

**BRITISH TELEVISION NEWS IN THE 1990s:  
NEWSWORTHINESS IN A MULTI-ORGANISATIONAL  
AND MULTI-PROGRAMME ENVIRONMENT**

**JACKIE L HARRISON**

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Department of Sociological Studies  
University of Sheffield

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study is concerned with the constituent features of television news in Britain in the 1990s. It examines both the content of television news and production strategies employed by television journalists in the context of the changing structural and cultural relations of British television during the 1980s and 1990s. An underlying theme of this thesis is the important role that television news has to play in relation to citizenship rights and as an important institution of the public sphere in Britain. A process of fragmentation of the television news genre has in recent years, resulted in the evolution of a variety of different news programmes which exhibit different concepts of newsworthiness and public interest journalism. Such fragmentation is challenging long established notions of quality and public interest programming and replacing them with a more populist approach emphasizing entertainment. In addition the ability of television news to play an important role in enabling the public to play an active part in a democracy is being further restricted and undermined in the mid-1990s through the increasing commercialization of broadcasting institutions.

To date analyses of news content and news production have tended to ignore the complexity of the news genre itself, and have assumed that television journalism can be analysed as a unitary practice, neglecting the competitive diversity and dynamic technological change occurring in British broadcasting. However it is a theme of

this thesis that the critical analysis and interpretation of television news remains incomplete without an in-depth study of the multiplicity of news programmes and news organisations which exist in Britain in the 1990s.

This thesis shows, using content analysis and observational analysis, that television news in the 1990s has reached a critical juncture. Key vectors of change, politico-economic (including the new wave of commercialization of television news in the 1990s), technological and transnational influences have strongly affected the broadcasting environment in Britain over the last decade and increased the pressure on news providers. News values are becoming more tied to particular contractual specifications made upon news programmes. Newsworthiness itself is constructed within journalistic professional culture, by the journalist's zone and mode of operation, and is adapted to the designated style of an organisation or programme. The variety and diversity of "mid-ranking stories" and the differences in treatment of "big news stories" by different news programmes - processes which are revealed in the empirical studies in this thesis - illustrate clearly how newsworthiness can be adapted and changed to fit particular programme epistemologies.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

<b>Aston</b>	A superimposed caption on screen indicating someone's name, profession, source of the film, or use of library pictures. The machine is called an Aston machine
<b>GVs</b>	General Views. General film of a building or location, such as the Houses of Parliament, which can be used by the correspondent as a means of linking different component parts of a news story, or when there is no other film available. Often the GVs are used to end a piece. Also such film can be used several times as it does not immediately date. Therefore a correspondent doing a political piece may ask the Video Tape editor to supply some GVs of the Houses of Parliament.
<b>In Vis</b>	In vision - i.e. not "out of vision" - speaking over pictures, usually refers to the presenter
<b>Inset or Still</b>	The still photograph or image which is often placed at the side of the presenter when introducing a news story
<b>Lead-in</b>	Written introduction to a taped report or interview, read by the presenter but usually written by a newsroom journalist
<b>Live Two-Way</b>	When a presenter speaks directly to a reporter "in the field" via a live link
<b>Newsrap</b>	When two or three news packages are shown together, superimposed over the presenter's voice (see Out of Vision and Underlay below).
<b>Out of Vision</b>	BBC term for moving pictures which are superimposed over the presenter's voice, ie is not part of a package or a report. This is usually abbreviated to an "OOV" This is called an "Underlay" or a "Ulay" at ITN.
<b>Package</b>	An all-embracing term for a reporter's report
<b>Peg</b>	When an event has occurred upon which other issues or pre-prepared material can be "hung".

RT	Running Time - the time length of a report
Rushes	Raw, unedited picture material for a report/package
Script	Generic term for almost any news item written for broadcast
Sign-off	Refers to the name, location and organisation "sign-off" made by reporters to round off their reports. For example John Smith, BBC, London.
Track	Refers solely to the spoken commentary part of a report or package
Underlay (Ulay)	ITN term for moving pictures which are superimposed over the presenter's voice, ie is not part of a package or a report. This is called an "Out of Vision" at the BBC or an "OOV".
VT	Video Tape
VTR	Video Tape Recording. The technical term for a report once it has been recorded onto the video tape.
Wires	Generic term for national and international news agency services. The term derives from the time when the information was fed by communication lines (i.e. "wires") into a telex machine or equivalent.

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# INTRODUCTION

In this introduction I outline the key concerns of this thesis. In Section I the macro context within which television news must be analysed is identified and introduced as an underlying theme of this study. The important role television news must play in relationship to citizenship rights and its significance as a major institution of the public sphere are being strongly affected by politic-economic (the new wave of commercialisation of television news in the 1990s), technological and transnational developments. The implications such developments have had for the public sphere, for definitions of public interest and for the role of television news in a democracy are considered.

In Section II I go on to analyse the nature of the television news genre itself, arguing that the developments identified in Section I are resulting in a diversification and fragmentation of the television news genre into a variety of different programmes where each programme is constituted by the selection of a number of news sub-genre. The general notion of genre is analysed and a model of television news in the 1990s is presented.

In Section III I outline the structure and aims of this thesis in more detail. In Part I of the thesis the changing structural and cultural relations of British news during the 1980s and 1990s and the main research paradigms which have been used to address the key themes and issues relating to television news analysis are examined. In Part II a dual methodological approach to the study of television is adopted using both content analysis and newsroom observation of a wide range of different news programmes. In Part III the similarities and differences between the different television news cultures and processes are analysed, showing how journalists share certain extant formulas, practices and normative assumptions in which

newsworthiness is grounded. However, I also illustrate how the variety and diversity of treatment of news stories shows how newsworthiness can be adapted and changed to fit particular programme epistemologies. Part III draws upon all the themes and issues identified in Parts I and II of the thesis to show how news values are becoming more and more tied to particular contractual specifications which may be increasingly undermining the ability of television news to provide citizens with the type of knowledge which allows them to understand public affairs and to act competently in the public sphere.

## I

This thesis is a new approach to the study of terrestrial television newsworthiness in Britain in the 1990s. It takes into account the changing structural and cultural relationships of British television in the 1980s and 1990s. Throughout this study television news is regarded as an important institution of the public sphere, one which has had, and continues to have, a vital role to play in the enhancement of citizens' ability to understand public affairs and to act competently in the public domain. Television news selection, production and content also embody important notions of public interest. These underpin all of the terrestrial news organisations analysed in this thesis and are institutionalised in the national broadcasting regulatory frameworks and legislation.

Television news values are strongly related to the regulatory framework which requires journalists to work to the criterion of impartiality and the notion of "objectivity". The ideal of "objective", fair and balanced reporting underpins the concept of television newsworthiness and incorporates the current view of what is in the public interest in contemporary British television news.



However, in the 1990s the television news genre is diversifying and fragmenting, resulting in the development of a variety of television news programmes. Such diversity in news programming is also leading to a difference in the concepts of newsworthiness and public interest in different television newsrooms and news organisations.

It is apparent that there is already a good deal of change occurring in television news production, selection and output due to a variety of commercial, technological and political pressures exerted on the news providers. Such change is currently manifesting itself in both the format and content of television news output and also the process, rationale and mission of newsrooms and news organisations. Due to fragmentation and diversification of the television news genre different television newsreels are adopting different ways of "knowing" what constitutes television newsworthiness and the public interest (these are referred to as different newsroom epistemologies throughout this thesis).

The key vectors of change which have strongly affected the broadcasting environment in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s are broadly politico-economic (including the new wave of commercialization of television news in the 1990s), technological and transnational. A key concern of this thesis is the implications such developments have had for the public sphere, for definitions of public interest and for the role of television news in a democracy.

The increase in satellite, cable and the introduction of multiplex packages and Channel 5 will lead to a continuing fragmentation of the television news genre and television news audiences in the late 1990s and twenty-first century. Tactics are already being adopted by all television news

providers to maintain audience share and to produce a product which is distinctive from that of the other competitors. There is an increasing tendency by all television news organisations to adopt a wider range of entertainment devices in terms of graphics, newsroom re-design, "star" presenters, a greater range of human interest stories, happy endings and so on to attempt to keep the audience interested which may be at the expense of helping to keep it informed. Programmes which do not succeed in the ratings battle may eventually be dropped completely as the multi-channel environment becomes more and more competitive. Other programmes may follow the precedent set by the British press and differentiate between quality news for an elite audience and tabloid news for the rest.

The use of electronic news gathering (ENG) has increased the pressure upon news-gatherers to obtain live pictures for immediate broadcast. The increasing stress upon immediacy which ENG and satellite technology can facilitate is reducing the tolerance for "old" news and thereby promoting the live and dramatic (exciting news) ahead of the important and significant (more complex and boring news). This can lead to a general reduction in complex content and context in favour of the use of simple visually exciting images and short sound bites (Gitlin, 1991) and relatively little information.

The rise of ownership of personal video-cameras is potentially a positive development which may result in increased citizen activity in the gathering of television news and may increase the potential for citizens to act in the public sphere. For example, the impact of the Rodney King video in the United States was illustrative of how a citizen could contribute in an important way to the knowledge, understanding of his/her fellow citizens as well as to act in a just and helpful manner. At its best a new multi-channel environment may offer a proliferation of local amateur

made videos which contain politically relevant information or provide the opportunity for alternative news programmes such as (*Undercurrents*, Channel 4, 30/4/94). However, in the United States there is already a tendency for video-vigilantes to favour the recording of the salacious and the dramatic ahead of the investigative and political. With the potential of hundreds of new channels being available to take such material it is possible that the lowest common denominator may dominate. Future audiences may simply receive material which compounds prejudice, xenophobia and fear contributing little or nothing to their awareness of their potential to be active citizens pursuing the public good.

The future of the content and format structures of mainstream television news, as well as the importance and significance of broadcast television news itself, are also being challenged by the kind of technological developments which will allow an individual to choose his or her own news stories (the "Daily Me" for example, although changes in the press are a little different from television, see Gilder (1994)). Currently, the television journalists (to differing degrees) define events as important, significant or interesting in their role as the custodians of newsworthiness and in this sense they are also interpreters of the public interest. However, if people were left to choose their own television news agenda from a news menu, atrocities such as the mass genocide in Rwanda may go unnoticed by many more British citizens. The possibility of the masses being well-informed citizens who are competent in the public sphere would be diminished even further as viewers would become atomised individuals, cocooned in their own particular media environment.

The danger of such developments is that the reduction or loss of an informative news programme for the masses on prime-time television

could result in an information poverty for many and exacerbate the inequality in knowledge which already exists amongst the citizens of British society.

As I show in Chapter 7 of this thesis, the BBC and especially ITN are already sensitive to the need for change and diversification of the news product and are creating a range of television news formats. The BBC launched BBC World into Europe in 1995, an under-funded commercial venture which relies on advertising revenue. ITN is very proud of its ability to provide a diverse range of news formats in response to particular commercial specifications. Television news programmes are increasingly having to redefine themselves to have a brand image and ITN is setting the trend. However, concern is already being expressed by media researchers such as Gaber and Barnett (1994) that the need to boost ratings has caused ITN's *News at Ten* to become increasingly "tabloid" (their word) where crime and human interest stories are emphasised and fewer political and foreign stories are carried. The future role and rationale of the BBC as public service broadcaster is being threatened by the current environment of adaptation and change and the values of public service broadcasting which have traditionally underpinned and defined the commercial broadcasting system are also being undermined (Eds. Miller and Norris, (1989); McDonnell, (1991)).

Research has shown that the majority of the public perceive television news as their primary source of information about the world (Gunter et al, 1993), and that television news has an important role to play in informing and enlightening its viewers. I argue later in this thesis that the belief in the possible reformation of a public sphere in which citizens can actively engage in public debate and argument is Utopian when related to terrestrial television news in a British public service broadcasting system

or to commercial news generally. However, television news still has a number of useful roles it could play in the empowerment of citizens in a liberal democracy. The excavation and analysis of the unaccountable areas of public life would enable citizens to understand and perhaps even control events which affect them and to make judgements about the validity and authority of political institutions. Television news is intimately bound up with a society's understanding of the public sphere and citizenship rights and therefore its journalists have a social responsibility to attempt to engage and empower its viewers (see Chapter 1 of this thesis). A particularly important role of television news is the representation of the various minority publics which are emerging due to the fragmentation and diversification of British society. Furthermore, television news journalists have a valuable part to play in interpreting the vast amount of information which is currently permeating all levels of society. Much of this information overload is unintelligible, out of context and irrelevant and the useful and valuable information contained within the information snowstorm may be missed or misinterpreted by the public. The journalist in Britain in the 1990s has a vital role to play in ensuring that it makes attempts to bring into the open and make the public aware of the important issues and events which affect it and by which it can subsequently make judgements.

In many respects this thesis offers both a descriptive-analytic and a normative-analytic account of the current state of television news in Britain in the 1990s. I have adopted such an approach because I feel that we are unsure of what constitutes television news in the current climate and whether the current range of television news programmes is providing the kind of information which is informative and useful.

Existing studies of British television news are becoming dated by the massive changes and developments occurring in television broadcasting. Such changes pose vital questions to practitioners and researchers, but are currently not being examined in any depth even though, as I show in Chapter 2, there are a wide variety of research perspectives and studies into television news and the media generally. Some of the media research studies are important and relevant to this thesis and have made contributions to the basic problem guiding this thesis, namely that of determining the nature of television newsworthiness in the contemporary period. Indeed the broad tradition of enquiry into the role of the mass media in their potential public interest capacity has contributed to one of the key concerns of this thesis which is that the mass media can and should make a contribution to the welfare of a democratic society and therefore that it should be accountable in terms of notions of public information and have a social responsibility.

Consideration of those research studies which have contributed to the analysis of television news by examining its content, its production and its effects have helped to form the theoretical and methodological basis for my own study. Newsworthiness can be examined as a concept relating to the content or output of the television news organisation and of the individual programme. The study of what is broadcast, however, fails to tell us much about the decision-making or causal context of the definition of newsworthiness by journalists. Such studies are often based upon "news factor" research or studies of "bias" in the news. Newsworthiness can be analysed from the production perspective, examining newsroom processes which explain newsworthiness in terms of routine and logistics, but such studies often omit to consider the wider macro influences, such as political economic constraints on the newsroom itself. Production studies are often based on "gatekeeper" theories, the organisational

analysis of television news, or the social context of their strengths and weaknesses. Newsworthiness can also be assessed in relation to the audience's conception of the phenomenon but, to date, this type of analysis has been neglected. Sparkes and Winter (1980) found that although journalistic news values are good predictors of audience interest in news stories they also found that audience members tend to over-estimate their interest in certain subjects, such as politics and foreign news whilst under-estimating their interest in violence. In this thesis I have analysed two of the dimensions of newsworthiness outlined above, I have analysed what is broadcast by the television news programmes, using a content analysis methodology, and examined the newsroom processes using observation and interviews. Reports on these studies form the substance of the two main parts of the thesis (Part II and Part III).

This thesis has also been influenced by a variety of production-oriented analyses which have examined the broad theoretical concerns in the area of media research in general and analysis of television news in particular. Many of these studies have employed Marxist concepts and models, but they have also used insights from semiotics and structuralism. In Chapter 2 I review many of these different approaches which have developed into structuralist studies, political economic studies and "culturalist" studies of the media and are generally concerned with the power of the media.

Through consideration of the variety of research perspectives and studies into television news in particular and the media generally, I have formulated my own particular analytic approach to the study of television newsworthiness in Britain in the 1990s. This thesis considers the question of television newsworthiness within the broad socio-political context within which television news is selected and produced, taking into

account the macro-developments occurring in relation to the new commercialization of the media, technology and transnational influences. The dynamic nature of the television news genre itself is taken into consideration and in recognition of the increasing complexity of the concept of television newsworthiness in Britain in the 1990s this thesis addresses the following five key issues.

i) First, television news has an important role to play in a democracy in relation to its position as one of the major institutions of the public sphere and as an institution which embodies citizenship. The importance of television news has been recognised by successive governments and its role as a business affected with public interest has been grounded in a commitment to careful regulation of the television medium. At its best the notion of public interest tries to capture the essence of what is in the public good or what constitutes good public service. Such aims can be and are reflected in the notion of newsworthiness demonstrated in the output of some television news programmes (particularly those adhering to public service broadcasting principles). Problematically public interest can have elastic and ambiguous meanings and can be stretched by television news programme makers to include varying degrees of entertainment devices and human interest journalism.

ii) Secondly, television news has reached a critical junction in Britain in the 1990s due in large part to the developments in technology, transnational influences and in the politico-economic arena (the new commercialization of television news). These changes and developments are resulting in increasing competition, audience fragmentation and a chase for ratings and are manifest in the content and production (and possibly the effects) of television news.

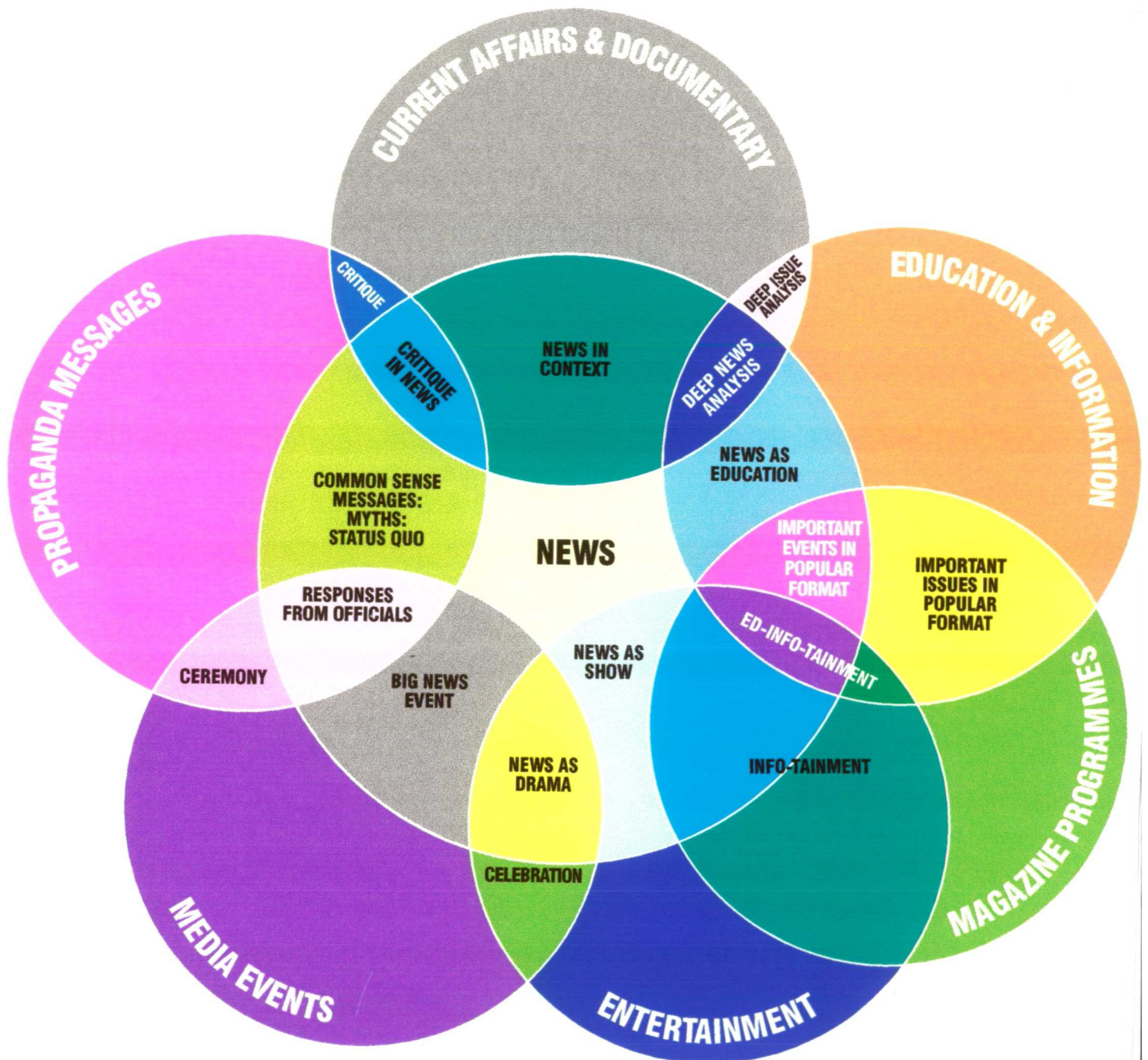


iii) Thirdly, due to the developments described above, the television news genre is diversifying and fragmenting into a variety of different television news programmes. Therefore it is necessary in the 1990s to analyse the concept of newsworthiness in relation to the proliferation of different television news programmes which are mutating and developing within the television news genre.

iv) Fourthly, it is vitally important to attempt to understand the content output and the production processes and dynamics (and ideally the effects such output and production has on the audience) in relation to the constitution of television newsworthiness and public interest journalism in the 1990s. In this study I adopt a two-dimensional approach to the study of television newsworthiness via, i) a detailed analysis of television news output using a content analysis and, ii) a fieldwork study of the production processes and systems of six different television newsrooms and ten different television news programmes.

v) Fifthly, recognition of the changing nature of television news raises questions about how we train our future television journalists. As television news continues to diversify it is arguable that already there is no longer such a thing as unitary television journalism and perhaps in two or three decade's time there will cease to be a common set of television journalistic knowledges. This study highlights the need for a reconsideration of traditional approaches to the study and analysis of television news in particular. It also leads to a reconsideration of the role television news has in a democracy particularly in relation to the informational contribution it can realistically make in the mid-1990s to the well-being of society, as well as to questions of whether its role as an important institution of the public sphere has been irrevocably compromised.

**FIGURE 1: THE TELEVISION NEWS GENRE  
IDEAL TYPE GENERIC MODEL**



Each circle on the model represents a different genre. The whole field is news-relevant, but only the area in the centre of the circle (the core) is “pure” news (E.g. events all news programmes cover, such as election of a new Prime Minister). Any news programme in the 1990s will also contain one or more of the overlap areas within the news circle providing a range of possibilities for innovation and variety. The differences between the overlap and the different number of overlaps included provides the basis for the observable differences between news programmes. Each news programme therefore forms its own sub-genres from the television news genre.

## II

It is clear that the analysis of television newsworthiness in Britain in the 1990s is meaningless unless the proliferation of television news programmes is taken into consideration. Currently there are fourteen different types of television news programme broadcast by British terrestrial weekday television, and these range from *Newsnight* to *Big Breakfast News*. All the different television news programmes studied in this thesis have the word “news” in their title, or a section in their programme called “news”. As such they are considered worthy of analysis in terms of their inclusion of the newsworthy in their broadcasts. Clearly all these programmes have something in common in that they, or their component parts, belong to a specific genre called “news”. Indeed, it is the case that the core communicative features of most television news programmes have a distinctive look and sound. Corner (1995) identifies these distinctive features as (i) studio modes, relating to the presenter, such as use of film, use of stills, graphics, interviews, live two-ways and so on and (ii) location modes relating to the reporter, such as use of filmed sequences, pieces to camera, use of actuality, use of stills, interviews and so on. Such basic units, along with familiar logos, introductory sequences, use of music and recognition of presenters, provide a basic communicative repertoire for television journalism. This communicative repertoire is immediately recognisable and distinct from other television programme forms.

Producing a precise definition of the term “genre” however, is very difficult. Whilst its etymological roots in the Latin word *genus* (kind) suggests that “genre” relate to literary types and could be applied to lyric, tragedy, the novel and the sonnet (Dubrow, 1982), contemporary use of the word “genre” is now also related to “popular” or “formula” writing

and has been used in recent years in the categorisation of film, television and popular fiction.

