to provide the news of the day. What we leave out is what in our judgement is what doesn't rank as news in the context of limited time and space."

(Chief Assistant to Editor, Television News).

As this quotation indicates, the fact that the time slot operates as a limit on possible content can be used as an excuse against criticism from those who feel that certain stories have been insufficiently featured in the news bulletins. Scarcity of time is one of the essential weapons in the editorial defensive armoury. Thus, the time slot is conceived of (as space is in a newspaper) as a "news hole" in which there is room for just so many stories, and no more. This excuse also functions for reporters out on assignment, who are in the position of negotiating relations between sources and the organisation. On one occasion, a television reporter's interviewee, the Minister of Transport, complained that a previous interview had not appeared. The reporter dealt with this criticism by saying that he was not in charge and that shortage of time kept it out; there could never be any guarantees, as time was short.

v). Slot-filling:

"I'm in the shit lengthwise - what've you got?"

(Editor of the Day).

As the account so far has suggested, there is a constant problem of controlling the work processes to meet the output times and of keeping within the slot. There is a detectable element of goal-displacement at times, when "slot-filling" seems to become an end-in-itself. At these points the newsmen are trying hard to be controllers rather than victims. The two senior editors are supposed to have some sort of overview of the entire programme. It seems to be the case, notably in television where the programmes are longer and the constituents more complex and numerous, that the editors shift their focus from the content of the programme to its duration, in the last fevered minutes before transmission. One Senior Duty Editor noted in an amused sort of way that the timing dominated his thoughts at the last minute: "The question you're asking yourself is "What can I drop?" He also drew attention to the adding up of the minutes and seconds before the transmission and during it: he considered all this adding and subtracting to be "primitive". The testimony of an Editor of the Day gives additional support to this impression:

"You come out and ask 'how was it?' You have an idea of how you'd like it to be, but you don't know what's happening while you're coping with the problems arising."

It is true to say that, in a sense, the newsmen do not "see" finished bulletin in the way in which the audience would. (26)

There is a rather odd feature of this last-minute rush to fill the slot. Returning once more to logistic themes, one finds that the intake

of items occurs so late in most cases by design, for the later it is the more immediate it is. So, one finds anxious editors working a system which can only feed those anxieties. The contingencies are created by the system of news-gathering, and the temporal principles which govern it. If news did not have to fit the various slots in the daily cycle, the character of the work and of the news would be different.

vi). Speed and standards:

"High standards of accuracy, judgement, and taste are all the more difficult to maintain when one is working under the peculiarly intense pressures of television. A daily newspaperman is likewise harassed by the race against time, but the TV reporter has to appear on the screen as well as compose his material. His work is governed by the strictest precision in timing. Facts must be even more concentrated than in the popular Press. The possibilities of ruinous technical breakdowns are more numerous than those facing a newspaper reporter."

Robin Day. (27)

It is necessary to balance the account (to use a BBC-ism). What was said above about time obviously ignores many other complicating factors which also shape the nature of the news. One, discussed in the last chapter, was "accuracy". The overriding criterion in editorial judgement is not immediacy. In terms of the BBC's long tradition of Corporate caution in the news field, where doubt exists, immediacy goes by the board. Certainly, the problems of maintaining accurate coverage, when

there is little time to check, should not be underestimated, as was pointed out to me with some pride, by a veteran reporter who had moved into newsreading:

"The incredible fact of the speed and accuracy of news compared with other programmes is often missed. Day after day you have to maintain the same standard and flow of service. It's always fascinating and I'm rarely bored."

The concern with accuracy is a distinctive element in the BBC notion of professionalism; a negative value is attached to the "irresponsibility" and sensationalism implied in being uncomplicatedly immediate.

5. Time and Newsmen's Language:

The foregoing account has frequently made use of newsmen's temporal concepts. The first section dealing with "Concepts" has elucidated the meanings of "time slot", "immediacy", "bulletin times". What it is intended to do here is to demonstrate in detail the close relationship between the working language of the group and the structure of the working experience. The concepts used reveal the fine distinctions made by the members of the News Division. To examine them aids an understanding of their perspectives.

i). The immediacy cluster:

There is a cluster of notions derived from, and related to "immediacy" which suggest upheaval, suddenness, unpredictability. Whenever new information bearing on an existing selected story comes into the news-room via one or other source, one task which has to be performed is that of "up-dating". This practice of accommodating previously unknown facts and interpretations takes place up to bulletin times within each pre-output period, and between output times on the same day, if the story

is kept on the "running order".

A new story is talked of as "breaking" - again, a term suggesting suddenness, unexpectedness, and discontinuity. From an ideal logistic point of view, the story will "break" sufficiently before the deadline set by the output time so that reporters and crews can be mobilised to "cover" them, and send back the material.

The news-consuming public is made aware of the importance of immediacy to the news producers in many subtle and also some obvious ways. One clear way of dealing with stories that have come into the newsroom, to be judged in some respects so significant that they cannot wait until the next regularly scheduled bulletin, is the "newsflash". This usually takes the form of a brief announcement read by a news-reader. An example of this was the announcement of Princess Anne's engagement (on 29 May 1973). This "flashing" of an item is a conventional way of giving it separate treatment in its own time. It is its very presentation outside the normally allocated slots which confers an aura of importance and urgency upon it. The newsflash, therefore, is a technique which (irrespective of its content) signifies to the audience: "This matter is just too important to wait any longer."

But the "immediate" news item can be kept within the formal time-horizon demarcated by the available slot. It has been noted here that newsmen inhabit a world where contingency is pre-eminent and expectations constantly revised. The atmosphere was summed up by one copy-taster in this way: "If a particular story's being planned, any good story could knock that for a six."

The likelihood, therefore, of a "late" story's appearance ("breaking") during, or just prior to, transmission is potentially disturbing, as it upsets the existing balance of the bulletin. On the other hand,

because of the value accorded immediacy, and the emphasis, in what is generally considered the authentic professional experience, upon upset, excitement, drama, the arrival of late news is highly desirable, even ideal. One strategy for coping with this is for the newsreader to preface the new item with "We've just heard that.....", and for the Editor of the Day to decide to present it at the first "natural" opportunity. This sort of formula stresses the immediacy of the information received, and allows the news item to be fitted into the bulletin as it stands, without the need for major surgery. A further possibility is that of slipping the item in near the end, and presenting it as "some late news". Here again, is an assumption that the audience is au fait with the meaning of the notion of "late news" (or some aspect of it).

A further completely distinct way of dealing with the story which is both "immediate" and "big", is for the Editor of the Day to request an extension of the time slot, because the item merits more attention. An example of this occurred when news of "The Watergate Affair" first broke in Britain: ITN's News at Ten added a third quarter of an hour in order to accommodate reports from Washington as well as "the rest of the news". The newscaster made it quite clear to the audience why the slot was being extended.

There is an internal equivalent, in the BBC newsrooms, to the publicly available newsflash, and that is the "services desk announcement", over the tannoy system, of an agency "snap" or "rush" news item which has just come off the teleprinters (see Chapter 3). Once again, the practice reflects the concept: a news item, which in the duty editor's news judgement is of possible significance, is allowed to by-pass the normal system of routine passage through the copy trays, and is announced separately. Such announcements are greeted with silent attention in the newsrooms: the newsmen concentrate on their content, for they could herald a new

"lead".⁽²⁸⁾ The immediate and important is, therefore, treated reverentially. A further associated feature is that if the latest item is a "tip-off" from a local source (e.g. a local radio station), there is always the possibility of pre-empting ("scooping") the competitors.

These ways of dealing with the immediate can instructively be seen in terms of the victim-controller polarity pointed to above. The newsmen are victims inasmuch as they are unprepared for particular eventualities, and controllers to the extent they are prepared for any eventuality. To say this, is, of course, to view the problems of control from the standpoint of purely logistical concerns, and to disregard, for the purpose of expository force, the questions of control which arise from political pressures and the legal framework, to name but two sources.

ii). Out of immediacy:

Stories which are unexpected and unplanned for are called "spot news stories", and concern events which of their nature could not be foreseen: aircrashes, collisions at sea, rail disasters, fires, assassinations, political coups, earthquakes, deaths. Newsmen distinguish between these and "diary stories", some of which may be known of months in advance: news conferences, space shots, state occasions, general elections, budgets - these all fall into the world of predictable "future events".⁽²⁹⁾ It is clear that foreknowledge allows an early logistical arrangement to be made, whereas spot news, on the other hand, involves an "instant" editorial decision as to what sort of action to take, depending on available resources. In these latter circumstances it is of considerable importance that there should be reporters and film crews on "stand-by" who have not been committed, that there are radio cars which are free, that there are circuits and picture lines which can be used for outside broadcasts or making recordings.

