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News Style: How the Discourses of Newswriting Produce and Restrict British Broadsheet News Texts

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Abstract

The study explores aspects of how British broadsheet news journalists produce news stories. It seeks to understand news texts in terms of their production within the journalistic community so as to develop a critique and investigate alternative ways of writing. Chapter one situates the study against the author's personal concerns as a practising journalist. Chapter two draws on a Foucauldian model of discourse, Etienne Wenger's theorisation of communities of practice and journalists' own understanding of their writing in terms of style to describe the situated knowledge within which news texts are produced. Chapter three places the study historically, arguing that 'modern' news discourse as a mode of practice, writing and understanding the world developed between 1880 and 1930 in Britain. Following chapters analyse this knowledge of writing in a number of ways. Chapter four uses journalists' memoirs and other metatexts to investigate how news texts make sense from within the practice. Chapter five reads the work of students on a postgraduate journalism course to explore what needs to be learnt in order to gain competence in news writing. Chapters six and seven analyse news texts from British broadsheets in terms of news writing practice. Chapter six suggests that a number of aspects of news texts can be accounted for in terms of journalists' search for capital within their community, and chapter seven that news texts are constructed with only loose coherence. Chapter eight draws these points together in an exploration of the potential of online journalism to offer ways of writing outside or on the edge of this practice.

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Chapter 1: Prologue

Claud Cockburn on The Times' Washington correspondent, Wilmott Lewis:
*News, he used to say, is in itself nothing. Presentation is almost everything.
The entire question, he would insist, is a question of style.*

(Cockburn, 1956, p.232)

1. The study's questions and orientation

When a newspaper reporter sits down at his or her computer to write an article, or telephones the office right on deadline to dictate a last minute story, he or she is likely to use a particular and distinctive form of language. There is a limited set of words that crops up again and again in newspaper texts, there are certain phrases that recur, conventional ways of stringing ideas together, general features such as an intro and a few paragraphs of quotations, and particular ways of addressing or invoking the article's readership. What is significant about such details of language is that they can be predicted regardless of a particular story's content, or the circumstances of collecting and processing the story, or which particular reporter is doing the work. The news reporter facing the blank computer screen actually faces a space criss-crossed with rules, conventions and techniques of writing. This study is about that space and about the language which emerges in it, which I will call news style. For reasons of time and space, nearly all my examples and discussion focus on British broadsheet newswriting, and its specific findings can only tentatively be extrapolated to broadsheets in other English language traditions, to tabloids or to newswriting for other media. I would, however, want to argue that the space of news style is shaped in similar ways throughout Anglo-American journalism.

The observation that news style is independent of the content of any particular story is important for two reasons. Firstly, it raises questions about aspects of journalism's ideology, particularly the idea that the news is a window upon the world. Secondly, it leads to questions about what effect news style has upon what can be written and what can become news. These questions can be addressed using solely the evidence of news texts, by examining the types of story which tend to get in the paper, or the

differences between source material and news texts, or the larger patterns of ideas which these language forms favour. The findings of textual media analysis are well-known: the news is patterned by values of what is newsworthy, it exaggerates and simplifies source texts, and the pressures on contemporary news practice tend to point in the same conservative and conformist direction.¹ The news is no window or mirror. I will draw upon textual analysis, but this study has a slightly different focus to that tradition. The focus here is on news style as action within the journalism community. I examine the rules and conventions criss-crossing the reporter's screen by analysing how journalists write the news. This study argues that news discourse, as I will call the accumulation of these ways of writing which precede any particular story, is not just a place of hegemonic struggle, but is a way of understanding the world through knowing how to write it down. Moreover, the ways of understanding of news discourse, for all their strengths in producing news on deadline, can be described as overwhelmingly strategic forms of action which produce informational nuggets and only in very limited term as communicative action.² The study will build up a critique of the ethos, the ontological stance, of newswriting in terms of what kind of communicative encounter is fostered by the conventions of news style.

The study thus focuses on newswriting as a social practice rather than a set of formulae. Newswriting practice is not a simple mechanism, however much that idea might be attractive to some journalists as a way of producing an ideal, objective writing (see chapter four), but is a complex and sometimes self-contradictory bundle of techniques and ideas. If journalists simply processed information, we might expect that press releases written to read like news stories would be published verbatim. As Allan Bell points out, press releases tend to be written as they are precisely so that newspapers will swallow them whole (1991, p.58). But in the same breath he notes that journalists despise press releases, and see them as less than news. There is no simple rule here, but instead a negotiation between journalists' understanding of news as the truth and the news outlet's textual requirements. Bell finds in fact that some press releases on significant topics do make it onto the page relatively

¹ The phrasing of this last point is Ralph Miliband's (1973; quoted in Curran, 1996a, p.138).

² This dichotomy belongs to Jürgen Habermas' theory of discourse ethics, to which we will return.

unscathed, but any journalist will also testify that huge numbers are interpreted very critically or simply binned. The picture is far from easy to explain. The journalist Brian MacArthur (1999) writes in his *Times* media column—in a piece subtitled, ‘Why good English still matters to a few of us’—that ‘newspapers remain the guardians of the style and usage of the world’s main common language’. But when journalists think of actual news stories, they ignore, almost without exception, the textual dimension to their work. The two sides of the news process, newsgathering and newswriting, are strangely segregated. How, then, do journalists use words, how does news style affect what they write, and how do journalists negotiate the limits of news language? The study argues that, in order to account for this complexity, we must look closely at reporters’ practices, and describe in some depth the ways they use language and understand their use of it.

My use of these terms will also, I hope, indicate the limits of this study. I am not claiming that understanding newswriting gives us a complete understanding of the news. Who journalists talk to, what they see and why they act as they do in collecting the news are affected by many cultural and social forces other than those focused upon the textual product. But newswriting is a vital dimension of news practice—half the job, really—and all the more worth examining because journalists themselves have paid little attention to it and understood it in curiously limited ways.

2. The personal motivation

That last point is perhaps my main personal motivation for undertaking this study, and it may help the reader to follow my path to the start of this analysis. I became interested in the issues surrounding news language during my training as a reporter and my work as a newspaper reporter in New Zealand/Aotearoa from 1994 to 1997, an environment heavily influenced in its practice by British newspapers, particularly broadsheets. I came straight from a degree in English literature that had taught me to be conscious of how language was used and, despite the New Critical assumptions of many of my lecturers, had begun to make me think about how language might relate to issues of ideology, power and culture. As a reporter I could not either put my finger on what troubled me about newswriting practice or carve out for myself fresh

ways of writing, but the experience gradually coalesced into the determination to study the area.

As a journalist (I worked as a specialist education reporter) I felt a sense of unease about news practice on a number of levels. I could work my way around most of these. I was determined not to intrude on people's privacy or bully them into giving me the news my paper wanted, and was fortunate that the demands of my employer did not pressure me to do so. I did not believe that reporting could be objective, and was lucky enough to work on a paper and under a chief reporter who encouraged a more evaluative and probing kind of reporting, although I am not sure I always lived up to the values of fairness, accuracy and responsibility with which I replaced objectivity. I was determined not to be a stooge of authority, and wrote articles which were certainly not respectful of government, again at a risk of not always being fair to public servants. But I had great difficulty in pinpointing what I felt uneasy about when it came to the way journalism put its texts together. I was aware of the phenomenon I point to above, that, when I sat down to write, the potential news story was already organised by a set of appropriate ways to work. It felt as if the education issues I wrote about ended up all looking the same, or at least as a small number of fairly formulaic stories. It also felt as if my education stories were very similar to the stories of other reporters. I was also conscious that the conventions of intros or quotations did not always do justice to the subtleties of what people said to me. Above all, I was conscious of the form of the news as something that was doing something to the content, and that I should not be conscious of this because I thereby undermined my authoritative claim in every news story to be just telling the news.

I was therefore conscious of a failure of journalism's stated aims to account for its textual products. This was not, for me, so much a matter of the truth claim of the news text. Journalism does not seem to me to really claim, certainly not in daily practice, that its articles are exactly true representations of the world, rather that they are justifiable approximations—'assertions with visiting rights' upon the truth (Romano, 1986, p.73) and 'adequate' for the job (Harris and Spark, 1966, p.100). For me the problem was more to do with the kinds of things that could be represented in

news style. I found my stories producing meanings I had not intended and could not vouch for, omitting ideas that were too difficult to communicate and losing touch with things beyond my computer screen. The old accusation that reporters wouldn't want to let the truth get in the way of a good story seemed the sharp end of an actual problem with the language of the news.

I do not want to overemphasise this concern. News reporting is admirable from a number of points of view. Despite the attempts of governments and powerful interests to hobble it, there is often real effect in journalism's idealised images of itself as standing up against abuse of power and reflecting society's imperfections back to itself. The techniques of newswriting which emerged near the start of the twentieth century (which I discuss in chapter three) are a great achievement. Every news story has an opening sentence of 20 to 30 words that tells the whole story, evaluates it and advertises it to readers at the same time. Every day, subeditors at large newspapers such as the *New York Times* distil literally millions of words into a few hundred thousand words of informative stories in a matter of hours (Evans, 1972, p.2). If the tools to perform these tasks were not given to each reporter already developed and well honed, the work would be all but impossible. But what concerned me as a reporter, and what led to this study, was the rigidity of these processes, both as textual and social practice.

I remember a few months into my journalism training feeling chuffed about my growing ability to write like a journalist. It was quite an intoxicating thing. I noticed that simple statements became authoritative and powerful once couched in news terms. I could add background statements such as, 'It is the first time the committee has met since the mayor's resignation,' to the articles I had published in the local community paper. These echoed with political know-how. I noticed too, as I did not have any experience of the situations I was writing about, that once I could negotiate the style these gaps in my knowledge did not show. Eric Jacobs notes a similar experience while a junior reporter on the *Guardian*:

I was able to depict the unions and the Labour Party as almost invariably in the right, and the bosses and the Tory government in the wrong, as in: 'The

Transport and General Workers' Union made a mockery of government policy last night when...' I came to think of these as little scoops of interpretation, and besides they were more dramatic. More cosmic, more fun than saying, 'The TGWU called a strike in Britain's docks last night.'

(Jacobs, 1996, p.115)

There is a sense of power for the journalist once she or he is able to tap into these little phrases and stylistic details. Writing intros, or rewriting others' work in the sub-editing class, gave me the same sense of power. There may be of course a general pleasure in feeling in control of language and more specific satisfaction in succeeding at a task, but I had a clear impression of the power that news style afforded. For some reason, it was not subject to the social sanctions on making categorical statements about others or to the self-monitoring of other ways of writing or speaking. It was not judged by its ability to construct an argument (as academia) or make links between ideas and data (as science) or communicate something about the writer. I experienced the status and authority of a journalist merely by being able to use its key forms.

The need to take into account the newspaper's readers also receded before the authority of newswriting. I think that at first I pitched my writing primarily at my image of the journalist—as a student I wanted to sound like a reporter. Later, in the workplace, I pitched my writing at my chief reporter. We reporters thought of ourselves as aiming our stories at a determinate readership, and translated ideas or gave background to events for its benefit, but that readership was an imagined one created in the space between the reporter and the news desk, and it was influenced as much by our desire to have our stories used prominently and at some length as our knowledge that most of our readers lived within a particular geographic area. It was quite a shock to me to discover that my neighbour, a widow aged about 65, read her paper from back to front, reading last—if at all—the articles I had struggled to get onto page one. Two points arise out of this orientation of our writing. Firstly, the closed loop of reporter and news editor allowed news style to partly define its own audience. Secondly, the distance of the audience reduced the need for any interpersonal dimension to news stories, allowing only minimal space for a reader to

position himself or herself in relation to the reporter's position, and in particular, to disagree with it. The news seemed authoritative and unmotivated by any personal considerations, and perhaps for this reason seemed to me so powerful a mode of writing. I will discuss these issues surrounding journalists' conception of their audience in more depth in the following chapter.

Journalists would claim that good writing stands above 'journalese', as it has been stigmatised. There was a conscious and heavy emphasis at the *Evening Post* in Wellington, where I first worked, on a 'punchy' style, something differentiated from what was seen as the clichéd, jargon-filled style of the Press Association or Wellington's morning paper, the *Dominion*. Stories were expected to be direct and denotative (periphrasis was frowned on, as was the jargon of news sources—a toaster might be called an 'appliance' but not a fire engine, the deputy editor wrote in a memo). The 'best' writing was active in voice and paratactic in syntax, and as a result seemed to belong to daily life rather than to the institutions of power. The official briefing paper was assumed to be tainted by its turgid style, while the reporter's translation of it into a news story was understood to read primarily in terms of its content—a set of understandings looked at in more detail in chapter six. There were no tools provided in the newsroom with which to critique this understanding of language, because news style was defined as the way to write well.

For me, language became an issue most obviously in writing about Maori or Pacific Islanders. As an education reporter I dealt with Maori and Pacific Islands groups arguing for culturally relative education. I was also for three months the *Evening Post's* Maori Affairs reporter. In all these contacts, I was struck by how difficult it was to write about Maori perspectives. News discourse by and large does not allow terms from other languages when writing about domestic issues, except in direct quotations. Terms used by Maori when speaking in English were usually those which were most culturally specific and so least easily translatable. *Kuia* is an obvious example. A *kuia* is literally an old woman or grandmother, but the word carries with it a bundle of connotations such as cultural knowledge, status, authority and caring. It may simply denote a Maori woman who is older than the speaker but fits aspects of

the definition. A *kuiā* does certain things and not others. She will teach in Maori language schools but will rarely engage in public speaking (an important male activity in traditional Maori culture), putting her in an in-between position towards an education reporter used to dealing with school principals. So getting comment from a *kuiā* was hard enough for the journalist, let alone finding a tag phrase to describe her role in the confined space of an article. I hardly ever saw the word used by New Zealand journalists. This was partly because of the convention against ‘foreign’ words, partly because of the difficulty a Pakeha (white New Zealander) had in using the word correctly, and partly because it would need explaining, thus making the word itself useless as part of the abbreviated, denotative vocabulary of the reporter. These reasons overlap. It seems to me now that there was another level to the problem. The discourse of journalism, in the largest sense, was at odds with Maori culture. Its assumptions about language, identity, what was important knowledge—that is, what was ‘news’ for the different cultures—and a host of other concepts made it very difficult to write a satisfactory article about issues of importance to Maori. I often felt I had somehow failed all parties in these stories.

The reform of the qualifications system in New Zealand/Aotearoa, taking place during my time as a reporter, also fitted uncomfortably into news discourse. The reforms tried to remove the distinctions between a range of educational ideas: senior school versus post-school education, vocational training versus academic learning, teaching versus assessment and work versus learning. The reform was delivered by measuring all learning in standard units of achievement. It was a minor triumph for me to find phrases to describe unit standards—eg, ‘the building blocks out of which qualifications will be made’—that saved me using a large proportion of my tight word limit in explaining the issues. News language is dominated by events, facts—entities of various sorts—which can be isolated and verified. A paragraph usually serves to describe one of these. Even quotations are treated as entities. But the qualifications reforms were driven by abstract concepts, and even worse, by a realignment of concepts. So journalists, including me, tended to describe the reforms in terms of what they would do to existing institutions: examinations, schools, work. Inevitably the debate became polarised into stories about the destruction or

preservation of these institutions. Examinations were destined to remain, but because the reforms were introducing school-based assessment they were represented as meaning the end of the institution of examinations. This was particularly the case in intros.

By contrast, I found the easiest type of news story to write was the breaking news story about an event, preferably an accident. Breaking stories were largely prewritten, and reporters needed only to fit the functional elements together with the 'facts' to create a news story. The difficult part of these stories was gleaning those facts. The 'news pegs' came from a narrow range of schemata: scale of disaster, blame, shock value or freakishness. So the intros were easy to write. Let me give a quickly found example from the *Glasgow Herald*:

Thousands of homes in the West of Scotland were involved in a water contamination scare last night after unexplained vegetable matter entered the public water system.

(‘NEWS INFOCUS’, *The Herald Electronic*, 9 October, 1997)

The structure, ‘Thousands of...were involved/affected by/forced to... after...’ is very common in intros. I counted it twice in the very small number of breaking news stories in the *Herald* of the day before. This type of intro is strengthened by local significance (the people are from the West of Scotland in this instance), by a sense of the passivity of its victims, accentuating the straightforward perpetrator-victim relationship and by the generalness of the event (the it-could-have-been-me feeling). I found these stories easy to write, and had fewer doubts about the quality of my work there. Because they offered total and self-contained stories and seemed not to involve writing,³ it was less apparent that they were partial accounts of the world and poor translations of ideas. But they are not representative of journalism. The two editions of the *Herald* I skimmed to find the above intro contained very few simple event stories, and were dominated instead by stories about institutions or people (e.g., political, court and education stories). These types of stories are more complex

³ That is, because they were so formulaic, the reporter did not have to work hard to find the words and was therefore less aware of issues of language.

in every aspect of their style, and I am not at all sure they can be subsumed beneath the breaking story's conventions.

As a journalist, I tried at odd moments to write in different ways. But I found it very hard to write short, lively or hard-hitting articles in any way other than in the dominant news style. One factor is obvious: time. Usually I did not have the time to think hard about my writing, working firstly on an afternoon paper where I had about three hours to research and write the day's breaking news stories and then on a short-staffed weekly paper where quantity edged out quality. Then again, I was a good but not a brilliant journalist by any stretch, and perhaps should not look too deep for my shortcomings.

But these pretheoretical thoughts point to key themes addressed in this study, and which it finds to be problematic elements of news style. My awareness as a trainee reporter of journalism's privileged and powerful position outside some social norms is analysed in chapter three in terms of the self-contained discourse of journalism which established itself in the early twentieth century. My strong sense of writing for an audience constructed within the newsroom as being simply interested in the facts,⁴ and my awareness of a closed loop, militating against any critique of news language, in which good news was defined by news style, are theorised in chapter two within the conception of journalism as a community of practice which seeks largely internal criteria for its practice and negotiates external pressures in terms of the community. The failure of journalism to account for its language in any depth, and in particular contradictory conceptions of the news as a thing in the world rather than something written yet as also a bastion against the debasement of the language, can be seen as an aspect of the way language is controlled within journalism. News style is partly a way of limiting the idea of language as something creative or constructive of the world, so that journalism can continue to claim to just tell the news. The power of becoming competent in news style that I was aware of is analysed in depth in chapter five. The novice journalist takes on a position in the world and a form of knowledge.

once she or he controls these linguistic tools, that puts her or him on the inside of an immensely authoritative field of practice. My awareness of the rigidity of newswriting practice, that made breaking news stories easy and Maori education stories always unsatisfactory, leads into the analysis in chapter six of the significant work that the forms of news style do in the community, and therefore to an appreciation both of the inwardness of news practice in its understanding of what good journalism entails, and of the difficulty of attaining capital within the news community with other language forms. In particular my awareness of a formulaic quality to the news is analysed there in terms of the immense value of certain set phrases to the news that is never simply a formula, but a pragmatic yet limited way of finding meaning in news material. My awareness of the power of news style to give my story authority and also to do violence to other people's words leads into an analysis in chapter seven of the techniques by which journalism displaces responsibility for the coherence of the messages in the news onto others. Finally, discussion of the limitations that the news community places on writing are brought to a point in chapter eight in an analysis of the possibilities of the emergent forms of online journalism in forging other ways of writing the news.

As a whole, I hope this study helps to critique the totalising effect of news style. News reporting is an activity which requires the writer to identify with its discourse to a very large extent. Journalists internalise what makes a good story, and so have little critical distance from those conventions. To succeed in this environment, and success is important in the insecure and ever-changing world of journalism, reporters have to be part of, or at least be able to get around in, the particular practices of the newsroom. One particular way of writing, or perhaps one particular set of techniques, has newswriting by the throat, so that it is difficult to write in any other way. Certain things can be said, particularly news of discrete events and those related to the dominant culture, while others voices and topics are marginalised. To critique this practice from a position that is not immediately rejected as alien to journalism, we

⁴ Herbert Gans also finds that journalists imagine readers who are interested in what journalists want to tell them, or at least that every story will interest someone, so that they can focus on the news as the most important or interesting events of the day (1980, p.240).

need to defamiliarise its style, to cast back news language as a medium rather than the event itself, so that we can begin to say how the news might change. I hope to do that in the following analysis.

Chapter 2: Theorising journalists' knowledge of writing: Discourse, community and style

Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache (Being that can be understood is language).

(Hans-Georg Gadamer)

[N]ewswriting is heavily influenced by stereotypes and by preconceptions of what 'the story' should be. Without pre-established categories of what constitutes 'news', it is impossible to sort out experience. There is an epistemology of the fait divers. To turn a squeal sheet [the police station's crime sheet for reporters] into an article requires training in perception and in the manipulation of standardized images, clichés, 'angles', 'slants' and scenarios, which will call forth a conventional response in the minds of editors and readers.

(Robert Darnton, 1975, p.189)

1. Introduction

This study seeks to understand journalism in terms of its style, that is, as I will define it below, in terms of the language of the news as it is used. In Jan Ekecrantz's words, the news text rewards close study 'because that is *where the action is*... Texts do not only do things with one another: people do things with texts and texts do things with people' (1997a, p.21). At the same time the study is about what journalists know when they write, both their formal knowledge of how to write and their knowledge of the world. I hope the idea of style brings these two dimensions together. In Robert Darnton's words, there is an 'epistemology of the fait divers' bundled up in the everyday writing strategies which journalists learn, an 'ancient cookie cutter' that shapes both what can be written and the way that is done (1975, p.189). There is a risk that we misrepresent journalism if we search for an ideology or a philosophy underpinning the news, but a more phenomenological approach—an approach which, following Gadamer, looks at journalism's stance towards the world in its language—can I think work towards an theorisation that is sensitive to the practice's particularities. As the American journalist Jack Fuller writes, most journalists:

consider themselves skeptics, but this is not so much a matter of philosophy as of style. Even among themselves, they rarely discuss the nature of the claims of truth they make in their work or the basis of the disciplines they follow in furtherance of those claims. And when they do think about the underpinning of their reports, they usually get no further than debating a two-source rule for unattributed statements or repeating the catechisms of Chicago's legendary institute of street wisdom, the City News Bureau: 'If your mother says she loves you, check it out.'

(Fuller, 1996, p.4)

I argue that analysis of the style which Fuller talks of, the mundane wisdom of the newsroom and the various ways of writing that work together to construct journalism's knowledge of its material, enables us to specify key aspects of the effectiveness and the limitedness of the news at making daily sense of the world. To engage in such analysis, I will use two further analytic concepts as well as news style: news discourse and the news community. This theoretical chapter discusses each of these three concepts in detail before drawing the argument together into a theorisation of the communicative relation between writer and reader in the news.

2. Discourse

2.1. Defining discourse

I will begin with a theory of the linguistic and the social. Hans-Georg Gadamer writes that: 'when you take a word in your mouth you must realise that you have not taken a tool that can be thrown aside if it won't do the job, but you are fixed in a direction which comes from afar and stretches beyond you' (1979 [1965], p.496). When you place yourself in a verbal act, you are engaged with the social world, engaged in a two-way process of understanding with others, and committed to an act of understanding which calls up your prejudgements and comprises a horizon of prior knowledge and expectation. You place yourself, Gadamer says, in a moment of being through language, a 'thereness' and a 'nowness', a position in relation to the world and all the rest of language. This particular theory is not the last word on hermeneutics, but it pinpoints something of the ontological mystery of language, the circular relationship between language and society within which the language-using

individual is situated, and within which I want to place my analysis of news journalism. A world 'comes into language' when words are used, and the words take on meaning in that act of representing (ibid., p.401).

There are a number of implications of such a position, common perhaps to a number of ways of thinking, but brought together well here. I want to discuss four of these briefly. One is that language has no priority over the social (or vice versa), but is inseparable from it. I want to keep hold of that idea throughout this study. However, the choice of a method of analysis necessarily requires some emphasis one way or another, so that we have to shear off an aspect of the whole to examine any of it. In this study I hold up the textual object of the news, with its roots of discursive construction and social meaningfulness hanging off it.

The second implication is that the idea of the individual loses definition, and certainly has no metaphysical, originary role. Instead it makes sense to talk of actions situated in time and place, which we can gather together in the idea of *practice*. The individual speaks, but not alone. She or he always speaks as a social voice that is situated against other language. This is not to deny the individual some agency, but focuses more in ontological terms on situated practice than in psychological terms on the actor. The position of the journalist is thought of as a way of being, an orientation towards the world, that an individual takes on when practising journalism. Like Étienne Wenger, whose thinking I return to in the next section, I want to discuss a whole bundle of terms from identity to knowledge to meaning to learning as inter-related aspects of social practice (Wenger, 1998, p.6). Anthony Giddens' (1984) term 'structuration' similarly tries to resolve the polarisation of action and structure by looking at how people place themselves or are placed in society.

The third implication builds on the phenomenological concept of 'horizon'. Putting a word in your mouth—engaging in the act of speaking—involves standing in relation to a world that is bounded by your sense of what can be thought, so that you see things in their place. In speech a commonsensical lifeworld comes into play, that forms the taken-for-granted basis for action. This stance is not simply a fixed

tradition but a horizon that moves with the speaker as the situation changes or as meaningful action happens. Such a theorisation of the lifeworld is basic to my argument, but can be a little thin for this study's questions, and I will also, therefore, draw on other theorists. In particular, the link between the material world/word and the ontological stance of the sayer is not entirely clear in this train of thinking.⁵ How, we might ask, is Gadamer's 'fundamentally linguistic' lifeworld held in common by people and in what way does it act as the basis for action? Rather than use 'horizon', I will use the related idea of a 'field' of practice, as used by thinkers such as Michel Foucault, because it describes in a more precise way what happens in that space between the word and its horizon.

But before I discuss that further, I want to touch on a fourth implication of this thinking, to which I will return in section 5 below. Gadamer's hermeneutic is partly an ethic, a statement valuing certain ways of understanding in language use.

Gadamer holds that 'true understanding', which he defines as understanding which reaches out beyond the understander's horizon, understands what the Other 'truly says to us'. It does not seek to assimilate that Other's meanings, but to hear them. Readers or listeners should leave their assumptions open to challenge, 'so that the text may present itself to us in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against our fore-meanings' (Gadamer, 1979 [1965], p.238). By extension, the writer of the text must seek to write all his or her truth and hold him or herself in a stance towards subject matter that is neither neutrality nor the extinction of the self, but again a consciousness of his or her assumptions. Gadamer should not be thought of as giving a pessimistic view of our isolation within our limited socially defined horizons, but as trying to describe conditions for understanding in a post-Kantian philosophy, where universal reason is suspected as an assimilative force rather than held up as a ground for the way society should be and the way we should act within it. This position is used in the study as a point from which to critique the ethos of twentieth-century journalism. Using 'ethos' in Heidegger's sense of Being's 'basic stance of dwelling in the world' rather than reifying it as 'the good', we can engage

⁵ I have a similar difficulty with Alfred Schutz's model of the lifeworld, where the relationship of experience of language and experience in language are not made clear (cf. Schutz and Luckmann,

in critique of an impoverishment of that stance, and in particular follow these thinkers by describing a contrast between the technologised ontology of modern society, within which news style is embedded, and an ethos committed to engagement and understanding. Section 5 develops this ethical dimension to the study further.

To return to the theorisation of social actors' inhabiting of language, I want to ground this discussion in Foucault's method. He, in a similar way to the phenomenologists, thinks of a discursively constructed or negotiated world, but emphasises the extent to which people are trapped within that language. Analysing how social power works through a myriad of statements which criss-cross and inter-relate to make up a field of knowledge, he seeks to define the discursive formations of contemporary society as follows:

[T]his field is made up of the totality of all effective statements (whether spoken or written), in their dispersion as events and in the occurrence that is proper to them. Before approaching, with any degree of certainty, a science, or novels, or political speeches, or the *oeuvre* of an author, or even a single book, the material with which one is dealing with is, in its raw, neutral state, a population of events in the space of discourse in general. One is led therefore to the project of a *pure description of discursive events* as the horizon for the search for the unities which form within it.

(Foucault, 1989 [1972], pp.26-7; italics in original)

What is said or written, in other words, can be studied according to the field of statements in which it is acting. The field of practice shapes itself in the language within which it is understood. To use one of Foucault's more famous slogans, discourses are 'practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak' (ibid., p.49). Language, then, has considerable power as social action. The discursive formation defines issues such as what can be said, what can be spoken about, who can say it, what cognitive status and authority a statement has, how statements are conceptualised and how they are theorised (Gutting, 1989, p.232).

1974, pp.16ff).

Using this theory of a field of knowledge, we can begin to analyse how journalists know stories. An anecdote from one journalist about how he entered the practice is a revealing introduction to this analysis. The story, from the autobiography of Sefton Delmer, the *Daily Express*'s Berlin correspondent during the 1930s, is particularly useful because it is not only a discursive event which makes sense within the field of journalism, but because it is about entering that field. The *Express*'s proprietor, Lord Beaverbrook, had taken Delmer on a stroll through Berlin's Tiergartenpark in an idiosyncratic job interview. Delmer mentioned in passing some German bank clerks he knew who arrived early each morning at work in order to learn English, and Beaverbrook seized on the information as a perfect news story illustrating the difference between the Germans and the British. Delmer writes:

Of course, what Beaverbrook was doing was to give me a lesson in news spotting. I had seen nothing remarkable in those early morning lessons. I had not thought of them as what journalists call a story. Now I knew better.

(Delmer, 1961, p.69)

This retelling of the moment occurs from within news discourse, and therefore uses its sense-making practices. Delmer talks first in terms of seeing, of 'news *spotting*' and '*seeing* nothing remarkable'. Yet when he sees the clerks as newsworthy, he is also beginning to think in terms of 'what journalists call a *story*'. And the change from seeing the clerks as 'nothing remarkable' to seeing them as a story indicates that this is not just about what the eyes can pick up, but about a form of knowledge that conditions his vision: 'Now I *knew* better.' Seeing the news, seeing indeed the textual object of a story in events, and thereby knowing the world as a journalist are inter-connected in Delmer's traversing of the journalism field. Beaverbrook's statements and Delmer's story told 30 years later take place on the field of news discourse, and contribute to that discourse's operation. Immediately we also see the way in which journalism turns people's actions into objects for its use: the clerks and their Prussian dedication to learning are reified into 'a story', slotted into Darnton's stereotypes and preconceptions so that they become amenable to news texts. The trade is here displaying to its novice the technology by which it turns events in the world into something it can use.

Norman Fairclough's application of Foucault's theory is a useful jumping off point for this study. Delmer's words are, in Fairclough's version of discourse analysis, 'linguistic facets of "domains of thought"...sociohistorically constituted in the form of points of stabilization which produce the subject and simultaneously along with him what he is given to see, understand, do, fear and hope' (1992, p.31). The words are points of stabilisation in that they can be seen as moments when thought can be made material and therefore shared and when social structures can be articulated and therefore made effective. They are simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice and an instance of social practice (p.4). Theoretically, I follow much of Fairclough's discourse analysis here, and this chapter is in fact organised around the three aspects which Fairclough identifies here: language, discourse and social action. But my object of study is different. Fairclough seeks to use such analysis to integrate linguistic and social theory, and to find in the study of discourse—and news discourse in particular—a 'barometer of rapidly changing times,' a way of observing the way the ideological wind is blowing (p.61). As I note in chapter three, he shows how the news weaves together a range of voices and imposes an order upon them. But he reads this order in terms of ideological structures in society (1995, p.77), while I am more interested in the particularity of news discourse, how it itself organises the world in certain ways, in order to critique those practices. I am interested here, in other words, in the discourse *of* the news rather than discourses contained *in* the news; how it weaves other voices rather than what voices are woven together.

2.2. Discourse's implications: contrasts with some existing analyses

Using this theoretical frame to investigate news practice, asking how news discourse works, what its field of operation looks like and what it produces, takes us away from a number of the usual landmarks in the study of journalism. I will briefly position this study against four of these, analysis of news values, analysis of cognitive structures in the news, theories about journalism's function and critique in terms of ideology. My purpose is more to illustrate the implications of the theory than to analyse the literature.

When we take discourse as the ground rather than just the product of journalism's practices, that is, when we give language an effectiveness in the news, it begins to make less sense to think of the production of news as governed by values. There is certainly strong evidence in the literature that journalists operate according to shared sets of values. Herbert Gans describes the enduring values of American journalists as, in general, 'motherhood values' characteristic of white, middle-class small-town America, including ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy and responsible capitalism (1980, pp.42ff.; see also Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Schlesinger, 1987 [1978]). Working from purely textual evidence, Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge (1970 [1965]) provide a robust list of a dozen news values of international news, which shows, to give just two examples, that events in close proximity to the newspaper will take precedence over those far away and that events that happen close to the newspaper's deadline are more newsworthy than those happening at other times. But a discursive approach asks different questions: how do these values arise in practice, how can we trace their effects, what is their relation to what is said? Two problems arise. Firstly, as Gaye Tuchman (1978) shows (although she works from a purely phenomenological rather than discursive position), what Galtung and Ruge call a 'consideration' in selecting the news can sometimes perhaps better be seen as an action which the journalist performs on things, casting a 'news net' of deadlines, news beats and routines on the world which causes occurrences to become events. Similarly, a consideration such as proximity to the newspaper is partly an act which journalists perform through their writing—reangling a story, for example, to focus on the local victim of a disaster far away. So this set of criteria about what gets in the news and how it is treated can also be seen as a way of acting, what we might call practical reasoning (Cicourel, 1992) or proximal rather than distal knowledge (Gherardi, 1999, p.112). Secondly, as Carlin Romano (1986, pp.39ff.) shows, journalists cannot describe why a story is newsworthy in terms of general criteria, and can only point to instances (they have the same problem defining 'facts'). I would argue that this lack of clarity is not a failing on journalists' part, but a methodological problem: news values are a useful critical tool to argue why some topics and treatments make it onto the news page and others do not, but they must be recognised as an abstraction from daily practice. They are, as Roger Fowler shows, a

reading that is situated outside and that freezes the constant interchange between how journalists act and write, what topics they have available, and how they see and understand them:

News values are rather to be seen as qualities of (potential) reports. That is to say, they are not simply features of selection but, more importantly, features of representation, and so the distinction between 'selection' and 'transformation' ceases to be absolute: an item can only be selected if it can be seen in a certain light of representation, and so selection involves an ideological act of interpretation.

(Fowler, 1991, p.22)

If we want to engage in a discussion about how journalism might be done differently, we need to analyse how the 'ideological act of interpretation' operates or, in this study's terms, how news discourse limits and enables the production of certain statements. Different issues arise, which I will not look at here, if one is interested in how news discourse organises the reading process (see Fairclough, 1995).⁶

The difficulty in searching for news values is an instance of a more general problem in the literature. Sociologists of news production generally talk of reporting as a way of seeing. Hence they discuss the news almost solely in terms of newsgathering and see news texts in terms of their content—what gets in and what does not. Tuchman calls the news a 'window on the world', a view of society limited or, to carry on the metaphor, framed by newsgathering practices (1978, pp.1-2). Ericson et al. write that: 'Visualization—making something visible to the mind even if it is not visible to the eye—is the essence of journalism as a method' (1987, p.4). Neither the process nor the product of writing have a place in these models, so that the effect of the way the news can be written is neglected. I would not want to advocate simply reversing the emphasis, so that writing was seen as paramount, and visualisation as something secondary.⁷ The theoretical point here is that, as I sought to show in discussing

⁶ Though see also Stuart Hall's argument that news values are unstable because they are aspects of the dominant ideology in society and therefore structure and precede conscious thought (1981, p.234).

⁷ So Hodge and Kress argue that language is so much more stable and coherent than what we see and therefore 'takes its place in our consciousness and becomes what we think we have seen' (1993 [1979], p.5).

Delmer's anecdote, each is an aspect of the other—or rather, they are both aspects of, and at time metaphors for, the form of knowledge which journalism comprises and which determines what is newsworthy. Robert Karl Manoff gives us a nice maxim: 'News occurs at the conjunction of events and texts' (1986, p.228).

An approach grounded in Gadamer's and Foucault's thought will similarly distance itself from a cognitive analysis of the news, which posits the existence of an 'underlying sequence of propositions' in texts (van Dijk, 1985b, p.77). This study will remain at the level of phenomena and the 'being' which understands them in a relation to that field of the already said and the about-to-be-said. I will argue with A.L. Becker that, 'The real *a priori*s of language are not underlying structures, but prior language, prior texts (1983, p.8; cited in Swales, 1990, p.86; see also Voloshinov, 1986 [1929], p.85 and *passim*). Knowledge will be thought of as a social object. As John Swales puts the issue, 'schemata alone reflect a microcosmic cognitive world dangerously adrift from communicative purpose and discursal content' (1990, p.91). This is not to deny that organisation of ideas takes place within the brain, but is to emphasise instead the social accountability of all language use and to emphasise that the communicative and hermeneutic intentions which are always present in language use are necessarily outwardly focused from the individual. This will be so particularly in an analysis of a highly regimented form such as news discourse, where individual intention or creativity are less prominent features.

The theoretical basis of this study also takes us away from thinking of the news as functional within a larger system. As James Curran (1996b [1990]) and Denis McQuail (1994) note, functionalist and structuralist assumptions underlie much of media studies. Even outside 'scientific' approaches, liberal scholars have tended to assume that the media are an integral part of representative democracy, whether in a semi-constitutional sense of the Fourth Estate or more vaguely as a voice of the people or a forum where free and open discussion of matters of public importance can take place (see, for example, Neuman et al., 1992). Lippmann (1922) warned early in the twentieth century, near the start of what I define in chapter three as the 'modern' period of journalism), that newspapers are designed to make money and are

simply not up to the job of creating a public sphere, a criticism Curran has recently repeated (1996a [1990], p.126). So Robert M. Entman (1989) portrays a self-sufficient and dysfunctional Washington media system, broken free from its harness to liberal democracy. Despite frequent criticism, he says, the media continue to engage in 'horse-race' coverage of elections, to swallow dubious information because it comes from authority figures, to sensationalise and personalise, and to engage in facile pack journalism. 'No single rational force guides the media's focus and slant,' he argues (p.125).

These practices continue despite the clear vulnerability of the media to the pressures of officials, interest groups and audiences, all of whom frequently express anger at media failings. And the recapitulation recurs in the face of journalists' own frustrations and sincere desires to improve.

(Entman, 1989, p.7)

Entman explains journalism's failure to respond to the criticism as the result of the political market pushing political élites into cheap media management and of the economic market causing news organisations to shy away from change (p.130). That is, he searches for another type of social system to which the media must be vulnerable. But these models of systems and their functional elements, which date back to Parsonian sociology, need to be seen as the metaphors that they are for the actions of individuals in specific social situations. Neither those individuals, nor the groups they form, nor the ways of thinking and acting they develop will be wholly explicable in terms of some larger social system. It could well be, for example, that the news continues to make sense in journalists' terms as a coherent and effective practice because it pumps out exciting, conflictual news and also that it appears to them to be working well precisely because officials' and interest groups' feathers are so ruffled.⁸

Similar problems arise with critique which finds ideological structures in the news—or, rather, assumes that already given ideological structures explain the news. Stuart Hall (1973), for example, constructs a 'encoding-decoding' model to analyse reading

positions in relation to a text which elides away any gap between hegemony and the news. My point is not to take issue with either a critical approach or the study of power but to try to draw a little less straightly the line between authority and journalism. There is something of a tug-of-war mentality to some of these critical readings, pulling on the text hard against imagined forces pulling the other way, particularly readings which follow work in the 1970s and 1980s at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. John Fiske argues that, 'the textual struggle for meaning is the precise equivalent of the social struggle for power' (1991, p.347). Readings from this position, that see themselves as engaging in 'the textual struggle' for meaning, argue that the news tries to 'affirm a single, uni-accentual value for signs,' that it is 'hostile to ambiguities and seeks to validate its suppression of the alternative possibilities intersecting its signs by reference either to "the facts of the story" or to "normal usage"' (Hartley, 1990 [1982], p.24; also Hall, 1981). But the relationship is not, I would argue from a discursive position, systemic, but occasional and complex, and requires an evidence-based theory of how the two are articulated. Daniel Hallin points out that cultural institutions do not always develop in ways which are functional for the dominant order (1987, p.308; see also Schlesinger, 1987 [1978]; Garnham, 1990, p.62; Bromley and O'Malley, 1997, p.1). Yet Hall's model and indeed many critics' work (e.g. Connell, 1980, p.149; Hartley, 1990 [1982], p.4; Fowler 1991, p.23) simply call the news institution 'elitist' and thereafter assume that it will encode the meanings produced by dominant voices in society.

There is a negotiated space between society and the field of journalism which I do not find it useful to see as always being closed down. David E. Morrison and Howard Tumber complain that 'insufficient attention has been paid to how the journalist as an individual exercises his own judgement in negotiating his role, and more than that, the critical politicizing of research in the area of mass communications has meant that the journalist as news gatherer has been pushed out of sight' (1995 [1988], p.315). This criticism perhaps pushes too far in the other direction towards an

⁸ So the *Sunday Times* editor Frank Giles writes that, 'Being complimented by a Prime Minister is heady stuff, not in general to be recommended for journalistic health' (1986, p.190).

uncritical attitude to journalists' practice, but I would want to follow its attempt to bring the journalist's actions and negotiations of her or his role back into sight. Wenger's (1998) model of a community of practice is useful here (as I argue in more detail in section 3 below). He writes:

A practice is what these [social actors] have developed in order to be able to do their job and have a satisfying experience at work...The concept of practice connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. In this sense, practice is always social practice.

(Wenger, 1998, p.47)

Practice is, in other words, always connected to the social but is not reducible beyond the act of doing to social structure. This model does not 'explain' the news, but does give us a way of constructively criticising news practice, with a view to developing ways of writing which push at its bounds.

Norman Fairclough (1995) is similarly critical of much of the British tradition of textual media analysis for losing sight of social practice. Indeed he calls these previous approaches 'arid formalism', criticising in particular critical linguists' 'rather monolithic view of the role of the media in ideological reproduction' and the failure of Bell's variationist and Heritage's Conversation Analysis approaches to give comprehensive analyses of how texts link in with their social contexts (pp.16, 21ff.). Raymond Williams' understanding of culture returns us to the situated theory with which this section began. We see here again the process and product of the sharing of meanings in a social group entwined almost inextricably:

Since our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes: the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to tensions and achievements of growth and change.

(Williams, 1961. p.55)

In this view, cultural practices of making sense of life are intertwined with the economic base of society, but they have a 'specificity and effectivity, a constitutive primacy that pushes them beyond the terms of reference of "base" and "superstructure"' (Hall, 1986, p.41). To analyse this 'specificity and effectivity', we need to think of the community and language in which they take place in a little more depth than is possible with the broader notion of discourse. The following two sections, looking first at Wenger's model of a community of practice, and secondly at what we can understand by news style, are designed to do this.

3. Community

3.1. Theories of language and community

Sociolinguists have coined and developed the term 'speech community' to examine the situated use of language theorised above. At one level the term is simply a descriptive category to describe groups who share rules for using and interpreting a linguistic repertoire (Hymes, 1974) or who share norms of language use (Labov, 1966, p.7). But it inevitably encompasses issues of the communicative competence of that group, and so has led sociolinguists to look qualitatively at how members of a group communicate and what they know. Gumperz prefers to talk of 'the knowledge of linguistic and related communicative conventions that speakers must have to initiate and sustain conversational involvement' (1997 [1982], p.41). Such a framework has proved useful. Mumby and Clair, for example, have applied this thinking to institutional units within cultures, and go as far as to say: 'We suggest that organisations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse' (1997, p.181). Common to all such studies is a sense that the members of the group do not need to agree on the way they use language, because they are already in agreement by being in the community. The group comes together, indeed, in this largely tacit, shared knowledge.

Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet (1992) point out that people have membership of a number of different social and language communities in their daily lives, and are therefore better seen as orienting to language use than belonging in some more passive sense to groups with certain competencies. To theorise this they

draw on Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger's concept of a community of practice, a model of social practice developed to explain the processes by which apprentices learn on the job (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Wenger expands the theory in his 1998 book, *Communities of Practice*, into a general theory of social learning. A community arises in the common focus of a group of people around a task. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet give a concise definition:

A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations—in short, practices—emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor.

(Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p.464)

In Wenger's model, the community and the set of practices both arise around the core activity, the 'endeavour'. What holds the community together, however, is the members' orientation towards their common goal and their practice as a meaningful activity and a meaningful relation with the world.

Before looking in detail at the value of this model for analysing newswriting, I want to position the term against John Swales' (1990) model of a 'discourse community'. At first sight, Swales' model of a sociorhetorical rather than sociolinguistic grouping should be of more use to describe journalism's written rather than spoken form and its community dispersed across newsrooms and news titles. He writes:

Discourse communities are sociorhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals. One of the characteristics that established members of these discourse communities possess is familiarity with the particular genres that are used in the communicative furtherance of those sets of goals.

(Swales, 1990, p.9)

The differences between this formulation and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's are subtle. Swales talks of groups that form 'in order to' work towards 'goals', while Eckert and McConnell-Ginet talk of groups that come together 'around' an 'endeavour'. The former talks of the 'genres' that members use, while the latter talk

of 'practices' that emerge. Swales' group is much more, as he points out, purposive, functional and rhetorical (ibid., p.24). A community of practice describes more of the way of being discussed in section 2 above. It helps us discuss how, in Clifford Geertz's aphorism, 'Those roles we think to occupy turn out to be minds we find ourselves to have' (1983, p.155), that is, how people become journalists by taking part in the activities of reporting. My sense is that journalism is much more an orientation towards a way of knowing and acting in the world than it is a rhetorical project. There is certainly rhetoric and persuasive language at work in writing the news, but as I discuss in section 4 below and later chapters, I think it sits on top of a claim to know the world and be able to interpret it, which is better understood in terms of the kind of practice discussed in section two. Although I will draw on Swales' thinking, this study leans in general then more towards Wenger's emphasis on practice rather than the rhetorical achievement of goals within a community. Knowledge, for Wenger, is something less strategic than a purpose, more a matter of *competence* in enterprises of value to the community. It is therefore something active, 'a matter of *participating* in the pursuit of such enterprises' (Wenger, 1998, p.4; italics added). The meaning of the enterprise is something that runs through and underneath any specific strategic decision. In the same way, learning to be a journalist, whilst susceptible to training (as I argue in chapter five), is a more or less continuous process, not simply something learnt on a journalism course or in the first years of the job. The community is always changing in response to its world, and new objects, new language and new ways of acting are constantly entering the field of news discourse.

We still need to address Swales' point that communities such as journalism, which exist more in their writing practice rather than in the physical proximity of their members, are better seen as sociorhetorical groups. Wenger too thinks of a community of practice as a physical community, a collection of people who work together—in his example, workers on one floor of a company. His communities depend upon the members communicating with each other frequently, developing as they go their practice and their modes of participation and meaning. But I am more interested in organisation across the space of culture and meaning than across

physical space—hence the importance of the idea of the discursive field here. Journalism is perhaps something of a special case that calls for a theory of discourse to explain it as a meaning-making institution at the same time as it calls for a theory of the local management of practice to explain its patchily professionalised nature.

As Barbie Zelizer writes:

Journalism is a land whose practitioners generally act with impunity, without the socially recognised paths of training, education, licensing, and criticism common to other professions. Learning to be part of the journalistic world thus results from a loose ‘combination of osmosis and fiat’, whose inhabitants generally improvise when attempting to standardize practice.

This means that the professional existence of journalists is largely shaped through situationally determined cues, functioning somewhat like a religion without a minister.

(Zelizer, 1999, p.155; quoting Goldstein, 1985, p.165)

Reporters’ loyalties and relations extend in this loose way—a religion without a minister—well beyond the newsrooms in which they work, and often cut across any workplace dynamics. Their understanding of their practice and in particular their writing are held in common. To put it another way, the space opened up by news discourse is what the community orients itself to. But it is nonetheless a ‘religion’, that is, a coherent set of practices held more or less in common by the 15,000 people in Britain who call themselves news journalists. If the situation were otherwise, we would find quite different styles of writing in each workplace and minimal mobility across workplaces rather than the core style of writing and high mobility that we do find.

I would not want to lose Wenger’s emphasis on individuals acting in concert to negotiate their environment, but I want to shift the focus a little away from individuals towards the collectivity, particularly towards the act of writing, which I am arguing plays a key role in the meaning-making of journalism. The exact shape of the community becomes blurred when seen in these terms, and questions can arise about whether there is one journalistic community or more in British broadsheet journalism, or how it relates to a tabloid community, a broadcasting community, and

to some wider international community of journalism which one might posit. But, remembering always that the idea is an analytical concept more than a precise object of study, and that journalism is perhaps difficult to describe precisely, such questions do not reduce the validity of thinking of journalism in these terms. This study separates out British broadsheet news journalism for analysis, and although that does involve an assumption that tabloid news, or American news forms, for example, will raise slightly different issues, I would hope it does not mean that conclusions made here cannot be adapted to other specifics. The historical links between British and American journalism would lead us to expect this, as would the free movement of reporters between tabloids and broadsheets. For these reasons, I have at times drawn on evidence or research from outside British broadsheet news where I think it is appropriate, particularly from the well-developed American literature on news practice, but also from analysis of Dutch (van Dijk, 1988b), Australian (Kress, 1983), New Zealand (Bell, 1991) and other journalism practice.

3.2. The implications of a community of practice for journalism

Wenger's model leads this study in a number of directions. It emphasises journalists' orientation to their 'endeavour' of producing the news, it allows us to study journalism as a practice, rather than force it into a professional model, it directs us to take seriously journalists' mythologies and to listen to journalists' discussions amongst themselves, and it helps us theorise how journalism inflects dominant voices as well as its powerful yet marginal position in society. I will discuss each of these points in turn.

Wenger's thinking, firstly, provides a lever with which to prise newswriting practice out of a sociological heritage that strongly emphasises newsgathering. The ethnography of journalism in particular has perhaps suffered from an over-emphasis on the conformity of outlook and values of journalists, although its more subtle practitioners observe that the power of newsroom practices lies less in their mechanics than in the extent to which journalists are valued who have developed expertise in these routine modes of processing the news (Tuchman, 1972). But while reporters operate within news institutions and also within certain models of their job, they can also be relatively independent in the way they work (see comparison of

newsrooms in Hetherington, 1985). Ericson et al. are right, I think, to say that news ethnography tends to overstate the homogeneity of the newsroom (1987, p.26). It is important to recognise the extent to which individuals can negotiate the system and can evade being determined by it. However, equipped with an interest in journalism as a way of writing and a way of understanding writing as a key part of the endeavour around which journalists are organised in their community, we can pinpoint a little better where the homogeneity of journalism lies. As I point out in chapter one, news language is highly restricted and provides little space for individuality. Journalists may not be determined by news style, but they do orient towards a restrictive set of writing techniques. It is perhaps here more than in newsgathering that the homogeneity of the news lies.

The point is surely that the community provides a collective identity to which individual journalists orient in the course of their writing. In a longitudinal survey of US newsrooms culminating in a 1991 report, Weaver and Wilhoit (1991) found that the effects of a journalist's age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or education on their approach to reporting were likely to be minimal, when set beside the effects of organisational routines and constraints (quoted in Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p.78). The surveys provide evidence for Wenger's theory that a practice such as journalism will assimilate people from across a range of social divisions to its norms as they come together around the common endeavour of producing the news.

News reporting is characterised by pragmatism and a craft ethic more than a strong sense of an institutionalised profession. There has been considerable resistance both among journalism educators (see Brake, 1998; Bromley, 1997, for discussions) and academics (e.g., Tunstall, 1971, pp.66-71 and 1983, p.190; Merrill, 1988 [1974]; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1991, p.218) to conceptualising journalism as a profession. Indeed, Zelizer suggests that, 'seeing journalism as profession...may have restricted our understanding of journalistic practice, causing us to examine only those dimensions of journalism emphasized by the frame through which we have chosen to view them' (1993, p.219). Wenger's definition of learning as a group's collective experience of making sense of its environment perhaps, therefore, describes the

practice a little more faithfully, allowing us to interpret the professional aspirations of some journalists and the tensions between journalists and the institutions they work in, without assuming that the formal codes and coherent ideologies of a profession fully explain the news (see Schudson, 1978).

Wenger also provides theoretical justification for taking seriously journalists' self-conceptions, often seen by media analysts as rationalisations for their dependence on society's élites or the mechanical drudgery of day-to-day practice, as meaningful practices. Gans, for example, writes:

Journalists do not seem to be aware of the conformity under which they labor. When things are going well at the end of the week, or at the end of the day at the networks, conformity actually takes the form of a cohesive and satisfying camaraderie, as colleagues work together to finish a product of which they are proud.

(Gans, 1980, p.98)

While Gans is right that news practice is rule-bound and conforming, we should not be too quick to dismiss reporters' collective endeavours and the way they interpret what they do as any less real. Indeed, Wenger's model argues that it is precisely when individuals come together in mutual endeavour that particular practices emerge. So the romantic quests to uncover corruption or defend democracy or the obsession with the scoop or up-to-the-minute news are all productive of news practice at the same time as they displace external pressures.

Zelizer (1993) uses Stanley Fish's (1980) idea of an 'interpretive community' in a similar if slightly more limited way to Wenger's term to describe journalists' stories about themselves as important to understanding what they do. Journalism, she argues, is 'an interpretive community united through its shared discourse and collective interpretations of key public events' (1993, p.217). The stories journalists tell about their work and the sense of a shared past they have, particularly the collective history American reporters have forged out of experiences such as Watergate and the McCarthy purges, define their collectivity and their orientation to

their practice.⁹ I would want to support Zelizer's idea that journalists' understanding of their relationship with wider society is largely worked through within the community. As Warren Breed wrote, 'the newsman's source of rewards is located not among the readers...but among his colleagues and superiors' (1960 [1955], p.194). But this study extends such thinking, going beyond asking 'how journalists shape meaning about themselves' (*ibid.*, p.222), to asking how the community which emerges shapes how journalists write. I will use a method close to Zelizer's in chapter four when I examine journalists' memoirs, but I argue that journalists' thoughts are not just frames of interpretation of practice—frames of hindsight and thus perhaps indirect influences on future journalism—but that they are inseparable from the frames within which everyday practice itself occurs. In this way, the study pursues the questions of how the act of writing is organised and distributed in the field of journalism, and how that allows certain ways of writing and thinking to take place.

We are here tracing the 'sharing of common meanings' down to a much more local level of community than is done in cultural studies. While news practice will be ultimately determined by wider cultural forces, it will be locally managed on an everyday level in a real life setting. Wenger's thinking suggests too that the wider culture will be drawn into the news community at every turn by the individuals who work in the news, but that it will be renegotiated within that practice, refracted by the particular relations there into distinctive ways of making sense. Wenger distinguishes between the institution and the community which develops in response to that. Viewing journalism as a community of practice therefore suggests that the institution of the news—the business or state organisation of the news outlet and the management of the newsroom—is only one thread of the explanation of journalism. The way reporters understand their jobs and the way they act in response to their employers' demands are not simply reducible to that institution. Some news sociology has been puzzled by what are seen as journalists' contradictory needs, on the one hand for participatory structures and on the other for a sense of independence

⁹ See also Jeremy Iggers on the role of the Janet Cooke scandal in American journalists' ethical discourse (1999, pp.11ff).

(so Gaziano and Coulson, 1988). Journalists resent managerial interference but at the same time need the pressures of the news institution to function. They are undoubtedly influenced by corporate capitalism (see Tunstall, 1983; Garnham, 1990) but struggle against it. Within the community model, there is no contradiction here, however. The community within which journalists' meaningful action takes place emerges in the practice of carrying out the institution's work.

Similarly, Wenger's model helps interpret the marginal position of journalism in society. Cultural studies has given the media a central role in contemporary culture. The media have been seen as performing a bardic role of telling us our culturally significant stories (Hartley and Fiske, 1978), or defining the public sphere of our Western 'media culture' (Kellner, 1995). I would argue that journalism is much more of a parasitic or border-dwelling practice in our culture. Journalists may be meaning-brokers, but are far less meaning-makers. They have a mutually beneficial but ambivalent relationship with powerful institutions such as politicians or the police, and they have visiting rights in many parts of society, but they are not central to any of these institutions. This is essentially Schlesinger's description of the position of the BBC, which he distances from the Glasgow University Media Group's conclusion that 1970s television journalists were biased towards government (see Schlesinger, 1987 [1978], p.xv for references to the academic debate on the GUMG analyses). Schlesinger tracks the BBC's attempts to negotiate its 'politically exposed' position (p.11) of being government funded yet also expected to act as part of a Fourth Estate that can criticise and comment upon government. It therefore borrowed newspapers' credo of impartiality and independence before developing its own 'strong ideological self-discipline', where opinions were restrained and facts presented with caution. The 'complex and ramified nature of editorial systems' (p.xxxii) are best understood in terms of news organisations' history and practices. Wenger makes particular mention in his model of boundary practices, which translate and coordinate meanings between other communities (1998, p.115). A theory of communities of practice suggests, then, that precisely because journalism brokers meaning in our culture, it is a marginal practice. At the same time, it points

up what is at risk when the community looks inwards for its criteria of value in brokering meaning, more than outwards towards those other communities.

4. Style

The study is predicated on the idea that journalistic conventions will be partly ways of writing and partly ways of thinking and acting. Journalists' newsgathering and writing may be seen as mutually constitutive: journalists think the way they do because of the textual products they are creating, and write the way they do because of the way they think. This is partly the import of Darnton's observations which provide an epigraph to this chapter, as well as being the theoretical position set out in section 2. The study also begins from the observation that the news is written in a conventional and quite rigid form. The different copy of two different journalists on the same newspaper is hard to distinguish and texts produced in different newsrooms around the English-speaking world can be circulated among newspapers via news agencies with little stylistic change—this is of course what allows news agencies to operate.¹⁰ This section argues for a way of analysing news language which keeps sight of both these points, and uses the idea of *news style* to do so. I am using the word in a particular sense, and will distinguish it below from other analysts' use of it and from other words to describe language variation. It means here four things. News style:

- describes a practice and does not presuppose a general system in which language is always functional for social purposes;
- describes the cues by which we recognise the news, that is, what is characteristically 'newsy' about the lexis, syntax, structure and other aspects of news language;
- implies a way of thinking and acting as well as a set of words;
- implies a choice between ways of writing, and therefore focuses analysis on that discursively situated moment of choice.

¹⁰ This basic style and the uniform content distributed round the world are of course inflected in their various outlets. One study of television picture agencies found a high degree of convergence in the use of images among 36 different national stations and 'a measure of shared professional culture' (Gurevitch, Levy and Roeh, 1991, p.202), but also that different accents were placed on the material in different cultures.

I will discuss each of these aspects of the use of the term below. They are the criteria by which the study as a whole will gather specific textual evidence about how the practice of journalism writes the world within its discursive field.

This multi-levelled description of news style is not meant to discover a formula of the news, but to point towards a discursive formation that enables writing and individual creativity at the same as it restricts. Individuals can be thought of as using the resources of the community with a degree of flexibility (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p.482), because they are orienting to news style as they take part in the community. When they do so, they gain both ways of making meaningful news and of establishing their status within the community. The news is a homogenising and quite restrictive community, but it restricts by providing the reporter with a particular set of tools as well as a space which restricts but does not determine what the individual reporter can write.