Such use of the notion of “genre” in relation to popular forms of artistic production is relatively new. In Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s the concept of genre in the cinema began to be developed (Neale, 1980). The assumed excellence of the taste of a few critics and journalists and the established orthodoxy of the theory of film were challenged as was auterism, the dominant critical method for discussing cinema seriously (Perkins, 1972). Critical interest was extended to mainstream commercial films particularly Hollywood cinema. Importantly, the struggle against the aesthetics of taste led to a realisation that any form of artistic production was a rule-bound activity which was embedded in social history and which gave an art form a social grounding.

Although much attention has been paid to the notion of “genre” in relation to popular art forms, genre theory itself has been further complicated by the introduction to Britain of semiotics and structuralism (and the focus on the single individual text, on the general principles of signification or on the politics of signifying).

Use of the notion of “genre” confronts us with a large range of problems, not least exactly which characteristics we take into account when deciding which label to grant to which literary type (Dubrow, 1982). Defining a genre, one from another, can be done by subject matter (what is the literary work about?), through a table of opposites or via analysis of iconography. None of these are enough individually to distinguish one literary form from another. Cawelti (1977) tries to define the characteristics of genres not by the things the literary forms have in common but by the rules of narrative grammar. He attempts to get

beneath the surface of the text to see if there is a common underlying grammar.

Problematically, however definitions of genre (such as sci-fi) can be so broad that they can cover almost everything and in the end be too vague to be of use. A more definite way to attempt to consider genre is to make the definition prescriptive, that is certain elements are identified which must be in the film or book in order for it to fit into a particular category. Such conventions appear to be accepted by audiences who find satisfaction and security in a familiar form. An audience's experience with a particular formula gives it a sense of what to expect in new individual examples. Dubrow (1982) argues that genre functions as a code of behaviour established between the author and reader and a well established genre (such as news) transmits certain cultural attitudes.

Analysis of genre definitions, tend to imply that a single definition will suffice for any one genre. Yet one finds that genre is often not one type but a collection of different types, unity of diversity or diversity in unity. Furthermore, although Cawelti (1977) argues that there is a tendency toward standardization implicit in the economy of modern publishing and film-making this thesis argues that in relation to the television news genre changes can occur over time and the notion of genre can disguise great variance in quality levels.

Television has now eclipsed film as a central mass medium so that it now has genres, soap operas, quiz shows, chat shows, current affairs and documentary, education programmes, magazine programmes, news programmes and so on. This standardisation of television programmes into different genres has meant that standard conventions have been adapted which enable the audience, the programme makers and the

distributors of programmes to identify particular programme characteristics which enable them to recognise and distinguish particular programme types.

In introducing the notion of the “television news genre” into this analysis of television news in the 1990s, I recognise the problems and difficulties I face in trying to define what even constitutes a news genre, let alone identify how particular programmes adapt and change within it. Also due to lack of time and space the discussion of the news genre for the purposes of this thesis must be left to a brief analysis of some of the component parts I have identified and therefore contains all of the weaknesses and inadequacies of many of the attempts to categorise other artistic forms (see Neale 1980; Dubrow 1982). However, I feel that an attempt to define the parameters of my study and analysis of television news is necessary. Such categorisation of the structure of “television news” as a genre is crucial to this thesis as it shows that such communication is not chance but is controlled and constructed and meaning can be derived from analysis of the different news forms which exist. Identification and analysis of a “television news genre” therefore allows a pursuit of the central theme of this thesis, namely that television news is diversifying from a unitary product into different programme-types constituted from a variety of news sub-genres. This implies that a variety of definitions of newsworthiness and public interest journalism now exist in relation to television news.

The definition of “news genre”, is further complicated because the concept of “news” itself is so broad and vague. News is information, the communication of knowledge, tidings or the delivery and reporting of a message. The nature, value, importance and structure of each message can vary greatly and have different meanings to different people. It

follows that news cannot be classified as a single discrete concept as it is apparent that the constituent features of the news message are complex and multifaceted. However, it would still appear, on the face of it, that news programmes can be easily categorised using a variety of devices such as, the studio and location modes identified by Corner (1995) or the time of day the programmes are broadcast, the size or nature of the audience the programmes broadcast to, or whether the programme is aimed at children or adults or at a national or regional audience. I use this categorisation in Chapters 4 and 5 for ease of broad description, but stress that this type of classification alone is not adequate for any meaningful analysis of the concept of the news genre.

Broadcasters do try to classify their programmes in terms of a single genre but again this particular practice is not adequate for any in-depth analysis of television news as I have outlined it is not a realistic notion that all programmes can be described in single genre terms (Dubrow, 1982). It was notable in my newsroom fieldwork that the broadcasters could not agree amongst themselves about what constitutes the news genre.

As Dayan and Katz (1994) point out, researchers have also shown an uncritical tendency to employ categories such as news, documentary, comedy, soap-opera, variety and so on. Very little serious research has been done on the constituent features of any of these genres. Although much attention has been paid to television news for example, little effort has been made to map out a working definition of the news genre and its component parts. Even those researchers such as Williams (1975) and Newcombe (1974) who have attempted to classify television news genres according to a generalisation of what the programmes in each category had in common, still do not attempt to analyse patterns of viewing of

television in terms of individual and discrete programmes falling into a particular genre, but in terms of the whole flow of the programming.

To try to escape from the straight-jacket of any one particular existing definition of television news, or the prevailing tendency to analyse television news as a single entity, I have formulated my own ideal-type model of the news genre (see Figure 1). Each circle on the model represents a different genre. The whole field is news-relevant, but only the area in the centre of the circle (the core) is news. News in the centre would comprise important public events which all news programmes would cover such as the election of a new Prime Minister, the declaration of war by Britain, a major plane crash in Britain, loss of many British lives abroad, some major international events and so on. However, any news programme may also (and in the 1990s will also) contain one or more of the overlap areas within the news circle. Around the core of news, connections with other forms of programming or other programme types or genres provide a range of possibilities for innovation and variety. This variety can be related to the news organisation, the channel, the position of the news programme in the schedule and so on. Thus, the differences between the overlap and the different number of overlaps included provides the basis for the observable differences between news programmes. Each news programme therefore forms its own sub-genres from the news genre (see Figure 1 and pages 20-21 inclusive).



### Note

All the different news programmes can also be influenced by “propaganda” messages (see later for explanation of the notion of “propaganda” used in this model and analysis) from official sources, although the extent to which these are challenged (if at all) varies from programme to programme, and upon whether the news story is domestic or international.

When a media event, such as the VE Day celebrations, or John Smith's funeral occurs, *all* the news programmes will cover the events. When these events are repackaged into a news summary, *after* the events have been covered live, the dimensions of the event which are stressed varies from programme to programme.

Channel Four News at 7pm  
BBC2's Newsnight

**Primary Influences**

News  
Current Affairs/Documentary  
Education and Information  
Entertainment\*

Sub-Genres

News  
Critique in News  
News in Context  
Deep News Analysis  
News at Education  
Important Issues in Popular  
Format  
Ed-info-tainment

Programme Type

Results in story plus analysis  
in one package. News is  
strongly related to  
the importance and  
significance of an event  
or issue

\*Some Entertainment  
influences are creeping into  
the format styles. Usually  
in the form of graphics.

BBC News (Regional and  
National)

One O'clock News, Six  
O'clock News, Nine O'clock  
News^, Look North News,  
Children's Newsround

**Primary Influences**

News  
Education and Information  
Entertainment

Sub-Genres

News  
Deep News Analysis^  
News as Education  
Important Issues in Popular  
Format  
Ed-info-tainment  
Info-tainment  
News as Show  
News as Drama

Programme Type

Often results in two packages  
in a "twin-pack" format.  
A story package and a  
backgrounder. News is  
strongly related to the  
importance and significance  
of an event or issue but with  
some interest added.

ITN's News at Ten  
ITN's 12.30pm News

**Primary Influences**  
News  
Entertainment  
Education and Information

Sub-Genres  
News  
News as Drama  
News as Show  
Info-tainment  
Ed-info-tainment  
Important Events in Popular  
Format  
News as Education

Programme Type  
Results in stories and  
features. News is strongly  
related to how interesting  
and important an event is.

ITN's 5.40pm News,  
GMTV News, Big Breakfast  
News, Calendar News

**Primary Influences**  
News  
Magazine Programmes  
Entertainment

Sub-Genres  
News  
Ed-info-tainment  
News as Show  
News as Drama

Programme Type  
Results in people and  
human interest-centred  
news. Produces hybrid  
news and entertainment  
shows. News is strongly  
related to how interesting  
and entertaining an event is.

Using the ideal type generic model of the television news genre the essential features of the television news genre can be illustrated whereby news may be composed of a variety of constituent parts. It is the presence or absence of aspects of these constituent parts that give news its own unique characteristics, and it is the endless variety of combinations of the constituent parts which gives each news programme its own peculiarity. The analysis of television news in terms of discrete programmes is vital if we are to understand the degree of adaptation, change and diversification that is taking place within the single news genre.

A way to tackle the problem of what constitutes a television news genre is to define news by what it is **not**, to carefully separate it from other genres and types of programming. It is interesting to discover that any attempt to do so serves to illustrate what news actually is. Furthermore, identification of the infiltration of key features of the “not-news” environment into the “news” environment actually goes a long way to explaining the key differences between the different television news programmes.

For example, the news genre would, on the face of it, appear to be distinct from the current affairs genre, as after all current affairs programmes do elaborate at great length and in some depth about one particular issue. However, clear distinctions between news and current affairs programming collapse when certain news programmes are considered. *Newsnight* and to a lesser extent *Channel Four News* deliberately incorporate features of the current affairs or documentary genre. *Newsnight* in particular recruits many of its journalists from current affairs programmes, and the BBC has a policy to provide current affairs type analysis in its news programmes. Both *Newsnight* and *Channel Four*

*News* have fashioned their programmes to include the type of analysis of issues that do not appear in the mainstream news programmes. As such some aspects of the current affairs or documentary traditions can be found in some television news programmes.

News programmes are also different from educational programmes and such a distinction seems obvious if one compares an Open University programme with the *Nine O'clock News*. However, again, some of the features of educational programming can be detected in many television news programmes. The BBC's Charter outlines its purpose to **inform**, **educate** and **entertain** its audience. At their best, current affairs and documentary programmes will intersect or overlap with the education genre, providing a much deeper analysis of issues and events. The best news programmes would also contain an element of this type of practice. However, as I show later in the thesis, the BBC professes to analyse issues, but in reality constraints of time prevent this from taking place in a news programme forum. *Newsnight* has more success as an analytic news programme since it does not have to concentrate on ten or twelve news stories but has the luxury of looking at two or three in some depth. In practice this is obviously the key locale for the BBC news analysis policy.

The magazine, human interest dimension of television news programmes is increasingly being incorporated into most news programmes. Yorkshire Tyne-Tees' news programme, *Calendar News* is overtly hybrid in character, combining "hard" news stories with sofa chats and human interest stories. Whilst I am not claiming that television news is the same as magazine programmes such as *This Morning* or *Good Morning*, undoubtedly many news programmes share some of their format and content characteristics. Other national mainstream news programmes are copying the friendly cosy style of magazine programme presenters, where

the “X” factor has to exist between the presenters and a light-hearted chat and joke is standard practice at key junctures of the programme.

Entertainment programmes such as films or television soaps and dramas manifest obvious differences from the so-called news programmes. However, news programmes increasingly are being forced to compete with entertainment programmes for audiences. As a result some news programmes are consistently incorporating entertainment devices (news as show) into both the format of the programme (such as the *News at Ten* “spaceship” set and other gimmicks) and into the content of the news programmes (such as “...and finally” stories, or stories of a dramatic nature set to music or live pictures (news as drama)). Where entertainment, magazine formats and the education genre overlap, a hybrid concept arises, the so-called “info-tainment” category. A further grouping occurs, according to Tunstall, (1993) where three goals of public service broadcasting merge: He calls this tripartite form “ed-info-tainment”, which comprises goals from three different genres, education, entertainment and information. Such a merging of goals is best seen in programmes such as *That's Life* or the *Antiques Road Show*, but originated in a quasi-news programme called *Tonight* which was invented in 1957 by the BBC and which was one of the organisation’s “flagship” programmes. The *Tonight* programme blurred the traditional distinctions between entertainment, information and even education and through its informal styles of presentation it broke sharply with old BBC traditions (Briggs, 1995). The producer in charge, Donald Baverstock,

'...could see no reason why we couldn't be serious about the state of the British economy.....and in the same programme smile about the hens that were laying bent eggs in Dorset' (Alisdair Milne quoted in Tunstall, 1993:81).

Media events, as defined by Dayan and Katz (1994), are actually beyond newsworthiness in that they bespeak their own importance and value to the nation. Indeed, media events when they occur, can engulf television news resulting in total devotion by the news to a media event, for example, the VE Day celebrations in May 1995. A media event can sometimes start its life as a big news event. For example, the death of Labour Party Leader, John Smith, began as a news event, but his funeral was a media event, requiring blanket coverage. The ending of the siege in Waco, Texas in April 1993, was, as I show in the case study in Chapter 8, a staged media event for the American media, but reported as a big news event in Britain. Television news therefore, may incorporate some types of media events as big news events or conversely the whole news programme itself may simply be engulfed by the media event. When media events overlap with the entertainment genre, the celebratory aspects of the event are stressed. Therefore a lighter human interest and entertainment oriented news programme would concentrate on covering the drama and ceremony of a Royal Wedding encompassing details such as the style of the wedding dress, street parties and celebration. A more serious news programme might examine the same media event from a more symbolic or traditional perspective such as the effect of the marriage on future Constitutional arrangements.

Propaganda news as defined by Chomsky (1992), can be detected most clearly in media reports of US foreign policy. In particular Chomsky's identification of devices of message control such as the demonisation of Saddam Hussein and the scant reporting of events in East Timor have parallels in Britain. Such parallels are: the criticism and attempts at control levelled at the BBC by Margaret Thatcher regarding the reporting of the Falklands War; the scant reporting of events in South America; the consistent representation of Africa as a place of famine and war by the

television news media; or the concentration of the television media on the coverage of the activities of the United Nations forces in former Yugoslavia at the expense of a clearer picture of the situation there. Such tendencies exhibited by the television news media to pursue the lines of coverage outlined above can be interpreted as a type of propaganda (albeit unwitting and non-conspiratorial). Such coverage gives the audience a particular picture of the outside world. As the case study in Chapter 8 shows, the coverage of the international story at Waco was replete with common-sense assumptions and opinions and demonstrated a tendency for all the television news media to follow simplistic and official "lines" when covering international news stories. An obvious danger of Chomsky's Propaganda Model is that it can overstate the case, and I do not wish to imply that the type of "propaganda" news we receive in this country is as constructed or as sinister as the news received in totalitarian states. However, as the case study of the British television news coverage of events at Waco clearly show, over-concentration on official spokespersons and authorities can provide a very one-dimensional picture of complex events.

Furthermore, television news contains many implicit assumptions and messages and particular images of race, sex, violence, marginalised religious groups and industrial relations. Such messages have been well documented by sociologists along with their concern about the constructed nature of the news, where events are defined, reinterpreted and altered as they pass through the news production process. Murdock and Golding (1973) argue, there is a noticeable tendency in the media to appeal to ideas of patriotism and the "national interest", as a way of stressing conformity and isolating outsiders and non-conformists. They also found that British concerns are considered to be more newsworthy and important than events in other countries. Their findings were



confirmed by the case study of the events of Waco (Chapter 8), when the television news coverage strongly pursued the British victims' angle thereby generally missing the opportunity to critically scrutinise the claims of the American authorities.

A stress on patriotism, British concerns and the marginalisation of extremism cannot be described as a conspiracy, or even as a conscious intention of the journalist working in mainstream television news. It must be noted, of course, that news cannot be, nor would we expect it to be, value-free. That those values are of more worth to certain sectors of British society is not generally accepted by journalists who can illustrate many instances where they have exposed corruption or sleaze in high places and given publicity to the plight of many of those who are powerless to speak for themselves. "Propaganda" news therefore, in a democratic country such as Britain is best described in political and ideological terms as an attempt to form (or to form by assuming the existence of) a consensual public opinion on the topics presented.

As I illustrate in Figure 1, "propaganda" news can also overlap with media events. Indeed we often see official spokespersons such as the Prime Minister or President providing a particular line which is then broadcast by the mainstream news. This is then seen as the accepted interpretation of any issue or event. The case study in Chapter 8 shows how the British television news media failed to critique President Clinton's positive endorsement of the use of military weapons against the citizens of the United States. At its best, current affairs or documentary television will critique any such official messages in programmes which provide a more balanced and realistic explanation and interpretation of those same issues and events.

The generic model of television news outlined in Figure 1 illustrates core features of the television news genre and shows how influences from the “not news” environment can act upon and shape the three dimensions of news. First, the news content, second, the production of news and third, the effects (probably) that television news can have on the audience. It also shows how in an era of globalisation, converging technology and commercialisation of television news, the distinction between news and entertainment, news and education and news and fiction is constantly shifting and adapting (Garber, Matlock and Walkowitz, (Eds.), 1993). It is because this ideal-type model of the television news genre can be exemplified in its own particularity by each different television news programme that it has the ability to be flexible and to adapt, modify and mutate. It is the developments resulting from such flexibility and mutation which are of most concern in the current period of change. If such modification of news programmes results in a deterioration of television news quality then it will obviously have very serious implications for the public sphere and for democracy. In the extreme case, if citizens become increasingly ill-informed and unmotivated, or become a passive and atomised audience of a medium that mainly provides trivia and sensationalism, then prejudice and xenophobia will be nourished.

Current developments in the broadcasting industry must therefore be of concern. Technological advances and government policies to deregulate media control, relax ownership rules and encourage competition, obviously have important implications for the future of the quality, content and format structures of television news in this country. Satellite news formats such as Sky News, are more entertainment-based than many of the mainstream terrestrial news programmes and may achieve a competitive edge and instigate a long term change in the format of

television news programmes. Live TV, a new cable channel owned by Mirror Group Newspapers may be setting new standards and expectations with regard to television news. Currently the programme has a “news bunny” who gives the thumbs-up or thumbs-down depending on how good or bad it thinks the story is. Such trivialisation of television news perhaps marks the first real attempt to bring tabloid news values to the television news format. The format of the show is manic, exciting and gimmicky, the news programmes and headlines have to fit into that format. Such developments may be particularly important. As I show in Chapters 6 and 7, the content of news programmes is related to the format structures of programmes (although not in the McLuhan sense that the message is subverted to the medium (McLuhan, 1987)). It follows therefore that what appears to be a tinkering with production techniques and format style may eventually have an effect on news content and quality.

My focus on television newsworthiness in particular was a deliberate attempt to try to understand how, why and upon what criteria different television news programmes select and produce their news. As I show in Chapter 6 and in the case study in Chapter 8, there are very similar journalistic epistemologies at work in all newsrooms when it comes to the interpretation and understanding of extremist behaviour or “expert” analysis. However in Chapter 7 and the case study in Chapter 8 I also show that a variety of epistemologies exist in different television newsrooms regarding the news value of middle-ranking news stories in particular and even in the reporting of the same event. It is therefore far too simplistic to assert that all news programmes are working with the same conceptions of newsworthiness.

In some ways, the diversity of television news programmes is showing a similar kind of differentiation to newspapers. On any one day, different newspapers may have the same or completely different lead stories. Stories may be analysed by the quality press or more simply and sensationally told by the tabloids. Political stories may be excluded in favour of human interest and drama stories. The local press, like regional television has a different range of interests based on the primary concept of geographical location of the story. Such similarities between the television news media and the press cannot, of course, be stretched too far, due to the fundamental differences between the legal frameworks regulating them. For instance television journalism is formally required to honour the norms of impartiality and objectivity, whereas the press is not so required. For television journalists, the journalistic profession is constructed around a conception of newsworthiness which is ultimately constrained by the need to present information about issues impartially.

A common-sense version of impartiality is the notion of aiming to tell “both sides of the story”. Whilst this ideal is occasionally achieved it would be better if all sides and the pluri-vocality of issues were represented. But the need for this in principle is rarely seen and is rarely the case in practice. Impartial news reporting, is, as I discuss in Chapter 1, a professional construct that is based upon the knowledge that its attainment is unrealistic. The word “objectivity” is rarely mentioned in regulatory guidelines but is replaced by euphemisms such as “accuracy”, “balance”, “fairness”. To some extent newsworthiness itself is determined by the pursuit of impartial reporting. In striving for such a goal, the television journalist has resorted to peppering the news with facts and figures in order to appear as neutral as possible, or to showing film which indicates that something is happening or has just happened (Tuchman, 1978). Reliance on such devices to meet a constructed

professional goal have in turn further increased the importance of such factors in terms of their news value for television journalists. As the analysis of the ending and aftermath of the Waco siege in Texas shows, news stories can become newsworthy in large part due to the possession of film and the frenzy of fact checking which can occur. In the case of the events at Waco such facticity revolved around the numbers of dead and injured in general and the numbers of Britons involved.

### III

My aim in this thesis is to analyse television newsworthiness in Britain in the 1990s. As I have already indicated, the concept does not refer to a single type of broadcast news, but to the wide variety of news programmes currently available. The changes occurring in broadcast media in terms of technological and transnational developments, as well as increasing commercialisation and competition will continue to alter the diversity and range of journalistic output in Britain. As I clearly show in Chapters 4 and 7 and in the case study in Chapter 8, there are several differences between what is broadcast by the different television news programmes, and in their newsroom epistemologies. This assertion must be countered with the recognition that this diversification has not reduced or challenged the many common sense assumptions still inherent in journalistic interpretation, which Chapters 6 and 8 clearly show do continue to exist in all television newsrooms. In Britain the audience can to some extent, choose from a fairly varied diet of television news programmes, a particular style of television news programme which suits their own personal requirements. I have gone some way toward identifying what types of television news programmes are currently available in Britain and have analysed the different considerations and

motivations behind each of those news programme's conception of what is newsworthy.

In Part I of this thesis I examine the changing structural and cultural relations of British television news during the 1980s and 1990s as well as the key themes, issues and research paradigms which have been used in the study of the broadcast media in general and television newsworthiness in particular. This sets the analytic and policy scene for the research reported in Part II and the findings and analysis in Part III.

In Part II, I use both content analysis and newsroom observation of the different television news programmes and news organisations in order to analyse television newsworthiness. I was influenced in my choice of a dual-methodological approach by Semetko et al who observed that,

'Content analysis can document what news media have covered in what manner but cannot reach to the behind the scenes forces, relationships, judgements and decisions that produce detected patterns. On the spot observation can shed much light on how media personnel interpret their roles and the kinds of reports they should provide, but only content analysis can show whether such orientations and aspirations have real consequences for what actually gets into the news. The pairing of these methods is particularly suited to comparative analysis of (political) communication systems' (Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch and Weaver, 1991:183-184).

As I show in Chapter 3 the adoption of two methodological approaches ensures that my analysis of television news is comprehensive in scope and addresses two aspects of television newsworthiness, the content of the news and the production processes used by journalists. The findings from each methodology are outlined separately, the content analysis findings in

Chapter 4 and the newsroom observation findings in Chapter 5. Thereafter, however in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, the different television news programmes are critically assessed and analysed in the light of what **both** methodologies show about the nature of television newsworthiness in a multi-programme news environment. The advantage of using a dual methodological approach is particularly apparent in the case study in, Chapter 8 where I critically analyse and assess the coverage by the British media of the ending of the Waco siege in Texas and the funeral of John Smith.