The rapid decision-making and atmosphere of upheaval which derive from the response to the spot news story seem to contribute to the general evaluation of this kind of story as nearest the bone of true news activity. "Diary stories" are often referred to, in a somewhat denigrating way, as "set pieces", where everyone knows the typical routines which will be gone through, and the surprise element is therefore absent. This observation points to an essential component of the professional ideology of newsmen. An example makes this clearer. One reporter, who was going to question one of the Common Market Commissioners at a press conference, felt that this sort of assignment was no test of his competence:

"This is no great shakes on journalistic abilities. It's a short bulletin - (so) 45 seconds to one minute of speaking. There's no great 'in depth' explaining job."

This suggests that stories are typically conceived in terms of the time-framework available to them. The reporter went on to tell his interviewee exactly how much time was available. In later conversation he emphasised once more that he was "slightly ashamed" at not having something more worthy of his skills to show me. Both shortage of time and the story's being a "set piece" contribute, then, to professional dissatisfaction.

iii) The "running story":

There is a further relevant category which reflects working patterns. The notion of the "running" or "continuing" story embraces all stories which transcend ("run" across) a given newsday cycle, and are pursued on subsequent newsdays. Examples of this kind of story are "The Watergate Affair", "The Icelandic Fishings Grounds Dispute", "The Call Girls Affair". The "running story" is, therefore, one which becomes embodied as a firm

expectation for some period of time among the newsmen. The running story reappears for a run of days on the planning documents. Perhaps the best example of how a particular category becomes embedded in day to day planning is the "Ulster crisis". During the period of observation "Northern Ireland" was a permanent category in the planning documents. This indicated that the newsmen had become sensitised to Ulster (and to the Irish Republic) as news-source areas. There was a firm expectation that "something was going to happen there" in the future because regular incidents had made the Irish Question into a running story. This example represents a limiting case. As one old-hand News Organiser put it, "It's been a crisis for so long you can't call it a crisis any more." The importance of all this, in the light of the perspective on time and newsmen's language, is that the concept of the running story reflects a tendency in news production for some newsworthy items, on some occasions, for periods ranging from days to months or even years, to become institutionalised.

The running story does indeed cut across the newsday cycle, but has a structure similar to stories within the newsday cycle which undergo continual "updating". What one is likely to find on any given day of the running story are what the newsmen judge to be the most salient facts of the day in relation to that story.

iv). A time continuum:

There is, then, a time continuum available to the newsmen. At the one end is the immediacy cluster of concepts and associated practices of everyday newswork; and, at the other, set piece coverage which lies in the province of the planning structure. The various internal documents concern themselves greatly with duration and location. Planned coverage falls into the controller mode where the editors are at least assured of certain certainties: the time of the event, the likelihood of recording a "name",

whether there will be "vision and/or voice", what the expected duration of the item is.

As has been shown (in Chapters 3 and 4) there are various temporal stages at which advanced expectations about news are documented: weekly (Home and Foreign Futures Diaries), one day ahead (News Diary), 8 am. of newsday morning (News Prospects), one hour before (the Running Order). These represent successive orientations to the particular newsday in question. (30)

There is a further relevant aspect of the time continuum available to newsmen. The concern of this study is with daily news production and the characteristics which it exhibits. The distinction between News and Current Affairs (often) has a temporal dimension attached to it, so that newsmen will consider some stories "too soft" for the daily bulletins, but suitable for the Current Affairs programmes. In this way, by citing "topicality" as an alternative criterion to "immediacy" newsmen can shift the responsibility for certain kinds of coverage to their colleagues. The story needing "heavy background" (ie. one which is unfamiliar to the British news public) will probably be a better candidate for Current Affairs coverage, where there is more time available in the programmes. (31)

v). Programme style and time:

There is a further set of terms, rooted in the working practices of broadcast journalism, which cluster about the notion of "pace" and significantly affect presentational style, and content.

To give a basic illustration, the problems of pace are more acute in television news production than in radio. This stems directly from the time-slots available to each of the two media. The longest radio bulletin lasts for fifteen minutes; the longest television bulletin has a half-hour slot, and as the TV newsmen never tire of saying, is

seen as well as heard, facing therefore different problems with holding the audience's attention.

A former ITN-man, Robert Tyrrell, has neatly summarised current thinking about TV news style:

"One half of the organisation covers the news as it happens, and the other half selects, puts in order, and presents. Always the news must come first. Other programmes may select their material to suit the medium, but the newscasts must give the news whether it makes "good" television or not. Everything a news department does follows from this proposition - coverage, story selection, writing, graphics, even the newscaster's tone of voice. A combination of simplicity, clarity, and urgency is the only possible style". (32)

As the emphases make clear - "news must come first", "only possible style" - the existing concept of news style is seen as somehow "necessary", and the way in which it derives from a standard of immediacy is obvious. ITN shares the BBC's concept of the "todayness" of the news. According to one account, there is a simple, folklorish way of making sure that your ideas are quite right within the organisation:

"Paying a courtesy visit to ITN this week I discovered that one source of inspiration for this highly effective team of news gatherers is our mutual friend, an old-lady-in-the-street. Some time ago a television reporter put this searching question to passers-by: "How would you define news?" "News", replied the old lady, "is

what happened today that didn't happen yesterday".

The genial simplicity of this reply smote ITN's Deputy Editor, David Nicholas, so forcibly that apparently whenever the operation shows signs of drifting into irrelevancies he repeats it to himself..."(33)

A further point made by Tyrrell (in the quotation cited) is that the speed with which television news is transmitted and the standards of "good" broadcasting are seen as competing values; the former necessarily wins hands down, being seen as more authentically grounded in the nature of the operation. Standards of good broadcasting, both in radio and television are seen as secondary, to be maintained where possible, but to be sacrificed when necessary (see Chapter 5). Moreover, it is not difficult to see how the "only possible" style becomes one which is simple, clear and urgent. It fits in naturally with the immediacy cluster of notions. The field material provides further evidence of this way of thinking: one duty editor, for example, said, in similar vein, that news should always be conveyed in "short, sharp sentences. That's what the art is - simplicity."

Basic notions underly this view of news style. Firstly, there is the dictum in both radio and television newswriting, frequently encountered, that "the audience can't go back over what it's just seen and heard". Doubtless, this applies to all broadcasting. An explicit contrast is frequently made here between broadcasting and print: whereas in the case of the newspaper, the reader, if uncertain about some point, can re-read some paragraph or sentence, the spoken word perishes instantly. Broadcast news, because of its serial form, moves continually forward through time, and so, if the writer or reporter has not chosen clear language and made his points simply right from the start, he has failed

to acknowledge the special nature of the media.

Secondly, the idea that "no superfluous facts" should be included in news bulletins is by now familiar: selection has to be ruthless in character where it comes up against the limits of the time-slot. It can readily be seen how the economical, clipped style referred to above fits into the picture. Newsmen adopt various presentational conventions.

Thus, for example, "headlining" is the practice whereby newsmen "pull out" the main story angle and present it in a very brief compass at the beginning and end of the bulletin. For example,

"Exports of copper from Chile have been suspended
because of strikes in the mining industry.

The Chinese Foreign Minister, Mr. Chi Peng-fei, is
visiting Britain this week and will talk with British
Government Officials on China's relations with the
European Economic Community....."

The headline is a dramatic presentational device; it plays a role in varying the pace at the very beginning and end of the bulletins, and also "rules them off" from other programmes.

"Catchlining" is a further device which serves to break up the flow of the bulletin: thus, for example, "Industrial News", "The Commons", "The Watergate Affair", all give the audience a brief "cuing in" to the content of the next story, while making the assumption that people are sufficiently familiar with past developments in that story in order to comprehend present ones. "Catchlines" also make publicly available, in many cases, the working concepts of the newsmen. They contribute to a news style which both looks and sounds economical.

