

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO
THE INFLUENCES ON
JOURNALISTS IN
TELEVISION NEWS STORY
CONSTRUCTION**

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ABSTRACT

Television news is a key provider of information within British society, investing those who produce it with power to determine what is 'important' and 'interesting'. In this context I set out, through observation and interview in the newsrooms of Channel Four, HTV West and BBC 1 Midlands Today, to gain insight into how journalists think and behave when selecting and constructing news stories. I sought to examine the effects of routine practices and the extent to which reporters and editors reflect on their decision making. In addition, I conducted a close reading of the headline item from the bulletin produced in each newsroom on the same day as my visit, in order to draw comparison between what editors and reporters articulate as important in a newsroom setting, and what appears to be the case in manifest content.

While considering a wide range of influential factors, an overriding objective was to assess the specific role of 'news value'. Do journalists consciously apply individual criteria? Are newsrooms organised so that editors and reporters routinely privilege certain subjects as 'news' and not others? Is there a journalistic tendency to 'notice', perceive and 'frame' events as a set of familiar types? In examining these questions, special attention was given to the conceptual model developed by Galtung & Ruge (1965), in order to assess its relevance in the 'real' newsroom environment.

My findings suggested that journalists do not openly reflect on newsworthiness in a systematic way. The complex task of preparing a story ready for broadcast was achieved in a manner that was almost automatic. Attitudes and behaviour appeared to be driven by routines, with decisions made quickly and with minimal outward reflection. In conversation, the importance of visual impact and drama, and an emphasis on negativity, emerged as being significant, although subsequent analysis of output suggested that other criteria may also be influential, for example a concentration on 'elite' subject matter. Overall, however, there seemed to be a lack of ability or willingness to discuss selection in a conceptual manner and newsworthiness was explained and 'justified' by reference to actual examples of stories or subject matter.

DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed..... Date.....

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- Appendix 1** **Transcription of headline news item from each visit.**
- Appendix 2** **Letter correspondence from Channel Four News and HTV News**
- Appendix 3** **Copies of early morning planning schedules from each newsroom**

INTRODUCTION

Television news is the source that a large majority of people appear to rely on for information (Lewis, 1990; McNair, 1998) and surveys appear to confirm this has been the case consistently since the 1950s (Mullan, 1997). In an age of increasing audience fragmentation (Fanthome, 2003), television news retains the capacity “to provide a platform for public political discourse” (McNair, 2003a:21) and perhaps even improve the quality of ‘public life’ as a result (Costera Meijer, 2003). Those people responsible for its production are therefore in a powerful position to determine what actually becomes ‘news’ on any given day, as how it is discursively shaped and packaged for broadcast. The thoughts, activities and decisions of editors and reporters in particular appear crucial to the process by which certain events, occurrences, issues and subjects are first identified as newsworthy then transformed, through the process of newsroom construction into news items (Tuchman, 1978). In this respect, various texts have pointed to the essentially arbitrary nature of a process by which a tiny fraction of stories can emerge as broadcast items from a potentially limitless number of newsworthy events and issues occurring each day (Hall, 1981; Negrine, 1994). Others have examined the extent to which television news can claim to be truthful and objective (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976; Goodwin, 1990; Gunter, 1997; Eldridge, 2000), suggesting that, ultimately, all news output is to some degree biased.

Following on from the relatively small number of studies that “have conducted detailed ‘behind the scenes’ research” (Hansen et al, 1998:35), my own investigation seeks to examine journalistic attitudes and behaviour in relation to news selection. My aim is to observe and interview journalists within three different newsrooms, Channel Four News, HTV West and BBC Midlands Today. The main objective is to highlight the nature of routine newsroom practice and examine those factors which my findings suggest are influential in routine journalistic decision making, especially with regard to news story construction. In attempting to gain insight into the latter, I will pay particular attention to the specific role of ‘news value’ as a key determinant in

selection and construction. This is a term which most reporters and editors invoke in the newsroom, yet evidence suggests most of them struggle to define it (Hall, 1981; Allan, 1999). Indeed, for those who actually select and produce the news, it may be that attempts to place news values within a conceptual framework are less important than recognising their function as “shorthand references to shared understandings about the nature and purpose of news which can be used to ease the rapid and difficult manufacture of bulletins” (Golding & Elliott, 1979:114). In other words, news production is a complex process, dependent on particular organisational practices which serve to both guide and constrain journalists in their daily activities. In this context, ‘news value’ may not need to be articulated by those selecting and constructing news, but merely understood as a set of rules implicitly guiding routine practice.

This last possibility, though, does not entirely explain how journalists come to see certain events as ‘news’ and not others, and, importantly, how certain elements within a story come to be given more prominence and emphasis than others. Although the values, ideas, beliefs and attitudes rooted in dominant ideology (Hall, 1982; Thompson, 1990; Turner, 1990) and the demands and routines of professionalism (Schlesinger, 1987; Solaski, 1999) may together exert a powerful influence on the way journalists work, neither provides a full explanation of how they come to decide on story selection. Throughout all stages of the production process, journalists need to be able to “impose some kind of order or coherence on to the social world” (Allan, 1999:62) and thus transform a ‘reality’ that is, on one level, random and chaotic into a discursive structure both familiar and meaningful to the audience (Fiske, 1987). Faced with the almost infinite number of potential news stories to choose from, journalists need a mechanism enabling them to: first, decide which events and issues are potentially newsworthy and, second, judge which are the most important in terms of hierarchical arrangement in the news schedule. Further, once a story has been initially selected, decisions continually need to be made on which words, sounds and visual images should be given emphasis during the editing process.

In light of this, a central aspect of my analysis is to consider how far journalists actually draw on specific selection criteria during key tasks such as discussing the daily schedule, deciding which pieces of visual material to incorporate into a story, and preparing the accompanying script. If editors and reporters invoke specific criteria when selecting information, what are these and are they referred to directly, or subsumed within the habits and routines of daily newsroom practice? To examine this I turned in large measure to Galtung & Ruge (1965). Their typology of twelve criteria, one or more of which need to be present in an event or issue for it to be considered newsworthy, remains to this day the most influential study of its kind (Watson, 1998; McQuail, 2000) and, as Allan (1999:62) asserts, it has provided the general basis for many similar studies since. In essence Galtung & Ruge's study was an attempt to understand what influences key decision making by reference to content rather than considering the perspective of the decision makers themselves.

In this sense it should be seen as a "post hoc explanation" (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996:116) of news selection. Accordingly, one of my aims will be to assess how apposite such a theoretical approach is in trying to understand the way certain material is selected and incorporated into the version of events actually broadcast. In particular, I am concerned with how their theory and others similar to it represent how journalists think and behave during news story production, at least amongst the subjects of my study. It is important to examine the basic dichotomy which appears to exist between an approach that seeks to understand selection based on content analysis, and others conducted among journalists within a newsroom environment. For example, how does Galtung & Ruge's typology measure up against a theory such as Tuchman's (1978), which argues that news stories come into existence through the way newsrooms are able to organise 'reality' and make the 'unexpected' routine.

Despite its longevity, Tuchman's study has maintained its influence as one of the key contributions to understanding the relationship between organisation and selection (Becker, 1995). For my study its usefulness is essentially twofold. First, it makes the vital connection between where journalists look for newsworthy events and where

resources, especially reporters, are dispatched or located. Events and issues that become news are not “necessarily the most significant that have occurred” (Curran & Seaton, 1997:277), but tend to be those that can be obtained with the minimal difficulty and cost. When it comes to looking for stories, news gathering is structured so that certain geographical areas are favoured, and also particular types of bureaucratic organisation (Fishman, 1980). In addition, journalists compartmentalise events, issues and subject matter in general according to different news topics, or ‘preoccupations’ (Hartley, 1982).

Second, and crucially for my study, Tuchman provides a possible explanation for how journalists come to privilege certain events and occurrences while appearing to disregard others. Following in the wake of earlier studies by Goffman (1974) and Molotch & Lester (1974), she argues that those who produce the news are able to match events and issues with known subject types or ‘typifications’, enabling editors and reporters to judge newsworthy material according to a preconceived notion of how it should be configured. Consequently, the format in which information is arranged, the order in which it is placed, and perhaps even the content itself, may be, to some degree, predetermined by a capacity to discursively ‘frame’ stories (Gitlin, 1980) almost at the point of ‘noticing’ them (Jacobs, 1996). This could, in turn, cause journalists to approach the task of individual story construction in a more perfunctory manner, possibly rendering aspects of the process automatic. One of the aims of my newsroom observation is to identify instances where this appeared to be the case.

To provide a context for the discussion of these key issues, it is necessary to examine news production from two opposing perspectives: the wider cultural conditions in which journalists operate, and the specific impact on individual journalistic behaviour of ‘professionalism’. Each is looked at in turn, beginning with Chapter 2 which provides a background to the wider ideological context in which journalists operate. This begins by looking at how certain ideas, values and beliefs, which exist beyond the newsroom environment, come to gain credibility over others and maintain their dominant position in society. I consider the way they are transmitted to journalists and

then appear to influence beliefs and attitudes during news story production. While acknowledging the impact of the wider economic framework on journalists' attitudes and behaviour), I will adopt a definition of ideology that treats it as a powerful provider and transmitter of meanings and ideas (Hall, 1982; Turner, 1990). This does not deny the influence of economic factors on news production (Murdock & Golding, 1977), or that the programme content of 'news' itself may be becoming more of a commodity in the market place (McManus, 1994). Indeed, a major issue for consideration in this study is the extent to which those who select and produce news content may be disproportionately influenced by certain powerful individuals and groups in society. Although it is important to stress at the outset that the consideration of news sources is not an area this study seeks to investigate, it is essential to be clear that those who hold dominant views in society are in a position to exert influence over journalists (Hall et al, 1978; Manning, 2001).

Chapter 3 then discusses the nature and role of the individual journalist. This begins with a broad outline of the types of people who enter the profession and the general characteristics needed to become an effective member of the newsroom, for example having a 'nose for news' (Boyd, 2001) and a willingness to question those in people and groups in society deemed to be powerful (Hartley, 2000). Of particular importance here is how far their faith in 'professionalism' (Schlesinger, 1987) as a structure and framework causes journalists to believe they are uniquely equipped to both identify newsworthy events and transform them into accounts that are reliable, 'truthful' (McNair, 1998) impartial and balanced (Gunter, 1997). Inextricably linked to this is the degree to which journalists are able to act with autonomy from editorial control. In this respect, Solaski (1999) found that reporters especially appear to share a common understanding of what professionalism means ideologically, which allows the organisation they work for to grant them a high degree of freedom to make key selection decisions. The extent to which this is the case is a question I will examine in my own research.

Chapter 4 elaborates in depth on the concept of news value. Central to this will be a rigorous examination of Galtung & Ruge, but there will also be a consideration of other key writers who, to varying degrees, have been influenced by their study (Hartley, 1982; Heatherington, 1985; Fiske, 1987). Particular attention is given to a recent attempt to update Galtung & Ruge's typology by Harcup & O'Neill (2001), as well as others who have adopted a different approach altogether. Among these are Golding & Elliott (1979) but I also consider Gans (1979) whose work, based on a study of both production and content, identified eight 'enduring values' specific to American news. These, as will be seen, are especially interesting when drawing a connection between dominant cultural attitudes and beliefs, and the kinds of news story believed to be important or interesting in America at the time of his study. It thus forges a tangible link between the wider ideological framework in which production takes place, the kinds of event and issue likely to be considered newsworthy, and the way stories might be constructed to impart a particular dominant meaning.

Following this, the final chapter of my literature review looks more closely at newsroom organisation. Unlike Chapter 3, this chapter's concern is less with the journalist as an individual, but with their collective behaviour within the wider structure of the news organisations that employ them. I am interested here in how the practices and routines, which may or may not be imposed on journalists, lead to particular types of news story being selected, allowing the possibility of certain areas of content being routinely privileged in individual story construction. As stated earlier, the wider framework in which I discuss this is Tuchman's (1978) model, with its underlying principle that all news gathering is constrained by where newsrooms choose to allocate limited resources, and that news stories may be configured according to familiar types.

Finally, my concern with news sources is mainly confined to the way they are utilised by journalists. I have already stated that certain sources hold a position of power in being able to determine what is deemed ideologically important or significant. In this light, Chapter 5 also considers how journalists appear to rely on familiar sources,

seeing them as providing more 'reliable' (therefore objective) information. I am therefore interested in how sources impact on specific selection decisions (Manning, 2001), but not especially where news actually originates or the nature and constitution of the sources themselves. I have also elected not to look at the relationship between information gathering and new technology. Although advances in the way information can be transmitted electronically at great speed provides an increasing sense of 'immediacy' in news reporting (Higgins, 2003), especially in the context of twenty four hour rolling news programmes like Sky and BBC 24, I consider this to be outside the main scope of this study. Similarly, although it may have a bearing on the way journalists assess subject matter, I am unable here to examine how television news output might be affected in terms of new and different types of format (Cottle, 1995).

Out of the above examination of key factors influencing journalistic behaviour I have identified three main questions. First, how much is selection and construction the product of 'automatic' journalistic behaviour? Second, to what extent is newsroom activity influenced by journalists' established routines and familiarity with categories and story types? Third, which individual selection factors, especially those proposed by Galtung & Ruge (1965), appear dominant or systematically applied to the information gathered? The various issues that surround these, emanating from the review of literature, are summarised at the start of Chapter 6. This provides a context for the discussion that takes place in that chapter, of my chosen methodology which, as will be seen, is essentially two-pronged in approach.

As this is fundamentally an investigation into the attitudes and behaviour of journalists, within a newsroom context, the bulk of the data is drawn from the three newsroom visits. In each case, a day was spent observing what editors and reporters did, both first hand and more generally in terms of the general atmosphere, and also engaging them in conversation when appropriate to do so. The aim is was identify themes and preoccupations which appeared influential in their decision making when selecting stories for the bulletin, then during the ongoing process of gathering information,

editing and scripting. In discussing the precise methods I used, Chapter 6 also critically reflects on how I set about trying to ensure that the data emerged 'naturally'. This includes an assessment of how far my presence may have affected the nature and quality of the findings (Burgess, 1984; Robson, 1993), along with a consideration of the validity of what amounted to a relatively brief period of observation (Hansen et al, 1998). After this I then outline the basis and rationale for the analysis of news items. The principle objective here is to compare news output with the actions and comments of editors and reporters, thus providing deeper insight into the selection process. This is a key part of the overall investigation because it allows me to relate specific comments on news selection, gathered in the newsroom, with what is actually produced.

In presenting my analysis of the resultant findings I began, in Chapter 7, by outlining the general context of the visits, providing a description of newsroom structure in each case and a detailed summary of the relationships between newsroom staff and its impact on individual autonomy. Crucially, I set out to explore how far journalistic routines might lead to forms of behaviour that could be deemed automatic, beginning with a general background to the newsrooms visited, including an outline of layout and structure. In order to place my findings in context, I then discussed my role as an observer. This allowed me to reflect on how far my presence impacted on journalistic behaviour on each occasion and therefore the quality of my findings. It is very important to state here that my approach was to remain as detached as possible from proceedings, and not to become an instrument of the research process at any level. How successfully this objective was achieved was a vital consideration for the analysis in general as it underpins any claims I can make on the way journalists think and behave. Accordingly, appropriate references were made to those occasions where journalists actively responded to my presence, such as displaying an overt lack of interest in my research, or, conversely, demonstrating higher levels of curiosity.

After this, Chapter 8 deals more directly with what journalists appear to be looking for when judging the newsworthiness of an event or issue. It focuses on the four factors

which appeared dominant among those I encountered: consideration of the audience, the importance of visuals, the need for dramatic impact, and the apparent desire to emphasise negative aspects of a situation. I am especially interested in the last three of these, as they form a key part of the examination of the news items in Chapter 9. Based on transcriptions of the lead stories from each bulletin on the same day of the visit, I will present a close analysis of the text and aim to identify which selection factors are most prominent. I will return in large part here to Galtung & Ruge's typology, discussed at length and in depth in the second half of Chapter 4. If it transpires that journalists appear to be drawing on criteria that were not made explicit in newsroom conversation, what does this suggest about their ability to reflect on newsworthiness during newsroom activity?

CHAPTER TWO

THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT IN WHICH JOURNALISTS OPERATE

Introduction

Central to this thesis is the analysis of those factors influencing journalists' behaviour when making decisions on newsworthiness. However, in order to place this in a broader context it is necessary to consider the various ideological forces that exist beyond the newsroom environment, and which are seen here as permeating society in general. In other words, there is an important assumption in the discussion that follows (and throughout this thesis) that journalistic notions of newsworthiness are underpinned and driven by those cultural values, ideas, assumptions and beliefs which are dominant in any given time period. These, though, are "rarely explicit and must be found between the lines – in what actors and activities are reported or ignored, and in how they are described" (Gans, 1979:39-40). It may be that there is no deliberate intention by editors or reporters to include specific values within television news discourse. As I will discuss in more detail below, the power of dominant ideological forces may be their general pervasiveness and that they tend to be 'invisible' to those who select and produce news stories (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976:x).

For Thompson (1990), ideology is a problematic term, in that its meaning and usage could be appropriated in either of two, interconnected ways. First, it may be used to describe a state of affairs such as a political concept like socialism. Second, it is a means to try to evaluate that state of affairs; to assess what it comprises and how it operates. The latter definition is particularly interesting for my study because it effectively allows ideology to be treated as a 'neutral concept', rather than one that seeks to represent *particular* systems of thought or belief (Thompson, 1990:5).

Applied in this manner, the concept allows deeper understanding into the way certain meanings and ideas retain their power and dominance across society. As he puts it, it “the study of ideology requires us to investigate the ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms of various kinds, from everyday linguistic utterances to complex images and texts” (Thompson, 1990:7). In this the media plays a key role, but it is important to see its power as co-existing alongside, and competing with, various other social forces. Moreover, a fuller understanding of how the relationship between the media and powerful ideas and meanings can only be reached by also examining the social context in which production occurs and messages are received. Crucially, Thompson believes the potential for instability in (British) society is avoided (largely) because certain forces and groups attain a level of dominance over others. This, though, is not achieved without constant struggle, either in ‘real’ social situations, or more figuratively through the messages received via the mass media.

Thompson’s arguments here are important for my study because they place the media so firmly in the centre of the consideration of how ideological power ‘works’. To him, forms like television play a fundamental role in helping to construct the “parameters” (Thompson, 1990:20) within which various ideological meanings are constructed, received and comprehended within different sections of society. However, in terms of how particular meanings and ideas come to attain levels of dominance and authority within British culture, I am more persuaded still by Hall’s (1982) belief that ideological forces retain their power and dominance because certain values, ideas and norms come to be *shared* by a majority of the population (Hall, 1982). In other words, there are certain values and ideas that act to bind society together and which lead to a degree of *consensus* about, say, what is important and trivial, acceptable and unacceptable, normal or deviant. Here, according to Hall, the news has a vital part to play in both promoting and consolidating such beliefs and ideas, although Gans (1979:40) stresses that there is a fundamental difference between ideological values inscribed within news discourse and the ‘value implications’ as understood by those seeking to interpret story content.

This last point complicates the task of trying to identify those values that predominate within news discourse specifically. However, the task may become more manageable if confined to those that seem to endure over a long period of time. It is these which, according to Gans, become part of what defines news and he proceeds to list eight types of 'enduring value' which appeared to have been dominant in American news over a twenty year period. I will deal with these fully in Chapter 4 in the context of the discussion that takes place there specifically on news value. However, in lieu of that, and in order to lay a firmer foundation for the more conceptual consideration of ideology that follows, I will now consider some of the values which appear to endure in British society. For this I turn especially to Morley & Robins' (2001) assessment of contemporary British culture.

Much of what they suggest here relates to those aspects which contribute to the country's identity. Chief among these is the long-held view that Britain has a leading role to play in world affairs. This is, essentially speaking, a legacy of the Empire and results in the notion that Britain is a 'civilising nation', one that has been, and still is, a 'force for good' around the globe. Connected to this is the idea of the British hero which, according to Bassnett (2001) is a myth that has become entrenched within modern consciousness by celebrated events such as Scott's expedition to the Antarctic. On a more popular level, there remains in Britain a strong feeling that local communities will pull together in times of crisis, invoking past glories such as the 'Spirit of the Blitz'. This was apparent in the recent news coverage of the response of 'Londoners' following the bombings in the capital on 7 July, then the subsequent failed attack two weeks later. Informal viewing of television news suggested the dominant message contained in the reporting of this was of resilience and a determination to maintain 'normality' as far as possible.

Another aspect of culture which helps define underlying values is the contrast made between town and country and, especially, the sanctity of the British countryside with its connotations of 'timelessness' and 'tradition'. At the same time, however, the widespread reporting of protests by the Countryside Alliance and other campaign

organisations against the abolition of fox hunting may point to an unease among certain sections of the rural population about threats to 'their way of life'. Such potential rifts between different social and political groups highlights the shifting nature of ideology, although, more generally, the idea of history and tradition being key to British identity appears to remain a strong force that pervades large areas of the media, such as the continual attraction for audiences of 'period' dramas and films (Higson, 2001). Partly allied to this, through its connection with the nobility, is the institution of the Royal Family which, Chaney (2001) argues, tends to be represented in the British news media as the epitome of noble and irreplaceable virtues. In other words, as an institution at least – as opposed to its individual members – coverage of the House of Windsor helps perpetuate the idea of deference.

However, Morley and Robins also make the point that a variety of changes have been taking place across British society during the last 25 years, and at a relatively fast pace. Citing the arrival of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979 as a critical turning point, their view is that there has been a decline in the idea of "communitarian values" (Morley and Robins, 2001:2) and a concomitant emphasis on consumer culture. A clear manifestation of this is the apparent rise in 'personal freedom' and the need to assert individual identity. Part of this is to do with the rise of the private sector in business and a relative decline in older, State run companies, and a further rise in the 1980s of a more aggressive, 'masculinised' approach to finance and capitalism, especially in the City of London (McDowell, 2001) and with the rise of the 'Yuppie'. On a different level, attitudes have relaxed in matters of gender identity and sexual freedom (Morley & Robins, 2001:12), although these changes are complex. While single parenthood is now much more common, there has been a reassertion of 'family values' with the current British Government promoting the virtues of the 'nuclear family' as an antidote to juvenile delinquency. While certain sectors of society lament the passing of certain aspects of rural life, there is much greater environmental awareness among large sections of society, and, very recently, a growing public debate about food and the 'health of the nation'.

Britain is also becoming more multicultural while, at the same time, there appears to be a public dilemma over whether to become more integrated, culturally, with certain aspects of 'Europe'. There is less and less deference to 'figures of authority', especially politicians (McNair, 2000); and even the Royal Family was forced to fundamentally re-examine its behaviour, outwardly at least, in the wake of the public response to the death of Diana Princess of Wales in 1997. Indeed, it seems reasonable to add here that, despite ongoing deference to the Royal Family as an institution, attitudes, especially in the tabloid press, or in television satire, towards family members can be anything but respectful. Here, though, Morley & Robins suggest that a form of parochialism exists, especially among the English, and a feeling that Britain stands aloof from mainland Europe. On this subject they also recognise, significantly, that specifically English characteristics are becoming more obviously relevant. This has been fuelled by devolution and Scotland and Wales seeking to differentiate their cultural identity from England.

This last point is especially interesting in that it raises the wider issue of what Britishness means. Here, Anderson suggests that all nations are, ultimately, no more than artificial constructions, or 'imagined communities', designed to create the impression of "deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1991:7). This, in effect, brings this discussion back to the fundamental question, considered earlier, of how far ideological values and beliefs can be shared across society. But it also has implications for how different groups, say, in society are perceived and represented within news discourse, in relation to their Britishness or Englishness. For example, the term 'black British' is a commonly used term, whereas 'black English' is not. The implication here is that Britishness is an umbrella term that can embrace all types of people. The important proviso here, however, is that for such inclusiveness (real or not) to 'work', all concerned must adhere to certain common values and ideas. This has been thrown into sharp relief with the various issues emanating from the recent London bombings. Once again, informal viewing of television news reveals that the question of what it means to be British is not just a highly topical

subject, but also one of contention. Throughout, television news has needed to tread a sensitive line.

So to reiterate, within the context of the above discussion, and accepting that within media studies there are variations in the way ideology is both defined and used as a basis for analysis (Donald & Hall, 1986; Fiske, 1990), this study will privilege a definition of ideology that treats it as a powerful provider and transmitter of values and ideas that are shared by large numbers of society (Hall, 1982; Turner, 1990). However, before examining this in greater depth, specifically in relation to news, there is one more important consideration to look at. My decision to place emphasis on the wider cultural context in which television news production takes place (Schudson, 1996) is not meant to be a dismissal of the impact on journalists' attitudes and behaviour of the wider economic framework in which they operate (Murdock & Golding, 1977). A consideration here of the structure and ownership of the mass media (Strinati, 1994) is still important. It has an impact on how certain individuals and groups gain access to the media in general; also television news needs to attract as large an audience as possible (McManus, 1994). However, economic factors alone cannot explain how particular meanings and ideas achieve a dominant position among journalists when they judge value and importance in news selection. They also provide little explanation of how such meanings and ideas come to be produced, circulated and consumed within society. In short, an approach which privileges economic factors as the major determinant of news content ignores the way in which meanings are interpreted and understood culturally, both through language and symbolically (Hall, 1982:68).

In essence, the 'political economic' approach is associated with two key aspects of news production. First, there is the influence that certain individuals and groups may have on journalists by being given privileged access to them. In making this point, Golding & Murdock (1991), suggest such favoured sources might include Government, businesses and large advertisers. They add, however, that the

relationship between such bodies and the journalist profession is complex and that the former are not simply able to insist that certain stories, or angles within them, are included in the news schedule. Indeed, Golding & Murdock believe certain theoretical approaches (for example, Herman and Chomsky, 1988) have tended to over-simplify the process by which information and knowledge is transmitted, by treating journalists as largely passive agents in the process. Further, they point to the need to recognise how society's structures, and therefore the ideological positioning of people within them, change over time. In short, they see "economic dynamics as defining the key features of the general environment within which communicative activity takes place, but not as a complete explanation of the nature of that activity" (Golding & Murdock, 1991:19).

The other major aspect of the political economy approach, stemming from the above, is the commodification of news. A key consequence of the existence of certain dominant groups in society is their ownership of news organisations. This, as Allan (1999:53-57) discusses, may lead to a narrowing of types of news story that are included in the news, since the corporate priority places pressure on journalists to select those stories that favour the 'powerful' in society, while simultaneously overlooking the views of minority interests, or people with views deemed ideologically unacceptable, for example pressure groups or political extremists. Although this may be mitigated, to some degree, by the need for British broadcast news to remain impartial, balanced and objective (Annan, 1977; Turner, 1990), "the underlying logic of cost operates systematically, consolidating the position of groups already established in the main mass-media markets and excluding those groups who lack the capital base required for successful entry" (Murdock & Golding, 1977:37).

I prefer to take Strinati's (1994) view, however, that non-economic factors must also be taken into account, when trying to understand how powerful forces in society determine and shape news content. While accepting that all news production does indeed occur within a wider economic framework, the latter needs to be seen, not as *the* primary factor underscoring all journalistic activity, but as one of a number of

key influences acting alongside professionalism, news value, newsroom organisation, journalistic routines, and the use of sources. Indeed, Golding & Murdock (1991:25-26) themselves point to this when stating that media production “is not merely a simple reflection of the controlling interests of those who own or even control [it]”. Accordingly, a key assumption in this study is that the specific economic circumstances in which selection and construction take place are of *secondary significance*, compared to the effect on journalistic attitudes and behaviour of particular values, ideas and meanings prevalent in society at any one time and, to an extent, the simple journalistic need to inform (Curran & Seaton, 1997; McNair, 2003).

Indeed, it may be that the economic conditions underlying news production are themselves, ultimately, rooted in such values, ideas and meanings, although such an interesting question is beyond the scope of my investigation. What I do wish to examine in more depth now is the way certain dominant meanings and ideas come to take hold in society as a whole, then among the journalistic profession which functions within that society. Therefore, the following analysis will deal with the following three areas: first, the way in which dominant meanings are transmitted to journalists; second, how these meanings appear to maintain their dominance within society, operating as a system of rules and norms, and are then reconfigured by journalists into the notion of a consensus among the audience; third, and most directly related to news production, how certain powerful people, groups and institutions in society may be able to exert influence on journalists in terms of the latter’s understanding of ‘importance’ and value.

The Transmission of Dominant Ideas and Meanings Across Society

How does television news (or any media form) “win a kind of credibility, legitimacy or ‘taken-for-grantedness’ for itself” (Hall, 1982: 67) and, in so doing, present a description and explanation of the world that conforms to society’s dominant values, ideas and beliefs? I will begin to address this question by considering an early reference to the ideological power of television news. This was made by Richard Hoggart in his forward to *Bad News*, the first of an important series of studies on the subject of television news and bias (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976). Having first described the way journalists ‘filter’ events from the ‘real’ world through the combined processes of newsroom routines, news values and specific television values (by which he means that news stories need to be presented in a form and style that the audience will find visually appealing), Hoggart suggests these processes are effectively contained within a fourth filter:

the cultural air we breathe, the whole ideological atmosphere of society, which tells us that some things can be said and others had best not be said...that whole and almost unconscious pressure towards implicitly affirming the status quo, towards confirming [people in their] existing attitudes, towards discouraging refusals to conform.

(Glasgow University Media Group, 1976:x)

Hoggart believes that the transmission of knowledge, unspoken but clearly understood (within newsrooms), that certain things can and cannot be said, leads journalists to focus on certain subjects and to treat them with a particular style and emphasis. In citing the example (at the time), of television news’ apparent fixation with strikes and industrial unrest (Tunstall, 1971), Hoggart alludes to the way journalists appear to become preoccupied with specific types of subject matter in their routine decision making. This is a vital consideration for this study as a whole, but at this particular juncture the important issue is how ideology as a force leads to

particular values, beliefs and assumptions assuming dominance over others and for this to remain the case over time. According to Turner this may be because, seen as a collection of ideas and meanings, dominant ideology “has deeper roots than the social practices of media production [and therefore] structures the most basic systems of cultural organisation” (Turner, 1990:204). Such ideas and meanings may, in turn, have a key bearing, conscious or otherwise, on journalists’ attitudes to newsworthiness and story selection.

Such a definition of dominant ideology, then, suggests journalists think and behave in accordance with the way they have interpreted various dominant ideas and meanings within wider society. In this specific sense they are in the same position as the viewers of the programmes for whom they are providing information and so may be just as ‘vulnerable’ to dominant ideas and beliefs in society as those outside the profession, in that they are in a position to either accept or reject the definitions (as to what is important) of the powerful. There is, of course, one crucial distinction between journalists and the audience in that the former are directly responsible for selecting and shaping news for broadcast. But the important point being made here is the possibility that those people given the task of deciding what is important and interesting, from an audience’s point of view, may have made such decisions because they share similar sets of attitudes and beliefs as the audience they ‘serve’. To reiterate, the extent to which journalists are able to think and act independently of outside forces, and simply adhere to a specific professional ideology, is a vital question for this study (and the central focus of the next chapter). But such a question cannot be addressed, I believe, without further examination of the way in which certain dominant beliefs and ideas manage to prevail across large sections of society.

Dominant ideology and consensus across society

How do journalists 'make sense' of their own personal environment, beyond that of the profession; as members of society rather than practitioners operating specifically within the institution of television news? How are the assumptions, ideas and values on which society functions understood by people whose task it is to reproduce and make comprehensible to the audience the 'facts' of any given event through the medium of 'news'? The answer, Hall et al (1978) suggest, is that journalists themselves make certain general assumptions about what is 'important' or 'normal'. They do this by operating from a belief that the way they understand and interpret certain 'facts' and 'truths' broadly conforms to that of the viewers 'out there'. In other words, television news construction is predicated on the belief that a consensus of views and opinions exists among members of the audience.

It is reasonable to add here that these same journalists may be partly responsible for constructing such a consensus through their particular choice of content and style of presentation over time. But what is more significant for this study is the possibility that particular interests and concerns maintains their dominance over others through a professional belief among journalists that both they and their audience "share a common stock of cultural knowledge [and] have access to the same 'maps of meaning'" (Hall et al, 1978:55). For example, if journalists operate from fixed assumptions about what constitutes 'normality' they will also hold certain ideas about what is 'deviant'. Consequently, certain actions or behaviour deemed 'wrong' or socially unacceptable may be represented negatively within a news item.

Further, television news in particular relies on certain discursive techniques in order to construct a version of reality that appears objective and accurate to viewers (Fiske, 1987). Indeed, studies down the years have pointed to a large majority of people in Britain relying on television news as their primary source of information (Lewis, 1990; Mullan, 1997; McNair, 1998). On the one hand, this only seems to strengthen the argument that news content is 'believable' when placed within the context of a

television bulletin. But it also implies that three out of every ten people are either sceptical or uninterested in television news. In other words, dominant ideology maintains its position of power (through television news content) because a consensus exists among the majority of people in society about certain values, beliefs and ideas, but there is still plenty of scope for resisting such 'top-down' pressures (Fiske, 1989). In this connection, Hall's (1980) 'encoding/decoding' reception model suggests viewers have the capacity to 'negotiate' or 'reject', as well as simply accept particular dominant meanings. This opens up the possibility at least that no journalist can be certain whether the story they have constructed will be 'read' uncritically or as intended by viewers.

These final remarks do not negate the idea that television news is a powerful source of information and journalists are in a privileged position in being able to define a wide range of meanings. Having stated that journalists themselves may be subject to the influence of certain dominant ideas, values and beliefs in society, I will now examine more closely what this means. To return to Hoggart's metaphor above, if those who produce the news constantly 'breathe' in the 'cultural air' of society around them, this assumes certain elements within that society are able to exert an influence over what kinds of issues are deemed important. Although Chapter 5 considers the way journalists engage with news sources in the specific context of news production methods, I will consider at this point how powerful, 'elite' groups may influence journalistic thinking ideologically.

Powerful Sources: Primary and Secondary Definers

Newsroom routines and such daily constraints as having to meet deadlines mean journalists tend to rely on familiar and routinely available sources. This may therefore lead to a privileged 'elite' of sources gaining a disproportionately large amount of journalistic attention, while a relatively large number of others are either overlooked or only used sparingly. As a consequence, the range of possible views,

opinions and simple 'facts' journalists are able to draw on when beginning the task of news story construction remains narrow and restricted. The issue I wish to consider now, therefore, is how these powerful groups manage to attain their position of dominance and then maintain it over time. Are journalists drawn to them routinely because they conform to some pre-existing notion of newsworthiness? Do editors and reporters simply associate particular people and organisations with a familiar range of issues or events?

Hall et al (1978) suggest that institutions such as Parliament or the law courts attract attention from journalists partly because they are known to produce events considered 'important' (also see Fishman, 1980), therefore causing reporters to place themselves in a position of easy access, such as the political correspondent who has access to certain committees and parliamentary papers (Negrine, 1994). But such highly visible groups also make themselves more 'noticeable' (McQuail, 2000) simply because of who they are or what they represent, for example the British Royal Family. Further, this dominant position of influence is self-perpetuating. Powerful sources are able to nurture and sustain their already powerful position and maintain their prominence in the minds of journalists. So, for example, Government ministers are more routinely sought out than 'ordinary' Members of Parliament; leaders of organisations and 'experts' are consulted ahead of more junior members; and representatives from groups considered ideologically extreme find it much harder to gain the attention of journalists than spokespeople from 'mainstream' institutions.

To use Hall et al's (1978) terminology, these powerful individuals and groups assume the status and role of 'primary definers'. They are able to determine (partially at least) which particular topics or issues are covered in the television news, as well as influencing the way journalists place emphasis on certain elements within stories that have been selected. This does not mean that television news simply 'mirrors' the definitions of the powerful since the process of construction, by definition, means any information gathered is subject to a degree of mediation. Indeed, television news journalists could produce a version of events that actively

sets out to counter dominant meanings and ideas. However, crucially, Hall et al believe this is not the case; that the news media reproduce the values, attitudes and interests of the powerful in a manner that is essentially unchallenging of the latter's ideological position. According to such logic, journalists therefore become 'secondary' definers of such values and interests.

According to such a theory, these powerful sources effectively define the framework and parameters in which discussion of a topic can take place, thus providing (within news content) the standard or benchmark against which opposing viewpoints may be compared and contrasted (and perhaps considered deviant). This is, of course, one of the essential features of dominant ideology, since it highlights the situation whereby groups whose values and ideas lie outside dominant ideology can only contest the definitions of the latter on the latter's terms. Further, evidence exists that certain powerful groups make themselves more attractive as news sources by the access they permit journalists. In his empirical study of American news, McManus (1994) adds weight to the 'primary definers' model with a detailed analysis of the 'market logic' which increasingly predominates in news selection decisions. Thus, in America at least, news organisations face an ever growing rise in competition from powerful groups like advertisers and corporate investors.

There are, though, a number of criticisms of the principle that certain individuals and groups are able to exert such levels of influence over journalists. In trying to bring these together, Allan (1999) begins with what amounts to a defence of the 'liberal democratic' position, whereby news is seen as performing the fundamental social role in keeping society informed of 'important' events and issues. This, as will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, appears to invest journalists with a certain degree of autonomy and immunity to outside pressures, revolving around the assumption, especially in television news, that they adhere to the principles of objectivity, fairness and balance¹. While this may be possibly true of individual journalists, it is arguably more useful, as Allan states, to attempt to develop Hall et al's (1978) notion of the primary definer rather than reject it altogether, based on an

idealised notion of what journalism is. One of the most notable contributions in this respect comes from Schlesinger & Tumber (1994), who offer six main critical points, each of which is discussed further by Allan (1999:71-78). I will look at each, briefly, in turn.

First, Hall et al's (1978) notion does not cater for a situation whereby different sources compete for attention from reporters. Drawing on the model suggested by Hallin (1986), Allan points out that the degree to which journalists seek out a range of different viewpoints at any given time, on any given issue, is directly linked to the strength of a prevailing consensus on that issue, at that time, within, say, a particular institution. Although outside the main focus of my study it is worth noting here how journalists seemed to privilege one particular set of views and lines of argument, largely uncritically, during the immediate aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attack in New York. Indeed, this may have led to a blurring of the boundaries between the demands of the professional journalist and feelings of the 'ordinary citizen', at least in America (Brennan & Duffy, 2003). It seems appropriate to add here that in the aftermath of the attack (principally in connection with the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq), the impact on news coverage in Britain, too, has been profound (Zelizer & Allan, 2002).

Second, Hall et al's argument, essentially speaking, does not take account of the increasingly sophisticated nature of 'news management' practised by certain official sources within institutions, notably within the political establishment, where the 'leaking' of documents and the passing of comments 'off the record' have become a major source of 'ready-made' news for journalists (Straw, 1993; McNair, 2003a). Third, there are those instances where a source of information, once seen by journalists in general as 'acceptable', becomes somehow discredited, and those same journalists proceed to attack it. The fundamental point here is that, in order for them to retain their power and influence, groups and institutions must work at sustaining their dominant position and not take this for granted. The fourth caveat placed on the basic 'primary/secondary definer' relationship is the ability of certain groups to

become so adept at gaining access to journalists that they begin to become established as an 'official source'.

The example Allan uses here is environmental campaigners, especially *Greenpeace*, who, through a series of celebrated stunts, have attracted media interest with a frequency that did not exist, say, thirty years ago. A more topical case of a group coming to the attention of the news media was in May 2004, when the pressure group *Fathers 4 Justice* hurled (what turned out to be) a harmless missile at Tony Blair during Prime Minister's Question Time². For this study, the pertinence of this kind of action is how far it leads to a shift in ideological attitudes and a change in selection priorities among journalists. Schlesinger & Tumber's fifth point, related to their first, is that, apart from notions about liberal pluralism, journalists are trained to question official news sources, to the extent that they may actively campaign against them. This statement suggests that journalists are not passive receivers of news material. Finally, account needs to be taken of the desire and ability of the sources themselves simply to be able to influence the news as a deliberate act. In other words, more attention needs to be paid by researchers into the proactive behaviour of news sources in this respect.

Another aspect I wish to briefly consider here relates to the comments of Watson (1998), who describes how the news agenda may be subject to the influence of the prevailing 'climate of opinion' in British society at any one time. In particular those who select, rank and construct news items may do so, partly at least, because they are able to sense the 'mood of the nation' on a specific issue. Watson discusses the possibility that alliances emerge between British people and the news media in general, especially in relation to party political matters, and this may affect the way news stories are selected and produced. In the same way, there may also be occasions when politicians and the public form a shared set of opinions about, say, the excesses of the news media itself. One key condition of this happening is that the public must be able to form views and opinions about particular issues from a source other than the news media, which is a difficult task (although perhaps becoming

easier with the increasing use of the Internet). Watson's comments here are interesting because they further illustrate the way journalists perceive 'interest' and 'importance'. If it is the case that a certain amount of information is derived from public opinion this must, by definition, be to do with subject matter. This is because it would only be possible for journalists to become aware of a widespread interest 'out there' through some form of public manifestation that a *specific* event or issue, say, is important.

Conclusion

This chapter has operated on the assumption that there is a direct relationship between powerful ideas and meanings, prevalent in society at any one time, and journalists. I have considered the nature of these ideas and meanings by focusing chiefly on dominant ideology as a collection of ideas and assumptions set and maintained by certain powerful groups, stressing how such ideas 'work' because journalists seem not to challenge or question them when selecting and constructing news; and because the majority of the news audience tend to accept them as 'normal' or 'natural' in the same way. To reiterate, as far as this thesis as a whole is concerned, what is most important is the impact of dominant ideology on story selection. If the 'economic base', as referred to above, and by implication the existence in society of powerful individuals and groups who are in a position to influence the kind of information journalists regard as newsworthy, is seen as the primary determining force in media production in general, it is important to consider the extent (if at all) to which news content is in any way being controlled from beyond the newsroom environment (as opposed to the strictly journalistic notion, say, of 'news value').

Hypothetically speaking, if an event or issue that satisfies various newsworthy criteria is not selected for the news schedule, or if individual elements within a story that has been selected are shaped and packaged in a way that foregrounds a particular

angle, could this be due to the 'wishes' of some powerful individual or group? Or is an editorial decision made to treat an event or story in particular manner because of the potential effects on audience ratings? Such issues would seem to revolve around the key question of how far journalists (along with more senior members of news organisations) can operate independently of dominant ideology. In this context, the next chapter looks at the specific influence of professionalism.

CHAPTER THREE

THE JOURNALIST AS A PROFESSIONAL

Introduction

Whereas the last chapter aimed to establish the broader cultural context in which television news production takes place, this chapter will turn its attention to the values, attitudes, thoughts and behaviour of journalists themselves, and examine how the notion of professionalism influences actions and decision making in the newsroom. What is the impact on journalistic behaviour of a set of professional ideas, assumptions and practices that may add up to an ideology in their own right (Hall, 1981; Schudson, 1996)? In addressing these issues, a central concern will be how far journalists are equipped with skills unique to the profession that enable them to pass judgement on what is important and newsworthy (Schlesinger, 1987; Allan, 1999; Hargreaves, 1999; Boyd, 2001; McNair, 2003b). It would seem that those working in British television news, estimated by the Journalism Training Forum to be between five and six thousand³, are in a position of great power to decide what is important and interesting from the audience's perspective. It is imperative therefore that the rationale for their behaviour within a professional context is thoroughly examined.

It is important to recognise the role of objectivity as a fundamental journalistic goal in the television news production process (Tuchman, 1972; Gunter, 1997). Along with the apparent belief by journalists that they know what the audience wants (Schlesinger, 1987), this chapter will look at what objectivity means to journalists each time they plan and construct an account of an event (Patterson, 1998). In this respect, whether or not it is possible to produce such accounts that are free of bias may be less important than the possibility that journalists believe objectivity is an attainable goal (Fiske, 1987); or at least that, by pursuing it, they are able to engage in more 'honest' types of reporting (Sigelman, 1973). While recognising the vital contribution made by the

Glasgow University Media Group (1976, 1985) to the study of news output, my main focus here is not whether certain parties are given either preferential or unfavourable treatment within news discourse. It is the way journalists appear to equate the production of accurate and truthful accounts (McNair, 1998) with the treatment of newsworthy information in an apparently balanced and impartial manner (MacGregor, 1997). Further, if the news is biased, this may simply be an inevitable consequence of the 'gatekeeping' process (Shoemaker, 1996; Watson, 1998) that inevitably leads to certain information being routinely selected, discounted or overlooked during the selection process. News is, after all, a "highly mediated product" at every level of its production (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976:1).

Characteristics of Journalism as a Profession

In order to provide contextual information for the discussion that follows, I will begin by looking briefly at the origins and development of journalism as a profession. Key to this was the establishment of certain basic principles that could act as a guide to editors and reporters. Initially, of course, these only applied to newspaper journalists, whereas in 2005 news is available via many different formats. In particular, the extensive diversification of outlets that has taken place within television news, the consequence of satellite and cable programming especially, as well as other providers such as the Internet, raises important questions about what it actually means to be a journalist. I will return to this later in this chapter.

According to Conboy (2004:109) the mid-nineteenth century represented a key moment in "establishment of journalists as a mainstream economic and political force". This was when newspapers for the first time gained a measure of financial stability and this meant a degree of political independence. Crucially, this was also the time when journalism as a profession was first equated with the idea of the 'fourth estate' (as distinct from the church, the judiciary and the commons) and with this came the assumption that journalists have a fundamental part to play scrutinising

the actions of the 'rich and powerful'. How far this led to true political independence is more debatable however, and Conboy suggests that, concomitant with this new role as public 'watchdogs', there was an immediate realisation among journalists that their own needs were best met by staying as close as possible to the 'centres of power'.

In other words, the emergence of the 'professional ideal' was accompanied by a certain degree of interdependence between journalism and the state. The Victorian era was also the time when the first news agencies, such as Reuters, were formed, which meant a more controlled and consistent flow of potential news. Also, the combination of new technological advances and the need to adopt a 'respectable' house style, based on the principle of objectivity, led to an increased emphasis on presentational aspects of news. All this, Conboy believes, meant news content began to homogenise. It also meant that the particular angle taken by the report grew in significance, as a means to offer a version of events distinctive from commercial competitors.

The birth of the BBC in 1922 saw the relationship between journalists and the state take on a new dimension, adding tension and complexity to the relationship between journalists and the British Government. Now for the first time, impartiality in reporting became an official requirement of a news organisation and, from the beginning, the BBC sought to present an image of being neutral and balanced to public and politicians alike. In contrast, the press was – and was seen as – biased, a manifest difference between newspapers and the broadcast media. The sense of the BBC providing news that was more factually objective was further emphasised by the immediacy with which it could provide information. This particular quality of television news helped it emerge, by the end of the 1950s, as the dominant provider of news in Britain. That decade also saw the arrival of ITV, in 1955, which signalled a restructuring of "the awkward collaboration between journalism and the state in the form of the BBC and its public service role" (Conboy, 2004:198). From that point on the style and content of television news would reflect a less deferential attitude to

'elites' within society. This is a trend that has continued to the present day, in all forms of news, to the point where the democratic process may have been undermined. As McNair puts it:

Politics has [now] become, at least in part, spectacle and entertainment, and coverage of it is increasingly shaped by a sometimes uneasy blend of public service and commercial criteria, as the information marketplace has become steadily more competitive.

(McNair, 2000:171)

For journalists themselves, the greater scepticism towards politicians and other 'elites' raises a number of wider issues relating to professionalism. From its inception ITV's news arm, ITN, utilised a more aggressive interviewing style with presenters such as Robin Day adopting a much less deferential attitude than had previously been the case. This tradition carries through to today where the studio interview is now almost defined by the adversarial approach. As McNair (2000:97) discusses, it is a matter of debate how far the aggressive style of John Humphreys and Jeremy Paxman, or the increasing preference for "polemic over argument" (Keeble, 2001:6), ultimately benefits the democratic process. Matters, of course, came to a head in 2003 with the fallout from the recent Iraq war and the death of Dr David Kelly, culminating in the Hutton Enquiry (see endnote 1). This was a particularly dramatic example of the tension that can sometimes arise between Government and the BBC, and the occasional need down the years for the Corporation to modify its output in light of political pressure (Born: 2005:464). Moreover, the whole issue raises important questions about the journalist's role as a defender of democracy. It has fuelled wider debate about the profession's "core practices and the expectations of its public" (Conboy, 2004:127).

On another level, in terms of individual journalists, it remains to be seen how far investigative reporting (Bromley, 2005:317) will be inhibited in the future. Indeed, the issue of how far the profession should be constrained in its basic function of selecting and reporting news may be seen as one of the key ethical considerations

that remain central to professional practice. According to Sanders (2003:29) the last twenty years has seen a wide range of controversial issues arise with regard to journalistic activity: “deception, invasions of privacy, treatment of suffering, payment of criminals, the use of sexually explicit material”. It is worth adding here that, while, in theory at least, *all* journalists must pay heed to the various rules and regulations laid down in documents such as the NUJ Code of Conduct⁴, most disputes that arise are to do with press rather than television news coverage (see later in this chapter).

One ethical question that is highly relevant to television news, however, is the impact of commercialism. The most obvious tensions here, once again, tend to originate in the press, such as the story cited by Sanders of a local newspaper editor who vetoed a front page picture of a black man for fear that the predominantly white readership would be alienated (Sanders, 2003:27). This is another way of saying that the need for profits influences attitudes to news value. More pertinent to my study is how far such market considerations will impact on television news in the future. The answer here remains uncertain in an age of broadcast fragmentation and greater competition between news programmes (Fanthome, 2003). It remains to be seen if the apparent trend away ‘hard news’ to ‘soft news’, and the apparent trend towards “a dull uniformity of coverage” (Keeble, 2001:8) will continue in British television news output.

I will now highlight some basic personal characteristics of journalists. The primary aim here is to establish in basic terms some profile of the kind of individuals who tend to inhabit the profession and I am not concerned with social background, gender or ethnicity; or in journalists as individual personalities. In order to provide an overall picture of who is producing the television news it is worth noting, however, that there has been a steady rise in recent years in the number of female journalists (Rudin & Ibbotson, 2002), so that, in its national survey of British journalists (http://www.skillset.org/uploads/pdf/asset_262.pdf?1. Accessed 24 August 2004),

the Journalism Training Forum (2002) found the numbers were almost equal between men and women across the profession as a whole. The survey also discovered, however, that the overwhelming majority of those inside the profession remained white. In terms of qualifications, 98% of entrants to the profession in 2002 were graduates, suggesting that formal educational training is becoming the dominant way to teach journalistic skills (Harrison, 2000; Purdey, 2001).

As Rudin & Ibbotson (2002) discuss, just under half of journalists in the mid-1990s who had a degree had graduated within an Arts subject. In stark contrast only three percent were from a science background while five percent had a business qualification. Although there may be greater parity along gender lines, at least in 2002, these figures suggest a bias in favour of certain types of people. Further evidence of this is in journalists' political leanings. Here, the study found a high proportion of journalists seem to take a broadly liberal or 'left-of-centre' position, which may, in turn, lead to a degree of consensus in their attitude to various types of (potentially newsworthy) subject matter. For example, many appear to be suspicious of figures in so-called authority, especially politicians in general and the Government in particular, and to adopt a generally antipathetical position when dealing with those who have power and wealth (though note my comments in Chapter 2 about the media response to September 11th and its immediate aftermath). By acting as watchdogs and probing into and reporting on the statements and claims of those in authority, or by simply being present at public meetings and courts of law, journalists believe they are helping to keep members of the public informed about 'important' decisions. As McNair states, the news media in the twentieth century came "to represent for most people, most of the time, their primary source of political information" (McNair, 2003a:51).

It seems pertinent at this point to ask what journalists are trying to achieve when they scrutinize politicians and other 'powerful' and 'elite' figures in society. Is this solely due to the kind of noble aims that go hand in hand with the 'liberal democratic' position? Should journalists continually strive to present the audience with high levels

of 'quality' public information (Costera Meijer, 2003)? Or are members of the profession driven by other, specifically journalistic motives? Here, John Hartley suggests that the actions of those who select and produce news are, to some degree, fuelled by an occupational ideology that sees it as conflict (Hartley, 2000:40). This raises the possibility that some journalists at least are driven by a desire to both pursue stories of a negative nature and treat information in a way that emphasizes its negative aspects. Hartley's view here is that the profession regards as 'heroic' those journalists who approach the task of interviewing as one of combat. He believes that, for example, there is a tendency among foreign correspondents to roam the world seeking out violence and conflict. Hartley's view here could be extended to the way British television news reports political controversy and perhaps here, too, there is a desire among journalists to stir up controversy and uncover the perceived failings of various politicians and other 'elite' figures. Indeed, such behaviour may be steadily increasing (Lloyd, 2002). In this sense, television journalism, notably the studio-based interview, appears to regard news as a form of combat (Paxman, 1994).

Other aspects of what Hartley (2000) argues, however, seem to highlight a degree of inconsistency and contradiction among the views of many journalists, especially when certain findings are scrutinised more closely. For instance, if there is a tendency to challenge society's powerful, especially political, structures, how far do journalists attempt to fundamentally undermine them? Were Hansen et al (1998:35) correct in asserting that the self image of the profession, as "independent watchdogs challenging government and powerful vested interests" is a romanticised one? Related to this is the question of which particular aspects of dominant ideology are being challenged and exactly in what manner. When Rudin & Ibbotson (2002) found that that only three percent of journalists saw their role as actively seeking to influence public life, the question that follows is where the desire to challenge authority comes from. Could this be more the result of wishing to seek out problems and controversy, as Hartley suggests above?

While journalists may need to be able to mix and engage with a wide cross section of

people, in a variety of situations, they also see *themselves* as “distinct from other groups in that they retain their independence, distance and detachment” from them (Rudin & Ibbotson, 2002:5). One important element of this, White (1999) argues, is that journalists see themselves as pulling together as a team. This, in turn, raises the question, which I will bear in mind in my own research, of how much news story construction is the product of group activity as opposed to reporters especially working with independence and autonomy. Indeed, it is the view of one senior television journalist that, rather than celebrate cooperation, some journalists at least are driven by a fiercely competitive instinct. John Simpson, the BBC Editor of World Affairs, while agreeing that news organisations benefit greatly from teamwork, lists a number of examples where television news journalists have allowed competitive rivalry to override other concerns, and the impact this has had on story quality (Simpson, 2002: 274-275).

Having briefly outlined some of the main characteristics of journalists as people, I now turn to the type of qualities deemed appropriate and desirable by the profession itself. On its current website, the Broadcasting Journalism Training Council specifies three essential qualities for any aspiring journalist: “determination to be a journalist, thirst for knowledge, a genuine interest in news and current affairs and the ability to write well” (<http://www.bjtc.org.uk/bjtc-faqs.htm>. Accessed 30 July 2004). But what does this mean in practice? Is it an essential feature of news production that journalists write an account of events that is clear and concise in order to appeal to the audience? If so, can they do this any more effectively than people outside the profession? Here, Boyd (2001), writing with journalists in mind, insists that those entering the profession must have a ‘nose’ for news (see next chapter) and that they need to retain a sense of curiosity about events and issues at all times. This may reflect a degree of consensus among those involved with training about the importance, journalistically, of inquisitiveness in the gathering of newsworthy material. But, like the ability to write ‘well’, does it necessarily imply some unique talent, which only journalists are capable of?

A vital question, then, is whether “journalism is an innate art, impossible to teach and requiring inborn talent and experience rather than training” (Golding & Elliott, 1979:179). The view of Ian Hargreaves (1999), former BBC director of News and Current Affairs, is that “[T]here are no qualifications for being a journalist, because in a democracy everyone is a journalist...because...everyone has a right to communicate a fact or a point of view” (<http://www.cf.ac.uk/jomec/issues99/hargreavesmain.html>. Accessed 3 December 2002). Such a perspective questions the notion of journalism being a craft, open to a privileged minority of people with innate skills. Essentially it means that if every human being has a ‘story to tell’, then all they need, in theory, is a means of communication and, before that, the technical knowledge to make use of it.

Similarly, although he acknowledges that many journalists would disagree, Ward (2002:29) claims that journalism is not “some higher art form”. Accepting that certain journalists possess more of a natural aptitude (for example, to act with speed and autonomy and, above all, write well), Ward insists that the fundamentals of ‘core journalism’ can be taught to a wide range of people. These core aspects relate more specifically to the construction of a story than the more general attributes discussed above, and are worth noting. Journalists, he believes, must be able to identify information that will attract and interest the audience, then collect all material necessary to tell a story, further narrowing this down to the most salient points and, finally, present these as “effectively as possible” (Ward, 2002:30). Both Hargreaves and Ward point to professional ability being the amalgamation of a set of skills that could, in theory, be learnt. The exercising of news judgement by journalists should not be equated with some special or sacred form of knowledge and, rather than being different from the rest of society, reporters and editors may perform a task that anyone could learn to do (Tuchman, 1999:303-304), although, with the increasing importance of online news provision, Singer (2003) questions how long current definitions of ‘journalism’ can remain valid.

Indirectly related to this, perhaps, is the question of how far journalism should be taught as an academic subject. Here, de Burgh (2003) argues that journalists should be

encouraged to develop a greater conceptual understanding of routine practices and decision making. He advocates a type of training which produces a more rounded set of attitudes within a profession “that is often intellectually narrowing, even if it offers wide experiences” (de Burgh, 2003:4). The way prospective journalists are tutored could offer more than a basic simulation of the newsroom and the ‘typical’ working day. Indeed, de Burgh believes that training should aim to equip journalists with an ability to evaluate the meaning and implication of academic research. So, for example, trainees, in addition learning about key areas like media law and ethical considerations (Keeble, 2001), could also be encouraged to reflect in depth on how news values are rooted within a particular cultural context. Although my study is not especially concerned with training as a discrete subject, the implications of de Burgh’s comments here are of great interest within the wider context of how far journalists feel the impulse to reflect on what they do.

So far I have looked at the type of people who become journalists and the basic qualities needed to become one. Implicit in the discussion has been the question of how a relatively small number of people, who may or may not be representative of the British population, come to have such faith in themselves and their profession, to be able to, first, select the most important stories of the day, then produce accounts of these that claim to be truthful and accurate. I believe there are two main reasons why this is so. Most important of all is the journalistic notion of objectivity as a goal which, if attained, somehow confirms to journalists the validity and veracity of their reporting. Indeed much of the remainder of this chapter will be concerned with this. However, first, I will investigate the extent to which journalists perceive the audience and ask how far they believe they know what viewers want and are interested in. Accepting the possibilities of anyone becoming a journalist, discussed above, just how do those who produce the news come to believe so firmly in their ability to seek out newsworthy information, when those outside the profession cannot do so? I will turn here in large part to Philip Schlesinger’s (1987) study of the BBC in the late 1970s.

Professionalism and the Audience

Schlesinger poses the question that if journalists believe they have the special capacity to 'know' an important news story, and then what a 'suitable angle' is, how much do they need to take notice of the audience at all? At the heart of his findings is the observation that no link exists between those production routines in the newsroom (which provide a framework for much journalistic activity) and the actual viewers the programme is aimed at. This is exacerbated by the journalistic tendency to function within a 'private world'. It is this "structural separation of, and consequent social distance between, the communicator and those ostensibly communicated with" (Schlesinger, 1987:106) that leads him to ask how those who produce news output take account of the relatively unknown audience's needs and wants? His conclusion, essentially, is that journalists achieve this in a manner they themselves find unproblematic, and therefore satisfactory, by adhering to the powerful notion of '*professional competence*'. His study found little evidence of any concern about whether journalists were communicating effectively with the mass audience. But, in contrast to this, there was much concern about how well the 'product' looked as a professional piece of work and what its impact might be on other journalists, key sources and highly specialised sections of the overall audience.

Throughout production, the audience in general remained an abstraction, only encountered on an ad hoc basis through letters, random encounters in public and occasional surveys. In this respect, Schlesinger cited the BBC's own News Guide of the day, contrasting its direct instruction to journalists not to become isolated and not to write just for other journalists, with his own findings suggesting many of those producing news stories do so for the editor ahead of the audience. In general, he found that journalists regard members of the public who contact the newsroom with a certain degree of suspicion, even derision. At best such audience views were regarded as representative of specific groups in society or the product of particularly vociferous individuals.

Consequently, Schlesinger found journalists relying heavily “on occupational knowledge and the cognitive support of the organisation” (Schlesinger, 1987:108). In this sense professionalism equates to the means by which journalists are able to justify making decisions about audience needs and wants. Within the newsroom itself, he found constant discussions taking place about story details and appropriate angles to take on them. Being ‘professional’ implied certain forms of behaviour both inside and beyond the newsroom that were supposed to equip journalists with ‘higher’ levels of knowledge, both quantitatively and qualitatively, than other members of society. A key part of this was the “immersion in newsworthy facts” (Schlesinger, 1987: 109). Thus journalists felt the need always to be ‘working’, even when on holiday, constantly keeping abreast of other news forms, maintaining a wide general knowledge through reading and other forms of enquiry, and immersing themselves in ‘newsworthy facts’ at every opportunity, with everyone they encountered.

Golding & Elliott (1979) also note the extent to which journalists ensure they consume a range of news forms, by which they mean the press and radio. There are two main reasons for this. First, the fact that a news story is being covered elsewhere ensures some sense of agreement about basic news selection. Second, by such behaviour, journalists are promoting the tendency towards homogeneity in news output. All this seems to have two important consequences. First, journalists believe that the adoption of such professional attitudes and behaviour legitimises their actions and decisions, for example, in deciding an event has ‘news value’. Second, it contributes to the insular nature of the journalistic environment in terms of the profession as a whole.

Paradoxically, however, it is the perceived interests of viewers that may be a primary factor in journalists’ own beliefs about what is ‘interesting’ and important’. One interesting aspect of journalists’ behaviour in this connection is the extent to which they newsroom monitor the output of other news programmes and other news producers in general. This, according to Schlesinger, is an indicator of the competitive nature of news production, but it also serves to confirm to journalists that they have

made the 'correct' decision in terms of news selection. If a range of different news producers appear to regard a particular story as important and newsworthy, then it must indeed be so. It appears, in this respect, that the style and format of news coverage by rival news producers may be more important to journalists than the relative audience shares, although the basic desire to broadcast a new story first is still a primary motivation (Schlesinger, 1987:111).

In relation to Schlesinger's findings, then, certain points can be made about journalistic perceptions of the audience. First, they appear to believe that a combination of professionalism, 'commitment', experience and "immersion in the world of news" (Schlesinger, 1987:116) leads them to be able to discriminate in selecting material viewers will find interesting. Allied to this is the judgment made by journalists of relative importance and here Schlesinger identified a hierarchy of importance relating to how far culturally and geographically events took place in relation to Britain, and how much 'human interest' was involved. However, the way journalists articulated such different levels of perceived significance to viewers was to apply relative value to different subjects, or to quote maxims such as 'one home story being worth five foreign ones' (Schlesinger, 1987:118). Above all, Schlesinger's various conclusions about journalistic behaviour point strongly to them believing *they* are able to decide for the audience what the latter will find 'interesting' or 'important'.