4.1. Style and function

Linguistics has traditionally thought of style as the choice between functionally equivalent alternatives—something that we do sometimes but not at other times, all other things in the context being equal. Traditionally, particularly among literary scholars, these stylistic differences have been defined as an individual speaker's variation or deviation from the standard language (O'Donnell and Todd, 1980, p.61; Traugott and Pratt, 1996, p.29). There are a number of problems with this idea. Firstly, it describes language use by its difference from a 'standard', a notion that, although it implies something quantifiable, is both difficult to pin down (Carter and Nash, 1990, p.5) and riddled with assumptions about social structures (Bourdieu, 1991). Secondly the idea focuses upon the individual user, perhaps even invoking a Romantic sense of the essence of the individual which is expressed in a unique way. This idea is of little use to analyse contemporary British news journalism, where individual variation, which calls attention to the presence of the writer, is played down so as not to reduce the impact of the news' claim to be a simple window on

'reality' (Glasser, 1996).¹¹ But style is also used by linguists and discourse analysts to describe a social dimension to language use, in a variety of ways. Robins talks of style as the peculiar slang or jargon of a closely knit group within a community (1989 [1964], p.50). Biber distinguishes between register, which he uses as an umbrella term for all variation according to situation, and genres and styles, so that, for example, sermons are first of all registers, secondly genres and thirdly differentiated according to different styles (1994, p.32). Ferguson, meanwhile, discards style altogether because it is used in too many different ways (Ferguson, 1994). But we can hold onto Allan Bell's compromise position from within contemporary sociolinguistics:

The basic principle of language style is that an individual speaker does not always talk in the same way on all occasions. Style means that speakers have alternatives or choices—a '*that way*' which could have been chosen instead of a '*this way*'. Speakers talk in different ways in different situations, and these different ways of speaking can carry different social meanings.

(Bell, 1997, p.240)

Style is, as Andreas Jucker notes, at heart 'a comparative concept in that it describes some relevant differences between a text or a discourse and some other texts or discourses' (1992, p.1). It does not describe a total linguistic competence, but different ways of using language that can be chosen, and which are meaningful. Because it is a comparative term, it is always a little vague. But that is part of its strength. As Sandig and Selting (1997) suggest, describing a style involves an implicit comparison with other styles, but without resolving those differences into a system at the level of language (as, for example, Halliday, 1994, does, constructing social meaning out of the system of difference between language items used and those not used). Style allows us to identify language practices without reducing them to *a priori* categories and to think of these practices in terms of language users' recognition of meaning.

¹¹ Comment and feature writing, in which part of the work of the text is to construct an authoritative or insightful narrator, are different matters.

I differentiate this study from stylistics, however. As David Crystal and Derek Davy (1969) define the stylistics project, style points to systematic language variation according to situation. Crystal and Davy seek to identify 'from the general mass of linguistic features common to English as used on every conceivable occasion, those features which are restricted to certain kinds of social context,' to explain why those features might have been used, and to categorise them according to their function in the social context (p.10). In this view, style is the set of linguistic differences which can be accounted for on the basis of situation, in much the same way as register or genre are sometimes used. This definition holds two major difficulties for me. Firstly, it assumes that we will find a set of mutually exclusive categories and sub-categories, so that in newspapers we will find headline styles, intro styles, feature styles, editorial styles and so on. This is indeed what Crystal and Davy find, a range of styles in different parts of the paper which nevertheless have much in common—such as underlying aims and a need for compression and clarity—but which are distinct (p.173). Bhatia makes similar sub-divisions of newspaper language using instead a theory of genre (1993, p.157). As Coupland argues, these models of social context as a 'carvable entity', separable by addressee groups, situations and so on are unreliable or mere starting points for language use (1988, p.14). Instead, this study proposes that journalists have a set of linguistic tools which they mix according to a more flexible set of stylistic requirements about what different language is available, what it can achieve, where it is appropriate, and so on. In other words, I would want to use the term style to indicate always a socially situated use of language, rather than a formal category.

Secondly, and more seriously, stylistics assumes that language found in a situation is functional within that situation. Ferguson uses the word register in a similar way, writing that, 'People participating in recurrent communication situations tend to develop similar vocabulary, similar features of intonation, and characteristic bits of syntax and phonology' (1994, p.20). There is a kind of ethnolinguistic ethic implicit in such a position, which assumes that all language is equally valid. I would want to hold that position when comparing the capacity for different languages to tell the news. But it would foreclose on analysis to assume that actual news language in

British broadsheets was naturally suited to its task. I want to prise that assumption open by analysing the social construction of the news within news discourse. The news constructs its remote and unknowable audience, it carries with it particular ways of making sense of the world, and it is an accident of its history. Its appropriateness to contemporary mass communication and its effect upon its material need to be investigated.

I prefer to follow the use of style that, according to Michelle Hegmon, has developed in archaeology (1992, p.518). Archaeology has traditionally thought of style in a similar way to traditional linguistics. At a basic level, the choice between a glazed and an unglazed pot does not change the pot's function, and has significance for the researcher only to identify societies and periods—the European Neolithic Beaker Folk, for example. But more recently archaeologists have suggested that style may be more socially meaningful—emblematic of a group, or assertive of relative identities within a group, or individually expressive, or indicative of social values. The distinction between function and style breaks down, making it a confusing tool of analysis. If style is functional in a culture, then it disappears as a distinctive quality. 'To take a chair—' write Shanks and Tilley, 'what proportion of this is functional as opposed to stylistic? No answer can be given; the style inheres in the function and vice versa.' (quoted in Pfaffenberger, 1992, p.503). Paradoxically, though, this is precisely its value. As J.R. Sackett points out, style is not something inherent in a form but something we read into it, 'formal variation that we happen to regard as being stylistically significant' (Sackett, 1982; quoted in Hegmon, 1992, p.519). The word 'style' therefore takes us to the nub of what is read into a cultural object as belonging to a 'this way' of thinking rather than a 'that way'.

There is, therefore, an active dimension to the idea of style; it implies a choice and a judgement. That element is important in my use of the word. Style is about the journalist's choice to write according to news discourse. In the terms of Pierre Bourdieu (1991, 1998), a person takes on, in news style, the habitus or way of standing in relation to the world of a journalist, to gain capital in the community, to establish an identity, and to achieve some meaningful social action in terms of the

discourse. Bourdieu argues that language acts symbolically to mark power relations and social institutions. Language rarely just communicates; it is symbolic of power or authority or wealth within a certain market, a market that ‘censors’ speech by applying conventions of proper usage and prohibited usage. The individual struggles against (without perhaps being conscious of the struggle) this ‘symbolic power’:

Discourses are always to some extent *euphemisms* inspired by the concern to ‘speak well’, to ‘speak properly’, to produce the products that respond to the demands of a certain market; they are *compromise formations* resulting from a transaction between the expressive interest (what is to be said) and the censorship inherent in particular relations of linguistic production (whether it is the structure of linguistic interaction or the structure of a specialized field).

(Bourdieu, 1991, p.78)

The way a journalist writes and the goals which she or he aspires to can be seen in the light of Bourdieu’s argument to be narrowly circumscribed by rules and conventions. These pressures are symbolised in ‘good’ news style. Hence the struggle of each journalist to succeed, to set herself or himself apart and to write specific news stories, takes place on the field of achieving news style. I differ from Bourdieu in seeing the social symbolism of language use—its style—as partly constitutive and not just a sign of a social field, but the central point remains that style is an important ground on which the relations of the journalistic community are played out.

Using news style involves, then, playing with a certain social role, taking a position in a practice. Glasser and Ettema (1989), although not talking directly about language, describe something similar with their notion of journalistic expertise as a ‘style of thought’ which rubs off on journalists from their colleagues as they do the job. This use of style overturns the traditional, Enlightenment distinction between form and content, between style and substance, between sophistry and knowledge. In Douglas Thomas’s reading, we are here following Nietzsche in rejecting Kant’s sense of rhetoric or style as ‘mere play of ideas’ and attempting to regain a Hellenistic sense of engaging with the most serious issues through play (2001, p.2). So rather than searching for the ideology of the news or the epistemology of

objectivity at work there, which are expressed through language, and of which style is the supplement, we can look in the play of style for a situated understanding that constructs the news on a daily basis. If we live in a world of language rather than Truth, critique of the news should perhaps be looking at how the news places itself in the world by its style, weaving a rhetoric of knowing what events are happening, of being able to tell people, standing between social groups directing the traffic of ideas.

Looking at news style in this way as practice rather than just variation brings a whole new range of issues into view. The formal homogeneity of the text corresponds to a homogeneity in the ways journalists process the information they receive. Bell finds that sub-editors generally do one or more of three things to a text: they delete material, substitute words for other words or phrases, and apply or reverse syntactical operations, such as making a clause passive or changing the order of main clauses and subclauses (Bell, 1991, p.70; see also van Dijk, 1985b, p.75). Shoemaker and Reese cite a study by Walter Gieber that found 16 wire editors from different newspapers differed little in which news they took off the wire on the same days or in how they edited or displayed it (Gieber, 1960; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p.118). There is a fairly rigid set of practices and discursive events that we have access to in discussing the style of the news.

Swales (1990) discusses such language practices in terms of genres which sociorhetorical communities possess. Although, as I discuss in section 3, this study's theory is inflected slightly differently to his critical framework, I would follow much of his analysis of genre in looking at news style. Swales sees his task as going both narrower and deeper than what he disparagingly calls 'stylistics' or 'register studies' sets of 'discrete-item surface feature assemblies of data' (p.3; Coupland, 1988, makes much the same criticism). Narrower in the sense of seeking to describe language use in specific contexts rather than via homogenising type labels, and deeper in the sense of following an 'interest in assessing rhetorical purposes, in unpacking information structures and in accounting for syntactic and lexical choices' as communicative acts within certain communities (Swales, 1990, p.3). Genre analysis does not just study the substance of writing but the discursive construction

of texts, asking, 'Why do members of a specialist community write the way they do?' (Bhatia, 1993, p.1). It is also interested in the larger structures of language use as well as the lexis and syntax which are central to most analyses of situational variation. These facets of its study are valuable in studying news discourse as well.

However, Bhatia's and Swales' attempt to account for why people write the way they do within their discourse communities seems to me a little *too* narrow, because it focuses on writers' purposes. Analysis of sociorhetorical purpose raises the difficulty of whose purpose is embedded in the genre. Is it the individual reporter's, or the genre's? Does purpose require that the writer be aware of the purpose? Swales does not pin this issue down, talking of recognition of a shared set of purposes within a community 'at some level of consciousness' (1990, p.53). But Swales is also aware that genres such as news broadcasts can have multiple and conflicting purposes, such as keeping audience members up to date, moulding public opinion, organising public behaviour and making the broadcaster's controllers and paymasters look good (p.47). It becomes difficult to see how a writer can be conscious of all these purposes at once. If the writer is not always conscious of the purpose, then the word role or communicative potential might be better. I follow Wenger and phenomenological sociology in focusing on social practice, including writing, as something that people do, and which is surrounded by ideas, justifications and understandings, and regulated by them, but not necessarily on a purposive or conscious level. I use the word style to try to communicate something of that—writers are making a socially meaningful choice but not always a conscious, purposive one.

4.2. Style as cues

A central question of the study of language use—not least genre analysis—is how people are able to recognise when to use a particular kind of language and, conversely, what kind of situation is being engaged in when certain language is used. One answer is that we can think of language use as including a set of signals about the framework which the hearer should use to interpret the text. This does not mean we should look for discrete markers in the text, but for language which is marked, that everyone who is competent recognises as the social action it is. Michael Halliday argues that even a fragment of speech directs the competent listener to (at least a

provisional assessment of) the appropriate social context, the social identity of the speaker and perhaps too the speech event being engaged in (Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens, 1964, p.87; see also Crystal and Davy, 1969, p.4). Corpus-based linguistics shows that we can identify what kind of talk is going on very closely in patterns of lexis and syntax. Certain collocations in particular are closely involved in determining the identity of varieties of English (Trosborg, 1997, p.6; see also Montgomery, 1995 [1986], p.108; Biber, 1994, p.35). Sinclair (1992) suggests that even the grammatical form of a stem word being used—such as the singular ‘eye’ instead of ‘eyes’—directs us to certain kinds of talk, on the observation, again corpus-based, that different word forms tend to arise in certain collocations and in certain contexts (see also Stubbs, 1996, p.37). The use of one word rather than another, and even more the use of a certain pattern of language, embed that language in particular contexts.

This is more than simply using language that is appropriate to a particular context. Language users can be better thought of as controlling aspects of the context through their use of particular language.¹² Fowler talks of cues in texts, which alert readers to the schemata and ideologies appropriate for a particular kind of text (1991, p.61). Gumperz identifies what he calls contextualisation cues, details of language use or accompanying paralinguistic details which signal to the competent member of a culture or community what kind of thing is being said or how it should be taken (1982, p.162; see also Fairclough, 1992, p.80). The repertoire of such cues can be gathered together to allow us to talk of a particular style. Style in this sense is not a set of rules. It will contain quirks and some forms inconsistent with any rule we might discover. There is an extra level of competence here, what Michael Agar call the ‘difference between the speechless master of L2 [second language] syntax and the L2 speaker who is communicatively competent in a non-native world’ (1997, p.466), or, as Aristotle defined rhetoric, ‘the ability to see, in any given case, the available means of persuasion’ (quoted in Thomas, 2001, p.5). It is about knowing what other cues could have been invoked, and what social meaning is therefore being

¹² O’Donnell and Todd take this position to an extreme, arguing against register analysis that no social situation ever ‘selects’ its own language variety (1980, p.62).

communicated. Style should therefore be seen as bringing together the whole network of relations and conventions around the text: the social and cultural context of the text, the skills of the speaker and the listener's perception of certain meanings, identities and practices. The locus of meaning is neither in the text nor in its social setting but, as in Foucault's discursive formations, in the relationship between these.

Style is often associated with the choice between similar words, but there is no reason not to include a range of language features, from syntactic choices such as omitting modifiers to the *Gestalt*, or larger, holistic style structure, of a text, to the use of rhetorical tropes when they can be seen in this way as meaningful variation that co-occurs (see Sandig and Selting, 1997). Recognising news style as the marking of language also suggests that we need not look for forms that have been invariant across the period I am calling modern news. Language, even written language, is always changing, and the community of practice model would lead us to expect details of style to change as the community evolves and its membership changes, but the study argues that the discourse in which news language is effective has been consistent in the ways it has known the world and shaped it across the twentieth century. The term style is inexact as a description of a level of language, but it is not meant here as that, any more than Foucault's analysis of discourse is meant as a linguistic analysis (Foucault, 1989 [1972], p.27). It is a tool to organise the range of language features which make the news text distinctive and meaningful in a particular way. We might better speak of aspects of language that are of stylistic significance than of a set of features that constitute a style—how language works in news style rather than what news style is.

4.3. Style as an ethnographic idea

I want to understand style, then, as meaningful variation which is as deeply implicated in power relations and systems of knowledge as any semantic content. News style is not just what is different in a text from the average or normal non-news usage (whatever baseline a critic might argue for), but is what, in Sackett's terms, is recognisable by language users as significantly meaningful variation. This use of the word style takes us closer to an ethnographic understanding of language use. Dell Hymes writes of the ethnography of language: 'the task is to identify and analyze the

ways of speaking in a community, *together* with the conditions and meanings of their use' (1997 [1974], p.17; italics added). As Fairclough points out, this kind of discourse analysis looks for the particular conventions and practices in a community rather than general structures of language (1992, p.47).

The question then arises whether, although news style is partly a set of cues alerting the reader to the way that the text should be taken as news, it might mean something different to journalists. This study does not give a clear answer because its focus is on the writing of the news, although I discuss in section five how the text constructs an ideal reader. But my sense is that news style means a lot more to the journalist, as it signals involvement in the way of writing of the community and status within that community (see the discussion of Bourdieu, 1991, above). Readers might accept other texts as news, but I would argue that journalism itself would have to change significantly for journalists to find value in writing in other ways. The idea of news style focuses us heavily, then, on journalists' understanding of their writing practice.

A central reason for using the word style to discuss newswriting is that journalists use the word to describe their language use—in the limited contexts that they discuss it (see chapter four). By analysing news texts in terms of their style, particularly in the senses of a meaningful choice of language and a set of cues which I have discussed, we reduce the potential for misunderstanding its motivations and conceptions. We must of course recognise that journalists' talk will consist of rationalisations and self-deceptions as well as insights into their practice, but locating such thinking with respect to news texts is part of a thorough-going critique of newswriting. In chapter four I discuss the regulation of newswriting in news style, and in chapter seven I discuss the particular and limited sense in which news texts can be described as 'stories'. As Deborah Cameron (1996) suggests, journalists' use of language is regulated by their understanding of it as style. She writes that newspapers issue style books to their staff with two aims: to establish a distinctive institutional voice (these will usually comprise minor linguistic details), and to establish 'conformity to a set of values that are held to define "good writing" on newspapers in general'. She adds: 'Journalists are expected to observe the rules, and

sub-editors or department heads are supposed to pick up and amend any deviations' (pp.319-20). As the quotation from Jack Fuller given at the start of this chapter also illustrates, the journalistic community understands and regulates language in terms of the idea of style.

The stylistic conformity noted by Cameron involves a general adherence to the concept of a 'plain style', an idea which chapter three suggests goes back to a general shift in attitudes towards language around the turn of the twentieth century and which George Orwell gave particular prominence. Since the start of that century, news editors have demanded clear and succinct writing of their reporters. As we will see in chapter three, leading journalists at the start of modern news spoke of the virtues of the news' 'compactness and brevity' (Alfred Harmsworth) and its 'purity of style' (R.D. Blumenfeld) (both cited in LeMahieu, 1988, p.26). As I will show in later chapters, the concept of a plain style has led not to a range of forms of writing, all characterised by clarity and simplicity, but to a limited set of stylistic practices which has been adopted across the board by British broadsheets. Moreover, the style has become so naturalised in journalism as standard, unmarked news language that it has come to signify an absence of style, a form of writing that is directly attached to 'the real' and is therefore unquestionable. I shall return to these issues in chapter four. Already, however, we can see that style seems to mean more to Harmsworth and Blumenfeld, on some unstated level, than simply the superficial lexical choices a reporter makes, but also the way the reporter communicates with her or his readers. The idea of style then connects directly with the issues discussed above of how news language constructs a particular form of knowledge and a particular community. As an analytical tool, the term holds out the possibility of pin-pointing how journalism uses language in a particular way—as the institutional form of language which Gumperz and Mumby and Clair point us towards—to make sense in a particular way.

The value of integrating the language choices, knowledge and attitudes of journalists in this one term can be seen in negative by looking briefly at an analysis of newspaper language which does not have this integrative dimension. Short, Semino and Culpepper (1996) use Leach and Short's (1981) typology of speech and thought

presentation to investigate the function of style in a newspaper article. The typology organises speech and thought forms into five categories along a continuum of faithfulness to the original speech or thought. Short et al. give the following excerpt from the *Sun* as an example of free indirect speech, a form that is defined as being ambiguous as to whether the words are the narrator's or another person's:

Neighbours said 35-year-old Dr [M], a genetic fingerprinting expert, lived alone but had regular visits from girlfriends.

A pretty young woman and her son moved in with Dr [M] shortly after his wife moved out.

(quoted in Short et al., 1996, p.120)¹³

Short et al.'s grammatical category and the general function they identify for it are, however, poorly suited to analysing the speech presentation in news discourse. I would argue that the above news text does not illustrate a discrete form which acts to cultivate an ambiguity. It seems to me much more a pragmatic use of two forms, statement of fact and indirect speech, a use which is explicable in terms of journalists' quoting practices. The indirect quotation in the first sentence of the excerpt was presumably chosen because faithfulness to precise forms of words was not an issue in this (again, presumably) factual account, and the reporter would feel no more was required than to give a vague sense of the information's source. Direct quotation of one neighbour might have implied some doubt about those words' veracity, at the same time as claiming precise reporting of those words. Quotation of separate neighbours might similarly have suggested their accounts did not corroborate each other. Besides, the wording chosen was easily the most concise option.

Furthermore, contrary to Leach and Short's typology, the continuum from direct to indirect forms does not imply in news style a movement away from an external focus to a deictic focus on the narrator, but instead suggests a move between forms of knowledge, words and facts, both of which are externally grounded. Whatever

¹³ I have deleted the individual's name here, and do so throughout the study so as not to add to any intrusion of privacy inflicted in the initial publication.

subtleties of language use could be argued for here, ambiguity is a thin way to describe them. The relevance of various forms of speech and thought presentation can only be ascertained by analysing how they work within the range of stylistic options available to the journalist and in terms of the news' claims to knowledge. As Muriel Saville-Troike writes, 'It is basic to ethnography that the units used for segmenting, ordering and describing data should be the categories of the community, and not *a priori* categories of the investigation' (1982, p.34).¹⁴ To understand how language is used by journalists, it makes sense to begin from their terms, while leaving ourselves the freedom to augment and refine them with what Swales calls *a posteriori* categories (1990, pp.39-40).

4.4. Style as choice

My analysis of news style is also fundamentally critical. If style is the choice between alternatives (whether that is individuals' choice or the choice of a community), analysing style allows us to imagine how things might be otherwise. We can think, with Allan Bell, of a *that* way whenever a *this* way is encountered in the news. Although they do not describe their work as stylistic, Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress's (1993 [1979]) critical linguistic analysis of the news uses this idea. As Kress puts the method:

At each point in the text choices are available to the speaker/writer... Why was this form chosen, rather than one of the other available ones? Why was this linguistic process applied and not these other possible ones?

(Kress, 1983, p.125)

Like Hodge and Kress, I would argue that the choice of one form over another is always potentially meaningful in language use, as it marks the decision (whether consciously made or merely conventional) not to use a number of potential alternatives. However, I do not take the next step with them. The school of critical linguistics, starting with Fowler et al.'s *Language and Control* (1979), has sought to establish links between journalism's restricted linguistic usages, a narrow range of

¹⁴ Conversation analysis makes a similar point of 'taking seriously the object of inquiry *in its own terms*,' particularly the orientations, meanings and understandings of the participants in a language event, rather than use 'terms which preoccupy' analysts (Schegloff, 1997, pp.166-7).

meanings available to the reader, and ideological structures in society. Hodge and Kress hold that ideology restricts what can be thought and said out of the full resources of the language, and therefore that the tendency of texts to favour the use of certain constructions can be traced back to the dominant ideology in society. They focus on grammatical or syntactical choices, particularly transitivity structures, nominalisations and the level of modality in verbal or adverbial forms (Fowler, 1991, p.4). I would hold back from their conclusions that style is determined by ideology, not because I think news style is immune from larger social forces, but because, as I have argued throughout this chapter, I would argue it must be demonstrated on a case by case basis.

The limitation of the critical linguistics method can be seen in Kress's (1983) analysis of two Australian newspaper articles on a strike by telecommunication workers. He points out that the *Adelaide News* conveys a stronger sense of certainty about the likelihood of industrial action, saying that telecommunication workers 'seem certain to' go on strike while the *Melbourne Age* is less emphatic: they 'are likely to' go on strike. Each newspaper has both forms available to it, and Kress's analysis attempts to account for their difference as evidence of an ideology in the *News* defining industrial relations in terms of conflict (p.125). He writes: 'The ideology used in constructing the text is expressed in the text, in the homology of ideological and linguistic structure,' (p.122). But can the choice of a form conveying more certainty by the *Adelaide News* be traced directly back to the newspaper's ideological position on industrial action? Kress's theory does not account for the possibility that two journalists placed within the same ideology might simply reach different conclusions about a situation. There is no examination of the possibility that the *News* journalist might have felt obliged to make his or her story more definite and hence more newsworthy in order to make the story front page material or meet the competitive pressures on the newspaper to deliver strong news. Nor is co-text analysed. The reporter might have qualified the strong form further down in the story with a quotation denying the prediction or with a proviso 'certain to strike some time'. It could certainly be argued that a more systematic analysis could have made a stronger case for such links, as critical linguists such as Clark (1992) and Fowler

(1991) do. But the point remains that there will always be doubts about a simple homology of political ideology and isolated details of language use, and yet critical linguistics has few other terms with which to discuss the context of the news language.

Once we reinsert the context of writing we can immediately posit alternative explanations to such analysis. A subeditor would view a nominalisation, such as 'The White Paper has gone out for *consultation*' (*Herald*, January 28, 1999, p.1; italics added), which omits the agent and patient (who is consulting whom), as a crucial technique to cut text to fit the available space. Information about the actor may be a low priority beside the potential loss of substantive information which the subeditor is trying to prevent. The critical point that passives may be chosen because of the way they encode meaning still has some validity (see Clark, 1992), but it needs to be seen in the context of a quite complex process of weighing up of pieces of text that goes on each time a reporter types a line or a subeditor amends it. But the methodological principle of asking why choices have been made, while taking a slightly broader approach in looking beyond lexico-syntax to the 'accumulation of discursive or textual choices' (Cameron, 1994, p.32) and regarding these choices as meaningful rather than narrowly ideological, an approach applied on a small scale by Jane Sunderland (2000), is still valuable. Looking for such choices in news language, looking for the style, focuses our attention on the practice and also on how the news might be written otherwise. We can retain a critical attitude to newswriting practice at the same time as we understand it in its practitioner's terms.

5. The Communicative ethos of news discourse

The final element of this theoretical chapter is the drawing together of the ideas of news style, the news community and the field of news discourse into a theorisation of how these condition the communicative relationship that the news sets up. I focus here particularly on the attitude and stance towards its audiences that is implicit in newswriting practice, what Paddy Scannell discusses in terms of the 'communicative ethos' of the news. Scannell coins the term to discuss the development in twentieth-century British broadcasting of an orientation to more relaxed and spontaneous forms of address than in the press and their impact upon social life. He writes:

The universe of discourse inscribed in the totality of output is not merely a content, but a set of relationships, a communicative ethos, that registers the quality and manner of social intercourse between institutions and audiences and, beyond that, the expressive idioms of public and private life.

(1992, p.335)

Although I am focusing on the quite different problems and opportunities of the press and restrict my discussion to the attitude of news journalists and the communicative space their writing opens up, rather than wider social implications, I find Scannell's term useful because it allows us to discuss the quality of the communication in discursive and particularly stylistic terms without bringing too many preconceptions to bear on what the news should do. The term helps us examine the lived relation of newswriting, in an ontological sense, in the light of Heidegger's use of the word 'ethos' to signify the basic stance of dwelling in the world.¹⁵ A number of critics call for a journalism that will 'reconstitute the public', and they criticise current news practice for failing to address that public, a public without which journalism loses its purpose (Carey, 1987a, p.14). Such criticism is often grounded in an idealisation of the news as conversation or community-building. Study of the communicative ethos of newswriting leads in the direction of these concerns, but points beyond such metaphors of ideal communication to the space opened up in the news in—as far as this is possible—its own terms. Criticism still, of course, can only take place with reference to standards, and for this reason the critique refers back at various points to Gadamer's hermeneutic of quality communication entailing a reaching out beyond the 'I' to the 'You'.

The practice I have theorised above and which I investigate in the following chapters is an institutionally situated use of language—a way of writing that has arisen in relation to particular technologies, economic conditions and social structures of mass consumer society. This institution places itself in a characteristically modern relation to news audiences. Giddens describes modernisation as partly a matter of the

¹⁵ I would not want to make claims about how audience members respond to the communicative space opened up in the news, because this study has gathered no evidence about that response. My concern is about the quality of the space opened up.

supplanting of traditional relations of interpersonal and community trust by trust in abstract institutions (1991, pp.133-7). Journalism since the end of the nineteenth century can be seen in these terms as an institution which has constructed a relation of trust with its audiences based predominantly on truth-telling, with a corresponding downplaying of interpersonal or community level relations. Certainly this is an ethic that appeals to many journalists in thinking through their responsibility. 'The primary purpose of news gathering and reporting,' writes John Herbert in a typical formulation, '[is] the truth' (2000, p.77; also Lambeth, 1992 [1986]). In similar vein, the *Guardian* editorialised after Carlton's partly fictional documentary, 'The Connection', was exposed:

Journalism should be a process of searching for the truth. Once that process is poisoned the bond of trust between programme-maker and viewer is broken.

(8 May, 1998; quoted in Berry, 2000, p.36)

Trust is identified by many theorists of communication as central to the relation underpinning the transmission and reception of language and other signs. Jens Allwood (1997), for example, draws on a Gricean model to argue that this trust relation depends upon communicants having a joint purpose of interpersonal exchange and upon their taking each other into cognitive and ethical consideration. These criteria are hard to find in modern news, which seems to me much better characterised in Giddens' terms as a contractual exchange of money and time for reliable information.¹⁶ As Michael Schudson puts it, news journalism holds to a trustee model, in which it provides news according to its own expert assessment of what is important and interesting (1999, p.119). This is a trust relation that precedes any communicative event more than it is constructed by the participants there. Readers after all do not know journalists personally, but must trust the masthead and the idea of news. Like modern professions, news institutions thus gain much of their

¹⁶ Although it should also be noted that Giddens elsewhere posits talk as the centre of social action, and envisages it in conversational terms of a mutual knowledge of co-presence, with coordinated monitoring of the talk and critique of both the Self's actions and the Other's (1987, p.100). In such terms, the news will always fail as communicative social action, a position that, as I note below, is surely a gross prejudgement of the situation.

moral legitimacy 'because, and to the extent, that they are structured to merit the trust of clients' (Koehn, 1994, p.7).

This study is about the discourse of newswriting that emerges around this institution of the news, and about how modern journalism produces texts within this narrow ethic of truth-telling. But the study is also motivated, as I discuss in chapter one, by a concern with how news style affects the communicative relation offered to audiences in the news. In other words, it is engaged in valuing news language as communication. This needs some further theorisation of the nature of the writer-reader relation set up in news discourse. Many critics look to models of conversation or community to judge what we might call the communicative ethics of the news—that is, journalism's commitment to a certain standard of relationship through the news. But just as the nature of trust in the news is an institutionally situated ethic of truth-telling and not an interpersonal matter, the acts of interpretation, establishment of common knowledge and engagement in a common public space that link journalists and their audiences through news texts can only with difficulty be described as conversations. The news is a one-to-many form of communication, with little feedback other than very attenuated and opaque forms such as letters to the editor or ratings surveys (Bell, 1991, p.87), and so can have only minimal reciprocity or mutuality. It can be better understood as opening up a space for its readers. As Wolfgang Iser (1978) puts it, a writer must construct an 'implied reader' in the text in order to write for someone else, to reach out to a 'You' external to the 'I'. He stresses that his concept is not of an ideal reader whom a writer may think of while writing nor of an aggregate of any real readers, but 'a network of response-inviting structures, which impel the reader to grasp the text' (p.34). The text opens a space for readers and sets up 'the conditions that bring about its various possible effects' (p.18). The reader is present, in Voloshinov's sense (1986 [1929]), as an anticipation by the journalist of the text's reception, but not in any ethical sense as a You in an equal power relation with the writer, as theorists of news as conversation tend to idealise the situation (e.g., Anderson et al., 1984). To hold reciprocity and local management by both parties as ideals of communication to which journalists should strive in writing the news would surely prematurely damn any mass communication.

Nor does the model of speaking to and for a community, thereby constructing commonality and mutuality, provide an ideal for the mass mediated relation of journalist and audience that I think we should be comfortable with. John Dewey's call for America to be transformed from a Great Society into a Great Community (n.d., p.208; quoted in Iggers, 1999, p.129), which underpins much of the current debate on community-focused journalism in the US, perhaps made sense in the early part of the twentieth-century, but surely today raises the spectre of the homogenisation of richly diverse communities into some mass society dominated by certain groups. Schudson points out that:

Communities are not publics. Publics are where strangers meet to consider and build a common life under rules by which they are treated as moral equals.

(Schudson, 1999a, p.131)

The criticism here is not just that the search for community is a retreat from contemporary society back towards a small town Arcadia that never existed, but also that to ignore the extent to which communities construct barriers of inside and outside is to make the idea of community into a dangerous political tool (see Arnett, 1997). To judge journalism by the extent to which it fosters community oversimplifies it by far, immediately reducing the value placed on dimensions such as the social responsibility of journalism to those outside that particular 'conversation' or community.

Instead, I propose to assess the particularities of the communicative relation opened up in news discourse by judging the ethos of news practice against Gadamer's conditions of understanding. As I discuss above and in more detail in the chapters that follow, Gadamer (1979 [1965]) argues that the quality of understanding is dependent upon the understander, firstly, committing her or himself to understand the object of understanding in itself as it appears to her or him, secondly, seeking to expand the horizon which forms out of her or his socially constructed preconceptions, and thirdly, engaging in self-critical reflection to establish what those preconceptions are. From within Gadamer's theorisation of understanding of

Being as inseparable from participation in language, the question of what the basic stance of the journalist, writing within news style, is towards the world is a question also about how news style affects the communicative potential of the news. The literature, as I note at various points in the chapters that follow, suggests that stance is impoverished along the relations both of what journalism reports and to whom it reports. There is an historical retreat from the audience and a strategic, instrumental attitude towards news material. I will sketch each dimension in turn at this point, to describe the problem of journalism's communicative stance that the study will go on to investigate in analysis of newswriting practice.

The modern news discourse whose emergence I trace in chapter three involves something of a retreat from aspects of the communicative encounter with the audience. The news tends towards the status of decontextualised information, independent of existing genres such as the letter or speech and independent of the social rules of their delivery. Walter Lippmann, a leading theorist of modern news in the first half of the twentieth century, is representative of the thinking at work here. He held up an ideal of news in positivist terms as facts purified of opinion, which would disabuse people of their prejudices, by bringing 'home to them the uncertain character of the truth on which their opinions are founded' (1922, p.361). This ideal is formed against a backdrop of a fear that the masses, particularly the mass as audience, could not be trusted to have judgement or rationality—indeed they appear in Lippmann's writings in images of noise and blinding neon lights (p.73). In other words, with the loss of the bourgeois public sphere in the face of a commercial media, Lippmann, along with many others in the period, turns to an ethos of disinterested scientific inquiry to ground journalism in a search for truth. As Carey has pointed out, Lippmann thereby changes the problem of the press from a moral and political issue into an epistemological one (1992 [1989], p.76). Daniel LeMahieu (1988) shows how early twentieth-century reporters drew on this thinking as well as on a discourse of aggressive class-based disdain for the mass audience. Yet this retreat from engagement with readers into an epistemology of fact is complicated. LeMahieu writes that, however much they might have despised and distrusted their readers in private, in public journalists have since the start of mass journalism also

aimed to articulate their desires, to speak for readers. For their part, readers have set aside the values and experiences of their daily lives to engage with these desires. He suggests: 'In commercial culture, it could be argued, the key relationship was often between the "communicator" and the "audience member", not between the two private individuals who happened to be filling those roles' (p.21). In other words, there is undoubtedly a communicative interaction in the news, but one in which the modern reporter's hermeneutic horizon is considerably foreshortened by a distrust of the reader.

My personal experience (see chapter one) that journalists construct a quite limited sense of their readers is borne out in research. Bell cites ethnographic research that journalists furthermore are not particularly interested in their audience's reactions (1991, p.89; citing Burns, 1977, p.133; Schlesinger, 1987 [1978], p.107). This is partly a suspicion of what they see as ratings-driven, lowest common denominator, journalism (Fallows, 1997, pp.52ff.) or again a fear of the mass audience—"If we had to think about how our readers feel, all twenty million of them, we'd freeze" (senior US journalist, quoted in Gans, 1980, p.234). But it is also because journalists write at one level to please their editors and impress their colleagues (Breed, 1960 [1955]; Gans, 1980, p.230). As I show in the chapters that follow, the community of practice of journalism seems to turn inwards, away from readers, to internal criteria of value. Although it is a border-practice, which brokers meaning on behalf of others, journalism emphasises instead the reporter's expertise, internalising news values which predict what readers will find important or interesting (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p.111). Journalists' understanding of the effects and meanings of their writing is formed largely inside the practice. Andrew Edgar criticises the news media for appealing to audience interest in terms of their existing hermeneutic horizons:

if the news media is to take itself seriously as a fourth estate, then it has been argued that it has to take a moral responsibility to promote, not merely the reaffirmation of cultural identity, but rather its renewal. The moral responsibility of the press is to expand, not ossify, the hermeneutic horizon.

(Edgar, 2000, p.85)

I will return in chapter six to Edgar's complaint of an ossification of the horizon of understanding written into the news. But my point goes further. News practice retreats, perhaps in fear of those prejudices, to its *own* construction of what should and might interest people. The ethos of news style involves a looking inwards for value and the opening up of a particularly limited space for the audience.

In Jürgen Habermas' (1984) terms, such a retreat from engagement with others can be described as the privileging of strategic over communicative action, an orientation towards exerting an influence *upon* others rather than achieving understanding *with* them (p.286). Such Weberian analysis has been important in many twentieth-century theorists' critiques of society and, although its assumptions of a passive and powerless mass public may be questioned, it is useful in discussing aspects of news style's ethos. In particular it foregrounds the media as a 'technology'. Heidegger argued in a late essay that technology's ontological role in making things present, in uncovering things in a particular way, has come to dominate the space in which consciousness dwells so that we see the world in technological terms as there for our use, and not there in any sense as Other:

One of the civilizational givens in a technological world is defining the earth as standing reserve (Bestand). Nature is understood in one-dimensional terms as a field of energy or power than can be captured or stored. 'The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit.'

(Christians, 1997. p.72; quoting Heidegger, 1977, p.14)

The world, then, not only reveals itself as for our use in modern civilisation, but only reveals itself in this use. This description of an objectifying stance can be applied to the news as I have described it above, a practice ethically grounded in an institutionalised trust in the expertise of the reporter rather than a relation that seeks understanding.

This is not, I want to emphasise, to judge news discourse as inadequate conversation. I believe that we must begin from the position that the news is a form of communication in its own terms. But it is to judge the quality of that communication by foregrounding the nature of the technology of news discourse. As a result, as

Joost van Loon (2000) argues, we will necessarily no longer accept its framing. So this study is not focused upon providing journalism with a code of ethics or seeking to place it beside a social norm, but aims to foreground the processes of news style—for this is its technology, in Heidegger's (1977) terms—to open up other ways of writing the news. Van Loon writes:

[R]ather than adjudicating between 'good' and 'bad' sense, which is something that dominated critical media-studies for decades, but has become less fashionable recently, I want to direct the issue of ethics to good v. bad sense-making. More precisely, the issue of ethics is about cultivating sensibilities in technologies of mediation which allow for modes of revealing and enframing that enhance our ability to be responsive.

(van Loon, 2000, p.58)

In other words, we should shift critique of the 'good' in journalism from the product—a position van Loon argues Derrida's critique of universal reason has made untenable—to the process. Van Loon goes a little far for me (as Steven Connor (1992) argues, the search for ultimate value does not disappear just because we have deconstructed it, for the deconstruction itself paradoxically is grounded in a version of that search), but he makes a clear case for critiquing journalism in terms of its technologies of mediation, as well as for journalism's ethical discourse to extend into a reflexive attitude towards the way the news records the world and mediates events. Modern journalism's turn away from the audience in certain respects and its turning inwards to the news community's expertise for its criteria of 'good' news constitute an ethos, a stance towards the world, that is likely to impair understanding. We can talk of this in terms of a cultural shift since Lippmann's day. Edgar argues that contemporary Western culture's understanding of meaning and identity has changed, from seeing them as things existing in the world to things constructed in discourse, so placing new moral responsibilities on journalism to extend its standards of the 'good' to the way it communicates and the way it constructs representations of others, an ethos that he calls a 'cultural politics of journalism' (2000, p.86). Edgar therefore calls too for journalism to understand its own acts of mediation and construction of meaning. In Gadamer's terms, news style cannot extend either the

journalist's or the reader's understanding of things without that reflexivity about the way it makes sense.

6. *Methods and data*

Building on the theoretical base described in this chapter, the following chapters will draw out some of the specifics of news practice. However, while they share the use of the key terms described above, each has a distinct set of analytical methods and data (although chapters six and seven share data). For this reason, key scholarship tends to be discussed at the start of each chapter rather than in this chapter. My aim is to describe news discourse in greater richness by a process of triangulation: the different positions all point towards similar conclusions. Chapter three compares representative news texts from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to discuss key parameters of the news discourse which emerged at the start of last century, and which still inform newswriting. Chapter four gathers together 30 journalists' metatexts in order to trace the outlines of news discourse in what journalists say and write within their community. Chapter five studies 160 assignments by journalism students in order to investigate what they are learning when they learn to write in news style. Chapters six and seven use a sample of news articles on mundane news issues from 10 British broadsheets. Chapter six examines the workings of journalistic capital in the style of a sample of news texts. Chapter seven argues that the texts in the sample cohere in quite limited ways that do not take responsibility for the meaningfulness of the report. Chapter eight then draws some conclusions about the possibilities of forms of newswriting outside this discourse.

Chapter 3: The birth of news discourse in British newspapers, 1880-1930

1. Introduction

This chapter aims to set the scene for the analysis of how news discourse operates by describing the discourse in its historical emergence. I propose from an examination of a number of news texts from around the turn of the twentieth century that we can identify a systematic set of differences in the way the news was written then, and the way the world was understood through its writing down, and the way it has been written since. I isolate three major developments. Firstly, the wide range of styles in the Victorian newspaper all became subsumed under a single news style as a distinct and particular discourse of the news took shape. Secondly, the epistemological status of the news text changed from that of a collection of raw information to that of a form of knowledge *in itself*, not dependent on other discourses to be able to make statements about the world. Thirdly, the news developed an independent social status, which did not need to have regard for the social conventions of public discourse. The chapter works towards characterising these developments as the emergence of a distinctive field of discourse of the news.

In 1901 *The Times* scooped the rest of the London press with the news that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had resigned:

We have this morning to make the startling announcement that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has placed his resignation in the hands of Lord Salisbury.

(*The Times*, January 1, 1901, p.6)¹⁷

The sentence reads oddly a century later. The reference to 'the Chancellor of the Exchequer' without naming him as Lord Randolph Churchill would be unusual in today's news language. The turns of phrase—'We have this morning to make', 'the startling announcement'—would be very strange and all but unwriteable in news

¹⁷ *The Times*' official history states that the paper was a day ahead of other papers with the announcement (*Times History*, 1947: 12).

discourse now. And the placement of the lead news item in the middle of the last column on page six would certainly not happen today. The sentence belongs to a newspaper style that is now long gone, and to a whole cultural environment in Britain that disappeared with the development of the mass media in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Much has been written about this cultural moment—the development of the modern newspaper after about 1880 in Britain—but little about the specifics of how the ways in which the news was written, news discourse itself, changed. Many historians look to economic and technological explanations of any changes in news language and technique. Factual reporting and objectivity arose because telegraphic news agencies demanded language ‘stripped of the local, the regional and the colloquial’ that they could then sell across America (Carey, 1986, p.164). The ‘inverted pyramid’ news story, with its summarising intro and the news presented in descending order of importance, came about because unstable telegraph lines during the American Civil War forced correspondents to give the most important news first (Stephens, 1988, p.254). Political reporting and commentary in Britain declined because the development of newspaper printing into a high-capital industry led proprietors to look to sell news to wider and wider audiences (Lee, 1978, p.128; Smith, 1979, pp.141ff; Chalaby, 1998, p.32). But these explanations seem to me insufficient as explanations for the demise of the ‘dignified’, as *The Times*’ official history puts it, Victorian news text (*Times History*, 1947, p.91). Economic and technological developments are certainly, as Raymond Williams phrases it, ‘conditions’ for the development of the discourse of the modern mass media (1961, p.194), but they are not sufficient conditions. Why, as Michael Schudson asks, did so-called telegraph style only come to dominate news style at the end of the nineteenth-century, when the technology had been in use since the 1840s (1978, pp.4-5)? There seem to be other factors at work. More importantly, though, the kind of history that explains away changes in news discourse, that finds reasons outside the discourse, neglects what seem to me some of the more interesting questions of news analysis—how changes have come about in the way meaning is created in the news story and how the news text relates to the reality it sets out to represent. Those questions can only

be addressed by looking at news discourse itself.

Close analysis of the emerging discourse holds out the possibility of understanding how journalism itself experienced modern news. Journalists who worked between about 1880 and 1930 and thus straddled these two periods were conscious of the birth of the modern newspaper primarily as a matter of writing style. Charles Duguid, City editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, divided papers into new and old according to their lively or dry styles and wrote in 1901 that the triumph of the 'new school' in financial journalism was almost complete (Porter, 1998, p.50). W.T. Stead's *Pall Mall Gazette* was a 'New Journalism' (Arnold, 1887) largely in its style, as I discuss below. The retired Fleet Street editor Bernard Falk remembered in 1938:

When I joined Messrs. Hulton in Withey Grove, Manchester [i.e. the Hulton Press], boxing reporters were just learning to omit such choice phrases as 'he tapped the claret' or 'looked in the pink of condition'.

(Falk, 1938, p.40)

When Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe) launched the *Daily Mail*, he told his staff to write plain, easily digested text for the paper's lower-middle class audience. A few years later he wrote that the 'success of the *Daily Mail* has been mainly due to its compactness and brevity'. R.D. Blumenfeld set out in a textbook of the New Journalism movement of the 1890s: '*Simplicity, accuracy, conciseness, and purity of style* are the surest signposts of success' (Harmsworth, 1903, p.12; Blumenfeld, n.d., n.p.; both cited in LeMahieu, 1988, p.26). The discourse of newness and modernity is even more conspicuous because what these journalists were doing was not always entirely new. As Raymond Williams points out, papers like the *Daily Mail* owed a heavy debt to a long tradition of popular Sunday papers (1978, p.41). But these methods come together under a banner of innovation that proclaimed that a functional, unadorned modern news was the way forward. These journalists' strong awareness of modern journalism as a new way of writing suggests that a thorough understanding of what it was that changed in newswriting will be key to analysing the entire field of modern journalism.

This change in newswriting is about more than the development of ‘*fact-centred* discursive practices’ in Anglo-American journalism in the mid to late nineteenth century, as Jean K. Chalaby has recently argued (1996, p.310). Duguid, Falk, Harmsworth and their contemporaries were aware of a much broader change, a kind of Industrial Revolution of the mind that involved a casting off of the old and an embracing of a new mechanised, efficient and methodical journalism at the level of language (as chapter four discusses further). This chapter sets out to demonstrate that what we think of as the modern news form developed in Britain (and perhaps a little earlier in America) over a period bounded by the birth of American style London half-penny evening papers in the early 1880s (Marzolf, 1984; Tunstall, 1994 [1977], pp.96ff.) and the gradual change of the traditionalist *Times* between 1914 and the 1930s (LeMahieu, 1988, pp.30, 260).

I use the word ‘modern’ in this thesis particularly for the form which developed in this moment of highly conscious modernising and which still dominates news journalism. I recognise, as Bryan Turner points out, the ‘inherently contested nature’ of the word modern that makes it impossible ‘to impose by a definitional fiat an agreed set of terms for debate’ (1990, p.1). John Hartley, for example, argues that journalism is inseparable from the ‘modern project’ of the last four centuries in Western society, and that it is characterised by modernity’s ideas of exploration, imperial expansion, scientific thought, political emancipation and the broader themes of freedom, progress and universal enlightenment (1996, p.33). It is hard to disagree that journalism takes place within this modern episteme, but there is evidence in the literature for using the word in a narrower sense when talking about journalism. Peter Dahlgren talks of a “‘high modernist” or “classical” paradigm of journalism’ which took hold at the end of the nineteenth century, that entailed a whole set of inter-linked notions of what the news was and did (1996, pp.61-2). James W. Carey calls the period from 1890 to 1968 ‘the era of modern journalism’ in the United States (1999, p.53).¹⁸ Throughout, then, I use the term ‘modern news’ to refer to the results

¹⁸ I do not, however, find the description of a postmodern age, that Carey implies follows the modern, useful to characterise journalism. Instead I seek to build upon another of Carey’s observations, that journalism has become cocooned in its own modern practices to the extent that it is not responsive to changing cultural circumstances (see chapter eight).

of the conscious modernising of journalism discussed in this chapter.

2. Method

The argument here draws on the findings both of existing media history and of a qualitative analysis of a scattering of newspapers from the period to trace the emergence of a new way of writing. The time span we are looking at forms a large, but coherent period in terms of newspaper development. *The Times*, as LeMahieu shows in a close analysis of headlines, adopted textual forms nearly identical to those of mass papers such as the *Daily Express*, but began to do so 20 years after they did, at a time that the popular press was moving on to screaming banner headlines and colloquial language (1988, pp.28-30). So, although more differences than similarities are apparent at first sight, these papers share the same field of discourse when looked at from the medium distance. This chapter does not examine any particular newspaper, because for any particular title there is a network of specific factors at work which obscures the more general change. We can miss the forest when we look too closely at the trees. The *Daily Mail* (launched 1896), for example, owed its success in large part to Alfred Harmsworth's clever advertising and marketing strategies and his conception of the newspaper as a product to be sold (Williams, 1961, p.204; *Times History*, 1947, p.117). And yet the newspaper drew on new ways of writing and new ways of thinking about writing that would not have been available to it 20 years earlier. Nor is this a history of a particular movement, such as New Journalism in 1880s and 1890s Britain or the rise of objectivity in post-First World War America, but of a general change in ways of thinking and acting. I am interested in these limits to what is sayable, or writeable, at a particular moment, what Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1989, [1972]) would call the discursive formation of the press: the set of rules and procedures which constrain and enable a set of statements about the world.

But while my framework here is quite broad, it is at the same time about little details of change. F.J. Mansfield writes in 1935 that, 'A few years ago some ingenious person in Fleet Street awoke to the futility of the full-stop in headlines' (1944 [1935], p.235). It's a revealing anecdote. We have to wonder: why were journalists unable to see that the headline full-stop was doing no work before this moment? Suddenly, it

seems, a certain way of thinking became available. The anecdote suggests two methodological points. Firstly, we cannot assume that even the most obvious ideas were present until we have evidence for them. And secondly, the discourse of the news, the possibility of thought, becomes apparent in analysis of small elements of language. It is for this latter reason that the chapter looks for stylistic details. It does not ask what changed in the material conditions of journalism or the ideology informing it, but, as I proposed in chapter two, how journalists inflected the language, how they used the language, differently.

3. The century before

The British press had been changing throughout the century preceding the period we are looking at. In the last years of the eighteenth century, the press had won the right to report Parliament and the courts (Smith, 1979, p.76). In 1855 the heavy taxes on newspapers began to be reduced, on the back of liberal reforms and the growing respectability and status of the middle-class newspaper as the fourth estate of government (Curran, 1978). The tax cut allowed for a drop in the price of newspapers and a consequent expansion in readership (Lee, 1978, p.120). The one-penny *Daily Telegraph*, in particular, grew into the world's largest newspaper in this period. Then, in 1868, the Press Association was formed, allowing cheap newspapers outside London to spring up and to prosper (Brown, 1985, p.4). At the same time Reuters was developing its network of correspondents, providing papers with cheap foreign news. Both Lee and Brown cite a range of economic, technological and social factors underpinning the growth in the press: an expanding urban population, improvements in education, a 500 per cent drop in the price of newsprint in the second half of the century, faster communications with the invention of the steam train and the telegraph and a generally improving standard of living.

Newspaper styles also changed over this period, but according to a slightly different dynamic. And I would argue that they did not yet form a coherent discourse. Partly because of improved practices of transcription such as shorthand (Smith, 1978, p.162), partly because of the decline of party-bankrolled newspapers and the rise of commercial operations in their stead (Lee, 1978, p.119; Cowan, 1946, p.314), and partly because of the rising status of journalism, the distinction between facts and

commentary became more clearly defined. Mitchell Stephens (1988) gives an example of a hoax story in the *New York Sun* in 1835—about four foot high, winged creatures covered in short, glassy-copper hair which lived on the moon—that did no damage to the paper’s reputation when it was exposed as a hoax. But, ‘[a]s the century progressed, violations of the truth...began to be looked upon more seriously’ (p.252). Particular styles such as ‘Telegraphese’ arose, perfected by the *Daily Telegraph*’s George Augustus Sala, creating or perhaps feeding a Victorian desire for richness of description. Falk writes that:

[A]ll public spectacles were treated with what to-day would be described as Hollywood’s exaggerated touch; the finest descriptive writers were let loose on the yawning columns, to dazzle the reader with an Oriental extravagance of imagery, and a voluptuous vocabulary that even Gibbon would have envied.

(Falk, 1938, p. 206)

As the newspaper grew in prestige in early Victorian society, the status of its text seems to have changed. Smith suggests that, ‘The reporter became, as it were, the principal broker for the substantial discourse of society’ (1978, p.63). The public sphere, in Habermas’s terms, had shifted from the coffee house to the news page. This is in large measure the argument which Chalaby (1998) proposes. But Chalaby argues that public discourse disappeared in this period and was replaced by a commodified journalistic discourse (p.66). When we look closely at news style, however, we see that the news was still more of a brokerage, in Smith’s term, for public discourse than a self-sufficient form of knowledge. Telegraphese, for example, would have drawn its cultural capital from descriptive writing in general, from the periods of master stylists such as Carlyle or Macauley or, as Falk suggests, Gibbon. It is only with the birth of modern news that we see newspapers developing their own particular discourse, through which reality was refracted, and in which the newspaper’s claim to authority and authenticity was made.

4. Modern news style

4.1. The development of a news voice

The historian Lucy Brown (1985) describes her twentieth-century puzzlement at some of the textual practices of nineteenth-century news. Reporters, she says, 'were like the painter who can copy but cannot paint direct from nature' (p.103). In February 1886 *The Times* sent a reporter to cover a series of meetings of the unemployed. Brown writes that, 'when faced with the problem of what to say about it, the writer copied the matter embroidered on banners, gave the names of the chairmen of each meeting, and stated that the proceedings were orderly. He offered no analysis or interpretation' (p.104). As a modern news story, this text would be incomplete and strangely selective, but I would suggest that in terms of the news practice of the 1880s, it recorded what was seen as public information. *The Times* kept up this practice well into this century, as Mansfield records in an undated example in his 1935 journalism textbook:

Another example of the two styles of journalism was given when the B.B.C. issued an apology for the inclusion in one of its broadcast music-hall programmes of 'a certain highly objectionable remark'. *The Times* gave the text of the official statement only, but the *Daily Telegraph* explained who the offenders were, commented on the 'broader' type of humour recently noticeable in broadcasts, stated that the censorship was to be tightened up, and wound up with a full statement by the comedian concerned.

(Mansfield, 1944 [1935], p.69)

The premodern news text, which *The Times* exemplifies here, had no discursive structures upon which to draw other than those called up by the texts it quoted. It seems that the news text therefore had no cultural authority to describe a scene or interpret events. By the early twentieth century, more modern papers such as the *Daily Telegraph* had begun to establish a discourse in which they could step beyond these bounds.

The nineteenth-century newspaper of course contained interpretation and description, but rarely in its own voice. In fact, it did not really have a voice. The newspaper

printed, for example, letters from correspondents or letters between public officials as news (and not, as a modern newspaper would, as readers' comments on the news) with little or no framing text from an editorial voice. It seemed to rely on the cultural authority of the letter as a mode of communication to vouch for the information contained. In this context, it is interesting that until into the 1890s it was seen as unacceptable in *The Times* office to edit correspondents' reports (Brown, 1985, p.234). They were printed in their entirety. Similarly, the newspapers printed verbatim reports of parliamentary or judicial proceedings, sometimes at great length; they printed speeches made at public meetings; they stole magpie-like from other newspapers, particularly from London and foreign papers. And they signalled the authenticity of these texts with explanatory headings such as, 'Epitome of Opinion in the Morning Journals' (*Pall Mall Gazette*, January 11, 1878, p.2) or phrases such as, 'The Board of Agriculture announces that...' (*The Times*, December 1, 1919). The phrases explicitly marked not just the source of the information but its status as information about the world.

The news had not yet developed the textual apparatus of interviewing, summarising, quoting and editing that would allow it to be able to claim to represent reality and to speak directly to its readers. The interview, a technique of gathering news first used by New York newspapers in the 1830s or the 1850s, depending on the definition used (Stephens, 1988, p.247; Silvester, 1994, p.4), was distrusted until the turn of the century (Brown, 1985, pp.160ff). It seems that politicians and journalists alike had difficulty turning the personal statement made to a journalist into a text official enough to appear in a newspaper. *The Times* correspondent Antonio Gallenga wrote in 1884 that he rarely used material communicated by a public figure in an interview: 'it was seldom that they had anything of importance to say to me and still more seldom that I durst report what they had said without their leave, or that I felt that they said what they thought when they allowed or bade me report their sayings' (quoted in Brown, 1985, p.163). The difficulty in moving between private and public language which Gallenga experienced is interesting. It suggests that journalism did not yet have the tools or the authority to redefine the context of words. There was no independent, self-sufficient voice to the news. It seems that only when that

developed could the journalist turn the conversations of kings and prime ministers into news.

Even when papers' reporters gathered information themselves, the style was shaped by the style of the topic of the text. *The Times*' law reports, for example, used a vocabulary and syntax strongly reminiscent of the courts:

The statements in question had reference to the conduct of the plaintiff in his capacity of chairman of the Ibo Investment Trust Company (Limited) and of the London section of the Nyaasa Company, of which the defendant is a shareholder.

(*The Times*, January 17, 1901)

It seems likely that the dependence on legal language in court reporting was linked to the weak status of journalism as a trade or profession. *The Times* employed lawyers waiting to enter the Bar as court reporters, who were thus neither lawyers nor reporters. Such practice would not tend to produce a strong institutional identity or a coherent discourse of the news. The same observation can be made of the late nineteenth-century British press as a whole. It was not until 1889 that the National Association of Journalists began offering training to journalists, and its successor the Institute of Journalists persuaded London University to offer a two year diploma in 1919 (Bromley, 1997, p.334). Both Schudson, writing on American journalism, and Brake give the 1880s to 1890s—a period when many professions were developing institutional solidity—as the period when reporters developed an identity distinct from writers, editors and similar groups (Schudson, 1978, p.65; Brake, 1998, pp.29ff.). And as Smith also notes, it was not until Harmsworth's newspaper empire in the early twentieth century that specialist journalism training, away from public life and leading to a professional life as a reporter, became institutionalised (1978, p.169).

The Victorian newspaper was thus a medley of various public styles, voices and types of text. The *Daily Graphic* of January 4, 1890, for example, was written in a wide range of styles, from a sentimental description of the aftermath of a boarding school fire ('Even so late as Thursday evening a striking testimony was borne to the

extent to which the calamity at Forest Gate...') on page 1, to a concise, factual correspondent's report from Berlin ('The ravages of the influenza epidemic continue in a serious form...'), to a florid column on 'Our Troops in Cairo' by Lady Butler ('But of all the heart-moving sounds...there is none to surpass that of the Scottish pibroch, when, under the African moon...'). Each text has stylistic features appropriate to it—circumlocution and slow, extended syntax for the fire, poetic syntax for Lady Butler's epistle, and so on—and thus calls upon a range of appropriate discourses.