Additionally, there are formularistic "well-tried words and phrases" which are used to sum up complex phenomena:

"We've found a way of simplifying the description of the trade gap which is reported as a matter of duty every month. 'The balance of payments' : 'the difference between what we buy and sell abroad'."

P.S. "How did this phrase come to be adopted?"

"Someone thought of it, and we hear it and say, 'yes, that's good'. Then we have to use it again, and so we ask, 'what was that phrase that was used the other time?' and go and find it. The phrase perpetuates itself, it becomes shorthand. It's the nearest phrase to what we think people will understand. It's not quite right, but it passes for the best because it's spoken: you can't re-read the TV script to find out what it said until you understand it, as with a newspaper".

(Chief sub-editor, Television News).

Such readily-accessible phrases obviously speed up the process of putting shape to the bulletin. To that extent they once more reflect the dominance of time-pressure in production.

Thirdly, each news programme is structured according to a conception of the "right pace". Thus, for example, one Editor of the Day said that he approached the problem of bulletin construction by thinking in terms of a "dramatic concept", according to which there would be "peaks and troughs" during the course of the programme: "You have to keep the interest moving: it's no good doing a flat 2-d newspaper. You have to give presentation some thought". We find the urgency of the presentation being justified by an appeal to the presumed psychology of the audience.

The idea of "moving it along" has a temporal basis: dramatic items are "spaced out" according to when it is thought that audience interest is likely to flag. It should be noted that this is an ideal statement of what is wanted, as, given the nature of news, the most ideally balanced presentation can be upset by later developments. But the basic significance is clear: there is a powerful belief that the rhythm of presentation has, so far as possible, to be controlled.

One relatively simple way of varying the pace and changing the focus of the audience's attention is to use two-man presentation. ITN has used this technique since 1967, and BBC's Channel 1 News introduced a somewhat different version in November 1972.

5. Subjective experience of news flow in the news organisation:

"Both my organism and my society impose upon me,
and upon my inner time, certain sequences of
events that involve waiting....."

(Berger and Luckmann)⁽³⁴⁾

"There are long periods of doing fuck all,
and then all hell breaks loose".

(Duty Editor, Television News).

Those who are in the position of awaiting new developments over which they have no control experience this condition as making victims of them. The newsmen, as is evident from many remarks in this chapter are frequently in the position of:

- a) awaiting new developments eagerly because "there is not enough news about; and/or

- b) being taken by surprise by the occurrence of unplanned and unforeseen events.

When newsmen talk of being victims, they tell this kind of story: The newsroom is quiet, and activity is controlled and routine: then, "the shit starts hitting the fan". As sociologists would say, a qualitatively distinct element of experience enters the situation, dramatically. The reason for this may be that it is an hour before bulletin time, and there is a lot of editing to be done as there has been a sudden large intake of tapes and film. Or, more generally, a big story may have broken, and resources have to be mobilised and plans abandoned.

The way this story is told accurately expresses the way in which the newsmen feel the operation moving into top gear with a jolt. The pace of work becomes frenetic, all-absorbing in its demands. The reporters find they have to leave suddenly on an assignment - to report a bank robbery, to interview a "personality", or whatever. The editors find they have to make rapid selections. In this picture of the work-style "everything is happening" in an episode of concentrated quick-fire activity: the utterances are clipped, almost rude; the movements deft; the atmosphere tense; the noise level rising steadily; subs rush between newsroom and cutting rooms, snatch a few words with the Editor of the Day, and dictate "copy" to the typists; the TV news rehearsal takes place at a breath-taking pace. This whole mode of experience is evaluated as extremely significant. Similarly, for reporters on assignment there is a qualitative contrast between preparation ("fixing" interviews and "doorstepping" sources) which involves waiting and holding back, and the act of reporting or interviewing, which is seen as the really authentic aspect of the job.

It is from the valued, authentic aspects of news production - notably the pre-bulletin hour - that this idealised, and typically enunciated, image emerges. It is from the direct experience of the structure of the work at a given point that the entire operation comes to be characterised in the style of a feverish drama.

Such an emphasis on action can be interpreted in terms of media professionalism. It is professional to be in control of the action rather than to be victimised by the pace at which it has, sometimes, to be carried out. To be professional in this regard is not simply to fulfil certain objective criteria of competence. It is also to fulfil certain subjective desiderata which point to an ideal way of experiencing the work. Newsmen have, therefore, a specific cultural interpretation of the "real meaning" of their work; and basic to this interpretation are the excitement and danger which arise from meeting "tight" deadlines.

But, the rhetoric which the newsmen employ in describing their activities diverges from the observed reality. The production situation is far from chaotic at anything other than a surface level; its rationale is to aim at control and prediction, while those who operate it celebrate contingency. And social control, in the form of editorial responsibility is always strongly exercised.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Charles Wintour, Pressures on the Press: An Editor looks at Fleet Street, London, Andre Deutsch, 1972, p.3. The first chapter of this book gives an exceptionally clear account of what an editor's daily timetable looks like, and makes valuable reading for anyone interested in the time-governed nature of news production.
2. Most studies have relatively little to say on the matter. Epstein, op.cit., 1973, in a book-length study, mentions time in connection with the illusoriness of "immediacy" (p.15), with the large amount of "prepared news" (p.30), "timeless pieces" (p.34), "time considerations" as a selection criterion (p. 148), the "collapsed time-frame" of TV news (p.179), "pacing" (p.199), editing (p. 240), "immediacy" (p. 266). But he offers no systematic treatment. Gans, in 'The Sociologist and the Television Journalist: Observations on studying Television News', in Halloran and Gurevitch, (eds.), op.cit, 1971, notes: "The first criterion (of news selection) is chronological; as in all journalism, the event must have happened on the day of or before the broadcast, so that sometimes significant events of older vintage are scrapped in favour of less significant ones of the day." (p. 91). He leaves matters there, although, of course, in terms of this study, his emphasis is right. The one study in which an extended treatment is given to time is that of Tuchman, op.cit., 1969, ch.4.
3. Georges Gurvitch, The Spectrum of Social Time, (trans. Myrtle Korenbaum), Dordrecht, Reidel, 1964, p.14.

4. Pitirim A. Sorokin and Robert K. Merton, 'Social Time: a Methodological and Functional Analysis', American Journal of Sociology, 1937, p. 627.
5. W.F. Cottrell, 'Of Time and the Railroader', American Sociological Review, 1939. He writes (p. 190): "After consulting Gulliver on the function of his watch, the Lilliputians came to the conclusion that it was his God. Observing the money spent and the care lavished on his watch, a Martian might conclude the same thing of the railroader."
6. An interesting account of this fixation can be found in Edward T. Hall, The Silent Language, New York, Doubleday, 1959, ch.9.
7. Wilbert E. Moore, 'The Temporal Structure of Organisations', in Edward A. Tiryakian, Sociological Theory, Values, and Sociocultural Change; Essays in Honor of P.A. Sorokin, New York, Free Press, 1963, p.163.
8. See Jack Goody, 'Time: Social Organisation', in David L. Sills (ed.), International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, MacMillan and Free Press, 1968, vol. 16. Commenting on the impact of the clock, he writes: "The measurement of time was now removed from the context of events; its divisions were given an abstract framework, and its reckoning became increasingly dissociated from immediate human experiences, shifting from the sun or tides to the formal divisions engraved on the

face of a mechanical device." (p.33). Also see Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964, ch.15.

9. E.P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', Past and Present, no.38, 1967, pp. 56-97. It has been pointed out by Thompson, and others, that the "Protestant Ethic" has made its own contribution to the way in which time is valued: it becomes a commodity. See Nels Anderson, Work and Leisure, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, ch.3, who observes of "the time-investment cult that evolved with industrial enterprise" (p. 52) that "When that system arrived it brought with it different time values for different kinds of work, which meant that those who bought or sold time had to think precisely about it" (p. 53). The locus classicus on this theme is, of course, Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, (Trans. Talcott Parsons), London, Unwin University Books, 1968.
10. See, for example E.E. Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer, Oxford, 1940, ch.3; Paul Bohannan, 'Concepts of Time among the Tiv of Nigeria', Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, vol.9, no.3, 1953, pp. 251-262, reprinted in John Middleton, (ed.), Myth and Cosmos; Readings in Mythology and Symbolism, New York, The Natural History Press, 1967, pp. 303-314; Hall, op.cit., 1959, ch.1; Merton and Sorokin, op.cit., 1937.