In Part III, I analyse the differences and similarities between the different television newsroom cultures, processes and output, concluding that journalists share certain extant formulas, practices and normative assumptions in which the concept of newsworthiness is grounded. In Chapter 6, I show how certain practices and values are the basis of all journalistic practice and common to all newsrooms, and can be listed as follows: a common training; adherence to acceptance of editorial policy and the assumption of editorial autonomy; the acquisition of objectivity as a professional appendage; the constraints of broadcasting law; the maintenance of a critical distance from a mythical audience; the acceptance and use of wire services and other technological devices; the adoption of a shared set of logistical constraints; the construction of the newsworthy around a diary and planning and the development of journalistic lore and myths through formal and informal journalistic language and humour. Such shared similarities and experiences form a framework within which, through which, and by which the journalist can understand and interpret events. These findings support the assertions by many media researchers, that a level of consensus exists amongst journalists about what is newsworthy (Gold and Simmons, 1965; Clyde

and Buckalew, 1969; Buckalew, 1969; Glasgow University Media Group, 1976; Whittaker, 1981).

In Chapter 7, I show how different television news programmes and different television news organisations create their own epistemologies. The concept of newsworthiness is also determined by particular political considerations of different organisations, different historical considerations, such as how and why a similar story might have been reported in the past, as well as economic considerations. Different organisations, cultures and history can result in a very different consideration and treatment of whatever is deemed to be newsworthy.

In the case study in Chapter 8, I analyse the similarities and differences between different British television news programmes, identified in Chapters 6 and 7, in relation to their coverage of two major events, the ending of the siege in Waco and John Smith's funeral. I show how journalistic devices such as a concentration on the British angle of the news story, an attachment to facts and figures and a reliance on particular sources of information, resulted in all the British television news programmes reporting a very narrow definition of events. In the United States the media access granted to its Government sources ensured that the Government line and rationale for the attacks on the Davidian compound in Waco were prioritised. Also the continual and concerted efforts of the anti-"cultist" movement to access the media in the United States illustrates how some sources can create an aura of credibility and expertise over time. This phenomenon, which is neglected by most media research, was illustrated by Schlesinger and Tumber (1994), when they analysed the activities and strategies of news sources in the criminal justice field of news reporting. Once credibility and expertise has been established there is a strong tendency for people from such groups to



acquire more media visibility and become spokespersons or “experts”. The use of FBI, Government, anti-“cult” and medical experts as spokespersons by the television media when reporting the events in Waco ensured that the events were presented and analysed in a way which did not attempt to understand the rationale of the Branch Davidians. I consider the implications for an authoritative and viable news product if the British television news media continues to sacrifice complex news content in favour of a more simple and easily digestible news product. Such a practice obviously has an impact on the informational quality of the news product and undermines its capacity to provide citizens with the type of knowledge which allows them to be competent in the public sphere.

The case study in Chapter 8 also illustrates how the television news genre has the potential to be flexible, concentrating on different aspects of the same event. The concentration by *GMTV* on the human interest angle, contrasts for example, with the political angle adopted by *Channel Four News*. Chapter 8 shows in some detail how the different television news programmes have adopted influences from the “not news” environment that act upon and shape the final news product. This flexibility shown by different news programmes illustrates how the ideal-type model of television news (see Figure 1) can be exemplified in its own peculiarity by each different television news programme by the formation of a variety of different sub-genres.

Chapter 8 also shows how certain events fall into a category of coverage that is qualitatively different from most ordinary, easily forgettable newsworthy events. Examination of a media event (Dayan and Katz, 1994), exemplified by the funeral of John Smith, illustrates how some events can be so big and so important that they exhibit a “beyond news”

character. Examination of the ending of the Waco siege in Texas, shows how a media event, staged in one country, can simply be a big news story for another. The distinctions between the media event, the big news story and the ordinary forgettable every-day news story illustrate important characteristics of the different types of television news programmes and the fragmentary nature of the television news genre.

Newsworthiness can therefore be defined as a construct of the journalist's zone and mode of operation. The mode and zone of operation are defined by the dynamic relationship between the political, historical, technological and economic macro influences and the organisational, cultural and professional normative values and practices of the particular television newsroom. The journalist's zone of operation, therefore, is a framework within which, through which, and by which the journalist participates in the understanding and interpretation of an event (as a journalist and not just as a natural individual). This participation occurs by way of the adoption of a particular mode of understanding and via a certain historical consciousness, which in this case is "journalistic". This agreement of usage is adapted to the designated style and epistemology of a television news organisation or television news programme and is only one way of doing the job (style or epistemologies are not universal). It follows that this can, and does, result in very different television news programmes and therefore it follows, a different definition by those journalists of what is newsworthy and what is in the public interest.

It would appear then, that the concept of newsworthiness is a fragile one, and is difficult to pin down to any single definition. Indeed it can be shown that what is deemed to be important by one news programme or news organisation is not necessarily regarded as such by another. Similarly, it is clear that it is seen by some news organisations or

programmes to be more important to interest the audience than it is to tell important stories for their own sake. This indicates that there are divergences amongst the profession about many aspects of newsworthiness. Indeed, even when a story is recognised by all the news programmes as being newsworthy, such as a major air crash, or a massive loss of life at a compound in Waco, each news programme may adopt a different ways of telling the story with some different interpretations of the same event. Sometimes such interpretations may only be superficially different and still adhere to the same set of prejudices and common sense assumptions. Sometimes, however, they can illustrate a great deal of difference between the rationale and culture of the different television newsrooms, such as the paternalistic and public service broadcasting ethos of BBC journalism, in contrast to the commercial imperative of ITN, *GMTV* and *Calendar News*. Such differences in rationale and culture in different television newsrooms and different organisations are strongly illustrative of the particular conception held by the journalists working in those newsrooms, about what serves the public interest and what constitutes television newsworthiness.

## **PART I: APPROACHING THE STUDY OF TELEVISION NEWSWORTHINESS IN THE 1990s**

Part I of this thesis examines the changing structural and cultural relations of British television during the 1980s and 1990s as well as the key themes, issues and research paradigms which have been used in the study of the broadcast media in general and television newsworthiness in particular. This sets the analytic and policy scene for the new research reported in Part II and for the examination and discussion of the research findings in Part III.

Chapter 1 situates the analysis of television news in the broad socio-political context of modern society centring on the role of television news as an important institution of the public sphere and the evolution of the public interest idea which underpins both the BBC and ITV systems. The notion of public interest is grounded in both legislation and the national broadcasting regulatory framework and is particularly relevant to the role of terrestrial news in a democracy. This chapter shows how television news values are related to the regulatory framework which requires that journalists work to the criteria of objectivity and impartiality advocated on the grounds of public interest, and how the notion of objectivity underpins the concept of television newsworthiness. The legislative and regulatory frameworks which embody values such as objectivity and newsworthiness provide a normative framework which incorporates the current view of what is in the public interest in contemporary British television news.

Chapter 1 shows that due to fragmentation of the television news genre and the development of a variety of television news programmes, different concepts of newsworthiness are evident in different television news

programmes illustrating that different notions of public interest journalism operate in different television newsrooms.

Chapter 1 identifies the key vectors of change, which have strongly affected the broadcasting environment in Britain during the 1980 and 1990s, these are politico-economic (and the new commercialization of television news), technological and transnational, and considers the implications such developments have had for the public sphere, definitions of public interest, regulation and quality.

Chapter 2 analyses the extant research which relates to the study of the media in general and television news in particular which is relevant to this thesis. Through consideration of these studies the theoretical elements which underpin the analytic and methodological approaches in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are developed. First the research which has been conducted into the content and production of television news is reviewed. These two dimensions of the study of television newsworthiness are particularly relevant to the content analysis and fieldwork studies which have been undertaken in relation to this thesis. The more general areas of television research are then discussed in order to indicate the broader theoretical issues which concern media researchers. Finally the various approaches to the study of television news are critically assessed in terms of their specific relevance to this research project and the areas of neglect identified.

To date sociological research has neglected to analyse what impact the commercialization of the television news has had upon the television news genre itself. There has been no consideration given to what impact diversification of the news genre has had on television newsworthiness. There is also in most research to date an assumption that television

journalism is a unitary practice, an assumption which my findings and analysis strongly challenges throughout this thesis.

I propose a new approach to the study of terrestrial television newsworthiness in Britain in the 1990s which addresses the issues and concerns identified in chapters 1 and 2.

## CHAPTER 1: THE MEDIA, TELEVISION NEWS AND DEMOCRACY

### a) Introduction

In this chapter the importance of television to a democracy will be analysed in relation to its role as one of the major institutions of the public sphere in modern society (Dahlgren, 1995). Television has also been credited, along with a variety of other electronic media, with creating a form of 'mediated publicness' (Thompson, 1995:236) whereby private viewing of public events has to a large extent replaced the kind of face-to-face interaction envisaged by some analysts (Habermas, 1984) in the nineteenth century bourgeois public sphere. The scale of modern society does not allow for very large groups of citizens to be physically co-present and therefore the mass media have become important institutions of the public sphere (Dahlgren, 1995). Given the importance of television in general and television news in particular in relation to democratic process generally this chapter will consider the impact of the increasing commercialization of the British television medium in relation to its role as an institution of the public sphere. In particular it will consider the evolution of the public interest idea which underpins both the BBC and ITV systems and which is grounded in both legislation and the national broadcast regulatory framework. Public service broadcasting will be addressed in the context of the changing institutional relations of British television during the 1980s and 1990s.

This chapter pays particular attention to the relationship between the television news media and democracy in the UK. In section (b) I analyse the way in which the television medium is changing its relationship to political process by responding to a variety of pressures to move from a

public service broadcasting model towards a market model, (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994). Such change elicits far-reaching implications for the public sphere, public interest and the nature of public service itself.

It is not just the British television medium which faces the impact of market forces, such a trend is particularly relevant to European nations where broadcast media systems have undergone a series of changes during the 1980s and 1990s. Such developments are having major implications for national broadcasting industry structures and cultures (Gunter, 1993). Unlike the USA broadcasting system where commercial imperatives had dominated since the 1920s, the British system of broadcasting was structured in a way which would ensure that the public broadcasting provider and the commercial system did not compete for the same source of revenue and also required the commercial system to adhere to some public service broadcasting principles. European individual states had a mix of systems with varying amounts of direct state funding or advertising, or a combination of both. Therefore for Britain and many European countries the trend towards greater commercialization of the broadcasting system is disrupting and disturbing many of the public interest assumptions and justifications relating to television programming generally and television news in particular.

In Britain television news values are strongly related to the regulatory frameworks of the BBC and the Independent Broadcasting Authority/Independent Television Commission (IBA/ITC) which requires that journalists work to the criteria of impartiality. The regulators rarely use the word "objectivity", but substitute it with euphemisms such as "accuracy". The notion of impartiality and due accuracy, qua objectivity, are advocated on the grounds of public interest and are reflected in the degree of trust which the audience places upon television news (see Gunter et al, 1993). The notions of impartiality and objectivity underpin



the concept of television newsworthiness and provide a normative framework which incorporates the current view of what is in the public interest in contemporary British news. In section (c) this chapter examines how notions of objectivity and impartiality, which are tied into the regulatory frameworks governing both the BBC and ITN news providers, are linked strongly to particular and differing notions of the public interest, and how they underpin newsworthiness itself.

Consideration of television news values is, however, further complicated due to the changing nature of the television news genre which has fragmented and diversified resulting in the development of a variety of television news programmes where different concepts of newsworthiness are evident. This also indicates that different notions of public interest journalism are currently operating in different television newsrooms.

In section (d) of this chapter a broad set of vectors are identified. These vectors have responsibility for many of the changes occurring within the British broadcasting system and have had important implications for the public sphere, for the public interest, and the nature of public service broadcasting as well as for the relationship between the broadcast media and democracy. These vectors can be broadly summarised as being politico-economic (in particular the new commercialization of television news), technological and transnational in nature and they have generated new problems and uncertainties for the existing national broadcasting industry in Britain. Such changes have challenged many of the normative assumptions characteristic of a national publicly oriented service as well as the rationale and future security of public service broadcasting as a guiding principle.

The broader issues relating to democracy and the media are outlined in the summary, which focusses on what I believe should be the key concerns of

contemporary British television news operating within a liberal democracy.

I also return to these important issues in my concluding chapter following the account and analysis of the research of a number of terrestrial television news programmes and television newsrooms in Parts II and III of this thesis.

b) The Broad Socio-Political Context of Television News in Modern Society

Contemporary changes and influences affecting the British television medium (see section (d) below) raise important questions about the media's role in the public sphere. Television news organisations appear to be struggling to define their role in the 1990s. ITN, the main news service provider for the British commercial system, is consistently having to justify its approach to news provision. It comes under regular attack from critics who believe that a good deal of the ITN product is "tabloid" in nature. In this context "tabloid" generally has negative and pejorative connotations and is connected to the issue of the quality, depth and standard of information provided by ITN programmes. The BBC also struggles to define its role, seeking to be both a public service broadcaster (where public service broadcasting is often linked to culturally elite notions of quality, and where the BBC perceives itself as serving the nation and preserving national identity) whilst simultaneously seeking to compete successfully in the domestic and international broadcasting market place. Some commentators and analysts criticise British television programme output for being increasingly influenced by American culture (Tunstall, 1977). However, criticisms of the Americanisation of British television needs to be considered in relation to its impact today and cannot be simply viewed as a negative innovation *per se*. Indeed, although ITN modelled its news presentation styles on the American news

format in the 1960s (Seymore-Ure, 1991), the newscasters, unlike their BBC equivalents, were also responsible for gathering and selecting the news (Briggs, 1995), and ITN set new standards of enterprise and pace for television news, making the BBC version look slow and unexciting. In the 1950s and early 1960s ITN's motto, 'see it happen on ITN' (Day, 1989:296) clearly reflected its wish to set the pace. We need, to be cautious however about criticising the "Americanisation" of British television news without being very specific about which aspects of American influence are of concern. Commentators such as American academic McManus (1994) are concerned that the application of market logic to news and in particular to broadcast news, has resulted in the replacement of the journalist with the consumer as the "gatekeeper" of what becomes news. He argues that the standards of journalism have been replaced by the rigours of the market. His analysis of four television stations, each affiliated with a major network, in the western United States leads him to conclude that junk journalism is an increasing problem in a market-led environment. In the United States however, control of such trends is made more difficult as any government enforcement of news quality risks a form of censorship and would contravene the First Amendment. If increasing commercialization of the broadcast media in Britain is leading to the same kind of problems as those identified by McManus in the United States, then the role of the regulators in this country becomes increasingly vital to ensure that broadcast journalists provide a supply of trustworthy, relevant and informative news.

#### D) The Public Sphere and the Media

One of the most important issues in relation to British television news in the 1990s is its role in the public sphere and its relation to the public interest. First it is necessary to briefly examine both concepts in more detail in order to provide a clearer context for discussion of how far the

broadcast media, and television news in particular, succeeds in providing a dimension of the public sphere in which citizens can debate issues in a democratic forum (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994). The role of British television news in the public sphere and its success or failure in serving the public interest must therefore be considered in conjunction with the liberal democratic ideal of cultivating an involved public where established state power is answerable to the public through Parliament and elections and where Government is necessarily involved in an on-going dialogue of sorts with the public.

Jurgen Habermas's critique of public communication in modernity is a useful starting point in any discussion of the nature and role of the public sphere as he provides within his analysis a picture of what would constitute an ideal public sphere (Habermas, 1984). However it is important to note that Habermas's critique was a press oriented analysis of the public sphere in the eighteenth century. Also any consideration of the bourgeois public sphere must take into account that his analysis participates in the Frankfurt School's characteristically pessimistic interpretation of mass society and the mass media's role in the twentieth century. Nonetheless Habermas provides a useful concept and the notion of the public sphere can be made relevant to today's multicultural and diverse civil society and usefully applied as a concept by which the democratic process of the contemporary mass media can be analysed. If the public sphere was totally divorced from any type of institutional control it would generate the critical consensus which is needed for public participation in democratic political process.

'By "the public sphere" we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body' (Habermas, 1984:49).

For Habermas (1989) the public sphere is a space which mediates between society and the state, it is a space in which individuals and groups discuss and argue about public matters. Within this space, such argument and discussion results in a critical consensus, whereby individuals can change their opinions in the light of reasoned argument and debate. Habermas locates the first signs of the existence of such a sphere in the late eighteenth century and early industrial age. Prior to this institutions such as the church, the state and feudal landlords had restricted public communication believing their actions to be for the greater good of society (McQuail, 1992). Habermas's bourgeois public sphere, which grew from discussion and debate in coffee houses and salons, emerged out of a successful struggle against the oppression of the church, state and feudal landlords and was grounded in the basic right of freedom of expression. In reality access to this public sphere was restricted to middle-class men only and was therefore extremely limited as a representative mouthpiece for the whole of society. As such the dominant male capitalist class was able to develop its hegemonic position (Stevenson, 1994). Nonetheless, Habermas argues that the public sphere created, for the first time, a chance to criticise the authority of the state which could be called to justify itself before a potentially informed and rational public (Thompson, 1990).

As the processes of communication developed in the mid and late nineteenth century through the rise of the mass newspaper industry the bourgeois public sphere declined. During the same period there was a complicated relationship between the growth and development of a mass commercial press and the decline of radical newspapers. This commercialization of the press resulted in the development of two basic types of newspaper, tabloid and broadsheet (see Curran and Seaton (1988) for a detailed account of the complexity of the historical development of the press). In relation to the tabloid press, which depends less on

advertising and more on mass circulation, commercialization resulted in a general orientation to please as many people as possible. The broadsheet press in contrast aimed to attract specific advertisers, by reaching a small target audience, already wealthy both economically and in terms of the information they receive. The content of the tabloid press developed to include salacious, melodramatic and entertaining stories. To some extent commercial broadsheet content also developed to include human interest stories and entertaining editorials and articles. The Daily Telegraph, for example, has long been renowned for its concentration on gruesome crime on page three. Curran and Seaton argue that the commercialization of the press has produced consensual journalistic views and a growth of entertainment at the expense of political news, particularly in the tabloid market. The more appealing nature of entertainment or human interest type journalism has changed the experience of newspaper consumption from one of taxing political analysis and debate to private enjoyment. It is of note that the decline of Habermas' bourgeois public sphere coincided with the development of the commercial press. Commercial communication in the form of newspapers gradually began to be consumed in private requiring no discussion or response. This trend has continued with television, radio, books, magazines, computer games and newspapers.

The rational-critical public of the bourgeois salons and coffee houses has been transformed into a mass audience, manipulated by commercial production, for Habermas this was viewed as damage inflicted on the cultural sphere by the economy and the state, by money and power. This has created a "pseudo public sphere" within which a culture-consuming public exists (Habermas, 1989). The modern mass audience is now atomised (Stevenson, 1994) and set in its private consumption pattern. The transformation of the general culture of the public sector in the 1980s and 1990s which has elevated the individual to the status of sovereign

consumer, has succeeded in exacerbating the trend towards private consumption of cultural goods. As most communication is now forced to channel itself via commercial media the individual is prioritised as a private consumer rather than as a public citizen (Garnham, 1990). We also need to consider whether it is still feasible to talk in terms of the viability of Habermas's ideal of rational-critical public debate, which results in genuine amendment of opinion, or whether the possibility of such discourse ever existing has been, and will continue to be, irreversibly obstructed by the commercialization of communication systems. Instead of the existence of a public sphere, providing for the possibility of genuine consensus formation, it is argued that the contemporary public are offered pre-prepared arguments which are rhetorical rather than rational. This daily diet of neatly packaged arguments offered by the mass media in general, and their news services in particular, is, it is suggested, aimed at eliciting compromise through non-rational persuasion rather than consensus through rational argument (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994).

The belief in the possible reformation of a British public sphere in which citizens can actively engage in public debate and argument has been related to the principles and practices of public service broadcasting (for example, see Curran (1991) and Garnham (1990)). But such optimism ignores the fragmentary context within which the broadcast media currently operate (Stevenson, 1994) as well as failing to consider the difficulties posed by the limits of nation states and the emergence of a European sphere of governance, if not yet a European public sphere (Schlesinger, 1995).

In this context it is useful to consider Habermas's belief that the mass media

‘free communication processes from the provinciality of spatiotemporally restricted contexts and permit public spheres to emerge’ (Habermas, 1987:390 in Peters, 1993).

Habermas here envisages the possibility of a plurality of public spheres. Today, due to fragmentation of society an increasingly plural society is emerging. Therefore any discussion of the public sphere, the public interest or democracy must take account of and accommodate this idea of plurality. It is argued by Mouffe (1992) that both pluralism and the respect of individual freedom are defended by the contribution political liberalism has made to democracy. Modern liberal democracy establishes a particular form of human coexistence where there is a distinction between a sphere of the public, a sphere of the private as well as a separation between the church and state, civil law and religious law. Whilst Mouffe goes on to argue that it is important to defend pluralism in many areas such as culture, religion and morality, our participation as citizens requires that we also commit ourselves to defend its key institutions. Such a contention can be problematic when it is those key institutions which restrict true diversity and pluralism. Resistance to a pluralist approach to religious education in Bradford for example, is currently based upon an argument about the need for national standards and curricula in education. Indeed, Leca’s (1982):30 question of ‘how can citizenship be combined with the coexistence of different cultural groups which only communicate between themselves with the deafness of resentment’ highlights one of the key problems of the diversification and fragmentation of society.

In the 1990s minority views are important and to some extent such voices do get heard via the media, although some forms of plural society are not always reflected well by the media. For example, non-radical Muslim’s have complained that the media coverage of the burning of Salman Rushdie’s book Satanic Verses reflected a particularly negative version of



the Islamic community in Britain (see McGuigan (1992) for a case study of the Salman Rushdie affair). A question which arises from this idea of plurality is whether the multiplication of television news programmes and diversification of the television news genre is a symptom or a cause of the fragmentation of the public sphere into different public spheres and more importantly what this means for the current and future value and role of television news. This emergence of different levels of “the public” at the national and regional level as well as the proliferation of new subnational political lobby movements has resulted in a plurality of dynamic alternative public spheres (Dahlgren, 1995). Groups which are forming around particular issues are using the media to gain publicity and a higher profile. Such movements and associations link the family and neighbourhood (the private domain) with political action (the public domain).

It has been argued by media commentators such as Jameson (1991) and Dahlgren (1995):<sup>79</sup> that we are experiencing an increased pluralism and fragmentation of the cultural sphere and the development of a variety of alternative public spheres. If this is considered in relation to the television news medium we would expect to see alternative political movements mobilising television coverage of their activities in a way which expresses the experiences and interpretations of the group members. Such groups would then have a growing political capacity to transmit their version of events and issues to the existing dominant television outlets by building up power relations beyond the traditional institutions. Such activity would legitimate their cause and a wider range of views would be heard in the public domain. To date we do see a good deal of effort, particularly by the more well resourced pressure groups and lobby organisations, such as Greenpeace to publicize their views and demands via the use of self-produced videos and so on. The dominant television broadcasters are usually very discerning about using such material without editing it, even

though it is an easy source of material. As more twenty-four hour news channels develop we may witness an increase in the use of such material, providing previously marginalised groups with their own broadcasting opportunities. Whether this will result in the type of programmes which empower or even motivate citizens to become more deeply engaged in politics, or to be more fully committed and decision-making members of the community is open to some doubt. As Walzer (1992) has pointed out citizens also have too many other things to worry about, not least they have to earn a living. Such activity in the workplace means that people tend to be more deeply engaged in the economy than in the political economy or the community. However, such a pessimistic view of the motivations of citizens should not discourage any type of broadcaster from his or her social responsibility to offer some opportunity for resistance of certain

‘constructions of political identity and subjectivity that take state institutions as the principle sites and state power as the primary object of political struggle’ (McClure, 1992:120).