Thirty years later, by about 1920, a journalistic discourse has emerged, which allows the news to subsume these various voices under a universal, standard voice. The change went to the heart of journalism. Edgar Wallace wrote around 1920, 'I claim to be the last reporter in the Street—all others are journalists' (quoted in Mansfield, 1944 [1935], p.74). Reporters ceased simply to report the voices of those in public life, but framed them within the voice of journalism. Schudson (1982) notes a trend in American news of the turn of the century away from reporting the opening of Congress through official speeches and towards statements by the reporter summarising the event's meaning. Particularly in the lead paragraphs, 'reporters increasingly took it as their prerogative to assert something about the larger political meaning of the message' (p.102). A glance at the *Daily Graphic* of August 18, 1919, shows the same trend in Britain a decade or so later. Important official statements are still quoted verbatim, prefaced with paragraphs giving details of who is speaking and when and where the statement was made. But most texts draw on a discourse independent in form of the source text, and it is a discourse easily recognisable to us today as news. The following is typical:

The police are searching for two youths in connection with an audacious 'hold-up' and robbery at North Dulwich railway station.

The two youths, it is stated, entered the booking office on Friday night and, threatening the young clerk in charge with a revolver, made off with the contents of the till—£3 5s 3d.

The intro of each news text summarises the topic, places the main actor at the start of the sentence and expresses action in the completed past or present tense. Each

paragraph contains one or two sentences of little more than 30 words, each expressing one idea. These words are predominantly Anglo-Saxon rather than Latinate, used in a concrete rather than figurative way, and are modified less by adjectives than dependent clauses which pack more information or action in. Lincoln Steffens, looking back on New York of the 1880s, wrote of this developing formula of the news: 'Reporters were to report the news as it happened, like machines, without prejudice, colour, and without style' (1931, p.179). By the 1920s, the *Daily Graphic* was using a similar style and even the conservative *Times* was being shaken out of its dignified prose (LeMahieu, 1988, p.31). Information from external texts was now severely edited, summarised and contextualised by the newspaper, and was thus translated into a single news style. The key change in practice was that it became acceptable to separate information from the style of language in which it arrived at the newspaper and to relate it in a concise and unadorned style. The *Daily Mail*, sporting the motto 'The Busy Man's Paper' and designed to be scanned quickly rather than pored over from first column to last (LeMahieu, 1988, p.26), depended on this development in attitude to information and style. I would argue that this development in turn depended on the emergence of a distinct discourse of the news.

4.2. News as knowledge

To put the point another way, Victorian news seems to have been able only to *represent* information, while the modern news story *was itself* a piece of information. It no longer needed to preface stories with, 'The Board of Agriculture announces that...' but could itself announce the information. The distinction between the news and the words carrying the news became elided in the early twentieth century, with the result that the very presence of news style accorded a certain authority. Perhaps something similar went on in art: the Romantic painting was still representing objects, while the modernist painting had more of the status of an object of contemplation itself. Journalism did not become, of course, anti-representational or abstract. But it became a self-sufficient form of knowledge. Schudson (1982), in an American context, finds that political journalists began to move away from 'stenography', that is, from verbatim reporting of others' words, towards interpreting. They began to see their role 'as involving some fundamental translation

and interpretation of political acts to a public ill-equipped to sort out for itself the meaning of events' (p.99).¹⁹

Brown (1985) gives another illuminating example of premodern practice, although she does not draw from it the conclusion I do. At New Year's, 1895, a large storm hit the coasts of Western Europe, during which a number of ships sank and up to 400 people drowned. Yet Brown found only one report in the British press, in the *Yorkshire Post*, which reported the storm as a single event. Many papers printed discrete details of missing ships and local reports of storm damage over a number of days, but only the *Yorkshire Post* collated the information into a story (p.254). Journalism involved predominantly collecting, not collating or interpreting. Victorian culture as a whole revelled in simply collecting and accumulating things—James Clifford (1988) charts the development of British museums in these terms. Knowledge seemed to percolate out of simple accumulating. But something more specific is also going on in the press. A disillusioned liberal, R.G. Collingwood, looking back from the early twentieth century lamented that the 1896 *Daily Mail* was 'the first English newspaper for which the word "news" lost its old meaning of the facts which a reader ought to know if he was to vote intelligently' (quoted in LeMahieu, 1988, p.111). Through the nostalgia we can catch a glimpse of what the news text meant to the Victorian liberal. The process of interpretation seems to have been understood to happen in the reader's mind, not on the page.

This attitude to information explains why newspapers could print contradictory reports side-by-side—something the modern newspaper would find difficult to do. They would also print information they explicitly marked as likely to be untrue—something I could imagine a modern newspaper doing only if the likely falsity of the information was itself newsworthy. The *Glasgow Herald* of February 4, 1814, for example, stated:

¹⁹ Anthony Smith dates this change much earlier, to the birth of the lobby system in the British Parliament, when the idea of a political journalism, distinct from verbatim reporting, arose, with the goal of finding out what was going on behind the scenes (1978, p.166). But this is political sketchwriting, not reporting, and is in a distinct tradition.

These [Dutch] papers contain a variety of reports, such as General Bolow having established his head-quarters at Brussels, which, we are sorry to say, has since been contradicted.

(*Glasgow Herald*, February 4, 1814, p.2)

Traces of the practice persisted in the more traditional newspapers into the early years of last century. When the Titanic sank in 1912, *The Times*' report of the next morning first summarised the available information in accordance with modern news discourse:

An ocean disaster, unprecedented in history, has happened in the Atlantic. The White Star liner Titanic on her maiden voyage, carrying nearly 2,400 people, has been lost near Cape Race, and according to the latest messages there is grave reason to fear that less than 700 of the passengers and crew have been saved.

(‘Titanic Sunk’, *The Times*, April 16, 1912, p.9)

A number of paragraphs of background information about the ship followed. The paper then printed 15 telegrams from New York, Montreal and Toronto, largely in the order they were received. The first message, ‘The Titanic sank at 2.20 this morning. No lives were lost.—Reuter’ (p.9), is clearly in contradiction with the later messages and with the introduction and sub-headline half a column above it, ‘Terrible Loss of Life Feared’. The paper was still expecting readers to extract for themselves a picture of reality from the telegrams—it did not need to take responsibility for any contradiction in the text.

That soon changed. It became a key job of the modern sub-editor to:

Combine one story into another, or perhaps combine running reports from several news agencies, a handful of correspondents and half a dozen reporters, to produce a single, intelligible report from a series of confused and even contradictory messages.

(Evans, 1972, p.7)

The re-ordering and reworking of material in the modern news text is therefore a key difference from the Victorian news text. Norman Fairclough writes that modern news

weaves together a range of voices in a web that imposes a certain interpretation on them (1995, p.77). The Titanic report marks the boundary: these techniques have not yet been fully incorporated into *The Times*' practice. The introductory passage above seems to act primarily as an abstract of the material to come. The modern news text, by contrast, is structured around its intro and its text is formed out of processes of summarising (van Dijk, 1988a, chapter two).

These processes are not only characteristic of modern news discourse, but they were rare until the modern news story developed. It is a standard part of a modern journalist's job to check the paper's clippings library when writing a news story and to summarise some of that previous material in a background paragraph. But Brown notes that when Stead of the *Pall Mall Gazette* began to put together a clippings file in the 1880s for future reference—or asked 'the devoted Miss Hetherington' to do so, as J. W. Robertson Scott put it in his memoirs—he was mocked by other journalists (1985, p.253). It was an eccentric thing to do. The best explanation for why Victorian journalists looked askance at the practice is perhaps that the newspaper text cannot have been seen as having any independent status as information.

By 1919 news practice had caught up with Stead. The *Daily Graphic*, for example, brought extraneous material into its news stories to give them context:

The police have made considerable progress with their investigations into the mystery surrounding the disappearance of Miss Connie Grant. Her supposed remains were found under the floor at 12, Pembroke Place, Kilburn.

William John Grant, Connie's father, and Alice Maud White, known as Mrs. Grant, were charged at Willesden Police Court yesterday with manslaughter.

It will be recalled that Mrs. White gave herself up on Wednesday after having been missing since the previous Friday, the day on which the remains were discovered. She appeared in the dock yesterday with her baby.

(*Daily Graphic*, August 1, 1919, p.3)

The news text was no longer simply a source of information, but a meaningful text. The 'news story', as news style describes the text, is perhaps not a story in

narratologists' sense of having a beginning, middle and end (see chapter seven), but does involve textual operations to make the text *coherent*. Harmsworth wrote in a set of instructions to his staff on the *Daily Mail*: 'Consistently through these quotations runs the idea that the material of the news is there to be shaped into a coherent body of reading' (Brown, 1985, p.251). Harmsworth's mass newspaper was pre-cooked as opposed to the raw material of the premodern paper. Daniel Boorstin (1971 [1961]) similarly describes a twentieth-century paradigm whereby the world is assumed to be deficient in some ways, and to require editors to choose and shape material from the mass of events to help readers to make sense of them. In the 1860s, a journalist could write, as James Parton did: 'The skilled and faithful journalist, recording with exactness and power the thing that has come to pass, is Providence addressing men.' By the 1960s, the news is 'whatever a good editor chooses to print' (p.117). Boorstin interprets the change as a general loss of faith in the givenness or providential nature of social life, but we can also look at it in terms of a discourse of journalism. The news story was not born until a news discourse emerged allowing information to be reshaped and reinterpreted. Smith writes that the news story became 'the basic molecular element of journalistic reality: a structured nugget of information,' and concludes, 'Journalism became the art of structuring reality, rather than recording it' (1978, p.168).

4.3. News and public discourse

Gallenga's worries about negotiating the boundary of private and public text point to another crucial change in attitude in modern news discourse. The newspaper abandoned its 'dignified', gentlemanly style, appropriate to formal public discourse, for a plain speaking, almost socially unaccountable style. The Victorian newspaper seems to have been quite tightly circumscribed by social rules. The *Times History* describes the innovations of Stead's *Pall Mall Gazette* in the 1880s almost purely in terms of the social conventions he broke:

Much more novelty was required and Stead introduced the 'interview' despite protests against his invasion of personal privacy; he conducted social and political campaigns; drew national attention despite criticism of his 'sensationalism'; checked the commercialization of vice and the exploitation

of the poor despite the allegation of muckraking; campaigned on behalf of General Gordon, ignoring the taunt of jingoism; and secured news scoops again and again.

(*Times History*, 1947, p.93)

Brown (1985) relates that when the politician H.J. Wilson commissioned what we would now call scoping studies prior to setting up his own paper, one expert told him that one of his potential competitors, the *Sheffield Independent*, was an inferior paper because, among other reasons, it introduced 'topics and language that should only be publicly met with in meetings for religious or benevolent purposes and which, when read in public houses and places of general resort not only offend, but give occasions for derisive ribaldry' (1874, H.J. Wilson papers; Brown, 1985, p.51). The premodern newspaper not only depended on a range of public styles for its authority, as I have suggested above, but it had to take account of the mores of the speech situations in which it would be read. It is these mores that Stead's New Journalism disregarded. As Smith says, the Victorian newspaper conjures up an image of 'a man on a platform speaking to rows of listeners and reaching a wider public *via* the shorthand reporter' (1978, p.163). The newspaper was not a communicative event in itself as much as a way in which the man on the podium spoke to more people. It was a vehicle for public debate, and it obeyed the stylistic conventions of that context.

On January 23, 1901, the day after Queen Victoria died, *The Times* muted the news of the death in circumlocution and euphemism that signalled that so great an event could not be approached in words. The black-bordered paper stated on its main news page, page 11:

It is with the most profound sorrow that we record the death of our much loved Queen.

Throughout yesterday the blow which has overwhelmed in grief the peoples of the British Empire was awaited with universal and almost breathless fear, which grew more tense and poignant as successive bulletins revealed its imminence. At seven o'clock suspense was ended by the following message from the Prince of Wales to the Lord Mayor, which was instantly made public:-

‘Osborne, Tuesday. 6.45 p.m.

‘The Prince of Wales to Lord Mayor.

‘My beloved mother, the Queen, has just passed away, surrounded by her children and grandchildren.

‘Albert Edward.’

(*The Times*, January 23, 1901, p.11)

The Times text obeys social conventions about the public announcement of death, expressing a reluctance to state the facts and verging on hagiography. These are not practices we expect of the modern news text. Much the same phenomenon is happening in the announcement of Lord Randolph Churchill’s resignation with which I started. The basic information, ‘The Lord Chancellor has resigned,’ is wrapped up in a style of formal public announcement appropriate to the event’s seriousness. This textual practice fits well with Smith’s description of the Victorian newspaper as fulfilling ‘a role of brokerage between authority and the middle class in Victorian society’ before rising circulations made the loyalties of the paper to a small social group no longer meaningful and opened the way for a ‘new formula’ (1979, pp.25, 141).

It is hard for us to unpick the modern news story from its current high social status, but its arrival, in innovations such as Stead’s, must have been a morally shocking event. The modern style implied an egalitarian directness and a dismantling of social convention. From the perspective of the premodern newspaper, the bald assertion of fact outside the conventions of public speech was a violation of good behaviour and part of all that was shockingly modern. This is apparent in the conventions for the opening sentences of articles. In a premodern newspaper, information could not simply be presented. It had to be introduced: ‘We have this morning to make the startling announcement...’ or ‘An ocean disaster, unprecedented in history, has happened in the Atlantic.’ It is perhaps similar to the ‘Hear ye! Hear ye!’ of one of the newspaper’s ancestors, the town crier. Only when the text had announced it had some information to transmit was the communicative encounter opened, and the information presented. Theoretically, we could describe this ‘throat-clearing’ as

similar to the opening adjacency pairs of conversation analysis by which a channel is opened between the participants, or as a version of the abstract of Labov and Waletzky's (1967) narrative typology by which the narrator signals to the audience that they are about to enter the narrative world. But whatever the sociolinguistic explanation, a change is evident in news texts. For a little later than the other changes I have charted, and apparent first in some telegraph news, the practice of simply launching into the information became acceptable:

Six workmen were killed at a mine at Kray, near Essen, Germany, on Thursday. A new shaft is being sunk in the Koenigen Elisabeth Mine there, and while work was proceeding, says Reuter, a heavy mass of rock...

(*Daily Graphic*, September 4, 1909, p.3)

The news story stood on its own not just as a self-sufficient form of knowledge about the world, but as a form of social intercourse not dependent on the context of its delivery or reading.

5. Conclusion

Schudson quotes Alvin Gouldner's phrase that the news is 'decontextualized' communication (1978, p.90). For the above *Daily Graphic* excerpt to make sense, the reader must accept the news text's right, authority and ability to state the facts of something that happened hundreds of kilometres away a few days previously. This change, and indeed the other changes in textual practice described above, were only possible because the news story became recognised as a self-contained language event. It no longer had to refer outside itself to the source text to be able to assert a fact; the journalist's role changed from a gatherer and recorder of news to a storyteller; and the news story could abandon the existing social conventions of its source texts or of formal social intercourse. A particular news style was emerging that was able to contain and communicate meaning in its own right. We begin to see texts such as the following *Times* story of 1928:

The China Navigation Company's steamer Anking (3,472 tons), which was on a voyage from Singapore to Hong-kong, was seized by pirates in the Bay of Tongking on Wednesday evening. The pirates numbered 40, and although

the ship's officers had no time to arm themselves when the pirates attacked they resisted valiantly.

(*The Times*, October 1, 1928, p.14)

The text quotes no official source text, only the newspaper by-line of 'From Our Own Correspondent'; it makes a claim about events in the world; and it makes no statement of regret or consolation for the event. The newspaper story has become a self-sufficient form of communication.

Theorists of mass communication who trace structural changes in society to developments in communication are fundamentally right. We should place considerable emphasis on the mechanisms which allowed newspapers to move beyond audiences within specific social groups to much wider audiences, which stretched across classes and encompassed whole nations (Carey, 1991, p.35). But they could not have developed in this way without a new form of writing that was self-sufficient both in social terms and in terms of the meaning of its words.

Although by no means independent of the power structures of society, the news acquired the ability to refract various practices and ideologies through its discursive practices and to tell stories such as *The Times* article above.

The techniques and ways of thinking discussed above are a coherent network which has become so naturalised and fundamental to the news that it is rarely articulated. We can catch moments of transition from pre-modern journalism which show the way these new ways of writing that emerged imply and require each other. James Milne writes in 1931 that:

The new book, with news in it, served up in summaries and extracts, is all the go...It says everything for the writing in the modern daily paper that the best stuff from the best books blends imperceptibly with it. That, likewise, is a testament to the ordinary reader, who has a gift for knowing what is good, though he cannot always give you his reasons.

(Milne, 1931. p.364)

A bundle of notions informs this short excerpt: that, for example, popular writing and

mass readerships are to be valued, that modern journalism is inseparable from the literary forms of modernism, that the modern news story speaks directly to the needs of 'modern man', and that the ability to summarise and extract from other texts is a key aspect of the modern newness. Journalism lives still within this discursive field, although it carries few of the connotations of a shocking avant garde or progressive, modernising practice.

Indeed, the aim of this chapter has been not only to describe specific aspects of news discourse by comparing pre-modern and modern texts, but also to theorise news style as an historical object. It arose in a particular historical setting and is far from being the natural or even the only way to write the news. James W. Carey's concern, quoted in the previous chapter, that journalism must reconstitute its public has resonance beside the analysis above of modern news discourse emerging as a morally shocking journalism cast off its responsibility to social mores. The call from Edgar and van Loon for a 'cultural politics of journalism' that has a more reflexive attitude towards its meaning-making practices is strengthened when we see how entrenched and well-worn news style has become since its beginnings a century ago in the consciously modernising attitude towards news language of Falk, Harmsworth and Duguid. News discourse's power to close the gap between the news and the events it describes, and to relate and reshape the statements of the range of voices in society under one style also raises questions, particularly Lyotard's accusation that to speak for others is to do 'grammatical violence' to them. Such questions and concerns become particularly apposite in the light of the analysis in chapter four and six that journalism has difficulty in addressing them because of the closely circumscribed role and social capital which language holds within news discourse.

Chapter 4: Scowling gloomily at their notebooks: Aspects of how journalists understand their writing

In the accounts of these reporters we have nothing less than memoirs about the getting of wisdom.

(Theodore L. Glasser and James S. Ettema, 1989, p.24)

1. Introduction

There is growing interest from media analysts in the memoirs of journalists, particularly in what these writings off the news page or off camera can tell us about how journalists make sense of their practice. Sally Bailey and Granville Williams, for example, call memoirs ‘an under-used source in helping us to understand some of the dilemmas, pressures and practices facing journalists in their work’ (1997, p.352). Howard Good argues for readings of journalists’ autobiographies that do not just ransack them for odds and ends of fact, but treat them as imaginative recreations of experience, which ‘stretch it, shade it, transform it, give it a coherence that was not there before’ (1993, pp.1, 3). Barbie Zelizer (1993) similarly places emphasis on the work done in such writings, which she theorises as the maintenance of journalists’ ‘interpretive community’. In the stories told in informal settings, in memoirs, in professional meetings and elsewhere, there exists ‘a shared past through which journalists make their professional lives meaningful’ and through which they define appropriate practice (p.219; see also Wenger, 1998, p.47). Theodore L. Glasser and James S. Ettema (1989) use such writings, as well as interviews, to locate aspects of the usually tacit, commonsensical knowledge that journalists have about their daily practice. They identify journalists’ ‘how to’ knowledge as a ‘style of thought’, which rubs off on members of the group over their careers, and they argue that journalists’ reflections on the job are built upon this situated knowledge, and can in fact be read for the wisdom they display (p.24). Jeremy Iggers, meanwhile, looks for journalism’s ethics in columns, editors’ memoranda, conversations and similar metatexts more than either in codes of conduct or analysis of practice, because it is there that ‘the discourse—or conversation—of many, sometimes discordant voices’ is to be found (1999, p.12).

Much of this critical work to ‘understand how journalists understand’ (Ericson et al., 1987, p.7) focuses on newsgathering, and very little mention is made of newswriting. Darnton (1975), Romano (1986) and Glasser and Ettema (1989) are among the few to mention language at all. There is good reason for this: journalists rarely mention the act of writing or the words they use. But the scattered references that there are in journalists’ metatexts point to a set of ideas about how words work in the news and to journalistic strategies to negotiate their jobs, providing us with an approach to understanding how newswriting fits into daily news practice. The patchy attention paid by journalists to newswriting is also in itself an argument for paying academic attention to this area. I argue that journalism suffers for its difficulty in thinking through how the news is written and therefore how it might be written otherwise. The following analysis of 30 memoirs by British journalists, most but not all broadsheet reporters, builds on the existing study of memoirs in order to make three interrelated points about news practice. Firstly, while many journalists are without doubt dissatisfied with the way their trade or profession represents society and with the language available to them, their memoirs and textbooks suggest that they have few ways of discussing this problem of writing. Instead, secondly, such reflections act to ‘censor’, to use Pierre Bourdieu’s terminology (1991, p.38), the role of language in constructing representations and communicating meanings, in an attempt to delimit and defuse the problem. Thirdly, while there is a strong ethos of truth telling and of how journalists should act in gathering the news, there is little sign of any ethical awareness or reflection surrounding journalism’s communicative practices. What amounts to more or less half of journalists’ activity is thus thought through only patchily and narrowly within the journalistic community.

2. Method

I have not interviewed journalists in reaching these conclusions, nor analysed news texts. I have looked instead for regularities in what journalists say within their communities. By analysing “the innumerable words spoken by men” through which “a meaning has taken shape over us” (Gutting, 1989, p.133; quoting Foucault, 1973, p.xvi), we can investigate not so much the actual practice as the conditions of possibility for writing the news. As the work of Zelizer and her colleagues shows,

attempting to understand the cultural dynamic, the process of self-understanding, of the journalism community, provides us with a richer understanding of news practice. We avoid, in Morrison and Tumber's words, using them 'in the same way as anthropologists might use stories and myths of some primitive tribe to explain the culture out of which the stories have emerged' (1995 [1988], p.314). As I have already argued in earlier chapters, the discourse analysis in this study does not *explain away* journalism's practices as the effects of technology or ideology as much as seek to trace how they make sense from the inside.

Such an approach also sidesteps what William Labov (1972) calls the 'observer's paradox'—that we cannot observe people without affecting the activity we are observing—a problem that is acute in the sociology of journalism. Asking journalists how they write tends to elicit statements that journalists feel they should make, such as letting the facts 'speak for themselves'. These are, to a substantial extent, externally directed statements. Herbert Gans was troubled by the extent to which he found himself positioned as an audience or as a visiting expert in newsrooms or even, at times, as journalists' conscience, 'which made me nervous because it implied that I was forcing them to stick with rules they might otherwise have violated' (1980, p.76). Zelizer (1993) and Glasser and Ettema (1989) argue that journalists' statements to researchers about being professionals or about objectivity are often stronger than they would be otherwise. Particularly in the case of newswriting, which is not a strongly theorised aspect of journalism, the gap here between what journalists might say they do in interviews and what they actually do could be quite large. The problem will be less in laboratory experiments such as verbal protocol analysis (Pitts, 1989; Schumacher et al, 1989), because journalists are being asked there to account more for their cognitive processes than for the meaning of the processes. We will look at some findings of such work in chapters five and seven. But there too there are problems. The understanding of the writing task could well be quite different in an artificial experiment and in the newsroom. Both interviews and laboratories introduce a new context which will affect our findings, as informants' knowledge about how to behave appropriately around researchers is invoked

(Cameron, 2001, p.20), and it is a very difficult additional factor to subtract in interpretation.

Analysing news texts can help us understand how meaning is invoked by journalists in their work, without being caught up in these methodological difficulties, particularly when we compare source texts or drafts with published versions (e.g., Bell, 1991; Renkema, 1984). I will use such strategies in chapters five, six and seven. But here too we must be careful not to ‘explain’ news production purely by reading the final products. As I discuss in critiquing Short et al.’s (1996) stylistic analysis of a news text in chapter two, and as I will also discuss in relation to van Dijk’s (1988a) socio-cognitive analysis in chapter seven, these techniques run risks of misreading—or at least reading differently—the writing processes and understanding that inform such text production, when they do not begin from an appreciation of journalists’ practice. This chapter therefore uses a methodology that aims to narrow the gap between the writing and the critical reading, and is intended to provide a ground for the textual analysis in later chapters as well as conclusions that inter-relate with later ones. An ‘archaeological’ method of discourse analysis, as Foucault termed it (1989 [1972]), aims not to read off journalists’ para-ideology or to interpret the texts as much as to find patterns and logics in the field of statements by journalists. As Jay Lemke (1995) puts it, we are looking for the social voices which surround the individual reporter and from which he or she shapes his or her own voice (pp.24-5; quoted in Cameron, 2001, p.15). Listening in on journalists’ statements to each other within the community of practice allows us to investigate these voices to which journalists orient in their work. Or as Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka describe it, the key words, proverbs and conventional wisdom in a cultural group provide some of the richest evidence for the cultural conventions within which language routines will make sense to that group (1997, p.254).

Some caution is required here too, of course. While many of the memoirs and related texts such as trade articles, journalism textbooks and prefaces to collected writings, are written largely for internal consumption, so that we can bypass some of the public defences of journalism in reading these texts, others have wider goals. Good

quotes US journalist William L. Shirer: 'I think most of us in this business want to have a final say, because we never had time to stop and ask what it all meant' (quoted in Good, 1993, p.7). In presenting journalists' 'final say' these texts may, as John Pilger's *Heroes* (1989) does, proclaim a little too loudly for the purposes of this study the public rhetoric about journalism's role. They may be concerned primarily 'to settle old scores, drop names or justify expenses' (Bailey and Williams, 1997, p.352; quoting Randall, 1996, p.198), as the memoir of John Junor (1990), editor of the *Sunday Express*, seems to be. Or they may be rather too self-reflective, structured by the genre of literary autobiography around 'the evocation of a life as a totality' (Marcus, 1994, p.3), as Sefton Delmer's *Trail Sinister: An Autobiography* (1961) is. In Gadamer's terms, books such as Delmer's have too much of the 'distorting mirror' of subjectivity for the self-evident, practical understanding of the working reporter to come clearly to the fore (1979 [1965], p.244). A number of such texts are thus oriented less to the community of practice than to wider social, political or literary ends.

Many of the texts are, however, organised primarily around the community of practice. Books such as Alfred Draper's *Scoops and Swindles* (1989) seem at first glance compendia of anecdotes, images and fragments of experience about news reporting. To theorists of autobiography they are 'merely' memoirs because they contain 'only anecdotal depiction of people and events' (Marcus, 1994, p.3), but from the perspective of investigating the journalism community, these anecdotes centre on the community rather than on the individual. Draper's book opens with a reflection on his final departure from Fleet Street, with the comment that television and *The Sun* have brought 'the end of The Street', as he and his generation knew it (1989, p.4). His memoir is very much a community act, which describes Fleet Street's experience and makes sense in terms of journalists' position in the world.

We will also be encountering the genres in which these metatexts are written, particularly the memoir genre, and some cautions are appropriate here too. I am careful, therefore, in reading the urge of some of these writers to tell 'what really happened', but which never made the news pages, as necessarily characteristic of

journalism. Memoirs must have something of that urge in order to be written and tend to collect the excess of experience over what has been expressed elsewhere in any case. Similarly, some of the neglect of language that I discuss below can be accounted for simply on the basis that writing about writing is the kind of highly reflexive action that the casualness of memoirs does not encourage. But both these aspects fit into patterns of statements across the genres of the metatexts and can therefore, accompanied by qualifications, be taken to be part of news discourse. Moreover, the memoir reintroduces the reporter as an experiencing individual, and is therefore a retelling of the experiences of a reporter. David Leitch's memoir says this explicitly (1973, p.9). Although there will be problems of interpretation here, the knowledge expressed is still to a large degree that of a reporter and not of a 'memoirist', if we can define such a category.

I analyse texts from much of what I describe in chapter three as modern journalism, focusing on the latter half of the twentieth century, when journalists who had spent all their working lives in the period of modern journalism were writing memoirs and related texts. I make the assumption that these texts can be studied as roughly contemporary. I want to make a case for a unity in twentieth-century news journalism at the level of the way of knowing the world. This method perhaps runs the risk of missing changes within that time span, but it also emphasises continuities which I think both journalists and academics, concerned with justifying the now as new and different to the past, have tended to neglect. As chapter three shows, those continuities are certainly identifiable, and as chapter six argues, journalists depend heavily on tradition and precedent as benchmarks of quality in newswriting. Similarly, the reprinting of both Harris and Spark's (1966, 1993, 1997) and Evans' (1972, 2000) textbooks suggests that something basic to the discourse of British news journalism is slow to change, as does the continued enthusiasm of journalists for long-standing statements of purpose such as acting as the fourth estate of government or struggling against censorship and manipulation by the powerful (e.g., Pilger, 1989, p.xiii-xiv).

3. Journalists' unease about writing

In any discourse, an important part of what is sayable is what is unsayable, and in the journalistic community, as expressed by journalists' memoirs, it appears that language and the act of writing are not easy topics of discussion. When their own writing is discussed, it is nearly always in a context of unease or dissatisfaction. Journalists' memoirs, their introductions to collections of their work, their interviews and to a lesser extent their textbooks are far more comfortable discussing life outside the office, reliving incidents of meeting people and talking about gathering the news. When inside the office, these metatexts discuss office politics and personalities, and only very rarely do we see a typewriter or hear about the act of writing. The excitement of chasing Princess Margaret's lover, Mark Townsend, along the lanes of England or the tension in the streets of Berlin in the early 1930s are of course compelling material beside the phrasing used in the reporter's copy to describe these scenes. The *Sunday Times* editor Frank Giles says he writes in his memoir about the experiences which exert 'the strongest call' (1986, p.184), and it is understandable that writing does not figure highly. But there is something strange in the comprehensive neglect in many of journalism's metatexts of the writing half of the job. Why does it exert so little call; why is the writing so rarely a high point of reporting? Why, when it does crop up, is the written text mentioned with a certain uneasiness or, alternatively, with jokes about how reporters have pulled a fast one on their readers? It is rare to hear news texts mentioned in positive terms, such as Giles' description of 'the never-failing excitement and satisfaction' at seeing his own words in print (ibid., p.70).

3.1. 'That damned canary again'

David Leitch is more typical in his unease at what the medium does to his experiences. His memoir constantly returns to what almost constitutes a guilt about the failure to communicate the nuances of stories, and to a desire to 'tell it properly' (Leitch, 1973, p.121). He recalls the first papal visit to modern Israel as:

a highly charged moment...It was also—and one saw this at once—genuinely 'historic'. Unhappily as soon as one tried to express this in a newspaper the emotional depth would be dissipated, and not entirely through

one's own lack of skill. The medium itself would turn it all into just another story.

(Leitch, 1973, p.80)

Leitch perceives the event as exceeding the capacity of news language. This theme of events not translating comfortably into newsprint is to be found elsewhere in reporters' memoirs. Claud Cockburn writes:

Years later in Spain a colleague of mine was sharply criticised for mentioning a canary as the only living creature in one of the bombed houses of a village. 'But you can't,' people said, 'use that damned canary again.' He admitted that it was a bit corny and took it out of his story. I suppose the trouble is that life is a good deal cornier than it ought to be, for there really was a canary in its cage in that bombed Spanish village.

(Cockburn, 1956, p.121)

Canaries and historic events become something else once written down: corny images and tired adjectives. The fascinating world 'out there' becomes conventional and predictable on paper. In a number of memoirs, particularly those of tabloid journalists, the awareness of a diminishing effect by the medium upon the material is expressed in jokes or wry anecdotes, as if to say that the individual reporter's writing or the whole news process is something of a sham. *Sunday Mirror* journalist Wensley Clarkson's memoir, *Dog Eat Dog* (1990) revels in accounts of the 'reality' behind news stories, such as the story about a holy girl in Portugal who had fasted for six years. 'I never saw her, but I still created a great read. It is amazing what you can achieve with a little luck and a little cunning' (quoted in Snoddy, 1993, p.36).²⁰ A number of reporters repeatedly invert the assumption that the news is true, and construct a distance between themselves and their copy (e.g., Draper, 1989, pp.17, 82; Knightley, 1996; Lambert, 1980). Broadsheet journalists are more likely to articulate this gap as a frustration with the product. This is not, of course, just about finding the words. Journalists complain too of the lack of time and the tight space hindering their writing. But running through all these concerns is a sense that, as

²⁰ Clarkson's words echo *Sunday Times* journalist Nicholas Tomalin's much-quoted mythologising that all journalists need is 'a plausible manner, a little literary ability and rat-like cunning' (quoted here by Paxman, 2000).

James Cameron puts it, a good journalist is one who struggles against the machine of news production:

To the individual in this machine [of writing the news] it brings its own dilemmas: the agonising narrow line between sincerity and technique, between the imperative and the glib—so fine and delicate a boundary that one frequently misses it altogether, especially with a tight deadline, a ringing phone, a thirst and an unquiet mind. Accept that, and the game is up.

(Cameron, 1978 [1967], p.311)

The medium of the newspaper and the ‘machine’ of newswriting are problems for the reporter seeking to tell it ‘the way it is’. They tend to diminish the material. The reporter who cares about communicating with his or her readers must struggle against that diminution.

A straight line is never drawn between newswriting and the failures of journalism to achieve its grander objectives, but it is significant that writing is mentioned almost always in this context of discomfort or frustration. David Randall discusses the writing of the news primarily in terms of the ‘sleight of hands with the facts’ that inevitably results from journalistic conventions, the need to simplify messy reality and the desire to make the news exciting (1996, p.9). Nor are these feelings solely about the words journalists use, but again it is significant that they tend to be focused there. When things go wrong, they often go wrong in the writing. In all these memoirs and discussions of their work across the past 50 years, there are almost no comments from a journalist who feels comfortable with or confident in the effect of the language and medium of the news. We have to go back further to the inter-war years, when the press was still making ‘a conscious effort...to discard the old, familiar journalese’ of the Victorian years in favour of the plain style of modern news (Mansfield, 1944 [1935], p.237), to come across straightforward enthusiasm for the ‘honest, human writing’ of ‘this modern age of realism’ (Milne, 1931, p.310). A sense of dissatisfaction with the finished story is characteristic of news discourse since then.

3.2. 'The nadir of journalistic endeavour'

The corny image of the canary leads to a more general concern among journalists about writing that descends into cliché. There are two issues here. One is that journalists very often discuss the difference between good and bad news writing as a matter of the avoidance of clichés, and see good news style partly as a choice on this level.²¹ The *Guardian's* editor in 1966, Alastair Hetherington, warned his staff against the phrase, 'nigger in the woodpile'²² because it was a 'cliché, and to be avoided' (Mayes, 1999), rather than in terms of its opaqueness, its lack of resonance in British politics, the writer's self-indulgence or laziness in choosing such a stock phrase, or indeed in terms of its offensiveness. What is bad about the journalist's stock of linguistic tools is often bundled up in a concern over clichés. This is clearly in part to do with journalism's sensitivity to criticism of 'hack' writing in wider culture, whether expressed in letters to the editor or in pejorative definitions of news language as 'journalese'—what the Random House Dictionary (1987) describes as 'a manner of speaking or writing characterized by clichés, neologisms, archness, sensationalizing adjectives, unusual or faulty syntax, etc.' Journalists will talk about the skill of writing most readily as meeting the proprieties of English composition—grammar, syntax, spelling, avoiding solecisms and clichés—in terms of which newspaper style books are partly concerned with positioning the news and the newspaper (see Cameron, 1996). The concern with cliché is partly a sensitivity about the news' propriety. This concern to be on the inside of good English and so the prevailing social order (Crowley, 1991, p.8) is perhaps weaker now than at the start of the twentieth century, but an aversion to clichés has become deeply embedded in journalism's collectivity.

This sensitivity towards clichéd language is, secondly, also a matter of journalism's understanding of its writing as reaching straightforwardly through language to the world of things, at the same time as it uses a quite limited and arguably hackneyed

²¹ Jargon, lack of clarity and wordiness are the other terms by which news language is criticised, but these are less about good style than language use which falls outside the category of news style altogether.

²² An (originally) American political shorthand for 'a concealed motive or unknown factor affecting a situation in an adverse way' (OED, 'nigger' 1d).

set of words and phrases. As we will see in chapters five and six, some phrases which might be devalued in other discourses as clichéd, such as describing a report as being ‘unveiled’, are thought of as appropriate and good news style, because they achieve for journalists the goal of presenting the world in all its vividness and drama—that is, presenting it vividly while ascribing that quality to the thing itself. But such language becomes visible at other times to the discourse as clichéd. Journalists are strongly aware that ‘newsy’ language is more attached to journalism than to the ‘real’ it is meant to be calling up. The trade publication, *The Journalist’s Handbook*, attacks the language of the contemporary press in such terms as ‘exhausted’, ‘woolly’, lacking ‘clarity’, but worst of all, at risk of being ‘untrue’:

The Indie’s [*Independent*’s] splash avoided ‘mounting pressure’ on the Royal story but could not resist ‘deepening mystery’. Both ‘mounting pressure’ and ‘deepening mystery’ are clichés; furthermore, they are usually untrue.

(Roy, 1994, p.25)

The formal dimension of the news becomes visible at these moments of reflection and leaves journalists uncomfortable about the ability of news style to act in a simple way as a sign of how the world truly is. So Harris and Spark caution in *Practical Newspaper Reporting* that stock phrases ‘end by making all things seem the same’ (1966, p.122).

The cliché is not only at risk of failing to represent the world, then. It forces the journalist to confront the linguistic form of the news and its conventionality. Derek Lambert describes his horror as a young reporter at having to write weather stories about ‘Jam-packed roads, bumper-to-bumper traffic, sizzling beaches—the formula which generations of journalists had tried in vain to change’ (Lambert, 1980, p.27). It was ‘the nadir of journalistic endeavour’, he writes, though with his tongue somewhat in his cheek (ibid.). Why was the task so invidious? To an extent, I think it is writing itself that Lambert is complaining about, as the formulations and set phrases of the news appear in all their materiality, preceding and outlasting the events of any one summer. Style, as the act of choosing the appropriate words to fit

what the journalist has found out about the world is diminished, reduced to a formula.

We can see also that, within the field of journalism, there is little capital attached to language. When the event 'behind' the writing is obscured, there is no interest or value for the reporter any more in the story, only Lambert's mock horror. Almost nowhere in the memoirs is an act of writing celebrated as a positive achievement. The *Daily Express* reporter Alfred Draper's proud quotation of his own intro on the Duke of Windsor's funeral, "Yesterday the woman known to history as Mrs Simpson conducted herself like a Queen" (1989, p.86) is one of very few. Indeed, there does not seem to be a well developed set of ideas in the discourse of journalism to describe what is good about newswriting. Beside the thread of uneasiness about the adequacy of news language, and the yearning to tell it properly, there is no corresponding thread discussing what good writing would be, and still less about how to go about producing it. Consequently, none of the journalists quoted above discusses ways of addressing their perception of inadequate writing. Cameron's Presbyterian ethic of struggling against the limitations of the job goes no further than that.

3.3. The mystique theory of writing

Instead good writing is either talked of in a very narrow sense of good grammar and spelling, as if that defines what good journalists aim for, or as a mystery. John Junor tells a story of a 'young man from the *Yorkshire Post*', Derek Marks, who had joined Junor's *Sunday Express*, and who came to see him to talk about his inability to write well:

I reasoned with him, explaining that it took a great deal of time to change style. I suggested he might be more relaxed if he dressed in a more relaxed fashion.

(Junor, 1990, p.64)

Marks' writing soon improved. For Junor, the incident stands without explanation, precisely noteworthy because it captures something ineffable about good writing.²³ Indeed, elsewhere in his memoir he describes the ability to write well as a 'magic touch'. One of the journalists he had taken on to write the 'Cross-Bencher' political gossip column was having great difficulty with the task. Even after a year his work had to be rewritten each week by colleagues:

I was getting desperate. There was no way I could sack Sendalt. At his age it would have been an awful thing to do. Then suddenly it all came right.

Wilfred found the *magic touch* and began to write Cross-Bencher columns as if he had been doing so all his life.

(Junor, 1990, p.164; italics added)

There is no insight—and Junor seems to imply there cannot be—into the mystery of good writing. Similarly, in her introduction to a collection of interviews, Lynn Barber quotes her first editor Harry Fieldhouse's advice to: 'Write your first para exactly as you would wish it to be, ponder every word, hone every comma, polish it to perfection—and then throw it away and write the article' (Barber, 1991, p.xix). The idea is present elsewhere. Harold Evans quotes Samuel Johnson's dictum to throw away any sentence you think is 'particularly fine' (1972, p.43). Barber claims to have followed Fieldhouse's advice in all but one of the interviews in her collection, although there is no noticeable difference between that piece and the others. Again, there is no explanation of why this strange technique should serve the journalist well, and it is so casually thrown in one has to wonder whether it is anything more than a statement of the mystery of writing.

Similar takes on the 'mystique theory of writing' (as Thomson (1998, p.74) disparages this attitude among his colleagues) are common in the writings of what the former *Sunday Telegraph* editor Peregrine Worsthorne calls *hommes sérieux* journalists (Porter, 1999, p.34), and the train of thought clearly draws on a Romantic ideal of expressing the inner self. Cockburn sees writing as an extension of his

²³ It is also a joke, because this struggling young man in the stiff suit went on to edit the *Daily Express*, and of course no joke should need an explanation.

personality, so that he 'was conscious that my style—in the narrow and in the wider sense of the word—was deteriorating' when he wrote propaganda freelance for some communist or far-left papers (1956, p.208). Giles talks of the 'creative effort' of writing and the 'proper appreciation of style' of good sub-editors, clearly suggesting he saw his writing as personal expression (1986, p.66). These journalists, who all attended private schools in England, earn little cultural capital from talking about newswriting as a trade activity, with technical skills, and fall back on the discourse of English men of letters. News discourse provides them with no way to talk about what is good in news language.

So too, while Harold Evans writes in detail about the mechanics of editing he pulls back from any systematic understanding of what makes a good news article:

Nobody can lay down a formula for varying sentences. It is part of the mystery of language. Sentences must respond to the thought being expressed. All that the deskman who cares about style can do is study the subtleties of rhythm in good authors and to take to ordinary copy a few generalisations which genius, he must understand, can always upset.

(Evans, 1972, p.28)

None of these journalists feels he can put his finger on what is good journalism, although he might spend considerable time expressing unease at, as Cockburn puts it, 'that damned canary'. Without denying that 'genius', 'creativity' and personal 'style' are useful flags of the intuitive processes of some writing, we can see in the lack of any other terms to denote good newswriting in the sample studied here evidence that journalism has to draw on other discourses that are not always appropriate in order to discuss good writing or how to write. Such terms certainly have little to do with the more mechanistic achievement of everyday news production, where the ideal is factual, transparent writing which reflects nothing more than the real world, and in which the crafting is invisible.

The result is at times confused thinking. F.J. Mansfield, in an early textbook of modern journalism (1935, revised 1944), *The Complete Journalist*, quotes William Cobbett's advice to: 'Write unhesitatingly, taking the words as they come, not

pausing for choice of words', as if the news reporter were a (nineteenth-century) essayist aspiring to some pure, Byronic mode which needed no editing. Yet on the next page he quotes Albany Fonblanque that the good writer will go over his or her work again and again, each time making the text briefer and better (pp.223-4).

Equally self-contradictory is the *Financial Times'* manual, *Inside the FT*. It warns reporters off empty, clichéd endings such as, 'predicting the future, however, is an altogether trickier business,' just two pages before it recommends some 'basic link phrases' such as:

Even if confidence holds, the authorities face a tough test,

or

Speculation is a real concern, but the roots of the problem run much deeper.

(Watts, 1998, pp.60, 62).

Any field of writing will contain contradictions, but such obvious clashes between an ideology of writing as inspiration and writing as endless crafting or between denouncing contrived language and promoting instances of it as trade tips suggest that journalism has few resources to reflect on writing, and therefore its practitioners feel also a certain unease about the effects of their language.

4. Censoring the writer

The situation is, though, more complex than simply a lack of attention to writing. Such contradictions or gaps seem to be avoided or controlled in many of the memoirs and other metatexts according to specific habits of thought. Following Bourdieu (1991), we can talk of a kind of internal censorship at work. For Bourdieu, the language used in a particular field, such as journalism, takes its effectiveness as social communication only partly from some general sense of grammar and meaning, but also from what he calls the field's 'linguistic market', or 'system of specific sanctions and censorships' (p.38), in which some statements and ways of talking are valued and others are devalued. We can therefore argue that, in order to receive status as journalists and to participate successfully in the field, journalists will be disposed to speak in certain ways. This disposition, or habitus, as Bourdieu calls it, will underlie the news but, I would argue, will be still clearer in journalists' reflections on the job, where their way of holding themselves with respect to each

other and to their material is a key theme. There is little symbolic value for journalists within their community in dwelling uneasily on how the conventions of newswriting shape the news, and indeed there will be a substantial cost in such thinking in terms of the journalist's position in the field. Instead, the power and possibility of writing is limited by an attitude of doubt and restrictiveness towards words.

This is nowhere clearer than in Evans' image of the journalist at his best, hunched over his typewriter and grappling with the truth, in the funeral oration for his colleague David Blundy, killed while reporting in Central America:

It is a testament to the integrity of David's endeavour that he hung his long frame over his portable for so long at such ungodly hours, scowling so gloomily at his notebook. 'Do you find a problem,' he said, 'of getting the words in the right order? What's it all about?' Of course! Writing may be hard for everyone, but it's easier to dazzle and shock and entertain than it is to get the words in the right order when you have set yourself, in the rough urgent compressions of journalism, to grapple with truth. Is the story accurate? Is it fair? Is it boring? David, naturally, doubted whether he met the tests he set himself; he did.

(Evans, 1990, p.311)

This image of the reporter scowling gloomily at his notes captures something in the attitude of journalism to writing. It is not just that good journalism is difficult. There is a sense of inner struggle, a 'grappling with truth', here, that is almost Calvinist in its language. The journalist must hold him or herself in the right way, scowling away, distrusting some 'easy' way of writing so as to keep the words in check. Out of this distrust or censorship comes the possibility of getting the words in the 'right order'.²⁴

²⁴ The converse of this position, a dangerous, sinful pleasure at the release of making things up, is also to be found in the discourse, and each of course reinforces the other. Phillip Knightley writes of how, desperate for a front page lead one night when working as night editor of the *Sydney Daily Mirror*, he invented a story about 'The Hook', a pervert whom he imagined lurking about Sydney's suburban trains. 'The more I worked on my fairy story, the more I enjoyed it,' he remembers (1997, pp.51-3; see also Graham-Yooll, 1995, p.284; Clarkson, 1990, quoted in Snoddy, 1993, p.36).

The same basic set of ideas crops up throughout journalists' writings about their work, and I trace here a bundle of strategies by which the journalist hunched over the keyboard can come to think of her or his writing as the right words and as accruing capital within the news community. The first is to attempt to subsume writing under the excitement of gathering the news, of going out into the 'real world'. The second is to define good writing as that which corresponds as closely as possible to the world, so that the best language does not arise as language at all, but can be imagined as a mirror. The third is to separate out writing from reporting as a special, supplementary quantity, so that the *Financial Times* can talk of good writing as a value-added element that sits on top of basic news (Lambert, 1998, p.x). The fourth involves a reflex to go always beyond language, under the surface or through it, to 'what really happened'. The fifth arises from the value placed on the ability to communicate within the constraints of the news: by a special logic of scarcity, these constraints come to be perceived as valuable because they are difficult to attain. The sixth is to displace responsibility for the way the text is written onto the audience. The point is not that these strategies are particular to journalism—they are certainly available elsewhere—but that they are effective in news discourse. Such habits of thought together tightly circumscribe the understanding of language's role in producing the news.

4.1. The chase

The textual product of the news becomes visible in journalists' metatexts most often as an extension of the excitement of ferreting out and gathering the news. There is, for example, a long tradition of stories about getting the story through in the face of huge obstacles, that tends to bracket the writing under the romance of the chase. The story is not so much a result of the writing process as a nugget of information that is somehow brought back, and the focus of interest is on the steamer and special trains which the reporter charters (Knightley, 1975, p.6) or the navy speedboat he or she commandeers (Draper, 1989, p.82) to get the story to the office. Mansfield quotes the following excerpt from Charles Dickens' reminiscences on his days as a reporter, so marking it out as relevant to the novice journalist:

I have often transcribed for the printer, from my shorthand notes, important public speeches in which the strictest accuracy was required, and a mistake in which would have been to a young man severely compromising, writing on the palm of my hand, by the light of a dark lantern, in a post chaise and four, galloping through a wild country and through the dead of the night, at the then surprising rate of fifteen miles an hour.

(quoted in Mansfield, 1944, [1935], p.73)

What Dickens actually wrote is not the point of the anecdote, it is rather the skill and excitement of transmitting the story in adverse circumstances. The point of interest is typical. Writing is often visible in journalists' recollections only to the extent that it partakes in that drama.

Foreign correspondents' memoirs are full of such stories, many about convincing telegraph operators in corrupt or hostile regimes to transmit messages, and others about the hazards of communicating with the office over such distances. Leitch, for example, tells of the time 'a desk-bound ignoramus in London had "hardened", as the saying goes, "spiritual legacy", so the story had eventually read as if the late Pope had left a will, which included a condition that Paul should set off for Jerusalem posthaste' (1973, p.73). There is an ironic kind of spice to these stories, in which words act as a fickle counterpoint to the reporter's fearless pursuit of truth under fire or in the absence of safe drinking water. Even in foreign correspondents' reports, which belong to a more writerly tradition than other news, any value in the actual words transmitted is generally a second-hand value that belongs really in the chase.

A story emerges in which journalism is an adventure in the world, much more than it is the craft of telling stories. The memoirs make occasional asides about the newsroom, but these mentions are either quickly recuperated to the pursuit of the news or devalued as boring and less than optimum journalism. Leitch's 'desk-bound ignoramus' quickly disappears again. The 'most interesting job in journalism', Mansfield writes, is going out of the office and making contact with life. Deskbound colleagues can only live this life vicariously, and in his description of the newsroom they pounce avariciously on copy that exudes the excitement of the chase or the thrill

of danger (Mansfield, 1944 [1935], p.72). The adrenaline of getting the paper out on deadline only flows, he implies, because of what is happening outside the office, and there is no sense of excitement at writing. Don Whyte's autobiography, *On the Lonely Shore* (1977), spends most of its time outside the office, in the lonely parts of Scotland of its title and out on the news beat. Phillip Knightley remembers sitting in the London office of the *Sydney Daily Mirror* and *Truth*, swapping the first and second sentences of British news stories around and sending the 'original' copy back to Australia. It was boring and demeaning. 'It did not take me long to find out that everyone else in the *Daily Mirror* and the *Truth*'s London office was as bored as I was' (Knightley, 1996, p.38). Francis Wheen complains of News International's move of its titles to Wapping partly in terms of the retreat of journalists into 'joyless' and 'hermetically sealed office blocks', where they sit in front of computers and meet the world only over the telephone (1999, p.3). In nearly all such mentions, newsroom work is boring, it is mentioned in the context of poor journalism, and it has value to the extent that it can be recuperated to the chase.

There appears to be an underlying logic at work here that writing risks detaching journalism from the world; reporters are therefore more comfortable with the idea of newsgathering. Again there is an uneasiness that the writing is not the best thing about journalism, not what really defines it. The story lies in the event, and the event happens again in the story, an idea of interdependence, bordering on the elision of both terms, that the intrusion of the idea of writing damages. But this is not explicitly addressed in these anecdotes. Instead the chase tends to eclipse and absorb the writing in journalists' recollection of the job.

4.2. The right words

A related strategy to control the intrusion of writing onto the story/event complex is to understand good style as an exact mirror of the 'real'. Journalists' writings describe a faith in the possibility of achieving a one-to-one correspondence between words and reality, so that once a reporter has properly found the story, she or he has also found the words to describe it. This is evident in casual turns of phrase. Mansfield writes, for example, of boring books 'containing' interesting news, rather than journalists rewriting boring material to make it interesting. Versatile writers

'extract' human interest stories from ordinary news, rather than rewrite them (Mansfield (1944 [1935], p.57). Anthony Holden describes David Blundy as struggling with the 'eternal problem' of finding those 'right words':

He of all journalists was the one who would tease and worry his copy through his typewriter, pouring an excess of agony into the eternal problem—never as simple as it might seem—of getting the right words in the right order.

(Holden, 1990, p.7)

Whether or not Blundy achieves this goal—and it is interesting that references to finding the right words come to be more of an ideal to be aspired towards than a commonplace achievement by the later years of the twentieth century—it provides a term with which to understand what the act of writing should do.

Again, it is the journalist's struggle, his or her attitude, that is significant in the discourse. Only rarely discussed is what the right words in a particular story might be. In fact, at times the writing is discussed as almost unmotivated. If the journalist holds her or himself properly in relation to the task, the right words will emerge, the story will tell itself. 'Facts are stated and allowed to speak for themselves,' as Leslie Sellers puts it (1975, p.245). Alfred Draper defends a controversial story about British military incompetence in Aden in such terms, emphasising that his quotations and statements are not his, but independently verifiable. The code of objectivity is implicit here, though even then more as a strategic defence (Tuchman, 1972) than as a way of writing, of formulating the statements of the text. More prominent is a defensive posture that the finished story has little to do with the writer. Draper expresses no concern about the way he put the articles together but comments that it was 'a story that I knew I *had* to write, but one which I honestly wished I had never got' (1989, p.171). There is an imperative from events to be written, so that even the choice of the right words fades from view. At moments of vulnerability to outside pressure, some journalists seem to feel that accepting that they choose words might imply a creative, almost literary act, which would foreground the writer at the expense of the event and involve the journalist in an uncomfortable amount of responsibility for the text.

Journalists feel uncomfortable also about the text when it is separated from the time of the event and the original date of publication, because the story/event complex is at risk then of coming apart. Wesker reports a journalist's comments that if a story is aired before it has been written it evaporates (1979 [1977], p.235). The story needs to be attached to the excitement of the moment of telling the news, that is, in a sense, also the moment in which the news happens. Andrew Graham-Yooll writes similarly that 'old articles often read badly and are best not shown' (1995, p.xii). This is partly a trope of self-deprecation, common in journalists' writings, but there is also a sense that the texts approach the 'real' better when read closer to when they were written. Journalism has few resources to think through the life of a text beyond that moment and indeed—as I argue above—little faith in the words to communicate well beyond that moment. The phrase, 'first draft of history', is one of the few, and that again allows the journalist to side-step responsibility.

4.3. Artists of another order

Yet journalism also values what it calls 'skilled writers and good writing' (Gaziano and Coulson, 1988, p.873) or 'stylish and well-constructed articles' (Lambert, 1998, p.x). There is a disjunction here between writing as basic reporting, about which journalists are not comfortable, and another kind of writing, writing as a supplementary quality on top of reporting, which they accord a special place.

The metatexts looked at here value firstly a pared down, transparent language. Harris and Spark tell novice journalists to aim for 'easy to follow, accurate, direct and unambiguous' writing (1966, p.107). Evans talks of the importance of sub-editors being able to read *through* officialese or abstract language to some reality beyond them, rather than *into* such language, and to rewrite in clear, concrete and concise language (1972, p.35). He writes also of a 'purity' of language that, in its ideal state, simply denotes things rather than obfuscate them. This way of thinking owes much to Orwell's essay, 'Politics and the English Language', and the related criticism of the language of totalitarianism in his novel, *1984* (Orwell, 1968 [1946], 1949). The best style is a transparency and immediacy which allow the reader simply to look through the words to the news event beyond. It also belongs to the wider tradition,

noted in chapter three, of a plain style, with its class overtones of preserving good language from petit-bourgeois affectation and ornamentation (Ross, 1991; see also Cameron, 1996). But it functions in news discourse to allow, as we have seen, the story and the event to drift into each other, each term eliding away the other.

Writing is then a supplement to the ‘naturally occurring’ story, just as bureaucratic writing obscures the story. Writing, whether it is being thought of as a good or a bad thing, can be divorced from basic news reports. A story, Mansfield writes in a revealing analogy, is like a rough diamond that is improved by cutting. And good writers are ‘artists of another order’ to those who find the diamonds:

Many of the most successful [reporters] are news-gatherers, news-presenters and organizers...He who knows what is of interest to the public, the subjects that appeal at a particular moment, is a journalist in a very real sense, even though he is unable to write the acceptable articles required by his intuition and discernment. The perceptive mind, though not equipped with writing ability, has its ready rewards.

(Mansfield, 1944 [1935], p.221)

Evans writes similarly that, ‘Some of the best at ferreting out facts are not pithy writers and never will be’ (1972, p.17). This commonly made distinction is not simply between ‘legmen’ and ‘write-up men’, as they were once called in US journalism (Smith, 1979, p.150), but is a basic attitude. The link from this pattern of thought to the Enlightenment distinction between form and content, and between style and substance, discussed in chapter two, is easily made (see also Romano, 1986). So Derek Lambert writes, although with typical exaggeration, of a segregation between writers and news reporters in the *Daily Mirror* newsroom:

During my time at the *Mirror* we had some outstanding features writers...The trouble was they were all *writers*. They inhabited distant quarters at the end of a corridor, they were all rumoured to be temperamental and they could take up to a couple of hours to write a story. We hard newsmen had to be protected from the decadent influence of this Bloomsbury Group inside our portals.

(Lambert, 1980, p.60)

Derek Lambert's namesake, the *Financial Times* editor Richard Lambert, describes his title's strategy to secure its market in similar terms. The *FT* will not simply report, because financial news services such as Bloomberg and Reuters do that more quickly and comprehensively, but will aim to 'add value' to its reporting both with commentary that will 'shed light' on the news and with good writing (Lambert, 1998, pp.x-xii). I will explore such value-added journalism in more detail in chapter six. Whether the image is of cutting diamonds to cause them to shine or of shedding light or adding value, newswriting and editing are seen as something extra to reporting.

The implication is not just of different kinds of journalism—features and commentary versus hard news—but of two independent parts of journalism held apart within the discourse. The eulogy to David Blundy is an interesting case because it represents the journalist as exemplary both as a newsgatherer and writer. Blundy was an adventurer and a spontaneous, romantic figure, who held off writing until the last possible moment before deadline, concerned more about truth than about the penpushers in the office demanding his copy (Holden, 1990, p.7). And yet, while a rebel against the diminution of the truth that office procedures seem to imply, he was also a meticulous writer, as we have already seen above:

David's perennially dishevelled appearance, his unpredictability, his apparently chaotic working methods—he would often have to borrow pencil and paper from interviewees—all concealed one of the most conscientious and dedicated reporters of his time. He of all journalists was the one who would tease and worry his copy through his typewriter, pouring an excess of agony into the eternal problem—never as simple as it might seem—of getting the right words in the right order.

(Holden, 1990, p.5)

The ideal journalist who is too preoccupied with events in the world to remember that he needs a pencil is also the ideal journalist who spends hours hunched over the typewriter. The discourse allows the journalist to throw him or herself into one aspect and then the other while holding them distinct.

4.4. 'Under the surface'

If writing sits on top of reporting, it makes sense for the journalist to think of the 'real meaning' of a text as lying beneath the words, rather than in them. The journalist need therefore place less value in the details of language in which something is written, yet again displacing meaning away from the act of writing the news. Particularly with source documents, where journalists learn to distrust surface meaning, words are something to get beyond. The ideal story seems to be a subversive one, finding out what others do not want the public to know or telling what others suppress. Journalists frequently quote the dictum, in America attributed to William Randolph Hearst and in Britain to Alfred Harmsworth, that news 'is something which somebody wants repressed. All the rest is advertising,' (quoted here in Harris and Spark, 1966, p.4). It becomes a discursive principle governing modern journalism that the reporter should go against the grain and under the surface of language. Michael Schudson writes that the journalistic instinct that there is always another story behind the story is a structural principle of the news (1986, p.91).