Bohannan has made some very lucid observations on this point: "We in Western Europe have elicited an idea, or a medium, which we call 'time' - or better, 'chronology' - and

have calibrated it into a standard guage against which we associate single events or a series of events. The presence of such a time guage among our cultural apparatus means that in addition to time indication and time-lapse indication, we measure time.

A minute and a day are qualitatively as well as quantitatively different; the difference is that between measuring and counting. Days are natural events and can be counted without a special apparatus; minutes and hours are artificial events, and can be counted only with the aid of special apparatus." (op.cit., 1967, p. 328).

11. Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology, (Trans. H.M. Wright), Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1973, p.100.
12. Stanford M. Lyman and Marvin B. Scott, 'On the Time Track', in A Sociology of the Absurd, New York, Meredith Corporation, 1970; "Time tracks are temporal periods employed by individuals, groups, and whole cultures to designate the beginnings or termination of things. To take a culturally universal example, the span of life and its benchmarked periods such as childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age are time tracks experienced as part of the human conditions." (p. 189).
13. Moore, op.cit., 1963, p. 163. For a more extended treatment of social time see W.E. Moore, Man, Time, and Society, New York and London, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1963.

14. See Lyman and Scott, op.cit., 1970, p. 201.
15. It is in such terms that we can interpret this kind of statement, made about a one-day-old interview: "If we don't use it today it's dead. It won't stand up much longer" (Editor of the Day); and, concerning a piece of film: "We'll have to use it today - it's getting a bit old".
16. "Continuity" or "Presentation" departments are always informed by the studio director, or by the Editor of the Day, if the programme is going to "over-run", or alternatively, fall short, of the time slot. This permits standards of good broadcasting to be maintained, for then the audience can always be told that "We are running x minutes late because of..."
17. Lyman and Scott, op.cit., 1970 have utilised a relevant pair of polar concepts: the humanistic-fatalistic dimension: "By humanistic time tracks we refer to the complex subjective experience that activities are governed by personal decision, are entered into with a sense of mastery or control, and are exhibited through self-expression, By fatalistic time tracks we refer to the subjective experience that these activities are matters of obligation or compulsion, are outside the active domination of the social actor, and are vehicles of coercive or conformist rather than individual expression. Social arrangements generate the experience that is defined as humanistic or fatalistic." (p. 191). In the micro-social

context of the newsroom we can see each of these ideal typical postures, which I have referred to in the text as the victim-controller polarity.

18. Tunstall, op.cit., 1971, p.22.
19. Day, op.cit., 1961, p. 12; emphasis added.
20. Memorandum, Editor, Television News to News Staff, 18 June 1972.
21. John Humphrys, 'The Last Days of Dacca', The Listener, 6 January 1972.
22. The newsman's notion of what constitutes "library film" gives another indication of predominance of immediacy in his thinking. It was described for me as "any film which isn't today's film; history is very rapidly in the making.
23. Another criterion, frequently used in content analysis, is that of "prominence". Informants said that it would be misleading to assume that a bulletin was organised in terms of a sequence of "most important" to "least important" stories. The notion of "the right pace" is much more central in organising the flow of news material.
24. It is not only stories which are thought of in terms of time-values, but also sources. Thus, for example, one Editor of the Day, instructing a reporter on the angle he was to take

in an interview, said: "X is a ten-minute interview type man - you can't wrap it up in two minutes."

25. News Guide, op.cit., p.8.
26. As another example, I quote this Editor of the Day in Radio News: "I'd like to hear the full bulletin some time while I'm still working.....We're totally immersed in it, you know. It's hard for us to take a clinical view, because we're working under high pressure."
27. Day, op.cit., 1961, p. 15.
28. A particularly good example of a new lead which occurred in just this way observed in the radio newsroom. The story was going to be the holding hostage of prison officers by political prisoners in Armagh prison. But in the pre-bulletin hour editors heard, via the internal network that a strike picket had been run over by a lorry. This became the "lead", displacing the other story.
29. The Intake Editor, Radio News, gave these definitions: "spot" news stories are "out of the ordinary things that happen"; "diary" stories are "run of the mill things".
30. Gaye Tuchman has written an interesting article which bears on what is discussed here: 'Making News by Doing Work:

Routinising the Unexpected', American Journal of Sociology, vol. 79, no.1, July 1973. Her central concern is with the routinisation of work in the news-producing organisation, and therefore with the problem of "control".

31. A most precise account of the conceptual discrimination made between various "possible" forms of broadcast news output is provided by Norman Swallow, and they all derive from the yardstick provided by the immediate:

"....the ideal at which all those concerned with news and current affairs should aim, must surely be this: (i) news of the moment, presented at the same times daily, and with one news programme at a peak evening hour which can be regarded as the 'main' bulletin of the day; (ii) immediate comment on the news, which will fill in whatever background may be necessary, and which will allow time for longer interviews than a normal news programme can allow those who are today making the news; (iii) nearly-immediate news-documentaries, for which the most suitable length would seem to be thirty minutes, and which are television's substitute for the topical feature piece in the daily newspaper and which have enough time to treat each subject in reasonable depth; (iv) lastly the documentary which is not tied to a particular news story on a particular day, but which has been prepared with great care over

a longer period of time, yet is nevertheless related to the news by confining its subject-matter to those themes which are directly concerned with the continuing issues of the age in which we live."

Factual Television, London and New York, The Focal Press, 1966, p.83; emphases and numbers added. Swallow has presented a four-tier structure in which the news as currently conceived, and organisationally located, plays a fundamental role.

32. Robert Tynnell, The Work of the Television Journalist, London and New York, The Focal Press, 1972, p. 19; emphasis added.
33. Peter Lennon, The Sunday Times Review, 10 June 1973.
34. op.cit., 1971, p. 44.

CHAPTER ELEVEN:

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents an overview of the arguments pursued in this case study. Here, the perspective outlined in the introduction needs briefly to be reintroduced in order to show its relationship to these arguments. I proposed that making the concept of an "epistemic community" central to the study of the news-production process would prove illuminating. This suggestion followed from studying the newsman's organisational milieu from the standpoint of the sociology of knowledge.

In developing this suggestion three main lines of argument have been elaborated.

The first is that organisational control procedures, which are legitimised by a particular editorial philosophy, are a key to understanding how the newsmen studied come to construct a "BBC" interpretation of the world in their news bulletins. This argument has, in various formulations, been given a considerable airing in the literature on news organisations. What has been done here is to provide a body of ethnographic data on those procedures which specifically obtain in the BBC. The present study represents the first detailed account of a major British news organisation's practice. This section of the study is presented as a contribution to existing knowledge about news organisations' operations.

The second argument is also one which has, in various ways, already been advanced in the literature. It assumes greater clarity, however, when seen from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge. This argument concerns the role of newsmen's professional knowledge

and expertise in the production of news. The claim which newsmen make to occupational autonomy is intrinsic to their ideology of "professionalism". In part, this notion has meanings which are specific to the organisational culture of the broadcaster. But its scope is more general, as it is also typical of claims made by members of the wider occupational culture of journalism. Here, the broadcasting newsmen's professional belief-system affirms their identity as a unique epistemic community which is especially qualified to produce "news". Through their knowledge of how to exercise the appropriate skills they are enabled, they argue, to reduce the chaos of potential news stories to the ordered sequence of the bulletin. The present case material contributes, generally, to our knowledge of the operation of occupational ideologies. It also contributes directly to our knowledge of mass-media communicators' current thinking about their work.

The third main argument is one which is less familiar. It concerns the importance of the temporal dimension of the news-production process. Here, in essence, I have presented a case for making the consciousness of time in journalistic work, and its practical consequences, much more central to the analysis of news organisations than it has been previously. This part of the study is offered as a contribution to the sub-field of the sociology of knowledge which is concerned with the analysis of temporal systems. This, moreover, closely relates to aspects of the two previous arguments. Firstly, organisational control operates most clearly at certain junctures of the news-producing cycle. And secondly, the ability to cope with deadlines is a key feature in the newsman's conception of "professionalism".