The public sphere (or the “meta-public sphere”, i.e. the sphere of all public spheres) needs to allow access from minority voices and opinions in order to provide a democratic forum from which either compromise or consensus can be elicited. In a truly pluralistic democracy, it is only by giving access to the full diversity of voices that a real rational debate within the public sphere or spheres can occur. However, Curran has argued that creating a democratic public sphere is a more complex issue than simply allowing minority voices to be heard,

‘..the potential for democracy, if it is to amount to more than an enlargement accommodating the formerly excluded, requires the reconceptualization of the public sphere in consideration of the media’ (Curran, 1992:83).

Whereas some analysts argue that democracy is simply about celebrating differences others have expressed concern as to whether the public has become so fragmented that collective action is impossible rendering the notion of consensus or compromise impossible (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994). The democratic public service media system envisaged by Keane (1991) aims to allow both argument and disagreement and is founded upon the desirability of a plurality of voices and uncensored media (McLaughlin, 1993). Such a system needs a heterogeneous public to make it work and the mechanisms for attaining public access to public space from which to hold public discourses need to be in place (Keane, 1991). Although a public-private distinction dates from Classical Greece where public life consisted of the coming together of individuals in a shared locality or space (Thompson, 1995), the distinction acquired a new form in the eighteenth century within the context of quickly developing capitalist economy and development of a bourgeois constitutional state (Thompson, 1990).

Public authority referred increasingly to state-related activity and civil society developed as a domain of privatized economic relations established under the aegis of public authority. Within or between the three realms of public authority, the private realm of civil society and the intimate sphere of personal relations emerged a new sphere of “the public” supported by law (the state) and differentiated from the market. In principle the types of argument and discourse which occurs in the public sphere is open and unconstrained, in practice the press and the broadcast media, both major institutions of the public sphere, have been subjected to control, regulation and censorship by the state officials and to the pressures and rigours of the market place. For Williams (1962, 1974, 1985) therefore, a truly democratic public service could only be achieved

through a formal separation of the media from the state and from the market.

Clearly this notion of a democratic public sphere is Utopian. Despite the philosophy of public service broadcasting which has underpinned the BBC and ITV systems since their birth, both have been consistently criticised for producing biased coverage in a wide range of areas, such as crime (Chibnall, 1977; Hall et.al, 1978), industrial relations (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976, 1980); terrorism (Schlesinger et.al, 1983); race (Hartman and Husband, 1973). Both print and broadcast media have been charged with becoming increasingly powerful in the last forty years due to concentration of ownership and reduction of accountability of broadcasters (Curran and Seaton, 1988) and of causing information poverty (Golding, 1990), failing empower the electorate (Chomsky, 1987) and of denying public access to the mass media, illustrating how political participation, citizenship and active viewer participation have been heavily restricted (Scannell, 1986).

‘The partial and attenuated citizenship imposed by information poverty casts..... a shadow over social theory. The current failings and structured deficiencies of mass communications mean that at a local and national level our democracy puts its citizens in blinkers’ (Golding, 1990:100).

The fear that the British media are more of a “fifth column” against the people than a “fourth estate” of the constitution has centred upon both the press and broadcast media in general and has related to concern relating to media ownership and control, systematic political bias and political influence (Newton, 1995), although the extent and type of political bias in radio and television coverage of the news are strongly debated and contested (Miller, 1991).

Clearly many researchers are concerned that the terrestrial broadcast media does not fulfil a democratic role very efficiently in contemporary Britain. Such concern is well founded, since neither commercial or public service television - (despite BBC rhetoric about serving the public, or commercial broadcasters' rhetoric about consumer choice) - allow for the emergence or development of a critical public sphere within the television news genre through audience participation and debate. For example BBC *Breakfast News* has, since February 1996, instituted a phone-in opportunity for the public wishing to comment on certain issues. However, the agenda is still firmly set by the broadcasters themselves, it is minimally interactive, and only includes a few self-selected audience members. Much broader interactive and general participation is now beginning to be envisaged in theory as something which the "wiring of society" with the new optic fibre technology may make possible (Neuman, 1991). However, today the viewing public continues to be given pre-packaged and heavily formatted information which is deemed to be in the "public interest". The key question is do these messages which are assumed to serve the "public interest" actually empower and inform the public? Such a complex question can only be addressed and analysed through audience or effects research which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

## II) The Public Interest and the Media

The notion of public interest is an important concept in the theory and practice of modern democratic politics. However, along with many such concepts, it can be problematic as it can have elastic and ambiguous meanings. It can be advocated according to a partisan version of what is in the general good (McQuail, 1992) (1), and can be invoked to justify both public service broadcasting and the freedom of media market forces. At its worst "public interest" is sometimes used as an ideological device to

cloak unjustified regulatory ambitions of government, or to curtail freedom of expression, sometimes it is used to justify media intrusion.

The idea of public interest has regularly been used to defend public service broadcasting. Such a linkage is understandable as public service broadcasting is often defined in relation to the benefits it is believed to be capable of delivering to society. Broadcasting historically been treated rather like the public utilities and has been deemed to be too important to be left to the vagaries of the market place. Broadcast media and telecommunications have been dealt with as 'businesses affected with a public interest and subjected to special treatment under law and government policy' (Melody, 1990:18). Values such as equality of access, universal provision, impartiality and objectivity have always been the keystones of the public broadcasting principle and invoked by the regulators in the name of the public interest. The BBC has traditionally been a public space for people who wish to make high quality (culturally elite definition of quality) radio and television programmes for their own sake and not necessarily in order to attract large audiences (Barnett and Curry, 1994). I show clearly in Chapter 7 how public service principles are being challenged at both the BBC and ITN in the contemporary broadcasting climate and how the notion of ITN as a business affected with a public interest is being seriously compromised. In the 1990s it is also clear that in practice there is little common agreement on what are the essential features of a public service broadcasting system (McQuail, 1992) or what is in the public interest in relation to television news output.

There have been attempts to update the interpretation of public interest in order to try capture the essence of what is in the public good. The quantity and diversity of information sources, communication opportunities and growth of media markets has elicited concern from commentators such as Melody (1990) that developments in the

information and communication sector may exacerbate class divisions and inequalities in society. Melody's concern centres on the development of pay-per-view systems which may be installed in libraries as well as the increasing significance of the integration of press, print, broadcasting, telecommunications and computers which may serve to exclude some sectors of the public from accessing valuable and empowering information. He argues that,

'The public interest requires that the diffusion of the new opportunities be planned and implemented at a pace which minimises the losses imposed on those who cannot benefit from them, and is accompanied by programmes to help the potential victims of change become beneficiaries of it' (Melody, 1990:30).

As British society in the 1990s is subjected to a deluge of information from a variety of sources, it is vital that this material is interpreted and presented in a way which is accessible to the whole public. What is not entirely clear is whether the most appropriate way for interpreting public information has been defined or that the key issue of what the public needs to know in order to function most effectively as a responsible citizenry in a participatory democracy is being addressed, either by the interpreters of information or the regulators of the broadcast media.

Research has shown that television news is an important source of information for many people. Since the mid-1950s the majority of viewers in Britain have identified television as their main source of world news ahead of the press (Gunter, 1987; Gunter and Svennevig, 1988; Gunter and Winstone, 1993; Gunter, Sancho-Aldridge and Winstone, 1994). These findings were confirmed by Gunter et al (1993) in a survey of one thousand adults. Ninety-eight per cent of the respondents mentioned television as one of the "first three" sources of world news. Sixty-nine per cent mentioned television first, above all other media as

their main world news source. For local news, newspapers are customarily named as the main source (Ibid; Hetherington, 1989), and even though the circulation of local and weekly papers has decreased over the years, the growth in alternative publications and free newspapers has increased the penetration of local press into homes (Franklin, 1994). However, it is only at the most local level that newspapers replace television as the most preferred news source. Even at the level of news about the region, television is most often seen as the primary news source (Gunter et al, 1993).

Although television is generally perceived by the public to be its primary news source, this does not mean that the public actually gets the majority of its news information from television. Research has shown that people spend on average less time watching television news than reading a newspaper each day. Furthermore, there is evidence that more information may be consumed from newspapers than from television news (Gunter, 1987; 1990).

One of the key features of the audience's perception of television news involves the degree of trust which is placed upon televised news. Such trust is not accorded to other media, and is based upon the belief that the broadcast news is not partisan in content. A survey performed by the ITC in 1993 found that, as in other years, only minorities of respondents in the survey perceived any bias towards political parties on the four terrestrial channels (Gunter et al, 1993). The notion of the objectivity of television news therefore is an important factor as eight or nine million people watch peak time British news programmes every day on the assumption that the coverage is "fair" and the majority of viewers believe that it is their main source of news. Indeed, for many people television news *is* likely to be their main source of news. Furthermore, although people who read daily papers possibly obtain more information from their newspaper than from



television news there is, nonetheless, an important public perception about the significance and reliability of television news as a source of information about the world.

British terrestrial television news obviously makes an important contribution to many people's lives. Although we have seen that television news does not create a public sphere or public spheres within which rational-critical debate and public interest formation can take place it does, nonetheless, have a significant role to play. There are clearly questions which arise relating to the public sphere and the sphere in which democratic process occurs. As fragmentation occurs within society at subnational levels (where a plurality of public spheres may be evolving) and changes at the supranational level (perhaps evolving in a European and/or global public sphere), the concept of a unitary national public sphere is getting more and more stretched. A unitary public sphere, regulated in the public interest however, was something that national governments, regulators and broadcasters could contribute to more easily. The significance of television news has always been, and still is, recognised by legislators who have argued that public control of the media in the public interest is necessary in the form of regulation.

'Regulation of communication information is a series of answers by society to the questions of who should know what, and when, and how and where' (Michael, 1990).

It has been argued that regulation should also be linked to seven core values inherent in most West European countries. Jay Blumler and representatives from thirteen different countries identified the following "vulnerable values" as worthy of regulation and protection all Western European countries:- Programme quality, diversity, cultural identity, independence from commercial influences, the integrity of civic

communication, the welfare of children and juveniles and the maintenance of standards, which market pressures could jeopardise (Blumler, 1992).

In Britain and other Western European democracies regulation has been consistently advocated on the grounds of public interest (Mather, (1993) (although equally there are those who advocate deregulation and a further expansion of the free market to be in the public interest (see Horrie and Clarke (1994:162-163) for an insight into Rupert Murdoch's vision of a market-led TV system serving the public interest with a public service element). The particular policy discourse and legislative structure which is developed with regard to broadcast media is illustrative of the evaluative ideas and terms encountered at play in national culture and politics. Regulatory frameworks articulates what has been deemed to be in the public interest in any particular nation. In Britain public interest has been delivered both via the public serving broadcasting system and via the regulated market. It follows therefore that changes in the politics of regulation of the media and the market affect the public interest idea.

According to McQuail (1994) the definition or interpretation of public interest by the political system that is passed to the regulators is generally arrived at without any recourse to ethical consideration or judgement. Nonetheless in a liberal democratic state what generally emerges is a set of principles which are designed to protect particular values assumed by successive governments to be in the public interest.

In Britain, for example, the Broadcasting Act 1990 protects the public from programming which is likely to cause harm, is biased or is acting against the public interest by ensuring that,

‘...nothing is included in its programmes which offends against good taste or decency or is likely to encourage or incite to crime or lead to disorder or to be offensive to public feeling’ (Broadcasting Act 1990:6(1)6).

‘that any news given (in whatever form) in its programmes is presented with due accuracy and impartiality’ (Ibid:6(1)6).

‘that due responsibility is exercised with respect to the content of any of its programmes which are religious programmes’ (Ibid:6(1)6).

and to ensure that the news output is

‘broadcast .....at intervals throughout the period for which the service is provided, and in particular (except in the case of a national Channel 3 licence) at peak viewing times’ (Ibid:31(1)31).

and is,

‘of high quality dealing with national and international matters’ (Ibid:31(1)31).

The Broadcasting Act charges the ITC with the role of awarding licences subject to a series of guidelines. Such guidelines are designed to control the quality and diversity of output, protect children, control advertising, protect minority programming, and more specifically, to ensure that television news is shown live, regularly at certain times of the day, is of high quality, contains both national and international news stories and is impartial and accurate. The Channel 3, and 4, (and in future Channel 5) news providers are all bound by guidelines which are clearly designed around the belief that television news has a valuable and important contribution to make to the British public.

The BBC is established by a Royal Charter and Agreement between the BBC and the government and has recently been renewed for ten years from 1 January 1997 and the licence fee retained as the main source of

finance for its public services until the year 2001 when it will be reviewed. The Major Government's notion of the nature of public interest and the role of a public service broadcaster was clearly articulated in its White Paper, *The Future of the BBC* in 1994 and centred upon issues such as diversity and quality of programming. The Major Government has stated that the BBC should continue to be the Britain's main public service broadcaster and that the role of the Board of Governors 'is to look after the public's interest in the BBC' (Ibid:3). As its role as a public service broadcaster the BBC must ensure that it reflects the needs and interests of the public, giving priority to the interests of the audiences and by providing programmes for minority and specialist audiences as well as for majority audiences.

Also the BBC must seek to

'reflect... the national identity of the United Kingdom. The BBC should broadcast events of national importance .....enriching the cultural heritage of the United Kingdom throughout support for the arts. The BBC should remain a major cultural patron of music, drama and the visual arts .....nurtur(ing) creative talent' (Ibid:6).

The high quality programming which the BBC must provide is linked to a more culturally elite definition of the term "quality" than is required by the Broadcasting Act 1990. Indeed the BBC itself focuses on

'developing services of distinction and quality, rather than on attracting a large audience for its own sake' (*Extending Choice*, 1992).

A major problem which has emerged for the BBC is how it can reconcile charging a licence fee for services with the probable long-term decline in its audience ratings which it is facing. It has been given a clear directive by the Major Government to promote the commercial side of its

operation. However the contradictory and damaging nature of such practice has been clearly identified.

‘Viewers do not pay a licence fee in order to improve our export performance. The licence fee is there to ensure that the BBC can reach those places commercial broadcasters can’t’ (Bolton, *Observer*, 14/1/96).

The interpretation of public interest by the Government in relation to the BBC and ITV systems, illustrates the different type of focus the concept can acquire in a public service context and a commercial context which also has some public service broadcasting values.

Although the BBC is facing great difficulties and challenges in trying to prepare itself for the possible loss of its licence fee and the encouragement of commercial activities by the Major Government, the Government clearly perceives it to have a different role from the ITV companies. It follows therefore, that the role of the news output of the BBC and ITN must also be contexted within these identified differences in interpretation of the public interest formulated by government and put into practice by the regulators.

The interpretation of *the public interest* is clearly subjective and flexible and can be interpreted in different ways at different times. However the legislative and regulatory frameworks which embody such values do have a positive role to play in establishing a normative framework within which British television news can be examined and analysed. This normative framework which incorporates the current view of what is the public interest, serves to highlight how British television news is replete with a complex mixture of values, constituted from vague and constantly changing notions of public service broadcasting, which are being consistently challenged by a new market-driven philosophy.

A major normative assumption underlying this thesis is that the television news media in particular have a significant contribution to make to the general welfare of society, and indeed that they have a social responsibility to do so. In my view the mass media should be recognised as in principle one of the institutions that embody citizenship rights (Keane, 1991; McGuigan, 1992) along with democracy, rule of law and the welfare state. To be a responsible citizen able to communicate competently in the public sphere requires knowledge and understanding in three broad areas of discourse, political, economic and anti-social behaviour (Roche, 1987; Golding and Murdock, 1991; Elliott, 1982). An understanding of politics enables us to judge how society is governed, an understanding of economics helps to see how society is managed and an understanding of what constitutes anti-social behaviour enables us to see how society is ruled and what constitutes justice and law.

Such understanding enables us to be a moral subject, to be able to make reasoned choices for or against an action, to recognise our rights and duties and develop skills. The television news media do have an important role to play in this process by enlightening the viewer qua citizen through the provision of useful, empowering information. This role should be, and is to some extent, recognised and pursued through regulation in the public interest. The notion of public interest which purports to be embodied in the regulation of television news, is based upon such values as truth, accuracy, fairness, and impartiality. However it is questionable whether television news - even though I argue it is one of the institutions which should embody citizenship - in reality actually provides the type of information which enhances the civil, political and social rights of the citizen in any meaningful way. My line of argument in this thesis is that the social responsibility of the television news media, which is expressed through its practices and operations, is qualitatively inferior both to many of the ideals embodied in its regulatory frameworks

and also to the normative conception of the public interest which underpins and motivates this thesis.

The notion of serving the public and the public interest was grounded in the initial BBC Charter, in the 1954 Television Act and has been consistently evoked as a requirement of broadcasting in a series of government reviews and reports dating from 1926 to the 1990s. The evolution of the concept of public interest over the years is indicative of the changing values relating to broadcasting, but it is striking that similar requirements have been a continual feature of both the commercial and the public broadcasting system in Britain and that those requirements have been consistently expressed by the legislators using language relating to serving the public, meeting social purpose, having a public purpose and, in the case of the BBC in particular, serving the nation. However, we have witnessed an evolution in some of the broadcasting values towards the belief that public interest in broadcasting can be better served by commercial competition than regulation. Thus we have seen terms such as quality, choice, popularity and diversity introduced into broadcasting legislation and regulatory guidelines in the 1980s and 1990s.

In 1926 a public inquiry into the status of the British Broadcasting Company as a consortium of wireless manufacturers was conducted by the Crawford Committee. It was recommended that the private company be replaced by a 'public corporation acting as trustee for the national interest' (Crawford Committee of Enquiry, 1926, quoted in *the Annan Report*, 1977). The values embodied in the birth of the BBC stemmed from disapproval of the American experience, where free enterprise had resulted in unregulated chaos and tastelessness. Such concerns were reported to the Sykes and Crawford Committees and were probably instrumental in helping to create a climate of opinion receptive to the public corporate monopoly. The concern with the potential bureaucracy

of state ownership was frequently espoused by Reith (McIntyre, 1993) and broadcasting was expected to be conducted in the public interest, an interest not regarded in law or in practice, as synonymous with government or state. However, such a clear distinction was blurred during the General Strike of 1926 when Reith and the BBC clearly supported the government (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991).

In practice the public duties of the BBC were not really made clear and there was no prescription as to what was acceptable to broadcast as the matters of content and social purpose were originally seen as peripheral. However, the requirement for “quality” and objectivity were prescribed by the Crawford Committee,

‘a moderate amount of controversial material should be broadcast, provided it is of high quality and distributed with scrupulous fairness’ (*Crawford Report*, 1926).

As the BBC developed the power of the new broadcast media to serve the national interest became inextricably intertwined with the notion of serving the public interest

‘.....the influence of broadcasting upon the mind and speech of the nation (makes it an) urgent necessity in the national interest that the broadcasting service should at all times be conducted in the best possible manner and to the best possible advantage of the people’ (*Ullswater Report*, 1937 para.7)

The 1962 Pilkington Committee, which considered the mixed economy of broadcasting developed further the view of broadcasting as having a social purpose and suggested that similar principles should govern both public and private broadcasting and those principles should be ratified in the commercial sector by the Independent Television Authority (*Pilkington*



*Report*, 1960). Broadcasting in Britain, whether a monopoly or duopoly service depended upon an assumption of broadcasting as a public good. The Independent Broadcasting Authority continued this trend,

‘The Authority’s first duty is to the public....we must answer to the public for the programmes of ITV. If they are unfair, if they are of poor quality, if they are shocking...’(*ITV Handbook*, 1974:5).

However, with the interventions of the Conservative Thatcher and Major Governments into broadcasting in the 1980s and 1990s, the new rhetoric of consumer sovereignty and the exaltation of the values of individual choice introduced the belief that the public interest in broadcasting was better served by commercial competition than regulation. The notion of public interest articulated by the Peacock Committee, the 1988 White Paper and the 1990 Broadcasting Act were more closely linked to concepts such as quality, choice, popularity and diversity. Such a change in language in relation to the public interest is reflected in the current ITC guidelines. The ITC,

‘...seeks to ensure that a wide range of television services is available throughout the UK and that, taken as a whole, the services are of a high quality and appeal to a variety of tastes and interests.....seeks to ensure fair and effective competition in the provision of these services’ (*ITC Factfile*, 1996).

The BBC was charged by the Government in 1994 with the onerous task of exploiting its commercial interests whilst simultaneously protecting its original “values” which are enshrined in the principle of serving the public and therefore the public interest. It stated that the BBC should,

‘...do more to exploit its assets (but)...all the BBC’s commercial activities should, however, be carried out in ways which are consistent with its public service objectives, which reflect its values’ (*The Future of the BBC*, 1994).

Such evolution in the ethos and rationale of the broadcasting institutions, will exacerbate the tensions, uncertainties and confrontations which will continue to occur in the broadcasting domain around such issues as *what is the public interest in relation to the BBC and in relation to the commercial broadcasting system?* However, working definitions of the concept are unlikely to be analysed in any more depth by legislators and regulators in the future, and will continue to be an expedient reflection of the politico-economic realm within which the broadcasting industries are operating. This means that the analysis of the value of television news as a dimension of the public sphere or public spheres must be similarly contexted and as such must raise concerns relating to the relationship between television news and democracy.

### III) Television News, Democracy and Populism

Democracy has been defined as ‘a form of public decision-making conducted in public’ (Keane, 1992:23). However, several writers have expressed concern about the tendency towards unaccountable decision-making, and the growing inaccessibility to many areas of public life (Kingdom, 1991; Keane, 1992; Ranson, 1992; Heller and Edwards, 1992; Marsh and Rhodes, 1992; Weir and Hall, 1994; Hogwood, 1995; Marr, 1995). It has been argued that such inaccessibility to public information, characterised generally by the increasing influence of supranational organisations, the growth in quangos, privatisation of public companies and reform of local government has resulted in,

‘...a new era of political censorship in which key parts of life are structured by unaccountable political institutions’ (Keane, 1992:16).

In such an environment, where the tendency is clearly towards increased secrecy and concealment, it is vital that television news programmes

attempt to provide empowering and valuable information to the public to enable them to make critical decisions and assessments of many aspects of public life. This can only be achieved by overcoming the tensions which exist on the one hand between the the state's persistent tendency to secretiveness and its intermittent interest in direct censorship, and on the other hand the need to simultaneously successfully master the information overload which is a symptom of late twentieth century society. Only by acting both as rigorous investigator and fastidious interpreter can contemporary journalism hope to overcome the constraints within which it operates. The informational content of television news can then be said to be a truly valuable asset to the public sphere or public spheres.

Raymond Williams (1988) argued for a democratic communication system, something which belongs to the whole society, and this led him to focus upon systems of control in the media. He identified three control systems which affect the way the media organisations function. His first, the authoritarian, is more applicable to communist and fascist state-controlled systems, where a minority controls the media which are repressed, restricted and censored. His second, the paternal system, attempts to guide and protect its viewers, in a way which is thought to be best for them by an enlightened minority. Unlike the authoritarian system the rationale for such control is one of duty and obligation and not overtly power-seeking (although any form of control will undoubtedly concentrate power in the hands of the controller) (Eldridge and Eldridge, 1994).

Williams' paternalistic control system is particularly relevant to the BBC. The first Director General, John Reith, saw it as his duty and mission to ensure that the audience were supplied with cultural products which were of a worthy nature and were what the audience needed, and not necessarily what they wanted (McIntyre, 1993). The impact of

commercialism on the BBC will be discussed further in Chapter 7, in relation to the effect it is having on public service values and newsworthiness.