Another consideration here is the relationship between professionally-derived judgments on news content and journalists' assumptions about what the audience knows about that content. This is important, Schlesinger suggests, for two reasons: first, it enables decisions to be made on when a story has run its course (because viewers are assumed to no longer be interested); second, it influences the amount of background information included. With regard to the second of these points, there may be a routine desire by journalists to keep such contextual information to a minimum partly because of time constraints, but also because, rather than continue to add to an existing story, journalists prefer to seek out new ones. This, in turn, may be due to a fundamental journalistic inclination to 'become bored' with an existing story

and then impute such feelings on the audience. In other words, journalists may ascribe feelings of boredom to viewers because they, the journalists themselves, wish to move to a new story. This is a very important point with regard to this study. It suggests journalists make news with their own interests at the centre of decision making, but do so under the official banner of providing what the audience wants.

Finally, BBC journalists appear sensitive to their particular role in providing information deemed to be of 'public service' (Scannell, 1989). In this respect certain subject matter may be included partly because there is an obligation to do so, the most notable example (until recently, and certainly when Schlesinger conducted his study) being the conflict in Northern Ireland. With stories such as this the necessity to provide information on a regular basis effectively overrides those journalistic tendencies referred to above to move to a new story because viewers have lost interest in it. Indeed, in this particular example, viewer opinions may be ignored as it is believed they 'must be told' about events. The implication here is that professional behaviour seems to treat particular subject matter differently because it is seen as fundamentally more important. Put another way, journalists may, from time to time, decide viewers should be told about certain events and issues based on ideologically determined notions of what matters in a democracy.

Overall, Schlesinger's findings point to journalists having great faith in their apparently unique ability to 'know' their audience and be able to deliver to them the most important stories of the day. Moreover, it appears that the same audience is content to let this situation continue, despite the theoretical possibility at least that the professional skills needed to make selection decisions could be acquired by anyone. A very interesting question then arises. If individual journalists are so potentially powerful, how far do news organisations seek to exert control over them? Specifically in terms of news story production, how do producers and editors deal with issues of journalistic autonomy? As the following discussion will hope to show, there are various reasons why structures exist to maintain manageable levels of journalistic independence, not least the commercial imperative highlighted in the last chapter.

However, it will also be seen that one key factor in all this is the adherence by journalists to the rules of objectivity in the treatment of information. In this sense, subjectivity is effectively kept in check by the professional faith in objectivity. Indeed, it may even be subsumed within a greater professional desire to 'serve' the public, and a sense that journalistic practice amounts to a "disinterested vocation" (Golding & Elliott, 1979:177).

The Relationship between Professionalism and Objectivity

Writing about American news, Solaski (1999) discusses the importance of a professional code in guiding journalistic thoughts and actions. The basis of his argument is that, because 'news' in its raw form is unpredictable and uncontrollable, and because journalists face constant needs to meet broadcast deadlines, heads of newsroom organisations must allow those beneath them relatively high levels of autonomy. The practical issue then arises, of how these individual journalists are controlled in their day-to-day work, both in selection and construction of news stories. In his view, a system of elaborate rules and regulations would be impractical and overly bureaucratically inefficient. In addition, one aim of having detailed rules of a prescriptive nature is that they aim to control unpredictable events, when the whole essence of 'news' is that it is meant to be new and unexpected (Solaski, 1999:309).

Instead, it is far more practicable to introduce a system of dominant norms and values that are not challenged by journalists. *In this sense, professionalism makes the use of discretion predictable*, by establishing guidelines for behaviour. It therefore serves as a vital function for news organisations because it allows them to exert a measure of control over the behaviour of reporters and editors and it works because the latter appear to be willing to adhere to certain 'professional norms'. These are made manifest as newsroom policy and appear to have the effect of limiting journalists' 'discretionary behaviour' without causing them to challenge them.

Although newsroom organisations attempt to train journalists on-the-job, such training is kept at relative low levels, and this is helped by the increasing number of new entrants to the profession having had training on journalism courses. However, once they have joined the newsroom, journalists are further controlled by more specific internal policy. Each news organisation will have certain standards and norms to guide their employees, such as the BBC's Producers Guidelines, all aimed at controlling potentially discretionary behaviour. As Solaski puts it:

“Just as news professionalism can be seen as a trans-organisational control mechanism, the idiosyncratic news policies of individual news organisations can be seen as an *intra*-organisational control mechanism. Together, these two control mechanisms direct the actions of journalists”.

(Solaski, 1999:313)

Professionalism also helps establish a ladder up which journalists can climb. This raises the key question, discussed in the last chapter, of how much the ideals of the profession should be allowed to predominate over the basic imperative of making a profit. Here, Solaski argues that news organisations aim to allow individual journalists scope for professional advancement while at the same time keeping them removed from the power hierarchy of the organisation. In other words, the success and reputation of a journalist usually depends on their professional achievements, rather than material success in increasing the organisations' profits. Such a view, if Solaski is correct, implies that journalism depends on standards that are divorced from commercial imperatives; a sort of 'professional purity' and “part of the romantic lore of the profession” (Solaski, 1999:313). It is the existence of a professional ladder that makes all this possible.

Solaski believes that the consequence of both adhering to a professional code, and being subject to a degree of regulation, is that journalists tend to produce stories that broadly conform to those values and ideas enshrined in dominant ideology. Professionalism may also prove beneficial to news organisations by making journalistic criticisms of capitalist enterprise less likely. At the same time, the

possibility remains that, to some degree, professionalism can remain independent of individual news organisations and journalists are able to maintain a degree of freedom from “executive control” (Elliott, 1977:152) which allows them to behave in accordance with the ‘liberal democratic’ tradition. Although internal newsroom policies are tailored to the organisation, the purpose of those policies is common across the sector. Journalists do not seem to see professionalism or newsroom policy as a constraint on their work. The boundaries of working practice it creates allow creativity and do not dictate specific actions; instead they provide a framework that is restricted enough so that journalists can be trusted to act in the wider interests of the organisation.

These comments are intended to illustrate how professionalism effectively allows journalists to act as individuals, but still be under the overall control of the news organisation they work for, even the whole news production in general as defined by common norms and practices. In other words, journalistic subjectivity is allowed to exist but is ultimately restricted. On the other hand, the journalistic goal of objectivity seems to be of paramount importance when seeking out ‘facts’ and reporting them in as balanced and fair a way as possible. Implicit in this is the idea that journalists are able to seek out facts from all sides of a story. Although in television journalism, certain reporters have argued for what has become known as the ‘journalism of attachment’ (Bell, 1995), the majority appear to rely on objectivity as the foundation for ‘good journalism’; the safety net that allows them to defend what they report on against accusations of untruthfulness or bias. Objectivity is therefore one of the most powerful features of news production and it is now necessary to consider what it means in more depth.

It is perhaps late in this study to be offering a definition of journalism, but I wish to provide one at this point in order to illustrate certain fundamental characteristics inherent in all news story construction and, crucially, to highlight one of the key contradictions of journalism – that an account written by a reporter or editor is also supposed to be ‘truthful’. According to Brian McNair, journalistic output is:

any *authored* text, in written, audio or visual form, which *claims* to be (ie. is presented to its audience as) a *truthful* statement about, or record of, some *hitherto unknown* (new) feature of the *actual, social* world [italics in original text].

McNair, 1998:4)

The basic requirement that journalists should be able to 'write well' only serves to highlight the importance of constructing a news story narrative that is clear and appealing to an audience. I do not intend discussing here the mechanical structure of an individual news story (Bell, 1991; Lewis, 1991). Indeed, it is important to stress that my concern in this entire study is the way narrative structure provides a measure of understanding of the selection priorities lying behind it. This is explored again in Chapter 5 where the specific aim will be to relate story construction to the way newsrooms are organised to privilege certain types of information. In other words, while key aspects of television news production, such as allocating reporters to specific areas of subject responsibility, may cause them to regard events and issues in a particular way, the focus of the discussion below is the relationship between story construction and professional behaviour.

In terms of the style in which information is structured within news reports, McNair believes it is vital audiences maintain the view that journalistic output is a unique form of narrative. It must retain its own specific identity. Indeed, the profession as a whole needs to be seen by 'outsiders' as different from other cultural forms because this helps maintain the audience perception that journalists provide them with an essential service. The style and content of television news is not so easily open to the kind of negotiation found in other cultural forms such as the arts or education, because it depends on its very existence in being able to appear trustworthy and reliable. In this respect questions of how interesting the audience find different news stories, or stylistic considerations about whether it should aim to entertain as well as inform, are subordinate to the overriding necessity that it presents viewers with the most recent 'facts'; that those watching and listening believe they are being offered a slice of the reality of 'what happened'. If news content did not appear to depict or represent some

essential 'truth', it would cease to have any meaning or value. It would no longer be a viable provider of 'factual' information.

Nevertheless, how far any journalist can report the truth of an event or occurrence is a difficult question. According to Golding & Elliott,

...the news attempts to be a comprehensive account of significant events in the world. Yet also, being finite, it has to be selective. Part of journalism's task is the intelligent selection of events in the world as newsworthy and the application to them of criteria of importance and priority. Much therefore is omitted, and selection necessitates partiality and the intrusion of personal judgment and organisational need. The second dilemma derives from the commitment of news to convey objectivity. If news is restricted to the brief narration of unadorned reports it is reduced to a meaningless collage of separate facts; unrelated, pointless and random. If it expands to include explanation and background it introduces meaning with the inevitable intrusion of opinion and tendentiousness.

(Golding & Elliott, 1979:17)

One immediate problem here is what truthfulness in news reporting is being measured against? This relates to questions of the nature of reality that I cannot pursue in this study in any depth. However, McNair (1998:73) suggests that what journalists actually perceive as 'reality' can be seen as existing on three levels: the natural world; the world as perceived by people in general; and the world as reported by certain people given licence to do so, in this case journalists who have been given such 'permission' as a result of the trust placed in them by the audience. However, as Tickle (2001:90-93) discusses, being told about an event can never be the same as actually experiencing it. This suggests that no journalistic account of an event, no matter how carefully constructed, no matter how well it holds up against alternative corroborative evidence, and no matter how reliable the sources, can ever be a truly accurate reflection of what happened. In other words, news can never 'hold up a mirror' the world, although it may be the case that training and experience provides journalists with unique abilities to tap into the most salient facts of an event. It could equally be argued (see Chapter 2) that the way journalists set about selecting

newsworthy material is to some degree determined by various common attitudes and beliefs across society, which is a key issue for the next chapter.

At this point, though, I wish to look at the relationship between the journalistic claim that they are able to report events in an accurate and truthful manner and the pursuit of objectivity as an attainable goal. Indeed this may go to the heart of what journalists believe to be ‘good journalism’; that by adhering to certain rules regarding impartiality and balance, they are able to access the essence of a story and present these to the audience. In this respect, Tuchman (1999) discusses the relationship between newsroom behaviour as a form of ‘ritualistic practice’ and the way journalists, arguably, use objectivity as a defence mechanism when challenged on professional assumptions about accuracy and truth. She believes that journalists,

...must make immediate decisions concerning validity, reliability and ‘truth’ in order to meet the problems imposed by the nature of his [sic] task – processing information called news, a depletable consumer product made every day. Processing news leaves no time for reflexive epistemological examination. Nonetheless, the newsmen need some working notion of objectivity to minimise the risks imposed by deadlines, libel suits, and superiors’ reprimands.

(Tuchman, 1999:298)

Tuchman found that journalists rely on certain ‘taken for granted’ procedures to minimise accusations of bias and inaccuracy. These procedures are based on the professional principle that, as long as certain rules of behaviour are adhered to, especially with regard to the way sources are dealt with (Willis, 1991) and stories constructed, journalists should be able to produce stories that are accurate, truthful and fair. Moreover, the profession will be in a strong position to defend itself against accusations of bias.

Another angle from which to approach this key issue of objectivity is that journalists remain detached from the subject matter on which news stories are based. Arguably, it is the self belief among journalists that they can routinely produce fair and impartial versions of events (say) which underpins the professional claim to both ‘know’ which

events and issues are most important and interesting from the audience's point of view, and also relay 'facts' and information accurately and 'truthfully'. As Gunter (1987) reminds the reader, television news retains its position as the most trustworthy source of information for the audience largely because the latter regard it as being more objective, impartial and balanced in its portrayal of people and events than other news forms, especially the press. So just how far can journalists remove themselves from the material they are reporting on? Is McNair correct when stating that there is "no neutral, value-free perspective from which the journalist could observe and report" (McNair, 1998:71)?

Gunter (1997) suggests the way news is reported falls between the two extremes. On the one hand, there are those accounts that aim to simply relay the 'hard' information about a given situation, for example, the value of the pound against other currencies; while, on the other, there are the great majority of news items which have been constructed as a narrative, where journalists have effectively been given licence to interpret the material gathered. The crucial question then arises of whether such interpretation amounts to opinion that is motivated by 'ideological preference' (Hall, 1980), or is the simple product of the selection process as a result of the privileging of certain types of subject matter during initial selection, then the subsequent decision-making by individual reporters on what to include, emphasise and leave out in the final broadcast. Indeed, as Gunter suggests, it may be that the most significant journalistic actions, in terms of creating an account of events that is biased, are the decisions they make that lead to certain information being excluded from a news story.

One theoretical explanation of how this might work in practice is the metaphor of the journalist as 'gatekeeper'. In essence, this is a model designed to illustrate the flow of information, from the initial point of selection, through to the final news item seen by the audience. It was initially developed in the 1950s in the context of newspapers and focused on the role of the editor as an individual with the power either to accept or reject different news stories. The basic idea was subsequently modified to allow for the decision-making that took place in the process of news story construction, and not

just during initial selection (Watson, 1998). More recently Shoemaker & Reese (1996) have developed the notion to incorporate a range of features of news production: the complexities of the relationship between journalists and news sources, commercial considerations and, perhaps most important of all to my thesis, the fact that journalists are involved in *continuous* selection decisions throughout the entire news production process.

Although in essence a simple idea, the 'gatekeeping' metaphor is potentially a valuable research tool. While it may not explain the complexities of news construction, only the issues surrounding selection of information (Schudson, 1996), the model does highlight the power journalists have "to give or withhold access to different voices in society" (McQuail, 2000:277). It also provides a structural framework in which to assess the power individual journalists have as trusted professionals to autonomously decide what to include and omit from news story content, visually, aurally and in the choice of language reporters use to describe an issue or event (MacGregor, 1997:49-50). Further, the issue of how much or how little information to admit through the 'gate' pertains to journalistic decisions on "how wide or how narrow a context to set each item or programme" (Birt & Jay, 1975). This is an important point because it relates to the different ways in which information can be relayed to the audience. It also pertains to the important issue of story length, which is a key factor in determining how much information can be included beyond the 'basic facts'.

What is more difficult to ascertain perhaps is how far subjectivity in news content is simply the result of a routine journalistic desire to construct a clear and intelligible narrative, and how much it stems from more overt, ideologically motivated decision-making (Tracy, 1978). As outlined in the Introduction to this study, both the BBC and the commercial channels are obliged by law to report on events and issues in as impartial a manner as possible (although see Endnote 1 and remarks on the 'David Kelly affair'). Indeed, this lies at the heart of all BBC output, as laid out in its Charter and Producers' Guidelines (http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/policies/producer_guides/. Accessed 20 August 2004). However, as discussed in the last chapter, there are certain

exceptions to this, notably cases of national security and with subject matter deemed especially sensitive, such as the Northern Ireland crisis (Annan, 1977).

More generally, since December 2003, all television news output has come under the regulatory powers of the Office of Communications (Ofcom). This lays down guidelines fairness and balance, and encourages plurality in programme content, and, in the case of the commercial channels, replaced the Independent Television Commission (in force at the time of my newsroom visits) (<http://www.ofcom.org.uk/>. Accessed 20 August 2004). While it is important to recognise the important role such bodies play in guiding journalistic behaviour my analysis, it must be stressed, is not directly concerned with bias or whether certain individual and parties are being represented fairly. Although I of course recognise the crucial significance to understanding television news content made by the Glasgow University Media Group (Eldridge, 1995, 2000), I prefer to see their importance to this study in establishing so concisely and cogently that television news is subject to mediation at every level of its production, (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976:1).

Conclusion

The main concern of this chapter has been to discuss how far journalists possess (or believe they possess) unique skills in being able to determine newsworthiness. This is an important consideration since those working in television news possess great power in being able to select those stories deemed 'most important' on any given day. In seeking to examine how this comes to be the case I presented a general outline of the types of people who tend to enter journalism, along with the kind qualities expected by the profession itself. The aim here was to try to establish if certain general types of attitude are prevalent among journalists in the way they relate to society around them. In this respect, there may be a tendency to want to question the actions and behaviour of certain powerful groups, such as politicians, even to adopt a fundamentally

antipathetical approach to them. This, however, needs to be seen in light of the wider influence on journalists of those ideas, values and beliefs embraced by dominant ideology, as discussed in Chapter 2.

There seem to be two reasons why the profession sees itself as having qualities that set them aside from other groups. One, as Schlesinger (1987) found in his study of BBC news, is that they feel they 'know' their audience, as a result of the knowledge and experience accumulated on the job and, increasingly, through graduate training. The second crucial factor here is the journalistic goal of objectivity. Although this may be impossible to achieve, what matters is that those who select and produce television news believe it can be. By seeking to represent subject matter impartially and in a balanced manner, editors and reporters appear to believe they can reproduce the 'facts' of an event or situation accurately and truthfully. This belief, in turn, is bolstered by official legislation and guidelines such as the BBC Charter and Ofcom. It is further strengthened by collaboration between journalists within the newsroom. Collectively, the way professionalism appears to 'work', in acting as a guide and framework for journalists to operate in, allows them a relatively high degree of freedom and autonomy. The extent to which journalists do work independently of editorial control is an issue I will be examining closely in my own newsroom observation.

CHAPTER FOUR

NEWSWORTHINESS AND SELECTION CRITERIA

Introduction

Although the values, ideas, beliefs and attitudes rooted in dominant ideology and the demands and routines of professionalism may together exert a powerful influence on the way journalists work, neither may provide a full explanation as to how they come to decide on story selection. Journalists still need a means through which to ascribe 'value' and 'importance' to each individual event and issue they encounter and order them in terms of hierarchical importance. Further, once a story has been selected, the reporter allocated to the task of constructing it must decide which particular visual images and words to include, and prepare an appropriate script. The last chapter made the point that individual journalists may have a high degree of autonomy as 'gatekeepers' in this respect, but did not explore how such decision-making actually takes place.

In attempting to better understand how journalists make selection choices, I am interested in the degree to which each one actively engages with a set of criteria that can be articulated. Do journalists carry round with them a mental checklist of specific factors to look for in any given event or issue, or is the process of selection less systematic and based on 'gut feeling' or familiarity with particular types of subject matter? To examine these questions in more depth, I wish to foreground Galtung & Ruge's (1965) theory of selection criteria, derived from a large-scale content analysis of Swedish newspapers. Despite being based on foreign news stories only, and being nearly forty years old, their typology of twelve factors, which need to be present in an event for it to attract the attention of journalists, has endured over time and remains highly influential. I will be elaborating on this further below but, in order to provide a

measure of background context, the twelve factors, plus brief descriptions are listed below:

- **Frequency** - the event must have occurred within a time frame that permits a meaningful and easily intelligible story to be written about it within the daily life cycle of the newsroom. Allan (1999) prefers to use the term 'recency'. Although the importance of keeping information as fresh as possible is fundamental to all news reporting, it is especially pertinent to television news which relies much more on immediacy than the traditional newspaper (as opposed to newspapers online).
- **Amplitude** - the greater the size or severity of an event the more newsworthy and noticeable it is. Any given event or occurrence needs to have reached a certain threshold of 'importance' or perceived interest before it can be considered newsworthy. One key aspect of this criterion is its relationship with levels of drama within any given event or issue (Galtung & Ruge, 1965:86).
- **Unambiguity** - the 'facts' of a story must be clear; events and issues need to be simplified as far as possible.
- **Meaningfulness** - for the audience to both 'care about' and 'understand' a story, it needs to be both *relevant* to their own circumstances and contain elements with which the former enjoys some degree of cultural proximity
- **Consonance** - journalists have a tendency to expect certain events to happen and in effect 'pre-prepare' a 'mental matrix' of how a story will be.
- **Unexpectedness** - an event should be sudden and surprising (Fiske, 1987).
- **Continuity** - once a story has entered the news schedule it has more chance of retaining its newsworthiness for an extended period.
- **Composition** - a balance of types of story in the news schedule
- **Reference to 'elite' nations** - there is a tendency to concentrate on stories from certain countries ahead of others.
- **Reference to 'elite' people** - similarly, journalists tend to privilege certain people and personalities while overlooking others.

- Personification - stories will tend to make more sense to an audience if they are given a 'human face'. This is especially the case in local news (Cottle, 1993).
- Negativity - whereas positive events are not generally noteworthy, 'bad news' tends to be linked to 'importance' and perceived audience interest.

Galtung & Ruge believe that the first eight of these factors may be seen as having universal application (are 'culture-free'), while reference to 'elites', the centring of stories around a person, and an emphasis on negative events are seen as more specific to western ideas and values (are 'culture-bound'). Such a clear demarcation between two basic types of selection criteria may turn out to be too crude and ignore the complexities of ideological influence on news story production (Hall, 1981), a point I will return to below. At this stage, however, it is important to establish three key characteristics put forward by Galtung & Ruge to support their thesis. First, the more any given event satisfies these criteria, the more likely it will register with a journalist and be selected as news. Second, any characteristics within an event that led to its being initially selected as newsworthy will become more accentuated during the production process. Third, both these features of news production - selection and accentuation - occur at every stage of what Galtung & Ruge (1965:71) refer to as "the chain from event to reader". This last point, with its assertion that selection judgements are made at all stages of production, is especially pertinent to my own study.

As stated above, Galtung & Ruge remain a key influence among those attempting to understand news selection. Indeed, it has been described as having "become as associated with news value analysis as Hoover with the vacuum cleaner" (Watson, 1998:117). Accordingly, a great many theoretical texts dealing with news make reference to it (Hartley, 1982; Allan, 1999; McQuail, 2000), many appearing to accept its essential validity as a general explanation for newsworthiness. Some writers implicitly subscribe to the principle of a finite list of factors but have adapted it within their own framework. For example, Fiske (1987:283-286), has distilled the original twelve criteria down to four: 'recency', 'elite persons', negativity and surprise. Others

propose a different sort of model but retain the basic principle of individual criteria being somehow used by journalists. For example, Westerstahl & Johansson suggest 'importance' and 'proximity' as the primary influences but that these *must* be seen within the context of national ideological values, beliefs and ideas. Importantly for my study, they also argue that "the dramatic character of an event" (Westerstahl & Johansson, 1993:74), especially when represented as 'negative' news, has a key bearing on selection.

More recently, Harcup & O'Neill (2001) have offered a complete reappraisal of Galtung & Ruge. In a new large-scale study of news content, similar to the original but examining all types of news, not solely foreign, they propose a revised list of ten factors. Two of these, 'Entertainment' and 'Good news', hold particular interest for my study and I will elaborate on them later in this chapter. Of interest at this point, however, is that, in the course of arriving at their revised list, Harcup & O'Neill question the continuing relevance of the earlier study. In particular, they conclude that Galtung & Ruge took too little account of more popular, 'human interest' stories (mainly because of the latter's concentration on foreign news). More significantly perhaps, Harcup & O'Neill believe the original study is flawed in focusing on the intrinsic qualities contained in original events, rather than dealing with news stories as mediated versions of those events. Such an approach, they believe, fails to consider the actual influence a journalist has on the construction of each story (also see Hartley, 1982:79-80).

However, despite making direct reference (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001:264) to Galtung & Ruge's statement that journalists inevitably distort 'what really happened' through the process of story construction (Galtung & Ruge, 1965:71), Harcup & O'Neill then fail to comment further on Galtung & Ruge's subsequent remarks in this respect, in which they acknowledge the significance of the compound effect of different types and levels of mediation during production. Moreover, Harcup & O'Neill, I believe, fail to give full credit to the way the earlier study provides a mechanism with which to analyse those qualities *within events* that cause them to be noticed by the news profession.

Indeed, these criticisms by Harcup & O'Neill directly influence their decision to exclude two of the original criteria from their revised typology. Because each is seen as part of the *process* of news story production rather than being 'present' in the original event, 'frequency' and 'unambiguity' are believed to be no longer viable and are jettisoned. My own position, however, is to regard these as being important determinants with continuing relevance to understanding news selection and I will be taking both into account, in this chapter and in my own research analysis.

In terms of the wider aims of my own study, it is significant that Galtung & Ruge's method is based on news output. It does not attempt to understand newsworthiness from the perspective of the journalists themselves. It works on the principle of trying to ascertain selection priorities by analysing output and 'working backwards'. The key question therefore arises of how adequate such an approach is in being able to explain the behaviour of 'real people' in a specific newsroom context. Moreover, how much does the theoretical principle that news story selection can be explained as a set of journalistic "ground rules" (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001:261) account for the dominance in news content of particular subject topics and themes? If Hartley is correct in stating that news, although "supposed to be about new, unexpected things", appears to be based on journalistic preoccupations with specific topics (Hartley, 1982:38-39), how well is this reflected in any of Galtung & Ruge's twelve factors?

In order to provide broader context, the following analysis begins by looking at news selection from the perspective of Boyd (2001), an ex-journalist writing primarily for the profession. This will be followed by a broader examination of the relationship between news selection and subject matter, considering in the process how appropriate the principle of a set of rules or criteria actually is to those working in a newsroom. In this respect, Golding & Elliott (1979), while accepting that individual criteria exist, also downplay the importance of these as an *active* consideration in journalistic thoughts and actions. They argue that news selection is such a routine aspect of daily newsroom procedures (which are themselves highly routinised) that judgment on whether information is or is not newsworthy is usually a passive process. Journalists

lack the time to pause, reflect and apply criteria in any systematic way. They do not invoke individual criteria in any explicit way but rely on “terse shorthand references to shared understandings about the nature and purpose of news” (Golding & Elliott, 1979:114). This is a highly significant statement in the context of both this chapter and my study as a whole, as it points to much of news selection being made as a result of automatic decision making.

I will then look more closely at the relationship between a possible journalistic emphasis on certain subject topics and dominant ideology. Here I will consider the study of Gans (1979), who proposed eight ‘enduring values’ in American news based on a study of both newsroom practice and news content. The importance of his conclusions to this chapter as a whole is the link they suggest between certain areas of content that prevail within a specific national culture and certain preoccupations driven by dominant ideology. In the latter sense they should also be read in the broader context of the discussion which took place in Chapter 2 on features and characteristics of British culture. Finally, I will return to Galtung & Ruge’s typology. Having by that point examined a range of different issues pertaining to news selection, I will offer a reassessment of each criterion, elaborating as appropriate on any factors which appear more complex in light of other theoretical ideas.

How do Journalists Decide what is News?

In attempting to understand how journalists decide what is and is not ‘news’, it is illuminating to refer to a fairly recent journalistic text aimed at the profession itself. Boyd (2001) comments that the starting point for all journalists in deciding on newsworthiness is to find a suitable ‘angle’ on which to base a story. Further, he believes all journalists know *how* to find this, routinely, in each story they encounter. New members to the profession undergo training (Harrison, 2000:112-113), and one crucial aspect of this is the instruction they receive from the programme editor on what

“to focus on” (Boyd, 2001:50). However, whether new or experienced, journalists must be able to recognise a ‘good story’ when they see or hear it. As Boyd states,

[m]ost editors would agree that newsgathering is more of an art than a science. But ask them to agree on today’s top stories and many would come to blows. To select stories to satisfy a given audience you are said to need a ‘nose’ for news.

(Boyd, 2001:18)

These comments by Boyd seem to be making two important statements about what journalists themselves perceive is happening at the initial point of news gathering. First, there is the belief, discussed in the last chapter, that they are equipped with special skills enabling them to craft news rather than produce it systematically. As Chapter 3 discussed, aside from what is taught as part of the training process (de Burgh, 2003), the news profession maintains the belief that journalistic writing is a creative act. In this connection, Costera Meijer found, in her own study of newsrooms, that the emphasis placed on “individual effort, individual drive and individual creativity” (Costera Meijer, 2003:18) militated against any desire to reflect on how news selection takes place. Boyd’s second point relates to the way television news must both attract and maintain as large an audience as possible. This implies two things: first, that programmes are effectively competing with each other for viewers; second, and more importantly in the context of this study, journalists in general believe they know which content will most appeal to the target audience.

Although ‘finding an angle’ is clearly a key part of the selection process, and a key point of discussion at planning meetings (Ericson et al, 1987), what is less clear is what this actually means. Does it equate to journalists initially ‘noticing’ an event because they recognise an appropriate newsworthy angle based on that event’s *intrinsic nature or appearance*? In this particular sense, is it the case that certain subject matter just *is* newsworthy? Or does the mental process of ‘finding an angle’ only begin once an event or issue has been selected? If the latter is the case, it suggests other factors are at play when editors and reporters initially come into contact with a potential news story. Here, Hall (1981) suggests there are three basic selection rules which, crucially,

journalists utilise but which also remain ‘untransparent’ within the news production process. To be considered for selection, a story

must be linked to or linkable with an event, a happening, an occurrence: the event must have happened recently, if possible yesterday, preferably today, a few hours ago: the event or person ‘in the news’ must rank as ‘newsworthy’. That is to say, news stories are concerned with *action*, with ‘*temporal recency*’ and ‘*newsworthiness*’.

(Hall, 1981:235)

Hall believes the kind of individual selection criteria advocated by (amongst others) Galtung & Ruge equate to a set of ‘formal news values’ that should be distinguished from the above, not just because they pertain to a separate aspect of the journalistic process, but because they are ideologically determined. More specifically he asserts that Galtung & Ruge’s theory needs to be interpreted in light of the ideological values, ideas and assumptions underpinning each factor. To illustrate this – and perhaps suggesting in the process that their typology is flawed in its execution – Hall asserts that a factor such as ‘unexpectedness’, for example, must also be seen in ideological terms. This is because it pertains to society’s expectations on a deeper level about what is normal (therefore what can be disrupted as a ‘sudden occurrence’ worthy of note). The implication of all this is that Galtung & Ruge’s differentiation between ‘culture-free’ and ‘culture-bound’ factors may be too simplistic.

Further, journalists may only begin to apply known criteria for newsworthiness once a newsworthy event or issue has become known to them. This, in turn, suggests that for events to become known in the first instance, other influences are in play, such as the way news organisations are set up to privilege certain types of subject matter through the way resources are allocated (see next chapter). This does not, I believe, reduce the importance for this study of news value, as an explanation still needs to be found for how subject matter is ascribed levels of value and importance after initially being ‘noticed’. In this connection, Golding & Elliott (1979) suggest that news values, as well as influencing initial story selection, also need to be seen as “guidelines for the presentation of items, suggesting what to emphasise, what to omit, and where to give

priority in the preparation of items for presentation to the audience” (Golding & Elliott, 1979:114).

In their own discussion of news values, Golding & Elliott begin by asserting that these are underpinned by two key determinants: consideration of what the audience will find interesting, intelligible and even enjoyable; and the availability of material which, in turn, is determined by how accessible it is and how readily it ‘fits’ into production routines and journalists’ expectations. In other words, Golding & Elliott seem, by implication, to be supporting a view of news selection that has as much to do with newsroom organisation as it does with judgments on ‘value’. Within this broader context they present their own list of factors: drama, visual attractiveness, entertainment, importance, size, proximity, brevity, negativity, recency, elites and personalities (Golding & Elliott, 1979:115-123). Of these, the first four are seen as being driven specifically by the audience. Because none is explicitly listed in Galtung & Ruge’s typology, I will briefly consider some of the issues they raise in the context of my own study.

The first important point is that all news items “exhibit a narrative structure akin to root elements in human drama” (Golding & Elliott, 1979:115). Aside from the broader question, of how far news items obey the conventions of the story with a beginning, middle and end (Lewis, 1990), it seems that other dramatic features such as shock, sorrow, fear and happiness are essential ingredients in many news reports. Above all, perhaps, a ‘good story’ is built on some form of conflict. Turning to visual attractiveness, of all the qualities important in television news, this is arguably the greatest single omission of Galtung & Ruge’s typology (Tunstall, 1971:21). As Golding & Elliott remark, television news is in a particularly strong position to exploit the advantages of ‘good pictures’. Most important of all, there is the possibility that certain stories may be included on the strength of their visual appeal, while at the same time stories with other claims for newsworthiness are rejected. Ericson et al (1987) came to a similar conclusion in their own study of newsrooms. Further, Golding & Elliott found that journalists referred to the function of pictures as a means to add

veracity to television news because it allowed the audience to see 'what is happening'. Such a statement may be an indication of the mismatch between journalistic assumptions about truth and accuracy, and a theoretical perspective that sees all news as mediated (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976; Fiske, 1987).

One of the considerations for my own study is how different selection factors may interrelate and, accordingly, one key example here is the connection between visual appeal and dramatic representation. However, similar cross over may occur between each of these and the criterion of entertainment. In their own typology of factors, Harcup & O'Neill (2001) both include the latter as a news criterion in its own right, but also associate it explicitly with visual appeal. They see television news in particular as being especially suited to story telling that is "captivating, humorous, titillating, amusing or generally diverting (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001:117). In other words, television news benefits from providing a human interest angle that is, in turn, visually comprehensible to viewers. At the same time, it is important to recognise that newspapers, especially tabloids, have traditionally relied on entertaining readers at least as much as informing them, and it is only relatively recently, with the fragmentation of the viewing audience and increased competition, that television news has been forced to embrace a more entertaining style (Fanthome, 2003).

The issue, therefore, of how entertaining news bulletins should be raises important questions on the quality of information given to viewers; indeed, what the function of news is. In the case of local news, there may well be a long established link between a more entertaining format and perceived higher ratings (Dominick et al, 1975). This leads into the factor of 'importance', which Golding & Elliott equate with how significant particular information is to large numbers of the audience. While the difficult question of how 'significance' is defined ideologically is not addressed here, the principle of deeming a particular event as being meaningful to a perceived majority of viewers helps explain how journalists come to select stories, on occasion, which do not meet other criteria of audience interest, such as news about certain foreign countries (Richter, 1978).

A similar approach to understanding news selection to that of Golding & Elliott (1979), is that of Heatherington, who believes that,

“most journalists, in [his] experience, will resist formalised ‘news values’ lest these cramp their freedom [and] working at speed...do not go through any mental checklist of factors such as Galtung & Ruge have listed”

(Heatherington,1985:7)

Once again, it is being suggested that the act of finding a suitable angle for a story may be divorced from any consideration of specific selection criteria. Nonetheless, Heatherington, too, feels impelled to present his own list of factors: significance; drama; surprise; personalities; sex, scandal; crime; numbers (the scale of an event); and proximity. To these he adds, notably, that visual attractiveness is also important specifically in television news. Looking at his list in relation to Galtung & Ruge’s, it seems reasonable to suggest that the factor of ‘sex, scandal, crime’ stands out because it pertains to *specific* subject matter. Apart from this, however, a broad picture is emerging of journalists appearing to utilise a set of selection factors, even if they are unable to articulate what these are precisely, or agree on their exact composition. What is also apparent, as Heatherington found in his own study, is journalists, rather than conceptualise newsworthiness in any systematic way, prefer to judge this in terms of its perceived importance or interest to the audience; or, just as important, how far it interests *them*, as professionals.

Heatherington also situates his discussion within the context of another key contributor to the understanding of news selection, Gans (1979). As will be discussed shortly, the latter’s own list of ‘enduring values’, which he suggests underpinned news selection in American television news in the 1970s, provides both a different approach from Galtung & Ruge but, more importantly, points more directly to specific types of subject matter which appear to predominate in news content within any given culture. It is with this in mind that I now consider the way news selection may be directly related to journalistic familiarity with certain types of subject matter.

Subject Matter and Newsworthiness

Within the television newsroom structure, reporters tend to have dedicated responsibilities for different areas of subject matter, for example 'political editor' or 'foreign correspondent'. This, in turn, is made possible because journalists have the capacity to compartmentalise 'reality' according to a finite series of story types. One possible consequence of this is that editors and reporters perceive events or issues *as stories* at the moment of encountering them? Indeed, Jacobs (1996) suggests that they are somehow predisposed to perceive the world in a 'storied way', aided by a professional capacity to recognise newsworthy material in terms of 'appropriate subject matter'. This 'works' by journalists being able to match certain types of event or issue with known categories, and this, in turn, influences "how they research and write a story, how they use video footage, and how they perform and enact a story during the news broadcast" (Jacobs, 1996:382). This process of writing a story is referred to by Jacobs as 'narrativisation'.

From a different theoretical perspective, Hartley suggests that, in any given time period, journalists are preoccupied with a finite collection of themes, which may be grouped into six general topics: Politics, The Economy, Foreign Affairs, Domestic News, Occasional Stories, and Sport (Hartley, 1982:38-39). He then chooses to subdivide these thematically, for example splitting Domestic News between 'hard' and 'soft' stories. The former might include crime, welfare and industrial relations; while 'soft news' embraces 'human interest' stories or those "where the newsreader settles more comfortably, smiles, softens his or her tone and perhaps even goes so far as to make a joke" (Hartley, 1982:39). Similarly, 'Occasional Stories' might be about celebrities, the Royal Family and other 'topical talking points'. What this kind of categorisation seems to illustrate is that the placing of news content into specific named categories is ultimately subjective. Hartley has chosen to present his

summation of what goes into the bulletin in a particular way, but another writer could, of course, elect to use different categories.

For example, Harrison's (2000) extensive content analysis of the diversity of story types across different British terrestrial TV news programmes in 1993 identifies thirty-three categories of domestic news and seventeen covering international events and issues (Harrison, 2000:216-228). These, in addition to politics and the economy, embrace topics such as Community Action, Medical Discoveries and Religion, as well as sub-categorising broader areas like Human Interest into 'light' and 'serious'. Further, it may be that there has been too much academic attention paid to certain types of 'hard news', especially those concerning politics and the economy. Here, Dahlgren & Sparks (1992) believe other, more popular types of story are not only deserving of far more study, but account for a large proportion of news output. In a similar vein, Langer (1997) promotes the broad theme of human interest as a substantial area of news content in its own right and proposes four types of what is called the 'Other News': 'The especially remarkable', 'Victims', 'Communities at Risk', and 'Ritual, tradition and the past' (see later in this chapter).

Different writers, then, are able to reformulate different areas of news content into categories to suit their own individual, theoretical purposes. In the same way, I would like to suggest, a similar process of compartmentalising 'reality' may occur within a journalistic context. The crucial point here is that the creation of categories in this manner, and the way information is further 'thematized' for broadcast (Brunsdon & Morley, 1978), may, ultimately, be an arbitrary and negotiable process. In news production, reporters and, especially, editors are trained to identify 'raw reality' as a specific type but how much are these ultimately defined by dominant ideological assumptions at any one time? Hartley alludes to this by offering a brief discussion of those topics missing from news discourse at the time of his analysis.

He concludes that there may (at the time of his study) have been scope to include stories about the European Community, British regional news, local government and,

on a more conceptual level, greater speculation of future problems and more 'good news'. It is not for me to judge here how much these gaps have been filled since Hartley's analysis, in the early 1980s. Neither does my study set out to identify those events which did not make the initial line up for the bulletin (though such research would make a substantial, further contribution to understanding selection behaviour). However, what Hartley's discussion here does raise is the vital question of how arbitrary selection is in terms of the focus on particular subjects. Further, the placing of newsworthy material each day into known categories may also stem from broader assumptions on 'importance' and interest grounded in dominant ideology. What this adds up to is that journalists may somehow come to 'know' particular events are newsworthy by equating them to pre-existing story types.

Subject matter and dominant ideology

Aside from Hall's (1981) suggestion, discussed earlier, that selection may be a consequence of two stages, one of which is outside the sphere of ideological influence, Galtung & Ruge's belief that a specific group of selection factors are bound within a particular cultural context, raises the possibility that the latter possess universal, even immutable qualities. In the same way, Westerstahl & Johansson (1993) place ideology at the heart of all news selection but suggest that it is subject to national variation. Based on their own large-scale study of news content, they suggest that selection is based on only three criteria, 'proximity', 'importance' and 'drama'. (To this is added a fourth influence, 'access', meaning the ability of reporters to physically be present at the scene or location of a news story.) Importantly, if there is variation in the way events and issues are reported within different countries, the reason is that these three criteria have been effectively distorted by national ideologically determined influences. There may be "deviation in news reporting from a standard based on more or less objectified news values" (Westerstahl & Johansson, 1993:77). Another way of saying this, perhaps, is that, whereas initial selection is made based on individual selection criteria (either a small number as Westerstahl & Johansson suggest, or a greater range,

as in Galtung & Ruge's typology), the actual angle taken is determined by dominant ideology.

Within this broader context, I am now going to focus on a major study of newsrooms conducted over a long period in America by Gans (1979). With regard to news selection, Gans contrasts newsworthiness "tied to specific actors or activities of the moment" (Gans, 1979:41) with those values that appear to endure over longer periods in society. In other words, he attempts to relate journalistic output to those deeper attitudes and beliefs ultimately defined by dominant ideological thinking in the USA (and in a manner similar to my brief consideration of British culture at the start of Chapter 2). While Galtung & Ruge suggest twelve factors, with only four being deemed culturally specific, Gans proposes eight values which he believes retain their hegemony over long periods of time. These are referred to as the "the recurring pattern of news" content (Gans, 1979:6) and are rooted in the specific cultural context in which news production occurs. In this sense, Schudson (1996) believes, Gans is adopting a similar approach to that of Hoggart (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976), when discussing the way journalists are subject to the 'cultural air' of society during any particular time period. Because Gans' view represents another perspective on the relationship between dominant ideology and subject matter, and because it will be illuminating to relate his particular news values to British news output, I will expand on each of his enduring values in more depth.

The first criterion considered is termed 'Ethnocentrism'. By this Gans means the tone and content of news tends to be favourable towards the home country. Although certain stories may be critical, these relate to events and issues that are considered deviant or abnormal in relation to (in this case) dominant American values. This is especially the case in war stories, where the reporting of deaths or casualties tended to emphasise the privileged status of American servicemen. It is perhaps reasonable to add here that such bias to a country's 'own people' is also apparent in British culture, as exemplified by the way British casualties in the current conflict in Iraq are invariably headline news. The second factor, 'Altruistic Democracy', relates

especially to political reporting and is based on the assumption that American society is based on democratic principles that, in turn, represent an ideal worth defending. Therefore, any behaviour by politicians that runs counter to basic values such as honesty, or which suggest the Government is not acting in the public interest (for example, its mismanagement of the economy) is regarded as newsworthy. In Britain, a similar attitude to politicians, and the democratic ideal, appears to exist. In Chapter 3 there was a consideration of the way some journalists may have a tendency to routinely seek out wrongdoings and failings. In this particular respect, Britain and America would seem to share similar cultural values.

Gans also believes that the public is 'expected' to maintain 'high' standards, according to the definitions set by journalists. Consequently all 'grassroots' activity regarded by the profession as 'positive' is highly newsworthy (particularly if it is seen as countering the 'excesses' or 'undesirable actions' of government; or is attempting to fight bureaucracy) and self reliance of any sort is also considered newsworthy. The obverse to all this is that American news also "keeps track of the violations of official norms" (Gans, 1979:44). The actions of 'ordinary' people are only treated in a positive manner provided they conform to the ideologically-based norms set by journalists themselves. To be more precise, what news tends to do, Gans suggests, is be highly selective about which deviations from so-called norms to cover. For example, journalists will take a routine interest in specific areas like race and civil liberty and expect people in society to behave altruistically in this respect. The key aspect of this part of Gans' theory is how journalists decide which principles are important and which are less so.

The third of Gans' criteria is termed 'Responsible Capitalism'. This could be seen as following on from the last point, in that it concerns principles closely tied to American values and beliefs. Here Gans believes that the workings of the economy and the issue of economic competition, tends to be represented in positive terms, and only those excesses such as gross worker exploitation or very high profits attract attention (for example, the scandal concerning America's seventh largest company, Enron, which

filed for bankruptcy in December 2001⁵). Economic growth is always positive unless it adversely affects inflation or interest rates. Aside from this, the economy would only be portrayed in negative terms by news in specific areas: if it has a deleterious effect on the environment; where it leads to old, traditional skills or ways of life becoming obsolete.

Further, whereas political or legal bureaucracy, and the 'red tape' of the welfare system, tend to be constructed as excessive, and routinely become negative news stories, similar features found among private companies, say, are less newsworthy (because the latter is not believed to merit being challenged). Above all, in American news, any threat to the success of private enterprise is potentially newsworthy and, for this reason, any organisations on the political 'left' are seen as a threat, as well as the cause of bureaucracy and the erosion of liberty. In Britain, there is a similar belief in the importance of the 'market' as an institution, as signified by the daily convention in television news bulletins to include share prices and currency rates. Also, it is only with extreme examples of corruption and malpractice, such as the Guinness and Barings Bank scandals in the 1980s and 1990s (McDowell, 2001:352), that British news seems concerned with 'white collar crime'. For much of the rest of the time, fundamentally speaking, private enterprise is seen as positive and outside the sphere of routine criticism.

The next influence relates to the American attachment to the individual and the local communities, both urban and rural, referred to as 'Small Town Pastoralism'. Perhaps there is a paradox here, in relation to the above comments on capitalism. Small, individual communities possess the virtue of being the opposite of everything perceived as large and overpowering in American society, notably large corporate enterprises and multi-nationals; as well as the all-pervasive interference of 'big government'. However, this is arguably at odds with the tendency of journalists to reinforce the value of the private sector and free market, because these are seen as integral to a successful capitalist economy. Further, the small, localised population also signify tradition, seen as appealing and "valued because it is known, predictable,

and therefore orderly, and order is a major enduring news value” (Gans, 1979:50). On a different level, but connected to the above comments on capitalism, smallness also embraces ‘old ways’ of doing things. News stories can thus be designed to elicit a sentimental response when dealing with subjects such as the passing of old technologies. Gans gives the example of ocean liners, seen as romantic symbols of a bygone age, but an equally suitable example in Britain might be the passing of the steam train. It seems reasonable to add here that this type of story is often found in local television news in Britain, where ‘the past’ is often seen as an important consideration for a particular regional community (Cottle, 1993).

Another key factor is ‘Individualism’. People who battle against adversity are especially newsworthy, such as individuals fighting powerful bureaucratic structures, or those who act heroically during disasters. Hard work is always virtuous and self-made people attract attention if they are very successful, as do those who are intrepid or pioneering in some way, such as explorers. Above all, journalists appear to value the individual ahead of the group. In Britain, there is a similar tendency for local news to celebrate the actions of individuals, especially in the case of the kind of heroic acts discussed by Langer (1998). From another perspective, as discussed in Chapter 2, there is also, it would seem, a growing need across society for people to display and promote their own individuality in, for example, the area of sexual identity. Indeed, Britain may be more at ease than America in this respect and it is reasonable to suggest here that British news bulletins reflect this.

However, perhaps as an antidote to this, Gans also believes ‘Moderatism’ to be important in people’s behaviour. Individuals are expected not to be extreme, politically and socially and violation of the law is seen in wholly negative terms by those selecting and constructing news stories. In this sense, individualism appears to be a ‘noble’ virtue in the eyes of the journalistic profession, but not if this amounts to rebelliousness taken too far, according to those limits set by journalists. Anything deemed too extreme is much less likely to receive attention. The views of those who

seek radical solutions to problems in society are mainly ignored while those who take a moderate stance are reported.

In this respect, Gans refers to the interest taken by journalists in so-called maverick politicians, whose opinions are sought because these are seen as contrasts to the dull majority, and who are expected to introduce a note of controversy. The implication here is that such individuals, through holding and voicing 'immoderate' views, are considered valuable from a journalistic perspective because they are entertaining and controversial. However, and crucially, these people are included in the news because they are seen as standing outside the mainstream and pose no serious threat to the status quo. They are in effect given permission by the journalistic profession to express more extreme views. Such people are typified, Gans believes, by so-called maverick politicians, whose opinions are sought because these are seen as contrasts to the dull majority, and who are expected to introduce a note of controversy.

Overall, Gans believes journalists disapprove of people who seek to undermine those values, beliefs and ideas which they regard as forming the ideological consensus underpinning society as a whole (Hall, 1982). Further, Fiske (1987) suggests that television news adopts a strategy whereby proportionately low levels of dissenting opinions and views may be included in a story in order to maintain the impression of 'authenticity' while never seriously challenging the dominant meaning. It is worth comparing this with the recent television news coverage of the potential terrorist threat to Britain, which suggests that, where national interest is deemed to be at stake, relatively minor public offences do indeed receive attention. In other words, where events or occurrences can be allied to perceived public fears or 'moral panics' (Cohen, 2002), so-called 'extreme' groups may receive far higher levels of attention than would normally be the case. A recent example of this, briefly discussed in Chapter 2, was when the pressure group, *Fathers 4 Justice* caused Parliamentary proceedings to be suspended in the House of Commons, in May 2004. This assumed greater levels of newsworthiness because of the prevailing climate of fear surrounding chemical attacks in Britain.

In his seventh value, 'social order', Gans begins by discussing the relationship between order and that which threatens it, disorder. The latter is sub-divided into four categories, quite broad in scope: natural disasters such as floods; technological accidents not rooted in nature, for example an explosion at a chemical plant; social disturbances such as riots; and so-called moral transgressions of laws and mores. A further interesting point is made, that much reporting of disorder is actually concerned with the restoration of order, which suggests that, following the reporting of negative news, there is a tendency for journalists to want to produce more positive news and look forward to a 'better future'.

Finally, there is 'national leadership'. This concerns role of individual leaders in both representing key areas of interest such as social and moral order, and as agents of change in society. As so much 'importance' is placed on the role of the leader in society (and in America, especially, the President), it is perhaps not surprising that, in representing such individuals, the news pays great attention to their skills, psychological make-up and other personal qualities, while simultaneously maintaining high expectations of them, moral or otherwise. In this respect, there is an interesting comparison to be made with the way television journalists, in Britain at least, increasingly seek to question and undermine certain powerful figures, especially politicians. Here, as I discussed in Chapter 3, it seems as though there is an ever-growing desire to adopt a combative stance when dealing with, say, Government ministers, in the interests of acting as 'watchdogs' and fulfilling news' function as a servant of democracy (Hartley, 2000; Lloyd, 2002; McNair, 2003a).

To reiterate, I have chosen to discuss Gans' work at more length because his theory allows me to draw parallels between prevailing values in news content and specific types of subject matter. His study also provides a further context in which to revisit Galtung & Ruge's twelve factors, which is the objective of the remainder of this chapter.

Further Examination of Galtung & Ruge's Typology

Frequency

Every event has a measurable life-span. However, according to Galtung & Ruge, the only length of time which is important in the context of news selection is how long is needed for an event to acquire meaning and to appear to be 'current' (Hjarvard, 1994). Or as McNair (2003:63) puts it, "events are far more likely to make it onto the news agenda if their time-frame 'fits' the rhythm of the news outlet concerned". Similarly, Allan (1999:62) writes that "recent events are favoured, especially those that have occurred in the previous twenty four hours and which can be easily monitored as they unfold in relation to institutional constraints and pressures". Allan's remark here is important because it simultaneously alludes to those (many) events which may be routinely overlooked because they do not occur in a manner and form that lends itself to news story construction in line with existing temporal conventions. Fiske (1987) also identifies twenty four hours as the period in which an event should have occurred to be deemed 'recent', adding that during this time "things should have happened that can be seen as an origin and as a point of achievement or closure" (Fiske, 1987:284). But does this automatically mean every news story is structured so that there is a 'beginning, middle and end'?

Lewis (1991) suggests this is not the case. To illustrate this, he discusses a study based on the way television news presented the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East, and argues that what the audience was given in each individual report amounted to little more than a 'snapshot' of the overall picture. Rarely was there any information about the history of the conflict (compare Fiske, 1987:284), and when journalists decided to include some form of context this was limited to a small number of highly selective 'facts', superficially explored. Neither was there any form of conclusion other than that which related to the most recent. I would like to add here that, even allowing for twenty four hour 'rolling' television news (which did not exist in Britain

at the time of Lewis' study), the tendency appears to remain for news production to compartmentalise information into segments of time. Consequently, even with, say, hourly updates, stories can lack wider perspective because the same conventional story format is adhered to as existed when bulletins were much more infrequent.

In general, there appears to be a strong link between journalists' conceptual understanding of recency – indeed, all selection criteria – and the way newsrooms are organised (Allan, 1999; McQuail, 2000). Constrained by the demands of the 'stop watch culture' (Schlesinger, 1987), journalists may be 'conditioned' to overlook the possibilities of turning certain events into news stories because to do so would mean deviating from the kind of conventional newsroom practices they routinely and habitually adhere to. At the same time, however, account needs to be taken of those television news stories that attempt to deal with ongoing issues rather than single events or occurrences. Indeed, this could also be seen as a limitation in Galtung & Ruge's theoretical model (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001), which deals with events only. In this respect, Hartley (1982) draws distinction between single events and trends. He believes it is easier, journalistically, to report a murder because it is instant and also because its fundamental meaning is quickly understood. By contrast, economic, social or cultural trends are, by definition, long term and it is harder to represent these meaningfully if the past twenty four hours is the only period on which to draw material. One way to overcome this, however, is to provide 'snapshots' of information, which is why news routinely reports on financial figures such as the state of the pound against the dollar or the daily movements in the Stock Exchange; or periodically informs viewers of the latest employment figures or various crime statistics.

This, in turn, raises a very interesting point for my study. In identifying which angle to take on an issue to be able to present it meaningfully to viewers, journalists are applying their own subjective judgement about what is important. They are effectively determining *how* something is reported, rather than *what*. Perhaps the combination of packaging information into time segments and greater frequency of news broadcasts

militates against journalists being able to take a wider or longer view of any particular event or issue. Even though the regularity of news broadcasts allows newly gathered information to be incorporated into each updated version of the story, the dual constraint of conventional story format and limited time span disqualifies the possibility of a more contextualised assessment of the wider subject matter. In this sense, the relationship between recency and segmentation, although “mutually supportive” (Fiske, 1987:284), produces a version of events that remains narrow and ultimately ‘decontextualised’.

Amplitude

By this Galtung & Ruge simply mean that the larger, more severe or perhaps more violent an event is, the more likely it will come to the attention of the news media. This is best illustrated by taking the example of an incident or event which happens on a large number of regular occasions but which only attracts the attention of journalists if a certain threshold of seriousness or magnitude has been reached, such as a motorway pile-up involving many vehicles and causing multiple deaths. It seems reasonable to add here straight away that, to be able to judge an event or issue sufficiently important (say) to be newsworthy, journalists need to gauge its significance in accordance with various ideological norms and standards.

In the context of my study as a whole, an interesting question stems from this, which is how far amplitude is being used to measure the newsworthiness of an event that has already happened, or to judge whether to develop an existing story (see ‘continuity’ below). Could it be that, once a decision has been reached to produce a fresh news item on a running theme (perhaps because it meets certain other key criteria), journalists are then predisposed to actively seek out levels of drama, or dramatic features, previously overlooked? In this respect, Galtung & Ruge make a very interesting comment in their footnotes, on the relationship between this particular selection criterion and levels of dramatic impact, that:

...the stronger the amplitude, the more the difference is needed to be noticed...the more dramatic the news, the more is needed to add to the drama. This may lead to important distortions. The more drama there already is, the more will the news media have to exaggerate to capture new interest, which leads to the hypothesis that there is more exaggeration the more dramatic the event.

(Galtung & Ruge, 1965:86)

In other words, they are implying not only that drama is an important factor in news story selection, but that dramatic effect may be introduced to a story during its construction in order to maintain audience interest. Thus, journalists have the capacity to prolong the life of a story by intentionally and proactively treating ‘the basic facts’ it in a particular, say more visually entertaining, way.

Unambiguity

This relates to the way television news tries to limit or ‘close down’ meanings, visually and literally, in order to minimise ambiguity in news discourse. In other words, television news stories need to be constructed as simply as possible in order for their dominant meaning to be remain clear to the audience. Further, for this to be the case, events and issues that, in their ‘natural state’, limit scope for varied interpretation are more likely to be identified by journalists as newsworthy, than those which could encourage “many and inconsistent implications” (Galtung & Ruge, 1981: 54). In other words, there is a reduced likelihood that more complex issues will become ‘news’ because of the difficulty of transforming them into an easily comprehensible narrative. Arguably, therefore, the primary meaning of this criterion lies in the way it allows judgments to be made on the constitution and appearance of the original event, not, as Harcup & O’Neill (2001) argued, in the way that event is *represented* as a news item.

Meaningfulness

Galtung & Ruge believe this factor has two interrelated applications. First, events are more likely to be selected as newsworthy if they contain a greater degree of 'cultural proximity' to the intended audience. Journalists will attach more news value to an event that is distant in geographical terms if they judge that the audience will find familiarity with the circumstances of that event or the predicament of those caught up in it. Second, an event must be 'relevant' to the person watching it, in the sense it means something to them personally, or to the social group they are part of. Once again, the physical location of an event is less important provided this criterion of relevance is met. This could mean that, providing other criteria are met, an event that happens far away geographically is more relevant to viewers than one which happens in their own locality.

Interestingly, Galtung & Ruge include this particular criterion among those that they consider culturally non-specific. However, it seems reasonable to suggest that the degree to which an event or issue is deemed relevant to television news viewers is influenced by the local cultural context in which such a judgement is made (and also the specific context in which it is received). Indeed, there may be a link here with Westerstahl & Johansson's (1994) model of news selection. This, as discussed earlier, proposes that judgements on newsworthiness are made according to specific (possibly immutable) selection criteria, but that additional layers of ideological significance effectively come into the equation, at the initial point of selection and then during story construction. In other words, the way journalists in any given country interpret information (especially from other cultures) is weighted towards a set of values, beliefs and ideas that are specific to their own national culture (Gans, 1979).

But if journalists tend to select stories on the basis of cultural proximity and relevance alone, what is the future for coverage of issues and situations in which the British television news audience has no direct interest? In this respect, Watson cites the example of Polish trade union activities in the early 1980s, when the news value of

'importance' and 'proximity' appeared to be secondary to ideology (Watson, 1998:124). He then contrasts this with the case of the Iran-Iraq war, also in the early 1980s, where a lack of perceived national interest at the time meant "few news values were activated" (Watson, 1998:126). Consequently, the latter story received much less attention in the British news media. Further, what are the implications of the rise in other forms of news, notably the Internet, which allow the audience greater levels of autonomy in choosing what to read about or listen to? If television news in its conventional format is forced to compete with such alternative news outlets, will it seek to provide more entertaining stories, say, while reducing the number of those from 'culturally distant' parts of the world?

Consonance

Here it is suggested that journalists have grown so used to certain events happening that they create a "mental matrix for easy reception and easy registration of the event" (Galtung & Ruge, 1981:55). Whether or not this ever extends to editors and reporters actually willing circumstances to follow a certain course is a question I cannot pursue in this study. However, a journalistic expectation that something may occur in a particular fashion may cause them to configure it in their minds in a certain style and format *before the event has happened*. As consequence, the final item may place emphasis on key particular areas while ignoring others because the former were uppermost in the reporter's mind before editing began. This factor thus raises the possibility that journalists may distort their own perceptions of 'what has happened' so that this is consonant with what they want to think or believe about particular types of subject matter. Further, such expectations may be equated with the basic journalistic act of 'finding an angle'. It may be the case that a representation that deviates too far from their expectation fails to register at all; that is, certain features of a event could be overlooked because the journalist is not expecting to see or hear them. Indeed, journalists may mentally edit out certain aspects of a story believing them to be irrelevant. In such a case, a story might not come into existence because journalists failed to seek out an initial angle on which to base it.

A notable example of the way consonance may impact on journalistic behaviour is the study by Halloran et al (1970). This was about the reporting of a major anti-Vietnam War demonstration in London, in 1968. It concluded that the way the event was represented was the outcome of prior expectations by the news profession that there would be disorder and trouble. Apart from raising important questions about how aware journalists are of actively influencing the way future events are presented, this particular example suggests that such advanced journalistic beliefs about what might happen may have involved a set of judgements bound up in dominant attitudes, beliefs and values in British society. More generally, the criterion of consonance will be shown to have direct links to the discussion in the next chapter, on how journalists perceive different events according to a range of familiar types.

Unexpectedness

Galtung & Ruge see this criterion as a 'corrective' to the last two. Although a story will be more newsworthy if it is meaningful and consonant, its chances of being noticed rise even more if there is an unexpected or rare quality about it. Conversely, an event that contains meaningfulness and predictability, but is also ongoing or occurs regularly, may attract less attention and stands less chance of being selected as news. In considering this, purely in terms of the way 'news' should always aim to appear 'surprising', Fiske (1987) points to an inherent contradiction between the need to maintain an unpredictable quality in all news content and the way newsroom organisation is geared to controlling unexpected events by placing them in categories, then shaping and packaging them for broadcast. This 'routinising' of unexpected events, first explored by Tuchman (1978), will be looked at fully in the next chapter, but here, in the context of news value, it is a particularly strong illustration of the essential artificiality of news production. While all news must appear to be 'new' and 'fresh' (from the audience's perspective), journalists, Fiske argues, employ a range of 'discursive strategies' which have the effect of masking or diluting any random or

unpredictable qualities that might have existed in the original event or occurrence (Fiske, 1987:283-293).

Continuity

This hypothesis suggests that once a news story has been defined as ‘news’ and achieved sufficient level of importance to be deemed a headline, its newsworthiness will remain high “for some time even if the amplitude is drastically reduced” (Galtung & Ruge, 1981:55). One key reason for this is that, having initially made the decision to privilege an event as ‘important’, journalists will seek to maintain its position in the news schedule. This is partly to justify its initial inclusion, partly because of inertia in the system and, perhaps most importantly, because it may gain a prominence in journalists’ minds borne of familiarity. Galtung & Ruge are not specific about the actual time frame during which a story retains such ‘high importance’. However, they suggest that, once an event has entered the schedule,

the news channel will be more open for follow-up events, at a lower threshold value. The effect of this will be the creation of ‘news strings’ that may create artificial continuities just because the channel is open.

(Galtung & Ruge, 1965:82)

Another way of saying this is that newsrooms may decide to perpetuate a story (or perhaps a broader issue of which that story is part) by effectively seeking out new angles. This has important implications for my own research – and also for the discussion in the next chapter on different story types.