At the simplest level, the discourse allows journalists to question sources in order to find out more than they have volunteered. 'Interviewing,' write Harris and Spark, 'is the lever that pries [stories] loose' from the surface of social life (1966, p.65). It also gives reporters a hermeneutic tool in using people's statements. Knightley mentions as a key incident in learning the job an aphoristic piece of advice from Nicholas Tomalin at the *Sunday Times*:

I walked around to Cudlipp's office repeating, 'In journalism, no no is ever final,' a piece of advice from a master journalist that was later to have a resounding effect on my career.

(Knightley, 1997, p.101)

An interviewee's refutation, denial or refusal to talk should never be taken at face value. The emphasis which Knightley puts on this episode suggests that the idea goes to the heart of how he understands the job. The real meaning tends to lie one step beyond what is said.

Taken further, the same rule of meaning allows Derek Lambert, in mock cynicism, to state that:

I came to know some of the more hackneyed ploys of the political speakers:

*Let us not delude ourselves...*Total delusion lies just around the corner.

*We will never concede...*Humiliating capitulation in the offing.

*We are united...*the party is in utter disarray.

(Lambert, 1980, p.75)

It is a common joke not unique to journalism (Swales, 1990, finds something similar pinned to a scientist's wall), but it is common there (see also Holman, 1998, pp.135-9) and accords with its practices. Rather than reproduce the texts of the powerful, the journalist sees her or his job in quoting from and editing them down to a story as being to find something in them that their textual form covers up, whether that is the key announcement at the end of the speech, or the phrase which reveals a change of policy, or the obfuscation of rhetoric. Things are not what they seem in language.

Distrust of surface meaning and pushing beyond it for the truth are textual operations done on the spoken and written words of sources. But journalism prefers to represent the discursive principle as an aspect of the reporter's character, the virtue of doubt. Blundy comes to mind again. Evans (1990) writes that doubt was part of the craft of Blundy, the ideal reporter, and an aspect of his integrity. Blundy's agonising for words was 'a testament to the integrity of David's endeavour' (p.311).

4.5. The virtue of difficulty

A fifth common thread in journalism's censorship of language is a set of statements about good writing in terms of the constraints placed upon the production of news language. By this I mean that, to an extent, the harder the writing is to achieve the more it is valued. The skills of producing news stories in an instant to dictate over the telephone or managing the huge flows of information that come into the newsroom or negotiating the stipulations of mad editors are transmuted by a certain logic into virtues, so that good newswriting is at times characterised by its difficulty. The dictum, 'Easy writing makes hard reading' (Milne, 1931, p.32), is extended so that easy writing conditions are thought of as also likely to lead to poor journalism, along

similar lines to the school or air force motto, *per ardua ad astra*. Dickens' handwriting in the jiggling coach is a high point of journalism. A story is more newsworthy, more of a scoop, the harder or more dramatic a task it was for the reporter, and this seems to extend into the writing as well.

It is easy to see how the value attached to the skill of dictating off-the-cuff copy down a telephone line would be extended so that the skill was still valued when there was no time pressure. The skill carries with it a suggestion that the events are dictating a 'natural' story, as well as that a reporter so accomplished at the fundamental techniques will be excellent in other respects. But again we can see a technique by which writing and language are narrowly circumscribed in journalists' value system. It becomes a general formulation, just like the subsuming of writing within the drama of the chase and the narrow focus upon the 'right words', that writing made difficult by external limits will be good journalism.

This seems to be what John Pilger remembers when he looks back wistfully on the strict stylistic constraints of the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*:

It had a unique and slightly manic style created by its wartime editor, Brian Penton, who decreed that everything had to be written in the active voice, and there could be no exceptions. One good reason for this was to ensure that the source of an item was included in the story. The passive 'It is understood' and 'It is believed' were never used because they were judged guilty of fudging the origins of a statement and therefore, ran Penton's argument, its truthfulness. Paragraphs were limited to sixteen words and clichés and 'words of unnecessary length' were banned; 'during', for example, became 'in'.

Although the *Telegraph* was a tabloid, it was then a very serious newspaper, and in the hands of a skilled practitioner the staccato style had a fluency and force of its own, and could be sustained for any length of story. And although it imposed some truly ridiculous constraints ('It rained' became 'The rain fell'), it encouraged in young reporters disciplines of speed and economy of description... When I first saw Fleet Street, festooned with

clichés, mixed metaphors and, horror of horrors, the passive voice, I felt like a Trappist monk in Gomorrah.

(Pilger, 1989 [1986], pp.42-3)

Pilger is aware of the ridiculousness of the news style he learnt, but he still defends it as a good discipline. Carol Sarler similarly writes of the difference between tabloid and broadsheet writing in terms of the 'virtue' of the former:

Because you are writing to shorter lengths, you lose the luxury of an on-the-one-hand and an on-the-other—which as we know is a marvellous escape clause.

(Sarler, 1998, p.8)

I detect a similar idea in Evans' image of words that 'have been fished expertly from the erratic torrent, weighed, assessed, revalued in the light of later catches, and finally prepared for public display in a setting which, hopefully, will exactly reflect their significance' (1972, p.2).

All these writers discuss skills required by the exigencies of the reporting process, but they seem to be saying something more. While Evans includes in his celebration of textual practice a proviso that the process should, 'hopefully, exactly reflect' the significance of source material, there is a perceptible drift away from the achievement of such writing towards the difficulty. The good journalist thrives on the limitations imposed on newswriting and good writing can to an extent be defined as writing in this context. For Sarler, brevity is not just a necessity but a virtue. For Pilger, more explicitly still, the discipline is good in itself; corsets of a linguistic variety are morally good for the journalist. The logic can be expressed in terms of Bourdieu's economic metaphor. These aspects of style will be rarely attained because they are difficult, and so will rise in value within the journalistic field, as commodities rise in price with their scarcity (Bourdieu, 1991, 1998).

4.6. Audience

Responsibility for the words on the page, when it is not controlled by the habits of thought we have looked at above, is often displaced onto the reader. On occasions when the text is thought of, it is frequently in this way *for* a reader, and to an extent

because of that reader. There is almost always only one reader, not a range of interests to be satisfied, and the image of this reader, as we saw in chapter two, is shaped by an historical suspicion of mass audiences. 'The reader wants a brief, one sentence description of what happened' (Harris and Spark, 1966, p.88). 'The newspaper reader above all does not want to be told what is not' (Evans, 1972, p.25). 'Every great problem facing us...will only be understood by the common man busy with his daily tasks if he is hit hard and hit often with the facts (Cudlipp, 1953, p.251). This powerful figure of the reader who requires to be hit hard, or whose trust in the news must be nurtured, is invoked to justify practice. Indeed, at times the image of the reader is quite clearly structured by news discourse's ways of thinking about the text. Cockburn recalls *The Times*' Washington correspondent Wilmott Lewis advising him:

'to remember that when writing for the newspapers, we are writing for an elderly lady in Hastings who has two cats of which she is passionately fond. Unless our stuff can successfully compete for her interest with these cats, it is no good'.

(Cockburn, 1956, p.189)

The elderly lady and her cats remind Cockburn that he should avoid jargon and instead use terms this reader would relate to; he should write to grab her attention in the first paragraph and not write too much, because she is easily distracted; he should write about issues that are of interest to the more parochial reader, or at least write in a way that relates issues to her interests; he should not expect any response from his reader; and he should not fall into the trap of writing for his sources or his peers. We can perhaps infer too that, as a social conservative, this reader will be a lover of the English language who will be sensitive to issues of 'correctness'. Yet again, the writing is not valued as a communicative act, but is a site of many of journalism's problems which the discourse needs to displace in order to defuse.

5. Conclusion: An ethical problem

Aspects of this ideology have been pointed out before. Renate Köcher (1986), to give one example, notes that British journalists value the research phase of reporting more than the subjective-creative processing of material. In contrast to German journalists,

‘they much more frequently mention the exciting, eventful nature of the work as well as the appeal of working under time pressure’ (p.52). But what close analysis of journalists’ metatexts reveals is how writing is *managed* in journalistic discourse. Writing is not only of lower value in British journalism—for German journalists also enjoy the chase—but it is censored in journalists’ stories to such an extent that it cannot be discussed in any sophisticated fashion. Journalists are often uneasy about what amounts to half their practice and are aware of formulas, clichés and a sameness which news style imposes on their writing (an awareness I discuss also in chapter one from a personal perspective). They often appear to feel that they are working at less than their best when they write. One journalist tells Wesker: ‘I’m increasingly worried by the necessary approximations of journalism’ (1979 [1977], p.285). and another that the news is only satisfying in the telling, as a performance ‘when “the world” is waiting for the story’, and loses its power when talked about outside that moment of telling (p.235). Randall equates the writing and editing process to a game of Chinese whispers where each stage of the process causes the story to bear ‘less and less resemblance to the truth’ (1996, p.10). There is little faith in words within journalism.

The response of news discourse is either to reach into other discourses often far removed from daily newswriting, such as a *belles lettres* tradition or Romanticism, or to discuss it in terms of externalities—the chase after the story, the event itself, the audience—or to think of language as something to be delved under, something supplementary to the story or something to be valued to the extent that it is a constraint. Writing is not ‘storyable’ except in such terms that all distance the news community’s ideal or self-conception from the words which appear in print. In the journalistic metatext, which has an important role within journalists’ interpretive community to make sense of the practice (Zelizer, 1993), we can begin to identify the kind of censorship that brings writing into line with the forms and formalities of the field.

There is nothing inevitable or natural in this phenomenon, as we can see not just from comparison with other traditions, but also from a glance at the writings of

British journalists a century ago. James Milne and Bernard Falk write in the 1930s of a period just passed in which newswriting changed from its old 'decorative literary style' (Milne, 1931, p.311) to clean modern lines. When Falk (1938) learned the trade, the ability to write expressively and with a rich vocabulary were signs of great journalism. '[T]he finest descriptive writers were let loose on the yawning columns,' and readers felt short-changed if 10 columns were not spent on a spectacular event (pp.206-7). As I suggest in chapter three, by the end of the 1930s learning how to write was still an essential part of learning the job, but it now had little *status*. Despite many other changes to the media, this downplaying of language in the news retains its grip on the way journalists think about their work.

This description of journalism's attitude to language can be framed in the ethical terms proposed at the end of chapter two. The uncomfortableness about language and its consequent management are clearly consistent with an ethos of retreating from engagement with readers and regarding the world as Bestand or standing reserve, which constructs a quite limited communicative relation between journalists and their sources and audiences based on truth-telling. Journalism's attitude towards language can be seen, then, as an ethical problem, a problem of journalism's basic stance towards the world and its understanding of what its practices are about. We can indeed identify a gap in the ethical discourse of journalism when it comes to language. For example, the Press Complaints Commission's (1999) Code of Practice for British journalists emphasises accuracy and the separation of fact from opinion or conjecture, with a gesture in the direction of avoiding racist or otherwise pejorative language. Like the metatexts discussed above, it puts much more emphasis on how journalists go about newsgathering. In fact, Gustaf von Dewell concludes from a comparative survey of European press ethics that privacy is the single issue that dominates British press ethics (1997, p.232). Carey's comment on American journalism perhaps applies in Britain as well: 'the ethics of journalism often seem to be a cover, a means of avoiding the deeper questions in order to concentrate on a few problems about which there is general agreement' (1987b, p.6; quoted in Iggers, 1999, p.28).

The journalist Martin Bell's call for journalism to reject the metaphor of the mirror and accept that it is 'a moral enterprise' is relevant here (1998, p.18). The journalistic community seems to think of its individual members as governed by codes of conduct and conventions but not to be comfortable with thinking of its texts as its responsibility. News discourse constructs a partition between the realms of newsgathering and writing. As a result, the *Sunday Pictorial* reporter Harry Procter can write:

I am certain there is not a man, woman or child in Europe who ever objected to the way I handled them in their grief. They may have objected to my published story, but never to my interview.

(Procter, 1958; quoted in Snoddy, 1993, p.33)

This bizarre defence of his 'death knocks', which indeed makes his conduct still less attractive, is possible because the act of writing is thought of as somehow peripheral. Procter the person and Procter the byline can be separated, and the latter is not the fault of the former, he seems to be saying. If Procter's defensive avoidance is extreme, the gap is certainly present in much of journalism—indeed, Snoddy, echoing Bell's call, uses Procter's statement as an example of a 'moral blindness' in British journalism (*ibid.*). Others, such as Alfred Draper, talk about the 'real story behind the story' in their memoirs without accounting for why these stories did not get into the papers and about the effect of printing the stories that did (1989, p.282). The story on the page and the rest of journalism can be held separate. Fiammetta Rocco writes that her interview subjects are usually happy to co-operate with her research, but often hate the finished article (1999, p.48). The writing is separate, and not subject to the same delicate negotiations. News language is certainly limited by legal considerations—the laws of defamation, contempt of court, copyright and so on—and external criticisms of certain aspects such as labelling or the use of inappropriate gendered language. But these constraints are not really part of journalists' conception of what is important or worthy about their work—not part of its 'internal goods' (Lambeth, 1992 [1986], p.73). There is little evidence in the 30 texts studied here of any value on how news style communicates meaning. The result is not just, as in Procter's death knocks, ethical problems with the way journalists treat the people they write about. As I have already suggested, the

attitudes described above also restrict journalism's ability to reflect upon what is *good* in newswriting. As Rob Schoonen and Kees de Glopper write, 'A writer must be able to reflect on the characteristics of a good text, and he must be able to reflect on ways to achieve this goal' (Schoonen and de Glopper, 1996, p.89). Without that, translation of intention into achievement is restricted. My argument will now go on to detail the non-reflexive process, what Zelizer (1993) describes as osmosis, by which journalists tend to learn how to write in news style (chapter five) and the narrow definition of good writing which emerges in daily practice (chapter six).

Chapter 5: The slow sorcery of apprenticeship: Learning news style

The child learns to control the genre, but in the process the genre comes to control the child.

(Gunther Kress, 1994 [1982], p.11)

1. Introduction: From mimicry to competence

News style is a slippery object when sought amongst journalists' statements about the job. It is, as I argue in chapter four, censored, displaced, poorly articulated. One of the few places that the textuality of the news is in the foreground of discussion is in journalism textbooks and in journalism pedagogy. For that reason this chapter seeks to fill in some of the gaps in chapter four's analysis of news discourse by examining the writing skills learnt by trainee members of the journalism community of practice. It asks: what is it that a journalist must learn in order to produce competent news stories; what discursive rules and operations constitute the specific competence of the writing journalist?

The chapter argues, on the basis of an analysis of approximately 160 articles produced by nine postgraduate journalism students over a six month period, that competence has two dimensions. On one level, the students learn a set of language forms and ways of combining them that write the world down in a highly efficient way. News style can be described as a knowledge of the right words to use, of appropriate phrases and syntactical forms, of segments of quotation and background with certain linking phrases between them, of rigid rules about what different types of story contain, of what goes in intros and of the need to translate source jargon into journalism's demotic. The novice learns a large repertoire of language use and the contexts in which each aspect is useful.

At the same time, there are ways of understanding bundled up with these skills. Some of the difficulties that the student work exhibits lead me to a suggestion that competence involves an unstated, situated knowledge of such things as how to

subsume other forms of writing within the news' discursive field, how to subordinate them to the communicative event of the news text, and how to take control of the unfolding meaningfulness of the text. The competent journalist knows his or her material authoritatively so that he or she can claim to know 'what really happened' in the world, by invoking implications in controlled ways, by showing the news rather than telling it and by using details metonymically. This is very much, I would suggest, an authority based on a control of language rather than on experience, and it leads towards conclusions in later chapters that news style is concerned as much with communicating authority and knowledgeableness as communicating determinate things about the world. The competence of writing the news is about using the tools of news style to enter the field of news discourse, with all its assumptions, values, goals and strategies. As Carolyn Miller puts it, 'What we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms... [but] more importantly what ends we may have' (1984, p.165; cited in Swales, 1990, p.44).

This analysis of students' developing competence in newswriting takes place within Wenger's (1998) construct of a community of practice that brings together learning, knowing and identity as interdependent facets of the being in the world of social individuals. We can see what is at stake in this notion by briefly examining writing that mimics the news but is written outside its social situation. Like many of the early texts in the sample studied here, the excerpt below demonstrates the writer's ability to write what appears to be acceptable copy, but which has not yet any of the comprehension of how the language joins together to tell particular stories and make certain claims to knowledge:

Three council buildings in the heart of Newtown could be badly in need of repair, a report out today suggested.

Chief planning Officer Christine Jardine today laid down plans for the refurbishment of both the Transport Headquarters in Haymarket Street and the Council Housing Department in Portman Square after it had emerged that at least one serious accident had resulted from the buildings' disrepair.

The third building in question, The Computer and Technical Support Facility in Newtown Square, is currently undergoing structural surveying following

an inspection where worrying cracks were discovered in the exterior and interior plaster work.

(#4, 1/10)

Much of the language here comes from the stock of appropriate news language. The text contains acceptable news phrasing (e.g., 'in the heart of', 'a report...suggested'), news syntax (evident, for example, in the characteristic news linking items 'after' and 'following'), tag elements attributing information to sources, time references ('today') and structure (e.g., placing key information in topic positions and dividing the text into one sentence paragraphs). There is some less adequate news language, such as the information-thin phrase, 'The third building in question', the officialese 'undergoing structural surveying', the use of the past tense main verb 'suggested' in the intro, and the capping of 'Officer'. But for a starting student, this might be seen as an impressive command of newswriting.

However, the passage can be seen to be the work of a novice because of the way it *deploys* elements of news style. The common news auxiliary verb 'could be' and the common news verb 'suggested' (both in the intro) are generally reserved for situations where the status of a piece of information is in some way in doubt. Here neither the fact that the report said the buildings were in disrepair nor the factual claim that they are in disrepair is in much doubt, and the simpler and more direct forms, 'are' and 'says', would be preferred by news discourse. News intros generally pack as much information in as possible to give the gist of the story, and the unmodified 'report' meets this requirement poorly. A phrase such as 'a council report' is required,²⁵ if the report were mentioned in the intro at all. The phrase 'in the heart of Newtown' lacks specificity. Still worse, the intro lacks the drama and focus that a relatively minor story such as this would need to get it published. The tutor has written in the margin by the third paragraph, 'This is the main story', and my competence as a reporter suggests to me that an adequate intro to the piece would

²⁵ One journalism student near the end her study talked of the 'rhythm' of the intro requiring another word before a key noun in the intro, and perhaps competence does involve a knowledge of sound patterning. Journalism, of course, also prefers information to be clearly attributed, so its preference for a modifier such as 'council' is doubly determined.

have started with information from that third paragraph.²⁶ The student also has not developed the skill or the confidence to restructure source material so as to find as newsworthy an angle as possible. These various difficulties, which we will look at systematically below, immediately mark the text as the work of a writer not yet integrated into the community of practice of the news. The mimicry of the news here certainly requires some degree of understanding of how a news story invokes a certain kind of knowledge, 'carried along' in the forms, if you like, but it falls short of competence as a news reporter. I am reminded of the almost always poor imitations in fiction of news stories, imitations that have some of the form and content of the news but are immediately recognisable as fakes. As Bartholomae writes of the university student, he (or she) mimics the language of academics in order to 'locate himself convincingly in a language that is not his own' (Bartholomae, 1983, p.300; cited in Hare and Fitzsimmons, 1991, p.349; see also Philips, 1987). This brief example immediately signals that learning news style involves much more than learning some forms, but is about taking on a knowledge and taking a position in a social group.

The chapter traces the movement from mimic to competent member of the news community by discussing, firstly, how scholars have theorised the issue, then how we might measure this learning, and then a detailed analysis of eight aspects of writing which emerge in the novice texts studied.

²⁶ A more competent version, drawing on information further down the story, might begin something like:

- * Fifty people were evacuated from Newtown Council's computer building yesterday after cracks appeared in its walls.
- * The council has now ordered an urgent survey of the Computer and Technical Support Facility in Newtown Square, which is barely ten years old, as well as reports on its other buildings built by contractors Donald and Mitchell.
- * The cracks were found by an architect after an earlier incident, in which one person was injured, triggered an inspection of council buildings.
- * Chief planning officer Christine Jardine today announced plans for refurbishment of the council's transport headquarters in Haymarket Street and its housing department in Portman Square. The final cost could be well over £250,000.

2. Learning to write: Theory

2.1. The expert writer

As Gunther Kress (1994 [1982]) points out, learning to write is a quite different activity to learning to speak. Children are already accomplished speakers when they begin to write, so what they must learn is less a matter of grammar or syntax or skills such as concentration than how to use the 'forms and possibilities' of genre, how to integrate their language skills towards certain communicative ends (p.114). The skilled writer is skilful at such integration. Learning to write is also, to a large extent, a matter of socialisation into certain ways of integrating writing. 'Learning genres...represents the child's socialization into appropriate and accepted modes of organizing knowledge, of knowing, and the modes of representing perceptions and knowledge to others' (p.124). The socialisation into a way of knowing is more prominent still when a specialist domain of written language, that seeks certain social ends, is being learnt.

The development of such a social knowledge is often discussed in the literature in terms of the continuum from novice to expert. Writing process research has traditionally thought of the expert's knowledge of writing as a set of strategies to achieve goals such as prioritising material, targeting a reader, producing idiomatic sentences, maintaining some unity in the text, and so on. The experienced writer has more of these strategies and better strategies than the novice (see, for example, Flower and Hayes, 1981; Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1991; Pitts, 1989). But Mark Torrance (1996) inverts the argument. While novice writers, he argues, may have to think through their writing in terms of strategies, expert writers are able instead to draw upon a knowledge of the domain, and to draw upon 'ready-made' solutions to writing problems. They need employ, therefore, fewer, more specific thinking strategies to achieve more in their writing (p.3; following Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986, and Holyoak, 1991). The difference is not so much at the cognitive or textual level as at the social level. The expert has a contextual feel for what the writing should do in terms of the social group where the writing is located. She or he can speak with Lemke's (1995) social voices, discussed in chapter four, with facility.

Expertise in general has become theorised in the past decade in such terms of experience in a discursive field, as G.R. Norman notes:

There is a convergence of evidence from a variety of fields of inquiry that expertise is characterised, not by the possession of any general strategies, but by the availability of an extensive organised body of specialised knowledge. Further, recent research has emphasised that characterisation of expert knowledge simply as organised networks of rules and concepts ignores the central role of experiential knowledge in expert performance.

(Norman, 1988, p.285; cited by Sheridan Burns, 1997, p.60)

The novice writer who lacks this experiential knowledge provides evidence of what that knowledge and the social context in which it operates entail. As Anne Beaufort writes, 'Viewing texts—and text production—as requiring greater or lesser degrees of context-specific knowledge can provide another means of tracking what is involved in the socially embedded development of writing skills' (2000, p.189). Such an approach does not find forms or genres. As Britt-Louise Gunnarsson points out, what characterises communicative communities is not so much particular forms or genres, which may be shared across a culture, but the way the communities use them, mix them and modify them (1997, p.141). The knowledge-focused approach signalled by Torrance and Beaufort finds a way of acting in the world through language—what I have called throughout this study a style.

2.2. Journalism pedagogy

Journalism scholarship provides little help in identifying this socially situated expertise. Journalism education, even in the United States where it has been established for 75 years, has surprisingly little to say to theorise one of its core educational outcomes. There is also little academic research on how journalists learn to write, and indeed little study of starting journalists at all (Schumacher et al., 1989, p.393; Becker et al., 1987, p.158).

What discussion there is of writing within journalism pedagogy tends to focus on grammar, spelling and other proprieties of English usage (e.g. Windschuttle, 1998,

p.17). This is after all what the industry finds most lacking in graduating journalists' work and the area in which it is most critical of journalism educators (e.g. Becker et al., 1987, pp.125, 128). Such a focus is also part of journalism's understanding of language, as discussed in chapter four. As a result, curriculum statements appear to mop up writing skills with the abstract idea of 'literacy'. A report on US journalism education written for the University of Oregon School of Journalism states:

A major concern of the School is literacy training, to which considerable time is devoted. All students are required to take Introduction to Journalistic Writing...After completing this course, which covers basic principles of writing, such as grammar and mechanics, students choose from a wide variety of writing courses that focus on medium-specific styles.

(Oregon Report, 1987, p.9)

The proposed British journalism standards have a similar structure (Guild of Editors, 1997). Journalists learn the 'basics', and then merely top that up with specialist news or feature skills. Clearly journalism students and trainees learn much more than this in their basic classes, but their teachers do not seem to have a theory in which to couch their course statements. The primary criterion applied in the marking on the journalism course studied below is similarly untheorised—the work should be of publishable quality.

The equation of newswriting with the very general idea of literacy is inadequate, not only because it harks back to pre-Second World War teaching methods and because evidence from researchers such as Kress (1994 [1982]), as discussed above, shows that learners' problems are often more about coordinating language skills than knowing the rules of written English. It is also an obstacle in journalism studies because it allows no way to discuss how things might be different, a key concern of this study. What theory there is of how to learn to write the news seems to be drawn from other fields—and is also more appropriate to those fields. G. Stuart Adam, writing in a Canadian context, points out that few journalism courses teach a range of methods of reporting (1989, p.74). Students are presented, by and large, with a single set of craft norms about the shape of the news story: the five 'w's, intros of no more than 25 words, sticking to the facts, and so on. He advocates instead that journalism

students study what he calls 'the higher journalism' and draw on the use of metaphor, narrative construction and imagination evident in the work of such elite journalists (p.75; see also Nelson, 1990). Yet this kind of critical language, although useful in reaching out beyond a fixation with the inverted pyramid as a model of writing, leans rather heavily on literary models that are impractical for a daily practice hemmed in by deadlines and space restrictions. Moreover, the high culture critical apparatus which Adam wants to import tends to define its object in opposition to journalism (Hartley, 1996, p.42), making it problematic as a goal for journalism.

Lyle D. Olson's (1989) suggestion that journalism education import the categories of lay and expert audience from the literature on technical writing presents similar theoretical problems. He writes: 'An appropriate strategy, for example, for a lay audience would include use of analogy, little theory and technical data, few definitions, shorter sentences in the subject-verb-object pattern, and shorter paragraphs' (p.4). While there is overlap here with newswriting, it should be obvious that this list hardly pinpoints what a news story entails: where is the intro or the imperative of compression, and should a news story be emptied of data and definitions? A news story is a specialised form of writing, not merely a point on a continuum of expert to lay. But there seem to be few other terms of analysis available.

Research on news language offers little assistance either, tending to focus on the text post-production, and to describe newswriting simply as a formula, rather than as a product of a combination of skills put to work in a range of environments. This reification is not in itself a cause for criticism, and it is essential in many projects in order to describe an object of study. The problem is that the formula adduced does not always accord with what we see when we ask what is involved in gaining competence in newswriting. Structuring a story as an inverted pyramid, for example, does not emerge in this chapter as an important skills of newswriting: it is not mentioned in tutors' marginal notes on journalism students' writing exercises, it does not help us describe the difference between student writing at the start and at the end of their training (see also Pitts, 1989), and it is of little use in structuring anything but

simple event or breaking news stories (see chapter one and section 4.7 below). Similarly, descriptions of news language by stylisticians or register analysts tend to single out aspects of language which seem peripheral when viewed from the perspective of how journalists learn to write. What is called ‘journalese’, for example—clichés, sensationalizing adjectives, ‘faulty’ syntax and so on—seems to characterise the writing of the journalism students studied below more at the *start* rather than at the end of their course, and indeed that of the less able students at the start. It is perhaps what the general culture thinks of as journalism, because its highly marked status grabs readers’ attention out of proportion to its frequency. As I detail below, what is learnt is in fact a much more finely-tuned set of writing skills.

Instead I follow critics who emphasise the cultural, knowledge-forming dimension of learning. The goal of journalism education, whether implicitly or explicitly stated, is socialization to the profession, ‘to produce an individual who can effectively and efficiently function in the occupations of journalism and mass communication’ (Becker et al., 1987, p.19). Glasser and Ettema (1989) examine news practice in terms of this activity, looking at the process of learning how to be a journalist as a situated practice—not just a student’s wrestling with a set of textual conventions, but a series of acts on the edge of and, with time, inside the community of journalism. They cite Robert Darnton’s (1975) description of his own movement from novice to competent journalist in terms of ‘the training in perception and in the manipulation of standardized images, clichés, “angles”, “slants” and scenarios’ that was required, and that was handed down over hundreds of years in the journalistic tradition (p.189; see also chapter three). This and similar journalists’ stories are evidence of a common sense knowledge about how a story ‘can go’. What rubs off from experienced peers, Glasser and Ettema argue, is ‘not so much the tricks of the trade or even an elder’s proverbs but rather a style of thought...attuned not only to the profession’s traditions and practices but to the heritage of one’s culture’ (1989, p.24). I also follow Wenger (1998) in thinking of learning as a continuous process in the newsroom, of which learning how to *become* a reporter is a special case of the iterative learning of how to *be* a reporter. In the continually changing world in which the practice is situated, the community continually has to relearn what it knows. It must continually reinvent

itself in order to remain the same (p.94). Learning is the 'verb', the 'glue', that enables the community, its knowledge, its members and its practices to be what they are. Harold Evans' phrase, describing journalism's 'slow sorcery of apprenticeship', comes to mind (1972, p.3).

3. Method

The sample comprises approximately 18 news and feature stories from each of nine students on a nine-month-long year postgraduate journalism course at a British university. The course includes an intensive four-days-a-week practical newspaper journalism component in its first six months, during which students have to submit articles every few days, sometimes to very tight deadlines and at other times with more time to work on them. All practical work is assessed according to tutors' perceptions of what would be acceptable in the newspaper industry. There are approximately 160 articles in total, selected from the portfolios of this practical coursework of the students at various points through that six month period, as they develop basic newswriting skills. About half of the sample is made up of short, local news stories, written from information sheets, which the students were required to produce on a weekly basis throughout the course. The other half involves self-initiated stories about actual events, in a range of specialist styles including court reporting, political reporting, profiles, reviews and features for magazines, tabloids and broadsheets. A number of articles across the portfolios are based on the same material, but because the students did not always, for various reasons, include the same assignments in their portfolios and because a large minority of the texts was based on their own research, no direct comparisons can be made between different students' samples. All the texts have been assessed by tutors and carry marginal comments and marks. Citations here give the number of the portfolio (#1 to #9), followed by the date at the top of the text, and a lower case Roman numeral if more than one text by that student exists for that date. The full data are not included in the appendices because of their bulk.

Although the skills and knowledge learnt on such a course will be broadly similar to those learnt in other journalism training contexts, it should be borne in mind that graduates of such courses still make up a minority of journalists, and a minority even

of starting journalists. Full and recent figures are not available. Anthony Delano and John Henningham's 1995 survey of British journalists found that only 13 per cent of the 48.5 per cent of journalists with a degree had taken a postgraduate diploma in journalism (1995, p.14), although there is also some evidence that this figure is much higher among younger journalists and is rising fast (Delano, 2000, p.267). That being said, the practical newswriting classes from which the work in the sample comes are certified by the National Council for the Training of Journalists and prepare students to sit its certificate examination, which Delano and Henningham found 40 per cent of British journalists held. The limits to the generalisability of this study probably lie more in how the skills develop than in what the trainees must learn.

As I have already suggested, we can describe some of the competence of the reporter by analysing journalism students' explorations of the journalist's writing position. Their errors are of particular value. Kress describes much of children's learning to write in terms of exploration, exploring, for example, how to communicate to an absent, unknown addressee (1994 [1982], p.36). He suggests that the values or knowledge which learners must take on when faced with these demands of writing can be identified in what their teachers define as errors:

the category 'error' acquires great interest, as it promises to be an aid in revealing the value-system of the one who classifies the errors, and of the one who has committed the error. The classification of error, and the type of error, is a measure of the distance between the two sets of value-systems.

(Kress, 1994 [1982], p.181)

Coulthard similarly proposes that the 'study of badly written text, or *inadequate textualizations*, may help us understand better the nature of successful textualization' (1994, p.2). This negative method can be seen at work in the analysis of mimicry above. The 'distance', as Kress conceptualises it, of the text from competence tells us what language skills the students must learn, and so brings us closer to an understanding of the discursive rules that run through news style. Such a method is particularly appropriate to the study of the work of students on a journalism course with a high practical component where acquiring competence is more by 'trial and error' and advice from an experienced professional than by codified instruction

(Zelizer, 1999). However, one note of caution is needed. Pierre Coirier (1996) points out that writing research has focused on the question of what a 'bad text' is and can describe not-yet competent writing in terms of precise linguistic criteria such as coherence, syntax, thematisation. But he warns that this is not enough to characterise good writing, which is perhaps more to do with the social outcomes of text such as its communicative purpose (p.334). It is possible, therefore, that this chapter will not engage with what journalism aims for in its best writing, but merely adequacy. Nonetheless, I hope my emphasis on the discursive practice and a social rather than narrowly linguistic competence will mitigate any problem. Chapter four also suggests that journalism has difficulty articulating or conceptualising excellent writing and that therefore the problem is not only in my analysis.

I use two yardsticks to identify the extent to which the texts fall short of satisfactory newswriting. I have, firstly, placed myself in the position of a critic rather than scientist, measuring the not-yet-competence of the students by my competence as a former reporter.²⁷ In a similar way, Bell theorises his own work on news language as that of an observant participant as much as a participant observer (Bell, 1991, p. xiv). Secondly, I have identified student errors or shortcomings by the marginal comments and corrections of tutors.²⁸ I place more emphasis on this second set of criteria, to reduce the analysis' dependence on my own knowledge and expertise in journalism. Both these yardsticks are, of course, measuring news discourse's principles of writing much more than they measure the particular abilities of the students. And both depend upon my theorisation of news style as a use of language that a competent journalist recognises as news. The chapter therefore measures journalism students against news style, in order to make explicit what the tacit, situated knowledge of writing the news entails.

The focus of this chapter is not the process of learning as a cognitive psychologist would understand it. I have no developmental theory or theory of cognition to prove. As discussed above, this work is placed in a tradition that imagines learning as a

²⁷ Illustrative forms created on the basis of my competence are marked with an asterisk (*) to distinguish them from data.

process of socialisation more than a development towards some ultimate competence. The sample is instead analysed according to categories of writing skills. I have tried to make no assumptions that the students' newswriting would develop over the course in any particular way. It is hard to find any linear development, as students struggle to meet the requirements of successive new types of story or see-saw between stumbling and flowing writing. The sample bears out the literature's finding that expertise is more about combining and adapting the available tools, something more likely to develop in moments of inspiration and sudden recognition than through steady growth. Similarly, no assumptions have been made that the writers start with the same zero level of ability, as some will have had experience in journalism before the course and all could reproduce news language to some extent. I do not assume either that the last work in the sample will show them fully competent.

The main body of the analysis below is divided into 8 sub-sections, starting with micro-level issues and ending with macro-level aspects of newswriting. The final section concludes by drawing together the knowledge of the world that is implicated in these strategies.

4. Analysis

4.1. Individual words

A number of the tutors' marks on student work concern individual words, suggesting that inappropriate vocabulary is an error that jumps out at the competent journalist. These suggested changes are often minor in their impact on sense—'fireman' is replaced by 'firefighter' (#1, 25/1ii), 'established' by 'set up' (#1, 26/1), 'His breakthrough arrived' with 'his breakthrough came' (#2, 25/11). It is hard to see why some of these words are preferred. Sometimes the changes perhaps add immediacy and focus: 'come up with' is changed to 'launched' (#5, 18/1). Sometimes it is to avoid having to account for an agent, or leaving the reader aware that no agent is included. For example, when 'attacked with a screwdriver' is replaced by the tutor's 'struck with a screwdriver' (#1, 25/1iii), the weapon is emphasised so that the reader

²⁸ None of the work in this sample was assessed by me.

is less likely to ask who the attacker was. I will return to this issue of appropriate forms under the next sub-heading. But the prevalence of this sort of correction is the more important point here, in three ways. It signals firstly that individual words are a level of language use easily identifiable as being 'right' or 'wrong' in news discourse, correlating with the finding in the previous chapter that journalists tend to focus their thinking about language on the right words, whether in their memoirs, in textbooks or in individual newspapers' style guides. Another tutor might have changed 'firefighter' into 'fireman', preferring the gendered term because it was thought of as more established in everyday speech, but the point remains that the marking suggests a good deal of understanding of news language is focused at this level. Bonnie S. Brennan writes in a survey of journalism textbooks that: 'Students of any of these texts quickly learn that excellence in journalism "always boils down to choosing the right words"' (2000, p.107; citing Garrison, 1990, p.vii).

We can separate out a second, related signal implicit in these changes. The trainee learns that the use of particular words is a significant aspect of news style which he or she must get right in order to tell the news properly. The achievement of mimicking news language is built on and reinforced as an important part of becoming a reporter. Vocabulary such as 'concur' and 'Nevertheless' (#2, 15/10) situate the writing outside news discourse, as academic or formal composition. Thirdly, such marking tells the student that newswriting is different to creative or expressive writing in that there is little room for personal style. The vocabulary can be quite rigidly defined as right or wrong (cf. Evans' list of words that the 'good deskman' should memorise (1972, pp.69-83)). And so the reporter also learns that he or she does not own the writing; instead, sub-editors or tutors can and will change words to conform to news style as long as the sense of the story is not changed significantly.

4.2. The appropriate forms

As noted in the Introduction, Mark Torrance argues that a major difference between expert writers and novices is that experts 'search a narrow, domain-specific knowledge base of ready-made solutions to problems within that domain' while novices engage in a 'weaker, more general heuristic search' for ways of writing

(1996, pp.3, 4). There is thus a body of solutions ‘already represented in a more or less complete form’ (p.3) which makes up part of the knowledge of writing in a particular domain. Kaufer, Hayes and Flower (1986) show that detailed prior knowledge of normal phrasing and sentence structure significantly speeds up the process of sentence production (cited in Schumacher et al., 1989, p.405). But what is at stake in learning to write is much more than speed of cognitive processing, it is a knowledge both of ‘off-the-shelf’ strategies and of when it is appropriate to use them. The tutors’ marking and students’ learning of individual words discussed above suggest that many of the strategies which characterise news and which enable the efficient production of news texts are located at the level of the word or phrase. In chapter six I will examine in more detail how such phrasing works in competent journalists’ writing, particularly to provide some assurance to the journalist that the text is a good story. But here I chart some of the useful and appropriate forms that make up the knowledge which students must develop.

The notion of appropriate forms is rarely made explicit in the marking, although there are, as we have seen, lists and style guides telling students to prefer usages such as ‘more than’ to ‘over’ (#5, 14/12; #9, 24/2) or translate official jargon into ‘everyday’ language (see section 4.8). Instead, we can see the students learning, largely by the trial and error heuristic described by Torrance, what is and what is not appropriate or useful language in writing the news. So one student writes ‘hopes of finding the couple alive were dented’ (#9, 28/10), and finds out only in the writing (and in his tutor’s criticism) that the metaphor does not work. Students’ failure and later success in learning the appropriate forms are discussed here under three categories: firstly, finding useful phrases that get around the multiple pressures on news reports, secondly, learning to avoid repetition and, thirdly, learning to be precise, most particularly in terms of writing techniques that avoid ambiguity and do not imply more than the journalist knows.

4.2.1. Useful phrases for compression, emphasis and linking

The most easily identifiable of these forms is phrasing which negotiates the premium on space in newswriting—although I would be careful in trying to separate this

aspect from the formal aspect of writing text which sounds like the news. One student writes in an early piece:

She suffered multiple injuries and was taken to St Mary's Hospital but found to be dead on arrival.

This is changed by the tutor to the much briefer:

She suffered multiple injuries and was dead on arrival at St Mary's Hospital.

(#1, 9/11)

The narrative is compressed from three successive clauses, arranged in a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* narrative logic, down to two descriptive ones, using nine fewer words. The same news phrase, 'dead on arrival',²⁹ is used to say more, implying the journey without having to mention it. Another student's version of the same exercise includes the text, 'taken to hospital suffering from shock', which the tutor changes to 'treated for shock' (#4, 9/11), omitting the reference to the hospital which is implied in 'treated' and which has been mentioned already in the preceding paragraph, and again cutting out a temporally successive syntactical unit about the journey governed by the relatively information-thin verb 'was taken'. The use of a descriptive rather than temporal parataxis ('a' and 'b' rather than 'a' and then 'b') and the use of information-rich, highly connotative words to compress sense into a small space are common forms that the students are required to learn. A third, and related, form is the common news technique of compressing two phrases into one by a number of syntactical operations, such as drawing a postmodifying noun phrase into the premodifier. Thus 'its manufacturing operation in Oxdown' is changed to 'its Oxdown manufacturing operation' by the tutor (#4, 7/12). Similarly, a more confident student writes of a hotel's plan 'to wheel-clamp unauthorised cars' (#7, 2/1), compressing the information about who may or may not park there into the participle 'unauthorised'. These strategies involve grammatical transformations, which we might list and categorise to describe journalism's grammatical resources (as Trew, 1979, and Hodge and Kress, 1993 [1979], begin to do). My sense, however, is that journalists learn such compressed forms more than they learn the act

²⁹ Though the phrase is also a medical term; phrases typical of the news need not, of course, be unique to it.

of compression, and that the search for general rules of news syntax takes us away from the practical knowledge of learning to write. The students are learning of the availability of forms of writing which are shorter, which make better sense as news and which are, in sum, more appropriate.

While compression is emphasised by the tutors, there are other pressures on the reporter for which appropriate forms must be learnt. Some syntax is simply not newsy enough—that is, not sufficiently dramatic, immediate or event-focused—and must be ‘turned around’ in order to be good news style. Here there is an explicit principle of transformation, although it is one peculiar to news and associated with the notion discussed in chapter four of going ‘under the surface’ of source material to find nuggets of news, and involves a number of syntactical or grammatical forms. Certain passive constructions are certainly seen as less newsworthy than their active counterparts. Clauses such as ‘The proposal was instigated at a meeting of the Oxdown Chamber of Commerce’ (#2, 26/10) or ‘These feelings are echoed by Campbeltown resident Doreen MacMillan’ (#5, 14/10) are seen as deadening and space-wasting passives (Evans, 1972, p.23), and are marked by the tutors, ‘turn around’ or ‘TRS’ [turn round sentence]. Once again we see that the modern news discourse identified in chapter two takes upon itself the power to rewrite and subsume other forms of discourse.

‘Turning around’ syntax extends beyond a simple principle of using the active voice. News style also tends to prefer prominently placed nouns to verbs for its major pieces of information, particularly in intros, so that nominalised forms are used rather than either active or passive finite verbs, as in the second part of the following intro:

Strathclyde Police have launched a murder enquiry after the death of a man in Larkhall in the early hours of this morning.

(#6, 26/1)

The second part of the sentence could be turned around into ‘after a man died...’, meeting the demand for dramatic, newsy verbs. But the student shows an awareness of an intro model which makes the death more important than the man, and gives that principle priority over the principle of newsy verbs. Indeed, the tutor emphasises the

preference for a noun phrase rather than a subordinate clause with an active verb by scoring out 'after' and writing, 'following is a better word'—a connective that can only take a noun phrase after it. In the same way, the inadequate intro:

Malaria has killed an Oxdown woman who had recently returned from
Gambia and a warning has been issued to travellers.

(#3, 16/11)

uses an active verb but is less satisfactory news style than a form which turns around the first clause:

* An Oxdown woman recently returned from the Gambia has died of
malaria, prompting a warning...

or still better reverses the clause structure of the entire sentence:

* A malaria warning has been issued to travellers following the death of an
Oxdown woman who had recently returned from the Gambia.

This last hypothesised intro draws on the principle of 'turning around' to combine a number of forms that both compress the text ('A malaria warning') and make the text as dramatic and as up-to-date as possible ('A...warning has been issued'). The novice must, then, accumulate these forms and learn which is most appropriate at which moment to tell the news to greatest effect.

My hypothetical versions of the malaria story above replaced the student's connective 'and' with 'prompting' and 'following'. The sample shows students failing to find connectives such as these and instead using adverbs which foreground the reporter's voice as he or she constructs an argument to connect two ideas. The second paragraph of a student's sports story begins, 'Nevertheless, a bumper crowd of 513...' (#6, 10/11), interrupting the flow of the text with a disjunctive parenthetical adverb. The tutor suggests in the margin an alternative phrase, 'Five hundred brave/cold souls', which links the sentence to the intro's reference to cold weather in a flowing movement that seems to arise from the material rather than from a reporting voice. Similarly, the tutor circles a student's comment, 'This would obviously have a adverse effect on tourism' and proposes a subordinate clause dependent on the sentence before, that omits the intrusion of the narrator in

‘obviously’ and attributes the idea to ‘fears in the community’ (#5, 14/10). Likewise, the tutor suggests a student’s linking of two elements in an arts story, ‘Her increasing profile, possibly due in part to an explosion of interest...’, be rewritten as, ‘Her popularity follows an explosion of interest...’ (#6, 22/11). In all these examples, the link, whether a connective word or a carrying forward of a word from one paragraph to the next, allows the reporter to imply a logical connection without stepping beyond a justifiable statement of fact into surmise. I will return to these questions of flow and narrative voice below. Here I want to show the need for the students to become familiar with a stock of phrases that get round the problem of linking ideas together without either calling into question the authority of the text or making links for which the source material provides no evidence.

The converse of learning such appropriate phrases is learning when not to use them. Like the mimicking story discussed at the start of the chapter, a number of texts draw on journalistic phrases which dodge problems of attribution, but at moments when they are not needed. ‘According to’ is a characteristic news style opening of a dependent clause of attribution, that is used, particularly when it precedes the main clause, to signal that the reported speech in the main clause contains a claim rather than a fact, and is sometimes used, when the reporter’s writing has taken liberties with the source quotation, to avoid using a more direct verb of saying. A number of students use the form often, as in ‘According to Station Officer Dan Rogers’ (#2, 9/11), when neither of these situations holds. The agentless passive phrase ‘is thought’ is also used inappropriately, in a situation where there is no need to fudge who is doing the thinking: ‘The actual cause of the subsidence is thought to have been...’ (#5, 20/10). The phrases discussed here are not formulae but appropriate forms available in news style when the pressures of space and ease of reading and newsworthiness require them. What is learnt is as much what such phrases do as that they can be used in the news.

4.2.2. Avoiding repetition

A common problem in the early work is a tendency to repeat vocabulary and structures, which suggests the writers do not yet have a range of forms at their fingertips. There is a historical aversion in journalism to repetition (the nineteenth-

century journalist George Augustus Sala of the *Daily Telegraph* became famous for his ornate, figurative synonyms by which he avoided repeating himself) and so a value placed on knowing a range of forms (see also Wallace, 1977, p.53). But variation is more than a stylistic issue, it is a technique of compression which students must learn. Repeating key words wastes the opportunity to use a different formulation that further characterises a piece of information—variation of, for example, ‘Council leader Charlie Gordon’ with ‘the Labour stalwart’ at the next reference, constructs an implication through the anaphoric reference that is useful for a number of reasons, but primarily because it saves space. In both these senses, repetition holds up the flow of the text, as we can see in the following:

He was equally robust in contesting the charge that sport equals football.

He pointed out that the onus is on other sports to engender their own publicity.

He implicitly identified the Rugby Governing body as being lax in the self-promotion of their sport.

(#2, 13/10)

The student seems not yet aware of the alternative ways to report speech, such as making a second sentence a subordinate clause to the preceding one (* ‘..., pointing out that the onus...’), or using the tense change of the reported speech alone as a signal to the reader of its status (* ‘Rugby’s governing body was particularly lax...’), or inserting a paragraph of direct speech. The result is not just the use of more words, but also a jerkiness. While there is thematic unity in these three sentences, the direct anaphora of ‘He’ focuses attention on this rather empty pronoun to hold up any movement through the material and through succeeding paragraphs. The knowledge of a variety of forms to avoid the stiltedness of such repetition is thus a key skill in linking paragraphs together.

4.2.3. Tight writing

The students have a particular difficulty in finding the appropriate phrases to communicate just what they have evidence for and no more. It appears that until they develop a broad news vocabulary and a sense of what that language achieves, until they can write ‘tightly’, in journalists’ terms, the students are at risk of writing text

such as, 'The prosecution...consisted of a taped interview' (circled by the tutor with the comment, 'just say produced') (#5, 16/12), which suggests that the interview was the full extent of the prosecution's case. The verb 'consisted' is also poor for two further reasons: it is a polysyllabic Latinate word that could be replaced by a simple verb such as 'is' and it communicates little sense of action. Appropriate forms are often multiply determined in this way, so that finding the 'right word' (see chapter four) is about the accuracy, simplicity, immediacy and other qualities of language. The tutors correct a number of such 'loose' words—including 'refuted' (#2, 10/12), with its specific, limited meaning that an accusation has been shown to be untrue, a claim news style is careful of making; 'suspected of belonging to' (#4, 28/10ii), which implies a denial or concealment when something along the lines of 'believed' is meant; and 'hit-and-run accident' (#8, 19/10), which makes assumptions about the police position which the writer does not have evidence for. This marking, related to the demand for the 'right word', noted above, alerts the trainee reporters to the need for a precise, referential news vocabulary. Within the discourse, then, the knowledge of the 'right way' to use words is an insurance against looseness.

Again, we see that news style comprises much more than a set of language forms, but extends to an awareness of how to pin language down or stretch it to tell a story accurately and legally. The demand for appropriate precision involves a sensitivity to the particular meanings of different words, and a care in their use. So, the word 'threatened' in a story about demonstrators heckled by skinheads is circled by the tutor—'the demonstrators were threatened by youths' (#4, 30/11)—because it implies more than there is evidence for in the source material. This is not to imply that the student was not sensitive to the nuances of meaning of such words before. But I would argue that the student applies particular news criteria to its use here: she is aware of the verb 'threaten' as an 'off-the-shelf' piece of news style, that it is a word which fits newswriting and gives a nice sense of drama to the story, and so uses it without the discrimination that comes of a developed awareness of the situations where it is appropriate. There is, if you like, a formal knowledge of news style but not yet a situated one. I will return to this issue below when discussing the learning of how news style 'can go'.

A related problem is that of ambiguity. Some of the students produce few instances that are confusing or ambiguous, but some seem to have a particular difficulty in using news language in a way that guides readers consistently to a particular denotative meaning. As discussed in the previous chapter, journalism puts a premium on language which allows it to claim a direct link to the 'real world', and certain types of ambiguity put that claim at risk. Journalists also judge clarity by the yardstick of being able to understand a sentence at a first, casual reading. Thus sentences such as, 'In one report, said the Chief Superintendent, newly-laid turfs were dug up and removed' (#3, 26/10), or 'The memories of some of Scotland's football legends are to be recorded and kept for posterity' (#6, 17/11), are not good news style because it is not immediately clear what all the subordinate elements depend on. Ambiguity is an occupational hazard for a form of writing as compressed as news journalism, and we can see that expertise in newswriting involves the difficult skill of being able to limit as well as make sense.

There is a large but discrete body of such appropriate forms to compress, reorder, link and precisely denote the news with conventions about when they are appropriate, in news style. When novice writers learn these usages they are therefore learning a number of requirements at once. Together, though, these forms suggest a position towards events and material that newswriting takes, one of controlling meaning without being implicated in the construction of meaningfulness. The best phrasing and syntax, such as 'fears in the community', invoke presuppositions which save space, keep the story flowing and do not force the writer to express a judgement or opinion. These suppositions are controlled, but in narrow terms of avoiding ambiguity or overstatement. Significantly, the tutor marking does not shape students' understanding of these strategies as needing to be controlled in any other way, such as in terms of their ideological potential (see Fairclough, 1989, chapter four). These formulations call up 'the way things are' (in the most ideologically potent sense of that phrase), so as to avoid implicating newswriting in any claims to state how things should or could or may possibly be. The 'tightest' writing, as journalists like to call

it, is tight more because it pushes suggestion into description than because it controls that suggestion. I will return to these issues in later chapters.

4.3. Using quotations and detail

Few of the students show any problems producing paragraphs of quotation, but it takes many of them a long time to develop the competent reporter's ways of using these elements so as to do useful work for the telling of the news. A few students are, for example, sloppy in the use of quotation marks to separate quotation from other text. This could be interpreted as nothing more than a slip, but the fact that it occurs very rarely in later copy or in the work of better students suggests that it signals a lack of attention to the very different status of the two forms of text in news style. A quotation provides corroborating evidence for statements made in the intro or in other summarising paragraphs, it allows the reader to assess the tone of an argument or the character of a figure in the news, and it provides 'colour' to bring life to other material (Keeble, 1994, p.74). If a quotation is being used effectively in one of these ways, it is difficult to see how the quotation marks can be left off. One tutor reports her observation that students do not provide enough direct quotation in their early work. However, a few students also use quotations fairly indiscriminately in their early work, without preceding them with appropriate sentences for which they might act as evidence and often in places where reported speech would provide a shorter, more easily read, sentence. For example:

And according to editor Sharon Harvey 'penetrates 99% of households.'

Ms Harvey who previously worked for the sister paper based in Lochgilphead noticed the difference when she moved to Campbeltown, 'People feel they own it.

It is very well thought [sic] in the local community.' She said

(#5, 14/10)

Even when read without its surrounding text, we can see that this text is unfinished, perhaps because the writer was aware that it was not adequate but was not sure how to fix the problem. Newswriting tends not to use quotations embedded in a sentence, because it interrupts the flow (see section 4.7 below), but usually separates quotations out as separate paragraphs, and only following an indirect quotation. The

first quotation here, therefore, would be more appropriate in news style as indirect quotation. The second and third quotations would be more appropriate as a single paragraph, in which position they would serve as evidence or illustration for the preceding summarising statement of the journalist's. The competent journalist would recognise the need for a logical link such as a verb of saying in the preceding sentence, so it would read something like: * 'Ms Harvey said she had noticed something different about the paper when she moved down from its sister title in Lochgilphead.' Another student frequently uses long direct quotations of four or five paragraphs to tell the story rather than as colour or evidence for the journalist's words. Taking account of the tutor's comment above that some students use too few quotations, the more general problem among trainees seems to be that although they are aware that news stories require quotations, they lack knowledge of how they work and therefore where and how much to use them.

The development of such a sense comes only slowly. In the following excerpt, the formal competence that was absent above is present—the student knows how to balance quotation against reported speech, how to use quotations as evidence and how to fit them into the flow of the story. Yet something is still missing:

A Scottish tuberculosis specialist yesterday warned against complacency in the fight against the disease, in the wake of reports that the number of cases in England and Wales has increased by more than a fifth in the last decade.

Dr Peter Christie, Consultant Epidemiologist at the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health (SCIEH), said that although Scotland has so far shown a continuing slow decline in TB cases, the increase in the disease worldwide and the spread of multi-drug resistant TB (MDRTB) pose significant risks to public health.

Dr Christie said: 'We are fortunate that in Scotland the number of TB cases is stable or in decline. However, this stability could easily be lost through complacency, and it is vital that public health vigilance and control programmes are maintained and improved.'

(#6, 16/12)

The quotation in the third paragraph corroborates or makes safe the preceding statements in a way which is formally correct in news style. It also communicates a sense of the doctor's concern. But it does these things in a repetitive way and fails to carry on the momentum of the story. In particular, the actual words of warning and the strong language—'complacency', 'it is vital'—are buried and distanced from the intro's announcement of the warning. A more lively treatment of the material in the student's paragraphs two and three might read:

* Dr Peter Christie, Consultant Epidemiologist at the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health, said Scotland had so far shown a gradual decline in TB cases.

* But he said this stability could be easily lost, as the disease was increasing worldwide and drug-resistant strains were spreading.

* 'It is vital that public health vigilance and control programmes are maintained and improved,' he said.

This much shorter quotation, focusing on the key warning, rather than the supporting information, would be more likely in news style. The student has no doubt already organised information given by the source to construct the formally acceptable text, but my further (hypothetical) reworking 'turns around' more of the material, making an indirect quotation about stability the main clause, on which the information about worldwide trends is dependent, and for which a shorter direct quotation of the warning is evidence, as well as removing medical terms and acronyms and leaving implicit the sense that Scotland was fortunate. This kind of reworking highlights the most newsworthy of the doctor's words and compresses the material. So, while the student knew the conventions governing how paragraphs of quotation fit into text, what was perhaps missing was an attitude to how they work within journalism's way of knowing. As the novice reporter gains confidence, he or she needs to regard source text less as information than as material—as sound bites—to be used by the reporter to tell the story in the clearest and most vivid way. The material becomes known in a slightly different way.

Such techniques of cutting and contextualising quotations suggest that news discourse places a higher priority on constructing a readily understood story than it does on preserving the integrity of the material. In particular, the reporter has a responsibility to see that the quotation makes sense, rather than to the subtleties of the speaker's communicative intentions. In the second article of an exercise where the students had to write regular updates on a situation on the basis of gradually increasing information, one student wrote:

Detective Chief Inspector Chris Robertson, the officer leading the enquiry, said: 'I would again appeal to anyone who was in the vicinity of the Chinese restaurant or the taxi rank...to contact the Murder Incident Room.'

(#4, 26/1)

The tutor has circled 'again' and written, 'Your readers will not have read the first appeal,' suggesting that the student should have omitted the word. The students are here learning to use quotations as supporting elements to the sense they are aiming to communicate, and to shape the words of those quotations according to that goal. As they learn the mechanics of quotations, the students are learning to construct a new communicative event to which the source speech is subordinate.

4.4. How news style 'can go'

Learning how to use quotations effectively is part of a larger competence—learning what the techniques of news style, which the students seem to learn first as empty forms (Geist, 1996), are able to achieve. This skill can be seen in its absence when we look at extended passages of text for what, following Glasser and Ettema (1989), we might call a knowledge of how a story 'can go'. Glasser and Ettema argue that there is no method in finding stories in journalism, but a commonsense use of 'a wealth of practical experience to make an appropriate choice of story' (p. 22). An experienced reporter knows how pensions plus officials 'can go' as a story, for example, and so can locate the story in the mass of material she or he faces. Glasser and Ettema are interested in the idea of a situated, tacit knowledge rather than specifics of writing these stories, but their argument can be extended to journalists' understanding of the specific textual practices organised in news style. What is missing from a number of texts in the sample here is a sense of what the compressed

and characteristic forms of news style are achieving in terms of the larger text. I pick out three areas of difficulty for some or all of the students under this heading: learning how to use the appropriate forms to link text above the sentence: learning how to use the ways available to communicate context and background appropriately; and learning the subtle issue of what can be left implicit and what must be spelt out in news style.

4.4.1. Making links

There is, firstly, almost no local coherence in some of the texts (I will return to the issue of global coherence in chapter seven). One student writes at an almost primary school level:

He was offered a place with The Sun and far prefers covering games and getting the feel of the pre-match atmosphere.

His work has brought him all over the world covering matches.

The highlight of his career was covering the world cup.

(#3, 13/10)

This student is certainly capable of much more complex sentences, and so this oversimple and disconnected style is less a language development issue (see, for example, Kress, 1994 [1982], on children's writing) than one of a limited understanding of how to use the short one sentence paragraphs of the news. The student knows that the news is made up of such relatively independent sentences, but seems to think of these as just simple sentences.

This is an extreme case, but a number of the students show a poorly developed sense of how to balance the independence of each short news paragraph with the interdependence of sentences that make up some kind of a whole. So one student writes:

New Town is sinking.