Williams' third category of control is the commercial system, which has as its core value, market freedom and as such is opposed to both the paternalistic and authoritarian methods of control. There are, of course, constraints operating in Western capitalist societies which dilute the freedom of market forces. As outlined earlier, regulators such as the Independent Television Commission and the Independent Broadcasting Authority and Independent Television Authority before it, were set up to ensure that market freedom does not result in a cultural product of low standard which does not serve the public interest. A continuing theme which has dogged the life of commercial television is that its product was not of a high quality (culturally-elite version of quality) and was prone to trivialisation and sensationalisation. ITN's *News at Ten* has recently been accused of pandering to commercialism, by producing news stories of a more "tabloid" content and format (*Independent on Sunday*, 22/5/94; *The Times* 8/6/94). Stuart Purvis, Editor-in-Chief at ITN, has strenuously denied such accusations, by claiming that, 'what ITN sets out to do is popular, quality journalism' (*Media Guardian*, 13/6/94).

However, the main source of revenue for terrestrial independent television is advertising. As advertisers are prepared to pay more money to programmes which are more popular, the pressure is placed on commercial television to increase audience ratings. ITN news is not immune from this pressure. Each day, the previous day's ratings for all their three news programmes are posted on the newsroom walls, for contemplation. *News at Ten* has been specifically designed to retain the audience after the commercial break and news stories are deliberately "advertised" before the break as teasers to ensure that audiences return

(see Chapter 5). This careful crafting of a television news programme on the basis of ratings is obviously relevant to the study of newsworthiness. I personally witnessed how some of the choices were made, subject to assumed popularity. ITN has been accused of over-indulging in gratuitous spectacles, of relying too much on film and format, such as graphics and presentation tricks at the expense of informational content (Ibid, 1994; *Independent on Sunday*, 22/5/94; *The Times*, 8/6/94; Barnett and Gaber, 1993).

This thesis analyses and questions the content and informational value of British broadcast news by examining fourteen different terrestrial television news programmes over a full week of output broadcast in April 1992 and by observing journalistic selection and production of news for ten different television news programmes in six different television newsrooms. In Chapters 4, 5, 7 and 8, I illustrate how there are many differences between the content and production of the different news programmes resulting from the increased diversification of the television news genre. This analysis shows how the flexibility of the television news genre has also resulted differences in style of television news across the different news programmes, and shows how increasing concentration on entertainment techniques and gimmicky format devices to increase audience ratings is jeopardising the information quality and value of some television news programmes.

Fortunately, British television news also exhibits some positive qualities. The public is given some useful and valuable information by the mainstream news providers. The BBC still retains a corporate ethos which is centred on a definition of quality which ensures that a diverse range of issues and countries are still routinely covered in its news programmes. ITN news redeems itself with an excellent minority news programme, *Channel Four News*, shown on weekdays at seven o'clock

illustrating clearly that news of a high standard can be produced to a commercial remit. Indeed *Channel Four News* shows that there are other ways of serving the public interest. Other commercial news providers at ITN's channel 3 also claim that they are serving the public interest by providing a popular and accessible range of news programmes. However, the link to mass popularity is a different interpretation of the public interest idea than that exercised at *Channel Four News* or at the BBC generally.

Our criticism of the more negative tendencies of commercialization can be strengthened by the knowledge that it is possible for a commercial news provider to produce a news programme which is more akin to the traditional BBC public service broadcast news programmes. Such television news programmes can play an important role in exposing injustices and inequalities. Recently the BBC exposed atrocities in Chinese camps and *Channel Four News* showed the British public the appalling practice in China of leaving babies to die. At home the revelations are often more circumspect, but nonetheless television news has participated in the exposure of government sleaze and scandal, although it tends to do so retrospectively following the press. Television news is clearly performing some kind of useful role, the public has learnt about corruption in government, about the unacceptably high salaries paid to the chairmen of the privatised utilities and the growing power and unaccountability of the quangos and so on. Whilst academics, sectional interests and minority groups have cause to criticise the selective content of television news and the obvious problems inherent in the concept of objectivity, it has to be conceded that television news journalists do not aim to mislead or to be biased in their interpretation of events and the public largely view news content as accurate and reliable.

However, whether the more human interest type stories, such as long running royal family stories are serving the public interest is more debatable, even amongst journalists themselves. Journalists working at ITN's channel 3 would view many of the general everyday activities of "Fergie" or "Princess Di" as newsworthy whereas those working for *Channel Four News* and on some programmes at the BBC would be much less likely to broadcast general royalty stories unless they had constitutional implications. Despite the increasing tendency to sensationalist and human interest reporting television news journalists have not yet resorted to making up stories, an activity which seems to be seen as an acceptable practice in some sections of the British tabloid press (e.g. *The Sun*, Chippendale and Horrie, 1990:157-159), or to introducing

‘meaningless trivial “Hey Dorris!” factoids as a way of disguising lack of in-depth coverage’ (Ibid, 1990:150).

On a more positive note, however, popularisation of information programmes generally can be credited with some success at democratisation of the public sphere. For example political debates conducted in a television studio, do make accessible political activity which hitherto would have been hidden from view. Similarly broadcasting has cultivated a type of style of discussing politics which makes it more accessible to the public than the rather grandiloquent debates conducted at Westminster (Sparks, 1991). Although Sparks also argues that a more aggressive style of interviewing politicians is also more conducive to the democratization of the public sphere, it is notable that Director General of the BBC, John Birt criticised such activity by presenters like Jeremy Paxman and John Humphreys as unnecessary and not conducive to good political journalism (Birt, *The Times*, 4/2/95, *Media Guardian*, 17/7/95).

The basic human and democratic rights of freedom of expression and freedom of opinion are curtailed by the current (one-way broadcast) structure of the television medium itself. Also, as I previously indicated, because the notion of public interest is largely determined by the government and the regulators, it is questionable whether television news produced in the name of public interest, can really provide the type of information which empowers the citizen, enhancing his or her civil, political and social rights. Given these constraints, the value of television news, as one dimension of the public sphere, obviously remains limited. In principle the concept of democracy carries with it a basic right of freedom of information, and this can provide a moral/legal basis for journalism and therefore for television news. However, in practice this needs to be institutionalised through a Bill of Rights and a Freedom of Information Act, and is so institutionalised in most Western societies. Unfortunately in Britain we do not have either.

c) Television News Values: Objectivity and Newsworthiness in Television News.

D) Journalistic Objectivity: Ideal and Practical

As outlined earlier, one of the key features of audience perception of television news involves the degree of trust which is accorded to television. Such trust is based on the belief that the broadcast news is not partisan in content. Part of this trust is grounded in the regulatory framework within which the television news broadcasters must operate in their role of serving the public interest by producing news which is impartial. As I discussed earlier the word “objectivity” is rarely used by regulators, but is substituted by euphemisms such as “accuracy”, “balanced” and “fair”. The BBC is very careful to ensure that it meets



the requirements set down in the Annex to the Licence and Agreement in 1964 which states that the BBC accepts a duty

'...to provide a properly balanced service which displays a wide range of subject matter ....(and) to treat controversial subjects with due impartiality.....both in the Corporation's news services and in the more general field of programmes dealing with matters of public policy' (*BBC Producer Guidelines*, 1994:21).

The Producer Guidelines (a handbook of some 275 pages) is circulated to correspondents, producers, programme makers, editors and managerial staff at the BBC. This book is referred to on a daily basis (all the producers, correspondents and editors I spoke to referred me to the handbook) and the BBC's position on objectivity in news reporting is very clear.

'Programme makers should be at their most scrupulous in factual areas....Reporting should be dispassionate.....(good reporting)....should offer viewers and listeners an intelligent and informed account that enables them to form a view. A reporter may express a professional judgement but not a personal opinion' (Ibid :21).

The BBC is forbidden in Clause 13(7) of the Licence from broadcasting its own opinions on current affairs and matters of public policy. The BBC also stresses that it is important to ensure impartiality and objectivity occurs over time so it is not necessary that all sides have an opportunity to speak in a single programme.

Broadcasting during elections is specifically governed by Section 93 of the Representation of the People Act, 1983 (referred to in the newsroom as "the RPA"). However, it is interesting to note that there is no legal requirement that all candidates be given exactly equal treatment. Fringe candidates are not accorded parity.

The news programming of the commercial ITV system is also regulated in terms of conceptions of the public interest in objectivity and impartiality. For instance, The Broadcasting Act 1990, states that,

'any news given (in whatever form) in its programmes is presented with due accuracy and impartiality; that due impartiality is preserved on the part of the person providing the service as respects matters of political or industrial controversy or relating to current public policy' (Broadcasting Act 1990:6(1):6).

Thus, the requirement for ITN to provide news which is accurate and impartial is controlled by law and regulated by the ITC and was a requirement of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) and the Independent Television Authority (ITA) before it.

Therefore the requirement for both the BBC and ITN to produce impartial and objective news is a legal one, a part of the constitution of the two systems laid down by Government from their inception. Those who accuse journalists of hi-jacking the concept in order to become more professional, or to somehow avoid making a personal judgement forget that journalists or organisations which break the law are likely to be heavily penalised. The BBC has to guard against penalties such as the removal of senior staff or Governors by the Government and needs to ensure the Government renews its Charter. ITN needs to try to ensure that it continues to be the sole or at least the main provider of television news to the independent television companies (its performance has recently been reviewed by the ITC in 1995). The ITC on this occasion concluded that,

'.....ITN has provided a well-resourced, authoritative and attractive news service, meeting the requirements of the Broadcasting Act 1990 for high quality. The review confirms

the position of ITN as the Channel 3 news provided nominated by the ITC' (*ITC News Release*, 21/12/95).

However, the ITC plans to conduct a further review of ITN's performance in 1998, illustrating how the pressures on ITN are different from those of BBC news. Although both have versions of the public interest in their notions of objectivity and impartiality and their regulatory guidelines, ITN has the additional problem of having to also satisfy the ITV companies and not just the ITC. The ITV companies can in principle choose alternative types and suppliers of news programming besides ITN as long as they achieve both the ITC guidelines and ensure profitability for the ITV companies. ITN is therefore much more vulnerable than BBC news in this respect.

Within their different television news organisations, and working to different pressures and versions of the public interest, journalists must ensure that they are producing a product which will be judged to be impartial and objective news. Therefore for most journalists, the practice of objective reporting is central to their task and is a professional ideal. An enquiry by Boyer (1981), produced a set of statements about the meaning of objectivity derived from a study of what journalists themselves say about objectivity. According to Boyer journalists believe that they look for balance and even-handedness in presenting different sides of an issue; attempt accuracy and realism in their reporting; present all the main relevant points; separate facts from opinion, but treat opinion as relevant; minimize the influence of the writer's own attitude, opinion or involvement and avoid slant, rancour or devious purpose.

However, as I indicated above, this professional claim to objectivity in reporting is of concern to sociologists. Indeed much of the sociology of journalism has, from the outset, been concerned with

'establishing that (news) information was produced, selected, organised, structured, and (in consequence) biased' (Collins, 1990:20).

Most sociological research begins from the assumption that the media, and therefore news and journalism are social constructions. News is not, nor can it be a mere reporting of the world "out there" and therefore must be value-laden. Central to the sociology of journalism is the argument that these values support the status quo, and therefore help the powerful vested interests of the "Establishment". Indeed, this problematic is not simply a British concern. American academic Michael Parenti comments that,

'objectivity means that reporters should avoid becoming politically active, and should keep their distance from their subject, while commentators, editors, and owners socialize, dine and vacation with the political, military, and corporate leaders whose views and policies they are supposed to be objective about' (Parenti, 1993:53).

There are several targets for those who criticise the usage of objectivity as a concept and a principle. First, there is the impossibility of complete objectivity, the unavoidable process of news selection must also result in subjective judgement by the journalists. Of course the journalists themselves may be unaware they are making normative judgements (White, 1950) but few critics believe there is a conspiracy at work in the television newsroom. Second, gaps and omissions are inevitably left in a news report as a result of the process of editing and selection, and these gaps may themselves offer implicit assumptions and judgements which may be interpreted as biased reporting. Third, the news is produced in the context of numerous powerful internal and external pressures and powerful and efficient sources, which will have an effect on the final product (Gans, 1980). Fourth, the claim to objectivity can be misleading,

especially when the so-called objective product is likely to contain hidden messages which privilege one account among several, for example those who finance the news (Shoemaker and Mayfield, 1987), or the interests of established power (McQuail, 1992). In short, objectivity is seen by some as being impossible and by others as being undesirable.

Glasser defines objectivity in journalism as an “ideology” by which he means 'a set of beliefs that function as the journalist's claim to action' (Glasser, 1992:158) which promotes three kinds of bias. First, it is biased against the “watchdog” role of the media in favour of the status quo. This is because of its efforts to report the “facts” and remain value neutral and also because media format requirements influence journalists in their selection and use of sources. Journalists tend to use reliable sources who in practice are usually prominent members of society (Altheide, 1985; Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1987, 1991; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994). A second bias is against independent thinking. As journalists are expected to remain value neutral and impartial, there is no longer a need for them to have a critical perspective. The third bias is the bias against the journalist's assumption of responsibility for what is reported. According to Glasser since the objectivity ideology itself implies that news is somehow “out there” ready simply to be reported, it is somehow independent of the reporter, who will not be held responsible for it (Glasser, 1992).

A “fact” is clearly different from a subjective opinion or value and therefore one should, in principle, be able to check and verify facts (indeed journalists make this a principle of their professional training). Research into the factualness (and therefore by implication the objectivity of news reports) has been approached in various ways, all of which are beset with problems of their own. For example, it has proven difficult to obtain a set of reliable facts against which to check media “facts”

(Blankenberg, 1970). Other sources of facts, such as those sources which set themselves up as “media of record” such as papers of record, news agencies, factual compilations from several such media and so on, have all proved to be selective, open to human error and not immune from bias (McQuail, 1992). By checking with persons or organisations which are the subjects or sources of news Bell (1991) has shown that whilst factual errors are usually trivial, claims of misrepresentation or out-of-context reporting of comments are common complaints. In contrast, the audience, when asked, seems to place a high value on the accuracy of television news reporting (Goodwin and Whannel, 1990, Gunter et al, 1993).

Observation of journalists at work in the newsroom has shed some light on the criteria employed by journalists in their selection of news stories and this has gone some way towards explaining some of the biases which are automatically built into the news product. For example, Hetherington (1989) found that journalists consciously or unconsciously base their choice and treatment of news on two criteria. First, the political, social, economic and human importance of the event. Second, whether it will interest, excite and entertain their audience. As will be discussed later in the thesis, there are many other factors and issues which determine news selection and production, and therefore the content of the news. Such factors and issues reduce the possibility of objective reporting in the ideal sense sought by certain critics.

The assaults on objectivity as the cornerstone of professional journalistic ideology therefore come from those critics who believe that reality is not “out there” but is humanly produced and humanly maintained, i.e. reality is a social construction (Carey 1989:26). However, this type of critique of objectivity is itself replete problems, because although we might agree that all social reality is socially constructed that does not then mean that we cannot assume that objective reports are possible about it. Also

reports are human communications and as such have to be put into human language. They are necessarily and unavoidably linguistic constructions, but this does not mean that objective reports about reality are impossible. Therefore we may accept that social reality is socially constructed and that news reports about social reality are linguistically constructed, we may also accept that news reports about social reality are socially organised via organisations like ITN or the BBC etc., none of this means that objectivity is impossible. All of the considerations above are compatible with analyses which might argue for or against objectivity.

Those who argue against objectivity usually see it as serving nefarious purposes, or as 'the most insidious bias of all' (Schudson, 1978:160). Or view it as a strategy of hegemony, or a "strategic ritual" used by the journalists to immunise themselves from criticism (Tuchman, 1972). It has also been conceived of as an option which prevents journalists from having to think or take responsibility for their actions (Glasser, 1992). It is important to present this account of objectivity as not simply being a journalist "for" and academic "against" scenario. Indeed, many journalists realise themselves that objectivity is simply a professional ideology, a normative assumption which cannot in reality be attained. The journalist Britt Hume urged that news people should not try to be objective, they should try to be honest. Instead of reporting the approved version of events and issues they should try to find out if the source is actually telling the truth, otherwise what is passed off for objectivity is a mindless acceptance of other people's version of the truth (Parenti 1993). However, problematically honesty and truth are as open to social construction as is objectivity. Such an attempt at finding the "truth" is actually what the police and legal processes such as interrogations, cross examination in court and so on attempt in order to present different sides of an argument for a jury to decide what is "true". This is not an easy task to take on and it means that in this analysis the journalist is no longer

a reporter but more of an investigator. Does this then mean that journalism is importantly involved in interpretation and assessment? If this is the case then it might follow that television news perhaps ought to be more like current affairs analysis, a status which could possibly be applied to certain stories covered by BBC2 *Newsnight* and *Channel Four News*.

Many journalists know it is not possible to attain objectivity (indeed by its own admission, the BBC is not impartial or objective about such issues as threats to national security, “terrorism” and apartheid) but they adhere to the idea that it is better to attempt to be objective (and fail) than to be partisan in any way at all and they justify such a position by saying (in what many believe to be an enlightened view), that they “do their best”.

An interesting approach to the concept of objectivity is given by Judith Lichtenberg, who examines the assault on objectivity made by sociologists and other critics. She argues that we cannot simply abandon objectivity and that the critics do not actually do so themselves. Although they appear to reject it they are covertly relying on it, because, although it is not realistic to believe that anyone can be objective we still need to assume that objectivity as an ideal is both possible and valuable. However, she, like the critics of objectivity, must conclude that,

'paradoxically, the aspiration to objectivity can contain biases of its own, by advantaging established sources or by encouraging an artificial arithmetic balance between views and tempting reporters to maintain the appearance of neutrality even in the face of over-whelming “non-neutral” evidence' (Lichtenberg, 1991:229-230).

It useful at this stage to unravel a series of propositions which link the issue of objectivity to the concerns of sociologists and to my attempt to analyse newsworthiness:



i) Objectivity is an ambiguous concept. It is seen by some of its critics as an ideal which cannot be attained, and as an ideological prop for vested interests in society. As I argued earlier, the regulatory requirement for journalists to work to a criteria of objectivity and impartiality which is advocated on the grounds of public interest is linked to the political system and therefore is established by the validating system. Yet the aim of attaining some kind of objectivity in their reporting is seen by journalists as a goal or a moral imperative which they must strive for in order to make both themselves and their profession reach higher standards and to ensure that they retain their position within the confines of a governmentally determined role for broadcast journalists.

ii) In essence both critics and journalists agree that objectivity as an ideal is unattainable, and therefore it is the compromise position which the journalists take up which is of concern; we have to consider if this serves the public interest.

iii) Because journalists adhere to certain formulae to ensure that a news story appears as, and can be read as being as “objective as possible”, news is peppered with facts and figures (Tuchman, 1972). These facts and figures and other criteria such as good pictures which show that something is actually happening or has happened, can be presented as “neutral”. For example, the case study in Chapter 8 shows how film of a fire raging at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, was used by all the television news programmes for two or three days. Another common device used to varying degrees by all news programmes is the placing of a journalist outside the building where a meeting is taking place in order to stress that the event is really occurring. Such actuality shots are also criteria which go towards ensuring a story is seen to be newsworthy.

iv) Certain stories may get into the programme simply for the sake of balance *per se*. For example, during the run up to the local elections in May 1994, the discussions in the BBC editorial morning meeting were along the lines of 'we had better do something on the Green Party today, can someone go out and get something'. It is important to note that the notion of balance and the notion of objectivity are not the same concepts. It is possible for broadcasters to ensure that coverage of an election campaign, for example, is balanced in terms of air time and still fail to be objective in their coverage.

The notion of objectivity and the belief by journalist, the regulators and the audience in its importance has resulted in the practice of objective reporting becoming central to television news reporting and its being reinforced as a professional ideal. Underpinning the notion of objective television news are notions of public interest, trust and authority. Such values are implicit in the constituent features of newsworthiness and can inform actual story choice. The influence of the ideal of objectivity on newsworthiness occurs through devices used by journalists to attempt to be impartial and objective, such as, an adherence to facts and figures which are believed to be value neutral, use of particular sources and the use of their own version of "balanced" reporting, measured in time, during election periods. We can now consider the concept of "newsworthiness" in a little more detail.

## II) Newsworthiness

Joshua Halberstam (1992) identifies three theories of newsworthiness. The first analyses news as a "speech act" model, whereby any report of a current event is considered to be news or newsworthy by virtue of it being published. Therefore newsworthiness is created and not discovered through its act of publication. It follows then that news is whatever the

editor or the journalist says it is. In the second model newsworthiness can be analysed according to the degree of importance, or significance of the event or item in question, and in the third it may be analysed in terms of people's interests. Halberstam, in part, supports the latter model, arguing that the concept of newsworthiness is linked to the satisfaction of actual human interests.

These three themes of newsworthiness are particularly useful as I believe they all offer explanations of the concept of newsworthiness pertinent to particular news programmes and illustrate the different notions of public interest journalism operating in different television newsrooms.

The first theme, of news being what the editor says it is, where the editor is somehow the custodian of news values and the public interest, is a recurring subject in television newsrooms and is often cited by journalists themselves as an explanation of newsworthiness. This theme, as I will illustrate in Chapters 6 and 7, is more pertinent to an explanation of journalistic mythology and bureaucratic arrangement, than to a holistic account of the constituent features of newsworthiness.

The second theme, of news as importance is illustrative of the dilemma of the journalist working for a quality television programme, trying to reconcile the need to attract and retain audience interest, with the notion of importance and significance. At the BBC such notions are closely aligned to its vision of what is in the public interest. Such notions of serving the public by providing them with information which is enlightening and informational has its roots in the origins of the BBC and John Reith's attitude to the needs of the public (McIntyre, 1993). As stories which are important cannot always be interesting, journalists working for news programmes which seek to report "worthy" stories such as the BBC's *Nine O'clock News*, in its role as a journal of record, argue

that to be able to make an important news story interesting is an endorsement of their ability as a journalist. Other journalists working for rival news companies would still argue that such news stories are boring. The audience, it is noted, does not have a voice in this discussion, but does have the ability to switch off. As I show in Parts II and III of this thesis, the need to attain and retain audience figures is of particular importance to commercial news programming and pressure to interest the audience is paramount. In contrast to the stress on the worthy and important, ITN's Channel 3 news programmes are more likely to broadcast news stories which will interest and even entertain the news audience, illustrating clearly the differences in perception between the BBC and ITN's channel 3 news providers about what is in the public interest.

Newsroom observation and content analysis confirms that the third theme of news as interest outlined above is particularly pertinent to the definition of television news at ITN's Channel 3; *Big Breakfast News*, Yorkshire Television's Regional News Magazine, *Calendar News* and *GMTV News*. In contrast *Newsnight*, *BBC Nine O'clock News* and *Channel 4 News* are more likely to pursue stories of importance and significance, as defined by them, (although, of course, this is not meant to imply that journalists working on programmes such as the *Nine O'clock News* have no interest in retaining an audience). Programmes such as *BBC One O'clock News*, *BBC Children's Newsround*, BBC's Regional News Programme, *Look North News* and *BBC Six O'clock News*, fall between the two definitions. Indeed, in 1994 the *BBC Six O'clock News* differentiated itself from the other BBC1 news programmes by slightly modifying its interpretation of both newsworthiness and the public interest. It did this by broadcasting more domestic stories and interesting news stories rather than the more "worthy" stories provided by the *Nine O'clock News* and *Newsnight* (see Figure 1 in the Introduction for an illustration of how news programmes are constituted from different news sub-genres, and Chapters 4, 5 and 7).

I will return to the themes relating to newsworthiness and public interest throughout the thesis. Much previous research has concentrated instead upon the values and messages in television news, where television news content, television news production and television news effects were seen to be related to a product of a uniform structure, format and process. It has ignored the possibility of there being a diversity of definitions of the constituent features of television newsworthiness, depending upon which news programme and which news organisation is being analysed. Using examples from both my content analysis and newsroom observation I will show how different conceptions of newsworthiness and what is in the public interest relate very strongly indeed to different news programmes, different news organisations and to wider influences relating to the increasing commercialization of broadcast television news.