Composition

This actually refers to the necessity of having a cross section of story types such as ‘hard’, ‘soft’ or (see above) ‘continuing’ news (Tuchman, 1978; Langer, 1998), in the

bulletin in the interests of balance. Galtung & Ruge use the specific example of introducing a domestic story to counter a heavy leaning towards foreign news when, on another day (with more domestic news), that domestic story would not have satisfied sufficient other criteria to warrant inclusion. This particular criterion is open to various forms of interpretation by editors especially, provided the central principle is maintained that there should be balance between different story types. So, for example, it could be argued that a balanced television news schedule should contain a number of positive or more 'upbeat' stories in order to counteract those of a more negative or downbeat nature.

Reference to Elite Nations/Persons

These criteria, two of the four that Galtung & Ruge link specifically to Western culture, are especially important to my study. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, the way journalists appear to routinely 'notice' certain individuals and geographical locations, while overlooking others, is connected to both newsroom preoccupations with particular subject matter and the ability of a relatively narrow range of powerful people and groups to act as 'primary definers' of news discourse. For my discussion here I am more interested in the concept of 'elite' types of subject matter rather than, specifically, people and places. There are, after all, certain objects or institutions, such as the British Parliament, that might be called 'elite' in terms of the attention they receive from journalists.

For the purpose of elaborating on this particular selection factor, I will begin with how the term 'elite' may be applied to people, but in two very different ways. In this respect, Fiske (1987) makes a crucial distinction between two types. First is the conventional group known to the public because of who they are: celebrities, 'the famous', the notorious, the infamous. Indeed, there are occasions when certain 'elite' people simply *are* the news (Watson, 1998:123). This has, of course, tended to be a news value that has featured in tabloid news reporting rather than television news,

although Langer (1998) argues cogently that the latter is increasingly adopting a more populist style with an emphasis on ‘human interest stories’. Following on from this there is also another, much larger collection of people whose individual personality is unimportant and “forgettable” (Fiske, 1987:284), but who have enacted a role which is familiar as a conventionally newsworthy story. A prime example here is the victim or someone who has performed a heroic act.

Extending this principle to nations, it seems that certain countries achieve routine news coverage because they are culturally familiar, and therefore perceived as interesting to viewers, while others (such as Iran and Iraq in the 1980s – see earlier discussion on meaningfulness) do not because, during that specific time period, there is a lack of deeper ideological significance. In many countries, only when an event has achieved a certain magnitude does it attract the attention of news organisations, and this is especially so if the circumstances are negative. To cite a commonly used example, it is only when many Developing World nations experience natural disaster or war that news organisations take notice of them. It then becomes a matter of deciding if a sufficient threshold of newsworthiness has been reached to justify sending reporters and other resources to the scene.

In discussing ‘elites’ as a news value, Langer stresses how such sources may assume an intrinsic newsworthiness (also see Bell, 1991). As he puts it, the

place and status [of elites] in the news comes from a place and status which is already defined elsewhere as part of other contexts – social, political, economic, and even in relation to a prior ‘place’ in the media discourse itself (well known for their well known-ness).

(Langer, 1997:47).

Accordingly, journalists are drawn to certain figures simply because of their familiarity with them, or, more accurately, the role they perform or the situation they are in. As briefly discussed earlier in this chapter, Langer introduces the term ‘other news’ to describe certain types of popular or ‘human interest’ television news story which he

sees as just as ideologically significant, in terms of their wider and deeper meanings, as more 'weighty' subjects like politics and the economy. The pertinence of this here is his suggestion that, in order to become newsworthy, people who are not already famous or known to the public need to enact a certain role or find themselves in a particular predicament. These, he suggests, come into four broad categories. People need to: have done something 'especially remarkable'; be a victim; be part of a 'community at risk'; or partake in some form of ritual or 'traditional activity'. Put more simply, if 'ordinary people' manage to 'breach expectations' by doing extraordinary things (Langer, 1997:48), they may attract the attention of journalists.

Langer proceeds to discuss how 'eliteness' is encoded in news discourse. His concern here is not with the original subject of the news story, which is what a study of bias might focus on, but how its signifying practices shift "between humanising the subject and at the same time exalting it" (Langer, 1997:49). By making someone seem 'human' those producing a news story narrative can represent them as being 'like us'. At the same time, however, this same person must also be different from the individual audience member watching to maintain novelty and interest. In asserting here that 'ordinary' people assume 'extraordinary' status by their actions or situation, Langer is drawing a firm distinction with those news stories based on conventionally elite figures performing what are often 'ordinary' acts (such as getting married or becoming parents).

Further, according to Langer these 'elites', be they 'ordinary' people or celebrities, enjoy a certain degree of power. This is achieved because of their symbolic importance in representing a particular type of 'reality'. A previously unknown person who has, say, achieved something unusual or remarkable may be constructed as, say, a paragon of virtue, or an ideal model of 'what can be achieved' with effort and determination. As I discussed earlier, Gans' (1979) cites the way American culture promotes 'Individualism' as a major virtue and how this causes the actions of 'ordinary people' to attain high levels of newsworthiness if, say, they are battling against forces larger than themselves. In other words, in the 'right' circumstances, the actions of

such people will assume deeper national significance. In a similar way, Langer argues that many ostensibly 'ordinary' acts, which appear to have little wider consequence, can transmit a strong, if subtle, ideological message. Unwittingly, therefore, this may even mean the actions of the 'ordinary' as well as the well known can serve as primary definers' in the way Hall et al (1978) discussed this (see Chapter 2). However, in the case of the 'ordinary elite' person, it is important to add that any power people may assume in this respect comes from the manner in which they or their situation has been represented – and this is determined by the reporter constructing the story. That is, arguably, where most power ultimately resides.

Personification

Here, Galtung & Ruge argue that journalists favour news stories based on or around human subjects – either named individuals or collective groups. This allows events to be “seen as a consequence of the actions of this person or these persons” (Galtung & Ruge, 1965:68), rather than the outcome of more impersonal, social, economic or political forces. They suggest five reasons why news organisations prefer to represent subject matter in this way. First, in many parts of Western society at least, human beings tend to be agents of their own actions and responsible for their own destiny. Second, specific people may be associated with particular situations or events (either positively or negatively). Third, and following on from comments made earlier, human action tends to occur within a frequency that conforms to that of the news media. Structures, on the other hand, are more difficult to fit into such time frames. Fourth, there is a close connection between the personalising of events and situations, and the privileging of so-called 'elite' people in society. (I would argue here that this would seem to be even more the case if the definition of 'elites' is extended to ordinary people performing familiar roles, as discussed above.) Finally, from a practical perspective, it is simpler to represent a situation, especially pictorially, by focusing on a human subject. The use of interviews to gain information is perhaps easier to

arrange and execute from a newsroom point of view than to try to explain a complex issue in impersonal terms.

Issues that are a consequence of a social factor that is impersonal, intangible or abstract are generally difficult to represent in a straightforward manner. On the other hand, narratives which centre on people, either individually or in groups, help facilitate a clearer explanation of how or why a certain situation has arisen. Indeed, it may be, as Schudson (1996:153) suggests, that “journalism is inescapably human and person-centred in scale”. Halloran et al (1970:27) expressly state that, along with negative events, the person-centred nature of news reporting was integral to the findings of their study of newsroom selection. Golding & Elliott include a similar criterion of ‘personalities’ in their own list of news values, referring to “the need to make stories comprehensible by reducing complex, processes and institutions to the actions of individuals (Golding & Elliott, 1979:122). They add, crucially, here that television news, being reliant on visual impact, is less successful at dealing with abstractions, and therefore political issues (say) are invariably dealt with in relation to the actions and behaviour of politicians rather than policy details. Finally, Cottle (1993) pointed to the vital importance to local news of basing stories around human experience, rather than describe events from a third party’s perspective (see Chapter 7).

Negativity

Galtung & Ruge set out to explain why they believe negativity seems to assume a naturally more important status than positive news (Galtung & Ruge, 1965:69). However, before discussing this in more depth, it seems a good idea to elaborate briefly on why positive events tend to be seen as intrinsically less newsworthy. Following his two speeches in 1994 on the ‘relentless negativity’ pervading British television news, then BBC news reader Martyn Lewis was widely criticised by his peers for suggesting that certain subjects like the Developing World ought to be reported more positively; or that news bulletins should focus on, for example,

economic success as well as failure. As Keeble (2001) points out here, Lewis may have touched a nerve throughout all levels of television news journalism. But was the general antipathy displayed to 'one of their own' because journalists equated Lewis' comments with an attack on their professional integrity? It was as though "their supposedly 'objective' news values" (Keeble, 2001:64) were above questioning, although, as Keeble observed, a different set of attitudes seems to exist among local news journalists. Here, the editorial priority is more about providing 'safe' stories (Cottle, 1993), often of a more uplifting, human-centred nature.

In this respect, 'good news' is seen as being more ambiguous than 'bad news' when it comes to the common perceptions of journalists and, by implication, the audience. What is particularly interesting about this is how little attention is actually paid to the role of positive news as a viable alternative, not just by Galtung & Ruge but by writers in general. When Hartley (1982:39) briefly considers those areas thought to be neglected by the Annan Committee's (1977) report on the future of public broadcasting, the reference to 'more good news' is effectively dismissed as implausible. In this respect, it is perhaps illuminating that, although Harcup & O'Neill (2001:279) incorporate 'good news' into their own revised set of news values as a new criterion in its own right, their discussion of it amounts to six lines of discussion of tabloid newspaper headlines, relating to popular acts of altruism and human good fortune (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001:275).

Galtung & Ruge, while not seeing a place in their typology for 'positivity', do offer various reasons why they think negative stories prevail in importance. The first of these is that, as a rule, negative occurrences happen within a temporal frame conducive to story construction. 'Bad news', in other words, tends to conform more readily to the criterion of 'frequency' than 'good news'. The example is given here of an aeroplane which may take months to build but can crash in minutes. Second, there is likely to be consensus in society (Hall, 1982) about what is and is not 'bad news'. Disasters, accidents and crimes, for example, are seen as being both intrinsically newsworthy and are relatively simple to comprehend as such. This, of course, needs the vital

qualification that what constitutes positive and negative in any situation is to a large extent an ideological consideration.

Here, Fiske suggests that journalists operate according to certain unspoken assumptions about what they believe people's social lives ought to be like. The criterion of negativity is therefore inextricably connected to the ideological beliefs, ideas, values and assumptions dominant in society at any one time. News content can only be recognised or defined as 'bad' if it deviates from what society in general regards as 'good'. Therefore, journalists, working within their own set of assumptions about what is 'right', construct news items around what they perceive to be the opposite: 'wrong'. In this respect, there may be a direct link between negativity and the representation of 'elite' figures such as victims or 'communities at risk'. Here, as Langer argues, such stories are "structured around implicit assumptions about a place and time where the events of everyday life run smoothly" (Langer, 1998:111). For example, a story about unexpected and disruptive 'forces of nature' only becomes meaningful as 'news' when it is seen in relation to the implicit assumption that under ordinary circumstances nature is a stable force. Indeed, this applies to any situation where ideological norms are perceived to exist; where there is a state of order that has been disrupted (compare Gans, 1979).

Further, these ideological norms are determined by those values, attitudes and beliefs prevalent in Western society. It may be that news media in general contribute to the dominance of ideological values favourable to a Western ideological perspective. This, in turn, may militate against Developing countries, themselves developing a new identity of their own (Richter, 1978). Fiske elaborates on this very subject, stating that various human conflicts and natural disasters that occur in the Developing World are constructed as normal for 'them' but abnormal to 'us', merely "confirming our dominant sense that western democracies provide the basics of life for everyone, are stable, and fairly and honestly governed" (Fiske, 1987:285). Another example he cites is that of industrial disputes and the way television news uses particular words and phrases to represent one side less favourably than the other. The example is given of

employers 'offering' pay increases and employees 'demanding' more money, the latter therefore depicted as greedy and engaged in struggle, the former in control, reasonable and generous. While this pertains directly to the kind of analysis undertaken by the Glasgow University Media Group (1976), and therefore an issue of bias, such use of language to present one group in more positive terms than another is, of course, also a way of depicting that group as law-abiding and 'decent' and the other as disruptive and deviant.

The third reason why Galtung & Ruge believe negativity triumphs over 'positivity' in news selection is that they see it as fulfilling a culturally-determined need within Western society. In accordance with this line of argument, not only do people in general have a latent need to be told something negative, but they are culturally conditioned to expect reports of events to be 'bad'. Indeed, this may be one explanation for the factor of 'consonance' discussed earlier. In turn, journalistic expectations that matters may turn out 'badly' could be linked to the prevalence in British news bulletins of stories related to 'moral panics'. Here, Cohen (2002) highlights a wide range of ongoing subject area where situations or circumstances tend to be exaggerated (Tunstall, 1971:264-265) to produce a news discourse. Notable here are: young male violence, paedophiles and child abuse, and asylum seekers (Cohen, 2002:viii-xxi). The important point here is that such perceived existence of threats to order permit journalists to utilise various emotive terms and metaphors, thereby further exacerbating the public sense of fear. Also, of course, such subjects as being 'flooded' by immigrants pertains strongly to prevailing ideological attitudes about (in this case) 'Britishness'. It is also worth adding here that the tendency for news reports to engage in more sensationalist styles of reporting, when dealing with ideologically controversial issues, is more pronounced in the press than television, where the need to remain objective is, of course, less of a factor.

The final reason, according to Galtung & Ruge, why negativity prevails as a key selection criterion, is that it is generally more unexpected than positive news. Again, it is believed that people living in a cultural environment where changes from negative to

positive are regarded as 'progress', or where the nation's health, say, is expected to continually improve, will take such a situation for granted. The dual expectation of stability or possible amelioration will be regarded as the norm and therefore unworthy of reporting. However, when this does not happen that amounts to a deviation from the norm and so becomes 'news', partly because it is a rare occurrence and partly due to its unpredictability.

Overall, it seems to me, negativity is an especially interesting criterion because it may be regarded from two different perspectives. On the one hand there are those events that 'happen', which, in accordance with dominant ideology within a particular culture, are widely believed to be 'bad' or 'wrong' or deviant; for example crime, accidents or natural disasters. Such occurrences might be seen as being 'intrinsically' negative. However, there are also those news stories where journalists appear to have placed a negative emphasis or slant on the material they are editing. One example of this might be the way politicians are represented; or the way crime – an intrinsically 'bad news' subject – may be constructed as being worse than it might be, say through providing statistical information without wider context. The importance of this distinction to this chapter as a whole is that those stories that result from intrinsically 'bad news' simply need to fulfil certain negative criteria, as recognised by a dominant majority of journalists. In this sense such stories are selected according to a basic rule: is it bad or not? Does it deviate from or transgress some established journalistic understanding of 'normality'? But with those issues, for example the state of the economy, journalists have the choice of how to report what has happened: they can select particular information that either increases the negative dimension or plays it down.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter has been to examine the way in which news values impact on journalistic decision making when selecting and producing news stories. A vital question throughout has been how far journalists are able to define 'news value'

in conceptual terms. As Golding & Elliott (1979) argue, it may be that journalists do not normally pause and systematically reflect on individual selection criteria, preferring to rely on 'shorthand' references to shared understandings about what is and is not newsworthy? I also considered whether journalists able to identify an event as newsworthy simply by encountering it or becoming aware of its existence and, if so, is this because they recognise its subject matter as being intrinsically newsworthy? Perhaps, both in initial selection and during story construction, a proportion of the content ultimately seen by viewers has been selected purely on the basis that it involves a topic, theme or specific individual that has become so familiar to the profession that they tend to select it repeatedly and routinely? Further, if such routinised selection of particular subject matter does take place, to what extent is this due to the effects of dominant ideology on journalistic behaviour and attitudes?

With these points in mind the second half of the chapter returned to Galtung & Ruge's typology and examined each of the twelve factors in depth within the context of the discussion that preceded them. What this illustrated was how the close relationship between different criteria (Galtung & Ruge, 1965: 81-83). For example, the concept of 'elites' is connected to how meaningful certain people and countries (as well as objects and institutions) are to a particular society. It is also tied up with the importance of negativity as a key concept, itself closely related to factors such as amplitude (in the case of heightened levels of drama) and consonance (and expectations that events will turn out unfavourably). The appropriation of 'elites', first by Fiske (1987) then Langer (1997), to embrace 'ordinary' people is inextricably bound with the power of negativity to attract journalistic attention. It should not be overlooked that the subject types that comprise Langer's 'other news', with the possible exception of 'ritual and tradition', are predicated essentially on 'bad news'.

My discussion here has also tried to illustrate most of these twelve factors, when elaborated on in the context of other theoretical ideas, are complex in their constitution and application. 'Elites' and negativity certainly come into this category but so, for example, does 'frequency'. Not only does it highlight the way television news stories

tend not be able to represent issues and, indeed, complex (that is ambiguous) events, but it also provides a different perspective to be taken on 'continuity'. This is because it raises the issue of where a recent event constitutes a brand new story and when it is simply a new angle on an existing one. Indeed, the entire question of 'finding an angle' is particularly important for this study, because it seems to underscore, not just basic journalistic behaviour, but the way selection criteria are appropriated by journalists (either consciously or not). Besides the clear link here with frequency and continuity, journalists may, arguably, seek out new perspectives on which to construct a story by adding new layers of drama to an existing scenario. Indeed, they may do this in advance of an event occurring. In other words, a forthcoming event may be consonant with journalistic expectations of its dramatic significance. Finally, in each of these scenarios, the role of negativity seems paramount. This, in turn, suggests that the way a story is constructed, so that unfavourable aspects or areas of conflict are foregrounded, lies in the way journalists chose to edit the material and formulate the script.

Overall, this chapter has set out the various ways in which journalists might apply selection judgement to potentially newsworthy material. But how do they come to recognise that material in the first instance? This may itself be tied in with the wider issue of newsworthiness, but it is also influenced by the way newsrooms are organised, which is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE IMPACT OF NEWS ORGANISATION ON STORY SELECTION

Introduction

A running theme throughout this study so far has been how journalists come to decide that certain events and issues are important. Accordingly, the aim of the last chapter was to examine in depth the various selection criteria that appear to be used in establishing newsworthiness, along with the possibility that certain types of subject matter enjoy privileged status when it comes to attracting the attention of reporters and editors. The particular methodology adopted by researchers such as Galtung & Ruge (1965), to start with news output then attempt to extrapolate possible criteria from it, enables an assessment to be made about what ‘news value’ might mean to journalists as a general form of guidance when deciding importance and interest. However, as Galtung & Ruge (1965:66) themselves point out, their theory is not based directly on the articulated views and experiences of those journalists themselves, and it may be that those who select and produce the news do not attempt to formulate – or ever feel the need to articulate – what ‘news value’ is in such a codified or systematic way.

As Shoemaker & Reese (1996:116) suggest, news values that “have been derived from analysing actual news content...represent a post hoc explanation”. Identifying and articulating specific criteria that (appear to) rationalise how and why a particular type of occurrence or event came to be selected does not fully explain why other occurrences or events that also met the same criteria were not selected. In other words, journalistic attitudes to story selection may depend on more than individual attitudes to ‘news value’. All news organisations are subject to the influence of the news industry as a whole and, beyond that, society in general (McQuail, 2000:248). At the other extreme, professionalism may allow journalists relatively high levels of autonomy in

their daily decision making. However, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the impact on attitudes and behaviour of the newsroom itself. How far is content “systematically and distinctively influenced by organisational routines, practices and goals rather than either personal or ideological factors” (McQuail, 2000:245)?

How Structure and Organisation Influences Selection

Central to my enquiry here is what type of occurrences and events attract journalistic attention as a specific consequence of newsroom organisation. As this chapter will aim to illustrate, a news story will often come into existence because the journalistic profession is routinely familiar with its intrinsic subject matter, and where to find it. Crucially this allows those organisations a degree of pre-planning in compiling the schedule and also means certain sources are favoured ahead of others (Manning, 2001). As Schlesinger (1987) found in his study of the BBC, pre-planned events make up a large part of routine news coverage (McQuail, 2000:283). The important consequence of all this is that many stories may come into existence because journalists are able to exert a degree of control over what should be random and unpredictable: ‘reality’ itself. Conversely, therefore, only a relatively small proportion of news stories stem from occurrences that ‘suddenly happen’, journalists tending to favour those events that by their very nature can be predicted or known about in advance. Thus, a high proportion of stories are based on, for example, anniversaries and other annual occurrences, impending or ongoing proceedings such as court trials, along with various official announcements and staged events emanating from sources regularly utilised as a source of newsworthy material. On the other hand, natural disasters, accidents, crimes or scandals, although they may be dominant in terms of perceived importance, and perhaps the length of time given over to them in the bulletin, comprise only a relatively small number of the total news stories in overall schedule.

Tuchman's (1978) long term newsroom-based study arguably remains one of the most convincing explanations (Becker, 1995) of how newsroom practice and journalistic behaviour are organised to anticipate where newsworthy events are likely to occur. It is an attempt to articulate the apparent connection between methods of information gathering and the privileging of certain sources of information, and how this may lead to uniformity of attitudes and behaviour with regard to news selection. Working from a premise that the way a journalist understands professionalism is largely defined by the needs of the organisation he or she works for (McQuail, 2000:257), Tuchman proposes a framework for understanding the relationship between the way resources are allocated and the particular types of story that are selected. In privileging certain locations and types of occurrence as newsworthy, news organisations not only enable certain events to become 'news', but impose order on the social world by effectively controlling where news occurs. Newsgathering is organised in such a way that resources employed, principally reporters and agency staff, are in a position to encounter potentially newsworthy material on a regular basis. According to this idea, news organisations function efficiently by being able to 'routinise the unexpected' (Allan, 1999; McQuail, 2000).

To explain this, Tuchman uses the metaphor of a 'net', which is cast around different parts of society and across selected countries and regions depending on the priorities of each news organisation. Newsrooms and the journalists who are directed by them are guided by what they perceive the audience is interested in and this leads them to select stories based on three assumptions: first, receivers of news are only interested in occurrences at specific localities; second, they are concerned with the activities of some groups and institutions but not others; finally, they are only interested in specific topics. The effects of this are essentially two-fold: first, news organisations both disperse reporters to a limited range of familiar locations; second, newsrooms are structured so that reporters and editors have particular responsibilities in relation to different types of event.

Those locations where the 'net' is effectively 'anchored' are where potential news stories will be routinely 'caught', others being simply overlooked or discarded, and this process will be intensified where the mesh of the net is at its finest; that is, where resources are most concentrated, which is also where the most powerful sources are to be found. In theory, the more extensively reporters are dispatched round the globe, located at different organisations, and encouraged to consider a wide range of occurrences and events, the more information may be gathered. Conversely, there is less incentive for editors to consider those locations with which they are unfamiliar as routine providers of information. It is as though those who select and produce news also determine what defines it in the first place. This also means they decide what does not become 'news'. As Allan (1999) points out, news organisations are in a powerful position to control where news occurs, but also what constitutes a non-event, and therefore where news is not expected to occur. Such a scenario only appears to support the idea that news is created by those who select and produce it, rather than being a 'natural' phenomenon.

Further, Tuchman does not believe journalists assess value and importance by measuring events against set criteria, but because, through training and past experience, they are able to 'frame' them (Gitlin, 1980) as a particular story type. Occurrences may only be considered as 'news' if reporters actually perceive them as events first. Only then can they be further mediated into the format and narrative of a news story. According to Molotch & Lester (1974), the news profession favours those occurrences that actually come into existence as events; that have been staged or planned by particular individuals or groups. One possible consequence of this is that there is a bias in favour of material that comes packaged within a format that is more easily translatable into conventional news discourse. Further, any source that can help facilitate this, such as the way Governments produce press releases, may be able to exert higher levels of control over news selection. It could be that journalists are pre-disposed to seek out and use information that comes in some sort of 'pre-mediated' format. If so, it could also be the case that other occurrences are simply overlooked

because in their natural, unmediated form, where they exist as a random occurrence rather than a more structured event, they become invisible to the attention of reporters.

The relationship, then, between where reporters are situated and the availability of sources is crucial to the type of events that become news. Here I would like to return to Andrew Boyd, whose professional perspective was considered in Chapter 4, in relation to news value. He refers to those:

days when news just seems to fall into your lap. Everywhere you turn another story is breaking. Days like this are a journalist's dream. The nightmare begins in the holiday season when nothing seems to happen. Local check calls to the police elicit jokey offers from bored constables to 'go out and bite a dog for you'...Most times [however] the newsperson's lot is somewhere between these extremes. What stories there are have to be dug for. Graft is required to turn a tip-off into hard facts.

(Boyd, 2001:29)

This statement is illuminating because it implies that, given the choice, journalists seek to reduce the amount of effort needed to obtain newsworthy information, and one key way to do this is to operate within a structure, which allows information to be routinely accessed easily, quickly and with the minimum financial cost. This adds up to another example of how news production, and journalistic activity, works by being able to exert some degree of control over 'reality'.

Further, in the absence of an overtly newsworthy event, journalists must apply their professional training and unearth information through skilful, professionally learned enquiry. The factors underpinning the kinds of question they might ask – both of themselves and of the sources they encounter – has already been discussed at length in relation to news value. But the kind of reporting based on making enquiries that unearths brand new stories, or which seeks to draw out hidden material through investigation, is only one method of newsgathering. Indeed, Boyd appears to acknowledge this by identifying a range of sources which are proactive in making information available to journalists. It follows, that by making use of familiar contacts, keeping a newsroom diary, maintaining a computer archive, and monitoring the output

of major news agencies and other news providers on a daily basis, editors can both ensure a steady supply of information, but also insert a high degree of predictability into the daily production cycle. Crucially however, newsrooms, and in particular editors, will be open to access themselves by those groups in society with an interest in influencing the news agenda, notably politicians, large institutions and pressure groups. These, in turn, will try to 'manage' the news through staging events, making press releases and providing 'tip-offs' (Boyd, 2001: 30-44).

By concentrating their attention on official spokespeople from political organisations, the medical, legal and education professions, certain large companies and powerful bodies like the London Stock Market, or institutions such as the Royal Family, reporters are in effect ignoring many other individuals and groups. Not only may this disqualify certain kinds of stories from being considered as news, but also the particular emphasis or 'angle' placed on those issues regularly covered in the news bulletin. The same applies to the way news organisations, aided by computer technology (Harrison, 2000), tend to rely on the large news agencies, notably Reuters, United Press International Press, Associated Press, Worldwide Television News and Agence France Presse, who produce a massive amount of visual and aural material each day, readily accessible through the Internet and the 'news network' (Boyd, 2001:40-42). Almost by definition the staff of these agencies, based in different countries, form a vital supportive component of the 'news net', often substituting for reporters themselves, who would only be dispatched to many parts of the world if the 'importance' of the news story merited it. All this militates against journalists needing to actually go out and look for news in places they are less familiar with geographically, locationally and thematically.

I will return to this last point later in the chapter, when focusing directly on the relationship between journalists and sources. Ultimately though, no matter how successfully (powerful) sources are in accessing journalists, news organisations can choose whether or not to ignore many of these attempts to gain their attention. The key question, then, is whether this happens primarily because newsroom structure

serves to limit the scope of journalistic enquiry or is due to other factors, especially the application of selection criteria. Indeed, and crucially for this study, Tuchman argues that individual news values are not significant aspects of the selection process. Her view is that journalists do not judge newsworthiness by recognising specific content, but because certain subject matter has become so familiar to them through routine selection that they only perceive it as a known category. So whereas the “news net imposes order on the social world because it enables news events to occur at some locations but not others” (Tuchman, 1978:23), an equally important ingredient of journalistic enquiry is their ability to place each event they encounter within a range of known classifications. News editors may regard certain places, organisations, people, ideas and incidents as being important to a British audience because of perceived similarities in values, attitudes and behaviour. This might explain McQuail’s statement that “[T]he nearer the location of news events is to the city, region or nation of the intended audience, the more likely it is to be noticed” (McQuail, 2000:280).

Further, the implication of an approach that favours a system of selection based on the application of ‘rules’ is that there are ways of dealing with newsworthiness common to all news organisations. Journalists may be predisposed to behave in a similar way. There may be a ‘shared culture’ of practices, routines and values (Harrison, 2000), a uniformity or consensus of approach when it comes to interpreting newsworthy information. One possible manifestation of this is the tendency in newsrooms for journalists to track and monitor the output of rival organisations, thereby allowing them to check the quality of their editorial judgement on any given issue. Another is the group mentality associated with certain forms of reporting, such as the political lobby (Boyd, 2003a) or the tendency for war correspondents to conglomerate in one place (Simpson, 2002). Shoemaker & Reese (1996:122) comment on the journalistic tendency to “rely heavily on each other for ideas, and [that] this reliance constitutes an important organisational routine”, adding that this contributes to a general similarity in content across all news media. It may be that journalists appear to regard consistency as a vital measure of quality.

Also important in the speedy and efficient production of news stories is new technology. According to Manning (2001) the significance of this is that it has the capacity to enhance traditional journalistic skills. The arrival of electronic newsgathering enables information to be transmitted more readily and quickly from out in the field, to be processed in the newsroom. Once there, unlike film, which had to be processed, video footage can be immediately edited ready for inclusion in the final news story. Improvements in satellite systems, notably the removal of the need to wait until a specific time to make the link back to the home country and the increased mobility of the hardware itself, also make transmission of information easier than it was in the fairly recent past (Manning, 2001:76). Finally, all information transmitted electronically can now be linked to computer databases. This means a large body of information is effectively 'on-tap', which is, of course, crucial to the operation of a twenty-four hour rolling news service. Linked to this is the development of the Internet. Obviously this has massive implications for the way the audience obtains information in general, and for this reason, the BBC and other news organisations now provide an on-line news service. In this respect, new technology makes available to journalists a large amount of material, even perhaps making journalistic enquiry a more passive process. As a subject of enquiry, however, this falls outside the scope of this study, as does the question of whether such new technology could actually alter the nature and type of stories selected for the TV news bulletins (Cottle, 1995).

This chapter will now focus in more detail on the idea of topic specialisation and the placement of 'real' events into known story types. This should facilitate a broader discussion of the way known and readily available subject matter may act as a primary motivation in journalists' identification of news stories but also, crucially, the way news organisations seem to favour certain sources ahead of others.

Newsroom Structure and Subject Matter

In her own assessment of how journalists judge newsworthiness, Tuchman's findings seem to support the idea of a finite range of story categories, from which the editor – in conjunction with reporters – must select a daily sample. The relative importance of each story is decided by negotiation and mutual agreement among various key newsroom staff, notably the programme editors, with disagreements a rarity (Tuchman, 1978:31-38). If such compromise is routinely reached, one of the key reasons may be the fundamental need to meet deadlines; the sheer pragmatic necessity to ensure 'something is ready' on time. This, according to Schlesinger's (1987) study of BBC newsroom practices, could lead to a form of automatic behaviour that ultimately takes precedence over all other influences on news selection (therefore supporting Tuchman's belief that choosing the most balanced schedule overrides application of news value in importance). It may be that journalists do not reflect deeply on specific selection criteria simply because organisational pressures and standardization of routines mean they have no time to do so. In order for the story to be ready in time each day, they may fall back on established notions, professional and organisational, of what is newsworthy, identifying certain events, people and issues newsworthy, because these are familiar to them as 'news'.

As Tuchman states, the smooth running of any news operation depends in part on each journalist knowing his or her individual responsibility. Theoretically speaking, the effect of this is to compartmentalise 'reality', by creating boundaries and confining individual journalistic enquiry to a limited range of subject matter. In this respect there is an interesting comparison to be made between the findings of her study and the way Hartley (1982), discussed in Chapter 4, attempts to categorise different types of news output. While Tuchman looks at the production of news as different categories from the perspective of the organisation itself, Hartley bases his conclusions on an analysis of news content. Although each is approaching the matter from opposite ends of the news production cycle, both are effectively stating that 'news' comes into existence because standard journalistic behaviour involves taking 'real events' and classifying

them within pre-determined categories. These, in turn, have been decided upon by the news profession.

As Tuchman (1978:45) states: “the news net produces more stories than can be processed. Each one of these is a potential drain upon the news organisation’s temporal and staff resources”. It is therefore advantageous (even necessary) to have a mechanism that equates different occurrences with particular story types. Further, just as the ‘news net’ enables news organisations to exert a measure of control over where stories are likely to be found, further levels of predictability are built into the process by journalists’ familiarity with particular story types. Certain subject matter may be simply recognizable as ‘news’, not just because it conforms to pre-existing beliefs among journalists about what is and is not newsworthy, but because they acquire knowledge and experience that allow them to place events within a known framework (Goffman, 1974). Building on this basic idea, Gitlin (1980) argues that the journalistic capacity to seek out and ‘notice’ individual stories is dependent on the way newsgathering is structured. As he states,

[M]any things exist. At each moment the world is rife with events. Even within a given event there is an infinity of noticeable details. Frames are principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters.

(Gitlin, 1980:6)

Thus an event, say, which exists in raw form ‘out there’ is transformed by the news production process into an individual narrative structure designed to represent it in a way that appears authentic, truthful and objective. To reiterate a key issue for this chapter, indeed the entire study, is the way news stories are constructed and regulated at every stage of production, rather than being ‘natural’ representations of ‘reality’. However, the significance of this to my investigation is less how accurately or truthfully ‘news’ represents ‘what happened’ but in what content suggests about the selection decisions that produced it. I am not concerned with analysing a story in terms of its component parts. My concern with the specific ordering of information, or

how clearly 'facts' are presented (Bell, 1998), extends as far as making an assessment of the kinds of selection criteria that may have been applied, or the extent to which the reporter producing the story appears to be seeking to foreground certain details ahead of others. I am, however, interested in how far information is shaped into a narrative in accordance with structural frameworks that are not openly discussed by journalists. This is a point discussed by Gitlin (1980) and with it comes the possibility that journalists process large amounts of information in a manner that is so 'routinised' as to be almost automatic. Indeed, Tuchman makes the point that newsrooms, like any organisation, could not function if they attempted to represent every 'unique occurrence' in its own 'idiosyncratic' way. This is why 'types' need to exist. This may be why, as Jacobs (1996) argues, journalists appear to be able to perceive events as stories almost at the moment of encountering them.

Further, just as Galtung & Ruge believe that events must normally occur within a recent time frame in order to be perceived as potential stories, Tuchman (1978) sees the relationship between journalists' attitudes to newsworthiness and the amount of time available in which to produce stories as one of the most important aspects of the news production process. As Schlesinger's (1987) study of the BBC illustrates, the impact of having to meet deadlines on journalists' behaviour raises two important aspects of the effects of temporal pressures in the news production process. One is journalists' self-perceived ability to produce a news story in accordance with the demands of the daily news schedule. The other, more abstract and conceptual, is the way editors and reporters appear to place themselves as "victims attendant on events" (Schlesinger, 1987:86). In his study, Schlesinger observed journalists exhibiting an almost contrived sense of urgency as stories came in, this made manifest by physical rushing around the newsroom, displaying anxiety and making speedy decisions. In this sense journalists believe themselves to be controlled by circumstances that have somehow been imposed on them (rather than these being self-imposed through *their* decision to select particular stories). Thus television news production becomes an intensive and all consuming activity, reliant on group cooperation and, above all, the management of time so that scripts are written and editing complete ready for the

broadcast. As Chapter 3 discussed, this forms part of the journalistic 'faith' that they possess special skills and knowledge, enabling them to triumph each day over the erratic and capricious force of 'reality'.

From a programme editor's perspective especially, the more stories that can be pre-scheduled at the start of the working day, the more efficiently he or she can plan the next scheduled bulletin. The significance of this is that it has a major impact on the kinds of occurrence that become news, because only certain types of occurrence can be pre-scheduled in this way. If reporters are to be dispatched to where something is happening, or has happened, and then be able to prepare a report ready for broadcast later in the day, this has two effects on what becomes 'news'. First, it means most stories have come to the attention of journalists some time in advance of preparation of the (next) programme. Second, and as a direct consequence, relatively few things that happen after the initial schedule has been laid out at the beginning of the working day will be of sufficient magnitude to merit the editor dispatching a reporter to cover it.

The effect of all this is not only to narrow down the range of events covered on any single day, but to limit the type of events that become news. Intentional or not, journalists, by routinely placing emphasis on certain 'facts' and information while disregarding or downplaying others, act to legitimise certain ideological positions while marginalising others (Gitlin, 1980:6). In other words, the process of 'framing' events and issues is ideologically significant (Allan, 1999:63). This is especially the case with television which, consisting of a relatively small number of stories, is highly selective even compared to newspapers. In terms of individual news items, what Tuchman refers to as the 'temporal rhythm' of any event (compare Galtung & Ruge's criterion of 'frequency' here) must be such that journalists can frame it as a meaningful account of events in the time span allowed by the editor.

The consequence of this may be that journalists need to typify "events according to their time scale, especially in relation to the news production cycle" (McQuail, 2000:282). It follows from this that the planning of the news bulletin is dependent on

journalists being able to recognise how different events fit in with conventional news types and formats. Rather than journalists applying individual selection criteria, Tuchman found that those she studied effectively compartmentalised 'reality' into five basic news story types: hard, soft, spot, developing and continuing. Arguably, the first two may be seen as the most important, with the others providing refinements. Essentially, hard news is the antithesis of soft news: the former deals with immediate events, while the latter covers stories that are not, by their nature, tied to a particular time frame. However, in the way journalists actually apply these two types as a guiding principle when making selection choices, such a basic distinction appears less straightforward.

In addition to the strict temporal definition, hard news may also be defined as 'important' in the sense that the audience needs to be informed about it as citizens. In this respect such news may be equated with the type of information seen as fulfilling a vital democratic role (see Chapter 2), such as items about political, economic or social issues. On the other hand, soft news stories are those the audience will find 'interesting'. These will tend to be centred on the actions or predicament of human beings, involving emotion and drama. As Tuchman acknowledges, such a distinction does not account for those stories that could be seen as both interesting and important. This point is taken up at length by Langer (1998) who argues that stories based on major accidents or crimes are not only constructed around a 'human interest' element, but meet the criteria of hard news by virtue of their immediacy and unexpectedness. Such stories do not lend themselves so readily to advance planning.

This essentially simple dichotomy, which, outside the conventional framework of news production, seems highly subjective, may be refined by the inclusion of the three other types Tuchman (1978) identified. Thus, hard news can split into either spot or developing news. That is, respectively, those events that happen suddenly and unexpectedly, such as accidents and (many) crimes (because certain offences may go undetected for a period of time and only become news when uncovered, such as 'white collar' crime), or those which relate to a 'breaking story' where the 'facts' are still

emerging. In both these, what might be called, 'sub-types', the temporal element is highly significant because for a story to be treated as spot news, sufficient information must be available – that is, 'enough' must have happened already – to be able to be turned into a meaningful account of events. If, on the other hand, the 'facts' are still emerging and more are needed before a meaningful narrative can be created, journalists prefer to see this as 'breaking news', which is still developing.

The final classification used by journalists is 'continuing news', which refers to "a series of stories on the same subject based on events occurring over a period of time" (Tuchman, 1978:49). With this, the type of subject matter has a bearing on whether journalists perceive it as an ongoing story. For example, wars and conflicts, or political issues, provide a continual stream of new information on an existing theme, while relatively minor accidents, such as car crashes, tend to be isolated occurrences. This is very interesting in the wider context of my study, because it points to a bias in favour of certain types of events being selected as news more than others. It raises the question of which types of event are routinely favoured in this respect simply because they appear to lend themselves to being treated as continuing news. Is this, as Tuchman proposes, because continuing news, especially, is an essential component in the pre-planning that is so important in the smooth running of newsrooms? In suggesting this, she arguably elevates the importance of ongoing stories to the newsroom process to higher level than Galtung & Ruge (1965), who simply treat 'continuity' as one of a number of selection criteria. Perhaps this strengthens the notion that a fuller understanding of selection comes from relating individual criteria to the newsroom process (rather than simply defining it in relation to content).

Finally, this chapter would be incomplete without considering the extent to which newsroom behaviour can be directly influenced by those who actually supply them with newsworthy information. How far is news selection, and programme content, determined by the actions of those ('elite') people and groups to which all journalists must turn in order to obtain much of their information?

News Organisation and the Impact of Sources

By singling out particular countries, establishments, groups or key individuals as regular news sources, journalists are not only imputing higher levels of importance to them, but are effectively legitimising their place in the news production process. The resulting narrowing down of potentially newsworthy subject matter is enhanced by the professional preoccupation with a finite range of news themes, but it also seems reasonable to assert that no story can exist without a location, and if journalists are not aware of where an occurrence is taking place, there is, in theory, no story. It may be that newsworthiness is determined less because certain events hold intrinsic 'news value' in themselves, but because they attain newsworthy qualities by virtue of being situated at a privileged location. Further, such sources, of course, have the capacity to influence the way journalists both understand a topic, and, because of 'news management', how they set about transforming it into a story. This was discussed strictly in relation to dominant ideology, in Chapter 2. Here I wish to develop some of the points made there by highlighting some of the key aspects of the more general relationship between newsrooms and those people and groups who provide them with information.

Key to successful newsgathering is the need for reporters to be alert to all potentially newsworthy events within their area of 'specialism' or designated locality (region, city or institution), and in those 'elite' locations privileged as sources of information by newsrooms. These include, for example, The Houses of Parliament, 10 Downing Street, the City of London, various legal, medical and education establishments, and institutions such as the Royal Family and the Church. For my study, the significance here is less the names of these establishments than the principle that journalists routinely call on them for information. Moreover, by doing so, many other, less privileged locations may be being routinely overlooked. Although daily enquiries should in theory turn up completely 'new' stories on a regular basis, Fishman (1980) believes that newsrooms draw on an ultimately narrow range of preferred sources. Indeed, he argues, journalists structure their daily 'beat' so that these sources are

routinely encountered. Further, those reporters in particular behave towards their sources in a manner designed to orientate them towards “a certain way of looking at an event: as a legal-bureaucratic entity, as a moral issue, as a part of a historical trend, and so forth” (Fishman, 1980:131). In other words, the way journalists attempt to draw information from people and organisations tends to be within a framework, and on the terms and conditions, set and defined by the journalists themselves. A good example of this is the pre-planned interview.

In short, such journalistic behaviour helps explain “how the media transform an indeterminant world into a formulated set of events” (Fishman, 1980:12-13). Fishman then develops this idea and considers the relationship between the way journalists detect occurrences, and how they then interpret them as meaningful events. Here, similar to Tuchman (1978), he believes there is a direct link between the regular news ‘beat’ and an understanding that certain people, organisations, locations and activities add up to a pre-defined topic. With experience, reporters learn how to “to put themselves in a position to be exposed to occurrences” (Fishman, 1980:31). Whether this is because journalists are physically exposed to the event or because they ascertain it from documentary sources, or it is intimated to them verbally, the effect is to privilege certain subjects and topics as ‘news’ and for journalists to select them as potentially newsworthy almost on an automatic basis.

The crucial point here is that, before reporters can decide if an event or occurrence merits further investigation, they must systematically expose themselves to them. They must organise their daily working practices so that regular sources are readily available and accessible. In other words, predictability is built into the daily news ‘beat’ as far as possible through the strategic dispersal of journalists in places where it is known familiar news sources exist. One important aspect of this, Fishman believes, is that the pace and timing of news gathering tends to fit in with that of the organisations from which news is being obtained and a journalist will need to juggle the time demands set by the daily routines of the newsroom with those imposed on them by the bureaucratically organised structures of the organisations they cover. Put

more bluntly, in certain instances at least, reporters must 'fit in' with the behaviour and movements of the sources providing them with information. Fishman also believes that, by placing themselves in a position to obtain "local structures of knowledge" (Fishman, 1980:52), journalists at the same time systematically ignore many events and issues.

Fishman also examines how journalists make sense of the information routinely encountered on the 'beat'. He suggests that, when reporting from bureaucratic organisations such as law courts, journalists are steered towards perceiving the 'facts' of the event in a particular order. For example, in a court case, there is an arrest, police questioning, charging, trial, judgement, acquittal or sentence; these phases are an inevitable part of the structure, and the journalist will be guided by this in constructing the story. The intrinsic nature of the original event therefore helps frame the structure of the way it is reported as a news story. In this sense, of course, the journalist is not controlling the terms and conditions on which information is gathered and received (see above).

Are these kinds of 'bureaucratically structured' sources simply more newsworthy than others because their intrinsic nature and composition causes them to be routinely sought out as part of the news 'beat'? Or is the power of certain 'elite' people, groups and institutions more fundamental, say related to general ideological power to define 'what matters' and what is 'important' culturally? Such questions lead me back to the discussion in Chapter 2, on the interaction between these sources and the news organisations they aim to influence, when I considered how certain sources come to attain credibility in journalists' eyes and how journalists assess such credibility

In the same way that Hall et al (1978) discussed 'primary definers', Manning (2001) recognises the power certain individuals and groups have in society to help define what is selected as news, and therefore influence journalists' actions and priorities in the newsgathering process. Focusing more closely on actual newsroom behaviour, Manning discusses the way newsroom routines combine with the need to meet

deadlines, encouraging journalists to privilege these familiar, 'elite' sources, and therefore helping to maintain their power. In addition, he suggests that those groups in society that are effectively marginalised, by being constantly overlooked by journalists during their routine need to vie for the attention of journalists. They need to become adept at getting their message across, for example, the publicity stunts carried out by environmental group, *Greenpeace* or, more recently, the pressure group *Fathers 4 Justice* (see Chapter 2). This may mean presenting information to newsrooms with a style and format on which journalists can find a newsworthy angle; or presenting newsrooms with information built around 'human interest'. It is vital that news sources competing for attention, understand both what kind of information journalists look for, but also how best to present it, even if this entails simplifying complex issues or personalising structural problems. Although such actions may increase the chance of journalists recognising an event as a certain story type, it also militates against those producing the news presenting stories outside the parameters imposed by the journalistic preoccupation with a particular range of interests and subject matter; beyond a finite range of ideologically determined values and beliefs.

It is important to stress that Manning sees Hall et al's (1978) notion of the primary and secondary definers as vital in highlighting the way power appears to be distributed unequally among different sources. It raises, almost by definition, the issue of those sections of society whose views, ideas and values are given less attention, misrepresented or even overlooked altogether, because they do not enjoy the same privileged access to journalists. But if news' function is to enhance the public's knowledge, therefore enabling them to play a more active part in the democratic process, how far are the "less powerful...significantly disadvantaged in the scramble to secure access to the news media" (Manning, 2001:1)? If news production is organised to privilege the values and ideas of a narrow range of powerful interests, while ignoring others, how can television news content claim to provide a diverse range of views and wide range of perspectives on any given issue? Further, if, as Manning stresses, the growing awareness of the need for audience ratings (McManus, 1994) means journalists may be encouraged to foreground popular beliefs ahead of more

serious and dry political debate. As well as narrowing down the diversity of viewpoints on a given issue, this may lead to the ideological views of a limited number of powerful 'definers' going unchallenged within news discourse.

One type of news source which has the potential to offer an alternative view from powerful institutional forces especially are those people closest to the event itself: the victim, the relative or the eyewitness. The importance placed by journalists on information emanating from members of the public may be secondary to that provided by more 'reliable', and perhaps more objective, accounts derived from so-called experts or official spokespeople. While reporters have always made use of *vox populi*, it is interesting to ask what purpose these serve: to provide hard information central to a story; to add colour and embellishment to it; or to add an extra layer of credibility (Hallin, 1986) or authenticity (Fiske, 1987)? Indeed, there may be a paradox here. On the one hand it may be that journalists, for the reasons discussed above, rely on a narrow range of privileged and powerful sources, such as politicians and their spokespeople. As Manning states:

Politicians, representatives of the medical or legal establishments, senior industrial figures, official spokespeople, or 'objective' analysts such as experts may be more newsworthy by definition than 'ordinary' people, enjoy greater legitimacy in the eyes of journalists as representatives of 'the people' or because they are located in strategically important sections of society.

(Manning, 2001:15)

However, while ascribing high levels of credibility to these kinds of source, journalists also seek to routinely attack and undermine them. As I discussed in Chapter 3, there is a professionally-driven tendency to seek out controversy and conflict among certain powerful people and groups. Just as Gans (1979) believes there is a prevailing ideology among American journalists, to hold accountable various powerful groups in society, it may be that journalists in British television news feel they are serving democracy by constantly questioning and finding fault among politicians and representatives from major institutional establishments. In other words, those groups

most regularly sought out as suppliers of 'important' information are simultaneously the most scrutinised for any failings or wrongdoings.

Finally, it seems reasonable to state that not all news is subject to control by sources. Although the influence on journalists' attitudes that comes from their routine exposure to a limited range of powerful individuals may be the impact on newsroom organisation of certain powerful bodies seeking to influence them, certain newsworthy occurrences such as accidents and disasters are, by definition, unpredictable (Molotch & Lester, 1974). They may occur at a geographical location beyond the area of the 'news net', or where the only information can be obtained from secondary sources such as the news agencies. An editorial decision then needs to be made on whether to dispatch reporters to the scene, which, as well as meaning the story must fit a known category and type, also implies some form of judgement on specific news value. Arguably, only by having some means to assess the latter, can news organisations, arguably, decide on the commercial justification for using finite resources (including time).

Conclusion

The central aim of this chapter has been to discuss the way in which newsroom structure and the organisation of resources serves to privilege certain subject matter and, by implication, favour certain news sources. Something that occurs within easy logistical range of a reporter, and is on a subject familiar as 'news', therefore stands greater chance of being selected than an event which occurs in 'remote' area, either spatially or thematically. In order to discuss this I have concentrated in large part on Tuchman's metaphor of a 'news net', because it seems to offer a rational explanation as to why some types of story seem to be routinely noticed, while others invariably 'slip through' and are never noticed as 'news'. Moreover, stories can only be 'noticed' where the 'net' has been cast which, with newsroom resources being ultimately scarce, is only across a minute fraction of the social, economic and political world.

All news selection, then, is ultimately about prioritising 'reality'. Journalists continue to concentrate on the same privileged locations and known categories of news and in this respect, the system of newsgathering within any given organisation may be a reflection of a broad consensus among journalists that specific events, issues, people and places are newsworthy while others are not. In the way her approach contrasts with Galtung & Ruges's and other writers who see the application of selection criteria as key to judging newsworthiness, the notion that stories are selected primarily because of daily routines and common practices raises fundamental questions for this study. Are stories, as Tuchman asserts, 'naturally' newsworthy by having been privileged already as a result of newsroom structure and organisation? Or do journalists actively apply certain pre-determined criteria in order to assess the value of a story, initially at the point of selection, in ranking each story according to importance, and finally throughout the editing process?

Occurrences that happen 'out there' only become news stories at all because a journalist has deemed them so. In their 'natural state' they are not stories; and they may not, as Molotch & Lester (1974) believe, become stories until they are first seen as an event. This raises the question of how occurrences come to be privileged as newsworthy events at all. Here, Tuchman (1978), believes that newsroom organisation helps structure journalistic thinking so that they perceive all events, issues and occurrences as one of a finite range of 'typifications'. This, in turn, leads them to 'frame' all information encountered in a manner that conforms to existing conventions about what constitutes a 'news story'. Indeed, this may be so automatic that reporters in particular conceive events as stories almost as they first see or hear them (Jacobs, 1996). However, Tuchman's argument, that news organisation leads all journalists to recognise particular types of events as being newsworthy, does not in itself explain how far such editorial decision making results of wider ideological influences and, in turn, the journalistic understanding of 'news value'.

Overall, journalists are subject to a wide range of influences and pressures. The question for my study, then, is how significant in this respect is the way newsrooms are structured and organised? McQuail (2000) may be correct in stating that, in order to fully appreciate news selection, it is necessary to look beyond the individual. However, Chapter 3 discussed how each journalist seems able to act with a high degree of autonomy. This tension between the power and needs of the organisation and beliefs, attitudes and actions of the individual journalist, should be seen as a crucial underpinning aspect of the discussion and analysis that follows.

CHAPTER SIX

RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The primary purpose of this chapter is to set out and critically reflect on my research methods, and to assess how well they met my overall objective of investigating the influences on journalists as they construct television news stories. Operating from the basic premise that all qualitative research is intrinsically “multi-method in focus” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:5), I sought to gather data from two different perspectives. First, there were field notes gathered from observing and talking to journalists individually in three different newsrooms. These took place at Channel Four in January 1997, HTV News in August 1997, and BBC Midlands Today in July 2000. To complement these, I also made a video recording of the broadcast on the same day of the visit. The lead item was transcribed and a detailed description made of each segment of visual footage, to enable me to conduct a close reading of the text. This was augmented by a basic semiotic analysis in preparation for the fuller examination that takes place in Chapter 9. These transcriptions can be found in Appendix 1.

The analysis of both sets of data was underpinned by a methodological approach that treats all news production as a text and all news output as a discursive arrangement of ‘raw reality’, produced within a broader cultural context. ‘News’, as made manifest in television bulletins, is therefore a constructed ‘reality’, grounded in, and emanating from, particular journalistic beliefs, values and assumptions. These, in turn, are subject to dominant ideological influences, the impact of the individual journalist as a ‘professional’, attitudes to ‘news value’, and organisational routines and constraints. Each of these fundamental factors has been discussed in the literature review and it is this that I want to return to now, before discussing my research methods in more depth.

It is important to be clear what my research aims were and to explain this I need to summarise the main issues that have emerged so far in this thesis.

Key Issues Arising From the Literature Review

In television news production, journalists adhere to sets of thought processes, assumptions, ideas and values that are grounded in established practices and routines, but are also subject to the influence of other key factors examined in this study, notably the idea of 'being professional' and the role of 'news value' as a guiding set of rules and criteria. However, it may be that these routines, and what they entail in terms of regular practices, thoughts and actions, are so embedded in newsroom culture that they may have assumed the status of 'common sense'. Consequently, editors and reporters may not seek to question or challenge many of the assumptions, values and ideas which underpin the news selection process. This may be especially the case with a profession that is not only privileged through its various connections with powerful groups in society, but also more protected from outside surveillance than many organisations. Indeed, Hansen et al (1998) make the point here that this insulation from the 'outside world' helps explain the relatively low number of studies undertaken inside newsrooms. But it also provides any researcher entering such relatively unexplored territory with "a rare look into the inner sanctum of media production, that privileged domain in which media professionals ply their trade, make their decisions and fashion their collective outpourings for consumption by the rest of us" (Hansen et al, 1998:35).

As intimated above, all decision making by journalists should be seen as ultimately taking place under the umbrella of various ideas, values and beliefs dominant within a culture at any one time. Within this broader ideological framework, the profession of journalism exists with its own internal practices, standards, assumptions, ideas, values and beliefs, which themselves have a direct influence on how editors and reporters think and operate. One key aspect here is the way 'professionalism' acts as a

framework and mechanism with which to exert a measure of control over journalists, and especially individual reporters, but at the same time allow them a relatively high degree of autonomy in decision making. What is the effect of this on the way individuals set about the daily task of constructing stories? Does it lead journalists to act independently of each other or collaborate at every level of production?

But it is professionalism which may have more of a bearing on attitudes to newsworthiness. As I discussed in Chapter 3, journalists appear to operate from a belief that they are able to judge what is important or interesting. They see themselves as equipped with skills to both know what the audience 'wants' or should know about, and be able to defend this against accusations of bias or inaccuracy. In short, journalists appear to believe they have a special 'nose' for news. If so, what kind of mechanism do they draw on to decide if particular events or issues are newsworthy? In turn, how is (relative) importance judged and decisions made on which elements to emphasise or play down in story construction? In this respect, one of the fundamental issues for this study has been to assess how far those individual criteria suggested by Galtung & Ruge (1965) are actually utilised by reporters and editors during routine decision making. More importantly, do they ever make explicit reference to these in their comments, or display a leaning towards them in their actions? If so which particular criteria stand out?

The final key area of influence I foregrounded in the review of literature was newsroom organisation. It could be, as Schlesinger (1987) suggests, that the simple need to meet deadlines consumes the thoughts of reporters and editors as the broadcast deadline looms, and consequently there is little time for reflection. But does this necessarily mean they are unable to reflect on their actions and decisions? Indeed, evidence suggests that, rather than being controlled by time, the news gathering process is designed to build a strong measure of predictability into the way sources are identified and information collected. An extension of this is that reporters and editors may be able to conceive and 'frame' the structure and content of any given story according to certain preconceived ideas about type and format. This could mean that

certain subject matter takes on an intrinsic newsworthiness. Faced with these various possibilities, another vital objective for this study is to compare the opposing approaches of a 'post hoc' explanation of news value (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), as exemplified by Galtung & Ruge, with those, such as Tuchman (1978), that base their conclusions on the actual study of journalists in a 'real setting'.

Before expanding on how I set about investigating these issues, I want to briefly highlight those areas I was unable to fully explore. Perhaps the most important of all is the study of news sources as a subject in their own right. During the newsroom observation I remained tightly focused on studying the people who actually produce the news stories and did not attempt to discover where those stories in the initial schedule originated. I was not concerned with why they were initially chosen, only how they were assessed in terms of value and importance *once selected*. Indeed, as will be explained fully in due course, this is why my interest in journalistic activity effectively began with the initial morning planning meeting. It is important to add, however, that I did seek to understand how journalists appeared to relate to the sources throughout the various stages of news story construction, in both comments and actions. The other key issue I was unable to cover, effectively by definition because of the brevity of my visits, was how journalists might be affected by wider cultural influences over a longer time period. Although Chapter 4 included an analysis of the interrelationship between dominant ideology and the use and application of specific selection criteria, this was to provide a fuller context for the overall examination of 'news value' as a guiding concept within production and decision making.

With these various points taken into account, this study therefore has two overriding objectives. First, to explore in detail what happens in the newsroom as journalists initially decide the line up of stories for that day's bulletin; then, how they set about gathering information and producing individual news items. Second, to identify and examine those elements which appear to be important in determining newsworthiness. Out of the many research questions emanating from the review of literature, the

following three were identified as being crucial in the productive engagement with research data (Mason, 2002):

1. How much is selection and construction the product of 'automatic' journalistic behaviour?
2. To what extent is newsroom activity influenced by journalists' established routines and familiarity with categories and story types?
3. Which individual selection factors, especially those proposed by Galtung & Ruge (1965), appear dominant in decision making and how are they utilised in a newsroom setting?

Discussion of Methods

I will now discuss these two aspects of my approach in more detail. Most attention will be paid to the observational aspects, because here I need to consider carefully how my role as a researcher impacted on the data gathering process. This is significant to my overall objectives for two main reasons. First, because their attitudes and demeanour towards me may reveal key aspects of routine behaviour normally hidden, notably the willingness and capacity to reflect on selection decisions. Second, in preparation for the analysis that follows in Chapters 7 and 8, it is important to highlight key areas where the nature and quality of findings could have been affected by my physical presence. By comparison, the analysis of the three news items is relatively brief. The method here was more straightforward, revolving around a basic semiotic analysis, from which the dominant features in the text were isolated with the specific aim of identifying selection factors and elaborating on their meaning in relation to Galtung & Ruge's typology.

Newsroom Observation

My choice of newsrooms was ultimately guided by practicalities. I wrote letters to several news organisations in late 1996 and the first one to reply favourably was Channel Four News.⁶ Initially I had anticipated making repeated visits; however, as their reply indicates (see Appendix 2), being constantly inundated with similar types of request, one day was all they were prepared to grant me. As the intention was always to conduct one more period of observation, I sent a second round of letters out in mid-1997. The first newsroom to reply on this occasion was HTV News in Bristol, who I had selected as a possibility because of its close geographical proximity. Like Channel 4, they were helpful in their response and the visit was set up for early August without any special conditions attached. Indeed, the tone of both letters was friendly and expressed polite interest. It may be significant, in terms of how I was actually received during the visits themselves, that my contact in each case was one of the support staff rather than a journalist. In other words, the people I was actually going to be observing and talking to appeared to have no input in the decision to allow me to visit.

It is also important to add here that the fact one newsroom was national and the other local is not the consequence of intention or design on my part and should not be seen as significant with regard to the primary aims of this study. My main “unit of analysis” (Tuchman, 1991:84) was the individual journalist and I wanted to observe them in a newsroom setting. If it were to transpire that marked differences existed in attitudes and behaviour among the journalists in each, that would be taken into consideration in my findings. Of course, I was aware of certain differences in approach between the two types of news programme and the propensity of local news to seek out more ‘popular stories’ (Cottle, 1993), a point I take up in the next chapter.

The decision to conduct a third observation grew out of a realisation that the quality of findings would be strengthened by an extra layer of data. This was undertaken with the same broad objectives as the first two. Were it to reveal broad similarities among all three newsrooms, in terms of routines, behaviour and attitudes to newsworthiness,

this would only strengthen the overall conclusions drawn about how 'typical' television journalists behave. Also, I was conscious of not having covered a newsroom run by the BBC although, once again, it is important to stress, my main concern here was not the broader issue of public broadcasting. As with the other two visits, access did not prove a problem. In this particular instance I was provided with the name of a contact via a third party (who had made the acquaintance of a senior BBC editor at an academic conference) and subsequent negotiations were conducted speedily and efficiently by email.

Once inside each newsroom my intention was to make contact with the programme editor at the earliest opportunity. This turned out to be as soon as the early morning meeting (which I quietly joined) had ended. For both diplomatic and pragmatic reasons, the aim was to allow myself to be guided and directed by them throughout the day. This applied especially to making initial contact with other journalists. Simply wandering randomly around the newsroom floor and eavesdropping on conversations (Deacon et al, 1998:256) was neither a desirable or practical option. It might or might not have enabled me to speak to more people, but would have drawn attention to my presence, when the aim was to cause "as little disruption as possible" (Burgess, 1984:92). I will describe and analyse fully the various conversations I had with journalists in Chapters 7 and 8, but it is worth stating here that the editor's decision to place me next to different individuals throughout the day was not the latter's choice. That this was effectively imposed on them of course raises the possibility that some at least did not want me to be there (and I have already established that it was other newsroom staff who had written the letter effectively inviting me).

In attempting to define the precise nature of my overall role as a researcher, my presence could not by any measure be described as a 'complete participant'. It is crucial to recognise here that I had no power to influence any aspect of journalists' work. Neither did I have, nor expect to have, any automatic right to be listened to (Ashworth, 1995), in the event of trying to express, say, a preference or viewpoint. I

was there first and foremost to watch and listen to what they said, even if I had begun the conversation. I may have been imposed on journalists as a physical presence next to them, but it was important, in the interests of remaining as objective as possible, not to impose ideas and opinions as well. Another distinction made between different research approaches is the 'participant as observer' (Robson, 1993:197), but this only partially describes what I did. According to Robson's definition, this required me to partake in any newsroom activities, which clearly did not happen. But in other respects, the way he outlines this method is applicable. I did make my position and research interests clear to all concerned, attempt to gain their trust, and ask them throughout the day to "to explain various aspects of what is going on" (Robson, 1993:197).