This revelation follows recent reports about cracks in the computer and technical facility in New Town Square.

Provost Shona MacKenzie confirmed today that the cracks were caused by subsidence.

The survey from structural engineers stated: ‘There was no reason to fear that the building was unsound...

(#5, 20/10)

The inappropriate (and inaccurate) intro provides evidence of Torrance’s hypothesis that novices are engaged in heavy cognitive work because their knowledge of the style is poorly developed—the student has tried hard here to reinvent the news intro. The linkages between paragraphs also reveal inadequate knowledge of news style. The student has used many of the appropriate forms of the news, but has not strung them together appropriately. ‘Provost Shona MacKenzie’ is a standard news form, but only works as a descriptor if we are told in previous sentences what council is being discussed, in the anaphoric technique of compressing and linking discussed in section 4.3.2 above. Similarly, ‘The survey’ is a typical topic element, but the definite article implies it is a known element (Sinclair, 1992) and so requires a previous reference to surveying to make sense. ‘This revelation’ does pick up on its preceding material so as to link the two paragraphs, but does so in a metatextual way, calling attention to the fact of a revelation rather than to the news event. If used appropriately, with each topic element linking to elements in the preceding sentence, these phrases would have worked to connect the paragraphs together in a highly efficient manner. ‘Provost Shona MacKenzie’ could have drawn upon a preceding reference to ‘Newtown Council’ to both specify who was speaking on behalf of the council and save the reporter having to specify which council the provost came from. But the student does not yet know how to use such phrases to save space and make them cohere, instead leaving them dangling slightly illogically at the start of each paragraph. Those students who begin able to mimic newswriting seem better at constructing some coherence.

4.4.2. Organising foreground and background

A key organisational problem for the students is knowing how to use background paragraphs to good effect in the text as a whole. The compressed style of the news, with its nominalisations, subordinate clauses, adjectival phrases, quotations and

similar elements of information, and its vague structural principles (see chapter seven) can swamp the writer with things to be organised. This task is, I think, almost impossible to achieve afresh with each new story without a well developed sense of how to marshal material with the background paragraph, and a sense of how this background interrelates with the intro and other parts of the text such as description or quotation. Rather than find the story angle in the mass of material through his or her commonsensical knowledge of stories, tell that angle in the intro and organise the rest of the material as information that is either important as context or implied or irrelevant, the novice reporter attempts to present all the information.

This difficulty can arise even when many of the other stylistic components have been grasped, because it is about organisation. Such a sense of what kind of story is being written, and therefore what is background and what is foreground, is missing in the following:

A baby, born prematurely, ‘died’ four times in three days, but is now set to celebrate her first birthday this Saturday.

Megan Corrigan’s mother, Mary, from Kirkintilloch, who did not see her daughter for the first four days of her life, said: ‘As we watched her one night, she had a heart attack and was turning blue.

‘That happened often that night.’

Megan, weighing 11lb and 12oz—less than a bag of sugar—was born, by caesarian section, at Stobhill Hospital, Glasgow, where doctors gave her less than a week to live.

(#2, 9/11)

The material here is jumbled, with a confused time sense and ambiguous phrasing (‘whose life?’ the tutor wrote beside ‘the first four days of her life’). The student has combined two events a year apart in the intro, without establishing one as the news event and one as background. The celebration of the baby’s first birthday is lost beneath the mass of detail about the birth and the point of that detail becomes unclear. A competent journalist would have made a choice about what kind of story to write here, and would have organised the material accordingly. The latest news

here is the anniversary of the baby's birth, and an orthodox news story would most likely start with that, using a small amount of material about the birth to establish the interest in the baby.³⁰ Intimate and emotionally significant information is often written as a 'softer' story which would delay the intro to the third or fourth paragraph, dwelling instead on the trauma of a year before to build up a contrast with the present happiness. The opening sentences would thus come to serve as background for the 'drop intro'. But the student has not organised the text to do either of these things, largely, I would argue, because of a lack of experience of the ways news style can shape the material—how the story 'can go'.

Another student writes a political story which moves from a newsy intro into 12 paragraphs of background material before returning to the immediate event being reported on (#3, 18/11), while a story by another is criticised by the tutor for packing too much into background clauses:

The pair, both aged between 25 and 30, failed to return to their holiday chalets near the Stirlingshire town of Aberfoyle, which is approximately 30 miles to the North of Glasgow, after a day-trip to the nearby Loch.

(#4, 28/10)

A number of students demonstrate difficulties of this sort balancing background information with other elements. Just as part of the problem for students in using quotations is regarding the spoken material as subordinate to the news text, so the problem for students in deploying material as background is constructing a hierarchy of material. These students seem to throw material onto the page because they do not yet instinctively know the power of the news to ordain material as a particular kind of story, and to organise it into main story and background.

³⁰ The story's opening might have read:

- * Stobhill Hospital's miracle baby turns one this Saturday, though she is still no bigger than a three-month-old.
- * Tiny Megan Corrigan, who was born by Caesarian section three months early, suffered heart attack after heart attack in her first days of life, and her miniscule lungs collapsed at the end of her first week.
- * Doctors at the Glasgow hospital gave the baby, who weighed 1 lb 2 oz at birth, less than a week to live at first.
- * But her mother, Mary Corrigan, prayed by her incubator as she fought for life.

4.4.3. Scaffolding

Related to the difficulty of organising material into background and foreground is the problem of knowing what can be left implicit and what must be spelt out. In section 4.2 I argue that the inexperienced reporter learns not only appropriate news forms but also the ability to invoke implications in controlled ways. The competent reporter knows what effects various lexico-syntactical forms and larger structures of language are likely to have within news style. The absence of both this knowledge and a confidence in making use of it is apparent in the sample in what I will call the ‘scaffolding’ scattered throughout many of the texts. The students seem to feel the need to buttress their writing with words which make explicit what they are trying to do. Sometimes this appears simply as overstatement:

Following the death of an Oxdown woman, a new health warning has been issued.

(#4, 16/11i)

The fact that the health warning is new is implicit in the reporter’s choice to present that information in the intro, but the student feels the need to add emphasis and significance by making that explicit. Unnecessary explanatory phrases are also common:

At 23, Mitchell Miller is one of the youngest ever finalists of the Macallan Scotland on Sunday Short Story Collection which is acknowledged as the most prestigious short story competition in Britain.

(#1, 23/11)

Speaking at the meeting, Chairman Philip Rush said: ‘Members of this Chamber are...

(#8, 26/10)

The former example does not trust the material presented to communicate to the reader the prestigious nature of the competition, and must buttress the text with a clause to that effect. The latter example similarly does not trust a previous reference and the opening words of the quotation to signal where Mr Rush was speaking. Phrases such as ‘This view was widely held’ (#1, 19/11) or ‘These were some of the views he shared’ (#5, 13/10)—which claim rather than show that the preceding

quotations are representative or noteworthy—occur regularly in the early work, indicating a lack of knowledge about, or confidence in, what readings news style opens up through its forms.

Such phrases stick out from the text (and are often circled by tutors) because they introduce the reporter's voice into the text or draw attention to the text as text or engage the reader in a relationship with the text rather than its material. The clumsy use of the news form, 'which is acknowledged', implies a speaking position because it implies a degree of personal response to the information. Adverbs such as the 'usually' in the intro, 'Watch the BBC Scotland news programmes and you'll usually see white presenters' (#7, 6/10), modalise the news text's status as something other than simple fact, as well as calling into play a narrative voice. As Fowler writes, a modal form 'suggests the presence of an individual subjectivity behind the printed text, who is qualified with the knowledge required to pass judgement, the status to grant leave or assign responsibility' (1991, p.64). News style provides reporters with techniques to avoid such effects so as to preserve a claim to be directly and impartially representing events and to gain authority to tell the news from that claim. The student arriving from undergraduate and other non-journalistic writing contexts where a good text generally involves a rhetoric of presence, which reminds the reader of the writer's and the argument's contribution to what is being talked of (see Swales, 1990, p.158), must learn that good newswriting requires different skills. So there is not only a failure in these apprentice texts to use news style effectively but also an underdeveloped sensitivity towards the particular form of knowledge in news discourse, that its basic claim and source of authority is to represent events.³¹

4.5. What a story contains

The tutors' marking suggests that news style requires certain types of news story to

³¹ This principle is frequently breached for effect. Fowler argues that tabloid newspapers use modal forms, which he sees as characteristic of conversation, to create a sense of commonality between reader and newspaper (1991, p.64). But as Pilger's feeling, quoted in chapter four, that he was a Trappist monk in Fleet Street's Gomorrah of loose language (1989 [1986], p.43), shows and as the tutor marking here also shows, writing that suggests a narrative voice is not part of basic newswriting, and is either supplementary to it or in conflict with it. See also the discussion of 'value added' phrases in chapter six, where a narrative voice is also introduced for particular effect.

contain certain language, particularly certain wording. A story about a homicide will tend to include the phrase 'murder enquiry' in the intro, a story about a person missing in the countryside will tend to have the phrase 'a search', preferably in topic position, in the intro. Conversely, a story about a happy ending to such a missing person story should not say the search 'has been called off' (#8, 27/10), because it has the 'wrong connotations' (ibid., tutor's comment). The majority of student work follows these principles of key intro language, but the minority which does not is blue-pencilled by tutors, thereby signalling the importance of this knowledge to adequate newswriting. The sample also shows that particular stories tend to require certain vocabulary items in the body of the text, certain levels of detail or certain approaches to shaping material.

A frequent tutor's comment is that a 'must', that is, an essential element of the story, has been missed out. To an extent, these comments are about the news value of material rather than about the language used to tell the story, and the comments rarely state where and with what phrasing these required mentions should be included. But, as I argue in chapter two, I would not wish to separate the two.

Learning how to include all the relevant information is related to finding the phrasing (section 4.2) and an appropriate structure (section 4.7), becoming familiar with what a type of story contains and recognising what the inclusion of details accomplishes (as discussed in the preceding section). One student's story on a woman who died of malaria is marked down for omitting the fact that leaflets about the disease have been distributed in the area and omitting details of the woman's job (#3, 16/11). Another article is marked down for omitting a police officer's quotation about 'mindless vandalism' (#1, 25/1) and another for not writing the story as a 'warning to readers' (#9, 15/2). Many marginal comments relate to the omission of identifiers, such as the name of a police officer's force (missing in the phrase 'Chief Superintendent, James Henderson' (#3, 26/10)) or details of when or where an event took place or a statement was made. The rigidity of the requirement for stories to contain certain things is evident in the tutors' marking schemes, which accord marks partly according to how much 'required' material has been included.

The students' course includes the writing of some specialist styles of news, and the sample reveals the need to learn sets of conventions about what each, particularly court and political stories, can contain. Stories about adversarial court proceedings have particular requirements for precise attribution, precise identification of defendants by their address and occupation, description of whether statements are made in initial examination or cross-examination, before a jury or just a judge, by prosecution or defence counsel, and so on. There is a particular set of language, such as the 'High Court in Glasgow' (not the 'Glasgow High Court'), and required titles such as 'QC', 'Lord Justice'. Unlike most other forms of news story, the focus is as much on the court proceedings as the events being described there, as much on the legal machinery as on telling the story, and the student must learn to balance these. The following section of one story is heavily edited by the tutor in accordance with these principles of court reporting:

The accused told the court: 'I'm an alcoholic. We socialised quite regular.'

On 1 September, 1999, Mr McColl and Mr Nicolson had been drinking on a binge which had lasted for several weeks.

The accused said he went to the toilet and on returning, claimed he noticed a knife on the table.

Mr Nicolson allegedly offered him a whiskey and then threatened to hit him with the bottle. A fight ensued and Mr McColl, in his own words, 'went into a pure rage. I was scared and just lost it.'

(#2, 15/12)

The tutor criticises the failure to attribute the second paragraph, which could be read as factual background and the phrase 'in his own words', a scaffolding phrase which also suggests the student's uncertainty about how to use news style to demonstrate whose words these are. The excerpt also does not specify which barrister's questioning is eliciting these responses, suggesting both a lack of knowledge about when such contextualisation is needed and an uncertainty about how to balance description of the court scene and narration of the events. The student is unsure both about how a court story 'goes' and what it contains.

The difficulties of the student who gave 12 paragraphs of background to a story about a debate in parliament indicate a similar lack of knowledge (#3, 18/11; see section 4.4.2 above). So too does the following intro:

An unscheduled debate was held in the Scottish Parliament yesterday following an unprecedented ruling against temporary sheriffs at Edinburgh's Judicial Appeal court earlier that day.

(#7, 11/11)

This intro signals that there was a debate, and signals what it was about and why it happened, but gives little of the content required by a political story, such as the role of various political parties or leaders in the debate, what questions were asked or accusations made, which political grouping came out best from the debate, or what the outcome was in policy terms. The student—and again there is an overlap with skills in knowing how news style works to organise categories of information such as background or finding appropriate phrasing—does not seem to have a knowledge of what the material can become as news. Related knowledge about the political system or how to analyse the political process are of course not yet developed either, but something is clearly missing in the student's knowledge of the usual content of a political story.

Swales (1990) puts considerable emphasis on this kind of knowledge as part of the competence of a writer in a genre. There are certain things that will be said, and in particular certain rhetorical 'moves' that will be used in most examples of a genre (he discusses in particular scientific research texts). The requirements of news style are particularly rigid. Swales, as well as Lewin and Fine (1996) and Martin (1985), do not find obligatory lexico-grammatical structures or lexical markers across texts of the same genre but 'commonality of the semantic participants' in the ways they realise moves (Lewin and Fine, 1996, p.429). The analysis above suggests that the news, as in the political story just discussed, has similar semantic requirements, but also a high degree of rigidity about phrasing. Certain things must be said in some stories, or they will be inadequate.

4.6. Writing intros

We have looked at a number of intros under various headings already—using the appropriate forms, how news style ‘goes’ and what a story contains. The intro is the news story’s central element, requiring at once many aspects of news style. as Pitts’ (1989) finding that students spend about half their writing time devising intros illustrates. The premature baby article quoted above is inadequate largely because a prioritisation of communicative goals and material was not done in the intro. A good intro cannot be written without a much larger competence, because the structure of the entire news text depends upon the intro. Writing intros is, however, also a particular skill in itself, and a form probably unique to journalism (Bell, 1991, p.176). What constitutes competence here is difficult to pinpoint, because there are different emphases in different areas of journalism and because it is a skill which journalists spend many years developing, but two specific aspects of understanding how news style creates intros are clearly evident by their absence in some of the student articles: a basic conception that the intro focuses the gist of the story (and, correspondingly, a sense that the rest of the story backs up the intro) and skill in generalising, summarising and homing in on salient details.

4.6.1. The gist of the story

Some of the early work of a few students reveals the absence of a basic understanding of what the intro does in news style. One text begins:

‘A miserable bunch of po-faced men’ is how sports writer Bill Leckie described many of his colleagues.

Bill Leckie who is the Sun’s senior sports columnist is bright, cheerful and enthusiastic about his profession.

It all started for Bill when: ‘At the age of eight and a half I did my first shadow match report.’

(#3, 13/10)

The writer has a conception of the need to grab the reader’s attention with some dramatic detail. But having opened with a quotation—in itself a rare and frowned

upon first item³²—to achieve this, he does not follow it up in paragraphs two or three with statements either corroborating it or explaining its context or giving more information about these po-faced men. Paragraph two in fact undermines the intro by saying the speaker was enthusiastic about his profession. The intro's use of the past verb form, 'described', rather than a present tense, and the absence of any details of time or place which would allow the sentence to stand by itself as a simple story (Bell, 1991, p.174), suggest the student has a poor grasp of the formal requirements of the intro. More importantly, however, the text shows little understanding of the role of the intro to epitomise the story in some way (whether by summing it up or giving its most important elements), and the role of succeeding paragraphs to substantiate the intro.

The failure to achieve this link between the intro and succeeding text is a common complaint in tutor marking—often expressed as the bodies of stories not 'covering' the intro—and suggests that even among students with a fair competence in other respects the skill of writing intros takes some time to develop. Because intros require a whole series of decisions about the priority of material, the tone of the article and the story scripts being called upon, it appears to be a skill which only develops as other aspects of understanding develop. Indeed, individual students' work tends to show an oscillation between more and less adequate intros as the students try out more of these skills in different combinations at this key point of the text.

4.6.2. General and particular

The second skill of intro writing that is noticeable by its absence in some work is that of negotiating the balance of general and particular. At times students' intros are too generalised to have punch and at times they are too particular to have general significance. The trainee reporter has to learn not only how to summarise or provide significant detail but when and in what ways to use these techniques. There is, for example, a metonymic logic common in news style, in which partial but vivid particulars are given in place of generalised, abstract language, with the implication

³² Harold Evans writes that, 'Quotes are almost always better *in support* of an opening statement' (1972, p.103).

that these particulars are significant and representative enough to stand for the larger phenomenon, as parts stand for a whole (see chapter seven). The parliamentary debate intro quoted in section 4.5 (#7, 11/11) is not quite adequate partly because the writer does not yet know how particulars could have been used to figure the whole event. The language of the intro, 'unscheduled debate' and 'unprecedented ruling', is too vague and generalised to be adequate (as the tutor notes: 'tell your reader why this is a story!'). Any specifics of the debate or the ruling are lost as the novice reporter attempts to find language broad enough in scope to give a comprehensive intro. As a result, the intro announces a story rather than summarise it. We can see a link between this problem and that of constructing a hierarchy of fore and background knowledge. The student does not yet have the confidence in using news style to be able to defer the general statement to later paragraphs in favour of vivid particulars in the intro. It also recalls the difference of modern news discourse and pre-modern writing. As chapter three shows, generalised first sentences, which act as preambles or orienting statements, characterise pre-modern news texts, while intros that launch straight into the most significant particulars characterise modern news.

A slightly different issue is over-specification in intros. Some details cannot easily operate metonymically (for example, numbers and place names), and reference to these in intros risks limiting the general import of the story. One student writes:

A survey has shown that 63% of pensioners in Riverside Estate are frightened of being accosted or mugged if they go out alone after dark it was revealed yesterday.

(#7, 2/11)

Both the exact percentage and the name of the estate are inappropriate in a news intro because they are both too precise and not the most important details. Their use runs the risk of implying that the fear is restricted to pensioners in this estate and that the figure is an exact assessment of the problem rather than indicative. The exact location of the survey and the exact figure are also less significant to the public than that there is evidence of fear among the elderly. Another student, in the same assignment, gives the figure of 'sixty three per cent of pensioners' in the intro and varies it with a reference to 'two thirds of resident over 65' in paragraph two (#4,

23/11). Although the student shows skill at varying phrasing and moving from specific to general, it is more a mimicry of good style, because knowledge of which order to use them is absent. The poorly conceived intro at the start of this section, with its quotation about ‘po-faced men’, also has this problem—no general point is achieved by the use of the source’s precise words there.

Accomplishing good news style involves, then, the ability to construct an epitome of the report in the intro with reference to detail in following paragraphs, and the ability to make judgements about the level of generality that is relevant. There is also a powerful form of knowledge underpinning these skills, which it appears that only journalists of some experience possess. News intros, in which the whole story is figured in some way in the first 20 or 30 words, know the general through the salient particular which is always more than just particular. The details of the debate in parliament will tell about the state of the governing party and about the state of the country, and the details of the pensioners’ fears will tell about the rise of crime and the loss of community. Similarly, tutors suggest on a few occasions that students ‘turn around’ the opening paragraphs to open with a striking image or scene and follow that with a drop intro for which the image acts as an attention-grabbing instance (e.g. #8, 23/2). Knowing how particulars can work in these ways is the predicate upon which is constructed the skill of finding the right point on the scale from general to particular in order to tell the most significant and powerful story. I will return to this issue in chapter seven.

Some of this sense of how to tell a story which resonates with wider significance can perhaps only be developed in the workplace. One of the better political intros in the sample still shows something missing:

The Scottish Executive came under fire for its law and order record yesterday in Parliament.

During Question Time, the Scottish Conservative leader, David McLetchie, called for the dismissal of the Justice Minister, Jim Wallace, for his handling of the crisis over the ruling outlawing sheriffs, and the announcement yesterday of the closure of three prisons.

Many of the technical skills of intros are present here. The ‘four Ws’ rule of stating who, where, when and what is followed, appropriate phrasing is used to accurately summarise what was important about the event (‘under fire’, ‘law and order record’), and the intro is ‘covered’ by the second paragraph. But there is little news value to the intro, because nothing new or startling is related. In an adversarial parliament, it would be expected that the executive would be frequently ‘under fire’. What I think is missing is a competitive edge, the desire to outdo the writer’s peers, by coming up with a story that is unexpected and previously undiscovered and that reveals the journalist’s critical ability to home in on the significant. News discourse is inwardly focused for its criteria of value, as I will argue in detail in chapter six. In Bourdieu’s terms, an intro exhibiting certain elements such as punchy phrasing, in the eyes of fellow journalists, will provide the writer with capital in the journalistic field. Almost all of the student work in the sample lacks what, for want of a better word, one might call ‘oomph’. As one might expect, students can only develop so far as members of the journalistic community while they are at journalism school, and their newswriting, not yet subject to the sharpest of the pressures of the newsroom, can only develop aspects of journalistic competence.

4.7. Structure

We can understand some of the problems discussed above in terms of a basic aspect of the epistemology of modern news: the imposition of a framework which makes sense of the material and subsumes it under a single idea or set of ideas, as I discussed in chapter three. It is this conception, for example, which allows intros to tell the whole story, or at least the gist of the story, and indeed to understand the particular news angle taken as figuring a whole story. So the competent journalist must not only know what the story can contain, what certain elements can achieve and how the story depends on the intro, but also how to string together and juggle all these elements so that an interesting and coherent report emerges. The competent journalist must take control of the unfolding meaningfulness of the text.

The news does not have a rigid structure. Paragraphs below the intro can be reshaped, reordered and even deleted with often little damage to the overall text, and the story can be told at almost any length. But there are implicit principles of construction, including a basic sense of a descending order of importance, the linking of one paragraph to the next to create a sense of an unfolding presentation of themes (as discussed in chapter seven, I hesitate to call this a narration, as news texts follow few of the structures identified by story grammarians), and an accompanying sense of consequence as the text progresses. A few students have difficulty structuring the material without a first-person voice which can provide an argument or point of reference on the events described. Others present series of standalone paragraphs with few linking elements (as noted above, some of the early work appears to assume that the short news paragraphs are self-sufficient)—the more extreme examples read like the minutes of meetings. The focus in the following, for example, seems to be on recording the words spoken by the subject of the article rather than any larger sense-making activity:

He thought it was a good time for young people to get into journalism because there's more newspaper and more radio and TV channels.

When he started out in the 1980s it 'was a middle class blokes place.

It was another ten years before it started opening up.'

He also said: 'There are fewer and fewer experts to do fill jobs, a terrible dearth of good news reporters and sub-editors who have been trained on a local newspaper.'

(#5 13/10)

There is little thematic coherence between these paragraphs, and little work is done to create such links (the 'also' in the last paragraph is one of the few). This lack of imposed structure recalls the style of the pre-modern news transcript discussed in chapter three. The process of making sense of the above story must occur almost entirely in the reading.

None of the students writes like this for more than a few weeks. They quickly learn the techniques of structuring basic hard news stories, with the most recent and most

important details and a summary of events given in the first paragraph, followed by information which supports and fills out the intro, and followed then by a further cycling through the issues already mentioned in greater depth and with fuller quotations. This structure, often called the inverted pyramid (although that term can be criticised for its failure to account for many of the particularities of news story structure), has been described in depth elsewhere (see, for example, van Dijk, 1988a; Keeble, 1994). The students tend to write more adequate stories when the material flows logically according to this rubric. However, they must also learn to trust that rubric to provide the reader with sufficient information to make sense of the material.

As we saw above in the use of phrasing, students need to develop a sense of what they can leave unsaid in news discourse, and in doing so must unlearn elements of what they know from other forms of writing. The following opening is nearly adequate, but leans at times towards telling a story using narrative forms rather than presenting a news dispatch:

Two walkers went missing in subzero temperatures last night on the Lochnagar mountain in the Grampian area of Scotland.

A full search of the area began at first light this morning for the walkers who police fear may not have been fully equipped for the conditions.

Chief Inspector Rowena Macpherson said: 'Every effort is being put into tracing them as quickly as possible. The extremes of temperature last night have heightened our concerns but we are hopeful that they might have been able to find shelter in one of the bothy's on the hillside.'

Friends of the walkers, who were waiting at the Grampian View Hotel contacted police after the pair failed to return from Lochnagar at the prearranged time of 10pm.

A preliminary search of carparks and descent paths from the mountain failed to recover the pair, after which a full scale search of the area began.

(#7, 27/10)

Although the tutor ticks the intro on this early piece of work, I would argue that a more experienced writer would have included the key information given in the

opening two paragraphs in the intro, and used the second paragraph to tell further significant information.³³ Part of the skill required here is that of finding phrasing to pack information into the intro, but it is partly a matter of structuring material. The student has presented the most important events in chronological order—the walkers go missing, then a search is launched—rather than in order of newsworthiness. The last paragraph in the excerpt also uses a technique common in narrative but rare in the news, repeating information from the second paragraph (both the full scale search and the fact that they were not recovered the night before), so as to reestablish the narrative line.³⁴ A more competent newspaper sentence might read:

* Carparks and mountain paths were searched last night, and this morning mountain rescue teams with dogs began combing the hills.

The student feels the need to recapitulate or clarify material, while news style would tend instead to present fresh information in succeeding paragraphs, allowing the reader to draw inferences between that material and material already given. It thereby allows one piece of information to connect smoothly to the next across these inferential structures, and down a hierarchy of newsworthiness, rather than use temporal progression to call up the story (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p.6).

When the logic of the story lies more in the way the reporter chooses to shape the material than it does in breaking news stories—that is, when the writer has to do more work to determine the ‘angle’ of the intro and the links between each piece of information—structure becomes a serious problem for novice reporters. As we saw in section 4.2.1 with ‘off-the-shelf’ phrases which compress material by replacing a temporally governed syntax with a descriptive syntax, students learn to use structures which subordinate one element to another. One student writes:

³³ The opening could have read:

* A full scale search was launched this morning for two walkers missing overnight in freezing temperatures in the Grampians.

* Police fear the pair, who were due to meet friends at the foot of Lochnagar mountain by 10 pm, were not equipped for a night in the open.

³⁴ Broadcast news, by contrast, requires repetition, as in the common practice of giving the main points of the news bulletin again at the end.

Residents of Woodvale, claim that a footbridge linking their estate to neighbouring Broomhill, gives access for gangs of youths who come in and cause havoc.

(#4, 16/11ii)

The tutor changes the last relative clause here to 'to cause havoc', not only compressing the material but replacing a sense of A and then B with a causal clause—the bridge is made a cause of the havoc, not simply part of a chain of events. As the reporter takes control of how meaning unfolds, the text presents to the reader an understanding that one thing happens as a consequence of another.

This kind of structure does not involve argument, but it does require that the reporter explain in the sense of communicating how information adds to other information to construct a picture of events. As I discuss further in chapter seven, there is a particular kind of discourse coherence in the news which functions in terms of journalists' understanding that stories exist in the world and are not made in the telling, and so seeks to imply without stating it the kind of subordination of one element to the next just discussed. It is possible for a writer to produce otherwise adequate paragraphs which do not cohere well in news style's terms, because the writer has a weak sense of how to make them add up in these ways, as in the following:

Controversy over the 300-year-old act of parliament which prevents Catholics claiming the British throne, has once again struck the Scottish Parliament.

Alex Salmond, leader of the Scottish National Party, yesterday challenged First Minister, Donald Dewar, to comment on the debate currently surrounding the Act of Settlement.

He said: 'Institutionalised discrimination against Catholics or any other group is not acceptable in this day and age.'

He also pledged his support to the motion, signed by over 60 MSP's, which calls for the Act's repeal.

In response, Mr Dewar echoed Tony Blair's statement that the government has currently more pressing concerns, and said that the Act is: 'a legacy of the past, and has to be seen as such.'

(#4, 18/11)

The problem of balancing the general and the specific in the intro, discussed above, is again evident here—'controversy' is too general a term to give the gist of the story. The skill of using quotation as evidence of the preceding text is also absent (section 4.3). But the text also has a two-fold problem of structure. Firstly, each of these five sentences is on a slightly different theme—controversy about preventing Catholics ascending the throne, debate about the Act of Settlement, discrimination against Catholics, a parliamentary motion calling for a repeal of the Act, and the claim that the Act is an anachronism. These topics could be linked, but the text has no statement in the intro that succeeds in yoking them together, no background paragraph to achieve this either, and no linking words to bridge from one to the next. The trainee reporter has not taken control of the way in which the text unfolds. Secondly, each of the sentences below the intro is of equal status, with none subordinated to another. This problem is linked to the issues of using quotation and background, already noted. It is characteristic of writers on the edge of news discourse that they are not yet able to construct such a hierarchy.

Swales, in his discussion of changes in scientific writing, calls such increasing subordination evidence of increasing intellectual complexity (1990, p.115). There is perhaps an element of that in the novice reporter's learning how to use the techniques of the news to do more than simply recount events. But she or he is also learning that news style involves organising ideas to a high degree, and claiming therefore to know the material in an authoritative way. To take on news style requires taking on the power of journalists within society to say what 'really happened', to act, in Zelizer's phrase, as 'the arbiters of events in society' (Zelizer, 1993, p.80).

4.8. The language of the people

The news also takes upon itself the status of a kind of demotic language, closer to the reader than official sources. The novice reporter must therefore learn how to

transform official statements or jargon into news style, to subsume them, as chapter three argues journalism practice learnt in the early years of the twentieth century, under a single discourse of the news that claims to speak to and for the people. A number of tutors' comments are directed towards removing traces of other discourses in students' work. This is particularly the case with police language. '[P]ersons' is scored out in favour of 'people' (#1, 28/10i); 'is currently ongoing to establish' is replaced by the tutor with 'being carried out' (#1, 2/12); 'prior to' is replaced with 'before' (#5, 2/12). Such marking has two implications. Firstly, these marks are not suggestions but corrections. Translating such institutional language into news style is regarded as central to the competency of the reporter. The reporter must be able to dig under, or cut through, or look through the source words to the 'reality' beyond, as we saw in chapter four. Secondly, as I discuss further in chapter six, the student is being taught that source language does not encode meaning but that it points to it, and the journalist can change that language without falsifying the information.

Yet news language is by no means a discrete way of making meaning, a distinct domain of language for which all language from other domains is foreign and must be translated. It does at times use the language of the police and other official groups and so the novice reporter must learn when source language is appropriate, when official terms are useful, and when not, almost on a case by case basis. So some police language functions within news discourse as the appropriate phrasing discussed in section 4.2. While the police officer's 'prior to' in one paragraph is circled by the tutor, the clause, 'police had treated the death as suspicious' in an adjacent paragraph does not need correcting (#5, 2/12), because 'suspicious' is a police word which is precise and also of wide currency. Similarly, news reports of the courts must replace some of its jargon but can only be accurate if they reproduce some of the technical vocabulary of the judicial process, both because that language has a precise meaning and because the saying of that language is part of the power of the courts to control and enforce. One student writes:

A fourteen- year- old boy appeared in the High Court in Glasgow yesterday in connection with sexual offences against two boys aged seven and nine, in his home in Ayrshire on the 10th January this year.

(#5, 16/12)

The formal phrase 'in connection with' sits uncomfortably in a news intro, and would be better replaced with a non-finite verb phrase such as 'charged with' or 'accused of' (or indeed, if the syntax was amended, the verb 'denied', as the tutor's comment implies). But 'sexual offences' cannot be changed without affecting the accuracy of the intro, because it is the legal generalisation which covers the various allegations, and therefore communicates the full import of the court appearance. The competent reporter knows what can be rewritten and what cannot.

This knowledge is inseparable from a confidence that the journalist can and should place her or himself in a position to rewrite the statements of powerful and official voices. Modern news discourse implies a casting off of social niceties, as I call it in chapter three. Even at the start of the twenty-first century, students do not arrive in journalism with such a levelling attitude. A number of the students' court stories contain periphrastic or Latinate language fitting for a solemn official occasion, such as, 'At the sitting of the High Court yesterday in Glasgow' (#3, 7/12) or 'The Court, presided over by Lord Milligan' (#1, 15/12), that the tutor marks as 'clumsy' or scores out. The students display more respect for the occasion in their writing than is appropriate in news discourse, which gives absolute priority to its self-conception of talking to its public. Another student writes of a road accident:

Elaine Huish, of 27 Riverside Crescent, was taken to St Mary's Hospital after the accident on Eastern Avenue, but was pronounced dead on arrival.

Her seven year old sister, Susan, who witnessed the incident, was unhurt but four of the fire-crew including driver Mr Denis Greene, 38, were also taken to hospital suffering from shock and minor cuts and abrasions.

(#4, 9/11)

The words 'pronounced', 'incident', 'Mr' and 'suffering' are all scored out by the tutor, because they are the language of the emergency services rather than the news. This is partly a matter of finding appropriate language which communicates the news in clear, terse and everyday language—these are the terms in which journalism textbooks advocate such changes to source language—but more has to be learnt than

just the forms. The student must also *unlearn* a respect for the authority of official voices to tell what happened.

The student must also unlearn a degree of politeness. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) terms, much of the corrected phrasing acts to preserve the 'negative face wants' of all those involved in the accident (i.e. not to be imposed upon), using formal and distancing vocabulary ('witnessed the incident' rather than 'saw the accident') and modalising premodifiers ('pronounced dead' rather than 'dead'). But news style minimises its interpersonal dimension as part of its claim to speak directly to and for the people. Although, as we will see in chapter six, it sometimes acts in a ritual way to express (or construct) collective emotion, the journalist must learn that interpersonal communicative strategies such as showing deference or politeness are social niceties with no place in the news.

Instead, the journalists are socialised into the conventions of journalism. In all the ways of writing described in this section, there is present a requirement that the novice journalist act in the ways that the community acts. As Silvia Gherardi points out, learning need not always have as its outcome an objectified form of knowledge of which the learner is the subject, but can involve networks of relations that have as their result new ways of producing language or new power relations (1999, p.112). One recurrent tutor criticism in the sample is that students do not follow house style. Students might write 'fourteen' rather than '14' (#8, 8/2) or capitalise proper nouns too frequently or not enough. The students are being taught that, while journalism entails an attitude of neutrality rather than respect towards the representatives of power in society, it also entails an unquestioning compliance with arbitrary style conventions particular to the news. In Bourdieu's terms, the students are learning to adopt the appropriate 'habitus', to hold themselves in the way that journalists hold themselves in their writing.

5. Conclusion

These eight areas of style are not an exhaustive survey of what must be learnt by the novice reporter to enter the community of journalism. Community members continue to learn and indeed come together as a group in this continual relearning, as Wenger

(1998) argues. A richer and wider picture of news style's requirements might well emerge from an extension of this study into the workplace, tracing the getting of journalistic 'wisdom' (Glasser and Ettema, 1989, p.24) discussed in chapter four. The stylistic analysis here also may neglect issues of balance, impartiality, legal sensitivities or accuracy, which are clearly part of a journalist's competence. But I am confident that the areas discussed above are a substantial part of the picture.

I have sought evidence for the learning of newswriting in terms of Torrance and Beaufort's arguments that writing is not a set of cognitive operations reducible to some overarching, abstract schema of the news. Contrary to the Piagetian developmental model, which thinks of learning as moving from concrete to abstract ways of thinking, recent research suggests that writing expertise involves the acquisition of bundles of context-specific skills and 'off-the-shelf' strategies (Beaufort, 2000, p.189; Torrance, 1996, p.3). Expertise involves a knowledge of how to do things. This knowing is always in terms of the discursive field of news practice—it is always a situated knowledge—and so is also a knowledge of what these language resources mean within the epistemology of news practice. The starting student's mimicry of news style, which entails some formal knowledge of news language, exists outside this field, and much of the work analysed above is adequate in a very basic sense as news without being able to draw the language together to tell powerful stories. Fully entering the discursive field as a community member involves taking on a powerful position of knowing the world. The claim of this chapter is to identify some of that knowledge by tracing journalism students' language use.

In conclusion, then, I will bring my findings together to describe aspects of the news' order of discourse. Three main points about the knowing position of the news writer emerge. Firstly, the not-yet competent reporter learns the usefulness of presuppositional structures, such as 'fears in the community' or 'it is thought', which lead to compressed and flowing text which backgrounds the reporting voice. What is significant from the tutors' comments and the students' errors, however, is that these instances of 'tight' writing are tightly controlled less in terms of what meanings are

invoked than in terms of their denotative accuracy and lack of ambiguity. 'Good' news style is tight more because it pushes suggestion into description than because it controls that suggestion. Looked at from the perspective of story structure, this knowledge entails taking control of the unfolding meaningfulness of the story, so that one detail or event is seen as consequential on the one before, or to lead on from it. The journalist must take on the news' claim to know authoritatively what happened.

Novice journalists must secondly, therefore, learn to subordinate material to the communicative context of the article, using source speech as evidence for the story and constructing hierarchies of material which impose order upon the material. The competent journalist learns to know what the story must contain and to fit events into the pre-existing categories of news style. The journalist learns at the same time to use people and events with a certain freedom as material to be deployed as sound bites within that story. In particular, becoming a journalist means learning how to subordinate material under a single idea (or sometimes two ideas) in the intro, finding the story in the material. It means learning how particular details can work to invoke general ideas. The novice can write adequate news reports but the accomplished reporter can use news style to construct powerful stories using the accumulated techniques of news style.

Yet, thirdly, the competent journalist has also learnt limits: she or he now has a determinate horizon, and knows what her or his ends are (Miller, 1984, p.165). As Bourdieu would put it, the journalist has learnt how to behave in language. No belief or explicit force is necessary in the 'linguistic domination' of news style, but a recognition and a certain disposition towards 'this invisible, silent violence' (1991, pp.51-2), by which the journalist gains material and symbolic profit. A good deal of the learning detailed above comprises set forms, set contents and set positions towards the world. Out of this linguistic repertoire a world is described for which the teller is not responsible—a generally known world, that is identified in knowable ways by news style. Is the world of the competent journalist a smaller place, then? Chapters six and seven address this question by examining how published news texts are constructed within news style.

Chapter 6: News culture at work

Not, of course, at the heart of the empire of letters, but somewhere out on the shady borderlands of its demesne, where language may often be corrupt and uncouth, and yet commendably alive. These are the fields in which to trot a new word up and down like a horse that is for sale—to show its paces and bring out its points.

(C.E. Montague, 1930; quoted in Mansfield, 1944 [1935], p.234)

1. Introduction

This and the following chapter seek to apply the insights of the previous three chapters into news style by tracing its effects upon the texts that readers receive. The analysis in chapter six comes together around an argument that newswriting accomplishes certain social acts within the news community, and that it is motivated to a significant extent by these internal goals and understandings. By writing within news style, journalists gain social capital in the field of the news. They reestablish their membership of the news community, they stake claims to position within that community and they further the community's position in wider society. I argue that the degree to which journalists write for their peers in this way leads to an inwardness of newswriting practice for, as we saw in chapters four and five, what newswriters orient to is a quite rigid, traditional body of knowledge of the news.

As a result, I argue here, there is a conservatism deeply embedded in news production that leads to 'good' newswriting being defined in rather safe, respectable and narrow terms. While C.E. Montague could describe news language as something dangerously alive and experimental in 1930, today the news is much more likely to be seen as homogenised, as 'functional and formulaic' (Williams 1999, p.273; also Hultén, 1998). Tradition and precedent are most often called upon to account for newswriting. Kevin Brown's (1988) article, 'How to Write a News Story', for example, defines a well put together news story in terms of what journalists did in the past. His three primary pieces of advice are: to assimilate Harold Evans' guide to subeditors, *Newsman's English* (1972); to follow the mantra of modern journalism

pioneered by Alfred Harmsworth's *Daily Mail*—'keep it simple'; and to draw from a set of standard intros, of which he gives a partial list (Brown, 1998, pp.3-4). This advice provides a firm benchmark of quality: past practice. It does not so much describe what a reporter needs to know to write well, as to direct journalists to what has gone before for their standards and practices. Other journalism texts simply present examples of good writing with little or no analysis (e.g., Harris and Spark, 1966). These examples are handed down in the community's traditions, and trainees learn by learning to use them (see also Zelizer, 1993; Glasser and Ettema, 1989; Darnton, 1975). News discourse has lost its modernising zeal as it has established its claim to be the right and natural way to write the news, and like any practice which has little theoretical underpinning or teleology, it is constantly at risk of leaning heavily upon the authority of precedent. Whatever each story's message, the medium is backwards looking. I follow a main strand of media criticism in asking questions about the news media's ability to meet its public goals of reporting public life in its fullness, of critiquing power and of communicating to readers what they want and need to know. But I hope this analysis describes the news' limitations in a little more subtlety than is sometimes the case because it seeks to denaturalise the status that news style has gained as the 'right words' (chapter four) rather than make large claims about its impact upon society. The news, as theorised here, is neither an ideological apparatus nor the voice of the people (Hartley, 1996, pp.9-13). It is a communicative practice limited to a significant degree by the way it has learnt to use language.

My point is partly that the weight of news conventions will shape the unreflective understanding of language users (Montgomery, 1995 [1986], p.223), but it is also that these conventions form one of the grounds on which journalists define good journalism. I use the concept of the regulation of journalists by news discourse to discuss this idea. Regulation implies not just a limiting force coming from above (whether that be editors or hegemony), but a set of rules which allows the practice to take place. It implies the definition of the normal but not necessarily the total, a practice towards which journalists orient but which does not entirely encompass their activities. It also describes a locally situated form of power. It is useful not least

because it allows us to investigate news texts without losing sight of the social actors using language. As Terje Hillesund urges, the chapter keeps in mind ‘a strategically acting, real person who is not totally determined by genre norms or other demands imposed by the given formats’ (Ekecrantz, 1997a, p.25; paraphrasing Hillesund, 1996). Following Bourdieu (1991), I interpret the forms and strategies of newswriting as having a symbolic value within the news field of newsworthiness and realness—they hold out for reporters the promise of good news journalism, just as certain forms of news language sound more authoritative or trustworthy to audiences.³⁵ The result is that the news is taken in the direction of certain ‘official’ ways of writing rather than others.

I look at four dimensions of news style which provide journalists with capital in the field of journalism—with a sense of achievement among the daily uncertainties and risks of reporting:

- a number of lexico-syntactical forms, which provide the journalist with assurance that the story is about the real and is newsworthy, and thereby that the story’s words are the right, natural form for it (section 3);
- small changes to source texts, by which news style both provides a space for journalists to rationalise their reproduction of dominant messages as independent from those dominant groups and re-enacts on a daily basis news discourse’s claims, described in chapter three, to be able to subsume other forms of knowledge within itself and to approach the real (section 4);
- ‘value-added’ phrases, which allow journalists to insert themselves as the voice of authority for a moment into the otherwise agentless ‘real’ of the news text (section 5);
- and clichés, by which journalists take on a role of ‘ventriloquating’, of speaking on behalf of the people in a ritual, dramatic language (section 6).

³⁵ See Ruth Wodak (1996, pp.110ff), who found that speakers of a local dialect in Austria prefer their news in the dominant Austrian dialect, because it ‘sounds official’, even when they have difficulty understanding it.

By situating news texts in this way in their field of operation, as Foucault puts it (Foucault, 1991 [1977], p.24), we can see how these 'official' forms regulate how the news can write the world.

This analysis does not set out to describe precisely what effects these internal motivations for writing have on audiences. Once writing is seen as a social action taking place within a community, we can follow Deborah Brandt in proposing that, 'What a writer does or writes down during composing may relate less to a reader's needs or expectations than to a writer's affiliations with the sense-making practices of a particular group' (1992, p.330). Journalists certainly write to communicate information but this analysis builds on the evidence discussed in previous chapters that they write largely for news editors and for an imagined reader and open a restricted space for communicative encounter. The work done by news style to establish a story as 'real' and newsworthy or distanced from the powerful, or authoritative, or speaking for the public is work done in order to position the text in relation to that reader constructed within the community of practice. It therefore opens up reading positions in the text according to journalism's understanding of what that reader wants and needs. An argument emerges that the regulation of journalists' writing to make it accountable within the community leads to conservatism and even fixity in the treatment of issues that is unlikely to engage the reader in a quality manner. As Risto Kunelius argues, the news does not encourage readers to connect their experiences to issues or events in the news. 'Thus, extremely taken, the hard news pretends that "the public" is something happening in the news, whereas the real, genuine public is a quality of reading, a quality of readership between the text and its reader' (Kunelius, 1996; quoted in Ekecrantz, 1997a, p.37).

2. Method

The primary data for the analysis in both this chapter and chapter seven are articles on two issues from the news pages of 10 British broadsheets (with some material also from the London *Evening Standard*), ranging from daily British national papers to bi-weekly local papers. The first set of stories concerns the release of a White Paper on consumer rights by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Stephen Byers, in July, 1999. The second group is a looser collection of stories about the

disappearance or abduction of young people, with about half the material about the abduction of two Hastings girls in January, 1999. These issues were chosen for three reasons. Firstly, I wanted to investigate how far a fair range of newspapers (excluding tabloids) forms a coherent body of news practice. I therefore chose issues which were written about by newspapers from London to Inverness. Secondly, I wanted to study fairly mundane, everyday news stories rather than ideological pressure points, so that we would not be distracted from news style by other social forces. And thirdly, I wanted to capture a number of variants of newswriting practice, and so chose two quite different types of story.

Most of the articles used in this analysis were gathered using keyword searches of the *Financial Times* global search archive (globalsearch.ft.com). I searched for texts with the words:

- ‘Byers’ ‘White’ and ‘Paper’, restricted to British and Irish newspapers during July 1999;
- ‘Missing’, ‘girls’ and ‘police’; ‘missing’, ‘children’ and ‘police’; and the names of a number of young people which searches on these words produced;³⁶ all restricted to British and Irish newspapers in the six months preceding the end of August, 1999.

Extra articles were found by searching individual newspapers both on the Web and on paper. Irish news data, which the search facility bundles up with British news titles, were not analysed.

The data gathering will not have collected all that was written on these subjects in these periods. The FT archive does not cover red tops or most of the regional dailies or weeklies; I found articles in *The Times* missed by the search terms, suggesting it is likely to have missed others; and I have not tried to allow for niceties such as variations between regional editions of papers. These limitations should not have a significant effect on the argument because I gathered data for a qualitative investigation of how news style works and not a quantitative analysis. As I discussed

³⁶ As I do throughout this study, I omit the individuals’ names, to avoid adding further to any intrusion of privacy resulting from the news coverage.

in earlier chapters, the focus of the study is on identifying how news discourse works to regulate the production of news texts, not on trying to define the distribution of stylistic features. The close analysis needed also precludes very large samples. Instead, the analysis' claim to validity rests on tracing links between features identified here and journalists' metastatements and processes of learning to write. I see this process of triangulation, balanced with a certain amount of caution, as a more useful strategy than any single research path.

A number of source documents for these news texts were also analysed, in order to trace some of the changes made to material on its way to becoming news. Official documents include:

- the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) White Paper, *Modern Markets: Confident Consumers* (DTI, 1999);
- two press releases from the DTI and one from the Office of Fair Trading on 22 July, 1999;
- the House of Commons Hansard records of the announcement on the same day (HC Deb (1998-9) 22 July, 1999, cols 1342-55);
- and a number of press releases from Sussex Police.

All these documents were obtained from government web sites, apart from the police press releases, which were kindly supplied by post by Mr Chris Oswick, head of Sussex Police's press office. Again, there is no claim here that all the relevant source texts used by journalists in the writing of the news stories were collected (notes from telephone interviews and press conferences would need to be gathered to even begin to make such a claim). But these source texts can make a case for the extent to which the regularity of news language depends upon news style and not the source material.

As already noted, I replace private individuals' names in the stories, particularly in those stories involving children, with capital letters.³⁷ Other conventions used in

³⁷ In one case, that of the missing Hastings children, this was a condition of access to press release data, as there have been court orders subsequent to the stories' publication suppressing their names.

presenting the data are given in the footnotes.³⁸

3. Lexico-syntax: A common techne

3.1. The news net of language

Gaye Tuchman (1978) argues that journalists have difficulty reporting on a world which is untidy, a world where happenings rarely occur conveniently for news deadlines or in proximity to newsrooms or unambiguously enough for the news. To accomplish their work journalists therefore cast what she calls a 'news net' on the world, made up of news bureaux, deadlines and reporters' news beats. They then typify material as news according to its falling within that net. She thus makes a quite strong claim that, as a form of knowledge, 'the news is a product of specific ways of organizing newswork' (p.104). Aside from its overstating of the case that reporters' daily needs shape the news, and its curiously one-way logic whereby the news net shapes the knowledge of what the news can be but is not itself shaped by that knowledge, the model is limited primarily because it takes little account of language.³⁹ But this notion of a situated, practical knowledge of the news does extend easily into an argument about news style. News language, as much as newsroom routine, can be seen to act as a news net. It is another tool common to journalists to make the world amenable to reporting, turning it from unwieldy occurrence into journalistic knowledge. In a sense, this is what the journalism students whose writing exercises we looked at in chapter five were learning.

³⁸ The following conventions are used to refer to the data in this chapter and chapter seven. Each news story, including each sidebar or sub-story separately archived by the FT database, is numbered (from 1 to 60). Press releases on the White Paper on July 22, 1999 are coded W1 for the main DTI press release; W2 for the second DTI press release regarding a survey comparing retail prices in Britain with those in other countries; and W3 for a press release from the Office of Fair Trading). The press releases from Sussex Police on the search for two children are coded chronologically S1, S2 and so on. Each news or press release paragraph, again as the texts appear in the electronic sources I used, is coded by lower case letters (a, b, c, and so on), starting from the first paragraph. The White Paper itself is referred to in the text as DTI, 1999, with further reference given in the bibliography. The full news, White Paper press release, Hansard and Sussex Police press releases data are attached as Appendices A, B, C and D respectively.

³⁹ Tuchman does acknowledge the need to account for typifications in language, and tacks onto the news net a weakly described notion that the news is sorted according to 'known narrative forms' (1978, p.103ff).

Such a theory of situated knowledge helps account for the often quite striking similarities between the treatment of the same topic by journalists writing on different publications. We find that not only do journalists tend to write news stories in such similar language that we cannot identify any individual style or idiolect, but that they tend to use the same words, phrases and syntax to describe the same events, what Roger Fowler calls news 'templates' (1991, p.172) and Henry Widdowson sees in more pragmatic terms as 'typical textualisations' (1996).⁴⁰ Large scale corpus analysis has allowed linguists to argue that the English language's idioms are made up of lexico-syntactical patterns, in which certain words tend to go with other words in a narrow range of syntactical forms (cf. Stubbs, 1996, pp.37-40). The existence of significant homogeneity in news language is, in the light of this research, neither particularly surprising nor confined to the news—all language use can be seen to be patterned in this way. But questions still remain. What is motivating the use of the specific lexico-syntactical patterning that occurs in the news? I want to account for some of these patterns in the news in terms of news style's regulation of the vocabulary and syntactical resources of the news. There are (at least) three elements to this, which I will look at in turn. Firstly, news style enables certain language items to act as unproblematic base knowledge, upon which the journalist's treatment of the topic sits. The style, secondly, provides a set of key words which guarantees newsworthiness. Thirdly, such useful phrases drift into being (for journalists) more than merely useful but the natural language, at times the only language that could be used, to tell the news.

3.2. Anchoring the story

We can account for some of news language as action to anchor a story within the news community in order to establish it as newsworthy or true. Consider the consistent patterning in the following intros from my sample, all from stories on the same day in August 1999 about a possible case of child neglect:

33a) A charity worker who left his 18-month-old daughter at a police station

⁴⁰ The traditional (and inadequate) journalistic explanation for such homogeneity is that two objective journalists working on the same story would simply tell the same thing twice, as each objectively reflected reality (cf. Ericson et al, 1987, p.100).

- Telegraph** before boarding a holiday jet bound for Spain will be questioned upon his return to Britain.
- 34a) **Scotsman** A man abandoned his 18-month-old child at a police station so he could go on holiday with his wife and two other children aged seven and two.
- 35a) **Guardian** A father who dumped his 18-month-old daughter at a police station after a domestic dispute and then flew on holiday to Spain may escape penalties because the bizarre action did not endanger the child.
- 36a) **Independent** Child protection officers were yesterday investigating a charity worker who dumped his 18-month-old daughter at a police station and then left to go on holiday.

The phrases ‘18-month-old daughter’, ‘police station’, and ‘holiday’ occur in every one of these intros, with only the *Scotsman* varying the pattern slightly in writing ‘18-month-old child’. Many other phrases are variations within a tight lexical group. For example, all the intros have an item of similar meaning corresponding to the *Telegraph*’s and the *Independent*’s ‘charity worker’: the *Scotsman* writes ‘father’ and the *Guardian* ‘man’. In succeeding paragraphs, moreover, each article tends to vary the reference by using the other phrases from the same group. The group of verbs, ‘left’, ‘dumped’, ‘abandoned’, works in the same way. We can in fact, following Fowler (1991), abstract a common formulation which describes the base element of all these intros:

charity worker / father / man | [who] | left / dumped / abandoned | his 18-month-old-daughter / child | at a police station

Not only are the lexical items highly similar, but they operate together in very similar syntactical forms.

How do we account for this systematic use of language in these articles’ intros? The obvious explanation is that each text merely copies a single, original text. There is indeed a story in the *Yorkshire Post* on the day before which is a likely antecedent:

A father dumped his 18-month-old daughter on the counter of a police station at the weekend—telling officers he could not look after her because he was going on holiday.

(*Yorkshire Post*, 23 August, 1999)

But questions remain. Why did all the newspapers studied copy this story's language so closely in the intros to their follow-ups? Why did they in particular copy or vary only very slightly its key words, 'father dumped his 18-month-old daughter at a police station', when their intros differ in news angles—the *Independent*, for example, focusing on an investigation by child protection officers, and the *Guardian* suggesting that the man may escape penalties? The news stories, moreover, differ in the material which follows the intro. A case can be made that the high regularity in the intro language is doing something particular. I propose that each follow-up story is rooted through this formulation in a previous text that has already demonstrated its newsworthiness and its connection to reality. By using this already given language, by, for example, calling the baby in the story 'his 18-month-old daughter', each story in the sample effortlessly achieves a certain status. In a quite practical way, such language use allows the journalist to presuppose the factuality of the already given news and to construct a new story which builds upon those facts by taking a fresh angle in other respects. We can predict that other articles on the incident would continue to use these terms until something changed in the details to effectively change the story. We can therefore argue that journalists using the formulation are perceiving it as an unproblematic given in the story, as the base upon which their articles are built. They orient in a highly regular way to this lexico-syntactical unit in their orientation to the story.

We saw in chapter four that, for the journalist, the event and the language which arises to describe it are not perceptually distinct. Therefore the question of using different language is unlikely to arise unless forced upon the reporter by changing events. I want to emphasise two points. Firstly, the 'charity worker' intros suggest that the establishment of *newsworthiness*—by which I mean the acceptability of the text as news within the journalistic community—is partly achieved by the journalist by anchoring a story in already newsworthy language. Secondly, these intros achieve their claim to *truth* within the news community partly by their dependence on a form of language which has already made good that claim. The re-angling of the story in these follow-ups is anchored linguistically in the 'reality' that the formulation is inseparable from.

3.3. Tapping into the tradition

Journalists do not just identify things in the world as stories, they identify them as particular types of stories. Discourse analysis, following both the phenomenological sociology used by Tuchman among others (Tuchman, 1978; also Goffman, 1975, Schutz and Luckmann, 1974) and artificial intelligence research (cf. van Dijk, 1988a), often speaks of this typification of news material as the imposition of frames or scripts upon it (Fowler, 1991; Wodak, 1996). But, as I discuss in chapter two, I am keen to identify this process at work in news language without having to look to a more abstract, non-linguistic form of knowledge structuring it. If journalists' commonsensical understanding holds that the appropriate language for a story arises out of the 'reality' being described, then we should be able to correlate appropriate sets of words and phrases with different kinds of story. In other words, we should be able to find evidence to support the claim that when journalists have identified a story they have also identified ways in which to write it. This indeed appears to be the case. More than half of the stories on the consumer White Paper⁴¹ are headed by intros with strikingly similar phrasing, of the form (underlining added):

4a) Trading standards officers are to be given sweeping new powers to close
Telegraph down 'cowboy' salesmen who cheat the public under Government plans
to be unveiled tomorrow.

The phrase, 'under plans to be unveiled', can be varied a little. So while four of the 15 White Paper intros use the same verb as the *Telegraph* intro above, others use 'publish' or 'announce'. As we saw with the 'charity worker' intros, a formulation can be drawn out:

under / in / as | measures / plans / proposals / moves | [to be] | unveiled /
published / announced | yesterday / today / tomorrow

We can predict that further stories on the White Paper, or indeed on other government announcements, will be likely to follow this model: | something happens under plans unveiled today | . We can also argue that the regularity identified here shows that as the journalists are identifying the type of story (which we could term

⁴¹ There are 15 distinct news stories in the White Paper sample, as well as four sidebars to main stories, one editorial, one web version of another story in the sample and a press release on Presswire which popped up in the search.

the government announcement story) they are at the same instant also turning to a small set of terms to write about the event.

The formulation works in a similar but slightly different way to the 'charity worker' intros. There the follow-up stories were all anchored in a phrase that was already newsworthy and unproblematically true. Here the formulation anchors the news intro less in 'reality' than within the tradition of the journalistic community. That is, it is not a matter of establishing that the stories' details are true—the various instantiations of the formulation mention different aspects of the White Paper's proposals, and the formulation is not contained in their main source document, the press release W1. Instead I would argue that the form provides some measure of good journalism. A sizeable proportion of the intros in the White Paper sample use the same form because they are drawing on a common stylistic heritage. That is not to argue that new stories simply repeat previous stories with minor modifications of factual details, but that they are, in Ekecrantz's blunt language, 'driven by needs and fads in the contemporary media system' (1997a, p.33). Resources such as the government announcement formulation provide a guarantee of newsworthiness because they thread the story onto a chain of previously adequate stories. In an instance of what Darnton termed the 'cookie cutters' inherited from journalism's heritage (1975, p.189), this kind of language establishes a continuity between new stories and the many previous stories on official announcements.

The set of stories on the disappearance of two children in Hastings, Sussex, in January, 1999, can be analysed in the same terms. Every one of the 12 stories on the search for the children uses two key lexical items that work, I argue, to place the stories as search-for-missing-children stories and to reinforce their status as members of that class. Each story has, as the first mention of the children in the intro, either the word 'missing' or a variant of 'disappear' (such as the phrase 'who disappeared' or the verbal noun 'disappearance'). The use of 'missing' as a keyword in collecting the data might account for some of this regularity, although a manual check of news archives using the names of the children as keywords produced precisely the same

results.⁴² Moreover, most of the stories then use the other word in the pair in the next mention. The third mention is generally a longer item that fills out these two items in terms of specific details. Unlike the two formulations already mentioned, where any items from a lexical group, in any order, serve the purpose, the language here appears to be very tightly regulated by news style. So the *Daily Telegraph* writes (underline added):

22a) Two 10-year-old girls who disappeared [first mention] on their way to
Telegraph school on Tuesday were still missing [second mention] last night.