A more extended review of these arguments follows:

1. Organisational control:

There are three distinctive elements in the argument about organisational control. (a). The first concerns the operation of the hierarchical system of "reference upwards" (Chapter 2) and the way in which this is legitimised by the BBC's editorial philosophy (Chapter 5). (b). The second concerns the role of the planning structure (Chapters 3,4). (c). And the third concerns the organisational division of labour between the News and the Current Affairs units (Chapter 6).

(a). The BBC's News Division operates a hierarchical system of control. A central problem for the News Division's controllers is to ensure that outputs are broadly in line with "policy", that they accord with, for example, Corporate definitions of accuracy, good taste, and impartiality. This goal is pursued in two principal ways. On the procedural level the production system can be described as constituting a series of built-in checks. As a system of sanctions, therefore, it acts to produce conformity. But there is also a cognitive element which we must consider in order to explain the success of the system, and that is the generally-accepted legitimacy of the BBC's editorial philosophy among the newsmen.

The checking procedures are performed by the occupants of a strategically interlocked set of roles in the News Division's hierarchy: namely, the Editor of the Day, the Departmental Editor, the Editor, News and Current Affairs, and the Director-General.

The most direct form of control at production level is exercised by the Editor of the Day. The Editor of the Day's standing (like that

of the rest of the hierarchy) is legitimised within the news-production system by the Corporation's editorial philosophy. He is authorised to plan and execute up to the point where "reference upwards" appears to him to be necessary. At the point where a problem arises which cannot be dealt with in terms of the Editor of the Day's mandate, the hierarchical system is brought into play. An Editor of the Day could not, for example, decide on his own account to permit the recording of an interview with an IRA-man.

Problem cases which crop up during the course of any given newsday are but one instance of how certain decisions move away, upwards, from the production level. There is, in addition, a more systematic impingement of the hierarchy on each day's decision-making. This occurs during the course of the daily "morning meetings" which come under the general control of the Departmental Editor. These meetings address the proposed agenda of the forthcoming newsday. This agenda is set out in the "diaries" produced by the planning units. Thus, at this particular point of the newsday cycle, there is an opportunity for the Departmental Editor both to vet the plans produced by the advanced planning units, and to influence the eventual treatment of those plans by the Editor of the Day and the production staff. In addition, the "morning meetings" provide an occasion for the co-ordination of the relatively autonomous activities of the Radio and Television News Departments. The intended result here is that the News Division as a whole should "speak with one voice"; the routine interchange of news judgements is obviously designed to facilitate this.

This level of the hierarchy's activities could be directly observed during the course of fieldwork. But, as mentioned in Chapter 2, there were two significant levels which were not. There, I pointed to the

significant influence exercised by the Editor, News and Current Affairs, and, above him, by the BBC's Director-General. Once again, the hierarchy operates by dealing with problem cases which are "referred upwards" through successive stages. It has a routine aspect too. For, just as the Departmental Editors are involved in decision-making on a daily basis through the morning meetings, the "ENCA" and the "DG", in turn, become involved each week at the review meetings. Here, the scope and content of decision-making is of a higher managerial kind. General strategies are outlined on matters such as the coverage of race relations, Northern Ireland, or air crashes. A persistent concern is the relationship between broadcasting and the State; the BBC's team of political correspondents at Westminster acts as an intelligence network which keeps in touch with Parliamentary opinion. The "minutes" which are generated by the two top-level weekly meetings embody BBC policy on News and Current Affairs coverage, and their contents are diffused downwards to the production level.

The existence of such an elaborate decision-making hierarchy is of particular importance when the news organisation is being studied as an epistemic community. The system of "reference upwards" ensures that crises or problems will mobilise those authorised to rule definitively on news treatment. The community, is, therefore, a stratified one: the editorial philosophy distinguishes those who are qualified to decide, and the scope of what they can decide.

It is worth noting, to make a comparative point, that such procedures are by no means peculiar to the BBC. A clear illustration of the way in which a news organisation functions as an epistemic community, which places particular trust in the judgements of its

higher authority figures, is provided in an account of newsroom practice during the investigation of the Watergate Affair. At critical junctures in the development of the story the Washington Post's Executive Editor and other senior editors became involved in testing the authenticity of the reporters' accounts. Responsibility for publication moved, therefore, from the workaday reportorial to the executive level.⁽¹⁾

Comparative material on the United States' network news divisions also demonstrates that a broadly similar process obtains elsewhere. It has been observed that, basically, "remote control" is the organising principle of American TV news production systems, with executives depending on producers and reporters "making the same sort of judgments that they would make in similar circumstances."⁽²⁾ This latter characterisation emphasises the fact that most decisions are taken at production level.

(b). The agendas created by the planning structure were, on the previous page, mentioned as coming under the Departmental Editor's gaze at the "morning meetings". While thus subject to control, they in turn also exercise a controlling influence by providing ready-made categories into which stories are "slotted" (for example, "Ulster", "Parliamentary", "Industrial", "Royal", "Economic"). The planning structure is not part of the organisational hierarchy which runs from the Editor of the Day through to the Director-General. It must, nevertheless, be considered as a distinctive mode of organisational control. The planning structure creates categories which reflect organisational priorities and expectations.

The hierarchical system operates, it has been argued, to produce content which is in line with "policy", the planning structure, however, reveals how the news organisation devises procedures which enable it

to produce "news", i.e., to impose a framework of order on chaos.⁽³⁾ Thus, the planning structure is designed to ensure that each newsday begins with a set of expected stories, even if they are not all going to be used. This daily agenda functions as a framework in relation to which news judgements are made about stories subsequently encountered during the course of the newsday.

By planning the future coverage of news events the organisation is instituting the first step in the bulletin production process. Apart from relying on the regular sources of news which provide information for the news diaries (notably, news agencies, newspapers, and public relations officers), the BBC itself possesses additional procedures for keeping the agenda filled (through the General News Service, the Monitoring Service, and specialist correspondents). Forward planning is therefore part of an organisational strategy intended to make each day's coverage as predictable as possible.

(c). The third element of organisational control concerns the Corporation's conceptual distinction between News and Current Affairs. This is reflected in the BBC's production arrangements. The untutored outsider is confronted by the distinctive sense of identity of the newsmen which is based upon these internal arrangements. The boundaries of the epistemic community are, therefore, organisationally delimited. What has been proposed (Chapter 6) is that the organisational separateness of the News Division from the remainder of the BBC's radio and television journalism units is significant in defining the scope of the conception of "news" which is held by the newsmen. And, furthermore, that this makes it easier for them to do their work because they can eliminate from their outputs stories which are not "immediate" or "hard".

There is in the distinction between "news" and "current affairs" an apt illustration of Gellner's general point that "to understand the working of the concepts of a society is to understand its institutions."⁽⁴⁾ To elaborate: The BBC's role as a news-producing organisation is operationally defined by reference to the News Division's outputs. And the news/current affairs distinction enables the classification of forms of output which are based upon an intra-organisational division of labour. There is a correspondence therefore between concepts and social realities within the Corporation.

A central feature of those social realities lies in newsmen's collective self-image as comprising a key sub-culture in the organisation, whose importance lies in producing the Corporation's "front page". For the newsman, an overthrow of the present conceptual distinction - in effect, a change in organisational structure - would constitute an adulteration of the (for them) clear and distinct concept "news" with the residual and hazier one of "current affairs". As Bernstein has noted, in a different context, a strong classification implies a high degree of control over the organisation, selection, and transmission of information.⁽⁵⁾ Such conceptual purity is manifested in practice by the newsmen through their stress upon "immediacy" as against "topicality", upon "hardness" as against "softness", upon brevity as against elaboration, and so forth.

The organisational distinction between "news" and "current affairs" thus operates as a kind of controlling boundary fence for the newsmen's sub-culture within the BBC, setting limits to their epistemic community.

2. Professionalism:

This study began by suggesting the relevance of considering the

relationships between the organisational context of news production and the content of the news producers' belief-system. In relation to this perspective, the claim which newsmen make to "professionalism" emerges as of central interest (Chapter 7). As an epistemic community which is work-based, newsmen point to their occupational knowledge and skills as attributes which distinguish them from the laity, and legitimise their exercise of the power to select the news of the day. Within the Corporation, as has once again been pointed out, newsmen have a sense of belonging to a distinct sub-culture.