Perhaps, then, it is more accurate to describe my role as an 'observer-as-participant'. In discussing this, Burgess (1984:82) defines it as when "contact with informants is brief, formal and openly classified as observation". In raising the issue of how long a period of observation is, Burgess raises an important issue. This is the extent to which data, aimed at highlighting the attitudes, behaviour and general characteristics of a specific group, can be meaningful if collected over a single day only. Here, Hansen et al (1998:56) claim that short term, "smash and grab raids are of little use" in serious observational study. However, I wish to suggest this may not be the case. Indeed, the brevity of my visits may even have been a strength rather than a weakness, partly because, almost by definition, I was not in a position to 'go native' and become too closely involved. Rather, a short burst of concentrated activity, speaking to several people, allowed me to remain detached from proceedings.

I was only ever intending to obtain a snapshot of the norms, attitudes and behaviour which appear to inform professional practice. But it was vital, even with a short period of observation, not to become part of the context I was observing (Burgess, 1984:80) and to try to keep the act of obtaining data as objective as possible (a point I return to below when discussing my interview method in more detail). The 'classic' participant observation approach is supposed to derive its strength as a research tool from long

term observation because respondents become used to the 'extra presence' and, cease to regard them as an outsider. For the researcher the process becomes routine and predictable Lang & Lang (1991:197) and therefore 'normalised'. This may be the case with some social groups, but one of the most striking aspects of newsroom behaviour, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, is the way journalists seem to become absorbed in the daily task of producing stories. This may in itself help to block out the presence, most of the time at least, of the 'unknown' person sitting next to them. It may become even more likely if the reporter or editor operates from an assumption that the researcher, who they did not personally invite, will probably never return. In this sense, a general indifference or lack of rapport could act in the researcher's favour, by effectively signifying that the journalist will do their job 'normally' in spite of being watched and spoken to for a brief period. Even more crucially perhaps, it may be that 'professionalism' equips journalists with the ability to act in this manner.

Indeed, the amount of interest in my work varied markedly between newsrooms. At Channel Four, staff in general displayed a relatively high level of curiosity, while at HTV and Midlands Today the response was more mixed, with some journalists being reasonably attentive and others remote or at best indifferent. With the latter, there was always the strong sense that I was being tolerated for 'one day only'. It is interesting perhaps that no member of newsroom staff, even those who had been helpful and accommodating, ever enquired how I would use the data. This may have been a mixture of needing to concentrate on routine tasks, as suggested above, or because the general unconcern for my enquiry precluded any curiosity about sensitive material, say, being published (Hansen et al, 1998:52). At the same time, perhaps, any display of vagueness or superficiality in their answers may have acted as a form of protective shell against giving away important details, personal or professional. Such a possibility, though further study would be required to test it properly, raises the interesting spectacle of the very group of people most responsible for exposing the private activities and failings of others being unwilling, perhaps even incapable, of revealing issues of substance about their own practices.

Expanding now on the method I used to extract verbal information, my approach was to utilise 'informal interviewing-as-conversation'. According to Burgess (1982) this method of collecting data has long been an effective means to focus on elements that tend to go unrecorded within more structured interviews. The unstructured, informal format provides opportunities for the researcher to follow up interesting lines of enquiry that emerge naturally. However, to remain an effective tool, such conversations must be carried out within a planned framework, even if this remains entirely hidden from the process. Whether conversation is sporadic or more sustained, there must always be a central purpose (Mason, 2002). Further, according to Burgess (1982:107), the researcher must both keep the discussion on track, in accordance with the research aims, and also remain flexible so that potentially fruitful lines of enquiry may be followed up, even if this means taking the conversation in a new direction. Because journalists are such busy people, every opportunity must be taken to keep the dialogue flowing and avoiding too many breaks in the dialogue.

Listening attentively was vital here, which was difficult while trying to make notes at the same time. To help in this, I relied on a short list of issues that needed to be covered. This needs to be seen as an *aide memoire* rather than a list specific questions. The advantage of such a tool is that it allows particular topics and themes to remain in the observer's mind, but at the same time the questions do not intrude on the flow of conversation (Burgess, 1994:110). At the same time, however, it was important, while compiling a set of notes that were descriptive and meaningful, not to actually be seen to be continually doing so. On one level this was simply not feasible while engaging individual journalists in conversation. The disadvantage here was that a number of potentially fruitful comments were not recorded verbatim, or not recorded at all. This was particularly an issue during those occasions when the conversation was more sustained and it was necessary to maintain a coherent line of reflexive questions, often amidst constant interruptions. It also throws into relief the one occasion, at HTV, when I conducted a largely unstructured interview away from the newsroom (in the staff canteen). This only happened once and proved interesting by allowing the

journalist concerned to consider my questions at more length. The impact of this on data quality will be discussed fully in the analysis chapters

It was important, then, that questions were posed as though part of a prescriptive list. They were designed to provide a loose structure and no more and were based around the major issues outlined earlier in this chapter. The particular language used to conduct the conversations was, on my part, as simple as possible, in the sense that I did not set out to be 'too clever'. I never used theoretical terms like 'ideology', or key words that had emerged as significant in my review of literature such as 'automatic'; or indeed referred to theorists such as Galtung & Ruge. Instead my questions were deliberately general and broadly thematic. For example, what kind of language did they use? Which subject areas, if any, drew out strong emotional feelings? How ready were they to discuss news value in conceptual terms? To what extent did they appear to be questioning decisions? In particular, I wanted to shed light on what actually happens during the crucial processes of assimilating information, editing material and preparing a script, and to ask how far reporters overtly reflected on the process of gathering, shaping and packaging information into news stories.

Linked to this, and one aspect of journalistic behaviour that proved advantageous in data gathering, was that it was not necessary to have knowledge of special terminology. There was no use of acronyms or abbreviations in our exchanges, nor any excessive use of technical jargon. There was never a point when I felt excluded because of impenetrable or esoteric language being used. Overall, this meant that editors and reporters were able to talk in their own language (Burgess, 1982:109), making note taking easier and helping to keep exchanges more 'natural'. Perhaps because it is imperative journalists express ideas clearly when formulating news scripts, they are naturally inclined to incorporate the same clarity within more informal discourse. In terms of my own conversational strategy, it was equally important not to appear over-confident or 'too clever' and, if anything, to present a slightly 'naive' persona.

Data was collected in notebooks, written as I went along rather than retrospectively. In this respect, I wanted any reflective observations to have a sense of immediacy and freshness. This led to me relying solely (during the day) on the notes I compiled at the time. As Deacon et al (1998:259) say, there are clear advantages to 'being there' and recording information at the point it happens. There was therefore no necessity to contrive an escape to the toilet, as I had no wish to add to my basic reflections until later when planning the analysis. There were, though, particular elements I actively set out to record, notably: physical layout, newsroom hierarchy, nature and format of meetings, sequence of events throughout the day and, of course, any general comments overheard, or actions witnessed, which pertained to the process of judging newsworthiness. It is important to add here that the reason for this was to provide a general context for the analysis that follows. For example, the way meetings were conducted, as will be seen in Chapter 8, were crucial in highlighting the approach of editors and reporters to debating the relative merits of different examples of subject matter. I was less concerned with recording every last detail, say in the manner of Cottle's (1993:46) diagram of the Central newsroom seating plan.

Finally, analysis of the data entailed initially transcribing all the handwritten notes, then reformulating data into various categories in line with the general themes that had begun to emerge from the overall findings. This is a vital point. It was central to my methodology that I did not impose my own views on the information collected, thus reducing the possibility of bias. Of course, it is impossible to remain completely free of influence in this respect. Indeed, there is perhaps an irony in my attempting to remain objective here, in light of the discussion which took place in Chapter 3, about how television news journalists seek to justify their actions because they believe in the ultimately 'impossible' goal of objectivity.

So far I have set out how I tried to ensure my general approach and data collection methods were as unobtrusive as possible, thus minimising the chance of 'unnatural' responses to the points raised. But I was, of course, an outsider entering the space of a

busy group of people, engaged in tasks that were driven by the daily requirement to meet deadlines. So to what extent did I have a disturbing effect on their routines? How far did this have an impact on the type and quality of data being collected? The approach I was using, by giving respondents plenty of space to ‘breathe’ and express ideas, has the capacity to those being studied towards “a more analytic reflection about processes and other aspects of the [the newsroom’s] functioning” (Robson, 1993:197). But, despite this, how far did my own actions lead to unnatural behaviour – that is, the expression of ideas and views that were unrepresentative of journalists – or at least of the particular individuals I directly engaged with?

In terms of questioning style, it was important, especially when faced with a situation where most reporters and editorial staff proved so economical in their responses and closed in their elaboration of ideas, to appear like an inquisitor. Because, as Hansen et al (1998) point out, data often has to be ‘won’ by the researcher, rather than always presenting itself, it was sometimes necessary to be more proactive, especially with those journalists who displayed lack of interest in me. Although this increased the risk of upsetting busy individuals if, say, I interrupted their flow of thought as they stared ahead at the computer screen, conversation never dried up completely and relationships generally remained cordial. Indeed, it is perhaps illuminating that the one time I seemed to openly upset a journalist happened when I was being especially persistent in a line of questioning. It was within two hours of the first visit, to Channel Four and the journalist in question took an overt dislike to my presence. I will take this up again in the analysis, because it pertained directly to his views on news value. However, it proved an early lesson in remaining sensitive to the effect I was having on people, and the experience was not repeated.

On one occasion in particular, I managed to ‘tease out’ more information than would have been anticipated. At HTV, a reporter, for reasons not completely clear, temporarily dropped her guard and revealed a level of candour I did not encounter with anyone else. Whether or not editing the story at her desk allowed greater levels of autonomy (Solaski, 1999), and therefore the belief that she could exhibit greater levels

of freedom, this particular journalist was, for a period at least, more amenable to conversation. This caused her to reveal, through a series of anecdotal stories and personal opinions, illuminating insights into journalistic behaviour. I will return to these in more depth in the next chapter, but it is pertinent to add here that by the time I left the newsroom at the end of my visit, her manner towards me had changed markedly. As I offered thanks for her help, she physically recoiled and turned to concentrate on the computer screen in front of her. It was as though this particular reporter now realised she had acted unprofessionally. It may be that a more senior member of the newsroom had spoken to her. Whatever the reason, her abrupt change in manner seemed to be a sign that some key aspect of the professional code had been broken and she now regretted it. She may have felt her professional integrity, even identity, had been undermined.

In summary, the way journalists responded to me gave an indication, not just of the kind of people they were as individuals, but, arguably, more fundamental characteristics of professional behaviour. Any indifference shown might have been a personal reaction to me or my own behaviour, or simply the manifestation of characteristics specific to journalists working in newsrooms. Perhaps part of being a journalist requires such focus on the task in hand that the presence of a third party is not just a nuisance but simply of no significance. All that matters essentially is the task of meeting the deadline

Analysis of News Items

I hoped, at the end of each newsroom visit, to have accumulated information rich enough in depth and detail to be able to draw meaningful comparison with the output I had recorded from the same bulletin that day. In particular, I wanted to examine how far dominant features in the text revealed journalistic preoccupations with particular selection criteria. Further, how far did these correspond to those factors which

appeared important in the newsroom discussions? Equally interesting, which factors had not been mentioned in that context, but still appeared to have been influential judging from the choice of words and images used in the final broadcast? What would these in particular suggest about the ability of journalists to reflect on their routine practices? In Chapter 9 my chosen method was to base the analysis primarily on Galtung & Ruge's typology. This is for the simple reason, emphasised at various points in this study, that it still retains a powerful influence as an explanation of how "events' become 'news'" (Galtung & Ruge, 1965:65). However, being content-led, and not based on what actually happens in the newsroom, I wanted to test its relevance to 'real' journalistic thoughts and behaviour.

As stated earlier, I recorded each headline item from the bulletin broadcast on the day of my visit, and prepared transcriptions of all verbal statements. These were set alongside descriptions of visual data to produce an overall narrative sequence, as constructed by the reporter. The subsequent analysis of this could be seen as providing a commentary on selection priorities but becomes especially valuable as a research instrument when used to complement the observational findings. While visiting newsrooms allowed a measure of insight into professional behaviour during routine newsroom activity, the recording and close analysis of each item produced evidence of the ingredients that went into the story. In this respect, I was especially interested in identifying which, if any, of Galtung & Ruge's twelve selection criteria appeared influential and then comparing these with comments on the same broad subject made by editors and reporters in 'normal' newsroom conversation (accepting, of course, my possible influence on proceedings, as discussed above). It is important to stress here that the aim was not to simply match each factor with the manifest content in a mechanistic way, but to focus on those specific criteria which appear dominant in terms of influencing journalists.

For the purpose of my investigation, the extent to which each narrative is representative of 'actuality' or 'truth' is not the primary concern. This thesis is not about assessing how far 'facts' and information have undergone some form of

transformation through the mediation process. My concern with how a particular version of “reality comes into existence” (Philips & Hardy, 2002:6) is confined to trying to understand how the reporters creating the story came to select particular material and how they chose to represent it in a particular way. As Gill (2000:175) states, all accounts derived from the use of language involve “choice or selection from a number of different possibilities”. While she does not refer specifically to news in making this statement, television news items should, I believe, be seen as highly appropriate illustrations of narrative constructions. As McNair (1998) points out (and the subject is discussed in Chapter 3 of this study) news item construction implies ‘authorship’.

The nature of journalism is that newsroom professionals, acting as a particular social group in society, are invested with the power to assemble pieces of verbal and visual information that they have selected, into narrative accounts. In so doing they are making continual choices to actively emphasise certain aspects, downplaying others and leaving other meanings implicit within the text (van Dijk, 1985). By treating all news output as a discursive structure, it should be possible to gain insight into how news stories are assembled as an amalgamation, ultimately, of selection priorities. It also, crucially, aids the investigation of news texts as manifestations of values, ideas, beliefs and assumptions that are taken for granted. This is a viewpoint shared by Tuchman (1991:83) when stating that “discourse analysis emphasises how the ideological significance of news is part and parcel of the methods used to process news”. In electing to analyse each television news item as a text, I am following this same path, in attempting to relate output to the actions and motivations of those who produced it, at the same time adding weight to my findings originating inside the newsrooms.

A detailed analysis of the data now follows. As already stated this will be structured around the major themes that emerged from my findings and I will comment

throughout on those instances when my personal engagement with journalists may have had an impact on their behaviour or comments.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE NEWSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

Remaining aware throughout of the important issues raised and discussed in the last chapter, the aim of this first tier of analysis is to set out the broad newsroom environment in which news production occurs and to discuss in depth its wider impact on journalists' attitudes and behaviour. It will begin with a description of the general background of the newsrooms visited. This aims to set the general scene and includes an introductory outline of news organisations themselves. Here, building on Chapter 3, there will be a brief assessment of the relationship between 'public service broadcasting' and commercial pressures; and also a consideration of the specific function and remit of local television news. I will then move on to describe the structure of each newsroom in greater detail, followed by an analysis of the processes of news production in each case. One vital issue here is the general editing process as this, of course, is the point at which a news story is effectively created. But, equally important is the behaviour of the reporter throughout the entire day. In this respect, how is individual behaviour guided by notions of professionalism? What is the specific role of the programme editor in this respect?

The analysis then looks at two of the major concerns for this entire study. First, and stemming directly from the previous discussion, I will examine how much freedom and autonomy individual reporters have in the overall task of story production? This, in turn, will set up an analysis of the way daily routines and editorial pressures might lead to a form of behaviour that is automatic. Such a possibility is, I believe, crucial when considering general attitudes to newsworthiness and individual story construction – which is the subject of Chapter 8. Finally, I return briefly to the discussion in the last chapter about my own role as an observer. It can only be stressed

again that the various insights I believe I gained into routine behaviour, and all the comments I managed to elicit from editors and reporters, may have been distorted in some way by presence as an 'outsider'. However, to repeat a vital point, every effort was made to limit this as far as possible. Nonetheless the fact I was there, asking questions and sitting next to people made me, to some extent, part of the production process. Accordingly, I will highlight those occasions where interaction between me and the person I was observing or talking to may have had a bearing on the findings.

In the course of describing what journalists did and said, I have changed the names of all staff, in the interests of anonymity. This applies to the following discussion, as well as in Chapters 8 and 9.

General Background to Newsrooms Visited

Although my overall aims did not embrace judging how far the actions of one journalist might be representative of an entire news organisation, it is, I believe, pertinent to investigate how far individuals are influenced by the organisational structure around them. In order to provide background for this, it is necessary to outline the type of organisations being studied. It is important to state that in doing this I will limit my comments to the relationship between organisational characteristics and attitudes to newsworthiness.

I will begin by commenting on the wider commercial context of news production. This arose as an issue in my first visit in certain comments made at Channel Four. These were in connection with the allocation of resources to foreign locations, and by implication at HTV and Midlands Today in relation to maintaining high audience figures. Indeed, alongside its expansion into digital output and online news provision under the leadership of Director General John Birt, the BBC itself has sought to embrace commercial interests (Tunstall, 1993) in a manner far removed from the attitudes and behaviour of the Corporation at the time of Schlesinger's (1987) seminal

study in the 1970s (Negrine, 1994:180). This raises important questions about the role of a public service provider in the twenty-first century, and it is the view of Bromley (2001:1) that there have been major recent shifts in the “context of public-private divisions”, the effects of which include a move towards more populist content and greater direct recognition of audience needs. This could be seen as being at odds with Schlesinger’s original findings, which indicated that BBC journalists in the 1970s were wary of viewers expressing an active view about news content.

There is also an implication here for the attitudes of television journalists in general to news selection. In Chapter 4, when discussing ‘news value’, I based my comments on journalists as a single group, rather than focus on those in television specifically; neither did I make more than brief and passing reference to distinctions between national and local news. This was, essentially speaking, because my overriding concern in this thesis as a whole is journalists and news selection *per se*, rather than an examination of the values and attitudes of specific groups. However, before expanding on some key features of the three newsrooms I visited, it is worth highlighting the following.

First, and to reiterate the historical discussion of professionalism in Chapter 3, one of the major influences of television news was how its relative immediacy caused the press to scale down the proportion of space devoted to ‘news’ and to increase the amount of feature articles and commentary. This aspect of television was reinforced by the capacity to support such ‘recency’ of coverage with a wealth of visual imagery, something that has become even more the case in recent years with technological advances and twenty-four hour news coverage. Second, as Conboy (2004) argues, television news content has become more entertainment led. This, once again, is a consequence of the visual possibilities made possible by new technology, but also, arguably, as a response to the increasing emphasis on, for example, ‘celebrity news’ in newspapers. On top of this, the increased competition, that has been a feature of the British press for over a century, has become much more of a factor in television news coverage with an increasingly fragmented viewing audience.

In this context, the key objective of Channel 4 News, since it started in 1982, has been to reflect the greater complexities within pluralist society, in a manner not previously done by the other three channels up to that point, and in so doing provide for a wider set of tastes and interests (Born, 2003). Having been initially constrained financially by its relationship to ITV, the year of my visit, 1997, marked the start of an increase in commercial expansion, under the new Chief Executive, Michael Jackson, and the years since have seen an ever-expanding commitment towards more commercially-orientated programmes. However, since my visit was in January of that year, those changes are unlikely to have had any significant impact. Indeed, there was no overt sense, through the discussions I had, that reporters and editors were being influenced by commercial factors, other than the basic journalistic desire not to “bore the audience”, which was the response of Phil to my question on the programme not providing more detailed coverage of the European Union. In terms of the overall remit and philosophy of Channel Four News, my experience in 1997 suggests little fundamental change between then and now, certainly in the context of the following statement on the programme’s current website:

Our driving imperative is originality – always seeking to set out our own agenda, to come up with a distinctive take on events, and to challenge existing assumptions. Our journalism aims to be authoritative and investigative, our production treatments creative and distinctive.

(http://www.channel4.com/news/about_us/index.html. Accessed 18 3 04)

Moving to the two local newsrooms, I will focus here mainly on the relationship between local news as a specific area of news broadcasting and the attitudes of those working in it towards story selection. According to Negrine & Eyre (1998) there is a clear distinction between the way national news and local news reports the same original event or issue. Whereas with the former there is no imperative to include any local or regional emphasis in style and content, with the latter this effectively defines how the story will be produced and presented. On top of this, there are specific differences in local news coverage between the BBC and commercial television. These various distinguishing features are illustrated by the way the 1997 General

Election campaign was covered. On Central News East (which Negrine & Eyre studied) coverage was intermittent and brief with the emphasis on maintaining a lighter, sometimes humorous line; on the day it was announced, the item was positioned in the middle of the schedule, well behind stories directly relevant to the region. On the BBC's Midlands East, however, the announcement led the bulletin and the tone remained more serious throughout the campaign; the essential difference here from national news was that issues of national significance were "refracted through local concerns" (Negrine & Eyre, 1998:44).

In terms of more specific selection criteria, Cottle's study of ITV Central News suggests regional television journalists have a particular 'visualisation' (Cottle, 1993:60) of how a local news story should look and sound; indeed what a typical programme should consist of. Those working in both Midlands Today and HTV, broadly speaking, may see themselves as operating within a specifically local news culture when it comes to judging newsworthiness and constructing individual stories. Central to this is that stories are populist in tone and content and, as far as possible, narratives are produced that present information from a 'human angle'. This applies to all types of event not purely those regarded as 'soft news'. In other words, an emphasis on the individual personality seems to lie at the heart of local news production. It is always preferable, Cottle found, to present people's experiences directly rather than for reporters to comment on them as third parties and the effect here is enhanced if content and style appeals to viewers' emotions.

Supporting this view with their own findings, Negrine & Eyre (1998) also emphasise how local news is permitted to be entertaining in a way that national news cannot be. Stories that do not meet this specific criterion may well be jettisoned even if they possess other significant newsworthy qualities (Golding & Elliott, 1979). This may, in turn, mean that the way local news stories are selected and constructed prevents the audience from engaging in "constructive debate in a public, democratic sense" (Costera Meijer, 2003:26). Indeed, Negrine & Eyre make the important point that, because there is a tendency among local news journalists to find politics 'boring

television', certain subject matter is simply ignored. For example, they found no meaningful information about how local government actually operates.

Another important feature of local news identity is that it emphasises its specific 'regionalness' (McNair, 2003:200). In this respect Cottle's study pointed to journalists at Central News striving to build up a friendly relationship with audience members, at the same time retaining a sense of authority as a reliable news provider. Allied to this, local news also appears to regard its role in the region as a form of 'moral guardian'. Similarly, Negrine & Eyre cite the way regional news programmes provide a 'familiar friend' image for their particular audience. They also make the important point that regional news is not necessarily local because the geographical territory it covers is too large. For a programme like Midlands Today to maintain its appeal, its audience, which includes counties as far apart as Shropshire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire, need to feel part of a distinctive regional grouping. As Negrine & Eyre put it, they need to feel they are receiving 'their news'. In this sense, local news is especially dependent on the idea that the viewing audience is part of a single community, among whom an ideological consensus exists (Hall, 1982).

Outline and Structure of Newsrooms

To recap, my first two newsroom visits took place in 1997 and there was then a gap of three years until the final observation at Midlands Today in July 2000. During that time, however, there was no fundamental change in what I set out to achieve. From the perspective of what I was studying, there seemed to be no shifts in newsroom attitudes and behaviour worthy of note, other than those associated with technological advances. While issues such as the effects on news gathering of, for example, the availability and speed of satellite transmission (Hesketh & Yorke, 1993; Higgins, 2003) are important, they are beyond the scope of this study. However, there is one specific feature of news production that is pertinent to my overall enquiry. This was at HTV where reporters were beginning to make use of digitalised editing technology,

meaning individuals could perform the task of story editing at their desks. For the purpose of understanding selection priorities, the relevance of this is that it allowed each reporter increased levels of freedom when deciding what to include and which elements to emphasise within the story. In making this point, however, it is necessary to add that, even where a picture editor was present, at Channel Four and Midlands Today, reporters appeared to enjoy high levels of autonomy from editorial control.

This last point is an important one. In my analysis a major feature of individual news story construction was its essentially formulaic nature. There was little sense of reporters seeking to produce reports that were, say, visually innovative, rather a concern to 'tell the story' as concisely and clearly as possible. Because news production is by definition a continuous process, a strong characteristic of journalistic behaviour is the sense that everything is in a state of flux. Everything seemed to have the purpose of meeting a specific objective: obtaining information on the phone; confirming a 'fact'; requesting a favour from a colleague. Journalists seemed to be, in general, earnest in their endeavours and even the few jokes made at planning meetings were caustic or disparaging, rather than banal or frivolous. In general, there was very little evidence of reporters, say, chatting aimlessly.

Inevitably there were exceptions to this, especially one reporter at HTV who, as briefly mentioned in the last chapter, revealed information normally concealed by the professional barriers journalists seem to operate behind (Schlesinger, 1987; Tuchman, 1999)). I will return to this in more depth later, and only need to add at this point that, ultimately, this individual was just as 'professionally serious' as anyone else, only dropping her guard for a limited period, before the final push towards the deadline properly took hold. Indeed, each newsroom gave off the palpable air of control and organisation. For long periods, people operated in silence, concentrating purposively on their computer screens or checking notes. It was not a bustling atmosphere in any sense, everyone seeming comfortable performing their allotted tasks. I witnessed no signs of panic or even rushing around and in this sense my findings contrast sharply with the "occasionally frenzied" activity observed by Cottle (1993:47), in his study of

ITV Central News. If the programme editor was monitoring story content closely this was not overtly apparent.

In terms of basic appearance, each newsroom looked broadly similar, open plan with individual personnel sitting at desks, with computers, and with sufficient space to work unencumbered by the activity of colleagues. At times a more senior member of newsroom staff would emerge from one of the smaller offices round the perimeter, but I had no personal contact with any of them. My experience suggested a relationship between seating arrangements and the researcher's ability to obtain data. While at Channel Four (and Midlands Today) I was positioned alongside the various reporters (which was indeed also the case later on at HTV), with Bob I was positioned behind him. He had already explained to me that all journalists in the newsroom were still getting used to the new editing system that was being phased in, which works on video recordings that have been 'digitalised' from the initial analogue recordings. This meant he, along with certain other journalists at HTV, was able to edit alone at his desk. Although he told me that editing the ten minute broadcast at lunchtime required considerably less effort than a full half hour bulletin, this task seemed to preoccupy him to a large degree and, because I was often facing his back, it was difficult to interact. Without eye contact, opportunities for dialogue appeared harder. Such difficulties as these – having to spend long periods watching journalists and waiting for an opportune moment to interrupt – characterised my experience at all three newsrooms. The sheer difficulty of achieving sustained periods of dialogue perhaps sums up the predicament of the newsroom researcher than anything else.

At the first available opportunity I approached the individual who appeared to have overall responsibility for the schedule at the early morning planning meetings. At HTV this was straightforward. Ben, the Planning Editor, was clearly controlling and driving the proceedings, a role he expanded on during our discussion during lunch, which I expand on below. Similarly, at Midlands Today, although a more senior member of editorial staff was also present, Robin the Producer, was doing most of the talking and allocating tasks to the reporters present, and it was him I spent the morning

sitting alongside afterwards. At Channel Four, however, it was harder to identify a single dominant figure, largely due to the presence of a Home and Foreign News Editor alongside two other more senior members of newsroom staff. All of these contributed vocally to the direction of the meeting, but it was Clive, the Home News Editor, who was accountable for the majority of content and with whom I spent the opening hour of the day. It is these three individuals who I will be focusing on for the purpose of comparing editorial responsibilities across the three newsrooms.

In terms of each newsroom's hierarchical newsroom structure, I only managed to procure an official list of job titles at HTV (see Appendix 2). It seems that, among news organisations in general, "a common language covering job titles and editorial/production methods has never satisfactorily taken root, glossaries notwithstanding" (Yorke, 2000:29). Here, under the Controller of News and Current Affairs there were three Producers, three Production Editors, four "Subs" (Early, Lunchtime, Late and Day), nine reporters and two presenters. In contrast to Channel Four and Midlands Today, the individual who had the task of planning, overseeing and monitoring the overall schedule was not the News Editor or 'Producer' but the 'Planning Editor'. Also, at HTV, as with Midlands Today, the role of News Editor/Producer operated on a rotational basis, with three such positions at HTV and two at Midlands Today, whereas Clive at Channel Four was assisted by two other editors with specific remit for Home and Foreign News. For the sake of simplicity I will refer to this role – that is, the person with direct overall responsibility for the bulletin on any given day – from now on simply as the editor

It is important to add here that I did not speak to all staff in each newsroom. For example, I was not in a position to confirm, say, how much direct influence was exerted by the Controller of News and Current Affairs at HTV, for the simple reason that I did not know who that person was to identify them. This should not be seen as a problem for this study, however, as it is the relationship between the individual who oversees the bulletin and the reporters who construct each individual story that is most important. Overall, I was less concerned with the precise nature of each one's job

specification than with how they related to those about them, such as the way the editorial staff engaged with the reporters actually producing individual news items. It was far more interesting, in gaining insight into news selection behaviour that, for example, Robin seemed to enjoy higher levels of power and control than his equivalents at Channel Four and HTV, or that the Senior Planning Editor at Channel Four was the only member of senior editorial staff at any of the newsrooms who took any interest in me. For this study, what matters is that I gained access to the person in each newsroom who had most direct influence in determining basic news selection and, in the process, gleaned verbally what each one's views were on the important question of newsworthiness. The main purpose of my enquiry was to gain greater insight into the way journalists in general behaved during the process of story construction.

Having set out the general atmosphere into which I conducted my research, and before dealing with specific issues relating to news story production, it is necessary to be clear on the basic flow of events that make up a typical working day in the newsroom. In particular, I will deal extensively here with that point in the editing process when the discursive entity familiar to the audience as a 'news story' is actually shaped and constructed. For this study, this is the key stage of news production, as without it there would be no story.

Description of the News Production Process

Integral to all news production is systematic planning of that day's bulletin. Accordingly, a key feature of all newsrooms are the planning meetings, often lengthy, and held daily, weekly and monthly (Yorke, 2000:29). It is at the early morning gathering that the day's schedule is formulated and this is the basic framework around which the rest of the day's activities are structured (photocopies of the original schedules, procured on the day of each visit, are in Appendix 3). In each of my visits, it was this occasion that marked the beginning of my observation and the moment I

first met many of those journalists I would encounter throughout the rest of the day. I will outline each meeting in turn, beginning with the 9.30 meeting at Channel Four. Here there were four editorial staff present, along with most of the reporters I later encountered in the newsroom plus the newsreader Phil. It was immediately apparent that certain members of the gathering made a disproportionately large contribution to the discussion and here Phil was the most vocal of all, expressing firm ideas about the different subjects that came up. However, at no point was the discussion heated or impassioned, a characteristic common to all three newsrooms at this initial meeting. At HTV there were eight people present at the 8.45 meeting and, like Channel Four, it was democratically conducted with Ben the Planning Editor guiding those present through various items on the schedule. In attendance at the Midlands Today 9.00 meeting were that day's editor, Robin plus eight other staff and a more senior editor, Vic, who had been my initial contact. Together, these two steered all those present through the provisional schedule.

The number of meetings varied. At Channel Four there were two more after the initial gathering, one mid-morning, the other after lunch, and I was invited to attend both of these. At HTV there was one more after lunch, which I was not asked to attend, while at Midlands Today only the early morning gathering was deemed necessary. As soon as the first meeting had finished the various reporters dispersed and immediately set about their allotted tasks. The act of gathering information seemed to follow a pattern across the three newsrooms. The majority of reporters went out on location with a cameraperson, returning later with raw video footage and, if applicable, interview material. If someone stayed put there would be a specific reason, for example, Charles at Channel Four who needed to scrutinise an already edited item in the company of a lawyer. When in, or back in, the newsroom, the general impression given was of reporters and editors continually engaged in researching and obtaining information, often on the telephone. This appeared (at that time) to be the favoured means of acquiring information, rather than the use of computer databases or online sources. The strong impression during the three visits was of a news gathering process based

around proactive behaviour, rather than journalists passively waiting for stories to be supplied to them.

The temporal flow of events at all three sites was geared towards getting stories ready for broadcast in time for the deadline. One of the striking aspects of journalistic behaviour was that they were engaged in the activity of news production almost continuously. Moreover, those who were working on stories for the evening bulletin (some, of course, had been preparing shortened versions for the lunchtime broadcast) increased their tempo after lunch. The achievement of the primary goal – the construction of an individual story by each reporter and the management of the overall schedule by the programme editor – manifestly took over as the dominant focus. At each newsroom I observed a general reduction in noise level and volume of conversation, as people calmly set about familiar routines. This suggested a clear sense of purpose, as the deadline inexorably approached. However, I never detected any sense of panic, and there was no overt sense that journalists were struggling under pressure they could not handle. On the contrary, their behaviour was highly controlled. Just as Schlesinger found in his study of the BBC, my observation of journalists across all three newsrooms suggests he was correct in asserting that “production is far from chaotic at anything other than a superficial level. Its rationale is to aim at control and prediction” (Schlesinger, 1987:87).

One factor that may have contributed to this was that the running order for the evening bulletin was stabilised as far as possible several hours before the bulletin. At Midlands Today, Robin explicitly stated that this was normally established around 2.00. Reporters need time to physically gather information, especially if this requires going out on location, then transforming it into a story. The news gathering process is slow, even when conditions are favourable (Yorke, 2000) and, although the advent of technology has greatly speeded up the transmission of information, the allocation of people and equipment to cover an event needs to be organised well in advance. Indeed, Yorke states that newsrooms tend to work on the principle that it is better to assume a story is going ahead and call it off if necessary than dispatch resources at the

last minute, should a big new story break unexpectedly. This may be another way of saying that much of the content in a typical news bulletin has been pre-planned. In this respect, Schlesinger's (1987) study of the BBC found that the diary system accounted for nearly three quarters of all stories. The crucial importance of this essentially simple newsroom tool cannot, therefore, be underestimated in ensuring there is sufficient material for the bulletin each day, and enough time to make appropriate logistical arrangements, principally the allocation of reporter roles.

It is perhaps curious, then, that during my visits very few explicit references were made to use of the editor's diary, especially as this was one of the first discussions I had at Channel Four, with Clive the News Editor. Here, he sought to emphasise the part this played in supporting the ongoing research element on which Channel Four News seemed to depend. On a purely practical level Clive's diary contained essential details of 'possible' future stories clearly distinguishable from 'others'. The prioritisation of news stories thus began in his notebook, as the individual charged with preparing the framework of the bulletin. Such a system of planning seems at odds with Galtung & Ruge's criterion of 'unexpectedness', as it highlights how television news appears to rely heavily on "what is regular and institutionalised, continuing and repetitive" (Galtung & Ruge, 1965:67). In general terms it may be that the rhythms of the news production process, and the need to start preparing individual items in good time prior to broadcast, militate against 'surprising' events becoming dominant in the average bulletin. As Molotch & Lester (1974) suggest, news, to become manageable, often needs to be an *event* to begin with, as opposed to a random occurrence. My own findings tend to support this and I saw no evidence of journalists seeing it as 'problematic' that most of the bulletin was essentially fixed several hours before the programme was broadcast.

However, a 'breaking' story did emerge, as the lead item at Channel Four, of an announcement by car manufacturers Toyota that they might at some future time consider withdrawing investment in Britain, should the latter not join the European Single Currency. This information arrived suddenly during the 2.30 planning meeting,

when another member of newsroom staff entered the room and interrupted the discussion already taking place (I did not ascertain where this person had obtained the information in the first instance). It was met with a brief display of animated interest around the table, along with an almost instant, apparently automatic, acceptance that this would become the new headline story. The perceptible increase in verbal activity seemed to signify a sense of urgency that all involved needed to move fast to produce a headline package in four hours, rather than great excitement. It appeared to be an instinctive 'call to arms'. It is also interesting to add that, as people were getting up to leave, the Channel Four News Editor, Melanie, told me as an aside that a story of this magnitude emerging relatively late in the day was unusual. That she volunteered to tell me this is perhaps less important a reflection of journalistic behaviour than the implication that news agendas are normally set several hours before transmission; and that journalists do not normally anticipate them changing. The other significant change I observed was at Midlands Today, when a new item was elevated to the lead story. This was because the original headline item was shelved for another day, due to its concerning a court case where an expected verdict that afternoon was not, after all, going to happen. This, as it transpired, was the item being covered by Mike, the reporter I sat with for much of the afternoon, so I was able to observe at first hand how he set about constructing the story (see later).

After broadcast, for most journalists, the day is finished. However, before everyone leaves to go home, there is a debriefing. I was able to attend this in each case and the overriding impression, in keeping with my general experience throughout the day, was of staff undertaking an act of habitual duty, rather than any great desire to reflect on the content of the programmes in any depth. Certainly, there was no retrospective discussion of selection decisions, such as whether a particular item had relayed the 'facts' in an accurate or 'truthful' manner; or whether, say, an individual has been represented too negatively. In each case the process, which involved all newsroom staff gathering around, perched on desks and standing, while the programme editor addressed them, lasted no more than five minutes. Very few people spoke besides the editor, and comments tended to be about the bulletin *en masse*, rather than specific

items. There was a general sense of satisfaction of how well, broadly speaking, the day had gone, rather than criticism. There was definitely no singling out of individuals for criticism. Overall, my impression was of journalists who, having dealt with the events of that day, were already positioning themselves mentally for the new challenges the following morning.

Individual Story Editing

This stage of production is especially important for this study as it is the point at which the story is actually created. At this point in the study I aim to outline this in a more mechanical sense, as I will be returning to it in the next chapter specifically in relation to news values. Once the reporter has completed the package the video cartridge is passed to staff in the control room gallery, where it joins all the other pre-recorded news reports. This is where transmission actually happens, and it is the point at which the Editor effectively hands over control to the programme director. He or she, assisted by the vision mixer and other key personnel (Boyd, 2001: 380), must ensure everything that is to appear in the bulletin is displayed on a series of screens, from the reports themselves to various graphics, titles and, finally, the studio and presenter. The careful planning that has led up to this stage, especially the exact timing of individual items and the preparation of the scripts, helps ensure the broadcast runs smoothly. It is important to add here that at this stage in the proceedings my data gathering was essentially complete, although I was present in the control room at both Channel Four and Midlands Today. I did not witness any fundamental change in the line up in either case.

The basic principles and actions underpinning story construction were similar across the three newsrooms, with the story being built up in stages. The different segments of footage selected by the reporter were welded to the script which, in my observation, was only completed at that point in the process. Using notes from a notebook, each reporter's technique was essentially the same: to write down an outline of what the text

needed to cover, and then refine this as the visual narrative developed. At HTV, an increasing number of reporters, including two I spent relatively large amounts of time with (Bob and Becky), were performing the editing task independently at their desks, using 'digitalised' equipment. This was indicative of the move towards 'multi-skilling', which started to take hold in British television journalism around the time of my visit (Purdey, 2001:159), although I had seen no sign of this at Channel Four. It is also interesting to note (though not central to this study) that at Midlands Today, nearly three years later than the HTV visit, the old method of using a picture editor prevailed, this despite the BBC's stated objectives in the 1990s towards a "multi-media approach to journalism, incorporating radio, television, Ceefax and online" journalism (Purdey, 2001:159).

The fundamental point here, absolutely central to this entire study, is that the reporter constructing the story was invested with almost total power to include or exclude material, and to emphasise or play down particular elements or aspects. It is important to reiterate that I never once saw any other party actively seek to intervene as the story was being assembled. Indeed, once the editor had informed the reporter of the item's duration, the former was left to their own devices, with only occasional and sporadic interest shown, such as checking that everything was on schedule, or perhaps to pass a brief comment on a particular image, on display at that moment. Reporter autonomy was not affected by the presence of a picture editor, when used. Providing the latter was sufficiently experienced (as those I witnessed were) they, too, were allowed to perform the technical task of marrying images and script unhindered by the reporter, who only needed to give very basic direction. Because of this, the particular examples I observed directly, in the editing suites at Channel Four and Midlands Today, were characterised by long silences, interspersed with short, succinct comments and directions from the reporter. There was no disagreement; each carried out their allotted role efficiently and purposefully.

The story I saw being edited at Channel Four News (not the one analysed in Chapter 9) concerned the imprisonment of asylum seekers in Rochester Jail, Kent. Work in the

editing suite began around 4.45 pm, giving the reporter Mary under two hours to prepare the item. Earlier that afternoon, shortly after I had first met her, Mary had allowed me to sit in on an interview she conducted with a spokesperson from an organisation campaigning on behalf of asylum seekers, and part of this was to be incorporated into the story (which is discussed later). In the editing suite, positioned behind her and the picture editor, I observed them perform the clearly familiar routine of piecing together the material for the story (which had a final duration of just under four minutes). Because of my seating position, and because they were both concentrating intently on the task at hand, it was left to me to choose appropriate moments to ask brief questions, usually to clarify something I had seen or heard. They in turn occasionally offered snippets of information, most of little value to this study, although those that were are discussed below. I remained there until the whole package was complete, just after 6.30 pm.

Both Mary and the picture editor had access to video playback facility, which meant she was able to compile her script in tandem with the raw images in front of her. She began by giving the editor a synopsis of the story, which was that a group of asylum seekers had been on hunger strike for several days, with the condition of two of them having deteriorated to such an extent that a political controversy was brewing. Besides incorporating an excerpt from the studio-based interview I'd sat in on, Mary had already decided which other pieces of visual information needed to be included. There was to be some recent footage of Conservative Home Office Minister Ann Widdecombe speaking in the House of Commons and, to balance this, some of Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn, about whom she already had notes in her notebook. These extracts were not yet to hand, so she rang and requested a colleague to obtain them. There were two other interviews, conducted earlier that day, one by another reporter with a clergyman visiting Rochester Prison and another, carried out by Mary, with a doctor who had treated the detainees. This was interspersed with various shots of demonstrators and shots of the prison taken from the outside.

Her method was to compose in her A5 pad a statement that linked each component part and offered an introductory summary of each contributor, then read this into the microphone when given the cue to do so by the picture editor. He then played it back for her to check and re-read if necessary. Everything was done at speed and, apart from the occasional aside or remark about the subject matter, they worked independently and efficiently. There seemed to be total mutual trust between them, borne of familiarity with both the methods and each other's professional competence. At one point I could see in her notepad clear marks indicating what was to happen in between her commentary, and a brief summary of what was happening as she spoke; for example, a highlighted reference in capital letters to the vicar walking. When it came to the part of the story dealing with the interview I had witnessed, I took special note. She listened to what he said and made written notes for herself, selecting one single 25 second extract from the three minutes he was talking. In making her selection choice, it seemed Mary was looking to extract a statement that epitomised the interviewee's overall statement. This was that the number of people being detained was rising in relative terms, with the aim of deterring future asylum seekers. It was succinctly put and easy to comprehend, which may have made it stand out, as her decision to use it was reached without lengthy deliberation.

Throughout this process, the picture editor also seemed able to work with autonomy, apparently knowing what would be required in terms of when exactly to make a break in the material before adding in a new section. I was informed by Mary that he was a highly experienced editor so could be left on his own to do this. Each of them was therefore working separately but also in tandem. There was unspoken trust and understanding between them. The introduction to the story was written, recorded and incorporated into the overall composition quickly but, from that point on, each of them needed intense concentration to ensure all parts knitted together into a seamless and coherent narrative.

By operating in this way – by effectively assembling the story as a series of visual and verbal sequences – Mary was able to decide on which gaps other recorded material

could be inserted so that they best fitted her own scripted narrative; also which footage could stand alone, without any verbal accompaniment. At every stage of constructing the script she needed to ensure total accuracy, timing her own contribution in relation to the visual material down to the second. Later on, as I watched, she straightened up in her chair, with her back to me, and deliberately went through a short series of relaxation movements, causing her shoulders to sag and rolling her head to exercise her neck. It seemed to be a spontaneous act and illustrated the (self imposed) tension she was under. Mary was willing herself towards the deadline; there was no chance of switching off mentally or physically at this stage in the production process, and also an almost palpable self belief that everything *would* be ready on time (Schlesinger, 1987).

At HTV, as stated earlier, the reporter Becky, making use of new digital technology was able to edit the story without the assistance of a picture editor. The story was about flooding the night before in Gloucester and she had been in the city gathering visual and interview material that morning. She was due to return there later to prepare for a live piece to camera at the head of the bulletin. For the purpose of explaining the process of editing 'raw' images, then marrying them to a script, what I observed was essentially the same as Mary above. The main difference was that it all took place at her desk with only her performing the same tasks. In this respect, it was not possible to measure the extent to which working with such enhanced independence simplified the editing process and freed up time to engage with my questions. What does seem certain is that she felt sufficiently relaxed to provide a range of interesting comments on journalism and newsworthiness. Due to the richness of her remarks, the details of our exchange will be dealt with fully later when I consider the subject of journalistic behaviour and routine practices.

At Midlands Today the 'traditional' editing method of using a picture editor was still in use. A version of the story Mike was working on, as stated earlier, had already been broadcast on BBC Breakfast News but, as the original headline item had been postponed to another day, Robin had decided to develop this one about a woman stranded in California and unable to leave America to visit her dying father, who lived

in the Midlands area. In other words, this was not a new story and what Midlands Today viewers were going to receive was an update adapted for a local news audience. What was new about it was that Mike was going to telephone the woman concerned, Deborah Aaron in America that afternoon, then weave an extract of her response into his own reconfigured version of events. This would be accompanied by the backdrop of a still image of her, selected by Mike from the video material at his disposal. For much of the first hour I spent with Mike little happened as he was endeavouring to set up the telephone interview. His first attempt meant having to leave an answer phone message and I was struck here by how unperturbed he seemed that she might not return his call in time for the evening bulletin, as though professional experience had taught him to remain optimistic in such circumstances.

At 4.28 (I noted down) she finally returned his call, also agreeing to fax him legal information exchanged between her and her lawyer in America, for use in the story. At 4.50 the actual telephone interview took place and involved her answering a short sequence of questions. Mike's aim throughout seemed to be to wait for one particular answer that best encapsulated her predicament, a point I will return to later when looking directly at the role of drama within news content. However, it is worth stating at this stage that, later in the editing suite, it was strongly apparent that Mike sought to isolate those elements in story that were emotive. Even though, like Mary and Becky, the wording of the script was primarily a matter of explaining the sequence of events as neatly and clearly as possible, he chose to stress the sense of loss experienced by both Deborah Aaron and her dying father, with whom there was interview material from the original BBC Breakfast Television report. More generally, this period in proceedings was marked by even less conversation than at Channel Four. Again, each knew exactly what their role was and Mike employed the same basic techniques as Mary and Becky had: use of a notebook to set out an overview of the story, then the integration of segments of the script in line with the footage selected.

Having established the broad context in which newsroom activity occurred during my three visits, I now turn to focus on turn to the key subject of individual journalistic autonomy during news the production process.

Editorial Control and Journalistic Autonomy

The principle issues here are the role of the editor, the amount of power they choose to exert over reporters, and the amount of freedom and autonomy the latter are routinely given (Solaski. 1999). It cannot be stressed enough that, at the three newsrooms I visited, the overwhelming impression given was that each individual assigned to a story was essentially left on their own to plan and execute it ready for broadcast. I did not find that programme editors sought to closely monitor the process, described earlier, in which individual reporters scripted and edited material. Instead, the latter seemed to enjoy almost complete freedom in this respect (Ericson et al, 1987). I will comment on any exceptions to this that I saw happen, such as the few occasions when editors altered the length of an item (although that is not the same as prescribing what information a story should include). Finally, it is important to stress, however, that I can only comment on what I actually saw and heard. I cannot provide evidence of those times when the editor or some other member of newsroom staff was in discussion with a reporter out of earshot, or when I simply did not see this happening.

Programme Editor's Role

With the growing complexity of news production, and as a result of increasing diversity of formats and the expansion of new technology, no single person is now expected to control all newsroom output (Yorke, 2000). However, one individual is still normally given the task of ensuring the bulletin overall is ready for broadcast. As outlined earlier, this person may share the role with one or more colleagues, but on any given day it is he or she who decides the content of the schedule, distributes copies

among those present at the early planning meeting (of which I have obtained copies), determines individual story length, allocates reporters and organises various logistical aspects. Although my time spent with the editors in each newsroom proved illuminating in gaining insight into the editorial process, only Robin at Midlands Today chose to promote his personal role in this when responding to my questions on news value. Whereas Clive simply described to me what his basic remit was – to assign crews, organise logistical matters relating to this and plan the schedule, both that day and the week ahead – Robin unequivocally stated that he alone decided what would go into the bulletin. It was this awareness of his ability to decide what was ‘most important’ which was striking, although he also stated that, although personal attitudes to newsworthiness were important, there was a consensus across all news organisations about what news value is. This suggests Robin took reassurance from the belief that his own judgments were in line with fellow editors. So did he therefore exhibit any characteristics or attitudes that were specific to BBC News?

Schlesinger’s study of the Corporation, originally undertaken in the late 1970s, found that a large amount of power was concentrated in the editor. This position was sustainable, Schlesinger suggested, because there was implicit trust in the editor from above because of the way the senior BBC management trusted their editorial decisions and judgments to filter down within an “omnipresent” and “invisible framework of guidance” (Schlesinger, 1987:137). In other words, it may be integral to the way reporters and editorial staff behave and above all relate to each other at the BBC, that each is aware of their particular roles and responsibilities as determined by the prevailing ethos permeating throughout the organisation. As such, this may be seen as an extra layer of the professional ethos, discussed in depth by Solaski (1999), and in Chapter 3 of this study, that allows newsroom management to trust staff ‘lower down’ and allow them freedom and autonomy.

I was therefore keen to ascertain how Robin himself made sense of this high level of freedom to decide the day’s news for the large Midlands audience. In the ensuing discussion two words continued to crop up: “people” and “interesting”. This would

appear to signify an ongoing and active awareness of what would appeal to viewers, and he made a particular point of stating the importance of knowing what would produce a reaction in the audience. Perhaps most interesting was the fact that Robin felt he knew, not just what viewers wanted but what they *liked*. He believed he could judge what their taste was. This is illuminating here in signifying two key aspects of news selection: the fact that a single individual is allowed to hold such a level of power on any single day; second, the high level of certainty that appeared to underscore his attitudes and behaviour.

Keen to learn more about how such a commanding position of authority might affect his attitudes to news production in general, I pursued the issue of whether his position of dominance within news production was of any concern. He replied that his faith in his own judgment stemmed from two factors. First, the values and standards expected of him from more senior BBC management had a powerful ‘osmotic effect’, which was able to permeate all areas of the news organisation. He did not elaborate but the implication here was that the values, ideas and practices bound up within BBC news production were passed through the organisation and assimilated by journalists in an essentially passive manner. Second, Robin had total confidence in capacity for senior management to monitor what he did. He believed that, should he produce ‘unacceptable’ content, people higher up the BBC hierarchy would find a way of letting him know. How this might work was not explained but Robin clearly felt comfortable in the thought that he was being overseen and effectively monitored by an omnipresent force. There was no sense that he equated learning by osmosis with the risk of acquiring professional norms and practices in an unreflective manner (de Burgh, 2003:8).

I followed this up by asking him how often he had been subject to control ‘from above’ and was informed that, in ten years at the BBC, he could “count on one hand” the number of times he had been instructed to do something by a higher authority and that when this had happened the reasons had seemed to him arbitrary. He said this was a “very BBC way of doing things”, but did not elaborate. These particular comments

were intimated to me in a relatively detached manner: Robin uttered the words without looking at me, his eyes fixed on the computer screen in front of him. It was not clear whether his manner here signified indifference to my questioning, or simply that his faith in the standard BBC practices was so complete that it merited no serious consideration. What he actually said here was also in line with Schlesinger's findings, over twenty years earlier, that newsroom editors at the BBC both "stress their autonomy" and "emphasise their reluctance to refer upwards and find it difficult to think of examples of when they have done so" (Schlesinger, 1987:148).

Robin paid no attention to the national television BBC news bulletin at lunchtime, but did check the output of his regional rivals at Central Television. This suggested his focus was geared heavily and specifically towards the Midlands Today audience. If such behaviour pointed to a degree of parochialism in selection decisions, it was at odds with a recent instruction from senior management (he did not elaborate who) that all newsroom staff, including editors, needed to aim for greater diversity, especially in relation to geographical location. This appears to highlight one of the fundamental aspects of journalism and news production. Underpinning this entire thesis is the fundamental assumption that, because of its intrinsic selectivity, news output is automatically limited in its scope. To reiterate and slightly modify Stuart Hall's succinct statement, of the large number of events which occur every day in the Midlands area, "only a tiny proportion ever become visible as 'potential news stories': and of this proportion, only a small fraction are actually produced as the day's news" (Hall, 1981:234). It should perhaps follow from this that any journalist, especially the editor, and above all one like Robin, with his firmly expressed views on giving the local audience 'interesting' news, should try to source stories as widely as possible. Yet senior management in the BBC still felt the need to remind him, like anything else, that the programme needed greater diversity and, especially, that stereotypes should be avoided.

It is important to add here that the subject of internal regulations and guidelines formed only a minor part of my discussion with Robin, and he did not see fit to dwell on it. In

fact, when he was addressing me on the subject, it seemed more out of duty (to show that these rules existed, and that he was fully aware of them) than because he enthusiastically embraced them. Above all, this editor seemed to almost relish the control he had to determine news content and, so perhaps he saw the Producers' Guidelines mainly as a safety net, a bulwark against possible errors of judgment and a form of reassurance as much as a guiding framework. As if to support such a possibility, only one other journalist in this newsroom made any reference to written guidelines, describing these as "tweaking" what journalists already know to do, and this was only because I raised the subject with her in the immediate wake of discussing it with Robin. At Channel Four and HTV the issue never arose. What this suggests is that, in order to understand more fully how judgments come to be made on what to select and emphasise during news story construction, journalists are influenced by far more than official guidelines.

In my observation, Robin stood out in so stridently articulating the extent of his *personal* influence on the bulletin. In this respect, he was the most obvious manifestation of the notion of a single 'gatekeeper'. The other two editors, while describing some of their main duties, never referred to aspects of the job pertaining to its essential power. Indeed, in contrast Ed at Channel Four who, as someone with editorial responsibilities senior to Robin, displayed no sense of certainty about the merits and value of specific news material. Neither did he make any claims about 'knowing' the audience as Robin had done, restricting any comments here to the possible effect certain types of content might have on them (see later).

Ultimately, while this editor at least enjoyed power across a range of key areas, this was always set against the constraining structure of newsroom organisation. This did not appear to translate into dissent or disgruntlement, however (Harrison, 2000). Interestingly, the one occasion when anyone I met expressed some measure of disagreement about a selection decision was when Robin volunteered to tell me of his reservations about a story in the previous day's bulletin, covering a Midlands football supporter who had been arrested for hooliganism in Belgium, but who (Robin

believed) had been represented too much as a hero. Because he had not been editor that day, he was unable to become involved and this seemed to be minor source of frustration. It could have been a further sign that this editor liked to maintain a wide berth of control. In turn, this may simply have been a reflection of his individual nature and personality. Or perhaps, as discussed earlier, it represented a style and manner in keeping with BBC editorial behaviour.

This raises a further possibility. While journalists tend to be passive in terms of accepting editorial decisions, they, paradoxically perhaps, also enjoy the freedom to gather information and produce individual news items with minimal intervention by the editor. This would seem to support the idea that professional autonomy is allowed because all concerned with news production know their role and, equally importantly, its parameters. It may indeed be a reflection of a professional assumption that to encourage independent thinking among reporters is integral to creativity (Herbert, 2000). Although in a position of greater authority and power, this applies as much to the editor as with anyone else and Robin was simply illustrating this with the above remark about the previous day's item and the football supporter. His personal 'misgivings' about the way a colleague chose to construct that story were sufficiently strong that he volunteered to tell me about it. However, it appeared to be part of his professional duty to accept that individual's editorial judgement. In other words, editors may routinely refrain from actively challenging the decisions of their peers. This was, in effect, another manifestation of journalistic autonomy, and also, it seemed, one of the factors that allow newsrooms to function so effectively in keeping to deadlines.

How much autonomy were reporters given?

I will begin once again with Robin at Midlands Today since I was able to put to him some direct questions on how much editorial control he was able to exert. As well as the sporadic conversation we had throughout the day, I also managed to engage him in

straight one to one discussion just after the 6.30 bulletin had finished and most staff had left. At this point, with the newsroom nearly empty, he was in a position to be more attentive, having no immediate responsibilities to attend to. I asked how much he sought to influence the script done by the newsreader, as I had personally seen no evidence of this happening, in the Midlands Today newsroom or during my other two visits (and neither had I asked this particular question at Channel Four and HTV). His immediate reply was that the newsreader must be happy with what they are reading, although they are not primarily responsible for writing it. Initially the reporter writes the link, then Robin “fiddles with it”, perhaps making it ‘harder’ (news). At the same time, however, the newsreader is always able to discuss the possibility of making changes and with an experienced newsreader, he might be inclined to defer to their judgment. This last comment seemed to contrast with the overall impression Robin gave me, of someone with a very strong sense of his own capabilities when it came to selection and ‘knowing the audience’. Similarly, when I asked him directly how much autonomy he would normally allow each individual reporter, he confirmed his approach was to be “fairly strict”, both on the overall framework and also the individual elements within it. In this respect, however, it did not appear that he proactively sought to influence the content of individual items. As I discuss below, when discussions took place between him and reporters, this was at their instigation.

Turning to the attitudes of the reporters, there was only one direct reference to editorial power at any of the three newsrooms, which was at Midlands Today when Annie remarked that having two programme editors operating on a rota system each week helped ensure consistency. Although she did not say this, there was an implicit acknowledgment here that checks and balances ought to be in place to prevent editorial power being confined to one person. In this particular newsroom, more conspicuously than in the other two, various staff from time to time went to consult Robin about some matter I was unable to hear and this did appear to be at the instigation of the reporter rather than the editor. My observation here therefore suggests that discussions between reporters and editor are an ongoing part of the production process. However, on the days of my visit at least, these were occasional and sporadic rather than constant

in the way that Golding & Elliott (1979) found in their study of different newsrooms. Further, those I witnessed, characterised by various nodding of heads and short statements, suggest discussion of story details and news angles do not tend to require protracted debate, certainly outside formal meetings.

While I was with Mike he made a point of keeping Robin informed of how his story, the eventual lead item, was progressing. I could not tell whether this was because of his concern that his main source would not phone back in time to have the story ready, as I discussed earlier when describing the editing process. It may even have been an action undertaken because I was present, that is, to conform to official procedures in front of the watchful eye of a third party. The fundamental question must surely be: how typical was this behaviour? Was Mike unusually diligent? It did not seem to be because of inexperience, as this reporter was very experienced, so much so that he verbally stressed how much autonomy he was normally given when constructing individual stories; that, for example, Robin never interfered with what he was doing in terms of edited material and choice of script. The one occasion when Robin actively approached Mike was to inform him that the item time could be extended. Like the other two editors I encountered, Robin never audibly commented on story content. For his part, Robin had told me, when I asked him, that his policy was to monitor what the newer reporters did, although I personally did not witness this happening.

In summary, then, individual reporters seem to be able to work with a high degree of autonomy and this allows them to proceed with a range of routine tasks – gathering information, constructing this into a news story narrative, and authoring a script – and meet broadcast deadlines on a routine basis. Despite Robin's more explicit claims to personally 'know' what 'his' (Midlands) audience both wants and likes, there was no obvious attempt by any of the three editors I observed and spoke to, to actively interfere with specific story content .

One factor in this, which only became overtly apparent at Midlands Today, was the way certain broader newsroom values, ideas and expectations filter down the

organisation and 'silently' pervade the attitudes of those actually producing stories, a process referred to as the 'osmotic effect' by Robin. This suggests that the smooth running of newsrooms, and the ability of journalists to overcome daily time pressures and routinely meet deadlines, is rooted in the capacity of all involved to understand what is expected of them implicitly. The editor has a crucial role to play in this, but may not need to make their presence felt other than 'being there', mostly in the background. Robin, in this particular respect, was fundamentally no different. Indeed, it may be that the set of procedures, values, ideas and assumptions, flowing through (in this case) the BBC, act to control him just as much as anyone else.

This may, in turn, have important implications for the way both reporters and editors make sense of 'reality' and make decisions on (relative) newsworthiness. In essence the gathering of information and its transformation into a news story amounts to a single task on which a journalist can focus completely in the knowledge that the editor will take overall responsibility for the programme as a whole. From the perspective of the researcher trying to gain insight into how certain information comes to be privileged and stories constructed to emphasise particular content, it is important to be clear on how far this combination of autonomy and attachment to known practices and procedures militates against journalists questioning what they do. This can only increase the need to further examine the extent to which such journalistic single mindedness serves to produce an intrinsic narrowness of thinking and the concomitant assumption that certain types of subject matter is 'naturally' newsworthy while others are less so, or not at all. This particular issue goes to the heart of this study and will form a substantial part of the discussion in Chapter 8. However, before doing that, and to close this chapter, I will discuss further the possibility that journalists are only able to operate efficiently through strict adherence to familiar routines.

Journalistic Routines and Automatic Behaviour

A vital question for this study as a whole is the extent to which journalists reflect on the processes by which certain information comes to be regarded as newsworthy, then selected and constructed into a news item. In general, even those editors and reporters who seemed to want to engage in some form of debate with me about newsworthiness became distracted by the omnipresent urge to meet deadlines, supporting Schlesinger's (1987) conclusion that news production is driven by a 'stop-watch culture'. Other than the two conversations I had outside normal routines, with Ben and Robin, the only other member of newsroom staff who appeared to have time for more expansive discussion, and the only person I encountered who openly reflected on what I said, was Ed at Channel Four. That he was also the Senior Programme Editor, and therefore higher up in the newsroom hierarchy than anyone else I spoke to, may also be significant here, for three possible reasons. First, it may have been that his seniority required him to consider broader issues. Second, he could simply have been naturally inclined to be more inquisitive. Another reason could be that his slight removal from the finer detail of that day's news production meant he simply had more time to reflect on, even cogitate over, routine journalistic practice.

However, although he was giving active consideration to any issues I raised, and was certainly not displaying apathy towards them as some other journalists did, Ed's statements and mannerisms suggested little more than professional curiosity. For example, when I asked him about the tendency for television news to offer negative representations of the Developing World (a point that he saw no reason to challenge), his response was to provide me with a recent example of a Channel Four News story where an editorial decision had been made not to depict a particular situation over-negatively (see later). In other words, he adopted the, arguably, defensive stance of all those journalists I spoke to, of dealing in concrete examples rather than abstract reflection. The same applied to Ben, the editor at HTV. But, while equally amenable to being interviewed, and taking each question on its individual merits, he had not given the impression of wanting to reflect on my questions in an abstract way. There

was no nodding of his head or pausing to contemplate meaning, which has happened with Ed. The difference is subtle perhaps, but may point to a hierarchy in the way different journalists are willing, or even able, to adopt a reflective position. This, in turn, may be linked to their seniority in the newsroom.