22b) Police in Hastings, East Sussex, said they remained hopeful that [L] and
[C] had run away rather than been abducted [third mention].

With minor variations (the *Evening Standard* story (24) uses 'missing' twice before varying the reference to 'disappeared') at least half of the stories follow this pattern strictly.

What is motivating this regularity? One clue is given by the different language of the later stories on the two children, apparent when the mentions are tabulated in chronological order (table one). Stories (28) to (31) follow the pattern just described in their first mentions, but all then use 'found' or 'found safe and well' at second or third mention, as in:

31a) The ordeal of two 10-year-old girls missing [first mention] for more than
Birmingham Post three days ended happily yesterday as they were found safe and well [second mention] and reunited [third mention] with their
jubilant parents.

The final two stories in the table suddenly widen the lexical group to 'abducting', 'false imprisonment', 'kidnapping' and so on. Clearly, what is going on is that the appropriate vocabulary is changing as the nature of the story changes, from 'missing children' to 'found children' to 'man-charged-with-abduction' stories. The mentions of the children's status correspond exactly, then, to the type of story being told. Even greater regularity is then apparent: in the reports on the first phase of the story, (21) to (26), every intro fits a single pattern.

⁴² The *Guardian*, the *Brighton and Hove Argus* and BBC Online were searched for the dates 20-22 January, 1999.

data #	newspaper	first mention	second mention	third mention
21)	Ev. Standard 20/1/99	who disappeared	missing	have not been seen
22)	Telegraph 21/1/99	who disappeared	missing	run away rather than been abducted
23)	Telegraph 21/1/99	missing	disappeared	reported missing
24)	Ev. Standard 21/1/99	missing	missing	disappeared
25)	Telegraph 22/1/99	missing	disappearance	had not run off but feared the worst
26)	Birmingham Post 22/1/99	missing	disappearance	no confirmed sightings
28)	Ev. Standard 22/1/99	missing	found 'safe and well'	been recovered
29)	Telegraph 23/1/99	missing	found safe and well	disappeared
30)	Independent 23/1/99	disappearing	reunited	found
31)	Birmingham Post 23/1/99	missing	found safe and well	reunited
34)	Telegraph 26/1/99	abducting	false imprisonment and abduction	disappearance
35)	Irish Times 26/1/99	kidnapping	disappearance	abduction, two counts of false imprisonment

table one

There are three levels of explanation for this phenomenon. At one level, the point is obvious. There are, after all, few words available to the journalist to describe the status of the children in the earlier stories. Of the suitable synonyms given in *Roget's Thesaurus* (Roget, 1962, §446), few are quite right. 'Lost' implies the agency of someone who has lost the children, which is not quite appropriate to the situation; 'gone' implies the children's own agency and again does not quite fit the situation of the children not turning up for school—they never went to school; while 'nowhere to be found', 'truant', 'stayed away' are still less suitable. The set of alternatives is limited to the likes of 'not turned up', 'did not attend school', 'absent', 'vanished', 'not been seen'. And indeed the data show that many of these alternatives occur in the sample. The *Evening Standard* writes in the second paragraph of its initial story on the children that [L] and [C] 'have never gone missing before and have not been seen since leaving together for morning lessons yesterday' (21b; underline added). A background paragraph in the *Standard's* story on their safe recovery reminds readers that 'It was three days since [L] and [C] vanished' (28e; underline added). The *Independent* writes: 'Exactly what happened to the girls during their time away was unclear last night' (30f; underlines added). However, none of the alternative vocabulary occurs in first or second mentions, the point at which the story's newsworthiness is flagged by the reporter, and most of it occurs in news stories after the children were recovered by the police. So while there is a wider vocabulary available, it tends not to be favoured at crucial moments in the writing of these stories. We cannot argue, then, that 'missing' and 'disappeared' are in any simple way the only language available. Nor are they simply the shortest or catchiest: a phrase such as 'who have never gone missing before' is no shorter than 'who have not been seen since'. We must look for further explanations.

The second level on which we can account for the regularity of these references relates to the source of the term, 'missing'. Press releases from Sussex Police give some sense of this, although these do not of course give us a full 'natural history' of the text—for that, we would need to look at transcripts of police press conferences, Press Association copy, and journalists' telephone interviews (see MacMillan and Edwards, n.d.; Fairclough, 2000). These press releases tend to be titled 'HASTINGS

MISSING GIRLS' (S1) or 'PUBLIC URGED TO HELP IN SEARCH FOR MISSING HASTINGS GIRLS' (S3). A case can therefore be made that the word 'missing' is as much a piece of police language as it is of news language, and that it calls up a set of ideas around the phrases 'missing children' and 'missing girls' in other and wider contexts of language use than just the news. That is undoubtedly the case, particularly as the police institution tends to typify the events it deals with as 'incidents' and offences of various sorts (Fox, 1993, 189-91), of which we can assume 'missing children' will be one type. Furthermore, personal communication with a police press officer confirms that police quite consciously code the language they use in their dealings with the media to construct a shared understanding about the significance of items such as 'the police are not looking for anyone else in connection with the death' or 'he is helping the police with their enquiries' (codes suggesting a suicide investigation and a suspect).

However, the line between police language and news language is far from straight. Consider the following excerpt from one of the Sussex press releases (underlines added):

S1) HASTINGS MISSING GIRLS

S1a) Police are concerned for the safety of two 10-year-old school girls who failed to arrive at their Hastings School yesterday morning.

S1b) At 0830 yesterday [L] and [C] set off together for a 10 minute walk from the Bohemia area of Hastings to Christ Church School, Woodland Vale Road.

S1c) When [C]'s parents arrived at the school in the afternoon to pick her up, it was discovered that she had not attended. Neither girl has been missing before.

The language used to describe the children's status is more varied than the news texts', there is no use of 'disappeared' or any other form of the word and no systematic variation of 'missing' with any other word. The language also works in a different way, both in purpose—operating to communicate police action and to appeal for help rather than to sum up the event—and in form—the press release's

first sentence does not attempt to give the latest, most important information. These differences suggest to me that the police and the news texts are drawing on the same general cultural significance of the phrase, 'missing children', and that the police's use of the item influenced the journalists', but that the two are relatively distinct.

Therefore, at our third level of analysis, I would argue that the journalists' systematic use of 'missing' and 'disappeared' in the earlier stories cited above (and their systematic use of 'reunited' and 'found safe and well' in the stories once the children were recovered) are only fully explicable when seen in terms of the news community. We can suggest that the journalists turned to this language in the act of identifying the events as a story of a certain kind, because the language assured them of the newsworthiness and appropriateness of what they were about to write. While other items are used to describe the children's status, these other words are much less common than they are in the police press release and they do not occur in the news texts' first or second mentions. The key items also vary systematically as the story itself evolves, moving from 'missing'/'disappeared' to 'found safe and well' to 'man on child abuse charges' stories. Such language can be seen to work, then, in a particular way within the newsroom to establish the story within the tradition of the news. At the risk of making heavy weather of such details, I argue that they regulate the way such events can become written as news. When the journalist reads the police press release or the government announcement, he or she sees the story through the application of these set elements of news vocabulary. In the terms of the tutor in chapter five, these phrases are a 'must'.

3.4. The natural language of the news

Ericson, Baranek and Chan argue that the collective wisdom of journalism lies largely in a 'vocabulary of precedents' (1987, p.133). Journalists tend to think of their practice in terms of examples rather than abstracted principles, and turn to past practice to justify their actions. The argument here is that the process takes place literally in the act of writing, that there is a pre-existing vocabulary regulating the news. Further, journalists turn to tried and true forms to meet two demands on them. The forms allow reporters to tap into the tradition of such writing and therefore

produce news that feels both authoritatively newsy and that, by extension of the news' status as an account of the 'real', feels attached to 'reality'.

Such writing strategies are not rigid formulae. They are optional strategies whose usefulness has been established over time within the journalistic community. It is this space which I find most significant. News style is not a 'specially differentiated sub-system within language' (Hartley, 1990 [1982], p.5) which requires thinking to take place within it. Nor is it a set of rules about how to use language. It regulates the news precisely because it allows some freedom for journalists to orient towards its authority. If half of the White Paper stories use the 'measures unveiled' formula, it is equally true that half do not, but gain their news status through another element of news style. The value of such language is not that it in some way unconsciously reflects a dominant form but that it allows the journalist to do things with news language. Journalism students' discoveries of the 'right' language and 'what style does' as they develop competence as members of the journalistic community of practice (see chapter five) are in large part learning to make use of these linguistic resources. Without simply mimicking good journalism, they learn to draw upon useful language to produce stories which meet the demands made of the news. In Teun van Dijk's phrase, lexical choice and syntax come to be routinised because they are 'strategically effective' (1988a, p.76).⁴³

The forms discussed above are all such off-the-shelf solutions to problems of writing appropriately. They are ways of writing that have been found to work and which have a status within the news community. This status starts with their usefulness, although it extends beyond it. 'Missing' and 'disappeared' are valuable words within the tight space constraints of the news and within the demand for language which is evocative at the same time as it is accountable in terms of available information. They suggest foul play without stating it; they elide away unnecessary or implicit details such as that the children are missing from home; and they manage to leave open the question of whether the children ran away or were abducted. There are

⁴³ Van Dijk discusses these strategies in a much more limited sense of meeting deadlines than I mean here, and he looks to cognitive structures rather than an epistemology of the news to explain their use.

many such phrases available to journalists, each with its own nuance and appropriate realm of use. For example, among the stories on missing young people, when there is a likelihood that the person is dead, we come across not just 'missing' and 'disappeared', but 'last seen' (42, 49), 'last seen alive' (43) and 'not been seen since' (52). These latter phrases suggest a little more strongly that the missing persons may never be seen alive again, and have therefore a narrowly circumscribed usefulness, but occur routinely in the appropriate contexts. In the White Paper sample, the phrases 'rip-off', 'rogue trader' and 'cowboy builder' work in similar ways.

In this orientation to appropriate language there is also, crucially, a claim to be describing 'reality'. News discourse, I argue in chapter four, bolsters its claim to truth by attempting to limit the dangerous creativity of language. News language becomes of concern to journalists the more it stands out as words which the journalist has devised for her or himself. Conversely, there is a 'right word' for every event, and once that word or set of words are found the story can be thought of as firmly bound to actuality: the language does not need to be accounted for. The reporter's orientation to a set of formulations that anchor the story either in a set of unproblematic base events or in a tradition of newswriting, which I have traced in the two sections above, works within this discursive construct. The phrase 'last seen alive' carries some degree of assurance that the journalist is writing about the grim reality of abduction and murder, by riding piggyback on previous stories of this kind and on the authority of police jargon. The formulation 'under plans unveiled yesterday' has the caché of political journalism, a sense of going beneath the plans, beneath the public unveiling, to the 'political reality' (chapter four). In practical terms, such phrases reduce the possibility of a news story being inaccurate or misleading or untrue, because these ways of writing have worked before. But they hold out the sense of being true in a larger sense, because they are consonant with what news journalism understands to be the way to access 'reality'. For the news, the event and the formulation go together. In other words, this analysis suggests that what journalists perceive as an identity between their stories and the events they write about is in fact an identity between the stylistic resources they have and particular types of story. While there is always a pragmatic orientation to language

which does the job there is at least a substantial risk that such a discursive loop will close and render some aspects of social life unsayable.

4. *The little changes of news style*

4.1. Opening up a space to manoeuvre

Jean Chalaby (1998) makes a distinction between journalistic discourse and public discourse, arguing that the latter became subsumed under the journalistic in the mid-nineteenth century. Although I would follow much of Chalaby's thinking, I argue in chapter three that news discourse only gained this ability at the end of that century. But I would also argue that news discourse's authority to tell the news is something that is claimed anew with each news text. The press release and press conference only become news once they have been inflected by news style and subsumed in some way under the authority of the news story. The news must continually redraw its space to be different and independent from dominant public voices. While these voices have considerable authority even when contained in news reports, news style allows a certain space—however illusory—in which the journalist can think of the news as something outside that field of public power. As Zhongdang Pan (2000) writes of Chinese journalists' attempts to reform the communist press system from within, journalists need some 'maneuvering room' or 'elbow room' within which to assert their professional position. Pan quotes Anthony Giddens' notion that people act 'to sustain a psychological distancing between their own interpretations of social processes and those enjoined by "official" norms,' whether that is thought of as space at the back regions or at the periphery of the practice (1984, p.126; quoted in Pan, 2000, pp.255-6). In these terms, news style opens up a space in which journalists can think of the news they write as independent and as closer to 'reality' than the statements of those in power. I argue here that it does this through an accumulation of small changes to the language of their sources. These little changes are a complex phenomenon. On one level, their effect is simply illusory, merely an imagined independence that has little impact upon the sense of the dominant messages. Yet at the same time these changes reinforce one of the foundations of news discourse, the sense that the news text can subsume material under it and contain knowledge of 'reality'.

4.2. Elbow room

There is a sanction in journalism against the straightforward or verbatim reproduction of press releases. A press release is not a news story, and a political or governmental press release is emphatically not one. As we saw in chapter four, journalists think of their job in metaphors of cutting through or delving underneath source material. Retyping a press release provides the journalist with no capital in the journalistic field, none of the status that goes with a display that he or she understands what the 'real story' is and has control of the material. But it is clear that press releases and other source material which already conform to some of the requirements of newswriting slip onto the page more easily than other forms of writing and much more easily than material not yet written down.⁴⁴ The White Paper was accompanied by a number of press releases that were still further adapted to the needs of the news, providing images, quotations, figures and summaries of detail to meet the demands of the news text (and of course to meet them in a way which served the purposes of the Government). The sample shows that the press release material did to a large extent become news. There is therefore a contradiction here between the textual demands of the news and journalism's distrust of public relations and government.

The differences between the news texts on the White Paper and their sources provide some evidence about how this contradiction is managed. In nearly all the stories small stylistic changes are made to the language of the press release, the text is reordered, and frames are added to distance and attribute the information, all opening up a space in which the journalist has 'elbow room' to think of her or his text as independent. Although these operations will in many cases have relatively minor significance for the reader, I would argue that they still perform a powerful function in giving journalistic capital to the text within the news community. Indeed, they have to be minor so that, while the status of the text changes for the journalist, the journalist does not have to account for substantive changes in meaning. They thereby

⁴⁴ Franklin and Murphy, on the basis of a survey of election coverage which found 49% of stories on a Labour candidate in one local newspaper copied press releases almost verbatim, suggest that economic pressures can cause reporting routines to erode key aspects of journalism's professional legitimacy (1997, pp.224ff.). See also van Dijk, 1985a, p.6.

allow the journalist to produce a news story and to write outside the 'official' space at the same time that he or she reproduces the voices of authority. In this sense, news style is only partly a set of lexical or syntactical tools (although those certainly play a role) but is also an action performed on the text, by which it is made adequate as news.

The *Evening Standard's* article on the day of the announcement follows the main DTI press release very closely, but makes a number of these small scale alterations that give the journalist the capital of producing a text independent of the source. The story opens:

- 9a) Ministers today vowed to make the consumer king with a shoppers' revolution aimed at slashing prices and curbing the activities of cowboy builders and other 'rip-off merchants', writes David Shaw.
- 9b) Ahead of a Commons announcement this afternoon Trade and Industry Secretary Stephen Byers said he would put customers 'centre stage' in being able to spot good value while forcing firms to offer better prices and services.
- 9c) There would be a spin-off for British business, he said. It would make it more responsive to consumer demand and better able to take on the competition.

The press release begins:

- W1a) Stephen Byers, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, today put consumers centre stage, with the publication of the Government's White Paper 'Modern Markets: Confident Consumers'. It sets out a range of initiatives to challenge high prices, improve customer service, provide better advice and stamp out cheats who continually defraud customers.
- W1b) The White Paper recognises for the first time that confident, demanding consumers are good for business: promoting innovation, stimulating better value, resulting in better products at lower prices.

The derivativeness of the article is clear, particularly in the intro. 'Ministers today vowed to make the consumer king with a shoppers' revolution aimed at slashing prices...' follows the form and content of 'Stephen Byers today put consumers centre

stage with...initiatives to challenge high prices...' very closely. In particular, the press release's key metaphor, 'put consumers centre stage,' by which it frames the entire government agenda, is reproduced in the article.

But the news text make a number of minor changes of phrasing and order. Some of these—there are too many interconnected changes to list them all—are reproduced in table two below.

The question surely arises: why has the journalist, who has accepted the press release's implicit claim to be newsworthy, then taken the trouble to alter the text in ways which do little to alter the meaning? Why is 'put consumers centre stage' (Ia) changed to 'make the consumer king' (9a), for example? The original phrase, moreover, does occur in paragraph two of the news text (9b), so that two similar

press release (W1)	article (9)	type of change
Stephen Byers, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry	Ministers Trade and Industry Secretary Stephen Byers (9b) (9a)	general for particular official naming convention changed to news style form
put	vowed to make	stronger verb; reported speech
consumers	the consumer	Number
centre stage	king (9a) 'centre stage' (9b)	different image quotation
with the publication of... (W1a) a range of initiatives to... (W1b)	with a shoppers' revolution aimed at...	change content of phrase; new image
challenge high prices, improve customer service...	slashing prices and curbing...	more immediate and dramatic for more abstract
cheats who continually defraud customers	'rip-off merchants'	colloquial set phrase for description

table two

phrases are used for the press release's one, breaking a cardinal rule of newswriting of writing concisely. I would suggest that the reworking reveals an assumption that source text will always be inadequate as news, an assumption that we can trace through to journalists' ideology of going under the surface of the material to find the real story and to journalists' stance as being the readers' representative, turning jargon into everyday language and official texts into vivid and interesting news. Not a lot needs to be done to make it adequate as news, but the words become the journalist's rather than the press release's.

Some of the changes in table two act work rhetorically in terms of the news text's purpose. For example, the change from the particular 'Stephen Byers' to the general 'Ministers', emphasises the announcement as a Government action rather than an action by Mr Byers, and so a more important and powerful action. I will look at this movement between general and particular, a form of metonymy by which journalism understands the class and the member of that class as almost literally interchangeable, in chapter seven. Most of the changes, however, do little work. The change from 'centre stage' to 'king', and from the plural 'consumers' to the singular 'consumer' could perhaps be argued to have been in aid of greater simplicity and forcefulness.⁴⁵ I suspect, though, that if the press release had said 'make the consumer king' the reporter might well have found yet another phrase.

The opening up of such a space is part of journalism's self-conception that it is not in the thrall of its sources, although critics are clear that journalism is in actuality heavily dependent upon a small group of regular news actors (e.g. Gans, 1980, pp.9ff; Hall et al., 1978, p.58; Bennet et al., 1987; Fishman, 1980). Journalists tend to discuss attitudes of an arms-length relationship in terms of objectivity, particularly in North America, but that catch-all word seems less useful in understanding what the

news does than examining the strategies of news discourse. Tuchman (1972) talks of the 'strategic ritual' by which journalists avoid acting in ways which would make them vulnerable to accusations of bias or dependence. The use of quotation marks here around "“centre stage”" (9b) and the grammatical dependence of nearly all of paragraphs (9b) and (9c) upon 'Stephen Byers said' and 'he said' act in this way to frame the content as not of the journalist's making and at the same time to frame Byers' voice in the implied impersonal voice of the news (cf. Kunelius, 1994, p.255). But the opening up of a space by the rephrasing of key elements is, I would argue, more significant still in the journalist's understanding of her or his relationship to the text. The key point is that the source idea is communicated in the journalist's words, not the source's. The material is stamped for the journalist as news, and thereby becomes authenticated as information which can be communicated to the reader. How much the reader knows of the difference to the source text is debatable, but the strategy allows the journalist to process the press release in a way which earns capital within the news community.

4.3. The power of little changes

At the same time, however, as we note the conformity of articles such as the *Evening Standard's* above, we should acknowledge that there is also a very real exercise of power involved here. The subordination of other forms of discourse to news style that we saw becoming possible with the birth of modern news in chapter three is carried out in such changes. In this way, the news text places itself between the document and the reader and takes on an authority to know the world. The small space opened up by news style is a place of some power.

Small changes can, then, involve a significant change in the power relations of source, writer and reader. When *The Times* replaces the word 'helplines', which appears in the White Paper, with the word, 'hotlines', it may be doing little more than make the language marginally more dramatic and colloquial. But the density of such little changes, which seem to have little communicative purpose, suggests to me

⁴⁵ News discourse understands a correlation between greater simplicity and greater impact, as indeed twentieth-century culture has done generally (cf. LeMahieu, 1988; Orwell, 1968 [1946]; Harmsworth, 1903).

that the journalist is consistently thinking of the White Paper's choice of language as being in need of improvement and of the document as needing some measure of 'translation' for the newspaper's readership. There is for me a knowingness about such changes. The act of making such changes is a flexing of journalism's epistemological muscles, asserting that it knows what the story is and can describe it better than source material. This action involves a claim embedded in the discourse that the news text stands closer to the reader than source material and can therefore mediate between officialdom and that reader. But more importantly, I think, it is an assertion of independence, a constant statement that the news knows the world in different and better ways than the source. Without this assertion, journalism would feel itself to be at risk of being assimilated by the powerful voices it re-presents. These ways of thinking are unlikely to be conscious, but are manifest in a casual (if not quite disrespectful) attitude towards the source language. The news text uses the White Paper here as a source, but as no more than that—the document is a starting point for the journalist's endeavour to try to describe the real intention of the Government, and can therefore be manipulated. Indeed, small changes that bring the text more in line with news style can give the journalist capital in the news field because they suggest some reaching beyond the language. 'Helplines' (DTI, 1999, p.38) becoming 'hotlines' (10n), or 'reform' (W3b) becoming 'overhaul' (16j), or 'trading standards officers' (W1g) becoming 'consumer standards officers' (14b) are assertions of news discourse's authority and power. Very little changes in the text, while the status of the whole text changes.

There is in particular a major claim to know things truly. Not only does text (9) foreground the fact that it knows Stephen Byers' announcement before Parliament does when it states, 'Ahead of a Commons announcement this afternoon Trade and Industry Secretary Stephen Byers said...' But there is a sense in which it claims to know the announcement's meaning better than the press release. The story's intro contains a statement about the strong intention of the Government in general—'Ministers today vowed'—to 'make the consumer king' with 'a shoppers' revolution' (9a). The quotation from the press release that Byers said he would 'put customers "centre stage"' (9b) becomes evidence supporting that statement of the newspaper's.

Indeed, the fiction maintained by journalists and press officers alike that the press release contains the actual words of Stephen Byers is enabled by the power of the news to know documents in an instrumental way to see some real world beyond. Both the reported words and the act of changing them are claims for the text's access to authoritative knowledge of the world.

5. Value-added phrases: Writing as experts

A number of critics have noted that journalists' expertise is rarely a specialist knowledge of the area they are writing about, such as education or politics, but is a matter of 'retailing information' (Parsons, 1989, pp.8, 206). Journalists can acquire knowledge of a specialism without acquiring specialist knowledge, because they make sense of it in common sense terms (Hess, 1981). I argue here that the populist knowledge, the ability to translate specialist information into the terms of the 'person on the Clapham omnibus', pointed at in the literature, is partly achieved and validated as such within the journalistic community through the addition of what journalists call 'value-added phrases' (Lambert, 1998, p.xi; Draper, 1989, p.3). As I argue in chapter two, the journalist's image of his or her readers is a construct of the news community. So we should think of a journalist's experience in a specialist reporting post as the ability to internalise the needs of the news organisation, so that the specialist knowledge is defined in terms of what news editors find stronger news or better copy (Negrine, 1993, p.13). Therefore I want to make a case that these 'value-added' elements help to establish and maintain their writers' position within the newsroom as able to write as specialists for 'normal' readers.

As discussed in chapter four, journalists can think of the achievement of the journalist in writing a story as something which sits on top of the factual story. *Financial Times* editor Richard Lambert describes his publication's niche in the marketplace in terms of the specialist skill of its journalists to 'add value' to material, particularly with what he calls 'good writing' (1998, p.xi). Textual evidence of this extra dimension is difficult to find, other than in parenthetical phrases or clauses in the news text's own editorial voice. These do not address the reader directly, but introduce for a moment a voice of authority, which rises to place an issue within a definite context, before disappearing again into the agentless 'language of the real'

which journalism thinks of itself as writing. They make most sense, I argue, in terms of the news community's valuation of skilful journalists as those who can add something extra. For a moment, they foreground the authority of the news text and claim to be closer to the reader—better able to understand from the reader's perspective—than the source material. The former *Sunday Times* and *Today* journalist Eric Jacobs (1996) talks of 'little scoops of interpretation', the kind of phrasing which declares the journalist's deep knowledge of a subject without actually having any scoop to provide (p.115; see also chapter one).

Few of the asides and added material in the sample contain much information of substantive value to the reader. The reader is invoked more as an audience for the journalist's knowledgeability on her or his behalf than as a reader gaining useful information. So the *Daily Telegraph* writes (underline added):

12e) 'Consumers who are knowledgeable and demanding get a good deal,' he
Telegraph said, setting shoppers a mission to moan.

or:

4a) Trading standards officers are to be given sweeping new powers to close
Telegraph down 'cowboy' salesmen who cheat the public under Government plans to be unveiled tomorrow.

4b) A consumer protection White Paper to be published by Stephen Byers, the trade and industry secretary, is part of Government efforts to place itself on the side of the consumer. It will allow suspect firms or traders to be shut down almost immediately if their activities are deemed harmful.

The underlined text calls attention to itself as something apart from the news event. The former example's alliteration has, as van Dijk (1988a, p.82) notes, a felicity condition that it has something new to say and can proclaim its knowledgeable status. The latter knowing aside uses the simple, confident 'is', a verb which states a relation and so itself acts upon the world rather than point to an action done by others, and the characteristically newsy phrasing, 'part of Government efforts'. Like Jacobs' 'scoops', the phrases here are exhibitions of the journalist's political nous. The claim is less about the world than about the article's authority to summarise,

define and reshape source material on behalf of the reader. Like the small changes to press releases noted above, this element of news style stamps the text as news, different in its relation to the reader and in the information it communicates to its government sources. It does not contribute to the raw information—it sits parenthetically in between the intro and the first sentence of elaboration—but ‘adds value’ to the information by giving the reader a political context in which to interpret it.

My reading, then, is that the journalists are orienting more to journalistic capital among their peers, maintaining their status as experts, than thinking from the perspective of a readership’s needs in these elements or addressing a particular audience. The *Independent* writes (underline added):

14b) Consumer standards officers in town across Britain will be given new powers to take action against rogue traders, such as builders responsible for persistently shoddy work.

and later:

14l) They are to get new powers to close down rogue dealers, including traders who fiddle the cost of airline tickets and car repairers who fail to carry out repairs for which they charge.

These underlined phrases do not extend at all beyond news discourse, but use examples firmly embedded in the journalistic heritage of ‘rip-off’ stories. The journalist could easily have given examples from the government material, but instead elides the government out of the picture as the source of the information, shifting the newspaper from being a medium between government and citizen to being the reader’s guide. Like the little changes to source language discussed above, the text is constantly doing work to establish itself as the news, knowing its source material on behalf of the reader. Implicit in news style is an urge to make sense of the material, and even more, to appear authoritative. The notion of ‘value-added’ arises within that stance.⁴⁶ Writing the news imposes upon the journalist the

⁴⁶ The notion also correlates with the trend towards a more ‘feminised’ (Carter et al., 1998; Christmas, 1997; Hartley, 1996) news, with more interpretation, context, human interest and engagement with the reader. However, ‘value-added’ phrases are good news style because they work towards these ideas without losing the authoritative voice of news discourse.

expectation that she or he will demonstrate the knowledgeability which goes with the language, and these phrases provide the journalist with a way of achieving that—if only within news discourse.

6. Clichés: The recurrent drama

A key part of the argument here is that journalists know the text in particular ways, and achieve particular work within the news community when they write. This is nowhere clearer than in their use of what might otherwise be regarded as clichéd or trite language. As discussed in chapter four, clichés can be defined as language which is tired and no longer effective. It is, for Kenneth Roy, language which no longer has the power to call up the real (1994, p.24). But when such language performs a role, allowing the journalist to speak in a ritualised voice, it maintains its representative power for journalists. James W. Carey (1992 [1989]) draws on John Dewey's writings to argue that mass communication can be interpreted as modern ritual, as the dramatic reproduction of the symbolic order of a culture. In contrast to the 'transmission' dimension of communication, this ritual aspect:

operates to provide not information but confirmation, not to alter attitudes or change minds but to represent an underlying order of things, not to perform functions but to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process.

(Carey, 1992 [1989], p.19)

Communication in this sense invites our participation, whether actual or vicarious, in a continuity with established values and the reestablishment of a social order.

The ritual model is useful in describing the consumption of the news. Carey talks of readers being observers at a play and of their daily lives being structured in part by newspaper reading (p.21). David Chaney links the rise of the 'civic ritual' in general, such as the public aspect of ritual events such as the Coronation, to the rise of the mass media (1986, p.248; see also Schudson, 1995, p.42). But ritual is also relevant to an analysis of the production of the news. While journalists would subscribe emphatically to a transmission model of their practice in their newsgathering, I would argue that they do also orient towards this dramatic ritual in order to construct breaking news reports that are meaningful in terms of some larger continuity. Out of

the series of discrete news stories a sense of a larger, almost universal story is suggested. This is achieved in particular, I think, through the orientation towards forms of language that in other news contexts would be regarded as clichéd. The iterative nature of the news comes to the fore in such forms, the reference back to old stories again and again in new particulars. A picture emerges of a conservative practice which focuses inwards for its criteria, that knows the world in the terms that it has always known it.

We can see this aspect of news style at work in a number of the stories on the two Hastings children. The *Birmingham Post*'s story on the denouement to the tale begins:

31a) The ordeal of two 10-year-old girls missing for more than three days ended happily yesterday as they were found safe and well and reunited with their jubilant parents.

Birmingham Post

The key language here is undoubtedly well used. The two children's experience is an 'ordeal', which 'ends happily' as they are 'found safe and well' and 'reunited with their parents'. Such phrases arise easily, and indeed are clichés for journalists because they arise too easily. Roy's test for the cliché is the model: 'pressure invariably mounts, and...it invariably mounts last night, late last night if possible' (1994, p.24). Missing people who are found are, in Roy's terms, invariably found 'safe and well' and 'reunited' with their loved ones. 'Safe and well' recurs later in the same story (31n), along with a number of other clichés: 'A huge police and army hunt' that 'ended in relief' (31d). The same and similar language crop up in other newspapers' treatment of this emotional moment. The children are also 'found "safe and well"' and 'reunited with their parents' in both the *Evening Standard* and the *Telegraph*. Their experience was an 'ordeal' in the *Telegraph*, where the father also 'admitted that he had come close to giving up hope in the hours before the girls were found' (29n). Yet I would argue that this language is not a lapse in news discourse (although it might well be seen as poor English by guardians of the language) but is ritualised language enacting the public drama of the event.

There is a fine line between the ritual language of clichés and language which, as the formulations described above, anchors a particular story in previous stories. Indeed, we have already seen how the phrase ‘found safe and well’ works to identify the story in this way. However we describe them, such off-the-shelf phrases code the text within the news community as valuable, important news, carrying with them the aroma of momentous past stories. The difference between these two uses of established language is on the dimension of the particular and the general. When looked at in terms of an iterative, ritual dimension, this language can be seen as not attaching itself to some specific event as much as attaching the event to the recurring drama of loss and reunion. This point can be overstated—there is still an assumption of a specific, unique event which provides the reality value and so the news value of what is happening. Yet news style is doing a slightly different job to what it usually performs. Like ceremonial language, it requires here a felicity condition that it has the social status and power to bring its readers together in emotional engagement. A contrast here with pre-modern journalism on ritual events is useful. The language is not describing or reflecting a ritual moment, as pre-modern news discourse did in talking of the death of Queen Victoria (see chapter three), but the ritual happens through the news story itself. In Bourdieu’s terms, the ritual language has the cultural authority to bring about what it describes (1991, p.41).

It is perhaps in this sense that journalism acts, in Hartley and Fiske’s (1978) phrase, as modern society’s village priests or bards, providing the images and representations around which the social totality can be grasped (see also Hartley, 1990 [1982], p.104). The news seeks in this dimension to describe not just individual events in terms of their empirically verifiable elements, but to encode an emotional response to public scenes such as the loss of the children and then their return, on behalf of its readership and indeed on behalf of the nation as it constructs that entity. The news is, in Michael Schudson’s use of Bakhtin’s term, ‘ventriloquating’, speaking for a community, and thereby expressing a version of the ‘public mood’ (1995, p.42). The *Telegraph* reports two days after the Hastings children’s abduction that ‘other parents at the school said a ‘terrible cloud’ had been cast over the community’ (23u) and that children and teachers gathered to pray for their return (22s). On the next day it

reports that 'parents tied a yellow ribbon to the school's gates to express their concern' (25ff). The *Birmingham Post* writes the day after they are found that, for three days, 'their fates preyed upon the minds of the nation' (32a). Such traditional images both describe and seek to enact the collective experience. But we should not over-compress analysis by interpreting this directly as a recuperation of disturbing events to the normal. For what this language is doing in the first instance, I argue, is allowing the reporter to claim to be writing within a social tradition when she or he is writing within a journalistic one. These clichés have a long-established social status within news discourse, and the text thereby invites readers to experience the recuperation of disruption to the norm in a media culture.

7. Conclusion: The limitedness of journalism's internal goods

The journalist not only uses the conventional forms discussed here to communicate the news but turns to them to define in part what is news. The symbolic value of formulations, little changes to source material, value-added phrases and ritual clichés help to establish the texts we have looked at as news. Such techniques (there are no doubt others not identified here) provide the journalist with a sense of having achieved good journalism. By using them the journalist can be assured that the writing is embedded in a tradition of similar writing that has achieved a newsroom standard of being newsy and able to stand for events in the world. The news text establishes its independence from sources by a retreat into news style and by instrumentally leaping over the source text to the 'reality' beyond it. It establishes an authority by strategies such as 'value-added' phrases to communicate knowledgeability, as much as knowledge. It speaks for its public by means of cliché. As I have suggested in earlier chapters, we can identify in its textual practices the extent to which the ethos of newswriting involves a retreat to journalism's 'internal goods' in its pursuit of excellence (Lambeth, 1986). It therefore looks both backwards and inwards. If the journalist holds him or herself in the 'right' attitude towards writing the material by doing what has been done in the past, then there is some assurance of the news text meeting the demands on it to embody the real. There is also what Schudson (1999) calls an 'inter-institutional coherence' at work in journalism, whereby journalists look over each others' shoulders more and between them form a consensus about what is happening and how to describe it. As Bourdieu

puts it, 'To know what to say, you have to know what everyone else has said' (Bourdieu, 1998, p.24).

What is good about a news text can be described in terms of qualities such as faithfulness to reality, or relevance to the public, or drama. But the analysis suggests that these qualities are applied in practice in a particular understanding of good writing. Leon Sigal argues similarly that journalists lack external benchmarks against which to measure the truth of stories which are often still developing as they write and so give considerable emphasis to formal values of consistency and convention (1973, p.181). The good and good news style overlap to a considerable extent in daily practice. The moral tone of the following posting on an email discussion list on journalism education is, in this sense, revealing:

It bothers my sensibilities to see sloppiness, and I think that is what relaxation of style guidelines gives us...we need to take every opportunity available to us to instill [sic] in the kiddies the necessity of thinking critically about everything we write, edit or read or hear. It is what journalists do. Requiring students to be consciously aware of these nits I think helps them also see logical falicies [sic], misadded numbers, unclear sentences, etc etc etc.

(Smith, 2001)

For Ham Smith here, adherence to news style is basic to the ethos of journalism, in a way that recalls Pilger's celebration of the rigidities of news style quoted in chapter four.

The ethic, the 'right' attitude towards writing, which the textual strategies described above point to, contains little valuation of any communicative quality. They reflect, in Habermas's dichotomy of communicative and strategic action, a retreat into the strategic, technological dimension of the news. This is an old theme of mass media criticism. John Theobald quotes critics from Karl Kraus in inter-war Vienna, to Walter Benjamin to Pierre Bourdieu, who all perceive a fixity in news language, arising from the use of clichés and the language of utility for techno-capitalist ends, which causes readers to become passive and distracted.

Once the cliché, or resonant phrase takes over, argued Kraus, then a gap has opened up between language and the communication of unadulterated news; the link between the event and its understanding by the public has been broken.

(Theobald, 2000, p.15)

Benjamin similarly sees newspapers as isolating information from experience, leading to the paralysis of the imaginations of their readers (1992 [1939], p.155). These criticisms may be partly nostalgic in motivation. We should be wary of imagining some 'unadulterated' news or a time when people were at one with their experiences and communicated these to each other. But I think they are right on an ethical level. The ideal of the news embedded in news discourse is more a technical expertise, such as the developing expertise whose contours I traced in chapter five, than an ideal of promoting understanding of events in readers' minds. And as Daryl Koehn points out, expertise can never promote the mutual trust upon which quality communication depends, because 'it does not have an end at its heart, but is the skill of consistently producing a preferred outcome' (1994, p.21). Journalism may subscribe to other, other-directed goals, but in its writing practice subscribes to a news style that opens up a narrow space for readers to inhabit.

This conclusion can be expressed in terms of the hermeneutics of news discourse. Gadamer, following Heidegger's ontological theory, argues that all understanding is inherently circular. Every act of understanding requires the projection of foreknowledge and prejudices from the knower's ontological position out onto the thing to be understood (1979 [1965], p.236). At one level, this can be read straightforwardly as saying that we understand in terms of what we already know, a point made often in both education and psychological theory. Yet it leads to some useful criteria for the quality of interpretation:

- the knower corrects his or her fore-meanings on the basis of what he or she sees and on the basis of how it challenges the knowing. We must hold ourselves ready to be 'pulled up short by the text' (pp.236-7);

- understanding involves the 'conscious assimilation of one's fore-meanings and prejudices', so that the text may 'be able to assert its own truth against one's fore-meanings (p.238);
- we anticipate the text will be complete: that it will fully contain what it has to say, and be the whole truth in its terms (p.262).

For Gadamer, true understanding does not arise out of a bridging of the gap between individuals, in the kind of elision of the gap between the event and its vicarious observation through reading the news that news style claims to achieve, but in the acknowledgement that we cannot absorb the other into our meanings. On all his criteria, journalism is at risk of communicating a very partial version of events. For journalists the best news is the news they already know through the formulations and clichés of news style. They risk learning only superficial details when they see their texts as being the news, rather than being about the news, and so have little means to cultivate a reflexivity, a consciousness and a questioning of their own horizons. And the attitude of a retreat from source language, a suspicion towards it, risks failing to understand 'what the other truly has to say' to them (p.xxiii).

Chapter 7: Fragments of the real: How news texts cohere

The press claims no responsibility for the world that it displays.

(Fallows, 1997: p.5).

1. Introduction

This chapter addresses the question of how a news text coheres, that is, how the text is structured or organised above the sentence so as to make up the object of understanding that we tend to call a news ‘story’.⁴⁷ The intention is to add to the debate about the unity of news texts while avoiding normative models which attempt to fit the news into generalised genre categories (White, 1995) or give narrative a privileged status (see Wald, 1987). Allan Bell states simply that journalists write stories:

Journalists are professional story-tellers of our age. The fairy tale starts: ‘Once upon a time’. The news story begins: ‘Fifteen people were injured today when a bus plunged...’ The journalist’s work is focused on the getting and writing of stories. This is reflected in the snatches of phrases in which newsroom business is conducted. A good journalist ‘gets good stories’ or ‘knows a good story’. A critical news editor asks: ‘Is this really a story?’ ‘Where’s the story in this?’

(Bell, 1991, p.147)

But this common sense view does not seem to me sufficient to describe the way British broadsheet news is written. As I show below, narratology’s models do not correlate well with the written form of the news or with the semantic structure we might abstract from the text. Bell’s news editor might well ask, ‘Where is the story in this?’ Although coherence is a central issue of discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1997, p.10), the way that a news text coheres seems to have been taken for granted, its coherence as a story used as a starting point rather than examined in detail. Peter

⁴⁷ As I discuss in chapter three, I tend to use journalists’ terms to discuss newswriting, because my object is as much the understanding embedded in writing practice as it is the text. This chapter, however, will place the term ‘news story’ in quotation marks, to signal that the news’ status as straightforward narrative is being put in some doubt here.

White writes that: ‘there have been relatively few attempts to provide a comprehensive, linguistically informed description of the contemporary news item as genre type, although there are numerous unsystematic and “commonsensical” descriptions within the journalistic training literature’ (1995, p.221). I ask here: how far do news texts cohere, in order to argue that a more finely detailed and discourse-specific description of their coherence is needed, one that takes into account journalism’s epistemology of reflecting ‘reality’ and its concern, discussed in chapter four, to deflect responsibility for the textual object away from itself. The news coheres, I hope to show, in quite limited and particular ways. News discourse subsumes source material under itself in powerful ways but does not, I argue, reshape that material into very well defined textual entities, raising again the questions asked in earlier chapters about the ethics and communicative effectiveness of modern newswriting practice.

The question of the coherence of news texts was first raised for me by a number of unusual sentence forms in the sample of news texts used in chapter six. Consider the following intros:

20a) Rogue traders and cowboy builders throughout Scotland could face a
Press & Journal tough crackdown under a raft of new consumer protection measures announced
by the Government yesterday.

2a) A drive to give consumers powers to force cheap prices out of retailers
Times and to win recompense more readily from unscrupulous traders will start this
week.

Intros are important to the overall unity of the news text, because the key ‘4W’ elements are focused there (Carey, 1986, p.148). But these intros seem to lack something in terms of unity. They are certainly not readable as random lists of clauses, and therefore must have some coherence (Stubbs, 1983, p.15). Yet there is a semantic looseness about them. A ‘tough crackdown under a raft of measures’ is a difficult image to make work, and is still harder to think through as a coherent unit of sense when it is made the object of the highly qualifying verbal construction ‘could face’. Similarly, ‘A drive to give consumers powers to force cheap prices...and to

win recompense' yields a confused object of knowledge in its piling up of non-finite and nominalised forms in a faltering syntax.

I do not want to suggest that these intros are difficult to process when read casually. News readers will be accustomed to such sentences and will extract information from them. But why were they written like this, particularly when journalism prides itself on the clarity of its language? The *Press and Journal* intro reads to me like a collection of standard newsy phrases which are strung together to express a series of loosely connected (if separately adequate) ideas about the topic. The *Times* intro reads to me as if the idiom, 'A drive to force cheap prices', has had the non-finite clause 'to give consumers powers' dumped in the middle of it to pack more information into the topic position of the intro. On the backs of these examples I propose two points about the way news 'stories' hang together as units of text. It seems to me that we can understand these sentences as loosely organised aggregations of the kinds of 'off the shelf' phrases discussed in chapters five and six. Therefore:

- the mixed metaphors, 'crackdown under a raft' and 'drive to give powers...and win recompense', will not have the force of mixed metaphors within news discourse, because they are understood more as relatively discrete blocks which are strung together in the news;
- these blocks instead gain their meaningfulness within journalism primarily from the way they refer to an external 'reality'—that is, there is less 'horizontal', between-element, coherence than 'vertical' correspondence down to the world which the text is about.

The textual analysis in section 3 below looks for evidence to substantiate these points. I argue that such a model accords both with the textual evidence and with evidence from journalists' learning (chapter five) and journalism textbooks on how newswriting operates. First, however, section 2 discusses and critiques theories of textual structure and coherence which are prevalent in analysis of news texts, to establish the need for a different way of looking at news text coherence.

2. Literature on news coherence

I divide the relevant literature into two main sections, narratology and discourse analysis, and discuss each in turn. In both, coherence is a term used to describe the quality of a piece of discourse that distinguishes it from incoherent or arbitrary text (van Dijk, 1997, p.9). Coherence is often used to describe the connections between adjacent or nearby sentences (in writing) or clauses (in speech), and is often limited to the semantic level, so that it is differentiated from the textual cohesion that lies in the patterning of words and word elements (e.g., Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981). It is also used to describe both qualities of the text and the reading (van Dijk, 1988a, p.62). This study, as already discussed, favours analysis which does not separate meaning and form, and so follows scholars who reject the distinction of cohesion and coherence (Gough and Talbot, 1996). It also focuses upon news production and does not address readers' perception of coherence. The term leads us to consider what news coheres (or does not cohere, if it is an inadequate piece) in terms of—whether a narrative or other genre form or some cognitive macroproposition (Giora, 1997) or an ideology—and therefore is a useful tool to investigate the way meanings are constructed by news discourse.

2.1. Narrative theory and the news

Bell, along with many other critics, cannot be criticised for identifying stories as lying at the heart of journalism. Journalism undoubtedly concerns stories. But problems arise when we attempt to find stories in individual news texts, suggesting that a more finely articulated analysis is needed. I will discuss three narrative models in particular—the narratological consensus on aspects of narrative construction, Labov and Waletzky's (1967) typology of oral personal narratives, and Hoey's (2001) narrative matrix. None of these can account for news text with much success, and I therefore find it difficult to see how they can be seen as the macrostructures in terms of which news texts cohere. Instead, as I argue in section 3, we can perhaps think of the news as glancing off cultural narratives without taking responsibility for the stories that it invokes or provides space for. If narrative has a basic epistemological status in culture (Dahlgren, 1992; Bruner, 1986), the news does not take responsibility for the narratives it invokes.

Nigel Fabb (1997) describes a number of characteristics of narrative which narratologists have found across many cultures and traditions. Narratives:

- trace an arc from initial complication to final resolution; this occurs not so much in the text's linguistic details as in the macrostructural story which the text provides evidence for;
- are organised into episodes, which are characterised by internal continuity in location, time and participants, and separated by discontinuity in one or more of these factors;
- tend to mark the text's entry into and exit from a different world to that of the telling with metatextual cues;
- exploit the sequentiality of linguistic form to construct sequences of events in linear time (Fabb, 1997, p.165).

The everyday news text does not fit this rubric very well, either at the macrostructural or linguistic levels. At the larger level, news texts rarely describe more than a moment in the arc from complication to resolution, and indeed rarely describe any sense of completion. 'News stories' which do give some closure, such as sports match reports or reports of court judgements, do so in the intro rather than at the end of some arc. Any sense of completion is inevitably then lessened as the text moves on to discuss the repercussions of the match's outcome or to give comment from interested parties that may question the court judgement. What the journalist calls a 'story' is perhaps better seen as one narratological episode, with a larger story stretching out in indeterminate extension behind and in front of the moment of news. Moreover, while Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan allows that a minimal story can consist of two events linked in time and place (1983, p.19), and a news text may contain two events, there is also a different orientation to material. Journalists are oriented to a real world, which they report on, and their world therefore never begins or ends in the text. There is no 'reconstructed world' (p.6) in the news for which a narrative is the temporal axis. Even if a very broad definition of narrative as an 'actional unity' made up of a logically or causally motivated, non-random

succession of events (White, 1995, p.224), we still have problems finding evidence for that unity in the text.⁴⁸

We can also test for the presence of narrative with hermeneutic questioning. Hoey (2001) argues that texts cohere in terms of implicit questions and answers, and narratives imply the question, 'what happened next?'. Rimmon-Kenan uses a similar test that temporal succession must emerge out of a paraphrase of the text (1983, p.16). But Harris and Spark tell novice journalists to ask quite different, non-narrative questions of their writing:

Are your sentences easy to follow, accurate, direct and unambiguous? Do they read smoothly? Are they dull and pallid: or do they capture the life of an occasion and the 'colour' of the people there?

(Harris and Spark, 1966, p.107)

Harold Evans tells the sub-editor to answer the reader's questions about what happened and what the result was all at once in the intro. The journalist is not being asked to construct a narrative here (1972, pp.89-92).

At the textual level, similar problems arise. Fabb's episodes are hard to pick out of news texts, which jump around in time, place and participants. News texts happen in a here and now, or as close to that as possible, and construct other times and places in hierarchical terms as background to that or as earlier events. The material is not often organised in a linear fashion into episodes. Therefore, too, the exploitation of textual sequentiality that Fabb finds to be characteristic of narrative is used only in short stretches of news text. Such 'etic sequentiality' (Harweg, 1988) is not a key organising factor, and indeed is sometimes seen as boring (Harris and Spark, 1966, p.92). For the reasons given already, there is rarely any marker of entry or exit from a different world. As chapter three argues, the modern news text stands always already unproblematically in the real world and need not announce its narration, and will

⁴⁸ Indeed, as J.R. Martin points out, such a definition will include recipes or reports, and must be limited to texts of documentation rather than explanation and specific rather than generalised activity sequences (1992, p.653), a set of additional criteria which immediately reduces its applicability to the news.

certainly not announce its difference to the 'real'. As discussed in chapter five, print journalists learn to reduce any metatextual dimension to a minimum so that the gap between the report and the world is elided. On each of Fabb's criteria, it is difficult to identify the news as narrative writing.

Paul Weaver (1981) distinguishes television from print news in this respect, concluding that print constructs stories which can be only semicoherent. Michael Schudson paraphrases his argument:

The newspaper story has no teleological drive to wrap things up; in fact, after the opening paragraph, or lead, which can be read as a complete capsule story in itself, the rest of the story may be presented in very loose and only semicoherent order. The newspaper story is designed not to be read in its entirety, whereas the television story is meant to achieve its significance only as a full and finished object that keeps the viewer attuned throughout. The newspaper story may confine itself to reporting an event, uninflected by any effect to give it meaning or analysis.

(Schudson, 1999b, p.1003; Weaver, 1981, p.284)

This statement may overstate the case, particularly in its description of television's narrativity, and the suggestion that the news is semicoherent needs backing up with some textual evidence, but there is certainly considerable distance between basic narrative structures and print news.

These problems come to a head when a specific narrative typology is used to describe a news text. Bell (1991) attempts to use the basic structure of oral personal narratives identified by Labov and Waletzky (1967) for this purpose. Fabb states that Labov and Waletzky's sequence of elements can be found in narratives in other media (1997, p.166), but Bell does not, in my view, meet with great success. His illustrative text and posited structures are reproduced in figure 1. The typology has six elements: the abstract, which gives a brief summary of the story to come; the orientation, which sets the scene for the narrative, giving the time, setting and initial situation; the complicating action, that is, the main action of the story; the evaluation, which interprets the action (this element may recur at multiple points in the text); the

STORY STRUCTURE

US troops ambushed in Honduras

TIME STRUCTURE

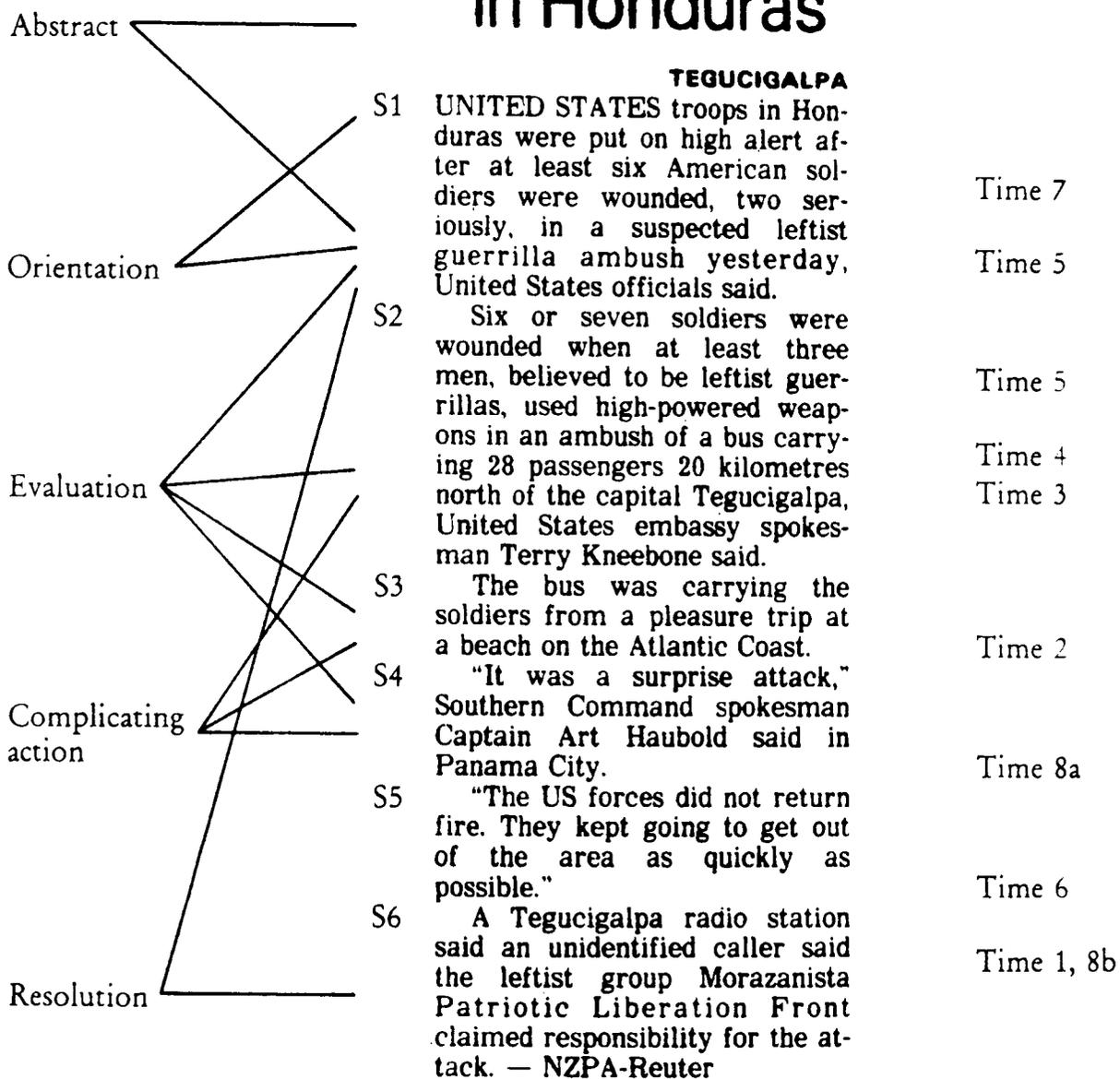


FIGURE 8.1 Narrative structure and time structure of international spot news story (*The Dominion*, Wellington, 2 April 1990)

figure 1
(Bell, 1991, p.150)

resolution; and the coda, which signals the end of the story and returns the reader from the narrated to the narrating world. Bell finds all of these except the coda in the news text, but finds them scattered throughout the text, as the lines in figure 1 illustrate (1991, pp.149-55). This in itself is not an insurmountable problem for analysis, as narratologists distinguish between the story and its instantiation (although the claim of this typology is that it describes the linguistic details, place and function of each element (Cameron, 2001, p.152)). But the fact that some pieces of text are interpreted as performing multiple roles and some roles are identified in a number of pieces of text (the intro fulfils some of the abstract, orientation, evaluation and resolution roles) raises questions about the usefulness of the model in describing news coherence.

Some of the analysis is open to question as well. Bell sees his illustrative text's intro as an abstract to the story, that is, as a preamble giving the point (Cameron, 2001, p.153) of the story. But the intro is perhaps better seen as telling the whole narrative episode, 'bringing together plot, character, scene, method and purpose' in the very first sentence (Carey, 1986, p.148), as indeed Bell later acknowledges the intro does: 'The lead is a micro-story' (1991, p.176). The key narrative information is focused at the start, not just prefigured there, and the text does not return, as Labov and Waletzky's story data do, to tell the story in depth. For the same reason, I would not read the '4W's of the intro as providing the orientation of the story. That seems to me a better description of Bell's text's S3, which summarises an initial state before the action:

The bus was carrying the soldiers from a pleasure trip at a beach on the Atlantic coast.

Even then it seems more useful to typify this sentence as background, which reaches back in time to account for the news event.⁴⁹ Labov and Waletzky's typology has been influential in research on spoken narrative but seems less well suited to analysis of written news journalism. There is, at the very least, ground for widely varying descriptions of which textual elements perform which of the typology's functions.

⁴⁹ White makes a similar point that the news text 'never provides a distinct orientation stage' (1995, p.238).

And while we can posit elements of narrative in the news text, key aspects such as the linear progression through these elements are absent. The model also has little to say about characteristics of the news such as the intro or paragraphs of quotation, or about the way the news text progresses from intro to last paragraph. If the news is shaped around narrative categories, it is certainly also shaped to a significant extent around some other principles.

Michael Hoey's (2001) attempt to fit a news text into the theoretical construct of a narrative matrix, made up of actors on the x-axis and events on the y-axis, is similarly problematic. A narrative is recoverable from his news text, about the killing of a market trader in Glasgow, and Hoey argues that it reveals some interesting characteristics of news discourse. He finds that the story contains redundancies and gaps, that the intentions of the narrator with respect to the telling are questionable, even voyeuristic, and that one of the witnesses comes across as a busybody (pp.102-5). But I would suggest that these characteristics perhaps arise only when the news is forced into a narrative analytic.

Firstly, I do not think there is strong evidence that Hoey's text contains redundant information. Indeed, this would mean that the text was inadequate as news. As I showed in chapter five, competence in journalism involves avoiding recapitulation or repetitiveness. When we look closely at Hoey's text, it is possible to argue that the 'redundancies' he finds are the result of extracting storyable information from the news practice of stating 'facts' in one paragraph and providing quotations which give evidence for those statements in the following paragraph. The text reads:

One of the men turned and fired a loaded shotgun into his stomach. Mr S., a father of two girls aged 11 and six, staggered towards his home but collapsed before he could reach the door.

A neighbour, Mrs Martha R., said: 'I came out when I heard his wife, Marion, screaming. Alex chased the men, then I heard a shot and he came staggering up the lane clutching his stomach.'

(Hoey, 2001, p.102)

The latter paragraph does repeat information, but not in a redundant way. It performs work in the news 'story' to corroborate parts of the former paragraph by providing eyewitness testimony. It is therefore only poorly described as redundancy.⁵⁰

Secondly, as I have argued already, journalists will not think of the story as beginning with the shooting and ending with the news text's statement about a police investigation, for the story exists for them in the world, and is not finitely bounded by the text. The story will include not just what is written in the text, but what was unsaid, what was got wrong in the text, what preceded the event and what came after. Indeed, the journalist must write an article without knowing huge amounts of what we might describe as the story of Mr S.'s killing. The reality which for journalists is the story is therefore not recoverable from a discourse analysis of this text and is perhaps never recoverable. The epistemology of journalism requires us to look at the text in terms of quite different assumptions to those used in analysing narrative fiction, where the writer is assumed to know the story and where beginning and ending are assumed to exist.

Thirdly, as Hoey himself notes, stories do not exist in isolation from their telling, and therefore his story will inevitably be a different one to the journalist's (2001, p.99). This is indeed the larger point of this section. It does not seem to me useful to assume that the text will cohere in terms of a narrative which is identifiable only with difficulty in the text. As I have argued, this is certainly the case in newswriting, but it is also likely to be true of the reading too. The reader of a news text, for example, will be used to intros containing key information by which to understand the event. The reader of narratives will be used to the story building up towards understanding at the end. Understanding takes different routes, is achieved by asking different questions of the material (Koshir, 1988, p.355), and constructs a different knowledge of the world in each. I question whether readers will reassemble texts into coherent narratives. It is for similar reasons that Gough and Talbot (1996) reject Halliday and

⁵⁰ News texts commonly cycle through material (van Dijk, 1988a), but always to retell something in greater depth or to provide more evidence for a statement. A narrative matrix does not seem to deal well with the distinction between this and redundancy.