This last point is of some importance, because newsmen stress the uniqueness of their skills by referring to the extensiveness of their immersion in the business of weighing news judgements. It is a natural next move in the argument to point to "experience" as the validating criterion for the judgements which have been made. The entire drift of this point of view is to suggest the primacy of the epistemic community of the News Division as a reference group, and, secondarily, the journalistic occupation.

Given that the newsmen point to their autonomy as a core condition of professionalism, this has to be reconciled, in the BBC, with an editorial philosophy which stresses control. This problem is resolved by the newsmen's stress upon devolved areas of unfettered action rather than "reference upwards". Where the clearest positive assertion of "professional" freedom emerges, however, is in relation to the (lay) news audience.

Newsmen have no wish to abdicate their claim to be the legitimate judges of what makes news, simply in order to achieve the highest audience figures possible. This would run counter to one strand in the conception of professionalism: namely that to be professional

is to be "responsible". Therefore, some news items are selected and presented on grounds of "importance". Nevertheless, the contrary tendency is acknowledged when newsmen refer to some choices as proceeding from a criterion of audience "interest". What reconciles these two separate tendencies is the underlying belief that any news judgement is one which should be made within the epistemic community of newsmen, rather than be made by incompetent outsiders.

Thus, it is quite consistent with this picture that the decisions to change the overall formats of the Radio 4 and BBC-1 news bulletins were not the products of consultation with the news audience about its wants or needs (inasmuch as these could be ascertained through the auspices of the Audience Research Department), but were rather assertions of professional autonomy. Most of the initiative for change came from the Departmental Editors who relied heavily upon their own intuitions and "experience" of what would make "good" television and radio news. Such debate as took place was confined to the initiatives of the News Division.

But it would be misleading to suppose that all matters could be decided thus. BBC newsmen's autonomy is, in the last analysis, subject to the licensing powers of the State. And the broadcasting newsman's attitude is most clearly influenced by exterior political realities when "impartiality" is advanced as the guiding principle for news coverage. A specific model of the British political system is used by newsmen as the yardstick for weighing competing claims. The underlying assumption is that the political Left and the political Right are in equal competition. Broadly speaking, the justifying notions of impartiality and balance applied across the spectrum of news coverage derive from this approach. (Chapter 8).

There is a clear link between this normative requirement for the professional - to be impartial - and the operation of the BBC's control system. As pointed out earlier in this chapter (and in detail in Chapter 2), the management of relationships with the State is of key importance for the BBC's controllers. The control system, ideally, should operate so as to eliminate statements on the part of news personnel which are likely to annoy or offend the politicians. But, in understanding the acceptance of this feature of professionalism, once again, one has to look beyond the simple mechanics of imposing negative sanctions.

"Impartiality" is the keystone of the Corporate ideology of "neutral" journalism. There is a clear alternative ideology of "committed" reporting in Western liberal-democratic polities, although it would be odd for an organisation living in the shadow of the State to adopt it wholesale.⁽⁶⁾ BBC newsmen, at any rate, are adherents of a neutral approach. And, at this level, what has been considered is the particular cognitive and evaluative structure into which newsmen become socialised. To be impartial becomes an inextricable part of being professional. While organisational constraints do operate, generally in the background, most normative regulation in this respect derives rather from the newsman's internalised commitment to the Corporate evaluation of what it means to be a good professional. It is on this basis that it becomes possible for the controllers to think that, on any given story, any one newsman ought to be able to replace any other, and that they will achieve the organisationally-defined standards of impartiality. Newsmen's ideals of practice in this respect (as argued in Chapter 9) can be compared to that of scientists. As Holzner has pointed out, "Observer equivalence...

is the prevailing principle in science and science related work communities."⁽⁷⁾ There is, then, a structural similarity between the two types of community.

The notion of impartiality in news coverage implies the pursuit of a fair and faithful representation of reality. This idea is linked, in the professional ideology, to another value, much emphasised in the BBC's News Division, namely, "accuracy". What is directly implied by newsmen when they celebrate accuracy, is their own commitment to a faithful description of the world as they see it. While "getting the facts right" is a fundamental journalistic value, the BBC's version of this has its own element of Corporate emphasis, which is linked to its self-image as the home of the "decent men of international broadcasting", and as an important national cultural institution.

But, the achievement of accurate coverage is seen as posing a problem in relation to the pace of news production. Its very rapidity means that newsmen have to operate with criteria of evidence which enable them to make swift news judgements. So, while news, like scientific knowledge, is "the product of a social endeavour extending through time" (in Ravetz's phrase), its "search procedures" and modes of authentication are simple and crude by comparison with the research methods and testability criteria of science. It is for this reason that I labelled newsmen "empiricists in a hurry". (Chapter 9).

Yet, hurried though they may be, within that context BBC newsmen do lay stress upon maximum caution. In effect, their concept of "accuracy" contains a strong element of "safety-first". This cautiousness is perceived as a virtuous attitude, for BBC News is seen by its personnel as an organisation which is especially trusted by the British public. Indeed, one way in which the newsmen have a sense of their organisation's distinctiveness is precisely in terms of its trustworth-

iness for the British public. Here again, as with "impartiality", one can see how a value current in the wider occupational culture is given a specific emphasis which derives from the Corporate ideology. The particular definition which is given to "accuracy" is quite consistent with the emphasis in BBC News on strong editorial control, and with the awareness that the Corporation has to tread warily in the realm of politics. The structural constraints which produce the News Division's political caution, evidently also produce it on an epistemological level.

Because of this cautious approach to evidence, I have drawn attention to the stock of newsroom knowledge concerning the testimony provided by other news organisations, and by news sources. What emerges clearly is the high degree of trust which the BBC accords its own, internal, news sources: the General News Service, the Monitoring Service, and the correspondents. It is in such ways that the News Division can be most clearly seen to constitute an epistemic community: those who are mandated to report and sift evidence mutually agree on the criteria of what counts as substantiated testimony, and on how to authenticate it. And these shared criteria are operationalised in the production routines. An important example of how only BBC-generated evidence is believed occurs in the case of Northern Ireland coverage, where every news agency report from Belfast has to be supported by the endorsement of the BBC-men on the spot in order to be accepted as true. One might expect this kind of scepticism regarding evidence to be widely found in news organisations which are concerned with the trustworthiness of their public image.⁽⁸⁾

3. Time-consciousness:

My final argument is simply that it is important to acknowledge time-consciousness in news production as deserving central consideration in the analysis of the newsman's occupational culture. (Chapter 10). Years ago, Robert Park touched on this point when he observed: "Once published and its significance realised, what was news becomes history. This transient and ephemeral quality is of the very essence of news and is intimately connected with every other character it exhibits."⁽⁹⁾ Here, Park was commenting on news as a product. One has, perhaps, a better grasp of the significance of this remark when it is set in the context of the production system itself. For, the product embodies the time-consciousness of those who create it.

This time-consciousness pervades the news operation and the belief-system of the producers, as this study has consistently shown. Clearly, mastery of the rapid pace of news production is a core element of the newsman's professionalism. Indeed, the enjoyment of time-pressure is, I have suggested, the most authentic way of experiencing the work. Such pressure is directly related to the pace of action required when the transmission deadline draws near. Moreover, the entire process of planning a "running order", the pace of which is governed by the criterion of urgency, and which is further constrained by the available time-slot, serves to indicate the coerciveness of exact timing. The tyranny of minutes and seconds is also evident when the newsman demonstrates his professionalism by "being impartial" in according equal time-values to competing parties. Again, it is manifested differently when newsmen resist time-pressures for the sake of "accuracy". These features of news production have been discussed at length in the body of the study.

On the level of organisation, it is also clear that a series of

time-cycles constitutes the significant framework within which news production is conceived. The description of the production system has shown that the organising concept for newsroom and reportorial activity is the newsday. Within this context, production goals are more specifically structured by the transmission deadlines. So there are closer time-horizons within the more distant one, while the planning structure operates with time-horizons more distant still.

The newsman, therefore, I would suggest, provides an apt example of what it means to be a member of a time-conscious occupational group in an industrial society. As comparative material makes clear (Chapter 10), his extreme fixation with precision, pace, duration, is a feature of industrial work, for non-industrial societies exhibit a strikingly different sense of time.