My first experience of witnessing the editing of an individual story, at Channel Four, led to an immediate impression that the dual processes of selecting images and words, and marrying these to a script, is largely formulaic. My subsequent observations at HTV and Midlands Today only served to reaffirm this and to reiterate the theme running through this analysis that journalists appear to know, without need for studied reflection, who and what to include in a story and how to shape and package it for broadcast. This may of course indicate little more than familiarity with certain kinds of subject matter that has become routinely newsworthy because it can be 'framed' as a known type (Gitlin, 1980; Jacobs, 1996). Indeed, my observation showed that little time was needed to decide which elements fitted in best with the overall message they were intending the story to impart.

As if to support this, Becky at HTV told me she always aimed to isolate "one good sound bite", and that she actively favoured interviewees (say) who were able to speak in short, sharp sentences. By this she meant people of a more 'official nature' who were more media literate. Such an attitude would seem to privilege particular individuals and by implication certain sources ahead of others. But apart from narrowing down the number of people able to contribute to the news agenda (Hall et al, 1978), Becky's comment here has another important implication. She actively sought out people like MPs, local counsellors, police officers and official spokespeople because they provided statements that were coherent and articulate. But, it would seem that her motive in doing so had less to do with privileging certain elite sources than making the editing process quicker and more straightforward. Indeed, her job was made simpler if information came 'already packaged'. She therefore preferred those sources who were sufficiently experienced in being interviewed because they knew to

ask the reporter what they were required to say, and she saw no problem in simply telling them.

This contrasted with the attitude of Robin at Midlands Today who told me that if he must include more serious stories he always aimed to give them an angle that stressed the human side rather than that of officialdom. Therefore, for example, he would rather include an 'ordinary' person than, to use his example, a local councillor. It is an interesting question, which I am unable to answer here, how much this pointed to a general diversity of attitudes among different journalists, or between newsrooms. It may simply be that Robin, as Editor, felt the need to foreground the needs of the community he believed so strongly Midlands Today was reaching out to. In this sense, his comment was simply a reflection of the official line promulgated by BBC local news that he was bound to uphold. Becky, on the other hand, may have lacked the same levels of sensitivity to the HTV audience. If so, this was in contrast to Ben, the Planning Editor, who had been at pains earlier to tell me how important the local audience was in deciding overall story selection. Perhaps, Becky simply made the connection between the implications of her statement and her own personal loyalty to viewers of HTV News? As I discussed earlier, I am able to make these suggestions about Becky's attitudes and possible motives because she was the one journalist I encountered who temporarily dropped her professional guard. She even embellished her earlier comments by telling me that she was rarely, if ever, surprised, by a respondent's reply to one of her questions because she already knew what they were likely to say. In contrast, others like Robin never displayed such candour (despite, in his case at least, being overtly confident about his own editorial skills).

From a different perspective of news gathering, another example of automatic behaviour I witnessed was when Mary at Channel Four allowed me to sit in on an interview with a representative from the Refugee Trust, an organisation campaigning on behalf of asylum seekers. This took place away from the newsroom in the atrium of the building, in relatively uncluttered surroundings. The camerawoman was positioned so that a large plant formed part of the backdrop and the speed and efficiency with

which the whole interview was set up and executed suggested that this particular location and routine were familiar to both her and Mary. Similarly, the interviewee appeared to know the procedure of television interviews. He simply followed Mary to where two seats were already positioned and sat down, at which point the camerawoman attached a microphone to his lapel, then set up the camera on a tripod. As this was happening, Mary conducted a short rehearsal of the beginning of the interview, which entailed her and the interviewee exchanging conversation on the subject under discussion and, at the same time, composing themselves. Everyone knew their particular role and executed their duties in a well-rehearsed, even slick, manner.

The story centred on the construction of a story about a hunger strike in Rochester Prison. The reporter began by asking about the condition of the hunger strikers. He answered that they were still trying to establish this but that they were being treated badly and should be released without charge. There had been Home Office inefficiency. Also, official statistics had been used to distort: even though less people were being held now, this was because fewer overall were seeking asylum. There was no attempt at cross-examination or following up any points, each question asked met with a prompt and succinct reply. It almost seemed as though the interviewee had a stock set of points to make and the interview provided a suitable outlet for this, Mary acting as a conduit. At the end of the exchange she asked him if they had covered everything, which apparently they had and he immediately left, his manner almost cursory. Checking with him that he was agreeable to what had been said (Fishman, 1980:131) seemed at odds with the notion of journalism being about interrogating other parties in the interests of democracy (see Chapter 3). This sense of the interview being essentially formulaic, almost perfunctory, was enhanced by the speed of events, the entire process, from beginning to end, lasting less than ten minutes.

In both these examples, which relate to different stages of news story production, what came across strongly was the extent to which stories are 'pre-written'. It was as though the specific subject matter they were dealing with amounted to characters and details

that were needed in the story the journalist was composing. The respective reporters appeared to have a clear idea in advance of what particular ingredients were required in this respect, along with its overall shape, and seemed to be able to draw on mental frameworks (Gitlin, 1980). Perhaps it is the existence of such templates that allows reporters the high levels of autonomy discussed earlier. If news stories do exist as types, on which journalists are able to draw 'naturally' within information gathering and editing, this would help ensure consistency. By adhering to an existing formula for story construction, the chance of a story being produced that is at odds with the remit laid down by the newsroom hierarchy, or which is overly subjective, should be minimalised. This may explain why those journalists I observed found selection choices a relatively straightforward process, once the material had been gathered. This extended to the amount of time allocated to each part within the story. Just as Mike had known automatically that fifteen seconds from his interview with Deborah Aaron was the optimum duration for that part of the story, Mary at Channel Four seemed to know precisely how much of her interviewee's comments were needed; in this case twenty five seconds.

One aspect, however, where reporters appeared to be subject to constraints imposed on them by the editor was in the length of individual items. At the three newsrooms I visited, the way bulletins were planned and constructed was essentially the same, in that the programme was assembled gradually as a set of component parts. It was almost akin to fitting together the different pieces of a jigsaw where the overall shape of the final bulletin became clearer as the day progressed. The basic information was all contained on a computer spreadsheet. Besides the basic details there were various headings designed to enable the editor to control proceedings efficiently, including basic details of the story displaying key elements, notably the 'story slug', or basic details, name of reporter dealing, sources, and estimated duration.

At this planning stage, Bob, who was in the process of editing the much shorter lunchtime bulletin at HTV, informed me that they always aimed to have just a bit too much news in terms of anticipated time. As I watched, he scrolled down the screen

and input the script to be read by the presenter, building each item up in small sections, telling me at one point that he was keeping tabs on total bulletin length because the expected duration of each item was automatically calculated as he typed the prose in. He reminded me that the images of the flooding for that evening's main story (being gathered as we spoke by Becky in Gloucester) would be arriving later that morning, and these would then be digitalised and edited in. As my time with Bob passed, various telephone calls and other conversations led to more script being added or details altered. The process was organic but also seemed to operate according to a tight formula, as though guided by familiarity with a known story type. Consequently, he appeared to know, almost automatically, which words to enter on the screen without needing to reflect and the overriding aim was to construct a coherent and clear narrative.

According to Robin at Midlands Today, stories have a "natural length", but there is always the possibility of adding to them, depending on which unexplored avenues were still open, or people available to be contacted. Annie, who was also present at this part of the conversation, supported her editor's comment by adding that stories which are too long "get boring otherwise". On the other hand, Robin confirmed that some stories lend themselves to being extended while others have little scope for lengthening beyond their 'standard time'. Those that do are the more complex ones, for example when car manufacturer Rover was going to shut nearly a whole programme was dedicated to it. It was particularly newsworthy as it was a complex issue and, even more importantly, it was of particular interest to Midlands Today viewers. Because Robin appeared to possess such strong faith in his ability to judge story length, I pressed the point further and asked how this was determined. The answer he gave was that this was down to experience ahead of everything else.

I also wondered openly why it was not possible to extend a story beyond its natural length, say, by adding wider context. Robin replied that this was possible but the main difficulty was lack of time needed to undertake the appropriate background research. I made a note here of the nature of his response as it was becoming apparent that Robin

was becoming increasingly indifferent to my presence. His answer to my question on additional context was noticeably vague and half-hearted. It seemed that he found such a question uninteresting in the sense that it was not a consideration he gave much thought to. Because this was my third visit to a newsroom I did not find Robin's attitude to me disconcerting but I did start to feel that I was not obtaining large amounts of data in the form of verbal responses, so began to think about asking to be moved somewhere else in the newsroom. However, such thoughts were briefly put in abeyance by the impending lunch break and by Robin adding that increasing the length of a story was only a viable proposition from an editorial point of view if there were appropriate avenues you could still go down, or extra people worth including.

As well as what Robin and Mike actually said to me about story length, there was the case of a story from Cheltenham which was also being run by BBC Points West (a neighbouring regional news programme). Cheltenham lies on the cusp of both regions and the issue of whether Midlands Today should also run this story had been discussed at the morning meeting. It was initially decided that there was no need for both newsrooms to be involved, but now the murder trial story was being postponed, Robin decided they would use the story from Cheltenham after all. Apart from being an illustration of the way newsrooms are, to some extent, linked to the temporal flow of the bureaucratic structures they routinely privilege (Fishman, 1980), this editorial decision raised another issue about how time is allocated to stories. Because the court decision to drop the original headline item arrived at 4.40 pm, Robin had to act quickly to find a way of filling the gap left in the schedule. With a speed that suggested he was making a decision based on instinct, he crossed the floor and told Mike that the new main item, about Deborah Aaron, could be extended by one minute. At this point, it seemed appropriate for me to ask Mike why the other stories could not be extended to provide, say, more background information. He did not reply to this directly but stated that all journalists have a "natural feel" for the length of a story, and that this, he believed, was broadly similar across other newsrooms. He also added that Robin had instructed them to aim for an average story length of around one minute fifty seconds,

an issue he did not appear inclined to challenge. It was as though the editor's decision must be beyond question.

What these comments suggest is that the length of most news stories is effectively pre-set. It may be that a combination of initial training and the experience of working in a highly routinised environment 'conditions' journalists to regard items that are too long as uninteresting. On top of this, editorial monitoring of story length acts as a constraint on reporters who must relay the essential 'facts' of an event or issue within a specified time frame. Journalists themselves do not appear to challenge this editorial decision. This may be for purely pragmatic reasons, in that there is no incentive to produce a story over its prescribed length if the editor then cuts it back. However, my sense was that journalists simply 'knew' to keep the 'facts' contained within a strict time frame. In this sense, they were performing a highly disciplined task, but this may also be a key reason why there was no concomitant desire (outwardly) to reflect on what they had done after the item was completed. My view here was strengthened by the general indifference to any comments I made about challenging story length. It was as if, as professionals, they simply knew how long a story should be and the matter was closed. The idea that they could only make such decisions because they recognised each event as a familiar type (Tuchman, 1978) did not appear to occur to anyone in this newsroom, while at Channel Four and HTV the matter was never raised. Such reliance on habit and routine, and such automatic acceptance of certain practices, seemed to extend, even, to parts of stories: when Mike was about to interview Deborah Aaron on the telephone he made a point of telling her at the outset that he was aiming to use fifteen seconds of what she said, as a central contribution to the story's narrative. The point is that he said this before she had said anything. This suggests he did not expect to hear anything revealing or surprising. He already had a framework of the story in mind and she was providing one component part for it.

Conclusion

Accepting the broader context in which I observed their actions and comments, it appears that the way newsrooms operate allows reporters a high degree of autonomy to construct individual stories largely free of editorial influence. Overall, my observation of editors suggested that, although they were constantly monitoring story length and the knock-on effect on programme duration of any changes made, this did not appear to translate into direct interference in story content. Individual reporters, in turn, seem to enjoy this independence. It allows them to focus closely on the task of meeting deadlines, only occasionally seeking advice from the editor. Further, and connected to this general independence, there was a tendency for those I observed to avoid high levels of interaction with colleagues, other than those occasions, notably meetings, when this was inevitable. In this sense story production seemed to be a highly individual activity with all journalists apparently knowing ‘what to do’ and what the editor expected of them.

Overall, my findings raise the possibility that reporters and, to a large extent, editors engage in habits and practices which militate against the kind of reflection that would cause them to consider explicitly what makes information newsworthy. In this respect, my presence as researcher may have highlighted certain aspects of behaviour that are normally masked by the ‘normalising’ effects of routine activity. It may be that I unearthed certain attitudes and viewpoints that might normally remain buried and unarticulated, even perhaps among journalists in private conversation. However, I have not yet tackled one of the most fundamental aspects of all – how precisely selection decisions are made. In order to address this question, the next chapter will offer an in-depth examination of what I was able to elicit from editors and reporters on what makes an event or issue newsworthy.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WHAT ARE THE INGREDIENTS THAT MAKE AN EVENT OR ISSUE NEWSWORTHY?

Introduction

In terms of the wider aims of this study, the last chapter may be seen as providing a context in which to examine more closely the ingredients journalists look for in deciding a particular subject is newsworthy. Much journalistic activity appears to function around familiar routines which, in turn, appear to militate against journalists questioning basic assumptions. Of even greater significance for this study as a whole, perhaps, is the relationship between possible 'automatic' behaviour and journalistic attitudes to newsworthiness. I found that, while the smooth running of the newsroom, and the daily production of the bulletin, seems to be a direct consequence of the efficacy of established practices, familiar routines and relatively high levels of journalistic independence and autonomy (Solaski, 1999), attempts by journalists to articulate what newsworthiness is were more incoherent and disjointed. No journalist I encountered ever offered a perspective on newsworthiness that could be regarded as theoretically grounded. The everyday discourse of considering stories, gathering information, editing and scripting did not – and probably does need to in journalists' minds – rest on expressing conceptual views and ideas. Rather, any references to 'news values' or what made a story newsworthy tended to be expressed as examples of subject matter. This was a major finding of all three visits and nowhere was it more apparent than at the planning meetings. For this reason I will be considering at some length the way 'real' people, issues and events were discussed, and comparing this to those specific attempts, prompted by my questioning, to discuss news value as an idea or abstraction.

When in conversation with editors and reporters, it was necessary to raise the question of ‘news value’ as an explicit area of enquiry and what emerged were a small number of dominant factors that journalists appear to regard as significant. These were: attitudes to the audience, the importance of visual images, dramatic impact, and a general desire to highlight the more negative aspects of any given situation. The relationship between journalists and their viewers is a subject that permeates all aspects of my analysis. It is implicit in all professional behaviour, for the reasons discussed in Chapter 3 – principally the way journalists believe they ‘know’ what their audience needs to know about, and that they, as professionals, have the necessarily skills to make such judgments and defend their decisions. In this chapter, therefore, I will deal only with the comments made to me by journalists specifically in relation to the audience and news selection. Following this, I will examine each of the other three factors in depth. These were, effectively, the only criteria to which journalists made any direct reference, and it will be illuminating, therefore, to examine their particular impact on news content during the textual analysis in Chapter 9.

Newsworthiness and Subject Matter

When listening to what journalists say, as opposed to trying to elicit ideas from them actively through conversation, it was apparent how little terms like newsworthiness, and even ‘news value’, were actually used. The way editors and reporters preferred to discuss the relative merits of any given event or issue was simply to describe its subject matter. It was as though, once on the schedule, the right of a story to be there did not need further questioning (Costera Meijer, 2003). In a similar way, the one major story that entered the schedule later in the day seemed to assume the same ‘natural’ newsworthiness. When the information ‘broke through’ at the afternoon planning meeting about Toyota (see last chapter), there was no deliberation about its relative value as a news item, or even debate about it becoming the headline item. Quite simply, all the journalists sitting round the table knew automatically that this was ‘big’ and their main and immediate priority was to act quickly to ensure a story would

be ready for broadcast that evening. I will now examine what happened at the planning meetings in greater depth.

Planning meetings

At Channel Four, at 9.30, the lead item was about Northern Ireland and a campaign to reopen the inquiry into the 'Bloody Sunday' killings by the British Army in 1971. Described by one of those present as a "running sore" with grievances coming to the surface, the suggestion was made that any interviewee used should be neither too extreme nor too marginal, but must also be of sufficiently high profile. In terms of basic news value this was noteworthy because of the stated desire by those present not to overplay any dramatic elements within the story. However, it was clearly also important to obtain a source of 'suitable' stature and legitimacy (Manning, 2001). So, while great efforts were being made, on the one hand, to construct a story that maintained balance and a sense of proportion, there was little hesitation in allowing a familiar, 'elite' figure the privilege to define the 'facts' of the story (Hall et al, 1978). Balance did not seem to extend to seeking out fresh sources. There was little dialogue that did not refer directly to subject matter. At that time (in 1997) the Northern Ireland situation was arguably without equal in British journalism in having been continually reported for nearly 30 years, therefore providing the archetypal example of Galtung & Ruge's (1965) selection criterion of 'continuity'. But such a familiar theme (Tuchman, 1978) did not appear to merit discussion of its value, merely how to go about gathering information.

This dominance of practical and logistical considerations over broader discussion of the subject matter set the tone for all my subsequent observations. To reiterate, at all three early morning meetings I attended the comments made by journalists on the provisional agenda of news items in front of them tended to be formulaic. Paradoxically, there was almost a sense of anticlimax before the day's events had been fully set in motion. This could mean that, once an event or issue has been identified as 'news',

any sense of adventure or excitement was nullified and a simple professional need to produce the item on time took over. Occasionally a slightly banal remark was made such as when one of the editors present commented that an item on tobacco smuggling in Andorra “sounds rather jolly”. What was the point of such a cursory remark? It did not suggest any concern for the details of the story. Even where items did attract more considered deliberation, the tone remained pedestrian. One such case was the fourth item on the Channel Four News agenda, concerning the hunger strikers at Rochester Prison (see last Chapter 7), where the discussion lasted several minutes. The issue of asylum seekers was, and is, an emotive one and perhaps this led to journalists wishing to treat its content more sensitively? However, the desire to lengthen the discussion was not accompanied by any strong display of emotion.

The flat tone continued with the next item, about bus deregulation, and this also illustrated another aspect of the way journalists verbally interact when discussing subject matter. Surprise was openly expressed by some of those present that this kind of story attracted public interest. Yet there was no suggestion that the item should be dropped. This suggests that stories deemed, say, socially important (because public transport is beneficial to society at large), are included out of a sense of professional duty, but not necessarily because reporters and editors themselves find them interesting. Out of this comes the further question, of whether certain stories simply retain their news value because they fall into a category of story types already familiar to members of the news profession. In this case, those institutions in society recognised as serving the ‘community’, and therefore constituting matters of ‘public interest’, are more likely to become automatically newsworthy when their position or status is threatened. Of course, this can only happen if journalists are made aware of the story via their daily ‘beat’ (Fishman, 1980) which itself is determined by established notions of ideological importance.

The early morning meeting at HTV was characterised by a lack of debate about any of the subject matter. At one point, when that evening’s lead item on floods in Gloucester was being discussed, Ben made the unprompted remark that it was “nice to get pictures

of squalor on camera”. In the context of the above, do images of wrecked belongings constitute public interest? This is among a range of questions I will consider more fully when examining the text of this story in the next chapter. What is pertinent at this stage is less the meaning of such a statement but, once again, to stress how few comments on subject matter like this there were. As with Channel Four, exchanges between those present at the HTV meeting tended to involve instructions being given or requests being made, along with questions about viability along the lines of Channel Four staff’s consideration of available interview sources. There was a similar routine nature to the meeting at Midlands Today. Here, during discussion of the opening story on the schedule (which was not the planned lead item), about a man from the Midlands area who had just been released from a Belgian prison following an arrest for supposed football hooliganism, Robin stated that this needed to be played “straight down the middle”. It was not felt necessary to explain what this meant exactly. That it probably referred to the maintenance of an impartial storyline, with no presumptions either way on guilt or innocence, is less important to this study than that Robin did not need to elaborate. Everyone present seemed to know what he meant. Indeed, I never witnessed anyone ask for a point to be clarified, at any of the three meetings.

Overall, the meeting at Midlands Today covered a greater number of items than happened at HTV and Channel Four. This may have been linked to the fact that they only had one meeting each day, compared with two at HTV and three at Channel Four. Again, most of what was said about each item was a basic description of its subject matter with minimal expansion. In the same vein as Channel Four and HTV, remarks were short and pithy. For example, in relation to the proposed lead item, on the murdered prostitute, Robin stated that lots of questions were raised because the “guy had killed before [in 1980]”. This is a potentially interesting commentary on how news angles may be derived from past events (in this case twenty years previously), although the reference to lots of questions was not followed up by further debate.

Among the other items, one on research at Warwick University on why humans smile was reductively referred to as a “bit of fun”. The idea here was to use this as a vehicle

for some light hearted interviews with the public on the streets of Birmingham, rather than to explore a potentially interesting insight into human behaviour. The point here is the intended style and format for this item was effectively pre-determined. Its intrinsic subject matter seemed to naturally conform to the status of 'light' and entertaining, therefore fulfilling one of the main requirements of local news coverage (Cottle, 1993). By appearing to adhere to a known type in this manner, and to frame the story along a conventionally entertaining, format, the opportunity to construct a more serious item, say about scientific research, was automatically negated. In contrast, the eleventh item on the schedule was more serious, concerning Deborah Aaron, an English woman living in America who was being prevented from visiting her dying father in Britain because of a very old minor drugs conviction. This attracted little more than routine discussion, which is interesting in view of its elevation to the headline item for the evening bulletin.

Towards the end of this meeting there was a fairly brief, but systematic, consideration of other 'possible' stories. One on the Queen Mother was being covered by the national news, which seemed to automatically rule it out of serious consideration, but did provide the opportunity for several jokes about drinking. This seemed to indicate that deference routinely extended to this member of the Royal Family in all British television news reporting did not extend to the way she was discussed, informally in the newsroom. In turn, this points to a possible contradiction between dominant forms of representation of particular 'elite' figures in society (that is, to portray the Queen Mother as a revered figure, uncritically and with respect) – and what the journalists who adhere to this ideology in public actually think in private. There was also a firm decision not to run with another 'possible', about a prisoner starving himself to death. The reason it was not newsworthy, according to Robin, was that he had already admitted guilt. It was therefore "no story" because of the nature of the subject, but had he been an innocent man it would have been.

Finally, an interesting point needs to be made about a story that was not in the end broadcast, concerning a whispering campaign against a prominent local councillor.

One of the main accusers was a man who had been interviewed in the past and the question of whether to use this as part of that day's story elicited a long discussion. The main factor determining whether to run the story was the nature of what the accused councillor said in an interview later that morning to Midlands Today. What is interesting here was that those in the meeting were trying to find an angle on which to base the story. There was evidently some doubt about whether the interview would yield information that was sufficiently interesting, but were this to be amalgamated with archive footage it might tip the balance in favour of including it in the schedule. In other words, the journalists here were attempting to generate a story out of seemingly thin material. Perhaps those items where the 'story' does not leap out at the journalists as a familiar type lead to lengthier deliberation.

However, what might cause journalists to seek out an angle where one does not immediately exist (in the sense that the story would then become viable if it did)? One possible reason is when journalists wish to promote the dramatic elements within a particular set of circumstances, to increase its impact. This is an issue I will be exploring in Chapter 9, especially when analysing the 'breaking' story at Channel Four, about Toyota. It will be seen here that this story was actually based around very little original source material. In this sense most of the narrative consisted of the particular angle placed on it by the journalist responsible for its construction. But the clearest example of attempting to weave an interesting narrative out the 'basic facts' also came at Channel Four, earlier in the day. This concerned a story that was not due to be broadcast until Friday of that week (my visit was on a Wednesday). Of all the discussions I witnessed during any of the planning meetings, this was the most animated and expansive. It occurred at the second meeting of the day, at 11.50 (officially scheduled for 11.30) and centred on an interview with American actor Al Pacino concerning his forthcoming film, *Looking for Richard* (released in late 1996). On this occasion, all present were actively interested and the relatively original dimension of the story clearly excited their imaginations.

The fact that this particular exchange was so dominant in terms of time and effort,

especially the energy invested in looking for an appropriate angle, suggests several important things about the way journalists regard newsworthy material. First, it points to their determination to turn an event into a story if they have decided it is newsworthy. In other words, while so much that happens in reality is simply overlooked, a story such as this which is in essence just another film release that has both come to the attention of Channel Four News' editorial staff and captured their imagination, may end up receiving a disproportionate amount of attention. Second, its intrinsic subject matter was less routine. Therefore, rather than knowing automatically what type of story it was, and how to frame the different 'facts' into a recognisable narrative (Gitlin, 1980; Jacobs, 1996), the journalists were pushed into more open and expansive reflection on its merits as an item in the schedule; most of all, how best to 'tell it'. It was the only occasion all day that I witnessed the process of narrative construction being articulated in such a transparent fashion.

Third, the discussion was democratic and each person's contribution received fair and equal consideration. In the end the angle that was to be taken was to, first, draw comparisons between Pacino's depiction of the character and other versions, then to promote the ongoing relevance of Shakespeare to schoolchildren. Once this decision had been made the discussion came to a swift conclusion and, almost half-heartedly, one of the reporters present, when the question was thrown across the room, said, "I'll do it". What was especially interesting here was that the debate was ultimately resolved by employing a seemingly tried and trusted technique: the story was to be framed within an 'educational dimension'. Therefore, in the end, the journalists resorted to a course of action bound up in familiar routine.

General comments made throughout the day

At Channel Four, during my heavily interrupted conversation with newsreader Phil, he

began a discussion on what constitutes news value with a recent story that had received wide coverage – and on which he seemed to hold strong personal views. It concerned a British man, Tony Bullimore, who had been trapped for several days in his sailing boat in the South Pacific. After the initial ‘good news’ of his being found alive the news media quickly began looking for a more negative angle, delving into his background and discovering he was something of a “dubious character”. That Phil referred to this in particular is interesting. His tone suggested strongly that he disapproved of journalists behaving in this manner and he was in effect drawing a line between his approach to ‘news value’ as a journalist and that of other members of the profession (although he did not specify who in particular). The point is that he saw himself, and Channel Four, fulfilling a specific role in news broadcasting, with its own specific requirements for newsworthiness.

His apparent dislike of journalists who seek out scandal and controversy led me to enquire if Phil shared a similar attitude to the news media’s treatment of politicians. In other words, was Tony Bullimore, as an ‘ordinary’ citizen, to be treated fundamentally differently from those conventionally ‘elite’ figures (Fiske, 1987) in positions of power in society? His response was to remark on how the British political structure actively discourages consensus and as a consequence, those in Parliament do not want it. Because as a subject, it was a dominant theme in television news at the time (January 1997), and as journalists appeared to have a preoccupation with the internal disagreements with the then Conservative Government, I commented that, in the case of dissent in Parliament about Britain’s place in the European Union, it seemed to be the case that the great majority of MPs actually agreed that integration was basically positive.

What was significant here was not that I was using anecdotal evidence but the response. Phil did not challenge what I said and added weight to it by stating that, in his view, “eighty percent” of existing seats could be predicted at the next General Election because they will stay with the same party (which actually turned out not be the case). In his view this rendered it non-newsworthy. In his view there was no point

in reporting that. It was the other twenty percent that were newsworthy. On a small scale, this attitude is in keeping with Galtung & Ruge's selection criterion of 'consonance', because it amounts to a prediction about what he expected to happen and that framed the terms in which he thought about any stories relating to the subject as a whole.

If, as Tuchman (1978) asserts, news is ultimately a constructed representation of reality, based on journalists being able to impose control over random events, this essential artificiality can only be reinforced by individual journalists anticipating what might happen rather than letting events unfold 'naturally' (as they would do in 'reality'). As I discussed in Chapter 3, part of the professional ethos depends on the idea that reporters and editors have a 'nose' for news and this, coupled with the notion of news production as a creative process, leads journalists to believe they are constantly revealing new and unexpected events. By effectively pre-empting what might happen at the next General Election, Phil was arguably doing what most people with knowledge of British politics might do. But journalists are supposed to be different from everyone else when it comes to being able to select stories and decide what is important. That, in television news at least, is why they are ultimately trusted with the task of selecting and producing news.

On a more fundamental level, if all news is actually supposed to be 'new' any television journalist, bound by the need to remain objective, should approach a subject with a completely open mind and not assume (as is the case here) that a particular scenario will exist at some future time. Phil, of course, made his remark about the election in an informal context and on the surface it seems to signify little more than a commonsense view of the political situation in Britain at the time. However, if such an assumption is analysed further it could be seen as evidence of journalistic fallacy that all news is a spontaneous response to 'random and chaotic' events (Fiske, 1987). Hypothetically, if all stories were to enter the news schedule randomly and unpredictably, and it was not possible to 'routinise the unexpected' (Allan, 1999; McQuail, 2000), how would reporters and editors ensure a story was ready on time?

Specifically on the reporting of Europe, Phil believed this was a “dense” problem to understand. Those journalists actively trying to obtain information from European Union bureaucrats found this a demanding task and once they had acquired this it proved difficult to grasp. He did not explain why such data might be considered more arcane than any other type of official documentation and I was led to speculate in my notebook that, because journalists tend to try to simplify events like ‘Europe’ as far as possible this may mean they are predisposed to only seeking out source information that is easily digestible (Gavin, 2001). Phil did comment shortly afterwards that an important aspect of news presentation was not to “bore the audience” and that the “programme must be consumable”, which may indicate that this need for television journalists to make stories as ‘unambiguous’ as possible (Galtung & Ruge, 1965) dictates the way they approach ‘raw information’ during the newsgathering process.

Phil then added that the case against ‘Europe’ was better presented than its “opposite”, but did not elaborate on what might constitute positive news about this subject. This, once again, underlines a key aspect of journalistic behaviour that I encountered across my three visits: that they seem to have less difficulty focusing on those facts, circumstances and characteristics that amount to a deviation from the norm, yet struggle to articulate what that norm is. The question remains, what is the case for Europe and why do journalists seem unable to expand verbally on what this means more specifically? Was Phil simply so attracted to seeking out things that had ‘gone wrong’ (Lewis, 1993) that he overlooked what had ‘gone right’? Indeed, when I pressed Phil and asked if Channel Four News could be more proactive in presenting a more positive view of Europe, he replied that they had tried on a number of occasions to do so “but the editors won’t touch it”.

Again, there was no expansion here, and I should perhaps have pressed the point further and tried to establish who precisely within the newsroom had attempted to be more proactive along with the level of editorial control that seemed to be against it. That I did not do this is perhaps indicative of the problems faced by a researcher on a

short newsroom visit, which in my experience centre on two main issues. First, in trying to access as many individuals as possible, there is an imperative to quickly move on to the next interviewee in order not to run out of time (and not to take up too much of the interviewee's own time), especially as the deadline for broadcast approaches. Second, the process of news story construction requires almost continuous journalistic engagement with the material, which militates against gaining their undivided attention for more than fleeting moments. Phil was being constantly interrupted, both by fellow newsroom staff and on the telephone, so our discussion was particularly disjointed and it was easy to lose the thread of the dialogue. Perhaps the essentially dislocated nature of newsroom-based interviews is in keeping with the way they tend to respond to questioning, which is to provide equally short answers. It is as though the whole atmosphere associated with newsgathering and story construction is designed (unwittingly) to limit open reflection and instead focus journalists' minds on meeting deadlines.

Specific Comments Relating to News Value

What was apparent was the way so much on the programme schedule could be judged by simply referring to its basic subject matter. When I sought to elicit more theoretical reflections, these tended towards remarks like Annie's at Midlands Today, that understanding of what constitutes a 'story' is something "you pick up on the job". Such lack of conceptual discussion may, on one level, support the idea that journalists do frame stories by type. But it also suggests Golding & Elliott (1979:114) made a valid point when arguing that 'news value', although important, is subsumed within daily, routine practical discussions. Perhaps this is why so many remarks made on the subject of news value was pithy and unproblematised, such as Mike's remark that "worthy news isn't necessarily the most newsworthy". This could have proved an interesting example of professional self-reflection, but the conversation failed to go anywhere as he resumed the task of preparing that night's lead story on Midlands Today. The episode seemed to epitomise my encounters with journalists, in that

potentially interesting lines of enquiry were closed down because the momentum of the conversation had passed by the reporter or editor becoming distracted. What Mike seemed to be suggesting here was that news content varies from the reputable and laudable to indecent and dishonourable, but how far this private view impacted on his professional attitudes and behaviour remained a mystery.

The one occasion, then, when a journalist had time and space to reflect on the issue of newsworthiness free of distraction, is especially worthy of attention. This happened at HTV when, after the other reporters and editors had left the staff canteen, I was able to ask Ben the Planning Editor a series of questions in a more leisurely manner. During the twenty minutes we had before he needed to return to newsroom and begin the countdown to that evening's bulletin, I was able to ask Ben what his views on news value were. He began by outlining his personal view, that HTV News should be constructed like a 'magazine', with a mixture of story types designed to appeal to the regional audience. What he then said, however, was more interesting, because he offered some considered reflections on the distinction between two basic types of news: 'hard' and 'soft'.

These terms are not new to journalistic discourse. Tuchman (1978) discusses them at length in conjunction with the way those journalists she studied sought to differentiate between different types of 'reality'. More recently, Costera Meijer (2003) found in her own newsroom study that journalists found it difficult to conceive of 'news' outside two basic types, 'real' and 'other'. The first of these, she explains, related mostly to negative events or 'hard' issues, while 'other' news (compare Langer, 1998) embraced softer, more popular stories. The crucial point here is that she found "most of the editorial staff incapable of dividing the news into more than two categories" (Costera Meijer, 2003:18). In other words, it may be a feature of journalistic behaviour to only consider news in terms of this kind of binary division.

Further, this may explain why unusual stories, such as the Al Pacino item discussed earlier attract more interest. Indeed, Costera Meijer (2003:18) found that those journalists she explicitly asked valued "an idiosyncratic choice of topic or format

outside the terms of the binary division". She also found, as I did (see Chapter 7), that at planning meetings the inclusion of 'hard news' was never questioned: unlike, more popular stories, its presence on the line-up was enough to justify its inclusion.

Elsewhere in my visits, I barely heard the terms 'hard' and 'soft' used. At Midlands Today they came up in passing during conversations with Robin and Mike, but neither felt the need to reflect on what they meant to them. Indeed, Ben would not have done had I not been in a position to ask him to expand. All three individuals seemed to presume I knew already, which in itself raises an interesting aspect of routine behaviour: that there was an almost total lack of concern expressed by journalists as to whether I was making sense of what they told me. It was always taken for granted that I understood what was being said. I referred earlier to the apparent lack of jargon in newsroom discourse, which was part of the professional virtue of imparting information clearly. Perhaps, therefore, this gives reporters and editors an in-built confidence that everything said will be 'naturally' easy to comprehend. In other words, journalists as people have acquired the professional ability to use clear, plain English and this extends to all the verbal exchanges they have, even with outsiders like me. Another explanation, however, could be that the reporters and editors I spoke to were simply indifferent to whether I understood or not. That they took it for granted that I would because they take all aspects of routine conversation within the newsroom for granted.

Returning to the subject of different news types, Ben offered some further views. The ideal bulletin should always aim to offer viewers a balance of different types of stories. Within this context, 'hard' news could be equated with a story that had 'broken', rather than a situation that was ongoing. 'Soft' stories, however, could be lighter, even positive in tone. I followed this up by asking if the definition of 'hard' news disqualified more upbeat stories. In keeping with the standard journalistic response to questions of a more conceptual leaning, Ben provided some examples of recent stories which could be considered positive and 'hard'. One was Camilla Parker Bowles

giving an exclusive interview to HTV; the other the arrival in Newfoundland of a reconstructed version of a fifteenth century sailing ship, *The Matthew*, that had left Bristol some weeks earlier. It is reasonable to speculate here that an interview given by a public figure close to the future King of England constituted a 'scoop' simply because of her 'elite' status. It was her *decision* to give the interview that was the event, and it is perhaps illuminating that Ben made no reference to the content of what she said. The second example concerned an ongoing story, of which this was the latest instalment. This was 'continuing' news, about a familiar subject, but perceived by HTV News as 'important' to viewers as well as centring on a specific event: the *setting out on a journey*. In other words, the hard news status was derived from the event-driven nature of the circumstances.

More importantly, these remarks by Ben may indicate how journalists are able to prioritise importance through shortcut mechanisms. The use of 'hard' and 'soft' to differentiate between potential story types may help editors in particular to arrive at selection decisions more efficiently because definitions of each type exist clearly in his mind. In this respect, he made a further interesting statement that news agendas change at different times of the year, and that there was more 'hard' news in winter. That he could make such a statement without seeing its problematic nature was illuminating and reveals, again, how key professional decisions on selection may be made based on unquestioning assumptions about newsworthiness. Also, if Ben believed that certain types of stories were likely to be more prevalent at particular times of the year, he was effectively pre-empting what would become 'news'. Indeed, it points to journalists being less inclined to seek out stories in summer, because that is not recognised as a time when stories routinely recognised as 'important' are expected to happen.

Moreover, the attitude displayed by Ben here may highlight one of the most fundamental features of news production. It is almost a cliché that news coverage over the summer consists of more popular stories, largely because there are fewer political events happening (notwithstanding unusual events like the suicide of Dr Kelly in 2003

– see Chapter 2). However, what this does not explain is why news organisations cannot extend their interest to other types of story that routinely receive less coverage, such as issues relating to domestic violence (Carter, 1998). The point I am trying to make here is that the notion of what is ideologically ‘most important’ appears so fixed in journalistic values and attitudes (possibly exacerbated by the ‘inability’ to conceive news existing outside a basic binary division of hard and soft), that, in the absence of, say, stories about political ‘elites’, they fail to seek out other stories of social or political significance, preferring to concentrate on those ‘lighter’ stories with which they are familiar.

Another reflection on newsworthiness, not directly pertaining to actual subject matter, was when Robin at Midlands Today sought to differentiate between the types of story of interest to the country as a whole and others of specific concern to Midlands Today viewers. In his estimation, the local audience he aimed to attract would not wish to be informed about certain types of event, issue and occurrence. When I tried to ascertain what this meant exactly, it became apparent that he was making assumptions about the tastes and preferences of people he did not personally know, based on his own ‘certainty’ that that he alone could judge for them (on the days he was producing the bulletin).

To try to illustrate this he made reference to general terms like ‘background stories’ and ‘serious news’. It appeared that he needed to be aware of such general categories in order to determine the relative value of different stories. For example, it was only by being able to identify a given event as ‘serious’ that Robin could then deem another ‘trivial’ by comparison. During this particular conversation, it was never explained how he was able to differentiate between events of national interest as opposed to those only relevant to the ‘Midlands’. Simply by encouraging greater sensitivity in selection and reporting (as laid down in the Producers’ Guidelines – see Chapter 3) is not the same as ‘knowing’ that particular events and issues have an intrinsic quality of ‘regionalness’ (McNair, 2003:200). When Galtung & Ruge discussed ‘cultural proximity’ as a selection criterion they did so in the context of newsworthiness

pertaining to events that were both “culturally similar” (Galtung & Ruge, 1965:67) and relevant. But, arguably, for this to be the case at all, the community being addressed would need to operate according to a system of shared ideas and values (Hall, 1982).

Perhaps this should be discussed in the context of the much wider debate about the function of (television) news. Arguably, national news, by aiming to present viewers with the ‘most important’ events that have happened recently, seems to be fulfilling the purpose of keeping the public informed about matters of ‘public interest’. Of course, the fundamental issue, which I discussed in Chapter 3, is how the relatively tiny group of people who constitute the journalistic profession are able to judge what ‘public interest’ is. However, if Robin and Ben are typical, local news may be less concerned with ‘importance’ and more with offering views that match the audience’s perceived interests and concerns. Aside from the key consideration of whether or not programme editors are equipped to make these judgements (which Robin especially was adamant he could), the question remains, whose interests and preferences are being addressed. Targeting a specific group of people may be a broadly achievable objective. But this is not the same as trying to reach the entire population of a region and, more to the point, know what this assortment of different communities and ideologies ‘wants’ and ‘likes’.

Another striking indication of how journalists tend to deal with questions that appear to challenge deeply entrenched beliefs on newsworthiness occurred at HTV. Here, one of the reporters, Bob, raised the broader subject of negativity as a news value, when remarking on a recent national story about a plane crash. I took the opportunity to ask him if he had a view on whether negative stories should always be treated as being more newsworthy than positive ones. His reaction was to turn to me and say simply that this was “an axiom”, immediately turning away and sitting with his back to me as surveyed the computer screen in front of him. Although this action was consistent with Bob’s overall indifference towards me, the way he dealt so swiftly with the question is noteworthy because of its sheer reductionism. Because, to him, there was such certainty that positive stories were intrinsically less newsworthy, it was equally ‘natural’ not to see this as a debate worth pursuing.

I did, however, try to pursue this matter and Bob subsequently stated that, according to his personal view, the amount of 'bad news' in a typical bulletin should be limited, otherwise the overall composition would lack variety and balance. He supported this by referring to recent subject matter. On the previous evening, the first three items on the late night HTV bulletin had all involved death (a woman falling into Cheddar gorge; a body found on a boat; a shooting). In his judgment, this was too many and a news bulletin should ideally include a maximum of two "nasty" stories. It is important to reiterate the context in which this statement was made to me. Throughout the hour I spent with Bob it was plainly obvious that I was an imposition on his time. This meant everything he said had to be eked out by me, and this last remark was no exception. In this instance, the question of balance in the news bulletin, and a possible surfeit of negativity, fleetingly grabbed his attention and Bob physically turned towards me to give his answer. In this sense it was an immediate reaction rather than a response over which he allocated time to reflect. However, it did enable me to follow up with the more fundamental question of how to define news value, and for a moment I could see he was deliberating on how to answer.

It transpired he was aware of possible distortion among viewers' perceptions in believing certain aspects of society were worse than they really were. This was not helped by the promotion in the news of a "fashionable crime" each year. That year (1997) it was drugs; in 1996 it had been 'road rage'; while the year before that, 'ram-raiding'. Most interesting of all, he said finally that "out there" most people did not come across these and other forms of violence. There were no signs that he wished to say how or why he could make this assumption and, because of the tone of our exchanges up until then, I decided to pull back. As I stated earlier in this chapter, it was important not to sound like an interrogator. This does not lessen the significance of the comments themselves, not least his utter dismissal of my suggestion that positive news could be as important as negative stories. This seemed to typify the deeply entrenched beliefs held by all the journalists I encountered and was not an issue they saw fit to challenge. It was merely that Bob was more abrupt than the others.

That he clearly did seem to believe that news content might distort public perceptions is indicative of the gap that exists between routine assumptions and behaviour, promulgated and maintained by newsroom practice and 'professionalism', and the viewpoint of individuals when urged to reflect on what they do. Perhaps most significant of all is that, despite expressing views in the way he did, Bob gave no visible indication that this would alter the manner in which he judged newsworthiness.

Across the three visits, various other journalists made brief remarks on the subject of newsworthiness, all characterised, in the same way as those discussed above, by an unwillingness to develop their thoughts conceptually or at length. At Channel Four, the foreign news editor Des (the journalist who became hostile towards my questioning) was not prepared (or perhaps unable) to offer a definition of what makes a *specific event* newsworthy. He did, though, volunteer his own general definition of news, which was to compare the world as it is now with how it has changed since yesterday. If nothing has changed that is not news. The example he gave to support this was of a bus that fails to reach its destination qualifying, potentially, as 'news', while one that makes the journey without a problem would be of no interest. The significance of this statement is its 'taken-for-grantedness'. The use of a bus journey as a metaphor for deviations from the norm, or disruptions to the status quo was almost banal in its simplicity. This journalist seemed reluctant to discuss the complexities of news selection in a more rigorous manner and this may have been connected to his generally dismissive tone as he spoke to me, his statement delivered with a querulous expression and minor shrug of the shoulders.

I did not meet such blatant indifference at Midlands Today, though neither was anyone in that newsroom interested in discussing 'news value' on any conceptual level. Early on, after the planning meeting had finished, Viv made the potentially revealing remark that news value and news selection were not necessarily the same. This could have been a fruitful line of discussion but, typically, his voice tailed off into fleeting introspection and then the subject had passed. It may have been that he was simply unable to elaborate. Later that day, I asked Mike to define 'news value'. His reply

was that anything could in theory become news, referring to it as “chat”; what people talk about. This was the extent of his initial reflection on the question although with me probing for more information Mike later declared that journalists must aim for a balance of different stories. A bulletin should ideally contain a mixture of “fluffy stories” and ‘hard news’, but there should also be a wide geographical spread. However, he then added the proviso that this last criterion should not take precedence if the story is ‘weak’. On the question of specific subject matter he offered three examples: that, in his personal view, the growth of the European Union is important; that Tony Blair has devalued Parliament by truncating the length of Prime Minister’s Question Time each week; and that British devolution has taken power away from Parliament.

He did, however, place value in providing the viewers with information they would find appealing. It was important to him that the audience should not be patronised, but at the same time they needed to be informed in a style and form that encouraged and maintained interest. It was of regret to him that people were “woefully ill-informed” about the European Parliament, his view here being that the BBC lacked both the financial resources and the will to try to ameliorate the situation. But he also felt that BBC2’s Newsnight should be more entertaining and that Radio 4’s Today Programme amounted to a “bear fight”, as well as being both macho and predictable. He did, however, approve of the “interesting way” stories are covered on Radio Five Live. On the issue of presentational style Mike thought regional news could represent European issues in a more interesting way.

I now want to explore the four themes, relating to newsworthiness, that arose as specific influences on journalists during my various discussions with them.

Attitudes to News Audience

In Chapter 2 the essential point was made that the function of news may be seen, ultimately, as falling between the two extremes of either being a vital servant to the

democratic function and, or just another product in an increasingly market-driven world (McManus, 1994). In light of this, it is perhaps surprising how few times those journalists I spoke to made direct reference to the viewers they were trying to reach (Schlesinger, 1987). In the main, it was the programme editors who did this, especially in the two regional newsrooms. This seems to be in accordance with the specific way local news, being more populist in outlook (Cottle, 1993), aims to be more in tune with the needs of 'its community'. Rather than explicitly refer to 'news value' in terms of what the audience needs to know about or find interesting, journalists made allusion to this by concentrating on the other elements dealt with later in this chapter, especially visual interest and dramatic impact. Those journalists, then, who did volunteer thoughts on the audience by making explicit reference to viewers were, by definition, highlighting the kinds of subjects that matter to viewers, and why viewers matter when selecting and formulating news stories. Among the few times such a comment was made was at Channel Four where Clive remarked that images in news stories helped viewers make better sense of the content than just having words on their own. Clive was especially keen on the importance of pictures in news reports, having already stated that these provided the basis for all ITN news items, as opposed to the BBC which started out with words and added the images afterwards. He felt this was a distinguishing factor between the two organisations. In the same newsroom later on, Phil stated that it was important not to bore the audience.

I was able to gain more insight into attitudes to the audience at the other two newsrooms, through my discussions with the Editors there. There may be a connection between this and the greater awareness of local news audiences displayed by regional news programmes, which I discuss above. During my conversation with Ben, he was adamant that HTV News must reflect the community. Indeed, they had a remit to do so. With reference to an earlier point, not only should the programme aim to balance 'hard' and 'soft' news, but also "reflect" the nature, views and preferences of the those viewers "on the doorstep". Indeed, there was a management philosophy that HTV and its viewers should feel part of one big family and that was why they aimed to put 'ordinary' people in front of the camera as much as possible.

In making these comments Ben was expressing awareness of the distinctive qualities HTV News had to offer, first, in relation to their neighbours in Central's Abingdon studios who did not incorporate the audience into the programme, and also their rivals at BBC Points West. The latter, he believed, offered their audience stories that were more "issue-led". It may be a condition of commercial news that they are more conscious of the competition as staff at Midlands Today did not make any remarks about ITV local news (McNair, 2003b). In terms of content, Ben asserted that reflecting the different interests of the audience led to HTV adopting its own distinct set of news values. As he's developed as a journalist, he has grown more sensitive to the needs of the audience and part of this is to maintain a questioning attitude. It was not clear what Ben was referring to here. But it is in keeping with the professional notion, which I discussed at length in Chapter 3, that journalists believe they have special ability to seek out worthy and interesting stories, along with an ability to construct them in a clear and meaningful way for the audience. If Ben was alluding here to his and his colleagues' capacity to question the values and assumptions on which selection decisions were made, he may have been deluding himself, since that was not a feature I witnessed in any journalists, in any of the newsrooms.

To reiterate, at Midlands Today, there appeared to be no sense of doubt in Robin's mind that he was able to determine what was 'news' to the million Midlands Today viewers (see earlier in chapter). This confidence seemed to stem from a firm belief on his part that he was able to feel the "pulse" of audience interest. Expanding further, news value was what interested people in the street, which Robin referred to as "news sense". The example of the story on Marcelle Davis (the murdered prostitute) illustrates forcefully Robin's approach to assessing what viewers find appealing. He confirmed this passed "Test Number One" in that it should interest a wide number of viewers. According to Robin 'people stories' interest the audience more than anything else because they cause viewers to react. It was the capacity for a story to elicit an audience response that seems to be important to Robin and this is how he appeared to judge newsworthiness.

A “good journalist” has good news sense, but at the same time knew how to gear a particular story to a particular audience. One area of subject matter that Robin did not believe the audience found interesting were political stories. He remarked with a degree of almost palpable relief that BBC Midlands News was now more populist again after a “blip” in the mid 1990s, when it tried to offer a range of ‘more serious’, ‘harder news’ stories. According to him, when news got “serious” audience figures went down. According to him there were now fewer political stories across BBC News bulletins in general, but especially in regional news, this the result of Greg Dyke’s more populist approach compared to his predecessor as Controller, John Birt. As if to underline this further he mentioned the previous day’s news coverage when the main national story was about the Government’s new spending plans. This was, in his estimation, adequately covered by the BBC1 6.00 national bulletin, so Midlands Today only needed to give it minimal coverage, which is what happened. Today it was to receive no coverage at all, a situation that clearly met his approval judging from his tone of voice.

Looking at these comments more closely, it is apparent that for this editor at least political stories are not seen as interesting from the audience’s perspective. I was not in a position to gauge how much this view was grounded in actual knowledge of viewers’ opinions. Neither did I try to ascertain how much his apparent dislike of such ‘harder’ stories influences the culture of the Midlands Today in general. On top of this, Robin’s role was a shared one and I did not meet or hear any references to the other editor, who may have held different opinions and views on news selection. It is difficult to gauge how far Robin’s attitudes on content and the audience stemmed from the replacement of John Birt as Controller. As I outlined earlier in this chapter, the ‘Birtian revolution’ (McNair, 2002) brought with it an increased emphasis on promoting political stories and providing background and context within individual story construction. Was Robin a particular individual who disliked this intrinsically, or did he simply believe the audience do not find it important or interesting? Moreover, how far did (does) his personal beliefs here reflect television news editors in general?

I also broached the subject of the audience directly with Robin's assistant editor that day, Annie, suggesting to her that news value is not just driven by the preferences of the audience. She reacted quite sharply by saying that, despite any previous remarks about the value of pictures, if all news programmes were concerned only for what the audience might want, all that would be on offer would be "fluffy animal stories". She then moved on to a different subject area to further emphasise that, ultimately, the audience must remain a secondary consideration alongside responsible journalistic behaviour. Indeed great stress was placed on the word 'responsible' and a further example given, that it would be very wrong to present a story about a 'small disturbance' and make it appear larger. In terms of her general attitude to the viewers (not her comments about specific programme material) Annie's comments here seemed to contrast with her editor's that day, Robin, who stated to me that his decision making was effectively driven by what he believed the audience wanted to know about. Overall, my visits to the three newsrooms indicated a consensus in attitudes towards the nature of the overall bulletin, as indicated by a lack of strong disagreement at meetings. However, perhaps the difference of opinion between these two members of the Midlands Today team (who actually sat side by side) is indicative of a less uniform set of attitudes, masked by the common purpose of producing the bulletin on time each day.

The role and importance of visual images

On entering each newsroom, one of the first features I noticed was the large number of television sets displaying other television stations. Although the number of potentially newsworthy stories 'out there' is limitless, news organisations like to monitor the output of the other news channels, to ensure they are not missing anything important, including, in the case of Channel Four, what other ITN outlets were broadcasting. The point here is that this monitoring was of the visual material only, since sound was kept turned down and the volume only increased if an item looked interesting. In other

words, the journalists were making their initial judgments on newsworthiness through pictures only.

In terms of their comments, journalists in all three newsrooms would occasionally volunteer remarks about the importance of pictures in television news. This seemed to be a factor that was deeply ingrained. At Channel Four, the home news editor, Clive, placed emphasis on the need for the central message of any story to be as clear and intelligible as possible and that at Channel Four pictures and sounds “breathe more” in the news story. Words inform pictures. Pictures have power. As I stated earlier, Channel Four’s method was to start with the visual images and then construct the script to complement them, a point Ed chose to emphasise again later that morning. At HTV, Becky told me her aim when editing a story was always to choose the “absolute best pictures” from the unedited material in front of her, although she did not expand on what criteria these were based on. I will be returning to Becky in particular later in the chapter, since my observation of her during the editing process provided particularly rich insight into the use of dramatic imagery during story construction. Her behaviour, though, only reiterates how the two key factors of ‘good pictures’ and dramatic impact are inextricably linked. I will now outline some of the specific comments made by those I observed in the three newsrooms.

At the early morning meeting at HTV, when the headline story about flooding was being discussed, Ben made the comment that: “It’s nice to get pictures of squalor on camera”. As will become apparent later when I examine the broadcast of this item in depth, this sentiment appeared to influence the way the story was told visually, with an emphasis on water damage and the general sully of furniture and possessions. Later on, Bob volunteered an observation about a national news story the previous day (Monday), about a near-miss involving a plane at Manchester airport (in which responsible actions by the pilot averted a far more serious crash landing than actually happened; in the event the aircraft merely lost its wheels. Bob did not think the story would have been the headline item without the pictures that accompanied it. According to him these were not especially dramatic, only showing the plane landing

uncomfortably along with flames as a result of friction. He did not pass any further opinion or judgment on what was another newsroom's editorial decision. However, that he made the point at all, feeling the need to add that the pictures were – in his view – not overly thrilling, emphasises how visual representation is central to the selection process.

Similarly, at Midlands Today, Annie offered the example of a story where someone was mugged in the street and that if no one had been present to take pictures, “so what”. In other words, the original event may not be intrinsically important to the journalist reporting on it, but the way it might appeal to the audience is. Indeed, she added, a script with no visual imagery would be constructed differently from one with it. While this, on one level, seems like a fairly obvious statement, there is another way it could be construed relating to representations of ‘truth’ and actuality. If, as is implied here, journalists alter the way they ‘tell a story’ depending on whether or not there are dramatic images to accompany it, this surely highlights the disparity between ‘reality’ and the news story, and serves to strengthen the idea that news is a constructed reality (Tuchman, 1978; Schudson, 1996). It simply reinforces the most fundamental aspect of ‘news’ of all – that it is a highly mediated product (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976). Moreover, it also suggests that journalists have a choice in how much extra context, visual or otherwise, that will be included in a story's narrative. The point is that the journalists make that choice. In deciding which angle to take, they are also determining which version of ‘reality’ is presented to the audience (McNair, 1998:73).

Perhaps the single most striking example of the power of images to influence selection priorities came at Midlands Today, when Robin was monitoring the lunchtime programme of rivals, Central News. As I sat and watched, an item appeared containing mildly dramatic pictures of a crashed lorry on the M42 motorway. The vehicle had burst through the crash barrier and rolled down the embankment, lying partially overturned at the bottom next to a bridge. On seeing this, Robin almost sprang out of his chair and exclaimed excitedly and loudly: “Great pictures”. Without

hesitation he asked Kate to obtain the same footage (which I was told came from an independent agency source), and space was made in that evening's bulletin to accommodate the story. This brief display of animation and enthusiasm has interesting connotations for understanding journalistic motivation when identifying newsworthy material. Robin immediately knew that the image of an overturned vehicle, sitting at an angle at the foot of an embankment, with the broken barrier by the roadside at the top of the picture would 'tell the story'. Because of the nature of the accident the damage done was to the barrier and lorry alone and there was minimal disruption to other traffic. Selection of this item was, it seemed, justified. This allowed Robin to make an immediate judgment on its newsworthiness. Indeed, it suggested that, when the pictures of an event are considered visually dramatic enough by the editor, it assumes a degree of automatic newsworthiness.

Besides its purely visual impact, this particular story contained a number of other features that might have influenced selection. First, it had happened that morning, so was recent, as well as being an event – like all accidents – that could be retold as a meaningful account in a straightforward manner. It was also essentially unambiguous, and was manifestly negative in that damage had occurred and there was injury to the driver (which was stated in the bulletin broadcast later that day). These three criteria transparently match those suggested by Galtung & Ruge. However, in terms of the remaining twelve, the connection is less in evidence. For example, it seems reasonable to suggest that the story was unlikely to hold much relevance or surprise for the audience in general. Neither was it one that followed on from a previous story that was continuing to attract interest; minor road accidents such as this tend to be individual occurrences. One factor that cannot by definition apply to a 'simple' accident such as a crashed lorry is 'consonance'. By definition perhaps accidents simply happen and cannot be pre-planned by journalists or any other party. Yet the act of selecting such a story because its circumstances equate with a known type raises important questions about the relationship between expecting things to happen and having a pre-planned mental image of how the story should look after the event.

Although this occurrence would meet many of Galtung & Ruge's selection criteria, it was clearly selected because of its dramatic impact. It is interesting to reflect briefly on one in particular: 'amplitude'. In his analysis of this in particular, Hartley (1978:76) makes direct reference to the "threshold of drama: the bigger the story, the more added drama is needed to keep it going". In other words, a story about a single crashed lorry, where no serious injury occurred (as was announced in the evening bulletin), does not appear to match any significant notions of amplitude. Neither did this particular occurrence seem heavily dramatic, although it was, as stated above, technically negative. This can only lead to the conclusion that the overriding motivation of the programme editor was to include it because he found the images interesting and believed the audience would share his view.

Drama

Either by making specific reference to it, or by implication through other remarks, several of the journalists I spoke to emphasised the importance of dramatic representation. At Channel Four, Ed, the most senior member of that newsroom's personnel I had dealings with, stated that there must always be a dramatic element to any story, but it was important not to distort the 'facts' of the situation in the process (see section below on negativity). I have outlined earlier in the chapter how, at the first planning meeting, those present expressed keenness not to over-dramatise events in Northern Ireland when constructing the (then) headline item on Northern Ireland. This tone was maintained at the 11.50 meeting, when a decision was made to defer a potential story (which had not been discussed at 9.30), concerning a woman forced to have a caesarean birth. The reason given was that she was "mad" and the journalists present did not wish to either distort the facts or be sensationalist.

Indeed, I rarely witnessed any signs of reporters actively seeking to increase the amount of drama in a story they were compiling. At Channel Four, Mary, on one

occasion, asked a colleague who had briefly entered the editing suite if there was any library footage relating to immigration, such as pictures of wire fences, brick walls and bold signs. It transpired that she was seeking some images of bleakness to accompany her story and to emphasise the plight of the refugees. Similarly at Midlands Today, Mike appeared to be searching for a particular image of the main subject Deborah Aaron that would emphasise her plight more forcibly. But these were the exceptions. The overriding impression was that these reporters had an urgent task to complete and all that mattered was to find the most appropriate words to describe an event or situation, and to compile a script that was clear and succinct. It is important to be clear about this, as I am referring specifically here to what I actually saw journalists do. Obviously it was not possible to know what their internal thought processes were influencing their selection decisions. That is something I will be able to reflect on in the next chapter, when examining the news output.

However, I was able to gain deeper insight into the attitudes of one journalist to newsworthiness in general and the use of drama to increase the impact of a story. As already intimated, the various remarks made to me by Becky at HTV seemed to contradict what she actually did when physically editing the story on floods in Gloucester. I will now outline in depth what she said, as we sat at her desk with her working without the help of a picture editor. One of the first comments made to me, as she sifted through the visual material gathered earlier that day was that she hoped it would be raining by the time she returned to Gloucester for a live feed some time after 6.30 in the evening. This was because the residents would be “worrying about it [flooding] happening again”. Regarding the pictures of damaged goods and property she was in the process of editing, she then said “it would be better if people were in tears”, as this enhances the story. Indeed, throughout this period of observing Becky, I was struck by how vital pictures were to her in emphasising (dramatic) meaning. In presenting her views here, Becky’s tone of voice seemed almost mischievous and was accompanied by an apparent desire to reveal certain tools of the trade. It was not possible to know how much this unguarded behaviour stemmed from my being there to provide an audience, but it may be that my presence helped elicit certain insights not

normally revealed by journalists. Her manner and approach was manifestly in contrast to Bob's from the same newsroom.

The way dramatic elements were introduced to the narrative happened on different levels, both through her actions and, above all, in the verbal insights she elected to provide me with. First, there was the simple use of imagery seemingly designed to emphasise negative aspects. This was suitably illustrated when she viewed footage of the leader of Gloucester City Council. He stated that most of the flats were covered with fairly clean water but the one he had just seen was in a pretty unpleasant mess. She proceeded to select that particular footage. Shortly after this, Jenny, the programme producer, came over and the two discussed whether the bulletin should state a loss of *hundreds* of thousands of pounds rather than *tens*. Becky revised that part of the script accordingly telling me that hundreds is "much better" than tens. This change was put into effect immediately and may be an indication of a routine link between journalistic practice and over-dramatisation of certain events.

In the same vein, Becky then revealed certain 'tricks of the trade', each of which offer a level of insight at odds with the generally vague nature of routine discourse I observed among other journalists. These all involved relating examples of past practices which may or may not have been isolated instances. First, there was an occasion when she was recording a story about peacocks at an aviary having damaged some flowers. When she and the cameraperson arrived, however, they could not find any damage so they destroyed a small number themselves. On another occasion a story about damage to buildings following a storm was visually embellished by her placing bricks on the ground to simulate fallen masonry. Finally, on arriving at an accident scene, flowers were placed on the ground in advance of the public visiting the scene. According to Becky the thinking of the reporter and crew at the time would be that they "assume" the flowers will arrive, but "can't afford to wait". Having provided these examples she reiterated that such practice happens all the time and is justified because the essence of truth in the story is retained. According to her logic here such

artifice is sometimes required to relay the story and in this sense all she and other reporters do is tinker with the details “for effect”.

Finally, on the specific subject of news value, Becky illustrated a different aspect to the way content can mislead while the narrative remains pertinent to the main storyline. By chance one of the streets near to the one where the flooding had occurred was called Wellington Street. Having discovered this, Becky decided to use it accompanied by footage of people in Wellington boots. This was explained by stating that, even though this was a serious story, “you’ve got to have some lighter bits”. Not only is this in contrast to the general emphasis placed on drama and more negative forms of representation, but it also may show how arbitrary specific content selection is when stories are being constructed. There appeared to be no clear rationale for either emphasising negative features or deciding to introduce a more light-hearted element. Becky simply made the decision to include those parts that would tell the story as she wanted it, even if this meant including an arguably irrelevant play on words.