Hasan's (1976) distinction between textual cohesion and semantic coherence, following Norman Fairclough's (1992) argument that language users are 'implicated' in a text's meanings by a whole range of text-world, inferencing and linguistic connections that are discourse-specific.

2.2. Discourse analysis and news structure

As discussed in chapter two I too follow Fairclough's use of a Foucauldian model of discourse, but with a focus more on the way news discourse weaves its voices together than on the voices which are woven together there (Fairclough, 1995, p.77). Fairclough's argument is, however, of some use in this search for the principles of news coherence. He shows that the intertextuality of the news pulls in elements of narrative as well as expository writing of various kinds (1995, p.7; see also Dahlgren, 1992, p.14; MacDougall, 1982, p.105), and talks of a 'polyphonic heterogeneity' in news discourse, mixing styles and modes of address within text units as well as mixing units of different kinds (op.cit., pp.88-9). News reports:

include mechanisms for ordering voices, subjecting them to social control. The mere fact that a plethora of voices is included in media treatments of social and political issues does not entail an absence of control, merely that the question of how voices are woven together, how they are ordered with respect to each other, becomes decisive.

(Fairclough, 1995, p.84)

Fairclough's description of the mechanisms of ordering are of a much higher order than those I am interested. He looks to processes of conversationalisation and marketisation. I want to describe these practices at a more local level—that is, looking at the text as journalism rather than as an instance of wider social processes—how it is that a news text coheres and makes sense as a piece of knowledge about the world.

The most influential discourse analysis of the coherence of news in terms of news discourse itself is Teun van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach (e.g. 1988a). Using theoretical tools from cognitive psychological and artificial intelligence research, van Dijk describes the macrostructures of news in terms of semantic operations that

reduce propositions down in language users' minds to macropropositions that give the gist of a report. The rest of a report coheres in terms of these macropropositions. In this way, he accounts well for the summarising function of intros and headlines. The model is less useful when seen from the perspective of news practice. Van Dijk misreads headlines as simply summaries of news texts, and misses their multiple roles as advertisements for them, as teasers sometimes which require the reader to read the text to make any sense of them, and sometimes as ironic comments upon the text. Language is a social accomplishment—it does things as well as refer to themes—and its complexity and ambiguity do not reduce to such logical structures easily (Hillesund, 1996; quoted in Ekecrantz, 1997a, p.25). The model of a hierarchy of summaries also does not account for journalists' practice of writing intros first and shaping the remainder of the 'story' in terms of the intro (Pitts, 1989; Bell, 1991, p.152). The intro cannot very well be seen as a summary of the themes of the article, when the article is only written after the intro. But the model is successful in describing the 'thematical realisation structure' of a news text as top down, relevance controlled and cyclical (van Dijk, 1988a, p.48). News texts begin with information of greatest macropropositional value and highest relevance to journalists' understanding of their readers' models of situations, followed by information of lesser relevance, with further details of each piece of information cycled through again further down the text. This theorisation of journalists' 'inverted pyramid' understanding of the structure of news texts seems much more useful than a narrative typology in describing how meaning units are distributed across the news text, although as I argue in chapter five, it is not sufficient to characterise competent newswriting.

Van Dijk also proposes a formal level of organisation of news texts, 'in which topics or themes can be inserted and ordered in the actual text' (p.49), which he calls news schemata. Using journalists' own descriptions of the content of the one sentence paragraphs into which they usually divide text, supplemented by his own classifications, he defines categories such as headline, lead, background, consequences, evaluations and verbal reactions (p.55). He sees these as semantically empty categories which are, however, correlated with certain macrostructures (so that the formal Headline realises the highest level of summary in the text). The

formal regularity of headlines and intros with space for quite limited content encourages the search for a macrosyntax to the entire report. However, it is hard to find such definite evidence for the other schema categories. Van Dijk is unable to find any fixed order of schema categories, and finds also that what he called the macrostructural organisation of the news report can override the categories, so that, for example, highly relevant details will be included in the lead or intro, which should contain only summarising macropropositions (p.57). He is forced to conclude that schemata are 'abstract functions', 'canonical schemata', to which the actual realisation in the text orients but which it rarely reproduces (1985b, p.90). 'In other words, according to this preliminary picture of what to expect about the local organization of news, the reader must unscramble bits and pieces throughout the text and fit them into the appropriate topics and schematic categories' (1988a, p.65).

This position seems to me unsatisfactory, because a schema for a form as rigid as the news should be able to account for the actual structure of individual texts. The problem is compounded because the macrostructures seem to have their own formal structure, the inverted pyramid. Bell dislikes this confused picture, and conflates the two levels (1991, p.252, n.3), and I will do the same. It seems to me that shaping a paragraph of quotation is as much an act of imposing sense upon material as summarising material into a macroproposition. Form and content are so deeply interrelated that a distinction between the two is difficult to sustain outside the tidy world of theory. But van Dijk's finding of a scrambled structure is in itself useful, showing that critics must work hard to impose orders of coherence upon news texts. Bell also finds, in attempting to apply van Dijk's model that, 'It can be unclear where elements such as attribution, setting, previous episodes, context or evaluation belong in a particular story's structure' (1991, p.173). He comments:

The unclarity over structure often represents a genuine unclarity in the story itself. The original may be deliberately equivocal about what material is attributed to whom, at what point the location actually shifted, or whether the evaluation applies to one level or a whole complex episode. This confusion results from the fragmented structure of news writing. The ideal news item is

one which can be cut to end at any paragraph. It is thus common for cohesion between paragraphs to be unclear or non-existent.

(ibid.)

In order to take account of the lack of a linear story structure and of the ‘radical editability’ of the news which Bell notes above, Peter White (1995) proposes that news texts, particularly what he calls event-based news items, are organised instead in an orbital structure around the intro. Each paragraph below the intro is linked to it in a relationship of dependence and not to its adjacent paragraphs. Such a model has difficulty accounting for aspects of news style identified in chapter five, particularly the inadequacy of writing which does not take control of the unfolding meaningfulness of the text. But it points in the right direction, I think, away from universal text types and towards a discourse-specific coherence. Once we abandon the assumption of a high degree of coherence, we can see more clearly precisely how news texts do hang together.

3. Writing in blocks

Journalists’ own statements about the structure of news texts give some perspective on news construction free of the assumptions of narrative unity or a macrosyntax. As we saw in chapter four, journalists do not talk readily of the way they construct the news. However, journalism textbooks and related writings do discuss some aspects of text structure, while using the terms ‘report’ and ‘story’ in an interchangeable way that suggests there is some ambiguity—even tension—in journalists’ commonsense notions of their writing (White, 1995, pp.270-1). Consistently they write of news texts as composed of blocks of different kinds of text, which can be moved, added to or deleted according to need. One writer talks, for example, of the intro paragraph, the context paragraph, the link phrase, the ‘Dear Reader’ paragraph which relates ‘colour’ intros back to a news point, and the conclusion (Watts, 1998, pp.58-60). David Randall says plainly:

If there is a secret of good construction it is in thinking of the story as being made up of building blocks. These are sections of information that make up units with which you will construct the story.

(Randall, 1996, p.138)

Unlike van Dijk, journalism understands each paragraph as a block of information as well as a way of organising text. Some textbooks go as far as to sketch out standard news texts made up of such blocks, such as *Financial Times* reporter Martin Dickson's 'model initial bid story' on the reporting of take-overs (figure 2). Newswriting therefore emerges in journalism's self-understanding as a kit-set building system following well-worn methods of construction. Intros such as that of (20), with its 'crackdown under a raft of measures' are merely haphazard instances of this stringing together of such pieces of text. We can therefore expect to see what the journalist Robert Thomson criticises in his colleagues: 'Every now and then in the FT you see a clump of colour stuck with string and sticky tape to the trunk of a story' (1998, p.76).

The links between these blocks of sense and text are poorly thought through in journalism. In fact, journalists focus understanding of these links between paragraphs as the article 'covering' the intro and as a matter of useful link phrases (chapter five). Rather than advocate the pursuit of a theme through elaboration, Keeble tells students that: 'News stories, whether of five or 35 pars, are formed through the linking of thematic sections,' which flow logically and easily one into the next (1994, pp.120, 127). Graham Watts of the *Financial Times* lists a number of 'basic link phrases', of which these are the first three:

Even if public confidence holds, the authorities face a tough test.

Critics, however, are not without ammunition.

Whatever the case, plain talking is likely to continue.

(Watts, 1998, p.62)

He gives no guidance on the way they shape a report, and indeed these phrases seem designed more to be vague signals of a change of tack in the text. This kind of cohesive device plays a minor role, I argue here, because such coherence is not greatly valued in journalism's textual practice.

A Model Initial Bid Story

- 1 Who is bidding for whom. Is the bid hostile/agreed. What does it value the company at. Is it in cash, or shares or both?
- 2 The bidder's rationale and the defending company's response. Bit of City reaction.
- 3 What the offer consists of: the nitty-gritty figures and what this means per share, eg Bidder A is offering X of its shares for Y shares in Company B, which on the basis of A's closing price last night values B at XXX per share.
- 4 Share price movements in both companies on the day and, where relevant, share price history.
- 5 More on bidding company rationale and its recent history and who heads it.
- 6 Ditto on defending company.
- 7 More detailed reaction from the City. What chances of the bid succeeding? Is it sensible?
- 8 What chances of MMC referral? Rival bidders? Other special factors?
- 9 Who owns what stakes in target company? (If the bidder owns lots, or buys them aggressively in the market, this needs to go right at the top.)
- 10 Investment banking advisers.

In All Subsequent Stories

1. Give the overall value of the bid, recalculating if it's an offer that includes shares on the basis of the latest closing prices.

figure 2

(Dickson, 1998, p.49)

Beverley Pitts' (1989) research on how journalists write, mentioned already in chapter five, is useful in filling out the sketchy models of the textbooks. Her work on local writing strategies suggests that journalists think of news 'stories' in terms of the intro and the rest. The intro is written first and then used as a 'barometer' by which to measure the angle, tone and direction of the remaining parts of the 'story' (p.17). Secondly, she finds that journalists do not follow the inverted pyramid structure which is used as a teaching tool by journalism tutors and textbooks and has been accepted by some analysts as a basic structure (e.g. van Dijk, 1988a above).

Journalists:

do not consciously rank facts in order of importance, as has been described in the traditional inverted pyramid structure. The writers in the study found that organizing a story as it was being written facilitated the writing process and did not hinder their logical development of the subject.

(ibid.)

Thirdly, journalists do not think of the total report as they write, but plan paragraph by paragraph, or at most two to three sentences ahead. 'Information already written in the story leads the writer to decide what should be written next' (ibid.). Although she uses final year journalism students for her work, and may therefore be describing the strategies of writers who do not yet know how to keep both local and global issues in their heads at once (see chapter five), these students nevertheless write adequate texts without needing to think about the coherence of their texts in terms of larger structures. They seem, by and large, to write by adding blocks on top of each other, with only a vague sense of what they are building.

White's (1995) orbital model describes this writing to an extent, particularly the 'radical editability' of the text, which allows paragraphs to be reordered without fundamentally changing the text. 'The rearrangement of the report's internal structure has not rendered the text communicatively dysfunctional or aberrant, nor has it produced some new sub-genre of news report,' he shows (p.231). Paragraphs following the intro instead provide a series of specifications for the abstract or synopsis given in the intro and the headline, either elaborating on it, providing causes for the effects described, giving background or appraising it. Although he finds that

adjacent sentences are lexically linked in various ways, he finds that there are always more links from each paragraph back to the intro and headline. He therefore discards the more local links as a structuring element (p.256).

White's background in systemic-functional linguistics leads him to look for local cohesive structures repeated at the level of discourse, so that, for example, he sees the cause and effect specification component as a distanced and elliptical version of clause links such as 'because' and 'so' (p.245). His explanation is thus quite narrowly focused on textual detail. Although the orbital structure is useful in pinpointing the weakness of any other principle of coherence than 'covering the intro', I find it more useful to ask how news texts cohere as meaningful units for the writer, so that I can begin to account for the various dimensions of the way the news text can know and communicate.

Van Dijk's finding that the news is characterised by 'strong relational structures' (1988a, p.84)—that is, that readers must relate the text to large amounts of world knowledge to the text in order to read it successfully—is a valuable pointer in talking about the construction of meaningful news 'stories'. The news text is so compressed by the tight constraints of the newspaper and so restricted by its requirement to be factual, that meaning is as often to be found between the lines as in them. The coherence of the text itself is therefore somewhat nebulous and always provisional, because its well-formedness is so much a matter of readers' contextual knowledge. It seems useful, therefore, to investigate the coherence of the news (certainly as journalists write this in) instead in terms of the way that journalists can think of their writing as compressing material into the constricted space of the news text. I suggest here three techniques: news style's stringing together of key fragments of source text as a way of relating the content of those texts; its understanding of details in the news as often more than just details, but representative details which resonate with other unstated things; and techniques of what Harweg calls 'cotextual connexity' (1988) to enable the text to 'flow' from one block to the next. These techniques are useful in order to pack information in and to construct texts which can be cut from the bottom at any point and still make sense. But they also make sense in terms of journalism's

epistemology: they allow the hierarchising and reshaping of news discourse to be understood as ‘finding’ the story (Manoff, 1986, p.218) in other texts and as the presentation of textual bits of the ‘real’ in news paragraphs without the intrusion of a reporting persona. The report coheres to the extent that the world coheres, these techniques seem to assume, rather than in terms of narrative or logical propositions.

3.1. Telescoping

The first of these techniques involves the paraphrase of source text by taking a few words from a sentence or even a few words from a speech to represent that text in the news. Journalism attaches high veridical value to pieces of source text as a way of guaranteeing access to reality. Journalism is largely about text-processing (van Dijk, 1988a, p.96; Bell, 1991, p.59), and journalists attach extremely high value to documents such as notes or diaries as ways of accessing experience (Leitch, 1973, p.10; Cameron, 1978 [1967], p.115); Knightley, 1997, p.154). As a result, news practice can reduce source material to fragments of text in such a way that each fragment is thought of as standing for a part of a source document, and the collection of these fragments as standing for the totality of material. We can think of this practice as underlain by the logic that Lippmann expresses when he speaks of the need that the news has to ‘telescope’ what is significant for public debate into the tight space of news pages: ‘A few words must often stand for a whole succession of acts, thoughts, feelings and consequences’ (1922, p.65). This mechanism is not quite the cognitive macrorules to compress text into the news adduced by van Dijk (1988a, p.32). For the ‘few words’ are construed in newswriting as if the world were a series of reified language-things, and the context and relationships of one to another seem less easily written in.

Such telescoping is apparent in the *Independent*’s compression of a parliamentary exchange on the White Paper into two paragraphs. The news text reads:

- 14j) He told sceptics that he is backing up the White Paper Modern Markets:
Independent Confident Consumers with £30 million from his budget to deliver his promises to improve consumer protection in the high street.
- 14k) Most of the money will be earmarked for trading standards units in local

authorities, which have complained that they are inadequately resourced to cope with their growing workload, including restaurant checks on the GM content of foods.

It is likely that this text is a transformation of an exchange between the Conservative consumer affairs spokeswoman Angela Browning and Stephen Byers in the House of Commons, although it has been so reworked that no traces of the question and answer and indeed much of the content of the discussion remain. The following are excerpts from the Hansard record. Angela Browning says:

To give just one example, since the Government took office, trading standards officers have been charged with the task of identifying the GM [genetically modified] content of processed foods. The technology developed in the past few years to carry out such tests is still extremely expensive and trading standards officers do not have the resources to carry out that task. We are looking for the Government to endorse the proposals in the White Paper with detail on how they intend to resource the promises.

Stephen Byers replies:

The hon. Lady makes an important point on enforcement. If we are to ensure that, day-to-day, enforcement is effective, we will need to provide trading standards officers with the means to deliver on the ground. Because of the priority that we attach to the White Paper and to consumers, whom we now want to bring centre stage, I will devote from my Department, redirecting resources that are earmarked within the budget to go elsewhere, an extra £30 million to deliver on the White Paper proposals.

(HC Deb (1998-9) 22 July, 1999, cols 1344, 1346)

The news manages to do in 71 words what the source text did in 174, and indeed adds information from elsewhere. But what is more interesting than the fact of compression is the way it is achieved. Words and phrases from question and answer appear to be slid together into one statement. The news writes that Stephen Byers is allocating money to 'deliver his promises to improve consumer protection' (14j; underlines added). Byers' speech includes the word 'deliver' ('to deliver on the White Paper proposals'), but not 'promises'. Conversely, Browning's speech contains the word 'promises' ('how they intend to resource the promises') but not

'deliver'. Whether unconsciously or deliberately, it appears that the journalist has summarised question and answer by bundling together some of the key words from each. The precise words here could perhaps be accounted for in some other terms were it not that nearly all of the *Independent* excerpt above can be thought of as pieces of text each produced by telescoping a larger stretch of language into a few words. So the event of the Commons debate itself disappears entirely in the phrase 'He told sceptics'. The antecedents of key phrases in just one sentence of the above news extract (14j) are given in table 3.

News text	Source material	comment
'He told sceptics'	There is no single antecedent here, but 'sceptics' communicates a sense of challenge and criticism to which Byers is responding	the phrase draws upon the atmosphere of the exchange in Parliament without making clear who the sceptics were, what the context of the telling was, or what their concerns were
'he is backing up'	Byers uses the verb 'devote'	the different verb changes the sense slightly, taking the emphasis away from any sense of generosity to substantive measures to ensure that enforcement is effective. There is a sense too of the financial detail mentioned here backing up the long list of the White Paper's contents detailed in the previous nine paragraphs, so that it links the text into preceding paragraphs
'from his budget'	'from my Department, redirecting resources that are earmarked within the budget to go elsewhere'	14 words are compressed by selecting just three of them
'to deliver on	As already discussed, this phrase	

his promises'	blends Browning's question about resourcing 'promises' with Byers' words, 'to deliver in the White Paper proposals'	
'to improve consumer protection on the high street'	The clause picks up on three phrases in Byers' speech: 'to ensure that...enforcement is effective', his repeated use of the keyword 'consumers' and 'provide trading standards officers with the means to deliver on the ground'.	of all the parts of the sentence, this clause does most to synthesise the Hansard excerpt and contextualise it, but again uses fragments of existing language and a standard journalistic phrase, 'on the "high street"', to achieve this

table three

Faced with the need to process a long stretch of talk for a small 'news hole', such telescoping is a useful strategy. But it is significant that journalism turns to a method which cannot be readily described by cognitive theories of text planning which postulate the integration of specific scripts for the construction of linguistic units with higher order cognitive categories such as genre-specific frames of knowledge or communicative goals (Wodak et al., 2000, p.47; van Dijk, 1988a, chapter two; Pitts, 1989, p.12). The news is written less in terms of semantic coherence than in terms of the compression of blocks of source text into shorter blocks which are slotted together according to kit-set construction techniques. In particular, the paragraph is constructed by linking together separate pieces of language that draw directly on discrete elements of source material, and similar processes are repeated between sentences. Newswriting reifies the material more than it gives a general articulated understanding of the significance of the interchange.

The reader will of course make links between these elements, but the point I wish to make is that the text is written in a way that need take only limited responsibility for such construction of a coherent whole. The 'whole story' that emerges in my reading

of (14j - k) above is a quite different one to that which emerges from my reading of the Hansard transcript also quoted above, but I do not think newswriting accepts responsibility for the difference. The telescoping leads to the loss of the Commons speech situation and therefore to Browning's comment that trading standards officers are under-resourced being phrased as a complaint by the officers themselves, with her example of the cost of testing for GM content in processed foods compressed, by generalising it, into 'their growing workload'. The reporter is then free to, for whatever reason, change Browning's 'processed foods' into 'restaurants'. Likewise, although the reporter may have had access to other information, the statement that 'Most of the money' would be spent on trading standards units looks also to be an inadequate account of Byers' response to the challenge about the resources given to trading standards work. (He says only that the money will fund the White Paper's proposals, although this is within the context of acknowledging the need to provide trading standards officers with 'the means to deliver'.) This is also a result of the elision of the speech situation. In this world of things, the source language's syntax, its style, its context and cotext are all lost. Journalists are of course aware that compression can lead to problems—Harold Evans talks of the 'rough, urgent compressions' of the news (1990, p.311)—but their practice places so much emphasis upon the text-world linkages achieved by techniques such as telescoping, that I think such questions do not arise readily.

3.2. Resonance

The second technique I will look at here, also a technique of compression, is the use of detail to suggest much more than is stated. While propositions in the news can be thought of to an extent as reducible to macropropositions which give their gist (van Dijk, 1988a, p.30), I think textual details also signify according to a different, much more impressionistic, logic. In the tight space of news discourse, language tends to do more work, so that the particular reference is always spreading out in a generalising movement in ripples of implication and resonance. The indexicality of the news with respect to the world is always slipping towards a kind of metonymy. The intro to a 'story' may give a specific detail, but it also stands in some sense for many other details not mentioned or not mentioned until later in the text. This is not quite a matter of the symbolism of news details (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996 [1991]),

p.59; Altheide and Snow, 1979, p.94). Journalism does not in general recognise the symbolic quality to its work, but does, I believe, depend heavily on a strategy of allowing details to resonate with fuller significance. As Leon V. Sigal notes, a common motif in the news is an individual standing for the aggregate—a farmer facing bankruptcy signifies a crisis in the entire industry (1986, p.13). Journalism's soundbite culture, where the 'jazziest' phrase comes to stand for everything that could have been said by the quoted person is a related phenomenon. As we saw in chapter five, a key element of the stylistic tools that journalists learn is that of imposing order and significance upon details, and this push towards resonance lies at the heart of such mediation. Daniel Hallin (1994), who found that the average soundbite in American television news' election coverage has shrunk from 43 seconds in 1968 to 9 seconds in 1988, argues that the news is becoming steadily more mediated, with journalists intervening more to shape material.

I will make three points about the implications of this phenomenon for how print news can represent events. Firstly, the news text not only causes details to resonate with information not stated, but gives isolated details an aura of generality which perhaps cannot be sustained. Secondly, the strategy makes the news quick to make sense, and loses much of the particularity of things. And thirdly, there is some evidence in the sample that the strategy makes the news susceptible to resonating in terms of the strongest prejudices and structures of thought in society. These implications are not taken account of in the writing. Rather, there is a sense that metonymy is a useful strategy for the journalist, and that, for the journalist, is it.

Journalists are taught, as general rules, to put the most important information in a 'story' at the top and to tell the whole 'story' in the first sentence. Journalists are faced with two choices in accomplishing these not always easily reconciled tasks: either to attempt to summarise the event from the point of view of its most important aspect, or to focus on one important aspect and allow that to give a sense of the rest. An example of each approach is given below:

57a) Detectives were last night hunting the 'brutal and violent' killer of a 22-

Herald year-old woman who was found dead on open ground near Ferguslie Cricket Club in Paisley.

9a) Ministers today vowed to make the consumer king with a shoppers' revolution aimed at slashing prices and curbing the activities of cowboy builders and other 'rip-off merchants', writes David Shaw.

The former intro focuses on the most salient aspect of the murder event, the search for the murderer, but also summarises the major elements. The latter intro uses the press release's key image (as discussed in chapter six) to communicate the overall goal of the policy, but then gives a number of details which do not summarise—'slashing prices', 'curbing the activities of cowboy builders and other 'rip-off' merchants'. The intro could be understood to say that slashing and curbing were the full extent of the document's aims, but I do not think the journalist would understand it that way. The strategy can perhaps be thought of in terms of a 'for now' logic (Geertz, 1983). These details stand in for other details which, but for the constraints of space and time, would also have been mentioned. Of course, the details which are mentioned are those which the journalist believes will most attract the reader's attention, whether that is a matter of greatest capacity for resonance or greatest impact,⁵¹ but they can be used because of a general principle that details can act in this way.

The technique of resonance that the latter sentence uses is a powerful rhetorical strategy in the news (as well as in politics, as Michael Billig shows in relation to a speech by former Prime Minister John Major on cricket pitches and warm beer (1995, p.102)). Catherine Johnson Pettinari (1999) finds such a rhetorical use of this kind of metonymy in political columns in the British press focusing on the physical appearance of (then) Prisons Minister Ann Widdecombe. Pettinari writes of one article in the *Independent* focusing on Widdecombe's height:

Rhetorically one way to look at this account is as a kind of metonymy. The Minister's height stands as the part for the whole; it is one reason among many possible ones that could be offered, and its [sic] functions in the

discourse context as a place-holder for those more plausible, but unstated reasons...It is left to the reader to search for what they might be.

(Pettinari, 1999, p.340)

The mention of the Minister's height is a kind of joke, specifically innuendo that she is unlikely to reach heights of office. But, as I have tried to show throughout this study, such manoeuvres are always more than that for news discourse. Faced with the need to select one sentence of quotation or one detail, it is immensely useful for the journalist to be able to think of one piece of text as able to stand for the rest in some general sense. The rhetoric is therefore also a practice which contains an attitude to knowledge. Carlin Romano refers to a kind of inductive logic in newswriting, similar to the scientific principle that if so many black crows are seen then all crows must be black (Romano, 1996, p.66). At the level of daily newswriting, and in the context of supporting material, one crow often seems to be sufficient, so that Stephen Byers' policy announcement becomes the intention of 'Ministers', of the entire Executive and 'curbing cowboys' means the whole project of improving consumer information and protection.

The push of news style towards resonance—or, to put it another way, the strategy's usefulness as a rhetoric of authority and significance—causes it to extend beyond material for which there is supporting evidence. Detail resonates with wider implication just by virtue of being in the news. In places this rhetoric is explicit. So 'One woman' slips into 'some women' in the following (underlines added):

58m) Laura Anne's death has sent shock waves throughout the community and
Scotsman some women have said they will not go out alone until her killer is caught.

58n) One woman, who did not want to be identified, said: 'I certainly will not go out alone after this. I had washing on the line outside and I wouldn't go out to get it because I was too scared.'

This is the difference between some forms of writings' tendency to the symbolic and the news' generalising tendency. News discourse pushes the individual's fear towards a universal fear in the community, perhaps because that would be more

⁵¹ We could theorise this in Sperber and Wilson's (1986) terms as details which contain the most contextually relevant information for the least work in comprehension.

newsworthy, and pushes the quotation to resonate with and justify the description of 'shock waves throughout the community'. The text pushes always beyond the particular.

Resonance is not merely the rush from the particular to the general, but is more usefully seen as a blurring of the distinction between the two. Again, it is a kind of construction of meaning for which the text accepts little responsibility. The series of stories on the disappearance of the two Hastings children discussed in chapter six, with its unstated general themes of crime, child molestation, parental worries, child delinquency and family break-up clustering around the articles, is of this sort. The series remains always particular, about the disappearance of two specific children, but the articles gain their significance from what is never said. This is partly because to state these themes would be to immediately put them in question, rather than leave them as unexamined presuppositions on the basis of which the action of the 'story' makes sense (see Fairclough, 1989, chapter 4). But my sense is that it is also because news texts are constructed to shimmer between the particular and the general.

There is a sense here for me that things tend therefore to make sense too quickly in the news—meaning takes the shortest route according to well-travelled paths of understanding in society. As van Dijk (1988b) points out, journalism can too often lay its texts open to racism, without necessarily being written with racist stereotypes in mind, because such texts are easy to write. The Dutch press in the mid-1980s described the arrival of Tamil immigrants and refugees as a 'stream' or 'torrent', thereby in van Dijk's analysis taking the easy option of constructing a semantic system that happened to be very similar to that of prevailing ethnic prejudice schemata (p.185). Details resonate in similar ways and their particularity is too quickly assimilated to dominant ways of thinking to be able to tell society very much about itself, so that the news loses a critical edge (Adorno, 1984 [1970]). The preference for such techniques of focusing and compressing the real as I have discussed rather than much coherence between elements in the end, I think, constructs a space quickly filled by ways of making sense of material that are dominant in society. While the news implies a coherent world, it does not map out

that coherence in its texts, with the ironic result, as Weaver notes, that it lends still more credence to the idea that there exists 'a single, coherent national agenda which can be perceived by any reasonable and well-intentioned person' (1981, p.292: quoted in Schudson, 1999b, p.1005).

One 'story' in particular provides evidence that news style is susceptible to the most strongly patterned ways of making sense in society. The *Telegraph's* main article the day after the consumer White Paper was tabled in Parliament opens with quotations from Stephen Byers which are rephrased and reordered so as to resonate with a set of ideas which only partly arise from the source material. The news text begins:

12a) Shoppers were told yesterday to loosen their 'stiff upper lips' and learn
Telegraph to complain like Americans as the Government unveiled plans to bring 'rip-off Britain' to an end.

12b) Stephen Byers, the Trade and Industry Secretary, said he did not want to create 'an army of Victor Meldrews' but wanted to see British consumers being more confident and assertive in resisting overpriced goods or shoddy services.

12c) 'For too long the attitude in Britain has been that things could be worse rather than that things should be better,' he told MPs as he published the Government's White Paper on consumer protection.

The source of these quotations is the second page of the main DTI press release, where a number of key quotations from Stephen Byers' parliamentary speech are gathered together:

Ip) Stephen Byers said:

Iq) 'We need to recognise that many people feel they are living in 'rip off' Britain. Paying high prices for shoddy goods, with cheats being allowed to prosper and move with ease from one scam to another.

Ir) For too long the attitude in Britain has been that things could be worse rather than that things should be better. The reality is that a stiff upper lip is not good for upgrading our economy or improving the position of consumers.

Is) 'We don't want to create an army of Victor Meldrews but we do need more confident and informed consumers.'

Material is taken out of its context of enunciation—telling Parliament about measures to improve consumer confidence—and placed in a new one—telling consumers to complain. The phrases 'stiff upper lip', 'rip off Britain' and 'an army of Victor Meldrews' are pulled out in the article's opening paragraphs as representative phrases, phrases that, I argue, will seem to reporters to stand for the whole announcement. This is a matter of judgement on the reporter's part, but it is far from being a conscious choice for which the reporter can be held to account. Instead, I think the reporter instinctively chooses phrases which have the greatest capacity to resonate for the newspaper's audience, as news discourse's drive to authoritativeness pushes the reporter towards totalising generalities. In the context of writing for the conservative *Daily Telegraph*, these generalities are of a 'little England' nationalist order. The resonance of these phrases calls in other material to support them. The comparison with Americans, made in passing by Byers late in his speech, is emphasised, the phrase 'confident and informed' (Is) is paraphrased loosely as 'confident and assertive', and the first sentence of paragraph (Ir) in the press release is quoted in a quite different context to the press release. There is a much stronger emphasis on a sense that a British cultural attitude is to blame for the state consumers find themselves in, and no mention of the *perception* among people that they live in 'rip off Britain', which is the theme of the press release quotations. I want to restate that I do not think the news text takes responsibility for a nationalist reading, but that it seeks out source language that will resonate in ways that will imply a total and authoritative interpretation of the White Paper. The text's assertion of its authority to know, which is achieved here by a reaching towards the over-general, opens up a space which a certain discourse of national identity is quick to fill.

3.3. Flow

The news text's coherence seems to me to depend largely upon each paragraph's ability to pull in things from the world (as in the technique of telescoping) and extend its contents out beyond its referents (as in the technique of resonance). The journalist can write the article with an overwhelming emphasis upon the compression of factual

material by such techniques, and some kind of assumption operates that the article hangs together to the extent that the world does. As Manoff (1986) notes, journalists ‘find stories’ rather than tell them, in their understanding, and the writing presents the found object. There is thematic coherence to the news article, in the sense that it is usually about a single topic, but that unity is presumed to exist before the journalist arrives to report on the material, and must to a large extent be inferred in the reading, as it is not strongly coded.

Journalists do, however, talk about the importance of ‘flow’ and of ‘knitting’ the ‘story’ together, and we saw in chapter five that inadequate newswriting can be described partly in terms of the absence of a sense of ‘how the story goes’ and of how to link one element to the one before. Readers must be led through the material by a ‘continuous, fair and easily comprehensible thread of thought’, which is achieved by a smooth flow in the writing (Harris and Spark, 1966, pp.70, 87, 107). If the reader stops reading onwards to the next paragraph, she or he may be lost to another article or even to another activity. David Crystal and Derek Davy note in their brief stylistic analysis of newspaper language that ‘it is important that the story, once begun, should carry the reader through to the end’ (Crystal and Davy, 1969, p.184). This is perhaps the importance of the link phrases discussed above—when there is no structuring narrative voice to follow, and few generic expectations about what will come next, it becomes important to reduce the impediments to a smooth, linear reading. As a result, a sequence of paragraphs is constructed more than a unity.

Consider the following article, selected arbitrarily from the sample:

- Telegraph
- a) The search for a 14-year-old girl thought to have run off with a 30-year-old man focused on a park yesterday after her mountain bike was discovered in bushes.
 - b) [VL] was last seen at 8.30am on Friday as she cycled from her home in Scunthorpe, Lincs, a few miles from where the bike was found.
 - c) A police helicopter and more than 12 officers, some with dogs and others on horses, searched the town’s Central Park after council workers found the bike.

- d) Police suspect she is with her neighbour, [CL], a factory worker who has left the home he shared with [JC] and their children aged 10 and six.
- e) He is said to have been meeting the teenager, who turned 14 on Thursday, for 10 months. [V]'s parents say she is infatuated and it was thought the pair hoped to elope to Gretna Green.
- f) A police spokesman said: 'While we're not worried that she's in any direct danger there's obviously some concern because she's vulnerable due to her age.'

This ordinary and typical article is coherent to the extent that it is about the search for one person. In cognitive psychology's terms, it makes sense in terms of a script about what happens when someone goes missing. But it can also be read in terms of scripts about the abduction of girls by men and indeed about sexual fantasies of both young women and adult men—or at least I think the *Telegraph's* interest in the topic makes sense in terms of a prurient interest in the sexuality of teenage girls. We can infer a story, and indeed a number of stories, stretching out in front and behind this moment. But the text itself has only weak thematic structure. Each paragraph after the intro (which encapsulates the known information from the point of view of the latest information) is about a different aspect of the story. All are perhaps necessary, in order to 'cover' the intro, but they could easily be reordered. As often in the sample, it is difficult to find a very clear application of van Dijk's rule of a top-down relevance structure here, where each succeeding piece of information provides less important information (1988a, p.48). Although paragraph (b) has some claim to come second in relevance because it details the missing person status, it could also be argued that (f), in which the police say they are not worried should come here so as to dispel any readers' assumptions of an abduction. Quotations tend not to come so early, and tend to substantiate or illustrate other text (chapter five), and so the quotation might have been paraphrased instead, but the material could have come at this point.⁵² Indeed, with the exception of (e), which provides background and would

⁵² In order to be adequate text, the article would need to mention by the second paragraph the girl's name and the events' location, but if paragraphs were reordered, this information could simply be taken from (b) and put in the new second paragraph.

tend to be postponed a little, any of (b) to (f) could have followed (a). As White (1995) argues, the paragraphs ‘orbit’ around the intro.

However, I think the text is strung together in particular ways in order to flow smoothly from one element to the next. There is never any disjunction between adjacent elements. This is achieved by the use of lexical details to establish ‘cotextual connexity’ between clauses and sentences (Harweg, 1988). The anaphora of ‘a 14-year-old girl’ in (a) and ‘[VL]’ in (b) work in this way, picking up on one element in the intro to make it the theme of the next paragraph. The deictic reference, ‘a few miles from where the bike was found’ (b) works to link the locations of the events. In this way, the reference in (a) to ‘a park’ becomes the context for the action of (b). Many forms of writing carry on elements from one sentence to the next, and Sinclair (1992) argues that writing is characterised by such a ‘retrospective’ structure (as opposed to the ‘prospection’ of speech). But the lack of much cohesion in other aspects of the text gives this aspect greater importance in the news, and becomes vital for a smooth transition between sentences.

I argue that this simple technique to link paragraphs of breaking news articles together is extended in more complex articles into a rhetoric of one element arising naturally from the one before. I noted in chapters one and five that novice journalists can produce more adequate text when writing breaking news such as the above article, but have difficulties when they must construct hierarchies of material that provide some order in the telling without implying an ordering voice. Journalism holds single event reports as its ideal type (Randall, 1996, p.250), perhaps because these can be easily assimilated to journalists’ self-conception that events happens and they then report them. Journalists, I think, look to write more complex articles along the same lines. Consider the following excerpt:

Independent 3e) Mr Byers will also pledge to tackle ‘rip offs’ in Britain by ‘putting the consumer first’. His White Paper will argue that demanding consumers are good for business, because they will promote innovation and competitiveness, which will eventually result in better products and lower prices.

3f) About half the population appears to be confused about how to make a complaint after buying faulty goods or suffering inadequate services. So the Government will suggest setting up an Internet site advising consumers what to do.

3g) There will be legislation to make it easier for trading officers to prosecute rogue traders, and the Office of Fair Trading will be given new powers to enforce existing codes of practice drawn up by consumer bodies.

An article on the consumer White Paper requires considerable work of interpretation, summarising and cherry-picking ideas from the large quantity of source material. But the *Independent's* article contains no textual traces of the processes of selection that went on to draw out these elements of the announcement and no cues to account for the order they are presented in. A reading of the White Paper shows that the economic argument in (3e), the issue of consumer empowerment in (3f) and the legislative measures of (3g) are the themes of key chapters of the document, which are 'telescoped' into these three paragraphs, but that coherence is not well signalled here. Instead, the report flows through textual details such as the repetition of the tense marker, 'will', and the contrast of 'demanding consumers' (3e) and people who are 'confused' (3f). To an extent, this is a time and space saving strategy. Merely linking elements rather than constructing an argument or analysis takes much less time and space. But it is also about the way that journalism knows its material: it knows the fact authoritatively but does not make a strong claim to know what the facts it collects add up to. Gans reports journalists distinguishing between the story and its implications (1980, p.40).

The problem for discourse analysis with this position is, of course, that discourse analysis regards facts as textually constructed (e.g., Romano, 1986)—text makes sense and achieves its claim to be factual according to the way it is articulated with other text that is well-formed in terms of a discursive field. Hence, on my reading of the excerpt above, the result of its limited coherence is that the various points here appear congruent, so that the economic theory leads naturally to the consumer information measures and the statutory issues. The differences of time frames, costs and actual actions involved in each do not arise in the article's sweep through the

issues. As Hall et al. write, news texts' tendency to describe forecloses on the possibility of analysis (1978, p.118). Because no narrative or expository voices or structures are invoked to take responsibility for the shape of the text, 'self-evident' causative links arise easily. It can easily appear that providing an Internet site on how to complain will remove people's confusion, and that faulty goods and the economic structures which lead to high prices exist on the same level, and can be addressed in the same way. So too the different issues involved in increasing consumer awareness and in improving enforcement are elided away in a sort of homogenising parataxis—demanding consumers and an Internet site and new legislation. While the article compresses, shapes and orders the material, the techniques of establishing coherence discussed here lead to a tendency to a succession of reified blocks of information existing in the 'now' of the telling. While I suspect that the journalist might not be averse to the sense of a logic running through these elements, the writing constructs something less, a thread or sequence.

4. Conclusion

A lack of coherence was a feature of much pre-modern news. News columns could gather together snippets of letters and telegrams on quite different topics and from a range of sources into their 'Foreign Intelligence' or 'From our London Correspondent' columns, almost as if they were compendia or dictionaries.⁵³ In chapter three I argue that, into the twentieth century, more stylistically conservative newspapers could still construct articles, such as *The Times*' report on the sinking of the Titanic, which left the reader to reconstruct the event from fragments. The modern news text does not do this. It radically reshapes its source material and aims for an article which totalises the information, implicitly (or in the case of the *New York Times*, more explicitly proclaiming this aim with the motto, 'All the news that's fit to print') claiming to subsume everything relevant under its intro. But, as I have argued here, its strong power is not matched by a strong generic structure. As I suggested in chapter four, journalism pushes responsibility for its texts away from itself onto the world or onto the audience. This is particularly true of the coherence of the news text. If there is some shape to the news, journalism holds, then it is a

⁵³ See Hoey for a discussion of the coherence of dictionary text (2001, pp.75ff).

reflection of order in the world or it is in the reader's interpretation. The techniques discussed above therefore act to tie the text down strongly but tie it only loosely together.

Jan Ekecrantz's description of the development of an 'ontological now' in Swedish news texts (1997b, p.397) provides a salient image of this textual 'power without responsibility', to adapt Curran and Seaton's (1997) phrase. In a study of time references in Swedish news in the 1920s, 1950s and 1980s, Ekecrantz finds that the present tense has by the 1980s developed a high ontological status. Facticity and the 'now' of the text are closely related, and language such as 'pupils must now put up with old books' emerges (ibid.; underline added). Newspaper language does not tell us in a narrative way about the past or the future but instead tells us about a present state to which it has direct access through this form of writing. A text which states that (underline added):

24b) Soldiers from the Royal Military Police training school at Chichester and the First Battalion the Princess of Wales Regiment, based in Canterbury, were also joining the hunt for the girls, who have now been missing since they disappeared while walking to school at St Leonards on Sea at 8.30am on Tuesday,

is claiming to an extent that the fact of the children's absence happens in the time of the news text itself. The news text is not simply the channel but the site of the information communicated, an interpretation suggested already in chapter four to account for journalists' discomfort about the news story as something existing outside of the moment of its writing.

I will make two points in conclusion. The first is that an understanding of the strong claim to represent the world and the much weaker claim to know how events interrelate goes some way to answering Glasser's question of how journalism justifies its transmission model of communication:

Journalists reify this view of the relationship between language and meaning whenever they caution their critics not to blame the messenger for the message. The implication is clear: The press will accept responsibility for the

accuracy of its descriptions but not for what is being described. What is less clear is how journalists will achieve, if not defend, this triumph of form over content: Is there any system of symbols, any language, that can avoid interpreting what it ostensibly only describes?

(Glasser, 1996, p.785)

A partial answer can be found in the weakness of the coherence of the news, which requires readers to do so much inferential work in expanding its telescoped text and locating the ideas in terms of which it resonates. In this way, journalists distance the act of writing from the content.

The second point is that the efficiency of the strategies discussed here for the transmission of a regular stream of news comes at a price. News style provides few resources for the journalist to think about the whole that is implied in the parts, and so his or her role in bringing that unity about is not made clear. There is, as a result, little responsibility taken for the meanings communicated, and so the communicative encounter between readers and journalists, and readers' communicative encounters with events, must be somewhat truncated. As I discussed above in relation to the principle of resonance, it is as if journalists make use of the generalising tendency of the compressed sentences of the news text to invoke a story with the strongest impact and significance, but do not take responsibility for the generalised patterns of meaning which they open up in the text. In chapter five I came to a similar conclusion, that novice journalists learn that 'tight' writing pushes suggestion into description more than it controls that suggestion. In journalism's terms, this instrumentalism is a strength, a key part of the news' rhetoric. If everything is not subsumed rigidly under the intro, then the journalist has less pressure on him or her to write an intro that does justice to all the material. If the text is not strongly structured after the intro, the journalist does not need to claim to know the whole story, and can therefore know what is presented more authoritatively. If the paragraphs are not strongly linked together, the journalist does not need to take responsibility for the ways in which they reflect upon each other, but can displace that responsibility. News discourse's ideal is to be an empty mediation of the 'real', yet one that mediates the world authoritatively. The journalist disappears out of the

frame, and the news' presence slips towards a claim to stand in for the real—to be real, or as near to the real as possible.

I think thoroughgoing critique of contemporary newswriting needs to begin with an understanding of the weak coherence of the news text, and the ethos which underpins it. The techniques described above seek to close the space between the news text and the world. As news style seeks to portray that world happening through its presence, it allows little space for a voice to tell the news, and so little space for any narratorial or cognitive knowledge either of that world or itself. As I have sought to show also in previous chapters, the non-self-reflexive and instrumental stance towards the world that is news style organises material in order to contain the world in its reports. It does not so much ask of the things it orders, 'What do they mean?' as 'What use are they?' In this respect news style is a prime example of the displacement of traditional cultural forms by instrumental thinking in modern culture, of the replacement of ideas with a meaning by technically organised information with a purpose. The major criticism here is not Weber's fear that the world will be rendered meaningless through a scientific ethos that tells us what is but can never tell us what we ought to do, (Stauth and Turner, 1988, p.37), but that newswriting withdraws itself from the meanings it invokes in its narrow ethic of distributing true information. As a result, while some journalists profess an attitude towards events that accepts that journalism 'does not stand apart from the world' (Bell, 1998, p.18) but is part of the social fabric, and has a considerable effect at times upon events (Iggers, 1999, p.136), the ethos of news style pulls them back to a stance that is inimical to the reflexivity and engagement with readers which I have argued for in this study.

Chapter 8: An invitation to abandon the craft? An afterword on online journalism

Criticism indeed consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits.

(Michel Foucault, 1984, p.45)

1. Introduction

Each of the preceding chapters of this study contains a conclusion, and I do not want simply to repeat the ideas presented there in this final chapter. Instead I want to bring together some key issues by concluding with a practical exploration of how the news might be written differently to the ways of writing traced in those chapters and criticised in the conclusions. This is not to propose a new news style. A major criticism in the study has been that journalism imbues one style of writing with the authority and facticity of the news. Instead I want to discuss how news discourse might be *opened up*, how some of the conventions of newswriting might be renegotiated and the stance of the writing journalist broadened. I most particularly do not want to conclude with a utopian proposal. I have discussed the news as a pragmatic enterprise engaged in by members of a community, and it makes little sense to bring the discussion to a point that resides entirely outside that practice and that community. For these reasons I will investigate some of the potential of one emergent way of writing the news to reshape central aspects of news discourse criticised in this study. I make a case that online news holds significant potential in this respect.

Media analysts are perhaps used to thinking of online news as a marginal element of news journalism. But online news is attracting substantial audiences. BBC News Online, which claims to have the highest reach of any content site in Europe, recorded a high of 4.9 million users a month in March 2001 (BBC Annual Report, 2001) (Houghton (2001) cites a figure of three million different users a month in January 2001), while Guardian Unlimited had an audited circulation of more than 2.4 million different users in March 2001 (ABC Electronic, 2001). These figures are impossible to compare directly with print or broadcast audiences, as the audiences

are both measured and convened in substantially different ways, but some sense can be gained by placing them beside the *Guardian*'s audited average net daily circulation for the six months from December 2000 to May 2001 of just under 400,000 copies (ABC, 2001) and its average estimated readership from April 2000 to March 2001 of 1,024,000 (National Readership Survey, 2001). According to the annual Which? Online Internet survey, 36 per cent of people in Britain had online access by 2001, a third more than in its 2000 survey, and of them, 15 per cent most frequently accessed news sites. The survey also found that 37 per cent of users in Britain said they accessed the Internet regularly for news, travel and leisure information (Which? Online, 2001). Such figures need to be read in the context of suggestions that access to the Internet in Europe could well double by 2005 (Bierhoff, 1999, p.9). These figures only scratch the surface of the ways and reasons that people access online news (Shaw, 2001) but, however interpreted, they suggest a substantial number of people are using the Internet for news.⁵⁴ It is beyond my scope even to begin to predict future online news growth (as Peter Dahlgren notes, the success rate for futurology tends to be low (1996, p.60)), and I do not want to make significant claims for particular forms of online journalism. But I argue here that a significant news form is developing online, which is opening up news discourse beyond the ways of thinking about newswriting which I have traced in this study.

I focus my discussion of online journalism below on a form unique to it, the 'weblog', in particular the *Guardian*'s weblog (www.guardianunlimited.co.uk/weblog). News institutions are being drawn in increasing numbers to this diary-style form of web site, which has only appeared widely on the Internet since 1999 (Blood, 2001). The weblog portal, Eatonweb, listed 71 such online journalism sites in October, 2001 (portal.eatonweb.com). We should be careful about making strong claims about any one form of online journalism, particularly given the failure of nearly all online news services to balance their accounts as yet (Ibold, 2001), and the likelihood therefore that their products will change. My argument is rather that

⁵⁴ A key issue for further research in this area is tracking the growth in use of the Internet as primary news source. One US survey suggests that figure has risen rapidly since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on America to 8 per cent of those with Internet access (HarrisInteractive, 2001).

weblogs, along with similar developments in online journalism such as the heavy use of hyperlinks in news texts, the heavy use by readers of online news archives, or the development of news titles into 'portals' to their city or region, are allowing the idea of what the news is and what news language does to be reformulated. The discussion therefore frames weblogs as an example of online journalism's potential rather than as the primary place where the practices raised in this study as problematic might be rethought. However, I do claim that the existence of news weblogs and their incorporation into news institutions signals that some epistemological change is taking place in news journalism. Moreover, I think the set of changes to which weblogs belong is located at the heart of news practice, and not merely at the margins, as so many developments in journalism have been, and therefore has implications for print and broadcast media more generally.

Amidst the hyperbole about the opportunities of the Internet for participative democracy and public communication (e.g. Rheingold, 1999), some academics have reacted with caution. James Cornford and Kevin Robins perceive first and foremost a continuing expansion of the capitalist media industry:

We do not think that we shall be getting the radically transformed media environment that techno-futurists are forecasting—in fact, the media 'revolution' is more about strategies for deepening and intensifying consumption processes (moving beyond the consumption-time constraints that have limited the revenues and profits that could be garnered from the 'old' media).

(Cornford and Robins, 1999, p.124)

Their assessment of the dominance of a consumerist logic in online media may well be right. However, the economic drivers of the news industry can be negotiated by and made manifest in news discourse in a range of ways. Indeed, as I argue below, it could well come about that this new environment makes possible the emergence of kinds of news that make better sense in terms of the 'consumerist urge' of contemporary culture than present practices. Because of the complexity of cultural change, this cannot simply be seen as an intensification of consumerism, but a change in the meanings and practices of the news. We can perhaps think of the

situation in Raymond Williams' (1977) terms of residual, dominant and emergent forms of culture. Social life is always in flux and, whether in culture in the more general sense or in a community of practice such as news journalism, there will always be a residue of old practices and meanings and the emergence of alternative or oppositional ones surrounding the dominant, articulating what the dominant neglects or represses or even cannot recognise, but which it is also always trying to incorporate (Williams, 1977, pp.121ff). The emergent practices of online journalism perhaps stand in this relation to news discourse, as pointers towards a change in journalism's 'structure of feeling', as Williams describes the orientation towards social life which underpins cultural practices. Indeed, Williams turns to the word style, the term I have used to conceptualise the textual practices of the news, to describe such a changing attitude (ibid, p.131). And at the level of news style, where this study has located a number of problems and limitations in journalism, we can see the emergence of different forms on the Internet. Their absorption into the dominant of news discourse, both in the sense of becoming acceptable but different forms of news, as broadcasting developed in the mid-twentieth century, and in the sense of having an effect on news journalism in general, would entail changes in key aspects of news practice.

The new opportunities of online journalism discussed below need not be seen as inherent in the new medium. As Williams notes, technological developments have rarely been either simply causes or effects of social changes, but are intrinsically bound up in our 'whole way of life' (1999 [1974], pp.49-50). I would follow a number of critics instead in seeing online news as a chance for news journalism to rethink itself in a new context. The American journalist Katherine Fulton argues that changing technologies pose a challenge for news practice:

The answers [to this challenge] will create a new generation of journalistic conventions that could well affect old media as well. New technologies, therefore, give journalistic reformers an ideal opening to try new ideas.

(Fulton, 1996, p.3)

Lasica (2001b) calls weblogs an 'an important addition to the journalism toolkit', and believes they may 'sow the seeds for new forms of journalism, public discourse.

interactivity and online community'. The Internet analyst and journalist Doc Searls (interviewed in Lasica, 2001b) argues similarly that weblogs have the potential to 're-personalise journalism' because they allow journalists to break free from the news institution's conventions. The emphases here are on the Internet as an opportunity to rethink news discourse.

These changes are the more significant because of the conservatism of news discourse over the twentieth century and the marginal nature of a number of other developments in news practice. A central theme of the study has been the homogeneity and stylistic conservatism of British broadsheet journalism. In chapter three, I noted the findings of newspaper history that, as journalism became more professionalised and commercialised, it became more homogenised (see Lee, 1978, Smith, 1979). However, I argued that we must also account for the emergence of a single style of the news between 1880 and 1930, and I suggested that this can be understood in terms of a discourse that developed, which took upon itself the power to subsume other styles under its own style, to stand as a form of knowledge rather than as a medium, and to stand independent of existing social mores of public communication. Later chapters argued that, to an extent independent of the changing economics of the news, this discourse of newswriting has become fixed, for a range of reasons that include journalism's censorship of writing, which restricts the reflexivity of this aspect of practice, the isolation of the news from its audience and the largely tacit nature of journalists' understanding of what they do. In their statements about writing (chapter four), in their training (chapter five) and in their practice (chapter six) journalists can be seen to depend upon what has gone before to define good news journalism and to establish themselves within the news community. Echoes of these findings can be heard in Jon Katz's criticism that the American press is 'unable to embrace change or face the future, [and] have opted instead to romanticize the past':

[N]ewspapers seem willing to do almost anything but the single thing that could save them: undertake radical creative change in their content and internal culture. They have added color, forced editors to ponder marketing studies, revamped sections, expanded sports listings, given free wash-off

tattoos to kids, laid off thousands of reporters...[but] they refuse to change in any of the ways most obviously and urgently needed.

Newspapers remain insanely stagnant in an interactive age. Only a handful of papers have even experimented with new technologies that could connect them to readers in new ways—like simply putting email addresses on most reporters' stories, or giving readers more than a few paragraphs of input in what's now the dullest and most useless element of all media—the Op-Ed page.

(Katz, 1997)

Godfrey Hodgson makes a similar criticism in the British context: part of the decline in public interest in political and foreign news can be attributed to 'hidebound and arrogant reporting' that takes no account of changes in society (2000, p.29). This fixity is partly a stylistic matter, the pragmatic choice of forms of language that have worked before, but it also has an ideological dimension. A narrow set of ways of writing has acquired such a naturalness and authority that it no longer appears as language, at some level, while alternatives are precisely apparent as writing, as supplementary or marginal. James W. Carey criticises a journalism community which gives its craft a natural, dehistoricised status:

Because the culture of a group is as recalcitrant to change as the psychology of individuals, these self-understandings—these stories journalists tell themselves about themselves—hang on long after the originating conditions that gave rise to them have disappeared. Shorn from their historical origins, these practices seem to be preternatural, and to abandon them seems like an invitation to abandon the craft entirely. In other words, one has to convince journalists that there is another way to practice the craft, consistent with their skills and interests, but better adapted to prevailing conditions of politics and contemporary life.

(Carey, 1999, p.53)

In these terms, to practise journalism otherwise is almost a betrayal, an abandonment of the craft.

There are certainly changes going on in journalism, but their potential impact on the ethos of news journalism is not, I argue, significant beside that of online news. Among the most prominent are the steady rise of a so-called ‘feminised’ journalism (Hartley, 1996; Dahlgren, 1992; Carter et al., 1998) and the current enthusiasm for civic journalism in the United States. It can be questioned how far either of these developments—certainly in application in newsrooms—inflects the epistemology of newswriting. A ‘softer’, feminised, personalised news, which emphasises people rather than issues and seeks to place events in context (Christmas, 1997, p.3), may do little to dent the status of ‘hard’ news style. As detailed in this study, the century-old ways of understanding that are embedded in newswriting seem undisturbed at the centre of the practice, and many of the ‘softer’ forms of news sit comfortably within or beside modern journalism’s epistemology.⁵⁵ Carey looks for radical change in news journalism to the public or civic journalism movement which has sprung up in the US in the 1990s, and which has found its way into some newsrooms.⁵⁶ Yet as a number of critics have pointed out, the challenge to journalism’s epistemology from civic journalism, when it convenes public meetings, conducts opinion polls on what it should write about and constructs a civic space within its pages within which solutions to community problems can be addressed, is limited. Journalism’s code of non-involvement in the matters it reports on is broken, but civic journalism remains wedded to the ideal of some objective measure of what ‘the reader’ wants, it continues to side-step questions of how far the news constructs the world it reports, and it reinforces the idea of the journalist as the keeper of public knowledge (Parisi, 1997; Schudson, 1999a). Indeed, the conservatism of news practice is perhaps evident in this movement for change itself, in its harking back to a community journalism (e.g. Anderson et al., 1994) which never existed (Schudson, 1995, p.43). The relatively minor impact of such challenges to the received wisdom of journalism—to the tacit epistemology of the news—illustrates how difficult it is for journalism to conceive of the news outside the box of current practices and thinking.

⁵⁵ Alfred Harmsworth, after all, founded the *Daily Mirror* to appeal to women readers, and in Hugh Cudlipp’s estimation, the *Mirror* succeeded in the 1930s because it focused on readers’ needs, gave them news they could use, and personalised issues (Cudlipp, 1953)—precisely what is heralded as new by some feminist journalists and critics (e.g. Christmas, 1997; Hartley, 1996).

⁵⁶ Colin C. Campbell talks of shifting from the ‘truth business to the problem-solving business’ (1999, p.xv). See Glasser (1999) and Rosen (2001) for more detailed discussion of the movement.

Against this background of marginal and inwardly looking change, developments in online journalism, including the news weblog, stand out. The next section below gives a brief description of weblogs. Following sections develop the argument that online news practice holds out possibilities for renegotiation of some of the limits of modern news style and in particular offers alternatives to its restrictive 'communicative ethos' (Scannell, 1992, p.335). I examine the contrast between the weblog and the stylistic homogeneity of modern journalism; the different relation between reporter and reader; a diminishing of the immediacy of the news text with respect to news events; the corresponding rise of a demand for comprehensiveness and expansiveness; and the scope in this context for the greater reflexivity in the writing of the news that the study has argued for.

2. The weblog

The type of web site that has come to be known as the weblog (known also as 'blogs') is an online diary—we might think of it as a twenty-first century commonplace book—and may contain personal thoughts and material, annotated links to other sites, community information or similar collections of personal or public material (see www.camworld.com, portal.eatonweb.com, www.blogger.com, www.chymes.org/hyper/weblogs.html for examples and further discussion).

Although weblogs are a young phenomenon even for the Internet, they can be characterised by:

- their regularly updated nature;
- an ephemeral and informal quality, and hence little attempt to impose a hierarchy on material;
- commentary upon the material posted, often in an irreverent or personal voice.

Their existence as a distinctive form of Internet language use is largely due to the software developed first by Userland software (www.userland.com) and then by other organisations, which provide web-based forms on which users can write and update their weblog sites at the click of a button. By far the majority of weblogs are of the personal variety (and in this curious mixture of private thoughts and public dissemination they exemplify the contemporary blurring of public and private noted

by many commentators (e.g. Fairclough, 1995; Seligman, 1990)). However, it is a common feature of emergent cultural forms that they are often seen at first as personal or private because they stand outside the dominant. The *Guardian's* weblog, launched in April, 2000, is of course an institutional product, but it draws on the form's characteristics. The web page, added to throughout each day, carries annotated links to what it calls 'the most fascinating and noteworthy journalism on the net' (*Guardian*, May 4, 2000), many from prestige international news organisations with commercial links to Guardian Newspapers, but including a wide range of others. The top of the weblog's front page for 26 June, 2001, is given in figure 3 as an example.