#### d) Social Change and Television News

The above analysis has outlined some of the problems inherent in the role of the television news media in relation to its role of serving the public interest in a democracy. The limited nature of the notion of public interest developed through the regulatory system, which underpins journalistic values of objectivity and newsworthiness, has been contrasted with a normative assessment of what role the television news media should play in enlightening and empowering a citizen to act morally and knowingly in the public good. Such an analysis, however, cannot and should not, occur in a temporal vacuum but must be considered in the context of recent social change. I will now discuss three broad areas of social change, occurring over the last decade, which have made the analysis of television news in relation to the themes outlined in parts (b) and (c) of this chapter both more complex and also more critical. Such themes can be divided into three broad vectors of change, politico-

economic (in particular the new commercialization of television news), technological and transnational.

#### D) Political Economic Changes and the New Commercialization of Television News

The 1980s and 1990s have been characterized by a new relationship between government and the state. The nature and role of the state, a wide collection of institutions over which government has control, (Kingdom, 1991), has been radically redrawn by the Thatcher and Major Conservative Governments. Such changes were given intellectual coherence by New Right theorists who gained political credibility by the alleged failure of interventionist policies of the governments of the 1960s and 1970s (Farnham and Horton, 1993). Thatcher used radical initiatives on all policy fronts to assault post-war social democracy, corporatism and consensus politics. The aim was to cut back the public sector by spending less on the welfare state, abandoning Keynesianism and releasing the forces of the market. The new politico-economic philosophy which has come to dominate the public sector is centred upon the belief that competitive market forces will be driven by consumer demand, ensuring that consumers will get what they want (Gunter, 1993). Baudrillard argues that in practice commodification can result in the individual believing he or she is the sovereign consumer, masking the effect of hegemony (Stevenson, 1994). Such concentration on the “possessive” individual, and individual consumer choice as the key right of public life has infiltrated and influenced contemporary governmental and popular conceptions of citizenship and the public interest.

Undoubtedly free-market philosophy has been a minor theme of British television broadcasting since the creation of the ITV system in the 1950s. In the past, however, the balance of state policy was weighted against it through regulation of the ITV system and support for the BBC. In the

1980s and 1990s this balance was changed and is now weighted in favour of the application of a free-market philosophy to the whole broadcasting industry. Such a change has initiated broad debate about the role of public service broadcasting in Britain and has threatened its future security (Barnett and Curry, 1994). It has also highlighted key concerns centred upon the nature of the public sphere, public interest and public opinion as well as the relationship between the broadcast media and democracy.

It is commonly argued that Thatcherism as a political ideology for governing a nation state was flawed and contradictory (Held, 1989). It professed to be reducing the size of the state and the role of the government whilst simultaneously becoming increasingly interventionist and centralist in a wide variety of state activities. In the 1980s, the broadcasting industry felt the full weight of the government's contradictory ideology. In the new era of the free market, the BBC was threatened both by a hostile interventionist government and by new commercial competitors. The BBC was forced to respond to such pressures, and as I will discuss in Chapter 7, was forced to change its ethos and culture, introducing an internal market and new managerial practices in order to guarantee the renewal of its charter and licence fee (Barnett and Curry, 1994; Horrie and Clarke, 1994). The recent replacement of BBC Chairman, Marmaduke Hussey with Sir Christopher Bland from LWT is certain to continue the practices introduced by Director-General John Birt, Birt and Bland being "old pals" and "too cosy for BBC's comfort" (Brooks, *Observer*, 14/1/96).

Political changes to broadcasting were formalised by the establishment of new legislative frameworks. The Government White Paper of 1988 was 'the biggest bomb put under British TV in half-a-century', (*Observer*, 13/11/88). The 1990 Broadcasting Act which followed created an auction

for ITV licences which were only protected from the rigors of pure market forces by the hasty addition of a “quality” threshold. Although the ITV system was and is a commercial system it was required from its inception to operate within some public service rules (see Chapter 7). The principles of geographic universality, catering for all tastes and interests and producing high quality programmes in theory are still key ITC requirements of the ITV licensees which must ensure that,

‘a wide range of services is available throughout the UK and that, taken as a whole, the services are of high quality and appeal to a variety of tastes and interests’ (*ITC Annual Report, 1993/94*).

As I go on to show in Chapter 7, such principles are being compromised by several factors such as: mergers and take-overs of ITV companies, the pressure to move *News at Ten* to provide more time to show films, and the chase for ratings which is marginalising minority interest programming and is influencing news programme content and format structures. The ITC as regulator will have an increasingly difficult task in defining programme quality and standards within the strong commercial environment which now exists in the ITV system.

Intervention in broadcasting by the Conservative Party was aimed at increasing competition, encouraging the development of new technologies and new services and providing the consumers with more choice and diversity. However, in practice it has served to challenge the future role of the BBC as a public service broadcaster as well as to elicit a growth in concern about the implications for the standards and quality of the services provided by both the BBC and its commercial competitors.

However, with or without Conservative Government policy the BBC would have been challenged from new technological developments and economic pressures. Even with strong political commitment to public



service broadcasting it is likely that public broadcasters were bound to face major funding constraints as a result of competition (Foster, 1992). The lack of support for public service broadcasting by the recent Conservative Parties has simply served to exacerbate this crisis.

Throughout this thesis I argue that this market-driven broadcasting philosophy has in practice resulted in a diversification of the British television news product. As I discussed in the Introduction, the television news genre has become increasingly flexible and dynamic in response to the need to produce a wider choice and range of programmes in the context of a more competitive broadcasting environment. The notion of increased choice and diversity of service has been one of the most beguiling as it presents the free-market commercial broadcasting as able to respond directly to the wants of the public. A major concern is that increased competition from new non-terrestrial services and from digital broadcasting multiplexes will reduce audiences and advertising revenue for the terrestrial commercial broadcasters and also reduce audiences for BBC television. While increasing quantity of programming this may lead to a lowering of its quality.

To date there is no operational framework which a broadcast regulator can use to effectively monitor quality (McQuail, 1992; Gunter, 1993), despite several attempts to provide a consensus view which would clearly define quality television (Brunsdon, 1990; Broadcasting Research Unit, 1989). In practice, broadcasting quality has been linked to a culturally elitist view of programme quality. However, some commentators (such as Mulgan (1990)) have recognised that such a definition may not be applicable in the 1990s, as quality is not the exclusive property of high-brow programming, but can be found in other genres such as soap operas (Gunter, 1993).

A key question to be addressed in this thesis is whether or not the diversification of the television news genre is resulting in a reduction in quality of television news in Britain in the 1990s. The notion of quality in relation to television news, can, as I argue later in this thesis, be ascertained via the examination and analysis of television news in relation to such factors as content, format and production procedure. For example The increasing proliferation of magazine-type news programmes, the use of format devices to increase entertainment value (Channel Four, *J'Accuse the News*, 1/11/94) and the shortening of television news stories (Barnett and Gaber, 1993) are just a few developments which have been heavily criticised in recent times for making television news programmes more down-market. If the quality of British television news is under threat, - for instance if it can be argued to provide little which is of good quality, or provides little which is useful to the public in a liberal democracy, - this has important implications for our understanding of the role of the media in the public sphere in modern society.

## II) Technological Changes

The 1980s and 1990s have seen an unprecedented growth in the power and diversity of media technology. The growth of satellite, cable, optic fibre technology, computerised newsrooms, the Internet and the capacity for technologies to merge, has led in principle to a much greater access to information and a massive growth in outlets requiring information.

In practice greater access to information does not necessarily correlate with a more knowledgeable and informed public and may even have the negative effect of obscuring information by exceeding the interpretative capacity of the subject (Baudrillard, 1993 in Stevenson, 1994). McLuhan in the 1960s began the late twentieth century concern for the cultural consequences of new communication technologies in his celebration of the role of television as a medium (see McLuhan, 1964). The negative

impact of the modern media in terms of the information overload it can produce was first noted in studies which Daniel Bell published throughout the 1960s, culminating in The Coming of Post-Industrial Society in 1973. Such developments were also noted by popular authors such as Alvin Toffler in Future Shock in 1970 and The Third Wave in 1980, and in arguments about the social effects of the new media which have developed along side new technological innovations (Neuman, 1991; Ferguson, 1990). In Chapter 6, I argue that technological innovation can have a serious negative impact upon the practice of journalism and upon the standards of information produced when the information blizzard is simply passed on to the audience. A more constructive form of journalism, which would aim to provide information to enhance and enable citizen participation in the public sphere, can occur only when editors recognize that the image and information blizzard unleashed by technology requires analysis. At its best journalism acts as an intelligent identifier and interpreter of publically important and useful information

Journalism is now tending to develop further towards a “desk job” as journalists try to manage flows of information from groups and agencies. Journalists are increasingly becoming desk bound analysts and interpretators. There is a possibility that in this role they are becoming over-reliant on the wire services supplied by the news agencies rather than going out to gather news stories themselves. Editing at the desk will continue this trend. Television news may simply become a repackaged product whereby journalists rely increasingly upon the judgement and values of unknown sources and agency journalists, or due to the tendency to rely upon feeds from the political units located at Millbank, opposite the Houses of Parliament, to increasingly rely upon the analysis of political activity to provide news stories.

In a recent critique of journalism in the United States, Fallows (1996) argues that there is a relentless tendency for both print and broadcast journalists to politicize areas of life, such as health care, education and economic growth which affect the citizen. Fallows believes that such a trend is destructive, constant illustration of the scheming nature of politicians and the reduction of every issue to the operational strategy of politics has resulted in a loss of audience interest. The journalistic belief that politics must be interesting in order to attract an audience is a reflection of the trend towards entertaining rather than engaging the audience. Fallows is concerned that people will cease to watch or read news which does not expand their command over life in some way, seeing the purpose of journalism being to give citizens the tools to participate in public life.

This trend towards desk-top journalism may result in an information-deficit if journalists simply resort to a lazy or entertaining version of journalism and fail to analyse and interpret the information adequately. Although there is a need for information processing in contemporary Britain, which provides a very important role for journalists. This role involves the serious scrutinisation of those areas of public life which increasingly are being removed from the public domain resulting in undemocratic and unaccountable government (Keane, 1992) and enabling citizens to understand, even control, events which affect them (Fallows, 1996).

The explosion of cable and satellite channels, in theory opens up access to the broadcast medium to the public. It is still unclear whether such access will be an empowering exercise whereby the public can articulate, argue and discuss its views in a public forum, or whether it simply will be reduced to an opportunity for the public to broadcast humorous family videos. The power of technology to provide the opportunity for public

participation in politics and democratic debate is unprecedented as the scarcity of broadcasting channels and capacity has always ensured that terrestrial channels have been restricted in number and meaningful access by the public has therefore been denied.

Technological development may be seen as a mixed blessing. On the one hand it can provide the opportunity for greater public access to a broadcasting forum and produces more information for public consumption. On the other hand, it is not yet clear whether the proliferation of cable and satellite channels will be put to good use as an opportunity for widening the sphere available for rational public debate, or whether the vast amount of information which is now available has the potential to produce and sustain an enlightened public.

### III) Transnational Changes

Western democracies have long existed in an international political and cultural order and are increasingly inter-dependent economically. There is widespread agreement amongst academics and scholars that a process which has been termed "globalisation" is occurring. If the process of globalisation is taken to its logical conclusion it would result in a fully globalised world comprising a single society and culture. Clearly, globalisation has not progressed so far and we are actually witnessing an uneven development of global-level society in different arenas, economic, cultural and to a lesser extent the political dimension. In the cultural arena in particular the degree of globalisation is the greater than in the political and economic arena. In the cultural arena, social relationships can be conducted orally, by public display, by publication, via broadcasting, and by computer. In the case of computer technology, broadcasting and print, social relationships can be conducted which are free from spatial constraints or referents which encourages the formation of relationships between people in disparate locations as well as in

proximate ones. Indeed Waters (1995) analyses the developments in virtual reality and the invention of a “cyberspace” where social relations are rendered completely independent of corporeal location as being a transition into “post-globalisation”. Unlike broadcasting and print, which are still constrained by the space in which social arrangements can be made by the finite nature of the globe, cyberspace can be rendered infinite via virtual reality.

In contrast to the limitless potential for cultural globalisation, in the political arena relationships are usually tied or constrained to particular spatial territories. Such territorial boundaries are generally coterminous with the nation-state. However, the sovereignty of the nation state is also being undermined to some extent by development of transnational practices, the decreasing effectivity of state policy instruments, the development of global bureaucracies and the development of an increasing number of inter-state connections (Ibid. 1995). For example, supranational organisations such as the IMF, the EC, UN, Nato increasingly are making large-scale decisions. This is of concern to some analysts and commentators. They see power and influence shifting away from elected national governments towards unelected supranational bodies (Keane, 1992; Marr, 1995), and, correlated with this, an increasing difficulty in identifying the key centres of power within nation states. This may present problems for those journalists trying to act in the public interest as thorough and analytic interpreters. State power is becoming increasingly dispersed and uncoordinated and is open to attack from both within and from outside the nation state. However, such forces working against executive state power should not be exaggerated as the so-called globalisation process is very uneven and depends upon each particular state’s past history and culture (Keane, 1992). Undoubtedly a British nation state still exists and the terrestrial broadcasters operating within its boundaries still have a role to play as national broadcasters, but a question

mark now hangs over the nature of that role. Historically in Britain information about the nation (national television news) has been emphasized over and above the importance of local communication. Although there is a requirement for both the BBC and the ITV system to provide local news the level of financial investment made and the amount of broadcasting time allocated to local news indicates its subordinate status in relationship to national television news. National news provision has always contained a percentage of international news stories, but increasingly financial commitment to overseas news stories has been reduced.

At ITN international bureaux have had to be closed or their resources rationalised, the BBC has made adjustments by redesigning and rationalising the BBC World Service. Such activity is contradictory when we consider the increasingly important role international news has as a result of transnational shifts when international affairs become more important in relation to the nation. In a sense, international affairs are closer and more relevant but at the same time the sense of nation has become less intelligible. Due to the process of globalisation the nation seems to be less self-sufficient and therefore is more dependent in international terms (Leca, 1992). It therefore becomes more difficult for the state to convincingly explain its political, economic, social position unless it can use the international context as its referent.

Such rationalisation and reduced commitment to international news represents a blinkered and unreflective approach to television news selection and newsworthiness itself in the context of news production in the 1990s.

e) Summary

The main concern of this thesis is to examine television newsworthiness in the multi-programme and multi-organisational environment which exists in Britain in the 1990s. In order to perform a detailed excavation of terrestrial television news it is necessary to take full account of the macro-context within which television news is being selected, produced and consumed. In the 1980s and 1990s the broadcasting environment has been faced with a series of challenges which are resulting in an increasing commercialization of the British terrestrial broadcasting media.

Such changes are grounded in politico-economic, technological and transnational influences which have had, and will continue to have, far-reaching effects on the broadcast media. In the case of television news we are already witnessing the effects of increasing commercialization as the British terrestrial television news genre itself diversifies and fragments as it has adapted and changed to the new broadcasting environment.

However, the fragmentation of the television news genre is challenging long established notions of quality in programming and also notions of the public interest. Some television news programmes defy traditional quality assessments forcing consideration of whether entertainment-type news programmes serve the public interest as well as the more serious news programmes (Mulgan, 1990). Although satisfactory definitions of quality programming have not been established (McQuail, 1992; Gunter, 1993), the broadcast regulators assume the role of assessing quality on the public's behalf.

As the audience increasingly segments according to consumption interests and capacities, it follows that television news will be increasingly targetted at different groups according to market strategies. This may result in further divisions in the prime-time audience whereby sections of



the public will receive an increasingly popular product of lower standard and information quality than more educated sections of the audience. Such popularisation of the news product is already clearly seen in the newspaper market both in Britain and the United States. The popularisation of newspapers like *USA Today* show how a reduction in complex content and introduction of colour and an accessible style can increase popularity whilst reducing it as a resource for political participation (Dahlgren, 1995).

The pressures which have been inflicted upon broadcasting institutions have had profound implications for the whole rationale and ethos of public service broadcasting in Britain, as both the BBC and the ITV system begin to drift away from their original founding remit. The market-driven philosophy of the recent Conservative Governments has encouraged a diversification of broadcast products, in the name of consumer choice. This development coincides with, and complements, the emergence of demassified, consumerist and post-Fordist society in the late-1980s and 1990s (Hall and Jacques, 1990). The decline of mass society and the emergence of consumerist and post-Fordist society is associated with changes in work practices, the decline of tradition political parties, the waning of national traditions, the changing structure of the family and changes in the technology of the media (Stevenson, 1994). Only major news stories or media events tend to bring the nation back together again as a unitary “public” with a common “public interest” (Katz and Dayan, 1994, also see Chapter 8 of this thesis on television news coverage of the ending and aftermath of the Waco siege in the United States in 1993).

These developments raise questions about the broadcast media, and television news in particular in relation to debates about the public sphere, public interest, public service broadcasting, as well as the role and value of television news in a democracy.

I have argued that the belief in the possible reformation of a public sphere in which citizens can actively engage in public debate and argument is Utopian when related to terrestrial television news in a British public service broadcasting system or to commercial news generally. Even though it is likely that the public sphere, of which television news is a part, is fragmenting, this does not mean that television news is currently providing the conditions for a more informed public. Diversification of the television news genre has produced a greater range and variety of television news programmes and styles ranging from the current affairs type programmes through to mainly entertainment programmes.

As I show later in this thesis, the informational value of television news programmes is often compromised by an over-concentration on entertainment devices and stylistic quirkiness. Furthermore, the regulatory and legislative framework which has been created for British broadcasting is based upon the assumption that “quality” or “public interest” can be determined on behalf of the public. Public control or regulation of the broadcast media traditionally has been advocated on the grounds of the public interest, but this is simply one way of legitimating state management of the media.

Given that the majority of the public perceive television news as their primary source of information about the world (Gunter, et.al., 1993) there is actually little motivation by either the public themselves, the journalists, the regulators or the government to lobby for a truly democratic forum for public debate and contribution within the context of British broadcast

news programming. This lack of motivation leads us to consider more carefully what the role of television news should be in a democracy. For John Keane democracy should not guarantee

‘.....peace and quiet and good decisions, but offers citizens the right to judge..... the quality of decisions. Democracy is rule by publics who make judgements in public’ (Keane, 1991:190).

Television news should therefore play an important part in enabling the public to participate and judge. Television journalistic practice charges journalists with the role of working with public concern by analysing and interpreting the data which exists “out there” on behalf of the public. Institutions such as academia in general and journalism are an important part of the public sphere and have a role to play in interpreting and presenting information to the public. A critical difference, however, is the time-scale to which such agencies work. Journalism has to work to a short time-scale and therefore is restricted in the depth of analysis, in the rigour of research methodology as well as by the format constraints of the programme structure. As such, the very nature of television journalism is multiply constrained and should only be perceived as a restricted source of selective information. Although it does have a useful role to play in society as an important and valuable provider of some types of information about the world, it must be recognised for what it is. What is disturbing for the relationship between the television news medium and democracy is the trend towards further restriction of the informational capacity of television news through increased commercialization of broadcasting institutions.

Television news has a number of useful roles it could play in the empowerment of citizens in a liberal democracy. The excavation and analysis of the unaccountable areas of public life would enable the citizen to understand and perhaps even control events which affect them. By

exposing injustice and corruption television news does enable the public to make a judgement about the validity and authority of political institutions but as Fallows (1996) points out there is a danger that a public which is continuously exposed to information about politicians who are shown to be scheming endlessly will cease to take an interest in the political news coverage or even in the political process itself. A balance obviously has to be struck between the presentation of important issues to the public and the temptation to politicize them.

Television news is intimately bound up with citizenship rights and as such its journalists have a social responsibility to attempt to engage and empower its viewers. One particularly important role is the representation of the various minority publics which are emerging due to fragmentation and diversification of British society. To some extent the diversification of the television news genre reflects the fragmentary nature of the audience, but it is questionable that the broadcasters themselves are adequately and accurately representing the diverse range of views which currently exist in British society. Fortunately television news does sometimes exhibit some of these properties, and exposes scandals in public life and brings our attention to atrocities and injustice. For instance in recent years it has addressed such issues as the unaccountability of quangos, the greed of the chairmen of the public utilities and human rights abuses in China.

A worrying trend, however, is the tendency of television news to concentrate on the more superficial, human interest type news stories and to sensationalise and simplify complex issues. Such a practice probably represents the attempt by television news broadcasters to reassemble a “mass audience” and a “unitary public” in the face of so much audience fragmentation around the lowest common denominatory interests (McGuigan, 1992). Indeed such a practice was adopted by many

newspapers when the press became commercialized through advertising in the second half of the nineteenth century (Curran and Seaton, 1988). Such a practice reduces the scope for experiment and diversity in journalism causing it to focus instead upon those stories that are most likely to interest and retain the audience.

However, given that television news as a useful information source is already a restricted and constrained outlet, such trends are very disturbing and raise very serious concerns about the value and role of British terrestrial television news in a democratic state in the 1990s.

## CHAPTER 2: RESEARCHING NEWS AND THE MEDIA

### a) Introduction

In this Chapter I develop the theoretical elements underpinning the analytic and methodological approaches adopted in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 which are applied throughout the rest of the thesis. Through consideration of a variety of research perspectives and studies into television news and the media generally, I formulate my particular analytic approach to the study of television newsworthiness in Britain in the 1990s. As I showed in the Introduction and in Chapter 1, the macro-context within which television news is now produced and selected has been evolving into a decisively market-orientated environment in the contemporary period. Such evolution has implications for the current and future role of television news in relation to the public sphere and democratic process. The notion of public interest has been adapted and changed in relation to the growing demands for a consumer-led news product. To fully understand the processes it is important to consider the types of concerns which have long-occupied the media research field in relation to the relevance and importance of television news and, further, to consider whether such concerns are still relevant in the 1990s or whether new concerns now need to be addressed.

A variety of media research studies are important and relevant to this thesis and have made contributions to the basic problem guiding this thesis, namely that of determining the nature of television newsworthiness in the contemporary period. A broad tradition of enquiry has developed into the role of the mass media in their potential "public interest" capacity. Central to this research is the concern that the mass media can and should make a contribution to the welfare of society and therefore have a responsibility to society (McQuail, 1992). Research into television

news and newsworthiness can be divided into studies of three broad areas: content, production and effects/audience perception(1) analysis. In this chapter I review research which has been conducted into the two important dimensions of the content and production of television news and newsworthiness. This provides some of the intellectual context for my approach to researching television news in this thesis. In this chapter I examine the broad theoretical concerns of media researchers in general and television news researchers in particular by considering a variety of perspectives in media research particularly concentrating on those studies and analyses which help to form the theoretical and methodological basis for my own study. Generally in this thesis I pursue a two-dimensional research strategy via, i) a detailed analysis of television news output using a content analysis and, ii) a fieldwork study of the production processes and systems of six different television newsrooms and ten different television news programmes. Relevant media research traditions include content-based studies such as “news factor” analysis or studies of “bias” in the news, and production-based studies such as those based on “gatekeeper theories”, the organisational analysis of television news, or the social context of news production. A review of these research traditions, of their strengths and weaknesses, is now necessary to help illustrate the analytic and methodological bases of this thesis.