These comments seem to place the spotlight on the way journalists construct rather than simply present ‘reality’. In this respect Becky clearly believed she was presenting a version of events that amounted to the substance of ‘what happened’ and that was all that was required from the audience’s point of view. As I discussed in Chapter 3, there seems to be an in-built contradiction in news production between the journalistic principle of objective truth and the essentially subjective nature of all news stories. To reiterate, journalists believe they can routinely produce versions of events that are fair and impartial and this helps them believe in their ability as professionals, not just to ‘know’ which events and issues are most important and interesting from the audience’s point of view, but also that they can relay ‘facts’ and information accurately and ‘truthfully’.

However, journalists can only report on the events they encounter and according to McNair (1998:73) what they are actually presenting to the audience is a version of

reality, removed from both the natural world and that audience's own perceptions of it. In other words, news can only ever be an approximation of 'what happened' and never a mirror to events and occurrences. Further, as I have already considered, Tuchman (1978) suggested, based on her own study of 'newswriters', that all reality is constructed according to known 'types'. These are, in turn, familiar to both the journalists, who (re)produce them according to habit and routine and also viewers, who appear to regard them as 'news'. TV news therefore maintains its position of trust among the audience (Gunter, 1997).

Negativity

One factor ahead of all others that appears to be influential in journalistic decision making is negativity. So far I have dealt with this as part of a related context, especially during discussions with journalists about related issues such as visual impact and drama, and also in connection with journalists' apparent reluctance to theorise on its status as a 'news value' (such as Bob's reference to 'axioms'). However, some opportunities did arise for me to pursue the issue in more depth, or at least ask for elaboration on a point made. As a result I gained some measure of insight into the role of, arguably, one of the more complex factors in Galtung & Ruge's typology (see discussion of this in Chapter 4). Away from the discussions I had, there were those instances when a reporter or editor signalled their preference for, say, negative imagery. I have already referred to some of these above, such as when Robin became so excited at seeing a picture of a crashed lorry. But there were other occasions. While sitting alongside Steve at HTV, another member of the newsroom, whose identity I failed to note, entered the room, saw an image of rain-flattened cereal in a field and commented on the "nice devastation". Then he turned and left. There was no obvious concern for the plight of the farmers who happened to be adversely affected by this. It was as though this individual was simply attuned to the negative potential of visual material, suggesting this was a high priority in his thinking on newsworthiness.

I wish to stress here that what emerged from my time in each newsroom was the way negativity, as an influence, seems to function on several levels. In a sense, of course, it is almost part and parcel of the criterion of drama, although it is worth noting here that, unlike Golding & Elliott (1979), Galtung & Ruge draw no explicit connection between negativity and amplitude when examining how different selection factors interrelate. But there are, I believe, other, less direct aspects, especially the way journalists seem to want to stir up controversy or expose disagreement (Hartley, 2000), or the way attention is focused specifically on negative elements within an event while other contextual areas are played down. There were occasions when a reporter appeared to highlight negative aspects of an event in a deliberate manner. For example, the reporter at HTV who revealed how she had once laid flowers at the scene of an accident (see above), although that level of candour was an isolated example. More generally, I have already alluded to use of negative emphasis in story construction in the earlier discussion of visual impact and drama. I will now elaborate on those instances where it was possible to engage in dedicated dialogue about this particular selection criterion.

At Channel Four News, Clive commented specifically on the importance of providing a range of story types, spanning 'good' to 'bad', or 'serious' to 'lighter'. In his view a news bulletin should consist of "light and shade", not be all doom and gloom. At HTV, Ben made a similar point and elaborated in slightly more depth, highlighting the requirement of not depressing viewers. He added here that this is why he always aimed to end the bulletin with a lighter item, which itself raises an interesting point. The use of 'soft' stories at the end of bulletins, which usually involve a degree of light hearted behaviour by the newsreader or reporter (Hartley, 1982:39) has, it seems to me, become associated with 'good news'. In Chapter 4, I briefly discussed the first of (then) newsreader Martyn Lewis' controversial lectures on the lack of positive stories in British television news (Lewis, 1993). It needs stressing here that many of the attacks on him by fellow journalists sought to equate his argument for 'good news' with these kinds of 'tailpiece' item.

In other words, those who were hostile to his viewpoint seemed unable to envisage positive stories as being anything other than trivial. Indeed, it is worth adding here that Lewis himself made a conscious effort in the text of his speech not to equate positive news just with so-called 'lighter' items. At Midlands Today, Mike's view was that the term 'spin' had caused greater cynicism, making the Government an easier target for criticism (Straw, 1993) and often being the sole reason for a story's existence. However, he then seemed to contradict this by stating that 'bad news' sells and "it's not cynical or destructive to privilege this." Indeed, on the subject of Martyn Lewis, Mike's opinion was essentially disparaging, believing the former newsreader (which Lewis was by 2000) only wanted to see half an hour of 'good news', which was, in Mike's view, "rubbish". With regard to the general issue of newsworthiness, Mike's attitude here pointed to the difficulty journalists seem to have appreciating an ideological position that deviates from those ideas and values in which the profession seems entrenched.

However, the point was also made in Chapter 4 that these arguments against 'good news' do not span the entire profession and it may be that some local news journalists at least sympathise with Lewis' position (Keeble, 2001). As Cottle found in his study of Central News, local news programmes try to fulfil the role of "moral guardian, safeguarding 'the family' from some of the worst excesses of the outside world" (Cottle, 1993:61). In this connection, Ben was keen to provide news the audience would find sufficiently interesting and attractive, and he insisted that HTV News viewers must not be put off by a surfeit of 'bad news'. However, he proceeded to add, his journalistic instinct still compelled him to regard negative items as intrinsically more important, and this was why these were routinely preferred as the headline story, although he would not rule out leading with a positive, if it were "big enough". Ben reaffirmed that dominant view across the profession, as he perceived it, that 'importance' goes hand in hand with 'bad news'. Ultimately, Ben's perspective here suggests local news journalists, as with any other type, cannot escape the ideological position that relegates positive news to an intrinsically lower status. From his

comments overall, the reason he believed ‘more upbeat’ stories had an important place in the HTV News schedule was not because positive information had an important role to play within a democracy, but because it related to local news and was also about entertaining its audience. This goes back to the point raised by Costera Meijer (2003), discussed earlier in this chapter, that journalists struggle to see stories not regarded as ‘hard news’ (therefore ‘important’) other than as popular (therefore ‘lighter’). Indeed, Ben stated at one point that, “strong negative comments are more newsworthy” than “bland comments”.

I found some evidence that journalists actively seek to routinely promote negative aspects in stories that are not intrinsically ‘bad news’. This seemed to be especially the case with attitudes to ‘harder’, political stories at Channel Four. In my discussion with Phil he made the remark that British politics is structured in a way that encourages dissent. This presumably related to the largely two-party process on which British politics is based, which encourages adversarial combat and the encouraging of ‘taking sides’. However, this is my supposition and Phil did not actually say this. Indeed, this was symptomatic of many verbal exchanges I had with journalists; that potentially interesting points remained undeveloped. In this particular example, it could be that ‘politics’ as a theme is approached as an intrinsically negative subject from the outset. In the same way that Galtung & Ruge state that journalists may actually want something to happen, thus creating “a mental matrix for easy reception and registration of the event” (Galtung & Ruge, 1965:67), Phil’s comments here may be indicative of a predilection to see politicians and political activity in general as a natural site for controversy, conflict, dissent and general ‘bad news’ (Hartley, 2000).

There were exceptions to this. Occasionally, while discussing a particular area of subject matter, the opportunity arose for me to ask a journalist to elucidate on a specific point and, at Channel Four in particular, it transpired that the idea of seeking out positive stories remained a theoretical possibility at least. During a conversation with Phil about how Channel Four News might seek to present the Developing World (in which I was aware he had a personal interest) in a more favourable light, he cited

the case of a major water facility being developed in Africa by the charity Oxfam. In terms of its benefit to the local people, this was unquestionably 'good news'. However, the cost of covering this was prohibitive and Channel Four did not cover it. What this implies is that there may be less incentive to allocate ultimately scarce resources to international coverage of a story if it is essentially positive in nature, and this tendency is only exacerbated if the story is located in a country not routinely covered by the 'news net' (Tuchman, 1978). If so, this only strengthens the hegemonic position of those countries routinely covered in the television news and, when considered in the light of Ed's remarks, suggests a forceful link between many of Galtung & Ruge's selection criteria. As well as being concerned, by definition, with 'elite nations' and negativity, there is the implication here that positive stories in culturally distant, foreign countries are not relevant. However, despite making such remarks, Ed believes that were there to be a major medical breakthrough that would save many lives in Africa, say a "cure for bilharzias", Channel Four would give it prominent coverage.

When I asked Phil about the possibility of emphasising more positive news from Africa, he said that were they to expand their coverage in this manner the increased costs would be prohibitive. If it costs £3000 to get information out of, say, Nigeria, it costs only a tenth of this amount in the USA. This implies that when newsrooms decide to report from a region like Africa they have to be highly selective. This, in turn, leads to the question of whether "commercial pressures lead to inadequate reporting, particularly of developing countries (Righter, 1978). Further, it may be that a decision to spend money on a potentially expensive foreign assignment would be directly related to how negative the story was. Or, to turn this statement around, would resources not be allocated in the case of a positive story? Unfortunately, largely as a result of the continual interruptions during this particular verbal exchange I did not put this particular point to Phil. However, it does, I believe, draw an important link between negative selection and the kind of economic considerations covered in Chapter 2.

In general those journalists I discussed negativity with as a specific subject seemed unable, or unwilling, to accept the possibility that a story can be constructed in order to foreground negativity. That they could be responsible for representing people, issues and events negatively, when the choice might have existed to present a more positive slant, rarely seemed to occur to them. Across all three newsrooms, as far as those reporters and editors I interviewed were concerned, it seemed that their version of reality simply reflected 'the facts' – 'good' or 'bad'. If the story happened to be essentially negative in tone and content this was because the original event was like that. That a negative story could actually exist simply because journalists chose to represent events in a particular way seemed not to occur to them in any explicit way. Thus Mary seemed to 'frame' stories about Europe primarily in terms of division among the Tory Party over Europe. That is how she 'narrativised' (Jacobs, 1996) this particular story type. Interestingly, perhaps because I had invited her to elaborate, she added a view that the constant emphasis on political disunity was becoming rather repetitive. This may point to a degree of dissonance between the professionally-driven act to represent (in this case) 'Europe' in a negative manner, and a more private view (that is effectively suppressed by professionalism) to question routine forms of representation. This may well be the reason why, having made this remark, she failed to follow it up with a suggested alternative way to tell the story, such as one that focused on the consensus existing among the Government.

Conclusion

My findings suggest that if stories do not exactly 'select themselves' (Hall, 1981), once they have arrived on the early morning schedule, their right to be there, for consideration at least, is not fundamentally challenged (Costera Meijer, 2003). This was demonstrated at the planning meetings I attended by the minimal comment made on why various stories had been included, even where a particular item was regarded by all present as 'dull' (for example, the story about buses at Channel Four). The

overall selection of stories was never explicitly questioned by anyone present. What seemed to matter most at that point were, first, how important an item was in a relative sense; then how each reporter should logistically approach the task of gathering the information needed to construct the item? Overall, comments at these meetings tended to be brief and perfunctory, and expansive debate was unusual. Only once, at Channel Four, did I witness what appeared to be genuine enthusiasm for the subject. Here the challenge became how to find a suitable angle with which to transform subject matter into a story. What was particularly interesting was that, after fairly lengthy discussion, they opted for a conventional story type.

At all other times there was the strong sense that all present simply knew what was required and set about gathering and shaping 'raw information' with a degree of automation. Within this context, I sought the views and opinions of individual journalists with regard to newsworthiness, looking for any themes that might emerge. It transpired that both editors and reporters seemed to find it difficult to articulate what 'news value' is in conceptual terms. There was no evidence that they drew on the kind of specific, named factors identified by theorists like Galtung & Ruge or, indeed, any other form of typology, even the kind suggested by ex-journalists such as Heatherington (1985). Neither did they seem to be in any way consciously influenced by matters relating to wider culture context (de Burgh, 2003). Terms like ideology simply never featured in discussions. When attempts were made to discuss newsworthiness this was because I raised this explicitly. Then, the overwhelming tendency was to turn to actual examples of subject matter, or past examples of stories they had covered, to make their point. The one journalist who, very briefly, attempted to locate news value within the more thematic framework of 'hard' and 'soft' news did so during the only exchange I had outside the physical confines of the newsroom. The significance of this last statement should not be overlooked.

However, a narrow band of criteria did appear to be influential across all three newsrooms. The first of these, visual impact, was stated as being important by the editors especially, as was dramatic impact. It needs to be stated clearly here that

remarks made about both visuals and drama tended to come up in conversation that I instigated; they were rarely explicitly referred to by anyone 'naturally' in conversation, although the impact the pictures of the upturned lorry had on Robin at Midlands Today need singling out here. The final factor was negativity. No journalist I spoke to actually used the term directly, but its importance was implied by certain remarks made to me and should also be emphasised that the material which journalists found either visually attractive, or which had dramatic impact, were negative in substance. In light of all this, it will be illuminating to consider, in the next chapter, how far these factors in particular manifested themselves in the news output produced on the same day of my visits.

CHAPTER NINE

ANALYSIS OF NEWS ITEMS

Introduction

This chapter seeks to build on the findings of my newsroom observation, by conducting an analysis of the lead item from each of the three bulletins, broadcast on the same day of my visit. There are two objectives here. First, I wish to examine how far those news values explicitly identified by journalists appear to have influenced selection priorities during the construction of each story. Second, I will assess the role in selection of those factors articulated by Galtung & Ruge and other theorists, but which journalists make no reference to in routine newsroom discourse, even when prompted by me into discussing news value and selection priorities. Therefore, my second aim here is to identify those of Galtung & Ruge's criteria which are dominant in the news text. By seeking out the influence, say, of such theoretical ideas as 'elites persons', it will be interesting to consider the extent to which emphasis is placed on certain types of subject matter according to criteria that reporters and editors may not reflect on in any systematic way. I will deal with each item in turn, beginning with an outline of the basic theme and structure. Following that the textual analysis will aim to highlight instances where different selection factors appear to have been dominant, supported where appropriate, by recollections of comments and actions I observed in the newsrooms.

Channel Four News – Toyota and Investment in Britain

The official theme of this story, as announced by Phil at the beginning of the item, is the comments by the president of the "Japanese car giant Toyota" that the company

may consider withdrawing investment in Britain if the country continues to rule out joining the European single currency. The basic 'news value' of this appears to be two-fold. First, were such a large investor to pull out, there would be longer term negative consequences for British industry and by implication Britain itself. Second, such a threat adds fuel to the ongoing political debate about European integration in general, further exacerbating disagreement within the Conservative Government and providing ongoing opportunities for the Opposition parties to make political capital. Judging from the content of the final news item these domestic aspects appear to be dominant in the message in the overall story, such as the initial comment by Phil that Toyota's decision had "reignited the row between the political parties over Europe". It is worth noting that no part of the story attempts to present the subject of European integration in a wider context. There is no contribution from any representative from Toyota itself (and I am not able to confirm whether this was sought), but there are five interviews with politicians and one with an 'expert' on European affairs. At no point in the story is there reference to whether Toyota had threatened to withdraw as opposed to merely stating this as a possibility.

It needs stating, then, that Toyota's statement amounted to a warning rather than a firm intention. Further, there appears to be no recorded footage of what appears to have been a very brief statement. Yet, between 2.30 and the 7.00 broadcast, Channel Four staff managed to construct a story of over eight minutes' duration, neatly packaged and shaped into a coherent narrative, incorporating a range of visual segments and including interviews with six people. This may be an indication that the reporter Richard was able to go into action with a clear idea of what he was looking for in terms of basic story construction. Further, it could mean he needed to act with a minimal amount of reflection in order to produce the final, neatly packaged and scripted story. Because I was physically present when the story first broke I witnessed first hand the immediacy with which it was seized upon by editors and reporters as the most important story of the day. There seemed to be a degree of predetermination in the way the initial piece of information (the statement) was transformed into a story on the familiar theme of domestic political controversy. With a speed and efficiency that

was almost automatic, the journalists concerned appeared to know how to frame the story at the moment they became aware of its existence (Gitlin, 1980).

Analysis of text

With this story, the role of the visual images appears subordinate to spoken word. The dominant meaning of the narrative is directed and propelled by the words of Richard and the various interviewees. This is particularly apparent in the exchange between Phil and Ian Lang. This may be because a story like this, being arguably more complex than the other two items, lends itself more readily to verbal explanation (Crissell, 2002). Of the images included, those which pertain directly to the overall theme of the story are the shots of cars, and men working on the production line. In themselves these do not explain why the story had been selected, but their inclusion may offer insight into one of the key messages Channel Four News aims to impart. The views of the factory, taken from the air, emphasise the scale and extensiveness of Toyota's operation and therefore the amount that stands to be lost. The image is not intrinsically dramatic but the way the camera pans along the vast one story building signifies an operation that is the product of large scale investment, employing large numbers of British workers who could lose their jobs in the future. On a different level, later shots of a car leaving the factory, then being driven along the road, symbolise how Toyota is free to move wherever it pleases and take its production with it.

Overall, the visual and verbal signifiers used do not seem designed to elicit an emotive response from viewers. However, the overall emphasis is still negative, both in the way certain characters are represented and, more importantly perhaps, in the way the story as a whole predicts unfavourable future consequence following Toyota's statement. Essentially, this story is predicated on an event which may or may not happen in the future.⁷ Its newsworthiness has been assessed on the threat of an event rather than the event itself, so it is ultimately speculative. According to Richard,

“increasing scepticism about closer European integration worries the company and Britain outside the monetary union doesn’t seem to interest the Japanese car number one car manufacturer”. The drama is confined to the stress placed in the verbal narrative on certain key words, such as Richard stating that “Toyota has invested more than a billion pounds of its own money in its British subsidiary”, therefore reiterating the magnitude of what might be lost should the company decide to pull out.

If the structure of the item is examined it may be seen that negativity is emphasised by the order in which information is presented in the story. Initially the reporter informs viewers only of Toyota’s decision. This is later augmented by the statement that another major company, Siemens, would not have “committed itself to investing more than a billion pounds in a new microchip plant on North Tyneside had it been aware of the possibility that Britain might decide to stay out of the single currency”. The link is therefore made between one large European company’s expressly stated viewpoint and the possibility of what Toyota might yet choose to do. It is only in light of this information that the reporter announces the opinion of the two other main Japanese car producers, Nissan and Honda. In contrast to Toyota, these two companies remain committed to keeping bases in Britain and do not appear to share Toyota’s concern. Indeed, Nissan is in the process of “increasing production at its Sunderland plant” and “it doesn’t support the views made by Toyota [as] Britain, it says, is the right place to be”. Similarly Honda is “totally committed to investment in Britain irrespective of whether Britain joins the European Monetary Union” and IR explicitly states here that these two car producers are acting in “strong contrast to the message coming from Toyota Tokyo”. It is noteworthy that such information comes in the latter half of the report, in the wake of the original negative announcement about Toyota.

On the other hand, the delivery of the four politicians’ views prior to the final, studio-based interview with Ian Lang alternates between positive and negative representation. The first two were at the time known for their ‘maverick’, outspoken nature, and therefore appealing to journalists because their opinions contrast to the ‘dull majority’ (Gans, 1979). Conservative MP Edwina Currie starts with her opinion that there is no

cause for concern at this stage, an essentially positive message by a known pro-European member of the government. It is then contrasted directly with the “Euro sceptic reaction” in which fellow Conservative MP Sir Teddy Taylor, while also expressing mild concern, suggests Britain is better served economically by remaining outside the currency. In his opinion “the rest of Europe” is “suffering...a sharp fall in their currencies compared with us and also a huge rise in unemployment”. Similarly, John Major, who was already being filmed on location at the site of a new electronics factory owned by LG, a Korean company, emphasised in an interview how such far-Eastern inward investment could be seen, in the words of Richard, as “a massive vote of confidence in the future of the UK”; that the British economy was in a relatively healthy state, and that matters are on the upturn with a steady flow of incoming investment over the previous ten years. This is again a message of optimism and is accompanied by metaphorical images of new growth, signified by the turning over of earth with shovels. However, at this point, Richard promptly reminds viewers that John Major made these comments “before news of Toyota’s statement on the single currency, on which Labour was quick to capitalise” became known. This seems designed to counter the positive note of what John Major has said, as does the follow-up comment by the Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown, that if “anti-European policy continued, then major firms like Toyota would start to express doubts about their investment plans for the future”, with potentially massive job loss in Britain.

This sequence of interviews, although being balanced in terms of the positive and negative views expressed, subtly shifts its main message towards Government disunity, despite being officially about Toyota. The tone continues with the interview with Ian Lang, the Conservative Trade and Industry Minister, during which Phil adopts a generally combative stance (Hartley, 2000), making use of the opportunity, provided by the television interview, to make Government ministers answerable for their decisions (Scannell, 1989). Although his line of questioning revolves around the central theme of doubt about Toyota’s future place in Britain, its main purpose seems to be to attack the Government’s position. As a consequence, there are repetitive responses to the questions asked and an overall lack of specificity. So, for example,

Phil states that certain “sound business heads in Japan” believe there will be “trouble” in the future, but there is no substantive detail to support this. When Lang responds by citing the more positive response of the Japanese Shadow Finance Minister, Phil effectively dismisses the latter as “a somewhat remote figure contrasted with the big businesses [in Britain] that are actually expressing serious misgivings”. Because the story is predicated on an event happening in the future, rather than one that has actually happened, Phil can only dwell on those aspects of the story that Channel Four have promoted as being most important. These are all essentially negative. Throughout the whole interview, each party maintains their own particular line: Phil focuses on the negative consequences if the Conservatives “get it wrong on the single currency”; Lang maintains the view that Toyota is alone in its opinion. Phil quotes a source from the company, saying it “would prefer” any future investments to be made in continental Europe rather than Britain. However, to express a preference is not the same as announcing a definite course of action.

Finally, an examination of the content of the item overall points to a lack of contextual information. This may become apparent by briefly considering what the item did not include. Japan’s economy is powerful and with this comes connotations of efficiency and success. This intensifies the dominant message that the British Government is displaying poor economic judgment by not following the rest of Europe. Yet at no point in the story are the actual benefits of joining the euro even mentioned. The emphasis is firmly on the downside of not joining, as though any deviation from this theme would detract from the main thrust of the story, that of political disagreement. In this respect, Gavin (2001) suggests that the generally negative representation of European Union in the television news is partly due to the generally negative attitude displayed by British journalists to the overall subject (and also the personnel working in centres like Brussels). This is exacerbated by the abstruse nature of many stories emanating from ‘Europe’, an aspect directly referred to by Phil in conversation with me at Channel Four. Consequently, it seems easier for journalists to make stories about alleged corruption or threats to British sovereignty. Although television news offers a less emotive level of coverage than newspapers, it remains limited in scope. Indeed,

Gavin's finds no strong evidence of antagonism by those working in television, which concurs with my findings among staff in the Channel Four newsroom. The result of all this for this story is that apparent lack of interest in the positive aspects of the single currency may not be because Channel Four journalists actively seek to represent the subject in negative terms. More likely perhaps, they do seek to construct a story which highlights Government disunity and the European aspects here provide a means with which to do so.

Other influential factors in story selection

As well as negativity, a number of other criteria suggested by Galtung & Ruge appear to have been a factor in the selection of this story, along with the shaping of its content and style. Among these, 'amplitude' merits special attention. To reiterate from Chapter 4, as originally discussed by Galtung & Ruge (1965), this relates to the size and severity of any given event or issue. It is not meant to be a way of comparing events or issues in terms of, say, their relative magnitude or seriousness. But, in establishing the important principle that any given occurrence or situation must pass a particular threshold before it becomes noticeable by journalists, this particular selection criterion raises important questions, most notably, how such a threshold is determined. Indeed, this highlights a key aspect of journalistic behaviour – that levels of 'importance' cannot exist as an intrinsic aspect of, or element within events or issues, but are imposed on them by journalists. That is, the process of 'finding an angle' involves importance being ascribed to a subject, say increasing the magnitude of a perceived problem, in this case the economic threat to Britain. If this is so, it invests a high degree of power in reporters and editors to decide what a suitable threshold is beyond which an event or issue becomes 'important', and raises the possibility that such decision making is ideologically motivated. In the case of Channel Four, the way those involved in selecting and constructing the item reacted in the newsroom suggested a threshold of importance had been reached that made it a headline story. But, crucially, this occurred because ideologically speaking, those at Channel Four

seemed to regard the general subject of disunity within the Government, along with the specific matter of a loss of investment by foreign based companies, as important and relevant to the programme's audience.

The story also relies heavily on 'elite persons'. All the politicians interviewed in this story could be seen as falling into this category, as they were senior figures in their respective parties at the time, and familiar to members of the audience. This raises the more general issue of how far certain individuals and groups are included within news discourse primarily to provide a role that has been pre-designated for them by the journalistic profession. Even the use of an industrial 'expert' may constitute an elite in the strict sense that Dr Blake is fulfilling a role familiar to the audience (Fiske, 1987:284). There may be a further connection between the use of familiar 'elites' and the way news sources are narrowed down by the essential limitations imposed on news production by the availability of resources. Faced with a finite number of reporters and a short timescale before broadcast, journalists may be inclined to routinely rely on those people they know, and who they know are likely to provide a speedy response. This is in line with my observations in the newsroom where certain journalists openly stated a preference for specific people to interview. Accordingly, they maintained lists of contacts, lending support to Hall et al's (1978) assertion that news content is heavily weighted in favour of the views and ideas of an 'elite' group of 'primary definers'. Indeed, Manning (2001) believes that the combination of the need to meet deadlines and the reliance on established newsroom routines, encourages journalists to privilege familiar sources.

To reiterate, although the trigger for this story itself fulfils the criterion of 'frequency', much of the story's content was taken up with the consequences of initial event rather than the event itself. There is an interesting link here between the 'immediacy' of the initial announcement and the ongoing nature of the political disagreement surrounding closer European integration. This may, in turn, support Galtung & Ruge's suggestion that if the "continuity effect" (Galtung & Ruge, 1965:82) is strong the lower the threshold of 'importance' needs to be. It also forges a connection between this

particular criterion and Tuchman's (1978) category of 'continuing news', which I considered in chapter 5. Part of the discussion there was of the way certain stories may be routinely favoured because of their intrinsic content. The point was also made that, while such stories help facilitate the smooth running of newsrooms, due to a certain amount of information already being known to journalists, they also militate against novelty in story selection. In the case of the Channel Four News story analysed here, the 'hard news' trigger of the Toyota announcement may have assumed enhanced significance to the journalists because it could be placed within the context of a wider political story. A further connection can be made here with Galtung & Ruge's criterion of 'consonance', whereby a subject may become 'news' when journalists already harbour expectations about it. When Toyota made their announcement this was genuinely 'unexpected', as my experience in the newsroom indicated. However, it may be that those journalists who instantly elevated it to headline status did so because they knew it would be placed into a wider political context. It was, in other words, a sudden, unexpected event made meaningful by other, ongoing events. Indeed, those in Channel Four may actually have desired such a controversial development, knowing, through past experience, that it was newsworthy (Galtung & Ruge, 1965:67).

HTV News – Floods in Gloucester

In a highly localised area of Gloucester three streets have been affected by an unusually heavy downpour overnight. This has led to a number of basement properties being flooded and residents temporarily forced out of their homes. By the time the reporter and crew arrived in the morning the clearing up process was well underway so the news item amounts to a snapshot of the current situation. The story is constructed as a mixture of a short live introduction, followed by the report that I observed being edited together that afternoon, and ending with a live interview with a member of

Gloucester City Council. It is important to reiterate that the floods have already happened. Whether or not they amounted to an isolated occurrence is not revealed. Mid-way during the report, after a section in which footage is shown of flooding in other parts of the region, the reporter informs viewers that more heavy rain is forecast and that “Gloucester residents could be in for another miserable night”.

This adds to the drama, even though there is no certainty that it will rain again that evening; and, even if it were to, the storm the previous night appears to have been exceptionally fierce. Towards the end of the item, there is an attempt to establish where the residents go from that point onwards, therefore personalising the extent to which residents have been affected by damage and disruption. In this sense this story is based on the plight of a community seeking to overcome adversity. By placing repeated emphasis on the various negative aspects, both what has happened and what may happen in future, the aim of the story seems to be to construct the events as a crisis. However, what the following analysis should reveal is that the damage and disruption in this particular case is relatively minor, with residents appearing to be inconvenienced rather than in a state of ruin.

Analysis of text

Of the three items studied, this one sums up the importance of images to inform the viewer about what appears to have happened. As Crissell (2002:158) states, pictures “often need words to render them intelligible, but once this has happened they generally have a more powerful, often emotional, effect than words alone. The shots of soaked items outside people’s dwellings strongly signify flood damage. Because the essence of the story is to portray the destruction that has been caused as vividly as possible, there is a certain amount of repetition in the images shown, especially the objects that have been damaged. As the camera dwells on various items, ranging from carpets to children’s toys, the reporter verbally reminds the viewer how “sodden” these belongings are. This and the image of water dripping from large saturated items like

mattresses and blankets laid out over walls, only serve to highlight the damage. By choosing to describe objects as 'sodden' the reporter seems to want to wring as much descriptive meaning as possible from the pictures. The term seems to have greater connotations of unpleasantness. Items that are sodden may be sullied and beyond repair. This impression is intensified by the accompanying images of sepia coloured living rooms. In one example, the camera lingers on a brown sofa, adding to the general impression of dinginess.

Visually there is constant emphasis on the water theme, for example, a pump gushing into the street. This signifies strongly how much excess water there is which needs emptying from people's homes. In the case of one resident's living room there are two separate shots of someone sweeping water from one side of the room to the other. It is not obviously clear here what this is aiming to achieve and the body movement of the person doing it seems almost apathetic. Was it meant simply to show people being active rather than passive at a time of crisis? Later in the report, as a spokesperson from the fire service is being interviewed, there are accompanying shots of water flowing freely down the gutter of one of the roads and at that precise point the fireman states that the street had been "almost like a lake". The significance of this perhaps is that this is no longer the case. Indeed, by the time the live section of the news item resumes towards the end, there are shots of puddles in which buildings are reflected. The image itself is conventionally pleasing to the eye, but it also signifies that the weather has improved dramatically, and the whole shot seems at odds with the reporter's statement that the rains may return.

Shortly after that the story includes pictures of part of the countryside near Chard in Somerset. The reason for this, apart from informing viewers that rain had fallen across the area in general, appears to be to show a flooded road. However, as the camera pans along, showing various cars negotiating the water it becomes apparent that it is only deep at one particular point, where there is a minor dip. The amount of water seems akin to that found in a ford and the cars manage to drive through it with relative ease. There is no evidence provided that water has settled along the road in general,

although the impression given by the reporter is that the flooding was extensive, stating that “drivers struggled this morning on roads that looked more like rivers”. This raises the question of whether this section was chosen because it was the only flooding of any description that could be found, as well as providing a suitable opportunity to show vehicles splashing through water.

The use of key words, accompanied by appropriate visual imagery, intensifies the negativity of the situation. The reporter begins by informing the audience that “it’s actually stopped raining in Gloucester at the moment”, inflecting the word ‘actually’ as if it is surprising that the deluge that had engulfed the community has currently abated. She then emphasises that the flooding “has probably been one of the worst days in their lives for residents here in the Midlands Road area”, with homes “devastated by the freak floods which hit the area last night”. From the outset the theme of damage and loss following this “torrential downpour” is established when the newsreader, Kevin Owen, announces that “dozens” of “families were evacuated when flash floods caused chaos early in the morning”. At this point a more accurate figure is not given, but later the reporter confirms that “thirty or so” buildings were affected. By not giving a precise number the reporter maintains a sense of tension and this presentational technique is used on two other occasions to add to the drama. First, near the beginning of the item, the newsreader announces that four feet of water was pumped out of some homes. It is not clear if this was typical. Later on, Becky states that the cost of the overall clear up will be “hundreds of thousands of pounds”. This could, of course, mean any amount in six figures, but by keeping it at ‘hundreds’ the scale of the problem can be left teasingly vague.

Dramatic effect is also created by reference to residents being “evacuated”. With its wartime connotation, this suggests people were being moved ‘somewhere safe’ (although the report does not enlighten the viewer how long it will be before the people gathered in the street outside will be returning to their homes). The situation does not seem to be “chaos” as it is described by the newsreader at the top of the item. What seems apparent, judging from the posture and facial expressions of the residents

appearing in the footage, especially from those interviewed, is of a community dealing with their problems in a calm manner. Rather than being out of control there is a sense of mild stoicism, even resignation. In contrast to the pathos engendered by the images of children's toys drying on the pavement, the residents do not appear in any way pathetic. They do not appear to seek pity, even though the report announces that their homes have been "devastated" and that the situation will "take months to recover".

While there is no attempt to delve into the personal backgrounds of these residents, the report isolates the predicament of certain individuals to add 'human interest' (Cottle, 1993). In particular, one man is interviewed and explains how he had stepped out of bed in the night and found the water rising rapidly above knee height. What is noticeable, however, is the calm way he describes this. The woman standing behind him seems equally at ease and is smiling. There is no sound of anger or distress in his voice. Rather his words are spoken in a 'matter of fact' way, with a hint of bemusement at the attention being paid to him. This does not appear to represent any feeling of calamity on the behalf of these residents at least. Indeed, as the interviewee starts to describe how he woke up to find his freezer floating around the room there is an audible guffaw. This immediately signals the end of that part of the report, as signified by a clumsily inserted break. It is as though the reporter wishes to hide such a lapse into humour, as this does not befit the stereotype of the victim. In a later scene, a woman is shown sitting in an armchair flicking through the Yellow Pages telephone directory. Initially her face is obscured but is then revealed to show a smile. This could represent self consciousness at being asked to simulate looking up the number for flood damage experts, which is what the reporter announces she is doing. There is no way of confirming how contrived this scene is, but it is worth recalling the comment the reporter made to me in the newsroom about how she had, on occasion, sought to dramatise a scene for the camera by, for example, laying flowers at the scene of an accident.

In a further example from the nearby Ukrainian club the reporter announces that staff "arrived for work to find chaos and tables floating in the bar". For the second time in

the report the term 'chaos' is used to suggest disorder and a situation out of control. However, all the cameras reveal is order essentially restored and the room generally tidy. A man from the club is interviewed. He seems relaxed and affable, but drama is introduced when he states that the water had been four feet deep. The reaction of the reporter here is simply to ask: "So how much damage?" This seems to be what matters most in her line of questioning and elicits the response that this runs to thousands of pounds, a figure he quickly clarifies as being "£30,000 we reckon". This in itself raises an interesting question, which is why the reporter does not ask the interviewee to explain how such a figure is arrived at. Indeed, informal viewing of television news suggests monetary estimates such as this are not normally challenged by journalists. It is as though the dramatic impact of a figure deemed to be 'high' is sufficient and it is unimportant what the cost actually constitutes, or even if it is a reasonable assessment.

As well as representing 'ordinary people' in an apparent state of upheaval and crisis, the report also focuses on the role of officialdom. Part of this seems to be for the residents to be seen being active trying to help themselves. But it may provide a vehicle for blame to be attributed to people in authority. In the last section of the story, the reporter presses a member of the City Council on what else they could have done to prevent the flood, reiterating her earlier remark that it may rain again that evening. Use of rising intonation is then used when she stresses that it has been a "*real nightmare* [my italics] for residents here". A similarly inquisitorial tone is apparent when she poses the question, "Mike, how did this happen? Couldn't the Council have done anything to prevent such severe flooding in such a built up area?"

Although her manner is not in any way aggressive, the assumption is built into the question that the Council perhaps should and could have done more. His response to this was to state that this was a "freak storm which literally came over Gloucester and then just dumped everything onto the city centre", which suggests there was little anybody could have done to foresee events. He then lays the Council open to possible criticism by stating that there are insufficient "sandbags to cover the whole city" if the storm is repeated that night. However, despite her original move towards interrogating

the interviewee, the reporter does not probe further. This is interesting as it suggests that the act of being seen to be quizzing a member of 'authority' is more important journalistically than the details of the answer given. It was as though the reporter here was 'going through the motions' and asking questions without fully engaging with the subject matter. Perhaps she was conscious of the report coming to the end of its allotted time and was beginning to prepare mentally for its closure. If so, this helps explain the perfunctory way she asked the question, "You've also got some sandbags hanging around somewhere?", as though not having heard the previous remark on this subject.

Finally, in contrast to the desire for drama and negativity there is also a brief moment of levity when the reporter provides the names of the three "worst-hit areas". These are Midland Road, Cromwell St and "the aptly named Wellington St", this last statement accompanied by a close up of the road sign for this street. During my newsroom observation this particular aspect of the story had arisen as a brief topic of conversation, at which point Becky informed me that, even in a serious story like this, "you've got to have some lighter bits". I return to the question I raised then, which is how such an apparently trivial attitude is reconciled against the generally earnest approach of the item overall. Could it be that the seriousness of the situation is of no meaningful importance to the reporter who compiled the story? Perhaps what matters is the construction of a story which contains dramatic events that will appeal to viewers' emotions? If this were the case, this story could not be seen as conforming to any notion of news being an integral part of the democratic function. On the contrary, a story about an event that has caused hardship to real people, but which is only treated as a 'ratings winner' by the newsroom, is indicative of an attitude to news production in keeping with the idea of news as a key function of a system driven by 'political economy' (see Chapter 3). The general lack of gravity attached to the actual predicament of the residents seems to be confirmed by the reporter then stating jauntily that "Wellingtons, it seemed, were the only things to be wearing this morning", accompanied by a picture of two people in green Wellington boots. This also points to the earlier concern for their plight being superficial.

Other factors influencing selection

Personification is used here to provide a human perspective on events. Although the names of people are not given, the residents in general are used in the story to perform the familiar 'elite' role (Fiske, 1987) of victim. Indeed, Fiske cites the example of a 'disaster survivor' as an example of a story where individual personality is not necessarily important in this respect. In this particular story the term 'disaster' may overstate the case. But the way the story has been constructed may illustrate a tendency for journalists to routinely envisage stories involving loss and upheaval in overly dramatic terms and, accordingly, represent their predicament in an exaggerated manner. That seems to be the case in this story with phrases like, "this has probably been one of the worst days in their lives for residents here in the Midlands area", with which the report begins. Elaborating at length on this theme, Langer (1998) argues that communities in crisis become newsworthy because they represent an absence from the norm, in this case the disruption caused by water flooding people's homes. In this respect, Langer specifically cites nature, when uncontrolled, as a typical example of such disruptive forces and, in this context, the newsreader's opening reference to "flash floods" sets the scene, with its connotation of everything being swept away by the oncoming water. Amidst this apparent helplessness stand the residents, who have had their lives disrupted.

According to Langer, what defines a story like this is that there exists some form of threat to the 'normal state of affairs'. In such a context, every effort must be made in the report to highlight it and to portray the residents in a crisis through choice of images and key phrases. It is also important here that the people in such communities are represented as victims of events beyond their control. In the part of the item where the fireman is interviewed, he recounts how residents were awoken by the noise of rain, "finding their houses were flooded", leading to a series of emergency phone calls.

The dramatic image is conjured up of confusion and panic amidst the darkness. Allied to this, and partly as a consequence of it, such victims are, Langer argues, commonly represented in such a way that the audience are able to identify with them. This is because certain types of misfortune, such as flooding as a result of freak weather events, could in theory afflict almost anyone watching. Such human interest stories are appealing to viewers because 'ordinary' people can relate to them on a more personal 'level of experience' (Langer, 1998:80).

Finally, with stories about victims come acts of heroism. In this story, although the clearing up seems to be mainly complete by the time the cameras arrive, the firemen are represented in a way that promotes the image of public servants battling against the forces of nature and protecting the innocent citizens of the community. There are various shots of them 'doing something', though it is low key, for example, carrying a hose out of a house. It is action but there is no 'action'. The reporter states that fire crews had "arrived in the early hours of this morning and worked through the night pumping water out of the 30 or so flooded buildings", adding that it had been an "exhausting job". Visually this last part of the statement is accompanied by a shot of four fire fighters activating a pump. Here, the report's verbal narrative helps. For their part the fire fighters seem largely indifferent to the presence of the camera. A spokesperson from the Gloucestershire Fire Service informs the reporter at this point that the whole road had been like a lake and, once again, there are shots of dirty, frothy water being pumped out into the street. The two main visual themes of the story, unclean water and fouled, spoiled belongings, is again emphasised and the essential unattractiveness, of having to spend the night emptying dark basements of soiled belongings, made clear.

Midlands Today – Deborah Aaron

Like the HTV item this is essentially a drama, but based around a single central character. A British woman, Deborah Aaron, emigrated to California in 1976 and has

recently been trying to obtain permission from the American immigration authorities to visit her father in Birmingham who is dying from cancer. If she leaves the United States it is unlikely, however, that she will be allowed to return owing to a £10 fine for possessing cannabis imposed 25 years ago when still in Britain. Ostensibly the situation seems unfair, and made worse because the father is equally keen to see his daughter. They have not met since she left. The narrative thrust here seems to be to present Deborah Aaron and her father as 'ordinary people' leading a battle against the bureaucracy of the US legal system. In this case Mike, by concentrating on the personal plight of the two main characters, stays clear of the wider debate on legalisation of 'soft drugs'. This points to a dissonance between a comment he made to me earlier that day in the newsroom, that he believes in using individual people's predicaments to explore wider social issues.

Compared to the other two stories analysed above, this is shorter and uses a narrower range of source material. It is a straightforward narrative, relaying the story of two family members and, in terms of its organisational structure, is a combination of certain background details, given as context, followed by an interview with the daughter over the telephone. This last section was what I witnessed taking place that afternoon in the newsroom, less than two hours before broadcast. Apart from Mike's script, this is actually the only new piece of raw footage used: as discussed in the last chapter, the rest of the visual material having been obtained from BBC Breakfast Television. However, in terms of the particular angle or storyline manufactured from this footage, CP had complete power to select and shape this in a manner he believed best told the story he wished to tell. This may be seen as an example of the essential artificiality of news story construction; that it is often a version of events based on material chosen by the reporter responsible for producing the story.

Analysis of text

This story is less reliant on visual images than HTV and, like Channel Four, verbal narrative is necessary to explain to the viewer what the story is about. However, those pictures used, especially of Deborah Aaron, seem designed to play up the emotional aspects of what is essentially a sad story of family crisis. In this sense, dramatic impact is a key aspect of the narrative. Indeed, such a desire to do this came across strongly as I sat with the reporter Mike in the editing suite. Whereas the images of drenched belongings outside houses, accompanied by shots of flowing water and fire fighters, contained strong denotative meanings, this item relies more on the level of connotation by framing certain images in a specific way. A particularly good example of this is near the start of the item, where Deborah Aaron is shown walking into the garden of her house in Los Angeles and goes to sit down alone on a bench. She conspicuously positions herself on one side of it as if to emphasise the space next to her, highlighting that someone is missing from her life. Here, the visual aspect appeared to be being “used to make statements beyond the scripted text” (Ericson et al, 1987:227). Also, being shown alone in this manner, the force of her predicament, as a mother of three children fighting a powerful legal establishment, is thrown into greater relief. These images are poignant in their own right, but Mike adds the comment that she “risks forfeiting her life in LA”, to further stress her plight.

From the very beginning, the audience is presented with the image of a woman who is in state of anguish. As the newsreader commences telling viewers about the story, the still image behind shows Deborah Aaron’s head set at an angle, with tightly pursed lips and watery, staring eyes. The emphasis on sadness and regret continues in the next part of the story, where her father is shown sitting on a settee making a telephone call. It is not made clear whether this is Deborah Aaron; however, the intended message seems to be that it is, as the camera moves to one side to reveal a black and white portrait of a young woman, who looks as though it could be her when much younger (CP was presuming this was the case). As the camera lingers on this image, the father carefully places the phone receiver down. It seems a very deliberate act, with the

emotive connotation that this is the one link between a father and his daughter 6000 miles away. During this last episode there is no commentary, as though the reporter wishes to leave this particular image to speak for itself. At another point in the story, the purpose of visual images seems to be to emphasise the normality of Deborah Aaron's life in America and therefore, by implication, what stands to be lost. The tone here is set at the head of the item by the newsreader announcing that Deborah Aaron faces a stark choice of whether or not to leave America and risk not being "able to live with her children again". With its implication that the present situation of a mother sitting at the dining table with her two sons smiling and chatting may cease were she to risk leaving the country, the narrative constructs a strong sense of negativity

During the interview with her father, those comments selected for the Midlands Today story seem designed to stress emotion, such as when he says, "I'm devastated really this morning. I was a bit shocked when I heard about it because... er ...I thought there'd be a little bit of leniency now that the situation is somewhat different. But...and...I can only describe it as cruelty". By placing verbal emphasis on words such as 'devastated' and 'cruelty', the scale of the tragedy is enhanced along with the idea that he and his daughter have been wronged by another party. Yet, despite such descriptive words, his manner remains calm and rational when speaking. Indeed, expressions like being "a bit shocked" amount to understatement. Rather than expressing anger and bitterness at the apparent injustice of the whole situation, David Gabbay adopts measured tones in response to an unpleasant and difficult situation. This sense of him being a controlled, undemonstrative person is further emphasised when he later states that he feels "really sorry for her because she's under terrible strain ...um... she really doesn't know what to do. She keeps telling me, 'I'll put the house on the market and give everything up and come and live in England'. I say, 'Well it's up to you'". Throughout this episode, the behaviour of Deborah Aaron's father stands in contrast with the generally emotive construction of the narrative. .

Because Deborah Aaron is being constructed here as an 'ordinary' woman caught in a battle she may well lose, the content selected by Mike (and by those originally in

Breakfast Television) seems designed to elicit sympathy. This might explain the apparent absence of contextual information about her. For example, why, even though the report includes a still picture of a much younger-looking Deborah Aaron and her husband on their wedding day, there is no specific reference to him or, indeed, to her marital status. There is the implication from what Mike says that she is a single mother, but no explicit confirmation. This may be because it would detract from the main thrust of the story, of a loving mother who is the victim of circumstances largely beyond her control. This last point is indicative of the way this story represents its subject matter.

Because this story centres so strongly on the plight of its two main characters, the view of all other parties is absent, in particular the perspective of the immigration authorities in America. Even accounting for Mike having to rely on original footage the context he provides seems highly selective. These remain anonymous and represented metaphorically by the paperwork Deborah Aaron is shown as studying while sitting at her computer. The only occasion when background comment is made about her situation is when Mike briefly suggests Deborah Aaron might have been innocent; that she had “insisted the drugs weren’t hers” when originally arrested in 1976. There is no attempt to corroborate this so, left hanging, it supports her role here as an injured party, then and now. Further, her role here of victim is enhanced by Mike stating that, “although she later married an American and lives in California with two of her three children, she’s never been granted permission to live there permanently”. By using the word ‘granted’ there is the further impression of an individual person’s freedom being dependent on the bestowing powers of a higher authority.

A further example of lack of context is at the beginning of this story when the reporter informs viewers that Deborah Aaron had been fighting an outstanding deportation order against her “for years through the US courts”. There is no more specific information, however, about exactly how long. Mike does at one point explain that she has never managed to obtain permission to live in America permanently, and that the “US Immigration and Naturalisation Service believe she’ll never get that permission”.

This, he states, is a major factor in her request to come to Britain being rejected. What may be significant here is that this body believes she may not permission, not that it is a definite and final decision. The audience is never actually told how likely she is to win in the end, only that it is an uphill struggle. This emphasises her role as a victim. There is also the question, to which no answer is given, of how close a family the Aarons are, and have been. Also, where are the other members of the family? Does she have any close relatives who can visit her father? Indeed, what about her mother? The audience is not informed about any of this, maintaining the impression that David Gabbay is completely isolated. The story therefore retains a high level of emotional impact.

Finally, alongside her dominant portrayal as victim, the story seeks to demonstrate that she is active in trying to defeat the forces against her. The item closes with a shot of her walking into a room, possibly a legal establishment, and being greeted amicably by two formally dressed people, who could be her legal representatives. Mike does not provide information here but the likely meaning of these pictures are anchored by his script which announces that “Deborah Aaron is now hoping the immigration service ruling can be overturned on a fast track basis by the US Dept of Justice, while she still tries to get her 1976 conviction quashed”. The story thus ends on a vaguely optimistic note, looking forward to Deborah Aaron possibly still having a chance of winning her battle. This is a story of one woman’s personal plight, and possible future personal tragedy, but it is ultimately only a snapshot and, in its wider context, closure has not been reached, even if the narrative of this version of events has.

Other selection factors

Once again, the drama contained in this story may be related to the extent to which the seriousness of the plight of the main characters reaches a certain level of amplitude. However, this story is different from the other two in that the drama is focused more directly on two individuals and their individual loss. Further, whereas both the

Channel Four and HTV items depended on highlighting negative aspects in order to establish dominant meanings, the predicament of Deborah Aaron and her father is intrinsically 'bad news'. Although there are similarities with HTV News, in the use of ordinary people in familiar, therefore 'elite', roles, the Midlands Today item is more personalised. With the residents in Gloucester, nothing was intimated about them or their backgrounds; even their names were unknown. None of this information was deemed necessary for the type of 'community at risk' story (Langer, 1998) HTV News was aiming to tell. On a different level altogether, there is an interesting observation to be made here about the connection between amplitude and cannabis. It seems reasonable to suggest that the way the Midlands Today makes no attempt to judge Deborah Aaron on her 'drug taking' signifies that the type of offence she may have committed in the 1970s is no longer deemed 'serious'. This points to a direct link between this particular selection criterion and dominant ideology.

For the purpose of this story, the narrative is kept as unambiguous as possible, only being concerned with the essential drama of the situation (not, as stated earlier, with the wider issue of drugs legislation). In this sense, the story is constructed so it is 'unambiguous'. What happened to her in the mid-1970s, and the path her life has followed since, are what make this set of events newsworthy. However, they only become so because of the way Mike constructs the narrative in order to place these events in context. This is a key point. A story about an ordinary man dying of cancer would normally have no news value. But when his daughter is unable to see him because of a minor criminal offence twenty-five years earlier, this becomes unusual, or 'unexpected'. The two sets of circumstances needed to co-exist before the story became newsworthy. The story of a woman fighting a personal battle against 'invisible forces' intensifies the drama, but without the need to interrogate those forces in any contextual depth. The audience is presented with a subject they are able to identify with. In this last respect, this story is also 'meaningful', since audience members immediately recognise the predicament the central character is in. This, as Cottle (1993) observed, is a key feature of the content of local news stories.

There is also an interesting link here between 'frequency' and 'continuity'. The way the story has been shaped offers an interesting perspective on the notion that newsworthy stories happened in the previous 24 hours (Hall, 1981; Fiske, 1987; McQuail, 2000). In this sense, what Mike does in order to construct a narrative that is 'new' is to present a snapshot of the current position but give this a measure of authority by incorporating a fresh section based on primary source material. This element of the story, therefore, is very recent, but it has been effectively engineered by the reporter: had he not telephoned Deborah Aaron that day there would have been no new material from that particular source. Given near autonomy by the editor, Mike was effectively invested with the power to determine the shape and direction of the item. Rather than this being an event which made itself known to journalistic enquiry, this story was all but created by the reporter when he selected the particular angle from which to construct it. This goes back to the basic question, first raised by Molotch & Lester (1974), of what an update of events actually is, supporting the notion that many news stories are not a natural reflection of the 'real world', but of events that have been in some way conceived and contrived by human agency. As I observed in the newsroom Mike set about scripting this story with a high degree of speed and efficiency, rarely speaking other than to issue brief instructions to the picture editor. It was as though he knew, with minimal reflection, what kind of story this was and the fact that much of the narrative consisted of selecting material that another BBC news programme had already assembled made this task even more straightforward.

Conclusion

Through textual analysis, this chapter has sought to identify certain factors which appear to have been influential in constructing the narrative of the three headline items. Common to each is the apparent need to emphasise any dramatic elements that exist in the basic 'facts' of the event. This is achieved in part through choice of visual images, though the extent to which these "make statements beyond the scripted text" (Ericson

et al, 1987) varied between the three stories, with HTV making the most use of pictures with strong denotative meanings. Further, there appears to be a close connection here with the prominence of negativity as a key factor in decision making (Golding & Elliott, 1979). Perhaps because of their function and remit to offer more popular stories (Cottle, 1993), the two local news items are predicated on negative situations of an essentially personalised nature. Further, these two stories, both concerning 'ordinary people' fighting adversity, do not seem far removed from Gans' (1979) conclusions, based on examining US news coverage thirty years ago, that 'individualism' holds particularly important appeal for the journalist profession. In contrast, with Channel Four News it is the Government, a specific 'elite' group, which is being represented in potentially detrimental terms. However, as I have argued, this is only made possible because of the way the story was constructed. In theory, the journalists here could have produced a story which simply relayed to viewers the statement made by the president of Toyota. But there seemed to be immediate recognition in the newsroom that the initial event that sparked this story could be related to a familiar story type.

The HTV and Midlands Today stories are more reliant on making a dramatic impact, through use of more emotive material. In the case of HTV especially, this is achieved in large part by the use of images with strong denotative meaning. The other two items also make use of images but the dominant meaning there is down to the verbal narrative, required to 'tell the story'. This said, the item about floods also makes use of certain words and phrases to maximise the sense of loss experienced by the residents. Indeed, this item, overall, is the most blatant in the way it has focused exclusively on the predicament of those involved. The story about Deborah Aaron also has a strong emotional element. Further, drama is also intensified by the order in which certain information is presented. In each story here, more positive, contextualising information is intimated later in the item. With the Deborah Aaron story the placing of information in this manner appears less important to the overall direction of the narrative.

Also, related to this, these two items increase the negative and dramatic elements within the story in that the order in which information is presented is less important in establishing overall meaning. In the case of HTV the extent of the damage, in terms of homes actually affected and cost of repairs, are left imprecise earlier on in the story in order to maintain dramatic tension. Similarly, the contextualising information about Nissan and Honda not sharing Toyota's concerns come later in the item. Indeed, with all three stories it is possible to argue that certain information has been either omitted or presented without full context, thus intensifying certain negative or dramatic aspects. With the Midlands Today item, the poignancy of the father-daughter tragedy must not be distorted by the apparent fact that neither have met for over twenty five years and they may not be a close family. In the case of the flooding, there is an apparent dissonance between images of disruption and the muted reaction of residents. In Channel Four News, the placing of the more optimistic perspective of two other Japanese car producers later in the item reduces their impact. Of all three, HTV News' story makes the most obvious use of key words and phrases to increase emotional impact, with expressions like 'chaos' and 'worst days of their lives'.

When journalists are able to articulate, or at least allude to, a particular factor when prompted to do so, in explicit discussion of the subject, that factor is also likely to be made manifest in the output produced. In this respect, there may be a link between newsroom practice and output broadcast. However, my newsroom findings suggest that any such comments are not made by journalists invoking 'news values' on a conceptual level. Of those factors which did emerge, only negativity exists as a specific, named criterion in Galtung & Ruge's theory, and in their comments to me journalists never actually used this word specifically. In the case of drama and visuals these were not explicitly included in Galtung & Ruge's list, though they were considered pertinent by other writers, notably Golding & Elliott (1979) and Harcup & O'Neill (2001). However, as my analysis also shows, other important factors may be applicable but are never made manifest in routine newsroom discussion. Of these, the following merit attention.

I have already referred to the way continuity appears to be a key aspect of news selection. However, my findings raise an interesting aspect of this not covered by Galtung & Ruge. Because my findings relate to one news item on three isolated days, I am unable to comment meaningfully on the way events remain newsworthy over time. However, it may be that a particular situation or theme can be prolonged by journalists finding a fresh angle. Crucially, though, the latter may not be information that is directly related to the original occurrence or event, meaning any link must be imposed by the reporter constructing the story. In light of this possibility I have tried to establish how the Toyota story appears to have been used as a hook on which the broader, ongoing issue of Government disunity could be hung. On a different level, the case of Deborah Aaron concerns an ongoing situation in which two people's lives are adversely affected by wider events. Here, a 'new' story was effectively created by the Midlands Today reporter by obtaining a resume of the current situation. This story was in essence a very recent update, contrived out of existing material. Compared to these two examples, the HTV story, a familiar type about 'communities at risk', might be regarded as the only one which is based on a completely new and recent set of circumstances.

Further, there may be a connection with the creation of a story through 'finding an angle' and two other factors, 'elites' and 'amplitude'. At Channel Four especially, journalists appeared to know almost instinctively which types of people to seek out and interview, in this case five politicians with known, contrasting views on European integration, and an 'expert'. In other words, the journalistic process of adding a new layer to an existing, ongoing situation, especially when the story 'breaks' within five hours of broadcast, is greatly enhanced if editors and reporters know which sources to contact, who can appear in the story, and 'define' the situation from a range of perspectives. In the case of amplitude, I have tried to illustrate how this, especially when equated with heightened levels of drama and negativity, further enhanced by visual footage, may be attached to an existing set of circumstances, again, as part of the process of finding a new angle. That is, a threshold of importance may not only exist

naturally within the intrinsic circumstances of an event, issue or occurrence, but is effectively imposed on 'reality' by the journalists constructing the story.

In summary then, while news stories appear to utilise other criteria from Galtung & Ruge's list, these are only recognisable through an analysis of those stories post broadcast. However, this is not what happened among those journalists I encountered. In Chapter 7, I outlined how, at the end of the day, the whole newsroom gathered round for a debriefing, but that this seems to be more of a dutiful, almost perfunctory exercise rather than a deeply felt need to rigorously examine what had been broadcast that day. Once the bulletin has finished, journalists seem to want to leave the newsroom quickly, as though that particular day has finished, and they are looking forward to the new challenges facing them the next day. This seems to be key to the everyday, entrenched norms of journalistic behaviour – to keep moving forward in the pursuit of stories. If such an attitude does prevail in television newsrooms, it by definition militates against journalists reflecting in depth, especially in the kind of abstract terms advocated by theorists, with regard to the way in which newsworthy material is assessed and decisions made on its relative value and importance.

CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this thesis has been to investigate the way television news stories are constructed by journalists within a newsroom environment. It is based on research conducted in three television newsrooms. The purpose here was to record the behaviour and comments of editors and reporters as they go about the daily task of discussing potential news stories, gathering and assembling information and transforming it into individual items. My objective was to gain insight into the way established routines, ideas and practices help shape and guide journalists' thinking and behaviour. I sought to establish how a small sample of journalists approach the key area of ascribing value or importance to different events and issues; whether this is the result of conscious, considered action, or heavily bound up in automatic routine.

Accordingly, evidence was gathered through a mixture of observation and interview, in order to obtain a snapshot of what editors and reporters do and, in response to my questions, what they think that they do. To complement these findings, I undertook a second tier of research, analysing the visual and verbal texts of the lead story from each bulletin, to ascertain how far attitudes to newsworthiness made explicit in the newsroom are manifest in actual output. In other words, to what extent was the item broadcast the product of those selection factors referred to by editors and reporters in newsroom conversation? Conversely, which other selection factors appear to have been influential in decision making that journalists did not articulate when discussing news value?

The analysis of data has been grounded in a wide range of existing theoretical ideas, grouped into four broad categories: dominant ideological influences, the impact of 'professionalism', attitudes to 'news value' and organisational structure and newsroom routines. The first two of these need to be seen as providing a general background in order to understand the wider context in which news production takes place, but from two opposing perspectives. Accordingly, Chapter 2 discussed how at one time certain

attitudes, values and beliefs dominant in society come to be able to exert an influence over the news profession. Included here was a consideration of the role of news as both commercial product and as vital a source of information within a democracy, followed by an examination of the extent to which certain powerful sources in society are able to influence the news agenda. Stemming from this last point is the question of how far individuals in the newsroom are able to operate independently of the forces above and around them, which paved the way for Chapter 3. Here I looked at how professionalism appears to equip journalists with knowledge and skills that enable them to judge 'importance' and 'interest' from the audience's perspective; and how the pursuit of the goal of objectivity in television news acts as justification for professional claims about accuracy and 'truth'. I also discussed at length the key subject of journalistic autonomy and how professionalism acts as a structure in which individuals are allowed to function free of direct editorial influence.

Chapters 4 and 5 then dealt with the fundamental question of news story selection, and what causes journalists to construct particular representations of 'reality'. From the very outset of my research, I have been preoccupied with the fundamental question of how far those primarily responsible for news story production – editors and reporters – conceptualise and engage with raw subject matter, bound up in 'real' events and issues 'out there'. Do they tackle the process of ascribing 'value' and importance to newsworthy material by systematically invoking a set of criteria? Is each potential story discussed at the early morning planning meeting analysed in relation to specific rules of selection? Or are the findings of Golding & Elliott's (1979) study a more accurate reflection of what happens, with their conclusion that 'news values', while featuring regularly in the daily discussions of journalists, are a general point of reference rather than a structured guide to selection. Another way of saying this is how far do journalists consciously reflect on what they do in the television newsroom, when deciding what is 'news' on any given day, and then shaping information within each story. This is a matter of fundamental importance in light of the apparent power television news has as a provider of information in society. Because, as Chapter 3 established, the number of journalists operating in television news is relatively small, it

is vital to try to understand how much this privileged group of professionals actually reflect on the various values, beliefs and assumptions underpinning their daily practices.

I believe that to fully address these last two questions in particular requires an investigation from two contrasting perspectives. In the analysis of my data, I have paid special attention to the theory of selection that resulted from the study of Galtung & Ruge (1965), arguably still pre-eminent today in its attempt to categorise and conceptualise the factors which make an event or issue newsworthy. In particular I wanted to assess the extent to which such a content-led approach explains what actually happens in newsrooms. As Chapter 4 explained, the original typology of twelve selection criteria has been appropriated by certain writers who offer their own version and recently Harcup & O'Neill (2001) have proposed a revised list of their own following a new study of news output. But what connects all these studies together is the basic principle that news value may be understood by extrapolating meanings and intentions from news content.

It is this fundamental methodological principle that I have sought to question in terms of its pertinence when trying to understand journalists' behaviour, in particular when set alongside those studies, such as Tuchman (1978), which are set in newsrooms and explore, first hand, the actions of journalists in action. She, too, proposes a means of understanding news selection based on a theoretical model – that the kind of stories that journalists seek out are ultimately determined by the way newsrooms are organised and structured so that certain subjects are privileged and sought out spatially, organisationally and thematically. Moreover, and crucially, her study opens up the possibility that journalists both select and produce individual stories by recognising stories as 'types', based on familiarity with certain types of subject matter. Further, it may be that journalists, when encountering events and issues, envisage them as "patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation" (Gitlin, 1980:7), so that information is routinely framed within pre-existing categories or familiar discursive arrangements.