The weblog

Our pick of noteworthy reads online

War crimes tribunals
Global writing on global justice
from Nuremberg to the Hague

About the weblog

- What's a weblog? ▶
- Send us your tips ▶

The weblog

Latest issues in links, plus the best journalism from around the web.

Weblog specials

- 16.10.01: Anthrax ▶
- 09.10.01: Air strikes ▶
- 28.09.01: Afghanistan ▶
- 12.09.01: Terror in US ▶
- 06.09.01: Concorde ▶
- 31.08.01: UN racism ▶
- 23.08.01: Big tobacco ▶
- 22.08.01: A right to die? ▶
- 16.08.01: Gender divide ▶
- 15.08.01: Zimbabwe ▶
- 09.08.01: Israel ▶
- 09.08.01: Cloning ▶
- 01.08.01: N Ireland ▶
- 01.08.01: Asylum ▶
- 31.07.01: PPP ▶
- 26.07.01: Europe ▶
- 18.07.01: G8 summit ▶
- 03.07.01: War crimes ▶
- 28.06.01: Aids ▶
- 14.06.01: Macedonia ▶
- 06.06.01: Election fun ▶
- 10.05.01: Election 2001 ▶
- 03.05.01: US executions ▶
- 25.04.01: May Day ▶
- 18.04.01: Africa slavery ▶
- 12.04.01: Easter ▶
- 16.03.01: Foot & mouth ▶
- 08.03.01: the Budget ▶
- 07.03.01: eco-riches? ▶
- 14.02.01: Sex on the net ▶
- 24.01.01: China ▶
- 17.01.01: Iraq ▶
- 23.12.00: Year in review ▶
- 11.11.00: US elections ▶

June 2001

Thumbs down for Spielberg's AI

June 29: David Denby, the *New Yorker's* film critic, wanted to like AI, Steven Spielberg's much-hyped movie. Instead, he finds the Spielberg-Kubrick concoction a confusing and uninspiring mix.
[New Yorker](#)

Bridging the digital divide

June 29: Millions in the developing world are missing out on the internet revolution, but a few enterprising individuals have taken on the monumental challenge of bridging the gap between the information haves and have-nots, **Asiaweek** reports.
[Asiaweek](#)

Weblog special: the Aids crisis

June 28: The UN's special assembly on Aids has ended - and, some say, exemplified the political difficulties in tackling the spread of infection. We look at the best journalism on the crisis on websites around the world.

Freedom riders to return to Mississippi

June 27: America's Freedom Riders - civil rights campaigners who, in 1961, risked their lives to challenge racial segregation in the bus stations of the deep South - are to stage a reunion in Mississippi. **The Mississippi Clarion Ledger** has the report.
[Mississippi Clarion Ledger](#)

figure 3

(Guardian Unlimited weblog, 26 June, 2001)

3. Challenging journalism's conservatism

One key respect in which the weblog diverges from news discourse is in its treatment of source texts, which are not subsumed under the voice of the news text to anything like the degree that happens in modern news. Contrary to what we might expect of a computer mediated journalism, the presentation of decontextualised information that is characteristic of the modern news text (Schudson, 1978, p.90) is less rather than more of a feature in the weblog. As is immediately evident from figure 3, the *Guardian's* weblog confronts readers with a range of styles and types of publication. In this one example, there are links to a news article on the contemporary conflict in Macedonia (from the *Washington Post*), an editorial on the issue in a rival to the *Guardian* (the *Independent*), a report from Human Rights Watch and a piece of in-depth reportage from *Time* magazine, as well as an internal link to a Guardian Unlimited special report. Each of these remains distinct as a text and as a different approach to the issue, rather than becoming summarised and excerpted by *Guardian* journalists within a new news text.

The implications of this are significant. Many of the interconnected ways of knowing in the news that I have argued make up news discourse in broadsheet journalism are disrupted. The opening up of the news page to a variety of forms reduces the textual claim to total authority of news style. Knowledge of what is happening in the world is not contained or channelled exclusively through the news text. Indeed, the notion of a single meaning to events cannot be sustained when two different accounts, each of which has the status of a piece of journalism, are provided for the online reader. Each news text in the weblog does not, therefore, stand in the stead of the event to the same extent as the modern broadsheet news story, and certainly not to the extent suggested by the absurd claim of news mythology that two reporters sent to cover an event would write the same story. British broadsheet newspapers will do something similar at times, either printing reports from other publications or reproducing original documents, but the practice is relatively rare and is not at the centre of newswriting. By contrast, this practice is definitive of the weblog. Among the variety of texts presented in a chronological rather than hierarchical fashion, news style is

situated as just one among a variety of ways of communicating information and knowledge, without privileged access to 'what has happened'. There is still a kind of authority constructed on the page, but it is, I think, a more contingent authority. Rather than news style unproblematically carrying with it the authority of the publication's masthead and of journalism in general, a kind of mesh of authority is built up whereby the news site's use of the article vouches for the text's value while the status of the *Washington Post* or Human Rights Watch or the quality of the reporting and writing reinforces the weblog's authority. The status of the news text is thus established more on the page than in the kind of abstract trust relation which Giddens identifies (1991, pp.133-7), which precedes and shapes the act of writing.

4. Reporter and reader

The weblog's relationship with readers is also constructed in a different way, standing perhaps in more of a service relation than the modern news studied in earlier chapters. Throughout this study I have used Gadamer's hermeneutic ethics as a yardstick of the communicative endeavour of journalism, and have argued that news style facilitates neither a reaching out towards others nor a stance of holding oneself ready to be brought up short by the other, letting others' experiences assert themselves against one's 'fore-meanings' (Gadamer, 1979 [1965], p.238). Instead, in relation to readers as much as to source material, I have argued that news style carries with it a quite rigid tradition and epistemology. Actual readers are to a large extent left 'out of the loop' and replaced with an image of 'the reader' which accords with news discourse. The much-vaunted interactivity of the Internet, if often overstated, offers possibilities of revising that communicative relation. The Internet is, in the jargon, a 'pull' medium driven by users rather than a 'push' medium shaped by the mass media.⁵⁷ Carole Rich claims that, 'The writer relinquishes control over the information to the reader' (Rich, 1999, poynter1.html). Andrew Shapiro argues that:

We may be aware of the obvious editorial slants of a certain publication or author, but even the most vociferous media skeptics look first to the major

daily newspapers and the evening news to find out 'what happened'. The opportunity, then, to hold the media accountable with objections and clarifications—or praise, for that matter—is one of the greatest values of an interactive medium like the Net'. As Howard Kurtz of the Washington Post puts it, 'the on-line feedback loop helps puts news organizations and consumers on a more equal footing.'

(Shapiro, 2000)

Again this is overstated—not least because, as Katz points out, few leading online news providers have taken the step of including journalists' email addresses in articles. But if the journalist is not displaced from the centre of the news, there is some change in the balance of power.

The achievement of being able to tell 'what happened' is always, as I argued in chapter three, a cultural achievement, and it is this ability rather than a demand from the medium that I would look at to pinpoint some of online news' distinctiveness. Hence we can think of this potential change in terms of a wider cultural development than just in terms of the opportunities of a new technology. A case can be made that there is a contemporary dissatisfaction with the mass media and an appetite for a different, less massifying, relationship between reader and journalist. The former president of Reuters NewMedia, Andrew Nibley, argues that people are no longer interested in 'serious' news packages as they have been defined in journalism, and that there is 'real outrage at the traditional media', particularly from young people who no longer want to be told how to think (2000, pp.37-8). Ian Hargreaves talks similarly of a need to find 'new ways to speak directly to readers' who are more interested in issues such as the environment, gender and racial identity, global markets in sport and entertainment and drugs than the old political and geo-political verities of the news page (2000, p.58). Walter Bender argues that online readers are developing different and more demanding expectations of news. In this view, readers are coming to expect information which is open rather than closed to their

⁵⁷ Although media executives, driven by the need for audited circulations so they can attract advertisers, are finding they can produce much more impressive online readership figures using the 'push' of email news services (see Meyer, 2001).

interpretation, links to further material, and, most importantly, a sense of belonging to a determinate social group in their use of the medium (2000, p.2). Anthony Smith, less enthusiastically, talks of a new 'consumerist urge' driving the way people use the media:

There appears today to exist a latent collectivist, egalitarian consumerist urge, a prompting to break through economic and institutional constraints, towards an abundance of messages, from which a mass of individuals can draw material according to their 'personal' choices.

(Smith, 1993 [1982], p.8)

In Smith's analysis, the Western individual, constructed as a consumer, now desires something more like entertainment—information which he or she can make a choice to use or not. The implication is that there is scope for not only a revision of what makes it onto the news page, but also of the communicative tools of the journalist and of the understanding of 'what happened' which these tools enable.

Most commentators on the weblog see the form as an amateur challenge to the mass media, a forum (or perhaps an agora, as many commentators seem to hark back, like the proponents of civic journalism, to a small-scale Athenian participatory democracy) in which non-journalists contribute directly to a mass medium by posting their thoughts and material that interests them (e.g. Lasica, 2001a; Blood, 2000). The online news provider, NewsTrolls (www.newstrolls.com), is a good example of a developed form of the weblog in this respect, bringing together skilled journalists and committed readers by allowing registered readers to add links, comments and articles to the web site to augment the work of its staff. The result, in my reading at least, is an interesting amalgam of texts and a sense of a broadness of perspective on events. But how do mass media institutions, which will surely continue to play a large role in providing news, respond to this environment?⁵⁸ The *Guardian's* weblog

⁵⁸ Enthusiasts of computer-mediated journalism foresee a whole range of innovations to journalism, from 'robot' software which will collate news from the Internet according to its assessment of reader interests, to the facilitation of new news markets of cultural diaspora or local communities in a way that demolishes the hierarchy of local, national and international news (Bender et al, 1996; Egginton, 1999; Nibley, 2000, p.37). Research is also underway into computer-mediated documentary which, using automated storytelling software, provides viewers with a mass of material that they can steer their own course through (Davenport and Murtaugh, 1997). Jack Fuller unenthusiastically

does show evidence of the communicative ethos of the news becoming reinflected. It gleans news stories from a range of sources and presents them for readers' browsing rather than first pre-digesting them so that it knows them in the authoritative but limited way discussed in chapter seven, invoking stories in controlled ways. The communicative relationship set up in the weblog requires more work from the reader, more of an active choice to click on the hyperlink, than does the newspaper, and therefore there is a qualitative difference to print. The weblog is much more of a virtual entity, that needs and invites the reader's participation for the news to be constructed out of the page of links. This is a difference of degree, for the reading process of print readers and the meanings they garner from their reading have always been complex, and it is making a leap of logic to conclude that the medium inherently and inevitably leads to a new reading process. More important is the attitude of the journalist implicit in the new ways of putting texts together that the weblog is an example of. There is less scope in the emerging practices of online journalism for the journalist to produce a product that can be understood as just a factual report. Rather, online news forms such as the weblog promote a more open-ended and reciprocal attitude towards readers. According to Rich, a number of editors of online news sites are moving towards planning major stories on storyboards in order to construct a number of pages linked by multiple paths of links and readable in any order (1999, poynter1.htm).

Such online journalism has potential to become qualitatively different in its communicative relation to print or broadcast news, not just because readers can respond by email but because the text is constructed for a more reciprocal relation of consumption. Eric Meyer argues that there is a decline across media in interest in 'feedback' systems but a growing demand for more control over how and what information is received (n.d., emcol3.html). In Smith's terms, the relationship is still a capitalist one of production and consumption, but there is more negotiation of the identity of 'the reader', or of the way understanding of the material can emerge, or of the 'truth' it communicates. Journalism perhaps moves from the factory of a

characterises such technology as replacing the authority of all texts 'with the meandering logic of a man commanding a TV remote control' (1996, p.102).

machine-like news style into the service sector. Forms such as the weblog thus stand in contrast to another *Guardian* product, 'The Editor' magazine, which has a similar purpose, to gather the best of the week's news, but which edits and rewrites material into a product for easy consumption. It also stands in contrast to the many filtering services or 'Daily Me' news sites, which repackage wire feeds for readers according to their preferences (examples include Moreover, CRAYON, Yahoo! News). The difference of the weblog is partly that it promotes a communicative relation that is more than the transmission of 'data bits', of decontextualised nuggets of information, to readers. The weblog, certainly in its present emergent state, is characterised by an ethos of sharing—Searls talks of an 'any-to-any system of talking and sharing rather than the traditional "hard journalism" model of writing that is distributed to the masses' (interviewed in Lasica, 2001b)—which motivates those who keep weblogs. Dan Gillmor, a journalist at the *San Jose Mercury News* who keeps a weblog for the publication, talks of the form as an environment where readers feel more able to respond—more empowered, less cowed by the news institution's authority, to enter into dialogue with reporters. 'We're in the midst of a change, where journalism is changing from a lecture into something that resembles something between a conversation and a seminar' (interviewed in Lasica, 2001b). Discussion of the Internet is prone to hyperbole, but forms such as the weblog do show at least potential to accommodate some of that. The space which the news weblog opens up for the reader is broader.

5. Immediate versus useful

Weblogs such as the *Guardian*'s suggest some qualitative changes in the editing and presentation of the news and a repositioning of news style as one among a range of legitimate ways of presenting the news, without a wholesale overturning of news practice. Online journalism opens up possibilities of change, while at the same time still existing at the heart of news discourse, and that is what makes the differences of practice there so significant. One particularly significant opening up of possibilities concerns the basis of news as something immediate. I argued in chapter seven that the news tends to portray events as if they happen in its telling, tending towards assimilating news to the moment of telling, as the increased use of an 'ontological now' charted by Ekecrantz (1997b, p.397) illustrates. As discussed in chapter five,

the news text also constructs a hierarchy of immediacy, descending from a present tense headline intro down to background paragraphs of past events. There is, then, a strong rhetoric of immediacy that aims to close the gap between the event and its telling. That, again contrary to what we might expect, seems to be less of a characteristic of the online news text. BBC News Online, for example, has found that one of its most popular features is its archives, which are being used very heavily, with the equivalent of 50 per cent of the entire archive accessed each week in early 1999 (Egginton, 1999). Although the BBC promotes its web site as literally up-to-the-minute news, readers seem to be interested in the site as much as a resource of information as the source of the latest details. Yesterday's news has of course been used as a resource by journalists since clippings libraries began at the end of the nineteenth century (Brown, 1985, p.253), but it has been used as a source of past facts and written into news stories as background to the present moment of the text, not presented as earlier texts. The availability of these archives to readers changes the provenance of the news text. Online news immediately has a history as well as a present, and perhaps will begin, as a result, to speak with less breathless excitement about latest developments and construct less of a hierarchy of past and present in its foreground and background paragraphs. As Dahlgren notes, 'users of cyberspace are in principle no longer so bound to the present' (1996, p.66).

The *Guardian* weblog contains no searchable archive, but it stands in a similar way as a resource as much as an account of the latest happenings. Its page is not rewritten afresh each day, but added to and allowed to grow longer until the end of the month, when it is placed in a month-by-month archive, and its contents bar on the left-hand side contains collections of pieces dating back months. A collection of reports on the prospect of civil war in Macedonia dated June 14, 2001, sits beside pieces on the British General Election in May (dated 10 May), US executions (3 May), May Day (25 April) and African slavery (18 April). The demand for new material each day remains, but the very strong link between news and newness which is a feature of modern journalism weakens.

6. A different authority

In chapter one I noted the intoxicating feeling of learning how to use news style, because of the power and authority it afforded. In chapter five I discussed this authority which the novice learns in more detail. I argued that the competent journalist learns to inhabit a powerful position of knowing the world through the techniques of news style. He or she learns the skill of ‘finding’ not just the angle of a story, but at the same time also the ‘natural’ shape of the material he or she is writing up, as he or she structures the material as a news text. It is this ability and confidence in using language to impose sense and order, I argued, which characterises the competent news journalist, more than the accumulation of vocabulary or any abstract understanding of what the news does. As I discussed also in chapter six, this authority depends too on a range of ‘off the shelf’ constructions of newswriting, constructions which are both useful and which carry with them the newsworthiness and truth-denoting value of previous times they were used to tell the news. Meaning and newsworthiness are imposed in the use of news style. The weblog—and perhaps online journalism more generally—again differs in some of the ways it writes down the world. I have already pointed to the weaker role of a single news style in the weblog. In addition, its text does not seem to attempt to restrict the text to a unified meaning, which the journalist has constructed from the material, but works rather in the opposite direction. The page of annotated links operates more by a portal logic, that is, on similar principles to the many web portals which provide ‘access to a structured collection of information resources’ on the Internet, while also ‘taking responsibility for the quality of content’ (White, 2000). There will continue, I am sure, to be a pressure for the journalist to justify her or his status by claiming to have access to a unitary truth, but the developing form of the weblog tends to work against this, opening up meaning rather than delimiting it, staking its claim to authority and value in the breadth of its knowledge of valuable material and its ability to draw them together in its links. We may perhaps see a dialectic at work in which the value of comprehensiveness strengthens as a key criterion of online news to the degree that the news value of newness weakens.

Again, we can follow Anthony Smith in seeing a wider context to this development. In Smith's (1993 [1987]) terms, the weblog could be described as a response to a crisis in modern journalism and in wider culture. Over the course of the twentieth century, he proposes, there has been 'a gradual acceptance of the implications of the collapse of the idea of the practicability of exact knowledge' (p.98). He argues that there is a continuity between such cultural moments as Heisenberg's discovery of the uncertainty of scientific knowledge, cubism's distrust of existing traditions of visual realism and Borges' impossible stories. Journalism, by contrast, continues to adhere rigidly to a world composed of certainties. 'The reporter has been trained to speak as if he or she knows, as if the world were still knowable' (p.105). We might point also to Fredric Jameson's notion of a 'waning of affect' (1991, p.10)—contemporary culture is more interested in surfaces and in the interconnectedness of things than in any aetiological search for depth, stability or totality of significance. The 'off the shelf' constructions mentioned above (and in detail in chapter six) depend for their usefulness upon a logic that there exists a generally known world which can be invoked in knowable ways by the reporter. The gap between the world and its description is pushed as tightly closed as possible within this way of understanding. The weblog's portal logic rests upon a different model of knowing. The *Guardian* site contains 'our pick' of the best online, as its banner advertises. Similarly, while online news seems to be tending to think of material in terms of relatively discrete blocks of text, at times in terms of a metonymic logic whereby a block of information implies a large background of things not mentioned (Rich, 1999, poynter4.html), just as British broadsheet news does (chapter seven), there is less of a sense that a whole knowable event is accessible through such blocks. The reader is asked to follow the journalist *across* a field of meaning rather than go *under the surface* (chapter four) to know what is happening in the world.

The style guides and texts for online journalism which have been emerging in the past five years are consistent in their advocacy of a more fragmentary, less unified, form of news for the world wide web. Rich warns that journalists who craft stories with a beginning, middle and end risk losing readers on the web, because those readers can click away to another site in an instant (Rich, 1999, poynter1.html). The

most successful news form emerging appears to be a layered story, with a brief story, even just the intro, on the front page, and a fuller story underneath it, with audio or video clips, related or earlier stories, original documents, raw statistical data, and other material underneath that. Andy Beers, the executive producer of MSNBC News, describes this form as one which 'offers readers different levels of information. Some readers want briefs, while others want full stories' (quoted by Rich, 1999, poynter2.html). More importantly for the status of the news story, the practice facilitates a desire to go beyond the news story to source material. For the reader there is a logic of clicking on to find out more, and for the journalist a logic of enticing the reader to click, which stretches the news rather than compartmentalises it within the boxes of a newspaper page.

As figure 3 illustrates, the *Guardian* weblog proclaims its breadth of knowledge as much as its timeliness or access to the 'real' story. In the left-hand column, topical collections of links on various topics ('weblog specials') from the current month's weblog and from pages dating back seven months are given in index form. Below these, 94 news titles from which the weblog sources the majority of the stories it links to are given, from conventionally authoritative news agencies (such as the Press Association's Ananova web site) and newspapers (such as the *Chicago Tribune* site) to special interest (the *Ecologist* site), alternative (AllAfrica.com) and satirical (the *Onion*) publications. Clearly, the range of its sources is an important part of the site's value, in its creators' view (Jakob Nielsen argues that online news uses links to gain credibility for its product (1997)) and in this it differs from the press. A newspaper will draw upon news agency copy, but more often than not present such articles as its own reporters' work. Somehow drawing on articles from other publications dilutes the authority of a newspaper. By contrast, in the online environment that is developing the competitive logic of the scoop or exclusive, where a news organisation puts great effort into finding things out that other news media do not yet know and finding them out more quickly, and then proclaims this fact to its readers, is less appropriate (Hume, 1999). Instead, a different competitive logic of knowing more, knowing better, knowing comprehensively, and knowing in as much depth or extent as readers would wish, arises. Nora Paul, a journalism trainer at the Poynter

Institute in the USA, envisages an 'annotative journalism' emerging, in which a politician's speech is published, supplemented by links to previous statements on the topic, critics' arguments, and so on (quoted in Fulton, 1996, p.5).

We can identify the Internet's characteristic offer of comprehensive knowledge at work here. Dahlgren writes of 'the general sense of the rapid and virtually infinite access one has at one's disposal' in browsing hypertexts (1996, p.65). Hypertext instead allows the reader to jump from place to place, to access information in any order (Rich, 1999, poynter1.html). In one sense, as I have suggested above, this is a welcome broadening of the communicative relation of the news from the sometimes narrow and restricted view of world of British broadsheet news, where the journalist learns to live within certain limits of phrase, content and outlook. The expansiveness of the Internet disrupts this inwardness, and the online environment seems to value a pushing out beyond the news text. Yet this claim to know comprehensively is as seductive as it is unattainable. As Kathryn Sutherland writes, the vast online database of the Internet offers always unrealised promises of open-endedness and democracy of information (1996, p.17). The Victorian mythic dream of total imperial control through an all-encompassing archive (Hartley, 1996, p.46) is perhaps re-emerging in a new variant. Yet unlike the Victorian museum or archive, the comprehensiveness of the Internet is never tested, as the hyperlinks move the reader ever onwards.

7. A different attitude to writing

This different authority of weblog news, combined with the different relation with readers and the more contingent status of the text, as a single news style broadens into a plurality, leads to the materiality of the text becoming more visible than in the hard news of broadsheet newspapers. Chapter four details modern news journalism's uncomfortableness with the idea of linguistic mediation of events, and the discourse's attempts to reduce the visibility of the act of writing the news. I argue both in chapter four and seven that this elision of the writing explains in part the narrowness of the communicative dimension of the news and makes the news more vulnerable to manipulation by dominant voices in society. A number of critics have indeed called for a more metatextual journalism, that acknowledges that its writing is an act upon its material (Pauly, 1999, p.147; Williams, 1999, p.288; also Iggers,

1999, and van Loon, 2000, cited in chapter two). Jack Fuller hopes for a journalism which is conscious of its rhetorical aims and tools, and open about this to readers (1996, p.117).

The news weblog, although it involves editing more than writing, can be seen to draw on similar dissatisfaction with news style and to be more amenable to styles which acknowledge the construction implicit in writing. Deborah Branscum, a freelance American journalist who keeps a weblog, writes of the 'creative freedom'—a phrase that modern news tends to shy away from—and the pleasure of writing without the mediation of the news institution (interviewed in Lasica, 2001a). Lasica also quotes Gillmor on how he involves readers in the process of writing:

One fascinating aspect of Gillmor's Weblog is how he lifts the veil from the workings of the journalism profession. 'There have been occasions where I put up a note saying, "I'm working on the following and here's what I think I know," and the invitation is for the reader to either tell me I'm on the right track, I'm wrong, or at the very least help me find the missing pieces,' he says.

(Lasica, 2001b)

Such acknowledgement of the construction of the news text is less likely in modern print news, and arises not just from the different relation with the reader, discussed in section 4 above, but also from a wholesale epistemological shift. The weblog news text is provisional, it does not totalise the event but points to it, it has a dialogic element, it is less formal. In all these respects, it exists not just on the edge of the news institution, but on the edge of its form of knowledge. As Branscum's enthusiasm suggests, it is also a reaction against that form of knowledge.

The *Guardian* weblog participates in this attitude to an extent. 'What the reader wants', a key element of news discourse's displacement of responsibility for the way the text is written (chapter four), makes less sense here, as the weblog is characterised by its eclecticism. As 'the reader' fragments into readers who can choose what links to follow, this idealised image becomes less of a justification for news style, and opens up a range of ways of writing. Moreover, the way that the

news is told in the texts it links to is clearly one of the weblog's criteria to select 'the most satisfactory and noteworthy journalism on the net' ('Guardian Unlimited's New Weblog', 2000). Many of the linked pages are interpretative articles or columns, where the overt subjectivity of the text places its choice of language in the foreground. However, the 'standfirsts' or introductory commentary in the *Guardian* weblog have none of Gillmor's metatextuality or any foregrounding of the process of writing. In this key dimension of language use, news style's grasp upon the weblog is still strong.

8. Conclusion

The central point that emerges from this afterword on weblogs and the wider developments in online journalism is that alternatives to the stance of the modern reporter are emerging at the heart of news practices and institutions. News journalism has difficulty in imagining the news outside modern news style's claims to be real and authoritative and hence, in Carey's words, alternatives are attacked as if they entail an abandonment of the craft. The weblog's different treatment of source texts, its different relation to readers, the weaker demand for immediacy, the redefinition of authoritativeness as breadth of knowledge and the return, to an extent, of the premodern emphasis (as detailed in chapter three) on the writing of the news text as central to its value combine to provide examples of way that journalists are learning to think outside the box of modern news style.

This is not to put forward an argument that an opening of stylistic options is the prime driver of change in the media nor that the news will shift wholesale to the model of the weblog. The picture is of course more complex. There are economic imperatives to change, driving news corporations such as Trinity Mirror or Scotsman Publications to push into consumer and community information provision. National and international news is so easily sourced from news agencies on the Internet that each news title needs to do something else with its journalism in order to gain online readers. There will be a range of different responses to the online environment from different media institutions. Moreover, readership research seems to suggest that the growth of online news is not replacing other news media, but complementing them (e.g. Perry, 1999). Searls similarly predicts an 'and' logic, not an 'either/or' logic, by

which weblogs and similar forms will inform 'old media' (op.cit.). As I argue above, the logic of online techniques such as hyperlinking pushes outwards towards multiplicity rather than to monovalency.

Online journalism will entail its own limits and problems—the illusion of comprehensive knowledge is one—but the form is at least a more communicatively complex phenomenon than modern news. The emphasis upon breadth of knowledge in forms such as the weblog and their 'any-to-any' communicative potential make the links between elements a central aspect of the skill of the online journalist. The *Guardian's* weblog does not tell the news as much as allow elements from nearly 100 media sites and a range of governmental and non-governmental sites to be read together. Its act of collecting 'noteworthy reads online' does not make any grand claims for the knowledge of the journalists who put it together, but speaks instead of discernment and the ability to locate needles in the haystack of the Internet. This seems to me much more a journalism of linking than of pinning things down, and fits into a model of knowledge as a process rather than a product. Readers are set along paths of exploration rather than given nuggets of information. It is an open rather than a closed text, in Eco's terms (quoted in McQuail, 1994, p.239). In these emergent characteristics, the weblog and similar online news developments provide space for optimism if not conclusions about the future of news journalism. The chance to renegotiate aspects of the practice is itself important. As the *Guardian* weblog's senior staff member Christian Alden writes:

If we're thinking about where we ought to be going as journalists, about what duties we have to our audience, what our news values are, what formats would best fit those relationships and those values, then we're better journalists. Even if they end up being a footnote in journalistic history, I think weblogs are a valuable step on that road.

(Alden, 2001)

This study has envisaged the challenge for journalism as focused to an extent upon reinterpreting the communicative ethos of news discourse. In the commitment of journalists such as Alden and other 'news bloggers' to question relationships with the audience, news values and formats, there is already a reaching beyond the craft—and

not an abandoning of it—whatever styles of journalism and formats become mostly fully absorbed into the dominant in the early years of the twenty-first century.

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Appendix B: Press releases on the consumer White Paper W1

22 July 1999

A FAIR DEAL FOR CONSUMERS, A FAIR DEAL FOR BUSINESS

Stephen Byers, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, today put consumers centre stage, with the publication of the Government's White Paper "Modern Markets: Confident Consumers". It sets out a range of initiatives to challenge high prices, improve customer service, provide better advice and stamp out cheats who continually defraud consumers.

The White Paper recognises for the first time that confident, demanding consumers are good for business: promoting innovation, stimulating better value, resulting in better products at lower prices.

Proposals in the White Paper include:

a hallmark for consumers to identify at a glance those companies that have signed up to a codes of practice which guarantees high standards of customer service, including proper redress when things go wrong, and which have received the Office of Fair Trading's (OFT's) Seal of Approval. This will help customers confused by the number codes that currently exist, many of which are little more than marketing devices;

a digital hallmark for Internet traders who abide by codes guaranteeing security of payment and privacy of information to enable customers to shop on the net with confidence;

the publication of international price comparisons. Early in 2000 we will publish the results of a survey of some 100 products in the UK, France, Germany and the US. The Secretary of State will use his powers to ask the Office of Fair Trading to investigate prices;

new powers for trading standards officers and the OFT to stop traders defrauding the public;

new powers for the courts to ban from trading those who continually cheat consumers;

a speedy procedure to introduce secondary legislation to outlaw new scams;

the development of a new advice network, building on existing advice agencies, to give people easier access to high quality advice;

a consumer gateway on the Internet and a trial local consumer helpline which will direct people to the best sources of advice ;

new measures to ensure information is accurate, comprehensive and easy to understand, including clearer prices and tougher controls on misdescriptions of services;

a rolling review of all consumer protection legislation, starting with weights and measures law, to see whether it is still effective in meeting the needs of consumers or whether it has become a burden on business with no apparent benefit;

the relaunch of the National Consumer Council as a dynamic and effective voice of consumers;

a full review by the Director General of Fair Trading of his consumer protection functions.

Stephen Byers said:

"We need to recognise that many people feel they are living in "rip off" Britain. Paying high prices for shoddy goods, with cheats being allowed to prosper and move with ease from one scam to another.

For too long the attitude in Britain has been that things could be worse rather than things should be better. The reality is that a stiff upper lip is not good for upgrading our economy or improving the position of consumers.

"We don't want to create an army of Victor Mildrews but we do need more confident and informed consumers.

"These proposals put the consumer centre stage. We will tackle the issues that frustrate so many people: how to choose a plumber that won't rip you off and where to go for advice when things go wrong. Our plans for a new consumer hallmark and a trial consumer helpline will deal with this. I am also proposing new legislation to take tough action against fraudsters and powers to deal with new scams quickly.

"We can all understand why rice costs less in China than Chingford. But why do trainers cost less in New York than Newcastle, or a CD less in Birmingham, Alabama than Birmingham in the West Midlands. Our survey of international prices will reveal these differences and action will be taken

"In all the White Paper contains some 70 measures on top of the powers we have already given to the Office of Fair Trading to tackle anti-competitive behaviour. A fair deal for the consumer and creating a successful economy go hand in hand. Confident, informed and assertive consumers will be a key lever to improving the competitive position of business."

The White Paper was produced in close consultation with consumer organisations, business and local authorities. Key to the success of the strategy outlined in the White Paper is a close working partnership with these bodies.

Two of the White Paper's proposals were acted on today:

regulations laid before Parliament today, will give more organisations the power to take action against unfair terms in standard consumer contracts. Trading standards authorities, the Consumers' Association, the industry regulators for gas, electricity, water, telecommunications and rail and the Data Protection Registrar, as well as the Office of Fair Trading will all be given the new powers.

the new Consumer Gateway also went live today. Located at <http://www.consumer.gov.uk>, it will steer people to consumer information on the Internet.

In addition the Competition Commission is already investigating the price of cars and the policies of supermarkets.

Notes to Editors

1. Copies of "Modern Markets: Confident Consumers" are

available from the Stationery Office. It can also be found on the DTI website at: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/consumer/whitepaper>

2. Comments on the White Paper should be sent to:
Consumer Affairs Directorate

Department of Trade and Industry
Room 416
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

email: white.paper@cacp.dti.gov.uk

W2

22 July 1999

BYERS GIVES GO AHEAD FOR FULL INTERNATIONAL PRICES SURVEY

Stephen Byers, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, today announced plans for a International Price Comparison survey following the completion of the Department's pilot survey which was used to establish a robust and systematic approach. The full research, which will be published in January 2000, will compare the prices of some 100 or so products across four countries: the UK, France, Germany and the US.

The research will:

provide information on 80 to 100 goods. The precise products are still to be finalised with the successful contractor but a draft list is attached. It is based on information from the Family Expenditure Survey and covers those items on which consumers spend a significant amount of money.

cover branded and non-branded goods;

compare prices in Britain, France, Germany and the US.

The work was ordered by Stephen Byers following concerns that the British shopper could be paying more for goods than consumers in other countries. The initial pilot, which was commissioned on 10 March, was not designed to produce robust information about prices, rather to establish a method as is usual in studies of this kind. In keeping with other information, the pilot does suggest that the full study is

likely to show a good deal of price variation internationally.

Stephen Byers said:

"There has been much speculation that consumers in Britain are paying higher prices for everyday items than consumers in other countries. I want to establish the facts and take action if it is proved to be the case.

"These data will be used to inform consumers and the Office of Fair Trading. As Secretary of State for Trade and Industry I have the power to refer prices in a particular sector to the Director General of the OFT. I will use that power if the survey suggests that the British consumer is paying too much."

The pilot survey collected prices on a small selection of items, in a variety of outlets from two cities in each country: London, Bristol, Paris, Lyon, Hamburg, Bremen, Chicago and Dallas. It was deliberately designed to tease out the potential problems in collecting such data. In particular statisticians were looking for feedback on the field staff's ability to:

understand item specification;

find suitable outlets;

locate the right item and choose substitute items where necessary.

The pilot collected data on leisure goods, women's clothing and food collecting information from between 10 and 25 sample points.

Stephen Byers commented:

"The pilot survey was designed to identify all the problems with collecting data across four countries. We have a responsibility as the department representing consumers and businesses to ensure that our information is robust and accurate and that is why we will now undertake a full survey. If I suspect that any of the results reflect anti-competitive behaviour of detriment to our consumers, I shall not hesitate to refer the matter to the DGFT. I look forward to receiving the results of the first full survey."

Notes to Editors

1. Copies of the report on the pilot study and of the Notice sent to the ECOJ are available from DTI Press Office.
2. The Notice appeared in the EC's Official Journal on 19 July 1999, ref 99/S 138-101883/EN. The commissioning process will have to comply with EC procurement regulations, and we are therefore unable to contract the research until 14 October 1999. Results will be made available at the end of January 2000.
3. The pilot study was designed to highlight the methodological and practical difficulties inherent in an exercise of this nature. It was not designed to produce price comparisons.
4. Under section 13 of the Competition Act 1980 the Secretary of State can direct the Director General of Fair Trading to investigate prices specified by the SoS. These must be prices that are of major public concern having regard to whether the

goods or services are of general economic importance or whether consumers are significantly affected by the price. The DGFT's report has to be published. The Competition Act 1980 gives the SoS no powers to act on the DGFT's findings.

Draft list of items for collection in a comparison of international prices.

Based on data from the Family Expenditure Survey July 1997-June 1998

FES category	Suggested item for collection
Food	
Fresh milk	Fresh milk UHT milk
Fresh fruit	Fresh loose apples Fresh loose oranges
Fresh vegetables and salad	Fresh loose tomatoes Fresh loose carrots
Poultry (uncooked)	Whole frozen chicken Boneless fresh chicken breasts
Bread	White loaf Bread rolls
Sweets and chocolates	Chocolate bar Chewing gum
Cakes, buns, currant bread, fruit pies, pastries and scones etc.	Fruit pie/tart Croissants

Cold meats, ready to eat meats	Garlic sausage
Cheese	Edam
Beef and veal (uncooked)	Steak
Pickles, sauces, flavourings, colourings etc.	Mayonnaise
Biscuits, shortbread, wafers, chocolate biscuits etc.	Choc chip cookies
Fruit juices, squashes	Orange juice
Fizzy drinks	Lemonade
Yoghurt and milk based desserts	Fruit yogurt
Potato crisps and savoury snacks	Potato crisps
Breakfast cereals	Cornflakes
Bacon and ham (uncooked)	Ham joint
Fish (uncooked) and shellfish	Trout
Meat - ready meals	Frozen lasagne
Pizzas, quiches, vegetarian pies	Frozen pizza
Potatoes	Fresh loose potatoes
Pork (uncooked)	Pork chops
Coffee	Espresso ground coffee

Clothing

Women's outerwear	T-shirt
	Blouse
	Skirt
	Trousers
Men's outerwear	Jeans
	T-shirt
	Shirt
Women's footwear	Court shoes
Women's underwear and hoisery	Tights
Men's footwear	Boots
Girls' outerwear	Dress

Children's footwear	Trainers
Boys' outerwear	Track suit
Babies outerwear	Babygro
Household	
Furniture	Single bed
	Kitchen chair
	Table lamp
Soft floor coverings, carpets, mats	Doormat
	Wool carpet (per sq metre)
Major electrical appliances eg cookers, fridges, vacuum cleaners, showers etc.	Cooker
	Fridge
Fancy decorative goods, mirrors	Mirror
Curtains, cushions, towels etc.	Towel (per sq metre)
Paint, wallpaper, plaster, wood	Paint
Doors, electrical and other fittings	Light bulb
Detergents, washing-up liquid, washing powder	Washing powder
Disinfectants, polishes, other cleaning materials	Bleach
Kitchen equipment, tableware and utensils	Kitchen scales
China, glassware (not mirrors), pottery, cutlery, silverware, thermometers, clocks	Dinner plate
Small electrical equipment eg hair dryers, calculators, shavers, irons	Clock radio
Washing machines, spin dryers	Washing machine
Other household hardware and	

appliances	Electric drill
Bedspreads, blankets, duvets, pillows, sheets (excluding beds and mattresses)	Fitted cotton sheet
Leisure	
Newspapers	Sunday broadsheet
	Daily tabloid
Horticultural goods, plants and flowers	Trowel
	Packet flower seeds
Toys and hobbies	Pre-recorded video
	Hammer
Greetings cards ,stationery and paper goods	Birthday card
	Packet envelopes
Pet food	Dog food
Personal computers, printers, calculators	Printer
Books, maps, diaries	Road atlas
Photography and camcorders	35mm camera film
Records, CD's, audio cassettes - hire and purchase	CD (specified)
Magazines and periodicals	Women's magazine
Sports and camping equipment	Tennis racquet
Audio equipment, CD players	Personal stereo
Personal goods	
Cosmetics and related accessories - after shave, sun lotion etc.	Sun lotion
	Perfume
Toiletries - cotton wool, toothpaste,	

tissues, shaving soap etc	Soap
Personal effects - jewellery, watches, personal silverware etc.	Wristwatch
Hair products - shampoo, colour rinses.	Shampoo
Toilet paper	Toilet paper
Baby toiletries and disposables	Disposable nappies

Services

Cinema admissions	Cinema ticket
Hire of self-drive cars and vans	One week's car hire

W3

22 July 1999

BRIDGEMAN WELCOMES NEW FOCUS ON CONSUMERS

Far-reaching plans for empowering and protecting consumers are good news and long awaited, John Bridgeman, Director General of Fair Trading, said today.

He and his predecessors at the OFT have lobbied for a number of years for reform of inadequate consumer law and for more effective powers for the OFT - the Government department with responsibility for safeguarding consumer interests.

Following the publication of the Department of Trade and Industry's Consumer White Paper, Mr Bridgeman said:

The Government's stated aim of putting consumers at the heart of policy making is an important milestone. Tough new competition regulation from next year, coupled with a commitment to sharpen up consumer law, will change significantly the OFT's ability to act in the consumer's interest.

'As the Government body responsible for enforcing much of current consumer protection law, we have long and frustrating experience of trying to use it effectively. It has often seemed as though the law was designed to protect disreputable and dishonest traders rather than their victims.

The Government's commitment to ensuring fair play for consumers is good news. I hope that we shall see some real changes as soon as possible.

'Consumer complaints are now running at 900,000 a year and these are the tip of the iceberg ' I believe that tens of millions of transactions for goods or services cause problems for consumers. Rightly, UK consumers expect better service and better quality and that demand is going to get stronger.

I am sure that good businesses are going to welcome the proposals to strengthen industry codes of practice. Increased powers and resources will enable the OFT to become much more involved in the development of these codes. And OFT branding will help consumers to identify reliable traders. The White Paper outlines core principles for codes and we will develop these in partnership with business and consumer bodies.

Proposals to streamline the law dealing with rogue traders are especially welcome and long overdue. New powers to allow courts to ban traders with a history of failing to meet their legal obligations will help to ensure that the most vulnerable consumers are protected. I particularly welcome plans to extend direct enforcement powers to trading standards authorities. Their prompt action will help to make this a real deterrent.

Reputable businesses whose sales can be damaged by the activities of rogues will benefit from these reforms. Furthermore, higher standards of consumer care are also going to boost spending by the millions of visitors who come to the UK every year.

I am also pleased that local authority trading standards officers, statutory regulators and consumer bodies are to be granted new powers to act against unfair consumer contracts. In the four years that the OFT has been involved with this work we have taken

action to remove or change more than 2000 unfair contract terms. The unfair contract terms regulations very quickly became one of the busiest and most effective areas of consumer protection for the OFT and they have even more potential.

'Consumer credit is also an important area and the opportunity to review how it is regulated is welcome. On average 20,000 new licences are issued every year. Last year more than 750 licence applications were either withdrawn or refused after challenges by the OFT. It is essential that this market is regulated efficiently and effectively.

'A number of the White Paper's proposals impact on the work and structure of the OFT and we will be looking closely at what resources will be needed to carry out our enhanced role.'

The White Paper's proposals for the OFT include:

- * Develop outline core principles for effective codes of practice; approve codes; promote and publicise codes, provide a seal of approval (chapter 4)
- * Take part in a review of the Consumer Credit Act and the consumer credit licensing system administered by the OFT (6.13)
- * Streamlined powers to take rogue traders to court (7)
- * Take part in a high level Enforcement Forum (7.24)

The OFT publishes a wide range of consumer leaflets which are available free from: OFT, PO Box 366, Hayes UB3 1XB

NEW - from 1 MARCH 2000

The UK will adopt tough, new competition law

Competition Act Information Line

0171 211 8989

Cartels Task Force

0171 211 8888

Appendix C: Excerpts from Hansard

22 Jul 1999 : Column 1342

Consumer White Paper

1.15 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Stephen Byers): Madam Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the White Paper published today to promote the interests of consumers. The White Paper forms a key part of our programme to support competition, innovation and enterprise.

Far too many people feel that they live in rip-off Britain, where they pay high prices compared to other countries, where cheats are allowed to prosper and move from one scam to another with ease, and where there are more shoddy goods than high-quality products.

For too long, the attitude in Britain has been that things could be worse, rather than that things should be better. We do not want to create an army of Victor Meldrews, but we do need confident and informed consumers. That is why the Government are publishing a comprehensive consumer strategy today.

Consumers who are knowledgeable and demanding get a good deal. They also promote innovation and improve the competitive position of business, which in turn means better products and keener prices for consumers. The White Paper will create a virtuous circle between knowledgeable consumers and business performance. It will do that in four ways.

First, the Government will work with business and consumer groups to introduce codes of practice that actually mean something, instead of giving false reassurance to consumers. Codes already pepper the Yellow Pages, but many are little more than marketing devices, offering no safeguards to customers.

The White Paper therefore proposes to introduce legislation to give the Office of Fair Trading powers to approve codes of practice that guarantee high standards of customer service, including proper redress if things should go wrong. That approval will not be a one-off. The Office of Fair Trading will withdraw its approval if the code no longer meets these principles. The OFT's seal of approval will provide at-a-glance assurance for the consumer.

We will also develop an e-commerce code, with industry and consumer groups, to be monitored by an independent body. As purchasing over the internet expands, it is vital that people feel that they have security when they make purchases. That is why we will introduce an e-hallmark, which will provide safeguards for the purchaser.

Secondly, we want to strengthen the role of those who protect the public against those who continually cheat consumers. The current law is ineffective. It offers no deterrent to the determined cheat, the perpetual scam merchant, and the exploiter of the weak and vulnerable, and no deterrent against the one-day sale in a hotel that is simply a rip-off, or the car repairer who fails to deliver and threatens those who complain. As constituency Members of Parliament, we all know of many other examples that have been drawn to our attention.

The traders often disappear before action can be taken, then reappear elsewhere to conduct themselves in exactly the same way. The White Paper therefore proposes stronger action against such fraudsters. I want the OFT and trading standards officers in local authorities to have

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powers to seek injunctions to stop traders carrying out specified practices, and to give the courts the power to ban them from all trading. Cheats who continually rip off their customers should be treated in this tough and responsible way.

We will consider the imposition of criminal sanctions where appropriate. We must also be able to respond quickly to new scams that might develop. We therefore propose a power to make orders by secondary legislation, which will specify that certain practices that have been shown to be harmful should be made illegal.

The third key proposal in the White Paper is better access to advice. People need quick, accurate answers to consumer problems. We will promote the development of a new advice network, building on the existing agencies. People will be able to see easily where they can get good-quality advice. We will also set up a new telephone helpline. Today, I have launched a new consumer gateway on the internet, to provide easy access to consumer advice and information.

Fourthly, we will improve research on consumer issues, so that our policies are based on sound evidence. Many feel that they are paying higher prices for everyday items than people in other countries. We can all understand why rice costs less in China than in Chingford, but why do trainers cost less in New York than in Newcastle, or a CD less in Washington than in Winsford?

I have, therefore, launched a full survey of international price comparisons. That will compare the prices of some 100 products across four countries--the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the United States. I already have powers to refer prices in a particular sector to the Director General of Fair Trading, and I will use those if the survey shows that the British consumer is being overcharged.

The White Paper contains some 70 measures, which cover a whole range of issues. We will make prices clearer to customers; consult on plans for tougher controls on misdescription of services; make sure that a pint of beer is a pint of beer; and make it easier for people to spot if the mileage reading on a car has been fiddled. We will also support and improve enforcement agencies so that they are better able to meet the expectations of consumers and business.

We do not want to distract business from its focus on serving its customers. We will in addition, therefore, begin a programme of reviewing all consumer protection legislation to find out whether it is still effective in meeting the needs of consumers, or whether it has simply become a burden on business with no apparent benefit to the consumer. To start the review, I have today published a consultation document on the law covering weights and measures.

The programme in the White Paper is ambitious. It reinforces our commitment to modern, open markets. It works with the grain of the knowledge economy. It promotes stronger business performance as well as a better deal for consumers. It rejects endless regulation as the saviour of the consumer in favour of competition, information and effective sanctions against rogue traders. It is forward looking and sets a framework for the future. It charts a new

way forward in which consumers and business serve each other's interests--benefiting us all through quality products and improved services.

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A fair deal for all our people--that is the vision of this White Paper, and I commend it to the House.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I thank the Secretary of State for making the documentation available to me just over an hour ago; I am most grateful.

There is much that we can welcome in the White Paper because it gives the consumer a fair deal. In particular, we welcome the fact that research into identifying retail price differentials between the United States, Germany, France and the United Kingdom will be improved. It is important that we identify exactly how the pricing structure is achieved before there is any hasty action to name and shame. For example, the strength of the pound, employment costs, land prices and so on will have a different impact in different countries. Therefore we welcome the Government's initiative in that area.

The Secretary of State mentioned enforcement and, in particular, the Office of Fair Trading and trading standards officers, but he did not mention resources. Given existing legislation, never mind any additions that he may intend to make, it is clear that resources, particularly in trading standards departments, are extremely important. It would be helpful if he would say how much new money will be put into backing the White Paper, particularly for trading standards officers.

To give just one example, since the Government took office, trading standards officers have been charged with the task of identifying the GM content of processed foods. The technology developed in the past few years to carry out such tests is still extremely expensive and trading standards officers do not have the resources to carry out that task. We are looking to the Government to endorse the proposals in the White Paper with detail on how they intend to resource the promises.

The Secretary of State's decision to review all consumer legislation is welcome, as long as no additional burden is placed on business. It is not acceptable

simply to consider the legislation with a view to adding to the unnecessary burdens on businesses. He says that he does not want us to be a nation of Victor Meldrews; I say to him, "I don't believe it!" because the hallmark of the Government is their introduction of ill-thought-through legislation and their subsequent reliance on endless regulations, which are a burden and a brake on enterprise and on business.

Consumers have more spending power today than ever before, and we support any initiatives to give them best value and to ensure that they are well informed, but may I ask the Secretary of State about a particular part of his statement? He said that the Government have been able to respond quickly to new scams, which is good, and that they therefore propose to introduce a power to make orders by secondary legislation, specifying that certain practices that have been shown to be harmful should be made illegal. Will his suggestion lead to the creation of a criminal offence? If so, is secondary legislation the appropriate means for dealing with such an offence? I should be grateful if he identified in more detail what he means by practices that have been shown to be harmful and exactly how the law will follow his suggestion through to ensure that such practices do not occur.

The Secretary of State also mentioned the important matter of electronic commerce, which is a growing area for consumers and something that we welcome. It will

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create a lot of changes. He is, of course, aware that there is a global marketplace; people are already buying across national borders. He mentioned an e-hallmark to cover goods sold through electronic commerce. How will that work? Will it apply to goods sold from a base in the United Kingdom? Is he seeking EU standards? How will the e-hallmark work in respect of people who make electronic purchases beyond the shores of the United Kingdom, particularly from the EU and further afield? We should be grateful for more detail on that.

Bearing in mind that this point has been flagged up in the press, so one must assume that it is true, can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that he intends to release the draft e-commerce Bill in the next 24 hours? Can he also confirm that no statutory licensing provisions will appear in it? We welcome his reference to weights and measures, but the Government failed to push in Europe for an additional moratorium for market traders. They are concerned because the regulations will change at the turn of the year, and traders in loose goods will be required to label goods in metric and imperial weights. Why

did not the Government press for the derogation to be extended for another 10 years? This matter will cause those traders and their consumers a great deal of concern.

I must pick the Secretary of State up on one point. At the beginning of his statement, he said that there are more shoddy goods than high-quality products. We want the scams to end, and we want people who produce defective goods and services to be brought to book so that consumers are protected from them, but I caution him: that sort of language talks down the majority of traders and the bulk of the goods in this country. He needs to strike a balance. I shall leave him with a quote from John Ruskin, who died in 1900—the turn of the century. He said:

"It is not cheaper things we want to possess but expensive things that cost less."

Most consumers would agree with that; it is nothing new. If the White Paper can achieve that, it will have the support of Conservative Members.

Mr. Byers: I am grateful for the support that has been offered by the Opposition to many points in the White Paper. I hope that it is one of those sectors where, in a spirit of partnership, the House can go with the grain of what we seek to achieve. We will wish to pursue the issue in that way.

The hon. Lady raised a number of questions. On retail prices, clearly, a range of issues needs to be taken into account in addressing why products cost more in one country than in another. It is dangerous to look at the matter in a superficial, headline way. We need to get below the figures and to find out exactly what makes them up; I am very keen that we should do so. We should expose all the arguments, even if some may be more difficult to address than others.

With regard to legislation and burdens on business, I hope that, when the hon. Lady has had the chance to look at our document on weights and measures, she will get a clear feel for the direction in which we want to go, which is very much about reviewing the current position.

Most businesses are concerned about the mass of detailed regulations that come from the weights and measures legislation. We are considering ways in which to withdraw some of them to make life much easier

for business. That will not compromise the position of consumers, who will still have protection, but it will make life much easier for businesses.

On e-commerce and buying through the internet, in international transactions, there is a real issue about where the contract is actually made and about which legislation would apply if there were a dispute after a contract was not complied with. In the White Paper, we say that we will seek agreement with the company or organisation that is selling through the internet. If it agrees to meet certain standards in complying with our consumer law on guarantees of quality of product, delivery and so on, we will give it our e-hallmark. If businesses do not agree to that, they will not receive the hallmark. That will be a simple way in which consumers can see whether the person with whom they are dealing, whether based in the UK, continental Europe, America or elsewhere, is meeting those standards. It is also an effective way in which businesses can comply with the standards. The pay-off for them is that, on their website, they will be able to demonstrate the e-hallmark to show the consumer that they have guaranteed those standards.

We hope to publish the e-commerce Bill in draft tomorrow. The hon. Lady needs to wait until then to see the detail, although she may have a good idea of what might be included in it.

We need to be able to move quickly on new scams. It is a dramatically fast-moving area: new scams are developing almost daily. We may find that, if we try to put something in stone today, we shall be out of touch by tomorrow, so we need some flexibility, although I take the point that criminal sanctions are a significant step. I said in the statement that we were considering criminal sanctions in certain sectors. We will consult fully before we embark on that road.

The hon. Lady makes an important point on enforcement. If we are to ensure that, day to day, enforcement is effective, we will need to provide trading standard officers with the means to deliver on the ground. Because of the priority that we attach to the White Paper and to consumers, whom we now want to bring centre stage, I will devote from my Department--redirecting resources that are earmarked within the budget to go elsewhere--an extra £30 million to deliver on the White Paper proposals.

Appendix D: Sussex Police Press Releases

S1



HASTINGS MISSING GIRLS

Police are concerned for the safety of two 10-year-old year old school girls who failed to arrive at their Hastings School yesterday morning.

At 0830 yesterday [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] set off together for a 10 minute walk from the Bohemia area of Hastings to Christ Church School, Woodland Vale Road.

When [REDACTED] parents arrived at the school in the afternoon to pick her up, it was discovered that she had not attended. Neither girl has been missing before.

Police are making house to house enquiries, are contacting their friends, and last night searched the route to school with a police dog and specialist search teams. Special Constables are involved. Police have contacted bus depots and taxis.

Photocopies of pictures of the girls are available at Hastings police station.

The girls are described as:

[REDACTED] brown shoulder length hair, blue Christ Church school jumper, black trousers, black puffer jacket with fur collar

[REDACTED] short blonde hair, Christ Church school jumper, grey skirt, orange jacket with Spice Fever on it.

Police are appealing for people who may have seen them to phone Hastings Police Station on 01424 425000.

PRESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE

Malling House Church Lane Lewes East Sussex BN7 2D2 Telephone (01273) 475432 Direct Line (01237) 404175 Fax (01273) 404280

LEASER NEWS

SEARCH CONTINUES FOR TWO MISSING HASTINGS GIRLS

The search for missing 10 year olds [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] continues this afternoon, almost 24 hours after they were first reported missing.

Police were contacted by Mrs [REDACTED] at 5.30pm on Tuesday, January 19 after she established her daughter [REDACTED] along with her friend [REDACTED] had not been at school.

Det Supt Jeremy Paine, who is leading the investigation, said: "All the indications from their schoolfriends are that they had not been at school during the day.

"We have a number of unconfirmed sightings of the two girls in the St Leonards on Sea area after school finished.

"We also have had, as a result of the earlier publicity, calls from members of the public, who believe they have seen the two girls having heard the descriptions.

"We are searching the areas of the unconfirmed sightings which include open land in the Upper Maze Hill, St Leonards area and a number of buildings that have been suggested as 'hidey-holes'.

"We would appeal for anybody who sees the girls or knows where they might be to ring us on Hastings 01424 456013."

[REDACTED] has short blonde hair and blue eyes. She's 4ft 5ins and a slim build. She was wearing her blue Christ Church School jumper, plus a grey skirt and orange jacket with Spice Fever on the back.

[REDACTED] is 4ft, medium built with shoulder length brown hair. She was also wearing a blue school jumper plus black trousers and a black 'puffa' jackets with a fur collar.

20.1.99 3pm

PUBLIC URGED TO HELP IN SEARCH FOR MISSING HASTINGS GIRLS

As the search continues for missing Hastings 10 year olds [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], police are asking people in the local area to help by checking their homes and gardens.

Det Supt Jeremy Paine, who is leading the investigation, said: "I would appeal to all residents of Hastings and St Leonards to conduct a personal search of their property, including their homes, gardens, sheds, garages and vehicles, just in case there are signs the children might have been there.

"It is possible, too, they may have taken food or are sleeping rough.

"We have searched, several times, buildings and areas suggested by their friends and are now into speculative searching based on our judgement of where they could be."

It was Tuesday evening that the girls were reported missing from their St Leonards homes.

There have been several reports of sightings of the girls since then, but none have yet been substantiated - there have been a few in St Leonards, but police have not been able to confirm that these were the missing girls.

Det Supt Paine said: "We have also been concentrating some inquiries in the London area, bearing in mind that [REDACTED] grew up in the West Drayton area and also that the place where her mother was cremated is in Ruislip. We are working closely with the police in these areas."

There have also been potential sightings in London and police are checking CCTV film. Late yesterday (Wednesday) there were three separate sightings of two girls in Plumstead - two on a train and one on a bus. These are all being followed up closely.

Supt Paine said: "We would appeal to the public not just in Sussex but in the Metropolitan area as well to be mindful of the descriptions of the two girls.

"A large police contingent is being drafted in from all over the county to help in the search from [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]."

About 100 officers and 100 Army personnel will be helping in the search today.

21.1.99 11am

MISSING HASTINGS GIRLS: PUBLIC URGED TO REPORT NEW SIGHTINGS

Detectives remain hopeful of finding missing St Leonards 10 year olds ██████████ and ██████████ but after three days admit fears are rising that they may have been abducted.

Det Supt Jeremy Paine, who is leading the inquiry, said: "As time goes by, the possibility of the children being alive and well becomes more remote and the possibility that they have been abducted against their will more likely.

"This is a line which we have always been aware of and have worked on in the background; however, I am hopeful that we will find them alive.

"I would still appeal for anyone in Hastings or elsewhere who thinks they have seen the girls to contact us.

"There was one sighting yesterday in Abbey Wood (South London) which sounded hopeful for ██████████ - however the follow-up has not proved fruitful.

"We would renew our appeals for anyone who was in the area of De Cham Road and Woodland Vale Road, between the girls' home addresses and school to contact us if they saw the girls walking in that area or talking to anyone."

The search continues both in the immediate area and further afield in Hastings for potential hideaways.

Det Supt Paine said: "Time is working against us but we will never lose hope."

22.1.99 11am

Press Release

"We have found 2 girls alive and safe in Sussex. A man is in custody. We can't positively confirm their identity, but we are very hopeful that it is [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. In the light of this, the search has been suspended"

● 11.58am 22/01/99

●

FROM 2PM PRESS BRIEFING 22/1

D/Supt Jeremy Paine said: I can confirm that the two girls found in Eastbourne this morning are [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. We are looking after them. They are alive and well although clearly have been through an ordeal. We have reunited them with their parents

A 46-year-old Eastbourne man has been arrested and is in custody at Hastings police station.

We are planning to have a press conference at 4pm with members of the families. This is to be confirmed. Keep in touch.

22/1 2.45pm

Girls found as a result of police enquiries.



HASTINGS KIDNAPPING CHARGES

At 7.45 this evening (23 January) Alan Edward Hopkinson, aged 45, of Flat 124 Kingfisher Drive, Langney, Eastbourne, was charged with ten offences including kidnapping, abduction, false imprisonment and other charges relating to serious assaults.

He remains in custody at Hastings police station and will be appearing at Hastings Magistrates Court on Monday morning (25 January).

23 January 1989

*Editor of Sunday Mirror given guidance
suggested by Chris C. (ie. victims of "ethnic
sexual offences" are entitled to compensation). Took the
hint.*

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