It remains to make a last observation about time and the newsman. Leach has commented that:

"We talk of measuring time, as if time were a concrete thing waiting to be measured; but in fact we create time by creating intervals in social life. Until we have done so there is no time to be measured."⁽¹⁰⁾

Each newsday constitutes a clear-cut interval in social life. Newsmen produce their successive editions of bulletins (and newspapers) at predictable moments every day. In doing so they are providing their audiences with pictures of reality. But, it would seem, they are doing rather more than this. If, indeed, we are creating time through the pursuit of social activities, then by producing news, newsmen are doing something more than simply producing a "reality" for a society. They are also producing, for general consumption, a sense of the pace at

which that reality seems to be changing.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, All the President's Men, London, Quartet Books, 1974, passim.
2. Edward J. Epstein, op.cit., 1973, p. 229.
3. See the brief article by Paul Rock, 'News as eternal recurrence', in S. Cohen and J. Young, (eds.), The Manufacture of News, London, Constable, 1973, pp. 73-80. He shares this interpretation: "What seems unregulated is, in fact, controlled. These imperatives relate chiefly to issues of the mapping out and timetabling of newspapers." (p. 75).
4. E. Gellner, 'Concepts and society', in D. Emmett and A. MacIntyre, (eds.), Sociological Theory and Philosophical Analysis, London, Papermac, 1970, pp. 115-149.
5. B. Bernstein, 'On the classification and framing of educational knowledge', in Class, Codes, and Control, St. Albans, Paladin, 1973, pp. 227-256.
6. On the two newsmen's ideologies see J.W.C. Johnstone, et al., op.cit., 1972-3. On "committed" journalism see J. Bensman and R. Lilienfeld, 'The journalistic attitude', in B. Rosenberg and D.M. White, Mass Culture Revisited, New York, Van Nostrand, 1971, pp. 131-149.
7. B. Holzner, op.cit., 1968, p. 71.

8. For example, Epstein, op.cit., 1973, p. 187, notes the assumption "that outside film 'cannot be trusted'" in his study of American network news organisations.
9. R. Park, 'News as a form of knowledge: a chapter in the sociology of knowledge', in Charles S. Steinberg, (ed.), Mass Media and Communication, New York, Hastings House, 1970, pp. 127-141. The article was originally published in the American Journal of Sociology, 1940.
10. E.R. Leach, 'Two essays concerning the symbolic representation of time', in Rethinking Anthropology, University of London, The Athlone Press, 1961, ch.6.

APPENDIX I:

Inside the newsrooms: problems and methods.

Newsman and sociologists are both occupationally afflicted (or blessed) with more than a touch of voyeurism.⁽¹⁾ What could be more apposite than producing a piece of meta-voyeurism, of biting the biter? So, the sociologist studies the newsman. Next, no doubt, the newsman will wreak his revenge, and begin to seriously debunk the sociologist in a spirit of self-defence, responding to increasingly frequent incursions on the privacy of his domain, and what he perceives as rank rationalist attacks on the mystery of his craft.

Gaining access: The research proposals for this study were first formulated in July/August 1971, and in November 1971. In the second version the rather grandiose schemes of the first were reduced to the more mundane proportions decreed by practicality. Having decided to study a news organisation from the standpoint of the sociology of knowledge the issue had become "Which one?". The BBC became the victim (or object of research) as the result of a happy accident. During a discussion, my co-supervisor, Mr. Michael Burrage, mentioned that one of his LSE colleagues' husbands worked for the BBC as an announcer. Mrs. Eileen Barker kindly put me in touch with her husband, Mr. Peter Barker, who, in turn, kindly agreed to broach the question of my gaining access with the Editor, BBC Radio News, Mr. Peter Woon. Mr. Barker informed me (in November 1971) that Mr. Woon had no personal objections to letting me in, but that in order to obtain official permission I had to approach the BBC's Editor, News and Current Affairs, Mr. Desmond Taylor. I duly wrote to Mr. Taylor, and in

December 1971 received a letter from Mr. Andrew Todd, Managing Editor, News, which suggested that I have "two brief preliminary discussions" (separate ones) with Mr. Stan Taylor, Deputy Editor, Radio News, and with Mr. Gerard Slessenger, Chief Assistant to Editor, Television News.

These discussions, which were, from my point of view, interviews, marked the first practical step in gaining access, and were held in early January 1972. I have no doubt that they were also interviews from the BBC's point of view, and, whatever the criteria were, I evidently met them. Mr. Taylor and Mr. Slessenger asked me to state my requirements for access to the news operations. In the event, the most practical course of action, they suggested, was that I should be allowed to "come in" for an initial two days' observation in each branch of the operation. The observation, like the interviews, was, no doubt, two-way. I had to prove, quite reasonably from the News Departments' point of view, that my nuisance-value would be small. I evidently satisfied them on that score since after that point I was allowed to "come in" subject to my clearing the access with either Mr. Taylor or Mr. Slessenger. The periods for which such arrangements were made were generally either two or three days.

The fieldwork period: The study reported above is based on fieldwork conducted between February 1972 and July 1973. At first, in general, requests for access to the BBC newsrooms were granted without question. The way in which requests had to be made, tended, however, to keep their number down. I had no wish to impose on either Mr. Taylor or Mr. Slessenger, who were acting as link-men. The operative consider-

ation was not good manners, but rather a fear that access would be withdrawn should my overtures be construed as "pestering". It is only right to stress the precariousness which, rightly or wrongly, I felt governed the relationship between me and the News Departments. The number of scattered days on which I was accorded full access to the News Departments' operations totalled forty. On each of these I followed through a complete newsday shift, which constituted some 14 hours in the field - i.e. some 560 hours spent in the organisational milieu. Some two-thirds of the fieldwork was carried out between February and July 1972. After this period, further overtures had, in effect, to be justified by citing some specific aspect of the operation to be studied: for example, "weekend news", "the night shift", "the futures system".

Those days on which access was granted were spent in observing as many aspects of the news production processes as possible. I frequently attached myself to the incumbent of a particular role for a whole day, trying in this way to build up a picture of his work. Such individual biographies were gradually related to form a more comprehensive picture of the overall process. During these newsdays I had a good many conversations with the whole range of news personnel. In all, discussions or interviews were held with 95 personnel directly concerned with the news operation. This is not to count brief exchanges with a further twenty or so personnel from which much was learned, but which could not reasonably be described as interviews or discussions. They were more like "chats". Of the 95 discussions or interviews during the field period some 40 were "formal" (if rather unstructured) in the sense that it was made clear that an interview was taking place.

And of these 40, ten were specially-arranged interviews with the more senior news executives, and were arranged, for the most part, on days quite separate from the main fieldwork. Interviews generally lasted for about one hour.

By the end of July 1973 I found myself with field notes covering the observations made, and the interviews and discussions held, which totalled an estimated 250,000 words. This has formed the basis of the case study. I took detailed notes during conversations and during observation (except on those rare occasions where express requests were made for me not to). Where it was not possible to take notes straight away - particularly in "social" rather than overtly "field" situations, such as when eating or drinking with the newsmen - notes were made as soon after the event as possible. The field notes contained a good deal of verbatim quotation, as well as fragmentary phrases set into the context in which they were uttered. I found that for periods of weeks after particular fieldwork sessions that I was recalling relevant details and adding them to my notes. Master copies of expanded observations were typed up on the basis of the written notes made during fieldwork. The overall strategy was quite simple: for the first half of the period of access I simply recorded every possible event and remark which came to my attention. After this I focussed more particularly on what seemed to be the emergent themes, such as the time factor, the cut-offness from the audience, impartiality. .

In December 1972 I began to write a first draft of the study, a process which lasted through until October 1973 as there were many interruptions of one kind or another. First drafts of what

are now Chapters 3 and 4 were written during January and February 1973 and were shown to Mr. Taylor and Mr. Slessenger. On the basis of their confirmation I concluded that I knew enough about the organisational structure, and in the remaining field sessions concentrated on the other themes. This current version of the study is a completely revised draft of the original written mainly between April 1974 and July 1974, and in December 1974.