In seeking to understand what journalists regard as important when deciding on newsworthiness, my own research suggests journalists do not openly reflect on newsworthiness in a systematic way. Just as Hall (1981) believes journalists struggle to define what news value is, I encountered little desire to express selection criteria by ascribing specific terms. In my role of observer and interviewer I needed to draw out information. Even with those journalists who were open and willing to answer my questions, there was never an instance where thoughts were presented as conceptual ideas. It was more a case of visual impact and the role of drama arising naturally in the course of a conversation that led me to identify these as specific areas I could focus on. In the case of negativity, this was not a term actually used by anyone I spoke to, but implicitly significant in their attitudes towards newsworthiness across a broad range of subject matter. Indeed, as I discussed in Chapter 8, editors and reporters seem more comfortable when conversing about the actual people, events, issues or situations on which stories are based, while even references to terms like 'hard' and 'soft' news rarely arose. Further, the occasion when these terms were used in a deliberately reflective manner was the one instance when I conducted an interview away from the newsroom environment, in the staff canteen.

This last point is highly significant. One of the overriding features of my newsroom findings was that journalists, when in the newsroom setting, and especially once the actual process of assembling and assimilating information into a story format has begun, do not reflect to any great extent on their actions. This is not to say that discussions do not take place, and I have described in Chapter 7 how the programme editors continually monitored the overall shape of the programme. However, there was little direct input by editors into individual story content. The three journalists I sat with during the editing process were given almost complete autonomy to select and emphasise information. The task itself was efficient and routine, and above all quiet. The concentration by the reporter was intense and often the only remarks were because of my questions. Indeed, a general lack of verbal excitement pervaded the overall atmosphere in all three newsrooms. I simply did not find that any of these environments were places of frenetic activity, so in this sense drew different

conclusions from Cottle (1993) in his study of Central News. What I observed were journalists who appeared to know precisely what needed to be done to achieve the single goal of having a story ready for broadcast. There was no hint of panic. This was even the case at Midlands Today when, two hours before broadcast, the reporter Mike was still awaiting the telephone call from America which would provide the fresh information around which the item was structured. It was as though he knew the situation would resolve itself satisfactorily.

The two main occasions when journalistic behaviour did not conform to these patterns of behaviour merit brief comment again here simply because they stand in such marked contrast to my general experience. At HTV, as I discussed at length in Chapter 7, the reporter I observed editing the main headline story seemed to drop her guard and reveal a range of viewpoints not normally made explicit in routine newsroom discourse. Although my presence as an outsider may have had some degree of influence on all those I engaged with, this individual in particular provided greater levels of insight by being especially expansive in what she was prepared to reveal about journalistic attitudes and behaviour. The point here is that such levels of effusiveness were unique among those I interacted with across the three newsrooms.

On the contrary the controlled manner of editors and reporters in general may partly explain why they seemed unwilling, or unable, to develop any conceptual ideas about news value. In this respect, the HTV journalist, too, did not articulate any firm ideas on this, preferring to provide me with illustrations of past stories and her motivations for certain courses of action with regard to specific types of subject matter. In a different way, the case at Channel Four of the news item on the making of a film, *Looking for Richard*, by Hollywood actor Al Pacino, stood out because those journalists, engaged in discussing how to find an appropriate angle on which to pin the story, appeared to find the task interesting, even challenging. For once, compared to all other discussions I encountered in newsrooms, the subject matter elicited more than routine, perfunctory interest and there was an appropriately higher level of debate and

excitement. This seemed to throw into relief how mundane and even automatic so much discussion normally was.

It is illuminating perhaps to contrast this behaviour at Channel Four with the way journalists responded to the new headline item that day. Here, apart from a very brief initial display of excitement, the reporter and editorial staff embarked on the task of preparing the story with routine efficiency. As my analysis of the text in Chapter 9 indicates, the way the eight minute story is structured around what amounted to a single, short statement by the president of Toyota, suggests those involved in its production had a clear vision on its shape and content from the outset. Analysis reveals that the main part of the story's narrative was the wider, ongoing issue of political controversy over the European currency. This was effectively the hook on which the story was hung and it may have assisted the reporter compiling it that he was fully conversant with the overall nature of the political argument, therefore allowing him to identify potential interviewees with speed and efficiency. It may be that he was able to 'frame' certain types of information deemed ideologically appropriate for a story of this type. Similarly, with the Midlands Today story, as I discussed in the last chapter, the story may only have been elevated to headline status as a 'new' story because the reporter has appropriated existing visual material and provided one section of fresh input based on a telephone conversation with the main subject. As I stressed in my analysis of the story, this seems to epitomise the essentially artificial nature of television news construction. This particular item needed an angle to make it viable as a story and that angle was effectively created by the reporter.

What I have aimed to do in this study is identify how journalists appear to behave, generally throughout the particular day of my visit and, especially with regard to discussing the relative value of different areas of subject matter. In my analysis of the three items, I was able to show that in each case the three factors that did become apparent in conversation with journalists were also manifestly important in style and content. The two local news stories both relied heavily on dramatic impact and, in the case of HTV News, the use of visual images was particularly important in denoting the

basic circumstances of 'what happened'. Although the events differed in their basic circumstances, both local news items were essentially about human loss, representing people who were victims of events largely beyond their control. Above all, what all three stories had in common was negativity. The event on which HTV and Midlands Today based their stories involved the direct misfortune of ordinary people, while the Channel Four item was directly negative towards a select group of individuals, politicians, while being potentially 'bad news' for many car workers in future. In each case, despite the intrinsically negative circumstances of flooding and terminal illness, the reports, through the use of visual material, attempted to maximise the sense of drama, such as the filth and grime in the houses in Gloucester, and the more subtle depiction of loss with Deborah Aaron sitting alone on a bench staring wistfully into space.

Overall, there appeared to be a journalistic tendency to seek out any negative elements from among the 'basic facts' and either ascribe to them greater prominence, such as the emphasis placed on the wetness of the items damaged in the flooding, or to speculate on what might go wrong in the future. Any such negative themes may be intensified by a lack of other contextual information, in this sense, for example, the likelihood of Toyota pulling out of investing in Britain seemed less important in terms of newsworthiness than the possibility that this might have unfavourable consequences at some future, unspecified (unknowable) time. However, when I raised the issue of negativity with journalists in the newsrooms, there was no indication that its status as a key 'news value' should be questioned.

Moreover, there was little sympathy for my suggestion that positive news could be just as important. Rather, this was seen as being essentially trivial. Taking a broader view of this, it seems from my findings that negativity has an especially pervasive influence in the selection process. Indeed, as Chapter 4 made clear, Galtung & Ruge believed it was best explained in relation to their other factors. I believe there is scope for a future study to examine negativity in a manner that more fully reflects its layers and complexity. For example, it is integral to the way reporters seek out conflict and

controversy, and also the manner in which selection can be used to exaggerate the severity of a situation through omitting certain areas of 'factual' content (as was the case in both the Channel Four and HTV stories).

There is also the interesting question of positive news is seen by the profession as intrinsically less important. Apart a few comments by Phil and Ed at Channel Four News, when they attempted to engage this subject on a serious level, the idea that there should be more 'good news' seemed to elicit a sense of ridicule. The same general attitudes emerged that had underscored the response to Martyn Lewis, the ex-BBC newsreader, when he was publicly lambasted in 1993 for suggesting there ought to be less 'bad news' in the average television news bulletin. This may have been typical of the lack of journalistic will to challenge firmly entrenched beliefs about what is and is not 'important' in the news.

Similarly, when the texts of news items were analysed for this study, it became apparent that other selection criteria, which appeared to have been influential, had never been referred to explicitly by those journalists I engaged in conversation. Possibly because 'professionalism' obviates the need to question their own actions, or simply because of the highly routine nature of daily production, the focusing on 'elite' figures does not seem to be an issue journalists think about in the kind of terms advocated by theorists. Therefore, there may be no incentive to reflect critically on the routine use of, say, a narrow range of familiar interview subjects, or subject types. This may have implications for the wider question, of how far journalists are able or willing to conceptualise about the apparently 'taken for granted' process of selecting and shaping material.

For example, it may be that editors and reporters are unable to recognise the possibility that looking for an appropriate angle might entail them imposing a particular level of importance or ideological significance on any given event or issue. Were such systematic reflection of what is happening during the process of selection part of daily newsroom activity, say at planning meetings, rather than the 'quiet', automatic

behaviour that appeared dominant in my visits, perhaps journalists might become more aware of augmenting the 'facts' with extra layers of drama. Similarly, a deeper level of engagement with theory could, for example, expose the connection between Galtung & Ruge's criterion of 'continuity' and Tuchman's identification of 'continuing news' as a specific type, actually acknowledged as such by those she studied in the newsroom (though never referred to in my visits). More generally, the kind of marriage of two opposing theoretical perspectives such as these would, I believe, produce not only a stronger theoretical explanation of news selection, but might seem more relevant to the profession, since at least part of it would be grounded in observation of what they do, rather than being solely based on content. Indeed, a professional examination of the role of 'continuity' in news selection might lead to self questioning about how certain events come to remain newsworthy because journalists have the capacity to impose fresh angles on old material, as happened with the Channel Four and Midlands Today stories.

Looking at selection behaviour overall, it needs re-emphasising here the central role of 'news value and its specific role in the production process in my study. I hope that my decision to focus so heavily on Galtung & Ruge was adequately justified in Chapter 4 when I both outlined its continued relevance to other writers dealing with the subject of newsworthiness, and sought to analyse each factor in the typology in greater depth. Indeed, at one point in the writing of this thesis, I would have liked to take this further and attempt a more fundamental reconfiguration of their theory. This would not have been a 'reworking' of the original content analysis, as was done by Harcup & O'Neil (2001). I would have liked to have undertaken a more fundamental reappraisal of all the theoretical ideas discussed and analysed in this study and attempted to integrate them into a unified theory. This would still adhere in principle to the basic criteria-driven model of Galtung & Ruge, but embrace ideas derived from the study of actual journalists, professionally and as members of newsrooms. It seems to me vital that theories of news selection are made more meaningful to the journalists themselves.

This might then act as an incentive for greater theoretical reflection by the profession itself about its internal processes and routines. It might lead journalists to acknowledge that, essentially speaking, news stories are ‘created’ by the profession rather than simply reflecting ‘reality’. By considering the nature of value, ‘importance’ and ‘interest’, or the way they seek out particular angles, in a more conceptual manner, journalists would, I believe, be encouraged to reflect on major issues such as the role and influence of dominant ideology. By starting to see, through an engagement with a new, more complex set of selection criteria, that they, like the rest of society, breathe in the same prevailing ‘cultural air’, journalists might begin to question the professionally-held perception that only *they* are able to determine importance and ‘truth’.

On a different but related level, de Burgh (2003) has argued that the profession needs to reconsider its method of training journalists so that they actively question the assumptions on which routine processing of newsworthy material takes place. From a position that sees their role as vital to the “intellectual and cultural life of society” (de Burgh, 2003:4), he advocates a more expansive method of training that encourages journalists to see beyond their normal set of values and assumptions. Then, for example, they might be prepared to offer viewers a more rounded explanation of the nature of workings of complex areas such as the European Union. This is de Burgh’s example not mine, but, in light of my own findings, the overall position being proposed here would seem to be an entirely appropriate way forward.

POSTSCRIPT

REFLECTION ON THE METHODOLOGY USED IN THE NEWSROOM VISITS

Review of original study

My main objectives in this study have been twofold. First, I set out to gain insight into the way existing routines, ideas and practices help shape and guide journalistic behaviour. Second, I sought to investigate how journalists come to place importance on particular events and issues. Bound up in these was a more specific focus on how far news selection is the result of decision making that becomes automatic within newsroom routines, and the extent to which reporters and editors are able to recognise a story because of its familiar subject matter. Allied to this last point, I also set out to examine how far journalists were able to apply a set of values and selection criteria that could be regarded as conceptual, in the manner of a study such as Galtung & Ruge (1965). In order to investigate this I carried out two complementary layers of data collection: three newsroom visits supported by a close textual analysis of the three headline items of each news programme broadcast. Although small in scale and duration, each visit produced a relatively high concentration of feedback from reporters and editors, both in the form of comments made during informal interviewing, and my own observation of individual actions and group behaviour.

To briefly reiterate, my findings suggested that journalists do not tend to reflect, in any explicit sense, on their decision making when it comes to news selection and story construction. Even those individuals who were prepared to discuss news value in more detail struggled to articulate this beyond the invocation of 'real' examples of known subject matter. At no point in any of the three visits did I engage in a conversation on the subject of news selection that tackled the issue on a deeper, more conceptual level,

although I did unearth evidence that certain factors – negativity, drama and visual impact – stand out as important components, both in what journalists say and what appears in content broadcast. However, when news output is analysed, other criteria, never referred to directly by journalists, but identified in other studies of news content, notably Galtung & Ruge, also appear to have played some part in deciding what to include in the story. On reflection, perhaps what is most interesting here is less that named criteria such as ‘elite’ persons, ‘continuity’ and ‘unexpectedness’ can be shown to have an impact on journalistic decision making, but how routine practices and actions during news production are not informed by such ideas in any explicit way. It may be that the opportunity to reflect on decision-making is automatically constrained by a professional disinclination to ever consider examining selection from a more theoretical perspective.

In this respect de Burgh (2003) makes a vital point when arguing that the profession should look to train journalists in a way that ‘naturally’ encourages reflection on a level that challenges routine values and assumptions. This is how I ended the Conclusion to my original thesis and I could have reinforced at that juncture how my own examination of three news texts produced data that enabled me to comment meaningfully on what journalists may actually be doing from a viewpoint not considered by the profession itself. For example, just how aware are individual reporters and editors of seeking to draw out negative elements within a story? Do they realise how much of the story they are producing is actually determined by the particular angle they have sought to project themselves, as opposed to simply presenting the ‘basic facts’? To me, the example of the story about Toyota, broadcast by Channel 4 News, encapsulates a possible tendency to ‘create’ a long, headline story out of the various ramifications attached to a single, short verbal statement – that a large company *might* carry out an action detrimental to both the British Government and a large number of British car workers. This is just one example of a possible dissonance between what appears to have been influential in news selection, based on an examination of output, and what I observed journalists saying and doing during the

newsroom production process. Moreover, it is one of a number of findings, discussed and analysed in the original thesis, made possible by my particular methodological approach, which was to draw direct linkage between two different, but directly connected, sources of data.

Ideally, I would have liked to have conducted a longer term study of newsrooms and an analysis of a much larger sample of news items. Although my period of research was brief compared to others discussed in this study, notably Tuchman (1978), Gans (1979) and Schlesinger (1987), I believe my essential aim was similar, in that I have sought to gain insight into the impact of routine practices and decision making on news selection. A brief outline of the latter's methodology in particular will help to place my own study in wider context. His was conducted over three separate time periods, between 1972 and 1976. In total he amassed data from a mixture of 120 formal and less structured interviews, and spent 90 hours observing journalists at work in the newsroom. Due to the length of time involved Schlesinger, having identified the main themes of his enquiry, was able to focus on them more intensely as his own ideas developed and he became ever more familiar with the basic procedures of newsrooms and the 'world view' of journalists. Each bout of visits gave him a sense of both change and continuity within the organisation and this, of course, gave a dimension to his overall findings that a study such as mine could not hope to emulate, and of course he would have been able to compare and contrast the same journalists' responses over a long period. Above all, the extent to which he was able to immerse himself in the daily activities of those he was studying (Schlesinger, 1987:11) meant he was able to draw on a huge volume of data.

Besides size of sample and duration of observation, an obvious distinction between mine and Schlesinger's study is that I visited three newsrooms whereas Schlesinger was only operating in one. I was therefore, albeit on a small scale, comparing journalists' comments and behaviour across different organisations. He expressly states (Schlesinger, 1987:12) that he was plotting and analysing newsroom activities to shed light on the routinised nature of production and, to this end, Schlesinger set out to

compare newsroom activities and decision making as an observer with an analysis of what was actually said to him by journalists. In other words he looked to relate actions and behaviour to thoughts and intentions *within* the newsroom itself and, as a result, was able to uncover certain inconsistencies in what journalists do and what they say they do actually during news production. However, he did not attempt to compare newsroom findings with an analysis of output, and I wish to argue that my approach – which did – enabled me to reveal types of inconsistency that Schlesinger’s was unable to.

Certain questions that Schlesinger sought answers to lie outside the scope of my study, such as, notably the specific development of the BBC as an organisation, and how far its news output can claim to be impartial. However, other areas pertained to mine on a partial or indirect level, such as the relationship with the audience and the amount of control – both corporate and editorial – exerted over individual journalists. I examined these in Chapter 3, alongside another of his considerations, the almost obsessive need to be up to date and meet deadlines. Where relevant, aspects of these issues entered my own discussion and analysis in Chapters 7 and 8, especially the amount of autonomy individuals have in relation to the editor, and also the impact of deadlines on their behaviour – which include its effect on their attitudes to me personally. But, in examining these myself, the aim was to enrich my own analysis in relation to the one area Schlesinger’s study and mine have in common: an attempt to uncover the processes which “have to be gone through before a news bulletin hits the air” (Schlesinger, 1987:12).

It remains the case, however, that the conclusions I drew were based on a relatively small sample of data and the journalists I spoke to may not have had sufficient time to properly consider the questions I put to them on newsworthiness. This was exacerbated by the increasing focus on the deadline as the day progressed. On the other hand, as I argued in Chapter 6, the relative brevity of my visits could be seen as less problematic in this respect when taken its wider methodological context – to compare what happens in the newsroom to what is actually produced in news content.

In other words, I did not set out to provide a comprehensive account of everything that happens inside a newsroom. Further, I have at no point sought to claim my findings represent the entire universe of the journalistic profession working in television news. My aim, though, was to provide as vivid a picture as possible of what seemed to be happening within the three newsrooms, and to offer a “flavour” (Mason, 2002:126) of some of the key thoughts and decisions made by a range of journalists with respect to my particular focus of enquiry: news selection and news story construction.

There is a further important point to make here. My original newsroom findings seemed to suggest that, because journalists were too busy to give deeper consideration to my comments and questions, their responses equated to a *systematic* inability to reflect on routine attitudes and behaviour. In reaching such a conclusion I was effectively suggesting that statements made in an ‘off the cuff’ or brusque manner are more ‘natural’ simply because they are less mediated. Perhaps, with the benefit of hindsight, I should have been more open to the possibility that when certain reporters provided me with answers that were so short as almost to be considered ‘short shrift’, their primary motivation was to simply say ‘something’ in order to appease me and enable them to carry on with their work. Further, Denzin (1997), in considering the role of context and personal interaction in ‘everyday speech’, argues that all human interactions are fundamentally unique. In my case, it follows therefore that verbal exchanges in the newsroom cannot “be repeated without a change in meaning and in context” (Denzin, 1997:36). This suggests that everything that the journalists I met said to me must be treated, ultimately, as being particular to the specific day (indeed the specific moment) on which the conversation occurred. Moreover, on another day, they might have provided me with a different set of viewpoints.

Further, it must be reiterated that the newsroom visits were not designed to obtain information in the form of ‘streams of consciousness’. It was not a matter of obtaining long, drawn-out stories about the experience of being a journalist and making selection decisions. On the contrary, I have been careful to acknowledge throughout this entire thesis that journalists are engaged in a practice that is driven by deadlines and a high

pressure environment. My findings strongly suggest that they simply do not have time for lengthy reflections when there is a deadline looming. What matters to my enquiry, though, is less that news production takes place within a set of cultural values and a social structure that is “a constantly shifting process” (Denzin, 1997:38), one that ultimately means all their actions and comments are subject to some sort of daily variation, but that I was in a position to examine their thoughts and behaviour *during* the very routine practices bound up in such cultural values and social structure. In other words, the various comments made to me, and the routine actions I observed as part of the ‘natural’ process of news selection (for example in the editing suites), should be treated as an outward manifestation of certain attitudes, beliefs, values and assumptions, on which news production and professional practice are based.

This leads on to a very important question, which is how different, qualitatively speaking, these thoughts and behaviour might be were journalists given the opportunity – indeed, given ‘permission’ – to comment at greater length and away from the newsroom. With no distraction from the pressures of having to meet deadlines, or from other colleagues, would journalists reflect at greater length on what they do and, in particular, how they make selection decisions? While certain aspects of production can only be meaningfully studied *in situ*, notably the interaction between reporters and the editor, or among reporters, and of course the editing process itself, there are other questions and issues that, arguably, can be investigated just as meaningfully away from the newsroom environment. Broadly speaking, these surround those aspects of the original data collection based on what journalists said to me and, during meetings especially, what I heard them say among themselves. It seems reasonable to suggest that those areas covered in Chapter 8, relating to newsworthiness and subject matter, would benefit from closer scrutiny in a different setting.

Further Research

For this reason I decided to embark on a further four interviews with broadcast journalists. The rationale for these was as follows. First, collecting more information simply provides a larger dataset meaning any conclusions on journalistic behaviour and selection will be more firmly grounded. Second, my newsroom-based findings suggested that once the news item had been broadcast and the day was over, the journalistic tendency was to move on to the next day and the next story. Being invited to reflect and comment on specific content would allow me to explore key themes, such as the ability to conceptualise ‘news value’ and comment on vital processes such as ‘finding an angle’, from a fresh methodological perspective. Third, and especially pertinent in light of the brevity of the first phase of visits (as well as being a key outcome of the viva process), is the opportunity this gives me to reflect on how far the different approach to data collection serves to enhance my findings overall.

Mason suggests that interviews are where “meanings and understandings are created by an interaction which is effectively a co-production” (Mason, 2002:63). In this sense they serve to ‘generate’ data rather than simply ‘excavate’ something that is already there. The difference between the two terms is important. No matter how careful I was in the newsrooms to remain objective and detached, I was inevitably influencing what was said, because it was my initial question or observation that triggered their response. In a more focused interview, one to one, I was bound to become even more part of the context of the views being expressed. In such circumstances, it was important to let the interviewee do as much of the talking as possible by letting the conversation flow. This, as Burgess (1982) discusses, is key to the successful ‘conversation as interview’. There is a further aspect to this, however, which is how open and candid respondents are in an interview situation. I have acknowledged above the possibility that those I encountered in the newsrooms may, on occasion at least, have been less forthcoming than they might have been in terms of the breadth and depth of information they gave me. The question is whether this happened (if indeed it did) because they did not have sufficient time to give deeper consideration to my

question, or whether they were deliberately being economical with the truth. Whichever the reason, it was important to use the opportunity afforded by the four more in-depth interviews, to delve more deeply into journalistic attitudes.

It is also possible, as Mason (2002:64) points out, that certain interviewees struggle to fully articulate what they think or believe. This is a particularly interesting matter for my enquiry here, because a key aim was to allow journalists to try to elucidate on issues, generally discussed in superficial, commonsense terms within the newsroom, in a manner that was more layered and, if possible, more conceptual. That was one of the primary reasons for adding an extra layer of data. Indeed, Mason proceeds to argue that the great strength of the interview, for the qualitative researcher, is to extract greater amounts of information based on a closer examination of a particular theme. It is, she says, the ideal vehicle with which to conjure up a range of social experiences and processes within the context of a clearly stated area of enquiry. But for this to work effectively, the focus (as expressed by the researcher) must be clearly defined and questions asked must avoid abstraction and vagueness.

Interview method

In each case the initial contact for the interviews was made by me as a result of information provided by third parties who knew them. The advantage of being presented with a 'lead' in this manner was that I was able to send advance emails setting out my aims and objectives. That this meant I had no control over their identity or position in the organisation (and that they all turned out to be male) should not be seen as a problem as my interest in conducting the additional interviews was to examine journalists in general. Bearing in my mind that each one had agreed to be interviewed and had been given a broad idea in advance of what would be discussed, my expectation was that each would be conducted in a cordial manner, though there was no way of being certain of this. To create as amenable atmosphere as possible I endeavoured to put each interviewee at ease by clearly stating at the beginning of each

interview that what followed was intended as more as a conversation (Burgess, 1982) that should last no more than forty five minutes. I had also signalled in advance that each interview would be audio-taped, stressing that this was not going to be transcribed, merely acting as a back-up if points needed clarifying. None had objected to this.

Once the interviews were under way, it was important to give them as much time and space as possible, but at the same time maintain a loose structure of questioning to keep the subject fixed around the issue of selection and newsworthiness. Thus, with these four interviews I adhered to the same principle as had been the case in the newsroom and relied on an *aide memoire*. The aim was to cover all the areas covered in this if possible, but retain sufficient flexibility for any new, potentially fruitful avenues of enquiry to be explored. Further, and crucially, where journalists failed to expand on a topic, and there was a hiatus, I did not attempt to pressure them into speaking. This was because I see such 'moments of silence' themselves providing an illuminating commentary on attitudes towards the selection process. Similarly, I tried to avoid using certain key words that had been considered in the earlier analysis, such as 'automatic' or 'negativity'. As far as possible, I endeavoured not to sway the conversation in a particular way in order to fulfil some agenda of my own.

My line of questioning aimed to follow that of the earlier part of the study, in the broad sense that I was still endeavouring to elicit ideas and views on news selection. In particular I wanted to ascertain their views on 'news value' as a guiding tool in news selection. Would this remain essentially invisible and unspoken, as I had found in the newsrooms? Or would the chance to think at length on the subject produce a more conceptual set of ideas? Would my interviewees maintain the desire and tendency to discuss selection not as conceptual criteria, but through providing examples from actual subject matter, as had been the case earlier? In making these comments I need to stress that, by adhering to a similar methodological approach to that of the original study, the objective was to produce data that allowed different nuances of insight into the selection process. After all, the subjects of these further four interviews were no

different, essentially speaking, than those I had observed and spoken to during the first phase of data collection; it was the context that had changed.

Whereas the original study sought to assess the ingredients of a story in relation to comments on the day of the broadcast, prior to going on air, these interviews aimed to take news output already broadcast as a starting point for the discussion and give journalists the opportunity to comment on it retrospectively. In my original round of data collection, when asked to reflect on news selection from a more theoretical perspective, I found a tendency to focus heavily on examples from actual events and issues covered. In this final phase, I therefore decided to locate this area of enquiry within actual, specified material and signalled in my initial emails that the opening part of the discussion would revolve around the previous evening's bulletin. However, this only applied to the first three interviews. With the final one, I made the decision to leave the conversation more open and to seek his views on 'what is important' in news content currently, as a general question. Would this looser structure produce a qualitatively different conceptual assessment of selection criteria?

Finally, all four interviews gave me the opportunity to look more closely at one particular aspect of behaviour that had emerged strongly as a key influence on story construction. During all three visits to newsrooms it became apparent how much the development of news stories depends on finding an appropriate angle. Indeed, in the case of two of the stories analysed in Chapter 9 – the Channel Four item on Toyota, and Midlands Today's story about Deborah Aaron – the evolution of the story itself largely depended on the angle taken. Whereas the HTV News headline story revolved around the natural occurrence of flooding, the other item on Toyota took a single, short published statement as a hook on which to 'peg' a series of aspects relating to the much wider issues. Similarly, the story of a mother essentially trapped in America relied on 'old' footage from another programme with the sole new perspective being added by a telephone call updating the situation from the mother's perspective. But these inferences were derived from analysis conducted some time after the newsroom visits, having had time to reflect on my data. I did not, in other words, raise the subject

of angles with journalists within newsrooms. I decided, therefore, to pursue this explicitly in the four interviews.

In summary, then, the information I was seeking revolved around obtaining insight from each interviewee into attitudes to actual news content, then to see how they could relate this to more abstract notion of newsworthiness. In this context the main issues I sought to cover were:

- What the views of each journalist were about the relative newsworthiness of specific subject matter. Which subjects would they volunteer to discuss? (With the last interview, this was not tied to a specific bulletin as it had been with the first three.)
- How they defined news value. Did they ever actively apply individual selection criteria? Did they believe any particular types of subject matter were intrinsically more important than the rest?
- How far it was possible to articulate what happens during the process of 'finding an angle', when initially encountering newsworthy material.

New Findings & Analysis

General comments on the four interviewees

The first interview was conducted with Alex of BBC Midlands Today on 16 February 2005. This took place in his home, as did the next one with Leo of BBC Points West on 1 March. In both cases the domestic setting was their suggestion rather than mine

and, although a more comfortable atmosphere physically, it did not appear to reduce the basic formality of the exchange. Indeed, allowing me into their own homes may have amounted to an unstated declaration on their part that they were going to give me their full attention and this seemed to be borne out by the flow of the discussion remaining ordered throughout. The same applied to the next interview, with Rupert Of Sky News, on 7 March, although the setting was more formal – an unused room within the new studios at Isleworth. Despite the tone remaining amicable throughout, Rupert appeared more encumbered by the location (and very likely the need to resume ‘normal duties’ – although I did not ascertain if he was actually eating into his routine editorial responsibilities in order to meet me). For this reason, unlike the other three, I felt a more pressing urgency to ensure the interview did not exceed its allotted time (although I did not ascertain what Rupert was sacrificing time-wise for our interview). The fourth interview, with Dennis of Radio Oxford, on the morning of 20 May, was also cordial and smooth running, although a little more distracting than the other three following his suggestion that we conduct it over coffee in a popular wine bar near the centre of Oxford; the additional noise, however, was not sufficient to impinge on the quality of the tape recording.

Although every effort was made on my part to encourage an amenable and relaxed atmosphere, it was illuminating how much more comfortable each one was discussing actual news content. It was noticeable how, during the first three interviews, each journalist had brought with them notes of the bulletins we were discussing and carefully referred to them when they felt necessary. There was a clear sense of ownership of the material because it had been broadcast in ‘their’ programme. However, Rupert, paradoxically perhaps, seemed visibly more relaxed once he had finished discussing his own involvement. Although he had commented on stories with a high degree of clarity and fluency, it was as though the act of moving away from material that, as one of the producers⁸, he had a degree of responsibility for, made him feel less anxious. This was signified by his repositioning himself to sit more comfortably and by adopting a more relaxed manner when actually addressing me. But with all four interviewees, when, as will be seen below, the discussion moved on

to news value more conceptually I found, as I had done in the newsrooms, that their capacity to articulate on a more theoretical level was at best crude and superficial.

Further, it may be that the nature of news production encourages journalists to only feel comfortable reflecting on more fundamental aspects of their work when this is grounded (initially at least) in specific material. Whereas the first three interviews had been quite tightly focused in terms of adhering to my own agenda, Dennis at Radio Oxford tended to branch off at tangents. By not being able to anchor his thoughts and ideas in an actual recent bulletin did he find it harder to focus on specific themes? It may of course have been due to his individual personality, but Dennis exhibited a far greater need, it appeared, to speak in terms of local anecdotes. He also seemed particularly preoccupied with the practicalities of news production (technical quality, legal aspects and logistical problems) and sought to comment on them even if this meant deviating from the specific point I was raising. He also displayed the repeated tendency of gravitating towards stories on matters relating purely to the city of Oxford (not even its environs), even when I phrased my question to encourage a more general response, for example, what his views were on the ‘importance’ of subject matter in general. Although all four interviewees were clearly concerned with target audience, this seemed to be a particular preoccupation with Dennis. He was also the only one of the interviewees who openly worried about what I might do with the information being recorded and I had to reassure him several times that he would be given a pseudonym and that my recording would not be played to any other party.

To different degrees all four journalists seemed to appreciate being able to reflect more deeply on matters relating to the production process, once given ‘permission’ to do so, although this was most apparent with the first two reporters I interviewed. Indeed, it was because Alex volunteered the remark at the end of our exchange that he had appreciated the opportunity our conversation gave him to “think outside the tunnel”, that I decided to actively enquire in the three subsequent encounters if each interviewee had gained anything positive from the experience of being invited to

reflect on specific subjects and issues. As it transpired, Leo proved to be the most positive about reflecting on what he did, especially on the subject of ‘angles’, a topic he freely admitted to previously giving little thought to on any conceptual level. Here he added the interesting rider that “longer term thinking” might well encourage journalists to look at this subject differently (he was also the most overtly curious about my own thesis). Of the other two, Dennis, although friendly and engaging in his manner throughout, essentially played down the experience of self reflection when I put the question to him at the end, although he told me that he did sometimes “worry” in his daily work about the power being a journalist gives him to select certain stories while ignoring so much other information, ultimately “news is just a commodity and journalism is just a job”. Similarly, while Rupert told me that “it had been good to go through the bulletin”, this was due to my direct question, and it may have signified little more than basic politeness on his part.

Finally, one other topic of discussion I sought to discuss, if practicable within the time I had, was the Hutton Enquiry (see Chapter 3). With Alex and Leo, the opportunity did not present itself and, partly because of this, I made a special point with Rupert to raise it. It also seemed more apposite in view of his more senior status, and also to gauge how Sky News had reacted to the outcome of the enquiry. His response here was simply to say that it had had “little impact”. Although spoken in a flat, matter of fact tone, I sensed a reluctance to expand on his part, perhaps a sign of sensitivity within news organisations on this subject. Further support for this view came in the final interview with Dennis, although here the circumstances were different in that he actually raised it as an issue. The way the conversation unfolded may be instructive. We had been discussing ‘breaking news’, in the context of ‘off diary’ stories discussed above, when he quite abruptly began to describe the circumstances of the death of Government scientist David Kelly, who had lived near Oxford, in July 2003. Rather than deal with this as a local news story (albeit a celebrated one), Dennis seemed to want to use it as a vehicle to ascertain my own views on the death. However, as I embarked (out of a sense of interest as to where this would lead) on what would have been a bland and platitudinous response (I did not wish to reveal my own personal

view), he became aware of my tape recorder and abruptly stopped, shifting in his seat and taking a sip of coffee. It was clear the conversation had to move on. This may or may not have illustrated a general unease among BBC journalists on the matter in general, but, in terms of the 'interview as conversation' method it revealed possible pitfalls for either or both participants when the conversational dimension becomes too dominant

I will now deal with the response of each interviewee in more depth, by addressing the main questions I set out to cover, as set out above. The order in which each issue is dealt with broadly follows that of the interviews themselves, although the various comments made by each of the first three journalists on the previous night's bulletin will be integrated into the analysis, rather than dealt with separately.

Newsworthiness and specific subject matter

I will begin by outlining what each interviewee said in response to my opening question, which was to ask how they thought "last night's bulletin went" (obviously the situation was different with Dennis, for reasons already discussed). It was interesting to hear how each commented on the relative merits of different stories, and in this respect, the first story cited in each case may be a strong indication of their personal attitudes to newsworthiness. My first interviewee, Alex, began by noting that the previous night's lead story – about alleged postal vote rigging in the Birmingham Council elections – met several key criteria for newsworthiness: it was relatively unusual, a potential scandal, and it had more far reaching political implications. This meant there were several different perspectives that could be taken during its editing and construction and that was the justification for placing it at the top of the broadcast. Journalists have the choice about how much time and effort needs to go into adding layers to a basic storyline (in this case, that there had been vote rigging) in order to make its presentation more varied and interesting for viewers. In this context, lead

items are usually treated differently from other items, in that efforts are made to add more “gloss” to the storyline. By comparison, Alex felt the second item, about the murder of a Chinese restaurant owner by one of his customers, lacked the same “resonance”. He did not qualify this, but it suggests it would have less audience impact than the lead item. Nonetheless, being a murder, it was seen as the second most important story in that evening’s bulletin. He also chose to comment on item three, suggesting it might have led in the absence of the vote rigging story. This was about ongoing problems for Midlands’ “long suffering” rail passengers, so it was potentially ‘meaningful’ to a large number of the audience, but he did not explain to me why it might have leapfrogged over the murder item.

As well as being interested in the views of the interviewees with regard to specific content, I also sought to ascertain their views on what was important to them in general. This led Alex to embark on a lengthy tale (which he returned to for a sustained period after I had switched off the tape and we were chatting over a coffee) about a man who needed a heart pacemaker but who was experiencing difficulty getting NHS funding due to the “post-code lottery”. Alex thought stories on this subject were becoming more widespread, and the issue itself was something he clearly cared about deeply. It had not been in the previous night’s bulletin, yet it was the first remark he made when I asked him to talk generally about subjects he believed to be important. It seemed to be a preoccupation on his part. Similarly, Leo at Points West commented that, although there are certain, more negative types of subject that the audience does need to know about, and that it is important viewers do not become desensitised, “life is still good” and there will always be a place for ‘fluffy stories’. Perhaps this is why, ultimately, he is always aware of broadcasting “to his parents and his gran”. They remain his target audience. Maintaining trust with the audience remained a key feature of news production among all four interviewees; even Rupert at Sky News explicitly made this point.

An important aim of asking journalists to reflect back on the previous night’s bulletin was to gauge the extent to which they could comment in a more detached, critical

manner. In this respect, the Midlands Today schedule provided a particularly good example. In this there had been two separate stories, at opposite ends of the programme line up, each related to alcohol consumption but from a different perspective. In the first one, item four, a man had died after drinking eleven pints of beer and twenty measures of spirits. The report included specific remarks on the dangers of binge drinking, with the implication that the victim had behaved irresponsibly, although, of course, it was a 'tragic' story. Further down the schedule, however, the twelfth item featured a small family owned brewery at Hanley in Shropshire. The direction of this story was in marked contrast to the earlier item, and was essentially a feature on a successful firm in the Midlands Today region, which allowed the reporter, in the process, to include an educational element through giving a short description of the basic brewing process. What made this item interesting in the context of the earlier story, however, was that it closed with a shot of a brewery worker happily and speedily draining a pint glass. The upbeat tone was rounded off with presenters Nick Owen and Suzanne Verdy sharing a little joke.

I asked Alex if he saw any contradiction in these two contrasting representations of alcohol. It was strongly apparent that this was the first time he had considered such a question, adding that their separation in the schedule explained why he had not made any connection between them. On one level this in itself is an interesting commentary on Galtung & Ruge's (1965) suggested news selection criterion of 'composition', which implies that those who produce the news are partly guided in their decision making by an awareness of how the overall line up of stories adds up to a balanced collection of different types of information. For this particular reporter, there was the implication that he would not have considered how different elements of the same news bulletin might be compared and contrasted in a manner that might lead to different treatment of subject matter in the future. (Indeed, the simple fact that the two items appeared in the schedule at all points to the editor of the programme either not being aware of the issue I had raised, or not believing it to represent any form of ethical problem at that level of production either.)

This seems to point to the essentially disconnected nature of news items appearing in the same schedule but also, and more pertinent to my own investigation, that individual reporters may not be predisposed to reflect on this because they are trained (automatically) to deal with each story in isolation from the rest. Or it could simply mean that the responsibility and pressure of getting 'their' story in on time prevents journalists from worrying about its 'fit' in the overall structure. That is the editor's job. Further, even though reflection is officially encouraged through the end of the day newsroom debrief, does this extend, at reporter level at least, to journalists choosing to regard the bulletin as a whole entity or just a set of component parts? In my earlier newsroom visits, I saw no evidence of this and I described in Chapter 7 how speedy and perfunctory that end part of the working day appeared to be. Alex's comments here seemed to provide further evidence of a journalistic tendency both to treat information in an essentially compartmentalised manner, and not to appear concerned about this. What is also interesting about this example from a methodological point of view is that I was able to compare my own retrospective consideration of a news programme with that of someone who had been involved with it.

In my next interview, the BBC Points West reporter Leo immediately referred to a story that resonated personally with him – that of a crash on the M32 motorway near Bristol in which two people had died. Leo believed this was the kind of story that helps define the purpose of local news, because people in the region want to know why there are deaths on 'their' road. Like certain journalists I had encountered in the newsrooms, he did not elaborate on how he might actually know what 'his' audience wanted. The next story he chose to comment on was lower down the schedule, an extended piece about donating blood. The central theme of this item was essentially twofold: to provide information and instruction on the mechanics of the donation, and to illustrate how this can benefit 'real lives'. To this end, it included a case study about how a woman suffering from leukaemia was being helped by ongoing blood transfusions. Leo remarked here that there had been no specific peg for this story and that was why it was low down the schedule. Had there been a crisis, say, in the general

supply of donated blood within the Points West region this would have elevated the item up the agenda.

Leo also made the interesting comment, independent of anything I had said, that the inclusion of the leukaemia sufferer was what gave this particular story its central purpose, adding that it helped Points West meet its public service broadcasting remit. Indeed, he believed this was a more important aspect than the story's essential 'news value'. He added nothing further, but such a remark implies that Leo separates notions of 'public service' in news content from considerations of how much value that content might have. Why should there be such a distinction? If assessing newsworthiness is about making a judgment on whether particular information is 'important' or interesting, then it seems reasonable to suggest that one of the criteria used to assess this could be its importance to society. Another way of saying this is that, in the interests of sound democracy (Sanders, 2003), highlighting the benefits to the community of donating blood is offering them 'relevant' information. This may be an illustration of the need for journalists to reflect more deeply on the specific nature of news value as a concept and not just a professional tool. Leo's reflections here imply, first, that stories that are less conventionally 'important' can nonetheless hold greater value as news items; second that, in his view as a journalist, individual stories are judged according to two sets of criteria, 'public service' and 'news value', when perhaps the former should be treated as an aspect of the latter.

Up to this point, Leo had not referred to the lead item in the programme, about a radical Moslem in Gloucester who had been found guilty in court that day of collaborating with an international terrorist network. Because of its official status in the bulletin as 'most important' story of the day, I decided I must raise this as an issue myself. He informed me that the court verdict had caught Points West by surprise and, because of its nature, they had been obliged to cover it even though it was the lead in the national BBC One News at Six on the same evening. In order to justify its conclusion in the local news bulletin as well, the newsroom had needed to find a new angle (see below) which in this case was to present to viewers the attitudes and

feelings of the local community. Similarly, at Sky News, the lead story was only mentioned later in the interview, again because the journalist I was interviewing did not find it personally very interesting. Indeed, this story had left him a “bit cold”. Instead, Rupert began by referring to an item lower down the order, in this case one about swearing and aggressive behaviour in professional football. This, earlier in the day, had been the lead but by 5.00 there was nothing new to add so it dropped to third in the schedule. Conversely, the story about the Italian man shot by US troops in Iraq had fresh information to add, pushing it up the order. However, in Rupert’s personal opinion, the football story was more important as it contained many elements viewers could relate to. As a story the latter was also deemed to be more complex in terms of the potentially different angles that could be explored.

But another point regarding this story interested me and, as with Alex earlier, I decided to use this opportunity to explore it further. I asked Rupert why, when informal viewing of football matches on the Sky Sports channel suggested this as a longstanding issue, it had suddenly become newsworthy. Rupert felt the problem had worsened, with new developments such as jostling the referee; and this has been in tandem with greater indiscipline in schools. He seemed to sense that I did not find this a convincing answer (although I was not intending to make my personal views known to him), and sought to change the subject by referring to the importance of viewer emails to the newsroom. These, he believed, help to keep people watching because it makes them feel more personally involved. Like the others I interviewed, Rupert was acutely aware of the audience’s supposed likes and interests, but it was paramount that viewers should maintain an active interest in the material. Sky put great store in making news stories as visually interesting as possible. To this end, item number six had been included on the strength of its fairly graphic shots of riot police violently suppressing left wing protestors in Turkey. Also, a story about the Moldovan elections, at number ten in the schedule, had been given greater meaning for the audience by the use of imaginative graphics, adding background context.

Dennis focused much more heavily on the audience than the others, possibly because he had no named bulletin as a reference point. When I asked him which news stories were important to him, he responded with a story about George Street in Oxford which is “mayhem” on a Saturday night, this situation exacerbated by 24-hour drinking laws. I suggested this problem may have been overblown by the media generally. He agreed – but they were, after all, “in the entertainment business”. He did not elaborate here, but proceeded to inform me of an issue that was clearly a current preoccupation. There had been a fairly recent development at Radio Oxford with the aim of further ensuring programmes reached the target listeners. Two fictional “archetypes”, ‘Dave’ and ‘Sue’, modelled on actual individuals (he did not say who), had been created and he and his colleagues were expected to address their interests and concerns when choosing subject matter. The couple are in their fifties and have fictional jobs and personal histories: Dave has a skilled manual job while Sue works in a secretarial capacity. Each is on their second marriage, have grandchildren and can recall the moment ‘man’ first landed on the moon. In seeking to provide the kind of news this couple would like to receive, Radio Oxford is trying to ensure that its staff, whose average age is around 25 do not lose sight that their typical audience member is 55 years or over, comes from the C1, C2, D and E social categories, and is interested in crime, house prices, council tax and school education. This target audience, however, is not thought to be concerned with stories about the University, so the station tends to avoid them as a matter of routine.

News value as a conceptual idea

With all four interviews, I deliberately delayed asking them to comment directly on news value as a concept. Had this emerged during their observations of subject matter – and especially with regard to the previous night’s bulletin in the case of the first three journalists – I would have asked them to elaborate. But, with one exception at Sky News, it did not, so when I did introduce the topic, it came to them as a clear change in direction. Would they, given a very explicit opportunity to do so, now attempt to

marry actual content with more abstract notions of what makes certain events, occurrences, issues and people newsworthy? As I will now discuss, each gave my question due consideration, but all basically struggled to articulate at any length, or in any depth on the subject. It was as though the earlier discussion on 'real subject' matter and my subsequent raising of news selection as an area of study in its own right were almost disconnected.

Although Alex does seek to analyse stories "a bit", this tended to be in relation to the issues raised by particular stories, or how well it stands up relative to others, he seemed most comfortable describing to me how it was "obvious" that certain occurrences, such as fires and accidents were newsworthy. I took advantage of the chance to press further. Could he offer a definition that went beyond that of describing news as "something which makes people's ears prick up", or a surprising or "highly unlikely" event, or that there is an "awful lot of subjectivity"? His response, after a short while thinking about it, was that: "If the sun rises that is normal, but if it fails to rise that would be big story", a metaphor that seemed to suggest Alex needed to think in terms of the most extreme example possible to explain what he meant. Equally illuminating perhaps, was that there was no development of the point. Given time and space, and a favourable atmosphere, Alex clearly struggled to define newsworthiness as an abstract concept.

My follow up question in all four interviews was to ask if they were ever conscious of applying individual selection factors. Alex thought he might have been when a new reporter, but he could not actually recall any particular examples. That he was unsure of this could itself be seen as a commentary on how professional practice discourages deeper theoretical reflections as journalists gain experience over time. Further, while he was not aware now of ever using criteria as part of a systematic process, he did single out 'uniqueness' and surprise as being crucial (perhaps in keeping with his chosen example of the sun rising). Leo's response was similarly generalised as he recalled being taught on his degree that negative news equals good news. When pressed a little further, he settled on the definition that news should ideally consist of

those “‘goose bumps’ stories”, those that are always newsworthy because they affect the community. Examples of these were health, sport and human interest. Were there any others? He replied that he personally took an interest in business and the arts. However, when he personally made selection decisions this was done on an intuitive basis, such as asking the simple question: what would *he* want to see on the television that evening? What will people want to talk about in the pub tonight?

At Sky News, would Rupert, as a producer, provide deeper, conceptual insight into how value and importance comes to be ascribed to certain kinds of material? In my newsroom visits the only journalist I had met of a similar level of seniority was Ed at Channel 4. As I discuss in Chapter 8, he took a more overt interest in my thesis, although his views on newsworthiness were essentially narrow and simplistic. Now, with four times longer to consider this, and no newsroom pressures to distract him, what would Rupert say? In the event his response was similar. This was a “most difficult question” and, basically, anything ‘new’ is newsworthy, particularly with 24-hour rolling news where keeping material up to date is paramount. Indeed, certain stories may enter the agenda largely for that reason, such as item ten about the Moldovan election. This, he conceded would not “affect mortgage payments next month”, its value as a story simply being that the material was recently gathered.

At this point, Rupert again cited the story about football and swearing – the only occasion during the first three interviews when material previously discussed in relation to an actual bulletin was further invoked. Wayne Rooney is a ‘big name’ and a link can be made here with classroom discipline; also it relates to a wider social issue and “people were talking about it”. He did not elaborate on whom exactly, or how he knew this. Further, Rupert believed certain subject matter can be intrinsically newsworthy, such as the impending decision by the British Prime Minister to announce the election date. Like Leo, he referred to the notion of public interest. At his level in the organisation, this is a common topic for discussion, in respect of how information is treated, or how to make a story appealing to the viewer and to maintain

their interest, but it is also one of those questions that can never be satisfactorily resolved.

Dennis's initial attempts at defining news value may have been indicative of a possible difficulty in taking a potentially fertile idea and developing it. His statement that all stories are in essence "being made" appeared to be an acknowledgement that news selection involves some form of construction, but he could not, or chose not to, go into any further critical insight here. He did, however, volunteer to inform me that he had a role, shared only by a few colleagues, to deal with 'off diary' stories – "stuff only he knows about". Significantly this invested him with the power to autonomously seek out and gather information on stories he personally believed to be newsworthy. For example, he had recently seen staff in a local restaurant illegally netting fish in a local river late at night and, believing it to be of interest to the Oxford audience, and because of its novelty value, it became a story. More interesting perhaps, because he had stumbled across it almost by accident when out walking, it amounted to a scoop and that increased its importance in the bulletin, as illustrated by its higher positioning in the agenda. In local news, however, off-diary stories are rare and most reporters are simply told to go to cover an event. He seemed relieved that *he* was still in a position to actually go out and 'find' stories, almost implying that the trend was in the opposite direction: to concentrate on those events and issues that would appeal to the stereotypical target audience, discussed earlier.

My persistence with Dennis appeared to bear some fruit when he finally provided a brief definition of newsworthiness, equating it with relative "proximity to the person", by which he meant the person who listens to Radio Oxford. Therefore, parking problems in the city would be more important than a disaster in China. This appeared to go to the core of Dennis's attitude to 'importance' in news. To him there was a hierarchy and local stories were basically all he was concerned with. However, and interestingly, he differentiated between types of local news event. Some were superficial and others less so. I asked how he made the distinction and his answer was to provide another anecdote – of a man who had been the organist for fifty continuous

years in the same church in Oxford. To Dennis this was intrinsically less important; indeed, it may not even be 'news' at all. It was far too parochial, which was something he believed local news should try to avoid.

He then added that the immediacy of the event is becoming less important. This was essentially because what the audience are increasingly seen to want are human interest stories, which are not necessarily bound by time at all. There is clearly a contrast between this last statement and the significance of 'fresh' and new stories to Sky News, as discussed above. Does this signify a divergence in broadcast news reporting, as different providers become ever more audience aware? Or could it be to do with the different mediums? I took this as an opportunity to briefly enquire how Dennis distinguished radio from television. Being a simpler medium than television, radio news stories require more inventiveness in their shape and construction in order to relay the 'facts' in an imaginative way, thus drawing listeners in. In contrast, Dennis saw television as a more contrived medium that needed to add layers of visual complexity to the narrative that radio broadcasts can by definition, ignore. For this reason his view is that, while radio stories are essentially simple and direct, television news can be more contrived. There is an implied suggestion here that television news stories, by incorporating elements simply to satisfy certain visual requirements, offer a more adulterated version of the 'truth' of an event.

Angles

One feature of local news production that proved to be uppermost in each of the reporters' minds was a relatively new method of information gathering, whereby journalists are furnished with personal video cameras with the aim of filming and producing news stories without assistance from any other member of newsroom staff and therefore with complete autonomy to research, shoot and edit the material taken. This is known as personal digital production (PDP), and Alex raised it as a subject for discussion in connection with item eleven in the Midlands Today bulletin, which

concerned a child with a rare type of facially disfiguring cancer. The story had been produced by the reporter over a period of several days and was thus not bound by the traditional need to be 'recent'. Alex referred to it as a "an off duty story" and that it represented a form of "fly on the wall" reporting. Because the package produced is not tied to a specific day, the reporter has time to produce it free of the pressures of deadlines. He or she can wait for developments to occur. There are certain rules attached, notably that the story should be of 'human interest', and that there must be a quote included by the main subject.

Although such constraints on content and style may amount to another version of the kind of restrictions on professional freedom noted by Solaski (1999), which I discussed in Chapter 3, PDP is interesting for my research because it opens up the possibility that individual journalists are being invested with enhanced powers when it comes to deciding which angle to take in constructing a news item. Among the three local news reporters I interviewed, each expressed reservations about this new development though for different reasons. Whereas Alex and Dennis were less sanguine about its benefits, Leo was enthusiastic to the point of leaving the room to fetch his camera. Nonetheless he believed the onus of producing a story on his own distracted him from 'being a journalist'. This was based on his view that the main task of a reporter is to focus on gathering information and constructing a story and that he had not joined the BBC to become a cameraman. Despite appearing to invest him with greater autonomy and freedom, Leo saw PDP as compromising what he felt he did best: researching, interviewing and script writing; as though these key tasks were sufficient and any further responsibilities were somehow detrimental to the production of 'high quality' stories. It was difficult to gauge here what this constituted apart from the need to produce items of sound technical quality. This was clearly uppermost in Leo's mind, as it had been in those of Alex and Dennis. Indeed, the latter saw PDP as being detrimental to good professional practice. The importance to journalists of high production values, in this context, has been a constant feature across this study in general.

Again, because of the format of the one-to-one interview, the issue of PDP, clearly a topic of great interest to all three reporters at least, allowed me to pursue the key issue, from my original data, of how journalists set about making selection choices at the moment of encountering information. I decided after my first interview with Alex to use it as a lever to further explore the process of 'finding angles'. It provided a practical context in which those I interviewed could consider this particular question and would perhaps elicit a fuller response as a result (as opposed to trying to consider 'angles' from a more abstract perspective). In this respect, Alex volunteered the remark that "there's an awful lot of staging" in setting up images for television news reports. (Perhaps this pertains to the 'contrived' nature of television news story construction that Dennis felt gave radio an advantage – see previous section) He, once again, drew on his anecdote about the heart patient and how he had worked hard at trying to illustrate how the pacemaker had benefited this individual, during filming. On top of this, selecting at the point of taking footage saves time later in the editing process. It is, partly because of this, a sign of what makes a 'good professional'.

Leo's take on angles was both different to Alex's and, because he found the subject especially interesting, more layered. He began with a remark that the particular angle a reporter chooses to take is an "ethical question". It was unclear precisely what he meant by this, but he seemed to be referring to the trust the Points West audience placed in journalists to select the 'right angle'. On a more practical and personal level, Leo prefers to let the events of a story unfold if possible and not to skew it by, say, introducing a more negative dimension. (Leo was the only one of the four people I interviewed to make any reference to negativity.) However, like Alex, and despite a preference for letting events develop if the situation allows, Leo would always have a particular perspective in mind before he began the process of information gathering. So how did he know which particular angle to take? This is "obvious". Although there are always various stories around a particular single theme, the nature of each story often helps to establish which theme is taken. For example, with the Moslem story (discussed earlier) it was obvious that the perspective of the Gloucester community should be the central focus.

Leo was thinking hard about this, however, indicated by pauses and silences, which I let happen without trying to fill in the space. Eventually he added that, despite on occasion discussing possible angles with colleagues, personal intuition is key to knowing which angle to take. On my request for an example, he cited the example of a man who had died, possibly poisoned and the body was later exhumed. There were questions he personally wanted to ask. In doing so he put himself in the mind of the viewer. Indeed, the “creative juices start to flow” when a story comes along that is different in content from the usual type they encounter at Points West. Most stories, however, require him as a reporter to ‘fill in the blanks’. This last comment might be seen as illustrating an important aspect of story selection, one that I encountered at Channel Four News. Just as those journalists working there had, on one occasion only, become visibly excited about a specific story (that of Hollywood actor Al Pacino making a film about Richard III), Leo here, without using an actual concrete example, was supporting the notion that most news story production is routine and even formulaic. Whereas at Channel Four I was able to glean this from observation, he was actually stating this as an actual example of reporter behaviour, even adding that, with regard to the subject of angles in general, long term planning within the newsroom might encourage more radical thought.

Rupert had already told me that when he had been a reporter himself, some years earlier, his approach, like Alex and Leo, had been to visualise stories at the point of encountering them. He seemed to know instinctively that certain features should be included because they would make the story ‘good’. Because of his producer status and due to this being the third interview, I pushed a little further here, asking Rupert how far making a ‘good story’ might somehow equate to deviating from some essential ‘truth’ of the original event or occurrence. His answer to this was brief – that “there is reality” but it needs to be turned into a story before it can be broadcast. What matters to him is that the integrity of individual events and issues are maintained and, above all, that reality is never distorted. Ultimately it is important to be ‘true’ to the original event and here anchoring stories in images is beneficial, as are facts and

quotes. Then it becomes possible to tell a “story as we see it”. News stories must aim to “broaden reality” to have wider appeal, and key to this is to include ‘real people’ wherever possible, often by deliberately incorporating case studies into the narrative.

In my final interview I also sought to press Dennis on this subject. Because of his personal manner, which I have outlined above, it took some effort on my part to get him to focus on this for a sustained length of time. Although he continued to look towards anecdotes as a way of explaining what he meant (or to divert attention away from the question), his slow pace of delivery suggested curiosity and interest. To illustrate his thoughts he cited the recent case of Bertie Place in Oxford, where residents had been dying and falling ill at an unusually high rate. Investigating this, he had discovered that it was built on an old Victorian tip, and that there may well have been large amounts of mercury in the ground underneath. Dennis wanted to cover this live but the residents were very against this, to the point of threatening him with violence. The angle he took, therefore, was to announce that the land might be contaminated. This was broadcast live and was in direct response to the residents’ behaviour. He felt it was the best angle to take in the circumstances, although he also knew his approach had been “sensationalist”.

In Dennis’s case here the particular angle used actually made the story possible. With a lack of input from the human subjects he was forced to present the ‘facts’ from a perspective that he knew, as a professional, would give the story meaning and elicit audience interest. But in essence this had been his angle. Indeed, he added that all journalists inevitably move away from the truth; they seek to “dramatise it far more”. As if to justify this, Dennis gave me brief insight into his personal method, which is to treat “all events as outrageous”. To this end he starts out by being affronted, or even offended, by the events or circumstances he is covering. This is his working philosophy and for him it works especially well with ‘off diary’ stories. The example he gave here was of ‘catching out’ a college professor’s attitudes to students and alcohol by interviewing him in a bar. What he meant here was that he had decided in

advance not just how to cover the story but how it might be configured on air in the broadcast.

Concluding Thoughts

By combining the analysis from this second phase of interviews with the earlier findings chapters, I believe my overall arguments are corroborated, but also considerably bolstered by the evidence I have presented. The four journalists were presented with the opportunity to analyse in far more depth than had been the case in the newsrooms. Indeed, all four displayed that, once given 'permission', they are able to think intelligently about their own assumptions and ways of working, albeit on a relatively narrow level. Although my evidence points to self reflexivity not being entirely absent there appears to be an essential shallowness to their thinking on matters of a more conceptual or abstract nature. Quite simply, with time and space to reflect on what makes material newsworthy none of the four journalists seemed able to develop any ideas much beyond presenting me with examples of subject matter – just as had been the case in newsrooms.

Alex's response to the question of how to define news value typified what followed in the remaining three encounters, in that his comments tended to be brief and untheorised. There was certainly no ability to invoke any conceptual ideas found in academic texts, such as Galtung & Ruge (1965) or Golding & Elliott (1979), nor any reference to 'enduring values' (Gans, 1979) that might exist in society and which influence ideas on what is 'important'. When I enquired as to their views on specific criteria, each journalist was able to cite particular factors that they personally saw as important. With Alex it was uniqueness and surprise, with Leo it was negativity and Dennis felt proximity was key (to his very narrow and particular Oxford audience). In the case of Rupert, as a producer of rolling news, the immediacy of the story was paramount.

On the specific subject of defining newsworthiness and commenting on selection criteria, I therefore found similarities between my interview responses and those of the journalists encountered in the newsrooms. At the same time this phase of research also revealed a new dimension to my overall findings. This was the evident care and attention Alex, Leo and Rupert gave to verbally assessing the nature and quality of material already broadcast. Whereas remarks in the newsroom, putting stories together for transmission, had been almost perfunctory at times, when journalists were able to reflect on content in a deliberate manner, this seemed to make them look at it more expansively. This may have been because they felt a sense of protective ownership towards that particular output; or it may have been a consequence of my effectively giving them 'permission' to do so. My earlier newsroom findings had showed a strong tendency to look forward rather than back, so perhaps these later interviews, designed with the specific purpose of encouraging reflection, compelled them to act in an unfamiliar manner. This may suggest that a more complete picture of how journalists think about news content and selection could best be achieved by combining newsroom observation and informal conversations *in situ* with more measured exchanges away from the day to day pressures of story construction and programme planning.

Further, the apparent lack of ability to deal with newsworthiness on a conceptual level only seemed to reaffirm the prevailing professional belief, discussed in Chapter 4, that journalists make selection decisions according to their 'nose'. This may strengthen the argument of Tuchman (1978) a key determinant of selection is the ability journalists have to recognise stories according to familiar 'typifications'. It had become apparent in the newsroom encounters that the act of placing particular events and occurrences within the frame of a known type was bound up in the process of 'finding' an appropriate angle on which to base a story, so I decided to pursue this further in the four interviews. What proved particularly interesting here was how they responded to the question. In each case, while finding it difficult to articulate their ideas on a conceptual level, the subject was treated with palpable interest and overt seriousness. There was no sense of dismissing it as a pointless exercise, which might have

happened in a busy newsroom. The discussion with Leo in particular was protracted and he made a point of informing me at the end of the interview how engaging he had found this issue.

So to conclude, finally, this extra phase of research has added an important extra layer to my research. It has allowed me to both reaffirm certain key findings but also to delve much more deeply into the key areas of 'news value', selection criteria and simply how a journalist approaches potentially newsworthy material. My study is still small-scale but, I wish to reassert, stands up well compared to, say, Schlesinger's (1978) study of the BBC. I have now conducted three distinct layers of research and analysis and grounded these in personnel from a range of newsrooms. I initially sought to compare newsroom attitudes and behaviour with output that was subsequently produced. Now, with this final phase of interviews, I have also managed to obtain valuable data based on journalistic recollections of output which has already been broadcast. In the process I have used the latter as a vehicle with which to explore the earlier findings. In other words, all my layers of research have been interconnected with the common purpose of gaining deeper insight into the selection process.

NOTES

¹ There are, from time to time, examples of pressure being exerted on television journalists by politicians especially, such as that exerted on the BBC during the 1980s by the then Conservative Government, over coverage of terrorism, Northern Ireland, the Falklands War and the bombing of Libya (see McNair, 2003b). The most celebrated recent example of this was the 'David Kelly affair' in 2003, culminating in the publication of the Hutton Report (<http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/report/> [Accessed 24 August 2004]).

² According to its website (<http://www.fathers-4-justice.org/>. Accessed 24 August 2004), "Fathers 4 Justice (F4J) is a new civil rights movement campaigning for a child's right to see both parents and grandparents". Two of its members entered Westminster on 19 May 2004 and threw purple powder at Tony Blair, causing Parliament to be suspended.

³ Although they acknowledge that precise figures are hard to establish, the Journalism Training Forum (2002) calculate that in the year 2000 there were just over 11000 broadcast journalists in Britain, of which just under half worked in television (http://www.skillset.org/uploads/pdf/asset_262.pdf?1. Accessed 24 August 2004).