Consideration of the wide variety of studies available in the area of media research indicates that a one-dimensional approach to the study of television news is inadequate as a methodology. As I go on to show, those studies which have simply relied upon content analysis have only elicited limited information although researchers have often made quite ingenious conclusions on the basis of such research. A three dimensional study of television news which considers content, production and audience reception would be the most thorough type of study to

undertake, unfortunately such studies are difficult to resource and pursue in a postgraduate research programme. After careful consideration I decided to pursue a two-dimensional study of television news in order to broaden the research, concluding that production analysis and content analysis would be the most useful to my study because they would provide valuable information about my interests in the production context of television news. Although audience research is a very important dimension of television news and television newsworthiness in principle because it helps us to further understand the constituent features of television newsworthiness and the audience's understanding of news values, it is very difficult to perform and is often inconclusive (see Footnote 1). The value of a multiple dimension research strategy is that it provides a cross-check on the findings and interpretations available from a study of any single dimension. In this thesis, I have chosen to rely on a two-dimensional strategy which provides for this cross-checking process. However I am also aware of the limitation of this approach and that my project could have been further strengthened had resources been available to add audience research to my content and production studies.

It is now useful to develop the theoretical components which inform and underpin the analytical and methodological approaches throughout this thesis. I now consider the broad theoretical concerns of television and media research, examining some of the main traditions of research into television news and newsworthiness (sub-sections below). I then consider in more detail those particular content studies (section (b)) and production studies (section (c)) which have informed this thesis. For reasons discussed earlier I will not devote much of this review to effects studies (but see Footnote 1).



### I) Television News and Media Research: Broad Theoretical Concerns

In this section I focus on production-oriented studies which have a general relevance to understanding my research problem and design.

Much of the British research into the mass media in general which surfaced during the 1970s used recent developments in Marxist theory as well as the insights offered by semiotics and structuralism. Other influences on sociologists came from Karl Mannheim, whose pre-war treatise Ideology and Utopia argued that all knowledge is situationally determined, that is what an individual knows is based on his/her location in the social structure (Mannheim, 1936). Tuchman argues that when this is applied to news, this tenet implies that all news presentations can be shown to be inherently middle class (Tuchman, 1978). Indeed Gans pointed out that American news workers are middle class (Gans, 1966), and Schudson argues that professionalism itself, including media professionalism, is middle class (Schudson, 1978). Much of the British and some American research considered the mass media as an 'ideological apparatus' (Hall, 1977:340) and most of this type of research concentrated on the question of the power of the mass media.

Other concerns have been voiced from a variety of sources, and the media has been variously accused of producing news which is largely a fabrication (Weaver, 1994), is largely manufactured from a series of contrived pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1964), and produced simply "to amuse us to death" (Postman, 1989). More seriously the media have been accused of serving as a propaganda tool, designed to manufacture the consent of the people, (Chomsky, 1989), by a complacent media (Chomsky, 1992). It is the content and effects as well as the construction and manufacturing process of media products which have long concerned

researchers and which have led to analysis of the structure of power and control in the media.

There have been different approaches to the analysis of media power from different Marxist studies of the media, such as structuralist studies, political economic studies and “culturalist” studies of the media. Concern with the power of the media, disillusionment with the ability of the “effects research” to fully explain how and by whom this power is wielded led to study of media institutions, their relationship with the socio-political environment and work practices.

Media institutions have been perceived of as being closely linked to the dominant power structure in society through ownership, legal regulation and values implicit in the professional ideologies and methods of newsgathering (Gurevitch, Bennett, Curran and Woollacott, 1982). Issues such as the influence upon the media of economic and political factors have been addressed via the political economic approach to the sociology of journalism. The political economic perspective searches for answers about the question of power in the media by addressing and analysing the media's structure of ownership and control. In order to understand the causal link between the economic determinants of the media and the content of the media, researchers from this perspective need, in principle, to analyse the professional ideologies and work practices of media professionals. However, there is a distinct lack of both theoretical and empirical investigation of the complex linkages between the ownership of media companies, corporate strategies, management forms and the production and sale of cultural goods both in general and also in work from this perspective (Eldridge, 1993). As the perspective locates the source of “bias” in the external environment, it seeks to examine the causal context of media power rather than its actual production and

content. Furthermore, as the political economic approach can only be speculative about the effects of ownership it suffers from a variety of weaknesses, which will be discussed later.

An important sociological perspective which emerged in the 1960s was cultural studies. Raymond Williams' use of content analysis and other empirical methods to examine popular culture attempted to see "culture" not simply as text abstracted from its origins in a social context, but to recognise the institutions of cultural production as worthy of study (Williams, 1962). Williams' contribution to a new wave of Left and Marxist social thought challenged the traditional Marxist division of society into the base, the economic conditions, and the superstructure, the effects of the economic base including culture (Stevenson, 1995). Acceptance of a pure base/superstructure model is inadequate as such historical materialist theories simply offer explanations which are economically deterministic or favour an ideological autonomy. From this extreme perspective the mass-media are simply ideological tools of the ruling class, who dominate either through ownership or via ruling class control of the state.

Stuart Hall's work at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in the 1970s was based in a culturalist field which incorporated neo-Marxist, structuralist and semiotic theories, and favoured Gramsci's notion of hegemony, where the media is understood as the site of contest between social forces, rather than as a mere conduit for ruling ideology. Stuart Hall drew upon the political sociology of Gramsci to emphasise the possibility of oppositional decodings of journalistic messages by audiences (Hall, 1980). In his essay "Culture, the Media and the Ideological Effect", Hall (1977) recognised that there was a relationship between mass-media growth and capitalism, but did

not go on to analyse this relationship, concentrating instead upon the media institutions themselves as ideological apparatuses. In contrast Murdock and Golding (1979) claimed that the ways in which the media operates as an ideological apparatus could only be understood in relation to their position as large commercial enterprises in a capitalist society (Garnham, 1986). More recently other researchers, like Philip Schlesinger, have criticised the hegemonic model as being too tied to the concept of dominant ideology and are more optimistic about the possibility for different views being heard in the media (Schlesinger, 1991).

These broad theoretical concerns for understanding the social context and role of the media are generally relevant to the concerns I outlined in Chapter 1.

In the context of the increasing commercialization of the British broadcast media and other macro-structural developments, such as technological developments and increasing fragmentation of society, affecting the mass media environment generally during the 1980s and 1990s, concern by researchers has been focussed upon the implications of such developments for the public sphere and democracy. The BBC in particular in the 1990s is having to respond to a variety of pressures to move from a public service broadcasting model towards a market model (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994). As I outlined in more detail in Chapter 1, it is this particular development which is of concern throughout this thesis and which underpins much of the discussion relating to the role and relevance of television news in a democracy.

## II) Dimensions of Media Research

### i) Content Studies

It is important to note that content analysis can only concentrate on what is actually broadcast. It has the obvious disadvantage of missing anything the editors and journalists decided not to broadcast and the reasons for such decisions, and ignores the production process itself. Study of television news content therefore only offers a limited perspective on what constitutes newsworthiness in television news. Nonetheless, analysis of news content is important in that it allows us to look for values inherent in the news output, for indications of racism, sexism and bias. As I show in the case study in Chapter 8, the use of common sense values, assumptions and myths in television news content can actually define and establish some of the dimensions of newsworthiness itself. Importantly, Harrison (1985) criticises the Glasgow University Group's (1976, 1980) research as being simply about analysing their own preferred reading of the messages in the news content and therefore ignoring two other vitally important issues. First, what were the real intentions (if any) of the journalists and second, what is the meaning that the audience gets out of the message. These issues are vitally important to the analysis of the concept of newsworthiness because we must ask how the message which is transmitted (containing newsworthy stories) is constructed by the journalists and whether the audience has the same conception of newsworthiness as the journalist (see section (b) below). This leads onto the second dimension of media research pursued in this thesis.

### ii) Production Studies

Production studies help us to understand organisational and extra-organisational complexity within which the news process occurs and helps to illuminate the subtleties of organisational activity and control. Findings from newsroom observation can reduce the temptation to make

broad sweeping assumptions from a reading of media content data and formulating conclusions about the motivations or intentions of journalists. One of the main weaknesses of newsroom study is that the means of access to information are controlled by those who are being observed. Access to senior managerial meetings are usually denied. An independent study of news content can therefore be a valuable tool in the analysis of some of the more sweeping disclaimers made by senior management or journalists about the selection of television news and provides an arena for discussion and disagreement between the findings from the two types of methodology (see section (c) below).

### iii) Audience Research/Perception Studies

The third dimension of television news audience research/perception/effects studies, has not been considered in this thesis. This is for two main reasons. First, as noted earlier, there are problems of resources in a postgraduate study. Secondly, effects analysis and audience research has been described as being basically inconclusive, in fact 'doing audience research is a messy and slippery business' (Lewis 1991:73) and is therefore difficult to pursue. There is an enormous amount of audience research literature in existence. For example there are over seven hundred studies indicating a link between watching violence on television and enhanced aggressiveness amongst viewers. However, all these studies can be condensed into only four basic research methods, (Gunter, 1986), and none of the studies have actually proven a causal link between watching television violence and violent behaviour. Also, there is disagreement between sociologists and those researching from the cultural perspective to what extent a viewer can resist, recognise or reject dominant ideological messages present in the texts.

Because it is so difficult to prove a causal link between the content of the electronic media and the effect they have on the audience it is similarly problematic to try to assess whether the news values of the journalist are the same as the news values of the audience. However, Sparkes and Winter (1980) found that journalistic news values are good predictors of audience interest in news stories. They investigated the significance of journalistic news values for levels of audience interest in news stories. They found that people tend to under-represent their interest in violence and overestimate their interest in cultural affairs and human interest. They appeared to be interested in economics and uninterested in politics and foreign news stories. It would seem then, that the journalists, in the main, are giving the audience what they want. However, such an assumption is itself problematic as the journalist's criterion of relevance (ie what is newsworthy),

'...has its own "bias" - especially towards the personal and towards the here and now - it also has its own logic and seems to connect well (but not completely) with the logic of audience interest, .....(journalists try to predict what audiences will find interesting)' (McQuail, 1992:200).

If one talks to journalists they appear to argue that they are somehow the custodians of the newsworthy, although the research outlined above would indicate that most of the general public have some idea of what they think should be news (and that sometimes this is different from what the journalist deems to be newsworthy). Furthermore this mystique which is attached to the ability to identify a good news story also extends to the journalist's ability to somehow be impartial and objective in reporting that story. Although a journalist must acquire a so-called "sixth sense" needed to recognise a newsworthy story, having a "good nose for news" or acquire the "right gut feelings" is not enough for television news

if the journalist commits the huge mistake of reporting the story in a way which looks biased. However, as I outlined earlier their perceptions of their own ability to be impartial does not match academic perceptions. For the purposes of this piece of research study of the television news audience has been omitted due to the inconclusive and problematic nature of analysing television newsworthiness from this perspective (see also Footnote 1).

#### iv) Contextual Studies

Studies of the context of the production of television news have often been performed from a “culturalist” perspective. This tradition of enquiry is rooted in film theory, social critical theory and literary criticism (Carey, 1989). Such an approach often does not have one single dominant approach but considers a variety of features in relation to communication. Researchers analysing the media in general or television news in particular from this perspective are often concerned with media performance. However, in contrast to those content-based or production-based studies, or audience perception studies which contain quantitative or “scientific” procedures, the analysis of production context, media culture or meaning from a cultural studies perspective is “interpretive” or “qualitative” (McQuail, 1992:13). Furthermore, from this perspective, media content is seen to only take on meaning when it is received and interpreted by the audience. As such, whilst such studies have a useful contribution to make to media theory, the findings can be problematic when they draw conclusions about content and production from speculative and/or interpretive analyses of study of the audience understandings.



## b) News and Media Content

The role of television has been changed and redefined over the last fifty years. The television medium has ceased to be conceived as a “mirror” of society, being viewed by some as the most important medium for the communication of political information (Negrine, 1991). It follows, therefore, that the content of the television medium must contain values and messages which are only representative of a percentage of views present in contemporary Britain. Research on the content of television news has grown and developed during the medium's life span and has been both theoretical and empirical.

When the content of the news is studied, we focus on the way in which ideas and images are represented. Although a unique news story may be produced for every news programme, that news story is always grounded in three key areas, first, what is actually being represented, second, the person(s) and/or the medium doing the representing and third, the audience for whom the representing is being done.

Studies of the content of the media have mainly focused on the first category, addressing the question of what is actually being represented. In the following sections I consider the two main areas of content-based research. First, news factor analysis, which concentrates on the factors inherent in a news event which increases its chance of becoming news. Secondly, research which has investigated the important issue of “bias” in the media through analysis of imagery and stereotypes relating to gender, race, industrial relations and crime in the content of television news.

## i) News Factors

News factor analysis is content-based research which attempts to examine the way in which 'a property of an event ..... increases its chance of

becoming "news" (Sande, 1971:222), that is, increases its chance of being selected and used by a news organisation. The news factor research tradition tends to focus on the analysis of the meaning content of the real-world events and also on the analysis of the meaning content of media-reported events. Although I show at the end of this section that news factor research has major weaknesses it is a useful starting point in the discussion of content-based media research as it clearly illustrates some of the pitfalls encountered in early one-dimensional studies into television and press news.

Attempts to identify news factors which define the news value of an event for a news organisation were made by Ostgaard in 1965 and Galtung and Ruge in 1965, although Walter Lippmann had already taken a few initial steps in this area in 1922. Today Lippmann's study is rarely acknowledged by news analysts. Instead one of the most well known studies is of the presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus crises in four foreign newspapers by Galtung and Ruge (1965).

Galtung and Ruge used the metaphor of the world as an enormous set of broadcasting stations, each continually emitting a signal, and formulated a list of factors which illustrate the criteria which have to be met for a selection of a news story to be made by a media organisation, given that it is impossible to register everything that is being broadcast. They identified twelve factors (sixteen if their sub-factors are counted). The first eight factors were based on reasoning about what facilitates and what impedes perception, regardless of culture or origin of the selector, and briefly relate to the following: how well an event fits into a newsday (frequency); the bigger and the more violent the event the more likely it is to be reported (threshold); the more clear and unambiguous the event the more likely it is to be reported (unambiguity); the more relevant the story

the more likely it is to be reported (meaningfulness); the more consonant the signal is with the mental image of what one expects to find, the more probable that it will be recorded as worth listening to (consonance); the more unexpected the event the more likely it will be included in the news (unexpectedness); once an event has hit the headlines and been defined as news, the more likely it will continued to be defined as news (continuity); because the journalists have to ensure that the whole “news picture” is balanced and not repetitive and boring, then very different kinds of events may be reported in order to ensure that a different news programme is produced each time (composition). In Chapters 6 and 7 and in the case study in Chapter 8, I illustrate how most news stories contain some of these properties, but argue that these are not sufficient as an explanation for their being seen to be newsworthy by journalists.

Galtung and Ruge's other four factors were deemed to be related to Western culture. The more an event concerns elite nations and elite people (elites); the more an event can be seen in personal terms (personalisation) and the more negative an event is in its consequences the more likely it will become news (negativity) (Galtung and Ruge, 1965:261-265).

Some studies have tested and assessed the importance and existence of news factors identified by Galtung and Ruge and identified some additional factors, which increase the likelihood of an event being reported. These can be briefly summarised as follows: In television news, the possession of film of the event increases the newsworthiness of the event (Tunstall, 1971); the more facts and figures that can be reported the more likely the event is to become a news story (Bell, 1991) and once a story is in the news tangential stories are more likely to be reported (for example, after the salmonella in eggs scare there was an upsurge in other

food/health stories and increased coverage of other environmental/health issues) (Fowler, 1991).

Other studies have concentrated on news factors as causes (independent variables) where news is published because of its particular qualities (news factors) and because of a consensus as to the significance of these qualities(2). This concept is apolitical because it excludes the possibility of intent in the behaviour of journalists as they are believed to select news events simply on the basis of the combination of news factors inherent in an event giving it news value, and not as a conscious or unconscious desire to meet a political, personal or institutional goal.

Analysts working within this perspective therefore tended to concentrate on identifying news factors which they believed were inherent in an event and which would influence journalists making a choice of which event to select. For example, Walter Lippmann in 1922 had tried to identify specific qualities of events on the assumption that several news factors determine the news value of an event and therefore the decision of journalists as to whether it is newsworthy. For example, Sande argued that,

'intuitively it is not difficult to imagine what some of these factors are, what it is that makes news "newsworthy". It is more difficult to show empirically which factors are operating and which are not' (Sande, 1971:222).

Sande identified an important problem with the empirical testing of Galtung and Ruge's news factors, and with any other empirical testing of so-called news factors, in that such testing would require data about the events occurring in the world which did not subsequently become news, in order to have a bench mark against which to assess the selection

criteria used. In spite of such problems with testing Galtung and Ruge's work, which is simply a theory of news selection, based upon certain psychological and cultural premises, other analysts have subjected their work to further empirical scrutiny and testing(3).

Researchers in the United States also found similarities in news selection patterns and hypothesised that there must be similarities in news judgements. Although the testing of news factors in the United States was unsystematic, analysts in the main settled on the existence and importance of six broad news factors, "directness", "proximity", "prominence", "unexpectedness", "conflict" and "significance" (Staab, 1990). Gold and Simmons performed a content analysis on twenty-four Iowa newspapers and found a very high degree of similarity between the types of stories used and not used (Gold and Simmons, 1965).

In a different study by Buckalew in 1969, twelve different television news editors were asked to rank sixty-four news stories in order of importance using values slightly different from those used by European news selection. Buckalew used the elements of, "high impact", concerning matters likely to have an effect on many members of the audience, a "conflict" element, involving verbal or physical clashes between principals of the story, or between the principals and natural forces, a "known principal" element involving persons or institutions, or issues well known through past publicity or position in society or the community, a "proximate" element, concerning people or events in the immediate coverage area, a "timely" element dealing with recent happenings, and updated items with news leads or fresh material. He found that there was near unanimity between editors regarding selection choices and that high impact items were of greatest importance, with

conflict stories having the second highest probability of being used (Buckalew, 1969).

Clyde and Buckalew asked fifteen newspaper editors and three television editors to rank sixty-four stories in order of importance and found that both press and television editors tended to think and choose alike (Clyde and Buckalew, 1969). Both types of editor valued stories involving conflict, high impact and proximity as above. Similarly, a very high consensus was found between news editors in ranking and use of fifty stories (Ward, 1973).

These studies are useful as they provide a summary of the criteria which result in the likelihood of an event being selected as newsworthy by a news organisation. In summary, events are more likely to be reported in television news programmes if they have good pictures/film, if they contain short, dramatic occurrences which can be sensationalised, if they have novelty value, if they are open to simple reporting, if they occur on a grand scale, if they are negative or contain violence, crime, confrontation or catastrophe, if they are either highly unexpected, or contain things which one would expect to happen, if the events have meaning and relevance to the audience, if similar events are already in the news, if they provide a balanced programme, if they contain elite people or nations, or if they allow an event to be reported in personal or human interest terms (Ostgaard, 1965; Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Sande, 1971; Tunstall, 1971; Rosengren, 1977; Sparkes and Winter, 1980; Bell, 1991).

It has proven difficult to assess whether the audience has the same conception of news factors as the journalists, although journalistic choices have been found to be good predictors of audience interest in news stories (Gunter, 1987). However, Sparkes and Winter (1980) found

that the journalistic tendency to emphasise the negative aspects of events from abroad is not consistent with what the audience found more interesting, which were foreign news stories written from the standpoint of the benefit to or effects on their own country. In other words the audience is more interested in the possible domestic aspect or repercussions of a foreign news story than in the violent aspects. However, as Seymour-Ure (1991) points out, there is an extremely complicated relationship between what the audience says it wants, what it really wants, what it actually watches and what it thinks should be available.

Clearly there are a number of problems with news factor analysis. These include methodological difficulties, the fact that most research has been limited to international press news and the recognition of the complexities and difficulties inherent in the empirical study of news factors. Nevertheless there appears to be a consensus that many, if not all of the factors do exist and that they are an important part of an explanation of news selection.

News factor research therefore has several inherent weaknesses. Although news factor research is content based it attempts to provide a summary of the criteria which news organisations use to select and present news items in their news programmes. To do this researchers have tended to draw out implications about news production from content-based studies. News factors are actually features of news organisations themselves and not of naturally occurring events in the world or of intrinsic properties of reported events. News factor analysis implies that a schematic outline of how an organisational culture organises its activities can be drawn simply from content analysis. Therefore news factor research is very limited, the notion of news factors

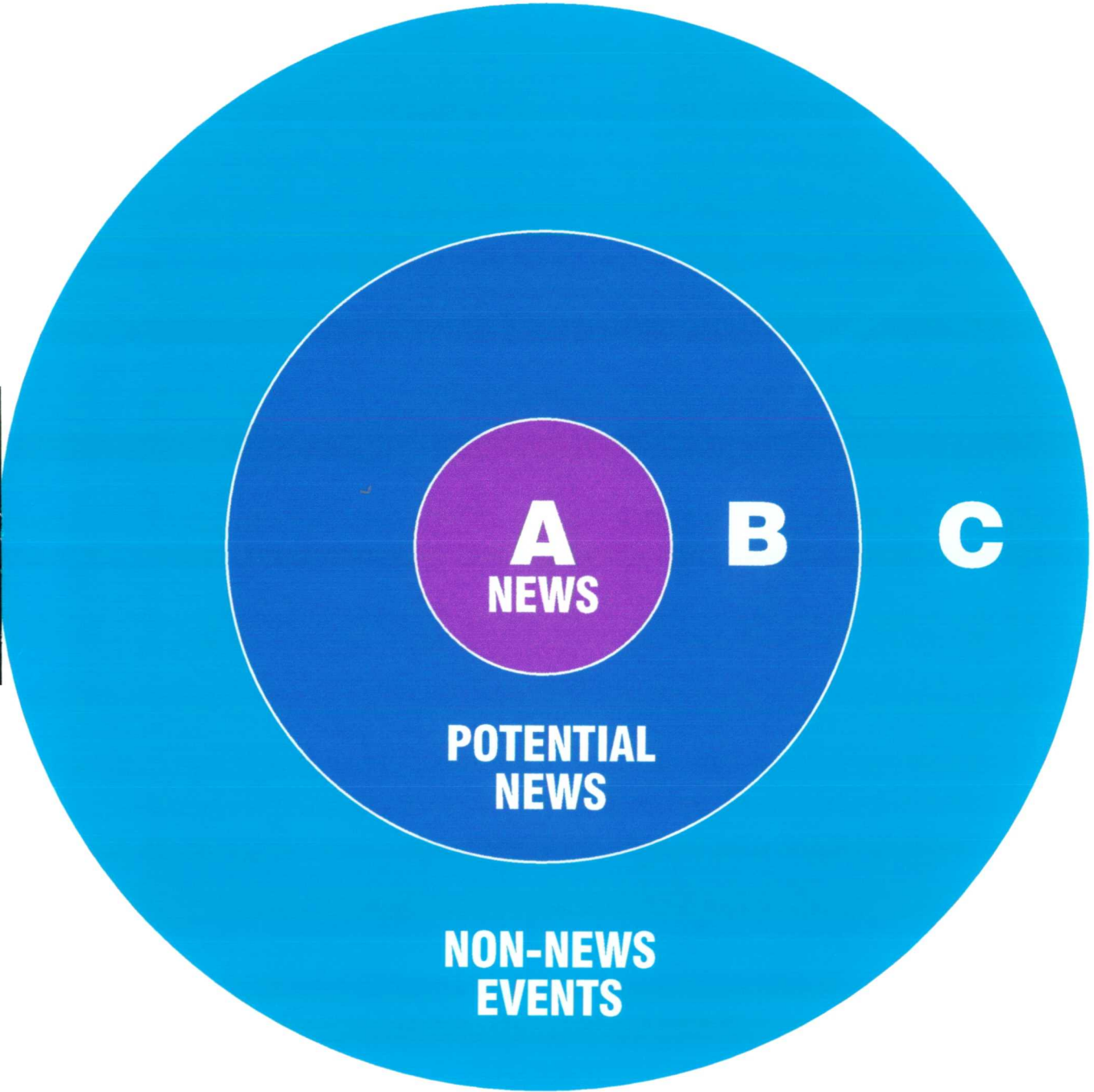
needs to be more clearly and explicitly related to empirical studies of the organisational culture and analysed in the context of the operational criteria of a newsroom. The information derived from content-based news factor research is misleading and ambiguous as it cannot fail to make conclusions about production criteria. The objective criteria identified by Galtung and Ruge as being inherent in events only exist because journalistic criteria exist, they do not stand independently. As such news factors are a product of a journalistic operational world view and do not exist on their own.