Some problems:

i) Shift-system and staff turnover: The rapid rotation of personnel through the shift system and job changes meant that frequently when I came into the newsrooms there were few people that I knew from previous encounters, and that I had to start making fresh contacts. This compounded the problems created by the need to continually renegotiate access anyway. This was certainly a disadvantage not experienced by Philip Elliott in his study of a small production team. Clearly, this sort of problem means that it might be months before a particularly good informant reappears. Nevertheless, there were a number of really helpful informants who seemed to take a genuine interest in the progress of the study who were a stabilising factor through time. It could be argued, conversely, that to confront new personnel continually, yet from a series of positions in which I had advanced my understanding of the newsman's milieu, was a way of improving the validity of my observations. Different people would assume my ignorance and proceed to describe phenomena, explain actions, and elucidate concepts with which I was already, at one level, familiar.

ii) A deskman's view?: One journalist (not in the BBC) to whom I described the general outlines of this account defined it as present-

ing a "deskman's" view. By this he meant that it took the perspective of the news processors rather than that of the news gatherers. I would accept this as a characterisation. The basic reason for the slant has to do with the greater availability of the editorial staff for interview and observation than was the case with reporting staff. I spoke to 13 general reporters and 3 specialist correspondents. In terms of learning about the detail of their work I had far more evidence based upon discussions with more than 60 middle and lower ranking editorial staff. It simply proved difficult to arrange to accompany reporters on assignment although this was done on several occasions. To some extent, then, a virtue had to be made out of necessity, particularly since I wanted to minimise my nuisance value. There is, however, a good empirical ground for this bias in concentration. And that lies in the power structure described in the study, notably in Chapter 5. The dominance of the Editor of the Day, and of the editorial function generally, made it important to get a good grasp of these. Reporters (in general) can be viewed as a news organisation's emissaries, its negotiators on the fringes of the news sources' social systems; they carry into the field organisational modes of thought, and frame their reports, as good second-guessers, to fit in with the controlling concepts applied in the editorial system. The study therefore makes no claim to completeness in this respect, and this particular area remains open.

iii) Impression management: The degree of co-operation and personal friendliness on the part of the BBC's news staff was great, with very few exceptions. Many of the newsmen seemed both curious and flattered by the thought that their work should be the object of "respectable"

academic attention. The ironies of interviewers being interviewed did not go unappreciated. But my role was not clearly discerned until I made it explicit. I was most commonly assigned the identity of a new, young sub-editor learning the tricks of the trade by talking to his more experienced elders. This was because I wandered about the newsrooms notebook and pen in hand looking terribly interested in all that went on (as indeed I was). It seemed to them a natural way of classifying my activities. An alternate, and less frequently cited version, identified me as a journalist who had come in to write about the BBC. Yet another variation on this theme had me in the role of a journalist in search of work in the BBC who had pulled strings in order to have a good look around first. An occasional paranoid label had me fixed as some kind of behavioural scientist, or time and motion man, who had come to spy on behalf of "management".

The role I had to adopt, that of the eager learner, was necessarily somewhat self-effacing, and accorded quite well with the notion of the new recruit, and his appropriate style of behaviour.

iv). Time Pressures: The rhythm of news production was perhaps its most surprising feature: the slowness of the build-up followed by the hectic pace of rehearsals, the transformation of copy, film and tape into "pieces" and "packages". I was warned that when things "got a bit hairy" as the output times approached I should not take it as a personal slight if I was ignored. It seems, in retrospect, that the direct experience of the tremendous pace of bulletin producing during the peak hour alerted me to the relevance of the time factor as an important way of integrating the study. The newsman's conception of time was forced into the sharpest relief for me by frequent references to the study as "an epic" or a

"soft story". After seeing me "around" on one or two occasions informants began to wonder why it was all taking so long, and when would it be finished. As 1972 progressed I found myself more and more having to negotiate my way out of the danger area of when the study was likely to be ready. Because I was forced into defending my apparent tardiness I came to have more insight into the relevance of pace for the newsman's kind of knowledge-construction, and to perceive this as a theme which needed more highlighting. In sum, here was both a pressure and a source of insight: indeed one could say that because it was a source of pressure that it yielded insights.

v). Tact: I was very aware during the period of this study that there was a good deal of anxiety about the coverage of Northern Irish affairs, and more generally concern about the fate of the BBC. One topic which I tended to broach very infrequently was the coverage of Northern Ireland. I did this in the full knowledge that it would have made interesting "copy" from my point of view. But on the other hand I had to weigh against this the possibility that I might be perceived as simply an enemy of the Corporation who wished to make trouble by trading on its embarrassment. I am of the opinion that the working newsmen with whom I had most to do could not anyway have told me much more than I already knew from press reports and polemics. The only conceivable advantage I could have secured there would have been to tap more widely the apparent beliefs about whether the BBC was "doing a good job". They knew little, or at least appeared to know little, about the higher-level structures of control. They knew the ground-rules as they then stood, and, as reported above, seemed on the whole to find them unproblematic. As for the more senior men, one didn't

have to be exceptionally gifted to recognise the strain and unease that crept into conversations when the Ulster question was raised. There were too many "off the record" statements and evasions. I should, had I been confident of my access, have pursued the issue. "Tact" on my part therefore involved, on the whole, suppressing a whole line of questioning. I think justifiably.

REFERENCES:

1. Or perhaps one should put it this way: that both the newsman and the sociologist can be conceptualised as occupationally curious ideal types. See Ruth Harriet Jacobs, 'The Journalistic and Sociological Enterprises as Ideal Types', American Sociologist, 1970, pp. 348-350.

APPENDIX II:
SOME BBC NEWS DIVISION OUTPUTS AND AUDIENCES
DURING THE FIELDWORK PERIOD

The durations and audiences of some Current Affairs programmes are included for comparative purposes. It can readily be seen why newsmen have an assured self-image: their audience figures are high in relation to most major Current Affairs programmes.

<u>Radio 4:</u>	<u>Audience in 1000's:</u>	
<u>Mon-Fri:</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>
7.00 - 7.15 am: News bulletin (N) ⁽¹⁾	2400 ⁽³⁾	2400 ⁽⁴⁾
7.15 - 8.00 am: Today Programme (CA) ⁽²⁾	2100	1900
8.00 - 8.15 am: News bulletin (N)	4350	4250
8.15 - 8.45 am: Today Programme (CA)	2900	2750
8.25 am.		2000
1.00 - 1.10 pm: News bulletin (N)	3950	3950
1.10 - 1.30 pm: The World at One (CA)	2900	2850
6.00 - 6.15 pm: The Six O'Clock News (N)	1500	1550
10.00-10.15 pm: News bulletin (N)	500	550
10.15-10.45 pm: The World Tonight (CA)	300	350
<u>Sat:</u>		
8.10 - 8.55 pm: The Today Programme (CA)		1000
6.00 - 6.15 pm: The Six O'Clock News (N)		3050
<u>Sun:</u>		
1.00 - 1.15 pm: News bulletin (N)	2900	2750
1.15 - 2.00 pm: The World This Weekend	2000	1800
(1.30 pm) (CA)		1500

<u>BBC-1:</u>	<u>Audience in 1000's: 1971</u>	
The Nine O'Clock News (N) (Mon-Fri, 9.00 pm)	9000 ⁽⁵⁾	8300 ⁽⁶⁾
Panorama (CA) (Mon, 8 pm)	6250	3900
Twenty Four Hours (CA) (Mon-Fri, 10.45 pm)	3700	3100
Nationwide (CA) (Tues-Thurs, 6.20 pm)	7750	4850

	<u>Audience in 1000's: 1972</u>	
The Nine O'Clock News (N)	8050 ⁽⁷⁾	7300 ⁽⁸⁾
Panorama (CA)	5700	3150
Twenty Four Hours (CA)	10050	2550
Nationwide (CA)	8050	6250

NOTES:

1. N: a Radio News Department output.
2. CA: a current affairs unit output. I have distinguished in these figures between the working groups which produce given outputs. It is worth noting, however, that the different outputs often appear in the context of the same programme. Thus, for example, the 7.00-7.15 pm. news bulletin appears in the context of The Today Programme; the 1 pm. bulletin is part of The World at One.
3. The source is the BBC Handbook, 1972.
4. The source is the BBC Handbook, 1973.
5. The approximate audience during February 1971.
6. The approximate audience during August 1971.
7. The approximate audience during January-February 1972.
8. The approximate audience during June-July 1972.