⁴ The National Union of Journalists Code of Conduct was drawn up in 1936 in order to lay down the basic principles of British and Irish journalism. More information can be found on the NUJ website (<http://www.nuj.org.uk/index.php>) [Accessed 10 August 2005]

⁵For a succinct outline of the background to this, see the article 'Scandal at a Glance' on the BBC News Business website (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/1780075.stm> [Accessed 30 July 2004]).

⁶ Unfortunately only some of the correspondence has survived from the three newsroom visits.

⁷ According to Toyota's current website (<http://www.toyotauk.com/index.asp>), the reason for setting up a UK location for its car manufacturing (in December 1989) was due to the "strong tradition of vehicle manufacturing in Britain and the large domestic market for [their] product. In addition, the UK offered us solid industrial

transport links to [their] customers and [their] 230 British and European supply partners”. Further, “there was also a supportive positive attitude to inward investment from the British Government at both local and national level”. This suggests that the attitude of the company towards investing in Britain remains positive. Currently, the two manufacturing plants in the UK represent “a total investment in excess of £1.7 billion and currently over 4,500 members are employed”.

⁸ Rupert’s main duties were more layered than the three reporters. Being 24 hour rolling news, Sky News works by planning material for broadcast in four hour sections and the producer’s role here is to take responsibility for that and to plan it over the previous four hours. In other words he worked in eight hour chunks of time. This entailed key areas such as writing links, discussing the content what kind of information needed to be conveyed to the viewer when presenters conduct ‘two-ways’ with reporters during broadcast, and liaising generally with reporters.

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	<p>VISUAL IMAGES</p> <p>FURTHER OBSERVATIONS IN BOLD</p>	<p>WORDS SPOKEN</p> <p>FURTHER OBSERVATIONS IN BOLD</p>
<p>A</p>	<p>News reader with Toyota logo behind him.</p> 	<p>NEWSREADER: The Japanese car giant Toyota has warned that its attitude to investing in Britain will change if this country stays outside a European single currency.</p> <p>The comments from the company's President have reignited the row between the political parties over Europe.</p> <p>Labour said Tory disunity on the issue was now threatening thousands of jobs.</p> <p>But the government argued that joining up to the Euro was only one factor influencing foreign investors...</p> <p>The basic theme of the story is established: that there is a possibility that certain areas of British industry, and by implication Britain itself, will be adversely affected by a large employer ceasing its operations in the country.</p> <p>This is therefore a negative story but, essentially, it concerns something that has not actually happened and may not come to fruition. Newsworthiness has been assessed on the threat of an event rather than the event itself, so it is ultimately speculative.</p> <p>Channel 4 News are announcing that they believe this is an important issue for British people in general and may have more far reaching consequences.</p>
<p>B</p>	<p>Spinning Toyota logo.</p> <p>Eventually the caption 'TOYOTA</p>	<p>...Our Industrial Correspondent Ian Ross reports on why Toyota issued its warning and how the row over Europe could</p>


	STORY' appears on screen.	affect inward investment.
C	<p>Aerial shots of factory site.</p>  <p>This view serves to emphasise the scale and extensiveness of the operation, therefore by implication what stands to be lost.</p>	<p>REPORTER: Toyota has invested more than a billion pounds of its own money in its British subsidiary...</p> <p>This signifies that it is a large company and therefore the consequences of ceasing production will be of a greater magnitude.</p>
D	The same site from a different angle.	At its by plant in Burnaston, Derbyshire, it produces the Carina E.
E	<p>Car travelling along a country road.</p> <p>It is the loss of industrial production, and therefore jobs and inward investment, that is the central issue here. In this sense, the individual car acts as a symbol of the Toyota company. But the freedom of the car on the open road may be seen as a metaphor for the freedom of the company to go off to another land if it chooses to.</p>	<p>E stands for Europe...</p> <p>This is ambiguous. Does it signify that Britain is part of Europe and that Toyota's presence here underlines this? Or does the very explicit reference to what E stands for remind the viewer of how Britain not seeing itself as being part of Europe might prove costly in terms of lost business investment?</p>
F	Another shot of a car.	<p>...the market it's meant for.</p> <p>Further emphasis as above.</p>
G	<p>Camera moves along rows of new cars.</p> <p>This is a straightforward denotation of what the Toyota factories do: manufacture cars. The large number of vehicles in the shot signifies the scale of what might be lost.</p>	Not to put too fine a point on it, Toyota and also Nissan and Honda are in Britain to push cars into...

<p>H</p>	<p>New white car moving away from above, off the production line, to mount a transport lorry.</p>	<p>...continental European markets. The fact that we are in the European Union is important to them...</p> <p>The reporter is, reiterating the importance to Toyota of Britain being a full member of the European market.</p>
<p>I</p>	<p>Same white car driving onto transport lorry from the front.</p>	<p>But it seems to be even more important to Toyota that we join the <i>single</i> currency...</p> <p>Emphasis on the word ‘single’ seems intentional and stresses that if there is only one currency in Europe that is of long term importance, then any country using a different currency must suffer adverse consequences.</p>
<p>J</p>	<p>Transport lorry leaving depot.</p>  <p>This is the equivalent of cars going to market. It emphasises that sales continue – but for how long?</p>	<p>...increasing scepticism about closer European integration worries the company...</p> <p>...and Britain outside the monetary union doesn't...</p>
<p>K</p>	<p>Phase in Edwina Curry.</p> 	<p>...seem to interest the Japanese car number one car manufacturer.</p> <p>That this is the biggest car company in its home country once again accentuates the potential seriousness if Britain does not eventually join the single currency.</p> <p>EDWINA CURRIE, MP: I wasn't entirely surprised because Toyota had</p>


		<p>been in touch with me in December and expressed a very strong opinion that it was essential for the United Kingdom to be an integral part of the European Union and, er, I was, er, surprised at the behaviour of their view.</p> <p>But here we are now with them saying that we've also got to be part of the single currency. I'm a little surprised they've gone that far but nevertheless I can understand their point of view. They're going to have to be dealing with the Euro. They're going to be selling cars in Euros and they would much rather that we were part of that entire set-up.</p> <p>The view of Edwina Currie, a member of the Conservative Party, and a known sympathiser with European integration, has been sought to support the principle of joining the single currency. The convention in all news is to canvass opposing opinions on any given subject considered important.</p>
<p>L</p>	<p>Image switches to Teddy Taylor.</p> 	<p>REPORTER voice over: And the Eurosceptic reaction:</p> <p>SIR TEDDY TAYLOR, MP:</p> <p>Of course, it's worrying but I hope they'll appreciate that if we join the single currency we would experience exactly the same problems as the rest of Europe are now suffering, which is unfortunately a sharp fall in their currencies compared with us and also a huge rise in unemployment.</p> <p>By way of balance, another Conservative MP presents a counter-view to Edwina Currie.</p>
<p>M</p>	<p>Shot of John Major, a member of the Korean delegation and William Hague (Secretary of State for Wales) all in dark suits, wearing daffodils in lapels. Initially John Major is smiling at</p>	<p>REPORTER: The Prime Minister as it happened was in South Wales this morning...</p>

	<p>someone and then begins to stoop down to use a shovel.</p>	
<p>N</p>	<p>Shot of John Major lifting a large clump of turf on his shovel.</p> <p>This symbolises growth. Also, on a wider level, it points to the economy continuing to expand.</p> <p>Camera pans out to reveal the entire group, all holding spades. They are backed by long white display with LG logo on it and “LG Wales Complex Ground Breaking Ceremony 29 January 1997”.</p> 	<p>...breaking the ground at the site of LG’s new electronics factory. And describing this slice of Korean inward investment and the jobs that go with it as a massive vote of confidence in the future of the UK.</p> <p>This is perhaps a more substantial viewpoint in favour of the present political position that Britain should remain outside the European currency. First, it is the prime minister who is making such a claim and. Second, Channel 4 are allowing a second party to defend Britain’s decision not to join.</p>
<p>O</p>	<p>John Major backed by a small group of people wearing dark suits, including the Koreans. Some press behind them. One person holding up a camera at Major.</p>	<p>JOHN MAJOR: We’ve been working at inward investment for a long time, not just in the run up to a general election. We’ve had a flow of inward investment over the last 10 years or so and I don’t think it’s an accident that in the United Kingdom we’ve seen unemployment falling pretty dramatically.</p> <p>The Prime Minister defends his Government’s stance, to stay outside the Euro, based on the apparent success of the British economy.</p>
<p>P</p>	<p>Same scene – different shot, showing more people wearing suits and John Major addressing two reporters.</p>	<p>REPORTER: This was before news of Toyota’s statement on the single currency, on which Labour was quick to capitalise</p> <p>However, the audience now learns that</p>

		<p>John Major made the above remarks before Toyota's decision was made.</p>
<p>Q</p>	<p>Gordon Brown, H&S, standing. Neutral background of cream wall plus wall lamp. Doorway in rear of view.</p> 	<p>GORDON BROWN, MP – SHADOW CHANCELLOR: I've been warning for some time that if the Government's, er, lurch towards an anti-European policy continued, then major firms like Toyota would start to express doubts about their investment plans for the future.</p> <p>3.5 million jobs around the country are dependent on Europe, a large number in the Midlands and it's very important that industry knows that even if the Conservative Party are divided and making decisions. <i>Not</i> in the national interest but <i>because</i> of internal party factions. The Labour Party's policy will remain clear, consistent and it will not change.</p> <p>The Shadow Chancellor is presenting an opposing viewpoint from the Government, as is generally the case in political debate.</p>
<p>R</p>	<p>Long shot of factory plant in distance.</p>	<p>REPORTER: Only recently the German company, Siemens, admitted that it would never have...</p>
<p>S</p>	<p>Closer view of 3 workers building a large framed construction, presumably at the new Siemens plant.</p>	<p>...committed itself to investing more than a billion pounds...</p> <p>The reporter returns to his original theme, which is to stress what might be lost to Britain if the Euro is not adopted as the standard currency, and that Toyota is not the only large company to express reservations.</p> <p>This is interesting. Even though the reporting of the different political viewpoints has adhered to routine notions of balance – with two separate viewpoints on each side of the argument – the stance of the journalist reporting for Channel 4 News seems to be that the negative aspects of remaining outside need to be</p>

		continually emphasised.
T	<p>Same scene, different angle. This time, showing a large sign at the site on which is written: “SIEMENS MICROELECTRONICS LTD Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd Hochtief (UK).</p> <p>This further emphasises that another large foreign employer is expressing doubts about its longer term future in Britain.</p>	...in a new microchip plant on North Tyneside had it been aware of the ...
U	<p>More builders working on the construction site, along with various machines and materials.</p> <p>This signifies work in progress, and that activity is constant and large-scale.</p>	...possibility that Britain might decide to stay...
V	<p>Another long shot of factory with another large sign with a different logo plus 2 flags flapping in the wind. The sky is leaden and the day is blustery.</p>  <p>The storm clouds are brewing and, metaphorically speaking, may be seen as a portent for problems to come.</p>	<p>...out of the single currency</p> <p>It is as though, despite the concessions to conventions of impartiality in the treatment of ‘elite subjects’ invited onto the programme, the direction of the commentary by the reporter sticks to a single theme. The editorial decision to seek out a ‘similar view’ from Siemens may contribute to such an assumption.</p>

W	Close up of a single flag waving.	
X	H& S of academic, more relaxed style of dress. Possibly in the Channel 4 building although not certain.	<p>DR NEIL BLAKE – BUSINESS STRATEGIES LIMITED: Well, I'm not too sure about the immediate impact of staying outside of EMU. I think EMU is very uncertain in itself. It's not too sure if its going to succeed, who's going to be in it, when it will happen. I don't think there's any harm for the time being Britain not actually committing itself to immediate membership of EMU. I think what is probably more important is the...the general pro-European attitude.</p> <p>If there are noises made that makes foreign investors think we are going to pull out of Europe altogether I think, er, that would be quite serious. It would certainly affect the way, um, Japanese producers for example think of being here if they're going to lose that preferential access to the European market.</p> <p>This is in effect a third viewpoint because it is offering a conciliatory view. This representative from British industry suggests a degree of hesitancy is an acceptable stance to take, with the important proviso that such action in the longer term might have serious, negative consequences for Britain.</p>
Y	Cars on assembly line.	REPORTER: But since Toyota's announcement. Nissan...
Z	<p>Factory worker sitting behind wheel of car in factory, working on internal parts.</p> <p>This signifies activity and industriousness. The employee shown represents one small, but vital, cog in this large enterprise. It is business as usual: with the help of British employees like this the cars keep rolling off the production line.</p>	...another big Japanese investor which is increasing production at its Sunderland plant...

<p>BB</p>	<p>Another worker (presumably) walking around a car on line, checking it.</p> 	<p>...has made clear that it doesn't support the views expressed by Toyota. Britain, it says, is the right place to be.</p>
<p>CC</p>	<p>Men in different factory (it looks like), working; checking new cars.</p>	<p>And Honda said it's totally committed to investment in Britain...</p>
<p>DD</p>	<p>C/up of man's hands working on engine.</p>	<p>...irrespective of whether Britain joins the European Monetary Union.</p>
<p>EE</p>	<p>Another shot of cars on line from farther away.</p>	<p>That's in strong contrast to the message coming from Toyota in Tokyo.</p> <p>By presenting the views of the other two main Japanese car producers in Britain – who share a view that is at odds with Toyota – the reporter is providing a balanced perspective, suggesting by implication that Toyota's stance is theirs alone.</p>
<p>FF</p>	<p>Studio. Plain background.</p>	<p>NEWSREADER IN STUDIO</p> <p>[Richard]</p> <p>Well, earlier I spoke to the President of the Board of Trade, Ian Lang (IL) I put it to him that it was Britain's position at the heart of Europe that had attracted inward investment – a position jeopardised by our reluctance to commit to the single currency.</p>

GG Ian Lang on television monitor in studio. Backed by night time shot of Parliament and Big Ben.

Cuts to newsreader as he is speaking, either full face or occasionally from a wider angle, or from the rear also showing Ian Lang on the monitor in front of Jon Snow.



IAN LANG – PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE:

Well, we're at the heart of the single market and indeed we are driving it forward and that is the reason why we get so much investment. Not just from Japan and America and Korea but also from within Europe itself. But what these companies also welcome is the fact we have resisted those social costs, those extra burdens on business, with which so many European countries are saddled and we shall continue to resist that.

NEWSREADER: But nevertheless these are sound business heads in Japan. They've looked across here and they've assessed that if there is to be a single currency – if they're trying to work in a country that's not in it – they're going to be in trouble.

IAN LANG: Well, the shadow finance minister, who I think you'd regard as a sound business head, has been saying the opposite and these jobs would not be here in the first place if we had not had a Conservative Government welcoming the inward investment, keeping low corporate tax rates, keeping low inflation, creating flexibility in the labour market and resisting the burdens from Europe which the Labour Party is so keen to embrace.

NEWSREADER:

But forgive me, Mr Lang, the shadow finance minister of Japan is a somewhat remote figure contrasted with the big businesses that are actually here and *they* are the people who are expressing serious misgivings.

There is a sense that interviewer needs to continue a similar line of questioning, whatever the comment of the minister, Ian Lang.

IAN LANG: They're the people who have invested here for the long term because of the confidence which they have repeatedly expressed in this government's commitment to maintaining a competitive and efficient place in which they can invest successfully. People take their decisions after the most careful long term appraisal and they have worked out that the policies being pursued in this government are the right ones to create a competitive base from which they can operate in Europe and indeed elsewhere around the world. B...

NEWSREADER [cutting in]: But are they not actually also stressing to some extent 'here today gone tomorrow' if you get it wrong on the single currency?

IAN LANG: No they're not. They're not focusing on the single currency in the way that you're suggesting and many of the inward investment cases that we're getting now are re-investments by companies that have invested here sometimes ten, er, even 30 or 30 years ago, reinforcing that success because they see...because they see the way in which the economy has become so much more competitive.

Lang continues to present 'facts' to support his case.

NEWSREADER: But let's look at what Mr Acouda [?] of Toyota is saying, er, "If we were to make *fresh* investments we would prefer to make them in continental Europe rather than Britain. Er... and then he goes to say that everything is still up in the air regarding the future of single currencies". They are obviously concerned at the direction.

Interviewer doggedly persists with his line of questioning; he will not let the matter drop. He is fulfilling the professional role of inquisitor,



continually focusing on the concern being expressed by one company, Toyota.

IAN LANG: Well, as I say there are other businessmen in Japan who regard a single currency as possibly not being 'dependable', to use their words. There are others in Japan, er, who think that they would prefer to see a country such as Britain remaining outside. There are mixed views on these issues and that is but one factor, one of many, that influences an inward investment decision.

Indeed, the reporter had earlier in the item made the point that Honda and Nissan have not to date expressed the reservations made public by Honda, implying that those companies do not share Toyota's attitude to Britain staying outside the Euro.



NEWSREADER [keen to get in as running out of time]: But isn't this why Ken Clarke and Michael Heseltine are right. If the single currency works we want to be part of it...

By using the word 'right', interviewer is displaying lack of objectivity. This term suggests that there is a correct stance to take on this matter, rather than it being negotiable, and Clarke and Heseltine are correct while Lang is wrong.

IAN LANG: Well...

NEWSREADER: ...The trouble with your lot surely is that you're saying, "We don't think there'll be a single currency and even if there is we don't think we'll be in it"?

"Your lot" is said in a slightly derogatory tone, again suggesting that IL is wrong.



IAN LANG [slightly exasperated]: Well, you know very well what the Government's position is on the single currency and I don't think there's, er, any need to personalise it in the way that you're doing. The Government has a clear united position on this . We think it's very unlikely that we would go ahead on the 1st January 1999. Indeed, we think it's very unlikely, er, that the currency itself would go ahead at that time.

IL appears annoyed at tone of question. This statement appears to be the crux of the minister's argument and seems clear – that the current British Government does not expect to join the Euro in the near future.

NEWSREADER: Well, let me see if I can wring this from you which is: it would be crazy for either Labour or yourselves to shut the door on the single currency completely, given the uncertainty amongst these critical investors like Toyota who are already here.


Trying to “wring” information implies great effort being put into extracting answers from IL. It is as though the minister is holding information back that. Based purely on what IL has so far said, he appears to be answering questions in a straightforward manner.


By using the word “crazy”, interviewer is expressing subjectivity.


IAN LANG: Well, as you very well know we haven't shut the door or anything. Our policy has been to wait and see, to negotiate, er, and to decide and that remains the position.

Once again, IL simply counters accusations.

END

	<p style="text-align: center;">VISUAL IMAGES</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FURTHER OBSERVATIONS IN BOLD</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">WORDS SPOKEN</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FURTHER OBSERVATIONS IN BOLD</p>
<p>A</p>	<p>Newsreader backed by image showing detail of someone’s living room and flood damage: a sofa, a brown, dirty-looking floor, and another object. Taken at ground level.</p>  <p>Setting scene for main theme of story. That a group of people’s houses have received serious damage.</p> <p>The images signify a disruption from the norm for the residents affected. The general wetness is emphasised by the camera angle, which suggests nothing in the room has escaped damage, although no intimation given of how many possessions have been removed and were ‘saved’.</p>	<p>NEWSREADER 1: Good evening. Residents in Gloucester are counting the cost after torrential rain flooded dozens of homes. Families were evacuated when flash floods caused chaos early in the morning.</p> <p>NEWSREADER 2: Emergency services have been busy all day pumping up to four feet of water out of some homes. Many of those affected weren’t insured.</p> <p>We can now cross to Gloucester and our reporter [Becky].</p> <p>Reference is made to “dozens”, but at this stage a more precise figure is not given (see point U below). This allows the possible number of houses affected to remain open and potentially large. Similarly four feet of water was pumped out of some homes; but this may only refer to a relatively small number.</p> <p>Use of the word, “chaos” suggests a situation that had been out of control, and this is further emphasised by the reference to “flash floods” which are a force of nature known for their destructive powers. Such torrents are swift and sudden, and sweep all before them.</p> <p>That residents were “evacuated” has wartime connotations, signifying people being forced out of their normal place of domicile by forces beyond</p>

		<p>their control.</p> <p>However, the emergency services have been heroic in coming to their rescue. They are a force for good, helping the victims recover from their losses.</p>
B	<p>Flooded residents handling (presumably) wet carpet outside their basement flat.</p> <p>Emphasising damage to individual possessions.</p>	<p>REPORTER: Well it's actually stopped raining in Gloucester at the moment.</p> <p>This implies the rain has been almost constant. Currently there is respite.</p>
C	<p><i>Very</i> brief shot of children's toys outside flat.</p> <p>Further emphasis – and that it is a child's possession adds to the feeling of pathos and innocent victim's loss.</p>	<p>But this has probably been...</p>
D	<p>Reporter standing on pavement, effectively looking down on one of the flooded basements, along with various plastic household items, piled up on and around a small wall. Reporter stands casually, her hand resting on the railings bordering building and pavement.</p> 	<p>...one of the worst days in their lives for residents here in the Midlands area.</p> <p>Their homes have been devastated by the freak floods which hit the area last night and although the clean up has been going on all day today it's going to be weeks before life is back to normal.</p> <p>The drama of the situation is emphasised to the full in the reporter's commentary. This is not described as just a bad day, but "one of the worst" in the lives of those concerned. (This judgement is entirely that of the reporter, as no resident subsequently articulates this view).</p> <p>Use of the word "devastating" implies laying people's homes to waste. Everything is in ruins and it will be a long time before normal lives can be resumed.</p>

E	<p>Same shot of people with carpet.</p>	<p>REPORTER VOICE OVER: The basement flat dwellers were this morning...</p>
F	<p>Same shot as C, but more detail of toys. These are colourful and include two teddy bears, another furry animal and a teddy bear-shaped plastic toy for a young child.</p>  <p>Being children's belongings greater sense of sentimentality is introduced to the narrative.</p>	<p>...carrying their sodden belongings onto the street.</p> <p>The word “sodden” emphasises the level of damage, having more dramatic resonance than a word like ‘soaked’.</p>
G	<p>View through window of someone with large brush sweeping water across a flooded living room.</p> <p>This may be for effect, to represent the residents actively trying to counter the difficulty they are in and return to ‘normality’. The overall image is one of dirt and wet, signified by an overall brownness to the image.</p>	<p>The rain started at about 1am – a torrential downpour...</p>
H	<p>Water pouring from a standpipe into the street.</p>	<p>...over the city, causing flash floods</p>



This shot is brief and seems designed to reiterate the signified meaning attached to the accompanying commentary – that there has been a lot of water deposited as a result of torrential rain.

I Inside the same room as G. More detail of man with same brush and a floor cleaner, pushing water around. The sofa is turned to the wall and there does not appear to be much else in the room.



The man's actions seem desultory. There is no obvious purpose to his pushing water around, but it tallies with the idea of residents clearing up.

J H & S of man with cropped hair and dreadlocks being interviewed. Woman standing behind.

which left dozens of homes up to 4 feet deep in water

Again, there is reference to a potentially large number of victims – but also, still, vagueness about the exact number. (See U below.)

MALE RESIDENT: Stepping out of bed into ankle deep water...um...by the time we got to the front door it was about knee deep...

This emphasises the level of water and,



As he speaks, she eventually turns to someone off camera and smiles.

The combination of his unhurried manner and untroubled facial expression, and her breaking out into a smile, gives the impression that the situation is serious because of the disruption to their lives, but not desperate.

by implication, the depth of seriousness. Water that is up to the knee of an adult, inside the bedroom, signifies a relatively large amount of water and the necessity to vacate premises for a period of time.

His tone of voice seems to lack high emotion – there is an almost perfunctory description of what happened from his perspective.

K Shot of two mattresses thrown over low wall in the street.

More examples of wet belongings to illustrate the possible widespread nature of the damage.

...the bed, the settee...

L Close up of mattresses, which are sodden. One is dripping.



Further emphasis on how saturated certain possessions are.

...everything...[INAUDIBLE]...the fridge freezer was floating [slight break into laughter at the end of the sentence].

Many objects appear to have been damaged. However, this particular resident at least can find some humour in the situation.

This is not the way victims tend to be constructed in the television news.

M	<p>Resident clearing up some items in an alleyway at the end of a group of houses, along which many other items and objects have been placed.</p> <p>There is the impression of things having been placed there quickly and a general untidiness to the whole scene. The scene looks grim and there are belongings everywhere, though they have been stacked up systematically. There is a degree of organisation here amidst an unpleasant situation.</p>	<p>REPORTER: The damage caused here is expected to run into hundreds...</p>
N	<p>Fireman walking down the street towards direction of camera, carrying a hose. In the foreground there is part of the front of a fire engine.</p> <p>The presence of the fire engine is a metonym for the presence of the emergency services, who have come to rescue the residents.</p>	<p>...of thousands of pounds, and many residents told whose flat was 6 feet deep in water...</p> <p>Similar to the use of the term “dozens”, by referring to “hundreds of thousands”, REPORTER leaves open the possibility that the cost could be nearly a million pounds, or perhaps as low as two hundred thousand.</p>
O	<p>Woman with her back to camera tidying up room inside another house. This room does not appear as badly flooded as the earlier example.</p> <p>There are three possibilities here. First, the room may never have been seriously flooded. Second, the flood water has subsided quickly, or been pumped out by the fireman – suggesting the earlier comment by the reporter, that the situation would “take months” to recover”, was an exaggeration. Third, the earlier visual example, above, was the exception.</p>	<p>...us they don’t have insurance. Like this woman...</p> <p>No explicit reference is made to this, but implicit in the statement is that a large number of residents live on low incomes and cannot afford home insurance cover. Perhaps these flats tend to be rented and the tenants do not feel the need to insure them?</p>
P	<p>Close up of dirty floor in what turns out to be a kitchen as the camera pans outwards. Focus of close up is the floor which is covered in black substance. Various utility items come into view, such as washing machine, oven and cupboards and the sludge-covered floor is in the middle.</p>	<p>...now covered in black sludge.</p>



The manner in which the camera zooms out dramatically reveals objects affected.

Q Open door, shot from inside room. Camera pans outwards but no new elements revealed, merely a wider view of the original shot.

Room appears to have been cleared up, as there are no visible signs of flooding or damage.

Staff at the nearby Ukrainian club arrived for work to find chaos and tables floating in the bar.

See left – despite use of the word, “chaos”, the state of the room now seems, ostensibly, to be ordered and the situation under control.

R Head and shoulders of a man, smiling and affable.

He could be putting a brave face on the situation, revealing an attitude of stoicism. Or it could be that the damage was not serious. It is impossible to tell from the images shown.

ALEX ANDRIJIW – UKRAINIAN CLUB: Er... we were, we were about 4 feet under water

REPORTER (of camera): So how much damage?


ALEX ANDRIJIW: Thousands of pounds worth of damage...um...I mean £30,000 we reckon.



The man feels the need to emphasise a more precise figure.



S Two fire engines, one stationary, the other moving slowly to a halt – eventually the door opens onto the pavement, far left of screen.


The whole area looks wet and the housing run-down and slightly dilapidated.


REPORTER: Fire crews arrived in the...

<p>T</p>	<p>Four fire fighters activating a pump.</p>  <p>Plenty of resources have been used here.</p>	<p>...early hours of this morning and worked through the night pumping water</p> <p>Again, the heroic actions of the rescue services are emphasised.</p>
<p>U</p>	<p>Two (more) fire fighters outside the door of one of the basement flats, looking tired and unenthusiastic about the job at hand, which looks to be in its latter stages, most of the work having been done overnight.</p> <p>Seems to signify this being an unattractive job to have to do. There is no evidence of any actions being performed for the camera, of which the fire fighters seem oblivious.</p>	<p>...out of the 30 or so flooded buildings. An exhausting job.</p> <p>Finally, the reporter informs the viewers of the number of buildings actually damaged, and it is relatively small. The earlier reference to “dozens” is thrown into relief and seems to have been included (twice) to emphasise the dramatic severity of the situation and possibly helping to attract the audience’s attention.</p> <p>Exhaustion implies sustained hard effort by the heroic fire fighters, who may have continued working until the task was basically complete.</p>
<p>V</p>	<p>Close up of pump in dirty, frothy water.</p> <p>Again, the main causes of the problem – water and dirt – are emphasised.</p>	<p>DEREK WHEELER – GLOUCESTERSHIRE FIRE SERVICE</p> <p>Well, unfortunately not only the flats...the whole road.</p>
<p>W</p>	<p>Large puddle in street by kerb, also frothy. Buildings opposite form reflection in the water.</p>	<p>was flooded as well, you know it was almost like a lake.</p> <p>[See left] No reference is made to the apparently improved weather. The reporter is still preoccupied with how severe the flooding was (rather than is).</p>

	 <p>The light and clearer sky signifies that the rain has stopped and perhaps the threat of more flooding has ceased.</p>	<p>The interviewee's reference to a lake exaggeratedly dramatises the depth of the water.</p>
<p>X</p>	<p>Derek Wheeler, left side of screen. In the background four fire fighters stand chatting near a vehicle.</p> <p>Their relaxed behaviour suggests the work is passed and the urgent task of pumping out the water is done. The problems that remain are about clearing up the aftermath: the damage to furniture, other possessions, walls and floors.</p>	<p>But as we were here, more and more people were waking up because of the noise and finding their houses were flooded and then we was getting more and more calls.</p> <p>Being woken from sleep to discover water gushing in, possibly in the dark, conjures up a dramatic image of helplessness, crisis and panic.</p>
<p>Y</p>	<p>Group of fire fighters standing outside a house. Image widens to reveal the front of a parked fire engine.</p>	<p>REPORTER: The worst-hit areas were Midland Road, Cromwell St and...</p>
<p>Z</p>	<p>Close up of street name: Wellington Street.</p> 	<p>...the aptly named Wellington St.</p> <p>The street name afforded an opportunity for a play on words that was apparently too good to miss.</p>

<p>AA</p>	<p>Close up of two people in green Wellington boots.</p> 	<p>And Wellingtons, it seemed, were the only things to be wearing this morning.</p> <p>The last part of this statement was delivered in a jaunty, ‘knowing’ manner. The reporter seems to believe that the audience will appreciate the slightly elevated tone. This contrasts with the earlier grave descriptions of damage and future problems faced by the residents, and also suggests the earlier dramatisation was contrived for effect.</p>
<p>BB</p>	<p>Resident, previously unseen in footage, sorting through some wet blankets outside a flat. Camera pans out to reveal three more residents standing, talking amongst themselves.</p> <p>Again, the lack of urgency and explicit concern by the residents contrasts with the main theme of the story – that there is a crisis.</p>	<p>As families removed the contents of their homes...</p>
<p>CC</p>	<p>From the side, a woman sits in an armchair flicking through the Yellow Pages telephone directory. Her head turns slightly to reveal profile. She is smiling.</p>  <p>The action of looking up telephone numbers seems to be shown to accompany the reporter’s commentary [see right] – that the victims are seeking some form of amelioration or perhaps redress.</p>	<p>... others were trying to contact flood damage experts.</p>

	<p>The fact the woman is smiling raises the possibility that this is a contrived action set up for the camera.</p>	
DD	<p>Two women in the street outside the houses, one holding a thick file, the other an A4 pad and using a walkie-talkie. Their expressions are earnest and business-like.</p>  <p>The objects being held are signifiers of officialdom. The dominant message here is that the two women's primary function is helping sort out the problems of the residents. This image also provides visual support for the reporter's commentary [right].</p>	<p>And Gloucester City Council were also offering as much assistance as possible, ...</p>
EE	<p>Woman, dressed smartly in dark suit stands amongst a group of residents, engaged in conversation.</p> <p>The person from the Council is depicted listening to the residents, signifying action on behalf of those with authority.</p>	<p>...their homelessness team knocking on every door.</p>
FF	<p>BO'N being interviewed, in ¾ profile. Informally dressed in leather jacket and open collar. His facial expression is serious and tone is sympathetic and reassuring.</p> <p>Seems to be in a position of power because he possesses knowledge of what the residents are entitled to by</p>	<p>[BERNIE O'NEIL – GLOUCESTER CITY COUNCIL]: Our housing officers have been round already to see if we can accommodate anybody...if they can't get in with friends or neighbours...um...</p> <p>...the drainage people are out and about looking at various aspects and...er...we've , we've got...um... a</p>

	<p>way of financial help.</p>	<p>plan whereby if people have got severe hardship they need to let us know and we can perhaps come up with some financial help for them.</p> <p>The council appears to have a mechanism to deal with occurrences such as localised flooding. Moreover, for the benefit of the news programme, such political bodies must be seen to be acting when there are problems in the community, especially those that become the subjects of a local news story.</p>
GG	<p>Car slowly driving in direction of camera, down flooded country road.</p>  <p>This is the first clip from a section of footage taken in another part of the region by another camera. Its function appears to be add wider context to the main storyline, of the flooding.</p>	<p>REPORTER: Gloucester wasn't the only place hit by floods.</p>
HH	<p>Same stretch of road and another car, farther away moving in opposite direction, another car eventually coming into view coming towards camera. Although the road, being undulating is main clear of water, this particular shot is of a temporary ford through which all traffic must pass.</p> <p>The situation does not look serious in the sense that any of the cars might get stuck in the water. The temporarily flooded road is because of a dip and</p>	<p>In Coombe St Nicholas, near Chard, drivers struggled this morning on...</p> <p>The term 'struggle' suggests difficulty, but this seems to be mild and fleeting judging by the accompanying footage.</p>

	cars must simply drive through it carefully. Was this section chosen because it was the <i>only</i> flooding of any description that could be found?	
II	Different shot of ford and other cars in background.	...roads that looked more like rivers. Visually, this part of the item suggests reference to rivers is an exaggeration. But tonight,...
JJ	Man interviewed earlier in J above, this time longer shot of him standing in doorway, either half dressed or wearing shorts. Camera pans away to show three men in boiler suits, presumably Council employees, clearing up. The man in the doorway has a bemused smile. The resident maintains his less than troubled expression, although this may be an outward manifestation of resignation. The Council workers are helping the residents, and presumably improving their situation, perhaps enabling them to return home that night.	...with more heavy rain forecast, these Gloucester residents could in for another miserable night. Having represented the plight of the residents as being serious and signalling that trouble lies ahead clearing up the damage caused, this reference to more rain adds to the drama.
KK	Similar shot to D above, of belongings piled up outside basement. Camera moves L-R and back to reporter in the street, similar to shot at the beginning of the item. She moves R-L towards Mike McCabe who she is about to interview, until they are both in shot.	[BREAK AS RETURN TO LIVE BROADCAST] REPORTER: Well, as you can see, everybody in the street has put all his or her belongings outside hoping that it's going to get dried overnight. But - unfortunately heavy rain is forecast and I think things are going to be even wetter. It's a real nightmare for residents here Because the commentary is live, and therefore less premeditated (in terms of prepared scripts), she could be delivering her commentary with greater emotion: "...a real nightmare" has a more informal quality. Now with me now is Mike McCabe (MM) from Gloucester County Council.



Then camera moves closer so that it is only him in the picture. As with Bernie O'Neill his dress is informal and his manner helpful and serious.

Mike, how did this happen? Couldn't the Council have done anything to prevent such severe flooding in such a built up area?

MM: I think the simple answer to that is "No". There was a freak flood overnight, a freak storm which literally came over Gloucester and then just dumped everything onto the city centre – and that's what happened. What we can do and what we are doing is helping people who have suffered from this storm.

REPORTER: Now what if there is heavy rain again tonight? Are you doing anything to prevent further flooding here?

MM: Well, there's nothing we could do...er...inasmuch as we haven't got enough sandbags to cover the whole city and it might be a wasted exercise. What we are doing is saying if people have problems tonight then they should ring us on 301212 and we'll get out to them with help as soon as possible.

Reporter does not probe here. There seems no overt attempt to interrogate the interviewee, and no sense of an exchange of dialogue. Once he has answered her question she simply moves on to the next. This view may be supported by her next remark: -

REPORTER: You've also got some sandbags hanging around somewhere?

She therefore refers to the point just made, as though she is not engaging fully with his replies.

MM: That's right, we've got sandbags, we've got drying machines, and whatever help people need we're not worried about, you know, who's going to pay for it. If people need help we'll get it to them as quickly as possible.

REPORTER: And let's hope it's not necessary.



MM: Let's hope so.


REPORTER: Mike McCabe, thank you very much.

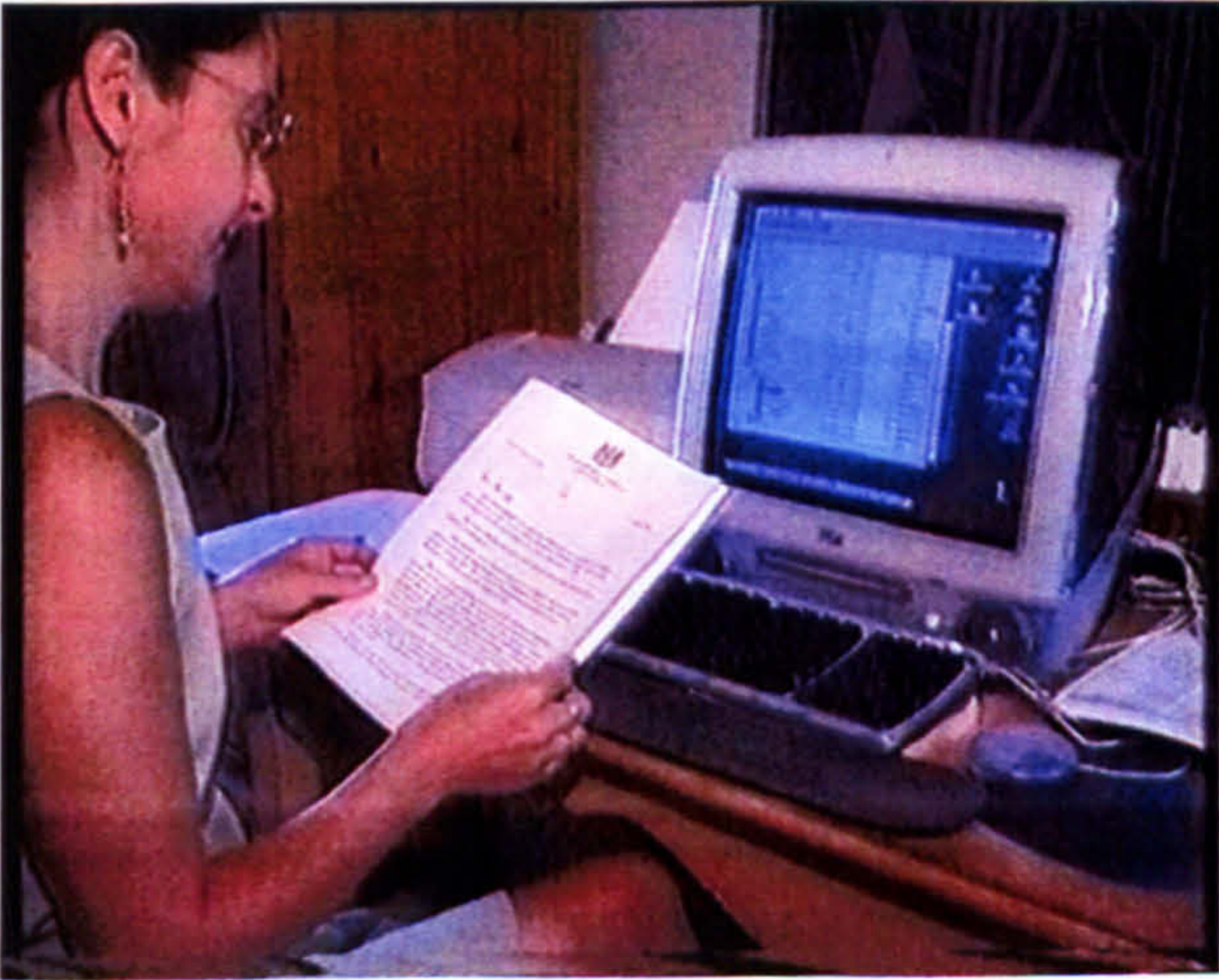
In other words, she has performed the task of quizzing the member of officialdom and is now looking forward to a brighter future for the residents. It may rain later that night, but it may not cause flooding again. This particular episode has achieved closure and one convention of news is that, having highlighted some disruption to the norm (the flooding) it is also important to look positively to the future and order being restored. She began the story with references to chaos and ends on a note of optimism.


End

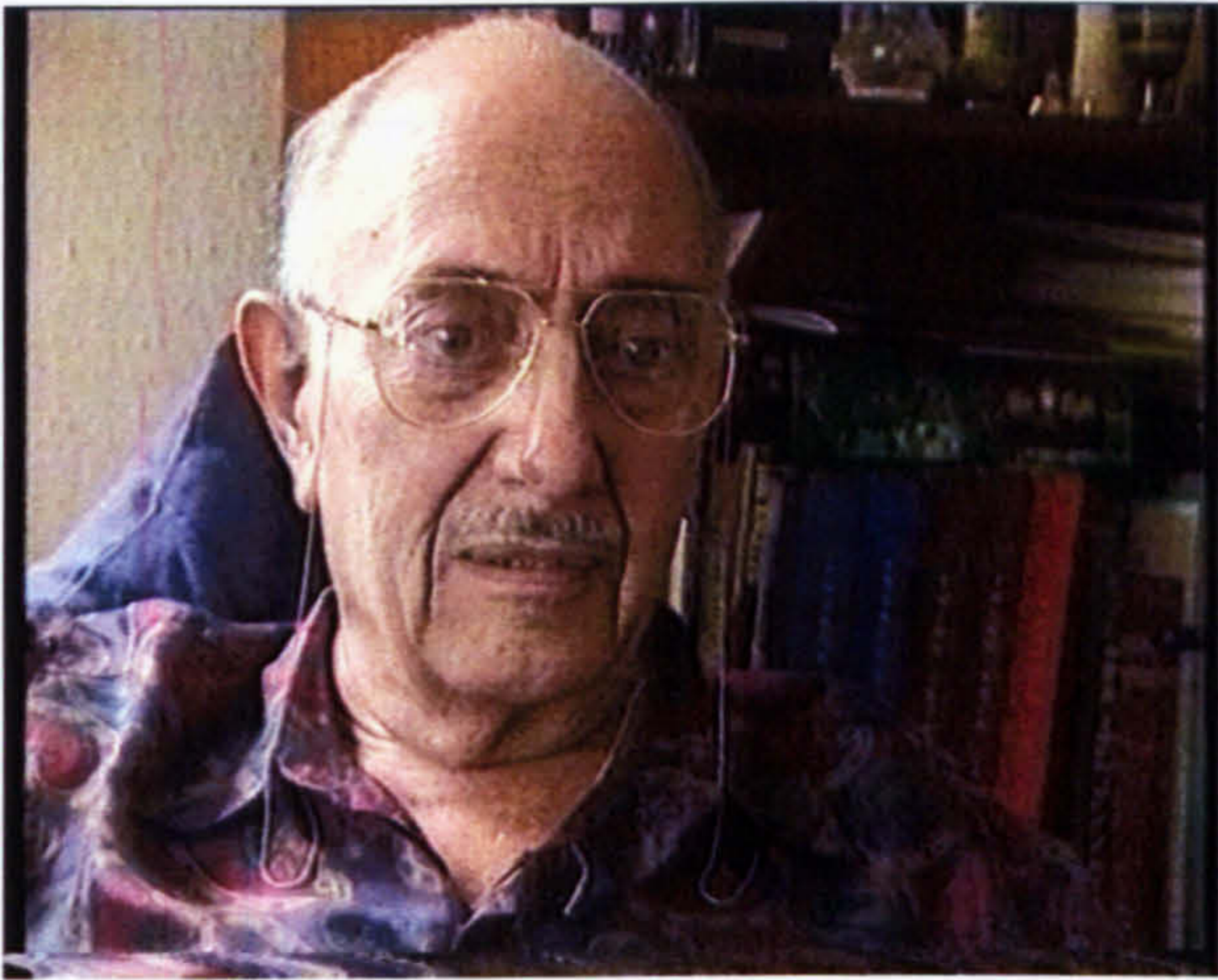
	<p style="text-align: center;">VISUAL IMAGES</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FURTHER OBSERVATIONS IN BOLD</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">WORDS SPOKEN</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FURTHER OBSERVATIONS IN BOLD</p>
<p>A</p>	<p>Newsreader accompanied by picture of Deborah Aaron (DA) looking sad and wistful.</p>  <p>Signifies worry and concern – this woman has a problem.</p>	<p>NEWSREADER: Good evening. A British woman living in America has lost her appeal for compassionate leave to visit her father in Birmingham who's dying from cancer. Deborah Aaron (DA) has been told if she leaves the United States, she won't be allowed back in because of a £10 fine for possessing cannabis imposed 25 years ago. Now she has to decide whether to risk not being able to live with her children again.</p> <p>The dramatic element is increased by the newsreader when she says that DA may never be able to live with her children again.</p>
<p>B</p>	<p>DA walks out of large house, bathed in sunlight, past red flowered bush and sits down on bench in garden.</p>  <p>There is an impression of size and space, and a connotation of freedom.. Alone on the bench, she is constructed as a woman in isolation, at one with her thoughts and</p>	<p>REPORTER: DA risks forfeiting her life in LA because of an outstanding deportation order against her. An order which she's been fighting for years through the US courts.</p> <p>“for years” – but how long exactly? Was there a long period when she was uninterested in coming to Britain to see her family? Audience doesn't actually know.</p>

	<p>problems. Is she still married or now separated? Is she now alone, fighting a lone battle, as a single mother?</p>	
<p>C</p>	<p>Close up of DA looking very pensive, half face to camera, eyes looking slightly down. Sadness in them.</p>  <p>Emphasises her isolation and sadness.</p>	<p>She had hoped she'd be allowed compassionate leave...</p>
<p>D</p>	<p>Father shown sitting on settee at home speaking to someone on the telephone.</p> <p>It is not stated who he is talking to. It seems as though it is meant to be his daughter but there is no way of knowing.</p>	<p>...to see her father who returned home on Sunday from his first session of chemotherapy ...</p>
<p>E</p>	<p>c/u of black and white framed photograph.</p>  <p>Again, the reasonable assumption is that this is of Deborah Aaron. The hairstyle</p>	<p>...for his liver cancer. This is ostensibly bad news, although audience are not told HOW bad, or what father's chances of survival are. By being told he has just had chemotherapy the news item is drawing on the audience's knowledge that this is a grave situation</p>

	<p>and formalised appearance suggests the photograph was taken many years ago and this possibility is strengthened by it being in black and white. Perhaps this how she looked when they last met. This would then emphasise further the sad nature of the situation should they not be allowed to meet before his death</p> <p>As the camera lingers on the photograph, the father’s hand comes into view, putting phone down in front of picture.</p> <p>Put down slowly and carefully – this is not a random, perfunctory action, but thoughtful and deliberate. This appears to symbolise the poignant moment when, once again, he is cut off from the daughter he has not seen for 25 years</p>	
F	<p>Head and shoulders of father facing camera, talking to interviewer.</p> <p>His expression signifies concern but there are no tears or displays of strong emotion; he has a stoic quality.</p>	<p>DAVID GABBAY - DEBORAH AARON’S FATHER: I’m devastated really this morning. I was a bit shocked when I heard about it because... er ...I thought there’d be a little bit of leniency now that the situation is somewhat different. But ..and.. I can only describe it as <i>cruelty</i> (emphasised word in tone of voice).</p> <p>“Devastated” emphasizes destructive nature of the situation. “Cruelty” implies that forces have conspired to punish his daughter.</p>
G	<p>DA sitting at table eating with family.</p> 	<p>REPORTER: DA was fined £10 in 1976 for possessing cannabis when she was a student in London, although...</p>

	<p>Nothing here to signify anything other than ‘normal’ everyday behaviour at the table with members of the family: smiles; informal conversation with her two sons.</p>	
H	<p>Longer shot of all 3 at table.</p> <p>Conventional domestic scene. DA is an ordinary caring mother and this is the kind of activity that is threatened with disruption or even destruction, should events not go her way.</p>	<p>...she’s always insisted the drugs weren’t hers.</p> <p>Emphasising how she was a victim <i>then</i> as she is now.</p>
I	<p>Still picture of DA and husband on wedding day.</p> <p>Just as she is an ordinary mother, DA arrived in America and got married in the conventional way.</p>	<p>But although she later married an American and lives...</p>
J	<p>Close up of son pouring drink.</p>	<p>...in California with 2 of her 3 children she’s never been...</p>
K	<p>Close up of other son.</p> <p>These two individual shots of her sons, again, serve to highlight the potential loss to all concerned should she not be able to live with her children in America. These are the children she will be missing.</p>	<p>... granted permission to live there permanently.</p> <p>Use of “granted” implies that some ‘higher authority’ is in a position of power of DA. She has to win their consent.</p>
L	<p>DA sitting at computer looking through papers.</p> 	<p>The Immigration and Naturalisation Service believe she’ll never get that permission...</p> <p>The anonymous people who work in the Service “believe” she won’t get permission. This is not the same as saying she will <i>definitely</i> not get permission. Interestingly the audience never gets to hear their side of things – this could be seen simply as a consequence of the logistical (and financial) barriers with the compilation of a report in Birmingham of events 6000 miles away in Los Angeles. But it is an aspect of the story that is missing</p>

	<p>This is what she is fighting: paperwork. This is a commonly used metaphor in TV news for bureaucracy and ‘the system’ the person at the centre of the dispute is up against.</p>	<p>nonetheless.</p> <p>Such absence of balance, however, does enable the narrator to represent the forces stacked up against DA in a more negative light. It all seems a very unfair fight.</p>
M	<p>Close up of official document, from US Dept of Justice, dated 11 April 2000.</p>	<p>... and that’s one of the reasons they rejected her request to come here on compassionate grounds</p>
N	<p>Still picture of head and upper body of DA. (taken from the same video recording used for the rest of the bulletin.)</p>  <p>This is different to the one shown at the top of the item: her expression is more determined and it has frozen to leave a slightly open mouth as though in mid-speech. It is an active, rather than passive, expression, announcing that she is ‘doing something’. Such an expression may also denote anger. (It is not flattering.)</p> <p>But there is also emotion as suggested by the slight wateriness around the eyes.</p> <p>DA is represented by this particular image as a driven and impassioned woman, fighting her corner against the bureaucracy of government and the legal system.</p>	<p>DA ON PHONE, FROM AMERICA TALKING TO COLIN PEMBERTON [recorded 2 hours prior to transmission]: I do not like being over here while he is going through everything that he is going through over there. I believe that he needs to have his family around him at this time and I would like to be with him. It’s the summer vacation, I could bring my sons to visit, and I’m just... er...really, really sick of living in this limbo. It’s a terrible, terrible situation to be in.</p> <p>[EDITED BREAK HERE, DETECTABLE AUDIBLY]</p> <p>The report does not provide any information about whether Deborah Aaron has ever left America since 1975. As she is experiencing such difficulty now it seems reasonable to suggest she has not. Does this signify a lack of closeness in the family?</p> <p>I can’t - I can’t - concentrate on anything. It overtakes everything in my life. I live literally from one day to the next and I’m just on tenterhooks waiting to see if somebody somewhere can help me because I just cannot believe this situation I’m in.</p> <p>All her speech is helping construct her as a helpless victim.</p> <p>Her vocal delivery is slow and</p>

		<p>measured. She does not come across as someone who panics easily or seeks to use excessive emotive language to make a point. Clearly distressed and upset by events, DA, however, displays control and a lack of anger – like her father. Yet the image of her, accompanying the interview, seems to be constructed to signify anger and strong outward emotion.</p>
<p>O</p>	<p>Same interview as earlier, with father.</p>  <p>He appears, once more, an emotionally controlled person.</p>	<p>FATHER: I feel sorry for her to put it bluntly, I really feel sorry for her because she's under terrible strain ...um... she really doesn't know what to do. She keeps telling me, "I'll put the house on the market and give everything up and come and live in England." I say, "Well it's up to you..."</p> <p>(EDITING INDICATES HE IS CUT OFF SHARPLY AT THIS POINT.)</p> <p>Interestingly, it is she who is being constructed as the victim and not him. Why is this? Why not elaborate on his predicament as a man maybe near to death from cancer? Is it because he is elderly and she younger with teenage children? Is it too complicated for the narrative to deal with 2 different types of victim; that television news must keep the storyline simplified and easy for the audience to follow?</p>
<p>P</p>	<p>DA walks through door into corridor of official-looking building - a legal establishment.</p>	<p>Reporter: DA is now hoping the immigration service ruling...</p>
<p>Q</p>	<p>Enters office with unknown person (husband?) Greets two more people, a man and a woman, for formal meeting, though they seem to know each other. Sits down.</p>	<p>... can be overturned on a fast track basis by the US Dept of Justice, while she still tries to get her 1976</p>



conviction quashed.

The reporter closes the story for the audience, with a small sign of hope.

END

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Mr. Paul Shaw,
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September 20, 1996

Dear Mr. Shaw,

Thank you for your letter of 5th September and for your interest in observing the Channel Four News operation over the coming months in connection with your thesis research.

The project you are proposing sounds an interesting one and we are keen to help where we can. However, because we have many observers in the newsroom at different times it will be very difficult for us to agree to numerous visits. We are always inundated with requests and cannot oblige everyone. At the moment we also have students with us from a university media studies course and this association will continue next year too.

So, as I'm sure you will appreciate, it is difficult for a busy newsroom like ours to have more than one 'observer' in the newsroom at a time. With this in mind, though, we would be happy for you to come in and spend one day with us. If you give me a call on the above number, we can fix a time that will suit you best and that will fit in with our other observer commitments.

I am sorry this response is less than you had hoped for but I hope it will still help you with your research and I will look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Wilson
CHANNEL FOUR NEWS



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12 September 1997

Paul Shaw

Dear Paul,

Thank you for your letter. Sorry I haven't been able to reply earlier.

The different job titles in the news room are:

Controller of News and Current Affairs

Production Editors (3)

Producer (News Editor) (3)

Intake Editor

Planning Editor

Subs: Early, Lunchtime, Late, Day

Reporters and Presenters (3 district, 5 Bristol based reporters. 1 sports reporter. 2 presenters)

I hope this is useful.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Lewis (Mrs)
Newsroom Administrator

c4n home list C4N
wednesday 29th january

Status Tim
READY 1:1

PRESENTER SNOW, ZEINAB
REPORTERS TAYLOR, JBP, MACLEAN, BARKER, RADO, ROSS, GOODMAN(Wirral), GIBBON,
RUSH, SMITHC, MOORE, ANDREWS

BLOODY SUNDAY A campaign to reopen the inquiry into Bloody Sunday will be boosted tomorrow, with the release of official documents by the Home Office. Campaigners say they show enormous discrepancies in the evidence of soldiers involved in the shootings. Politicians are expected to join the campaign for a fresh investigation. THOMSON

LABOUR Labour's NEC meets today to consider Blair's plans to ensure that any future Labour administration is not dogged by internal strife. The leadership wants to give the NEC a greater role in policy formulation, at the expense of party conference which would become more like a rally. GIBBON

UNIONS The government will find some criticism from an unlikely quarter this morning for its policies on trade union reform. The CBI says proposals for curbing public sector strikes are unworkable. Although firms affected by strikes will be given the right to sue for damages, the CBI says in practice it will never happen. ROSS

POSS/OTHER

HUNGER Two more asylum seekers refuse fluids at Rochester prison

BUSES Government's own transport advisers criticise bus privatisation and deregulation.

ROAD Three tunnellers still resisting eviction on A30 in Devon

CONMAN "Miracle cure" man goes on trial for fraud

NURSES Dorrell launches recruitment campaign

WALES Major inaugurates microchip factory, with promise of 6,000 jobs

1 PROSPECTS TUESDAY ??? 08:39:16 05/08/97

PROSPECTS TUESDAY AUG 5th. 1997

DATE=05/08/97

TIME=08:15

Desk: Gill, John, Maurice
Pres - Main: Kevin, Elise *JANE*
Lunch: Jonathan
Reps - Simon, *Jane*, Lis, Mark, Elise
Glos: Jackie
Wilts: Derek
Som:
Sport: Matt

=====

FLOODS: OAPs evacuated as Gloucester is flooded. JACKIE/ Beard.

DRUGS; Henbury up in arms over drugs. Meeting 1900.

MARIA ASUMPTA: Jury likely to be sent out today. Exeter Crown Court.
Ex West Country?

KIDNEY; Swindon health chiefs turn down offer of much-needed dialysis machine because they don't have the money to run it. DEREK.

FIRE: Weston ice cream factory destroyed. Fulwood pics from overnight and getting more this morning.

JAW: Swindon man ends up with dislocated jaw after appointment with the dentist.

Pre-shot DEREK. Digitised but uncut.

PLAYGROUND; Lottery winner upsets Pewsey with 20 thousand pound supper playground for his kids. Villagers say it looks like a prison camp.

PUB; Lib Dems fight change in pub names in Somerset. Wheadon pics running for GMTV.

BOAT HIPPIES: To be chased. SIMON.

PAINTINGS: The Bsl medical illustrator and his paintings. JANE.

PARAGLIDING: Pix of woman champion available from family.

EX-GMTV:

=====

Royal Ordnance factory at Bridgwater benefits from big order.

CBI survey says West firms report drop in export orders.

400 items of fake merchandise seized by Glos. Trading Standards. TONY

New jobs at B'water engineering firm.

OTHERS:

=====

HEALTH: Chepstow girl sues Northampton Health Authority over medical blunder which has left her paralysed. JACKIE chasing.

CROP CIRCLE; star circle near Avebury.

BLIND; Blind gardener in Twerton creates colourful show. WDP.

FARMERS: Somerset's NFU chairman opens his farm at Bridgwater to environmental, animal welfare and rural interest groups. 1030.

BEER: Five breweries from Bsl area on shortlist for CAMRA's Beer of Britain award to be announced 1500 in London. (Central and others are there).

BLIND children being offered keyboard lessons in Bsl.

2 PROSPECTS TUESDAY ??? 08:39:16 05/08/97

SPORT:

=====

CRICKET; Future of game to be decided today.

FOOTBALL: Swindon v Man. Utd. Last night's match. Tape being collected from Wootton Bassett at 1100.

SWIM: Clevedon man to swim Irish Channel this weekend.

SYNC. SWIM: Portishead 0830. MATT/ Breckon. Also live for lunch.

GOLF: Snooker stars in charity golf day at St. Pierre Club, Chepstow.

ROLLOVERS:

=====

: Mesh-Sam (Beta) : Trumpet Man - Tony (NW)

PRESHOTS;

TREE; Gloucestershire Woman goes to court of appeal for permission to demolish messy tree. 1300 JACKIE/ Beard.

BALLOONS: Part pre-shoot Russian stunt plane pilot John Griffin who's appearing at the Balloon Fiesta. Compton Abbass 1500 LIS/ KEN.

POLICE FILE; AM Fulwood.

Story Slug	Operational	Editorial	Details	Last Mod By	Time Last Mod
PROD DAVE LUNCH VICKI	PORTERS >>>>>>	Richard in at 1330 due to 2128 but going straight to story (see below). no editor in stoke. JC CP JY LD GL.		Alison Marsh	09:00:29
DAWN RAID	LD - filming for tomorrow			Claire Bisho	15:17:59
FORRESTER		Released yesterday, now at home with family...we can phone him AFTER 10:00AM (he didn't get back til 3am) on 0121-241-5631 for possible interview. (351 Queslett Road)		Vicki Berry	19:06:02
HEADLESS CORPSE	LS- brekkie, lunch (preshot)	Would have been his 21st birthday today - police and family speak to us.		Claire Bisho	15:57:47
HOAX CALLERS	- preshot yesterday; on local radio but not TV. Brekkie, lunch.	Staffs fire service clamping down on hoax callers.		Claire Bisho	16:00:48
MARCELLA DAVIS	PW	Should finish today. Message left with Robin Corbett (Chair Home Affairs Cttee) for live tonight - 0171 2153420		Claire Bisho	14:35:54
SMILES				Vicki Berry	09:26:12
TOUGH LOVE	JC- MTD only	Series called Little Angels starts tonight on BBC1 called Little Angels - looks at how a centre in Cheltenham is helping families with naughty kids. Request in for a clip from the programme itself.		Claire Bisho	17:06:58
POLICE HISTORY	- might make for lunch depending on how canal book shoot goes; MTD (preshot)	Vera, whose husband and family were all policemen, has published an illustrated book on the history of H'shire Police Force. From inception to amalgamation. Old Pix, some moving archive (we hope)She also has mini-museum.		Claire Bisho	11:38:34
CANAL BOOK	JY filming am - hold as stby	BOOK ON BIRCHILLS CANAL, WALSALL, LAUNCHED TODAY. OLD BUGGERS OFF BOATS YOUNG BUGGERS ON BOATS. OLD PIX, NEW PIX, MIXES, MUSIC, NOSTALGIA BY THE BILGE BUGKETLOAD.		Claire Bisho	11:24:48

Story Slug	Operational	Editorial	Details	Last Mod By	Time Last Mod
CAT HOME THREAT	RS -MTD only	Wellcat Animal Sanctuary in Quinton's been going for 30 years looking after 100 cats a week but money's getting v. tight. Used to rely on a charity shop - but it's been forced to close. Now they're using up reserves...they say law needs to be much tougher against cruelty to avoid so many unwanted/ill cats. Loads and loads of cats everywhere, inc. some unusual ones eg. have cerebral palsy...Main interviewee: Pauline Beasley on 426 5594. RS 1330. Meant to be a standby but can go today.		Claire Bisho	11:37:52
STORY OF TOILETS	GL - MTD ONLY	Twyford's will hand over its collection of toilets to complete what will be the world's first ever toilet museum ever. Part of the Gladstone potteries museum the collection is to get its own building later in the year. Today you can see the best of the bunch on display as children from a local brass band play handbells water music. Also filming at the Twyford's factory where we can see hi-tech toilets being made and tested using plastic poos		Claire Bisho	15:19:28
ISABEL PEAKE		Check to see if DNA results in.		Lucy Mellings	17:32:39
FLOODING BACKLASH		People who were flooded in Middlemoor Road, Northfields say the council has done absolutely nothing at all since our cameras were there and yet they were promised help with new floorboards etc. We interviewed Angela Cummins and she's on 0788 4462291		Claire Bisho	17:23:34
FIRE ENGINES D DAY		FRE AUTHORITY MEETS TO TAKE FINAL DECISION ON HALVING THE NUMBER OF FIRE ENGINES IN WHITCHURCH, LUDLOW, MARKET DRAYTON AND BRIDGNORTH. LP/JG		Lyndee Prickett	11:21:50
MP COURT CASE		TRIAL DUE TO TAKE PLACE OF SEAN PETER COLOHAN, ACCUSED THREATENING VIOLENCE TO PAUL MARSDEN MP AT BEFORE STAFFORD CROWN COURT.		Anne Delaney	11:15:28
SCULPTURE		New sculpture being unveiled in Warwick outside the Shire Hall at 11am. Heron and fish apparently... Contact 0411 847573		Sarah Loat	15:20:07