News factor research crucially ignores those news studies which have shown that media coverage does not merely reflect “reality” as journalists' decisions are shaped by a variety of organisational factors which are themselves related to the specific news organisation and news programme the journalist is working for. Furthermore such studies tend to lose sight of what actually constitutes newsworthiness. There is a tendency in some content-based studies in particular to assume that those stories which are broadcast are the only ones which are deemed to be newsworthy in a working day. This is a misconception as there are often several potential news stories which may or may not be selected depending upon a variety of considerations operating in different television newsrooms.

To illustrate this point more clearly we should imagine three spheres of news stories (see Figure 2.1 overleaf). The inner sphere, sphere A, contains the actual news stories that are broadcast, sphere A is located within sphere B, which contains potential news stories, stories which may be broadcast depending upon a variety of organisational and logistical variables. Spheres A and B are located within sphere C, the world of non-news events. Sphere C contains all the events which occur in the



**FIGURE 2.1:  
SPHERES OF NEWSWORTHINESS**



world which are deemed to be inconsequential to the general public and therefore not considered by journalists to be either newsworthy or in the public interest. The areas of tension in this model are located at the thresholds between each of the spheres and it is at these points that the criteria are employed by journalists which determine whether an event is newsworthy or worth broadcasting as an issue of public interest.

News factor research is useful as it identifies some of the factors inherent in an event which will render it newsworthy. However, as I go on to illustrate in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 decisions relating to newsworthiness are also informed by a variety of other factors and variables constituting a journalist's zone and mode of operation which vary in different newsrooms and in different news organisations. We can now turn to consider another main content-based media research tradition, namely "news bias" research.

## ii) Bias in the News

As I outlined in Chapter 1, there is both a regulatory requirement for impartiality and objectivity in journalistic reporting and a strong adherence by journalists to the notion of the importance of objectivity in television news reporting. Despite such aspirations by the legislators and professionals, charges of biased reporting have been a consistent feature of academic criticism of television news output and the study of the content of television news has focused strongly on the lack of objectivity in reporting. Charges of bias in the content of television news have come from a wide range of sources. Indeed the British political parties carefully monitor the amount of coverage devoted by television news to each party. The Conservative Party's Media Research Unit is often used to make claims about the "left-wing bias" of the BBC. Many objections have come from the Left and the trade union movement. The most

notorious and controversial criticisms of television news have come from the Glasgow University Media Group, and even though, as I go on to show later, the Group was later heavily criticised for the lack of rigor in their analysis of television news, their studies are important because of the reaction they elicited amongst the journalistic profession and for highlighting some of the tendencies inherent in journalistic practice.

Their first project examined all television news channels in the first half of 1975 and found that television news programmes tended to offer particular explanation of high wages as the cause of inflation far more often than other possible explanations such as the economic recession, rising prices or the energy crisis. Study of the Glasgow dustcart workers strike in 1975 revealed that television news tended to concentrate on particular images and themes such as the issue of the health hazard caused by the strike. There was over-use of library film showing piles of rubbish and rats implying effectively that the difficulties and inconveniences were the fault of the strikers. The Group's explanation for this kind of distortion was that television news simply draws upon a narrow range of views that tend to favour the powerful or the establishment (GUMG, 1976). The Glasgow Group indicated that through omissions of information, industrial relations were generally reported from a perspective which favoured the management and not the unions.

In their further content analyses of industrial relations (GUMG, 1980) and the Leyland Car Strike (GUMG, 1982) the Group concluded that the people who make television news share the same ideas and routines of production in whichever organisation they work. This leads to predictability and sameness of the product. The Group argued that it was the minor differences of style rather than the news content which gave people the impression that the BBC and ITN offered different kinds of

news. Indeed the Media Group's study of television in the 1970s found that there were very few structural differences between different news organisations in terms of the amount of time devoted to each category of news, the length of items, use of film and so on.

However, in the 1990s, one cannot make such assumptions about the similarities in television news and the findings from my content analysis in Chapter 4 clearly show that differences in television news format and content do exist between contemporary British terrestrial news programmes and organisations. My observation period at television newsrooms also shows that in the 1990s there are different rationales and corporate values which help to determine and differentiate news values for different television news programmes and therefore influence what is deemed to be newsworthy. Such diversification of the television news genre is, as I argued in Chapter 1, symptomatic of a variety of vectors of change which have occurred and are still occurring in the 1980s and 1990s.

Following its study of television news in the 1970s, the Glasgow University Media Group made a very serious charge against the television news medium which claimed then, and still does today, to be impartial and balanced in its reporting

'at some common-sense level television news has to appear neutral or its credibility would evaporate, it is this "utopia or neutralism" that many of our findings deny' (ibid :1).

More recently Philo has developed the theme of bias in the news still further in his analysis of the damage to the 1984/5 miners' strike of the "drift back to work" theme in television news output. This theme was consistently used by the broadcast media in the coverage of the miners'

strike in the 1980s and implied that the strike was breaking down (Philo, 1990). It is interesting to note that Philo, who was a member of the Glasgow University Media Group in the 1970s, was still identifying the same types of bias in television news a decade later. Similarly, Hartley's textual analysis of television reporting during the so-called Winter of Discontent in the 1970s, argues that television news was instrumental in "narrowing" the coverage of industrial disputes in such a way that made it easier for the Opposition to politicise certain instances and to go on to win a General Election. Such "narrowing" was identified by Hartley in film which referred to a strike by hospital workers,

‘we (were) not offered film of just any old hospital, but of children’s hospitals (what happened to the sewerage workers?)’ (Hartley, 1989:127).

The Glasgow University Media Group's particular analysis of media content elicited many critics although the broadcasters themselves admitted that television news is obviously limited in its ability to explain complex issues, which is why current affairs programmes are also available. However, journalists are, as I found in my visits to television newsrooms in Summer 1994, still very much aware of the Glasgow University Media Group's criticisms. Although most of the findings were very publicly denied by the broadcasters, privately many journalists believe that some of the charges of bias are relevant.

Martin Harrison was granted access, by ITN, to the transcripts of the same news bulletins analysed in the early Glasgow Media Group studies, which led to a series of criticisms. Harrison found that the views and opinions which the Glasgow University Group attributed only to the dominant groups in society, were also prevalent among other social groups including workers and trade unionists. He also found that the

language used by the media such as “demand” and “threaten” and “strike” was also used by the unions themselves and concluded that,

'As a matter of personal judgement rather than “science”, ITN coverage seemed in general to be competent, fair and more diverse in its “frames of explanation” than could ever be guessed from the Bad News account' (Harrison, 1985:145-146).

However, Harrison only had access to running orders, transcripts and scripts and saw very little actual film of the period under study. Harrison's “objectivity” research has subsequently attracted accusations of bias (McQuail, 1992:184). This is instructive, because although news research has persistently challenged the possibility of real “neutrality” in reporting (Cohen and Young, 1973; Epstein, 1973; Tuchman, 1978, Fishman, 1980), research itself sometimes falls into the trap of being factually incorrect or selective. An interesting point here is that often such research claims to be objective, something it often seems to deny the very possibility of to journalism. The fact that such research fails to be objective is forgivable, however the fact that it claims objectivity while denying it to others opens it to the charge of hypocrisy.

Clearly there are difficulties inherent in measuring and assessing news content, i.e. news output, what is actually broadcast. However, in order to analyse newsworthiness in this thesis, it has been necessary in this section to address the various issues and the voluminous array of research on the content of the news output. This discussion provides a basis for the data-gathering work and analysis discussed in Chapter 4 which takes the form of a detailed content analysis of one full week's output of fourteen different television news programmes. We can now turn to consider the production dimension of news and media research.

### c) News and Media Production

Before television news even reaches the screens it has undergone a series of selections, editorial adjustments, technological manipulations and newsroom conventions. This dimension of the study of television news and newsworthiness examines one of the most important issues in the analysis of news, namely how is television news content produced and what actors and factors play a part in its production? This will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 5 in the form of a three month observation study of six different television newsrooms and ten different television news programmes, which I undertook at the BBC (BBC1's newsroom, *One O'clock News*, *Six O'clock News*, *Nine O'clock News* and BBC2's newsroom, *Newsnight*), ITN (Channel 3's newsroom, *12.30pm News*, *5.40pm News*, *News at Ten* and Channel 4's newsrooms, *Channel Four News*) in London, and at Yorkshire Tyne-Tees (*Calendar News*) and BBC North's newsroom (*Look North News*) in Leeds.

It is useful to consider the variety of gatekeeper and organisational studies in order to understand their inherent weaknesses and to consider the development of an increasingly sophisticated approach to media research which has occurred over the last fifty years. In section (i) the contribution which gatekeeper studies have made to the study of the production process are considered. In section (ii) organisational approaches to the study of television news are examined, particularly in relation to the insight they have provided relating to the production and selection of news in a newsroom. Section (iii) refers to the importance of news sources and their role in producing "pre-packaged news" in the production process. Finally section (iv) draws upon those studies of television news which have taken an "interpretive" or "qualitative" approach. The contribution that the different production studies (as well as the content-based studies discussed earlier in this chapter) have made to informing my

own study of television news is considered in the summary (see section (d)).

Research into the production of television news, as well as examining the political, ideological and cultural changes imposed upon the news organisation, must also address issues such as the organisational setting and the day to day routine and bureaucratic practices which produce television news. One of the myths of television news is that it represents random reactions to random events. Any analysis of the production practices of journalists in a television newsroom reveals that in fact most events have to conform to a variety of newsroom criteria of newsworthiness in order to become a news story. These newsroom criteria are not simply about reacting to any ad hoc piece of exciting news which occurs (although important random events such as the death of John Smith, Labour Leader, on 12 May 1994, are dealt with very efficiently), but about planning ahead and producing news stories according to a rigid set of temporal and spatial criteria (Schlesinger, 1987; Tuchman, 1978; Rock, 1973). It is vital to consider this aspect of television newsworthiness as news values are found in the content of television news but bureaucratic news values are also specific to the production of television news.

The socio-political, organisational and temporal environment within which the journalists work reflect and sustain their news values and therefore influence what is deemed to be newsworthy. Politico-economic, technological and transnational influences in the 1980s and 1990s are changing the structural and cultural relationships of British television resulting in an increasingly commercial and competitive environment. Such changes are affecting the television news genre itself and its fragmentation into different news programmes constituted from



different news sub-genres means that television news journalism can no longer be conceived of as a unitary practice as has been assumed by the Glasgow University Media Group and other media researchers.

Early studies of journalism from the perspective of the organisational or sub-cultural approach conceived the production of mass communications as a chain along which messages passed and were selected, rejected and produced. This process was seen to be similar to the opening and shutting of a series of gates, therefore the gatekeepers became the key focus of study, as researchers attempted to identify upon what criteria the selections were based (White, 1950; Shoemaker, 1984). This work was subsequently criticised and researchers turned to more sophisticated analyses of newsmaking. Organisational and sub-cultural approaches to the study of news originated with the study of single news events and a move away from the presumption of deliberate bias and manipulation of news for personal ends, towards the acceptance that bias in the news was often “unwitting bias” (Golding and Elliott, 1979). Researchers also began to study the long-term, routine processes of the newsroom and analyse their implications (Epstein, 1973; Altheide, 1976; Tracey, 1977; Schlesinger, 1978) and the objectives of the organisations. Ethnomethodological studies of newsroom practice have been undertaken (Molotch and Lester, 1974; Tuchman, 1972, 1978).

#### i) Gatekeeper Studies

Early gatekeeper studies centred around the role of the individual decision-maker in the newsroom. David White used a concept pioneered by Lewin, (1943) and applied it to the study of news selection by the wire editor. The wire editor, in White's study, selected stories to be printed from the large amount of wire copy provided every day by Associated Press, United Press and the International News Service. White

concentrated particularly on the role of the wire editor arguing that he(sic),

‘is the most important gatekeeper of all, for if he rejects a story the work of all those who preceded him in reporting and transmitting the story is negated’ (White, 1950:384).

White's research was challenged in 1969 by Bass who argued that White, and subsequent analysts who followed White's gatekeeper theory of news selection, misapplied Lewin's concept. In Lewin's model, the gatekeeper was the person in a family who decided which food items will be used by other family members, Bass (1969) argued that the transfer of this concept to a single actor in a newsroom was a misinterpretation of the term, because it was based upon commercial considerations made in the context of a family and not in a newsroom. Despite the problems identified by Bass, several analysts continued to use White's gatekeeper theory to try to explain news selection.

For example, White's definition was used to analyse the step-by-step flow of an international news story through a series of gatekeepers (McNelly, 1959), and was retested and re-examined to reveal that the audience received a better balanced news diet in 1967 than in 1949. Whereas three categories dominated output in 1949, human interest, international politics and national politics, by 1967 five categories dominated output, international war (due to Vietnam War coverage), crime, national economics, human interest and disasters (Snider, 1967). In 1967 an attempt was also made by Donohew, using content analysis, to try to identify what factors relate to decisions by newspaper gatekeepers, finding that their attitude is an important force in the selection of news. The study however, had inherent weaknesses, it omitted to compare the original wire copy and the finished paper, and left unaddressed other

forces or factors which also affect attitudes, for example the educational background of the gatekeepers, or any face-to-face meetings with members of pressure groups which may have taken place (Donohew, 1967).

The concentration on individuals as gatekeepers was challenged by studies which revealed that individual journalists were not actually the "king pins" in decision-making, as decisions were made, not on individual assessments of newsworthiness, but on a cluster of news values and journalistic and organisational criteria (Robinson, 1970). Bass had earlier shown the complex operation of a group of people working as a unit in news processing as well as pointing out shortcomings of some of the adaptations of the gatekeeper theory (Bass, 1969). Indeed, news selection and news distortion takes place at all steps in the chain from event to reader, and not just at the starting point of the chain, or in the hands of specific individuals (Galtung and Ruge, 1965).

Following this tradition, the study of organisation of news selection at NBC showed that news selection was not linear or person-centred but the result of formal and informal organisational processes. The organisation was the gatekeeper and not the individual journalist. Journalists can be envisaged as members of a trained and socialised sub-culture governed by powerful norms (Bailey and Lichty, 1972).

Contrary to the findings of White, other research has shown that journalists are only passive transmitters of information, as they exercise and execute routine jobs (Staab, 1990). He argues that it is not necessary to discuss separately the role of different gatekeepers in the news process, as there is little reason to believe that their perception of "newsworthiness" differs radically according to whether they are in the

collecting, transmitting or presentation stage of the process. Gatekeeper research has made an important contribution to the study of news as it has shown that news selection does not take place on the basis of the whims of an individual journalist in an organisation, but is built into an organisation's ethos and rationale. Journalists work together, to produce a news product which reflects their shared agreement on what is "newsworthy".

## ii) Organisational Analysis of Television News

Research interest in television news is best understood when one considers the summary of the main characteristics of news organisations. They are complex, large organisations which have large capital resources and a highly skilled personnel. Broadcasting institutions in terms of size, complexity and recruiting policies are highly bureaucratic. Bureaucratic logic is believed to have an impact on the programmes, but this logic is not immediately apparent to the audience members. Their output is directed towards a large, mass audience, which has little or no access to the media organisation and which is contacted simultaneously. The key to the news concept is immediacy and speed, but the information only flows one way. A small number of professional elites speak to widely dispersed heterogeneous audience members who are not in contact with each other. Despite a great deal research into the audience and the effects of broadcast material on viewers (see Footnote 1), little is known about the audience's real response to the information it receives and audiences do not have much opportunity to comment on the broadcasters' output, or to make any difference to the content or production styles.

Public and academic critics' concerns about the media business (and about television news organisations in particular) often relate to patterns of ownership (in the case of ITN) and issues of control by the state (in the

case of the BBC). Both of these themes are explored further in Chapters 6 and 7.

Organisational approaches tend to reject the analyses posited by the political economists and the culturalists as being too conspiratorial (McNair, 1994). Their focus is not on the external factors which have a causal effect upon the content of the news or the audience, but on the production of the news. Production processes are seen to be features of journalistic organisation which ultimately effect output, and therefore what is newsworthy. Such studies concentrate on the constraints imposed on the newsgathering practices of the journalists, on format constraints and on the routine professional practices of journalism. From this perspective, 'news is the result of an organised response to routine bureaucratic problems' (Rock, 1973:73). Indeed the logistics of journalistic practice has been seen to often revolve around organisational factors such as shortage of time, cost constraints and forward planning. There is an enormous use of the forward planning diary undermining the claim that journalism is somehow "chaos" or "ad hoc" (Schlesinger, 1987), rather such planning is routine practice. (Tuchman, 1978).

Organisational approaches to the study of television newsworthiness are particularly pertinent to my study. Through the focus by such studies, on the production aspects of television news, they, unlike culturalist and political economic approaches, do not neglect a sub-cultural dimension of analysis. As such, organisational and sub-cultural studies are useful as they help to deepen an analysis of what constitutes newsworthiness in television news by providing yet another perspective, namely that of internal constraints, regulations and newsroom culture. Organisational approaches to the study of journalism stress that,

'the news form is at least to some extent a function of the organisational structure which is needed for large scale communication of information to the public' (Bruhn-Jenson, 1986:46).

From this perspective the confines of space, the shortage of time, format and running order determine many of the priorities and deciding factors relating to the selection, production and presentation of events which may or may not become news and not just news factors or something inherent in an event.

'...events become news when transformed by the news perspective, and not because of their objective characteristics' (Altheide, 1976:173).

For example, lack of time or logistical problems relating to getting a camera crew to a location are basic organisational factors which determine whether or not an event makes it into the news. As I have already shown Galtung and Ruge, (1965) argue that an event is more likely to make it onto the news agenda if it fits into the news organisation's "newsday". Events which take a long time to happen (e.g. the building of a bridge) are less amenable to being handled by routine news reporting processes, and they tend not to appear in the news. The bridge itself might not make the news unless there is a ceremony (i.e. a single isolable event) to celebrate the completion of the building, or if the bridge collapses/is destroyed (i.e. another single isolable event). As a single isolable event is relatively simple to see and to assess, it is also easier to be factual and accurate about it. Although the emphasis in news has been shown to be upon the acquisition of facts, the link made by academic researchers between journalistic professionalism and the practice of fact-gathering as something of an organisational ritual aimed at symbolising the news organisation's objectivity and impartiality, did not occur until the 1920s (Tuchman, 1978). Analysts working from the

organisational perspective are concerned with the methods journalists use to gather facts, arguing that it is these routine bureaucratic methods and professional rituals which account for the choice and treatment of events.

The journalist's professional task to be impartial, by providing facts from different perspectives, is fundamental to the study of newsworthiness because the choices journalists make are routinely governed by professional pressures which are themselves instituted in routine procedures. Researchers from the organisational perspective therefore differ markedly from the political economists and culturalists by arguing that the format and content of television news is much more likely to be product of the organisational constraints and professional norms (such as the expectation of objectivity and impartiality) affecting journalists. Factors such as problems of space requirements, time constraints, logistical difficulties, scheduling issues generally involving commercial and technological problems have to be overcome before the news can be presented in a concise and entertaining way. As such, observation of journalists at work reveals that in general practical issues tend to dominate day-to-day news production far more apparently than any ideological biases from journalists or biases acting upon them. However, as I show in Chapters 6 and 7 and the case study in Chapter 8, researchers concentrating on the practical and bureaucratic nature of journalism as the most influential determinants of news production must guard against ignoring the values and ideology operating on and in the television newsroom.

Undoubtedly, however, researchers analysing news from this perspective, have gone a long way towards clarifying some of the myths of journalistic practice. Ethnographers and other researchers have spent time in news rooms analysing the day to day routines. Instead of concentrating on

specific single events in the news, this long and patient study of the day to day dynamics of a newsroom has helped to illustrate the routine and bureaucratic nature of much of television news selection and production. (Burns, 1969, 1972, 1977, 1979; Halloran, Elliott and Murdock, 1970; Elliott, 1972; Tracey, 1977; Golding and Elliott, 1976; Schlesinger, 1987; Silverstone, 1985). Indeed, it is worth noting that,

'anyone who has been in a television newsroom for just a day must have been struck by its apparent disorder and confusion.....The stereotypical newsroom of the Hollywood imagination is hysterically bustling, coping on the edge of chaotic breakdown with a commodity that is unpredictable, fast-moving, elusive and protean' (Golding and Elliott, 1979:83).

In reality newsrooms adopt a strongly patterned, repetitive and predictable work routine, are essentially passive in character and vary only in detail from country to country, organisation to organisation and programme to programme. Studies conducted in the United States (Canto, 1971; Warner, 1971; Epstein, 1973; Altheide, 1976; Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1980) and in Mexico (Molina, 1987) do not contradict the fundamental findings of the British studies, which is that television news is largely a product of bureaucratic and routine practice

Despite all the research showing the similarities of the nature of bureaucratic and routine newsgathering and production systems, and the similarity of organisational constraints on all journalists in television newsroom, it is apparent that different news programmes and news organisations can and do produce differences in news output (both in terms of format and content) (Cottle, 1993). Therefore, a multi-programme and a multi-organisational approach to the analysis of news selection is needed. Important questions are, to what extent is a theory of



news factors, news gatekeepers or an organisational analysis of single television newsrooms universally applicable or even relevant to the range of television news programmes which now exist? What other organisational, socio-political or economic factors influence these differences in news output? What effects do the diversity of television news programming and the fragmentation of the television news genre into programmes constituted from a wide variety of different news sub-genres have on the concept of television newsworthiness?

Organisational studies of television news often concentrate on the production and selection processes, although some analysts have something to say about the content of the news (see for example Golding and Elliott, (1979), Schlesinger, (1987), Cottle, (1991)). Research in this area is important because it acts as a half-way house between the more conspiratorial analyses provided by the culturalists and the political economists, who see bias and influence on the news product as somehow being “out there” and affecting journalists and those who believe that news can be explained in terms of objective characteristics (news factor research) inherent in an event which will guarantee that it will become a news story.

Production studies initially concentrated on single events (Lang and Lang, 1953, 1970; Halloran, Elliott and Murdock, 1970), but moved away from the simple attempt to discover deliberate distortion and to document “unwitting bias” (Golding and Elliott, 1979). Other studies turned away from the production of news about single events, and extended their analysis to the long-term, routine processes which comprise the daily task of news production (Epstein, 1973; Altheide, 1976; Tracey, 1977; Schlesinger, 1987). The concern of sociologists about the bureaucratic nature of news making is particularly pertinent in relation to the BBC.

The BBC is a huge organisation with three major locations in London and employs over twenty-four thousand people (*Media Guide*, 1995). Although it has regional offices the bulk of its employees are London-based (Tunstall, 1993), which has resulted in accusations that the BBC over-serves a South East audience. The large bureaucratic nature of the BBC results in a paradox. Although the BBC has a unitary nature with a single career structure and single programme-making ethos, its sheer size results in a complex hierarchical organisation in which some colleagues may never meet each other (Burns, 1977). The system of referral-upwards in the BBC may appear to encourage greater employee autonomy than top-down control, but in reality the messages are pushed down from above via the weight of the upper and upper-middle echelons of producer managers (Schlesinger, 1987; Tunstall, 1993). There is little evidence to suggest that this practice has changed under Director-General, John Birt (see Chapters 5 and 7).

iii) News Sources: "Pre-packaged news" in the news production process

The sources who provide news stories are also an area of concern to sociologists. If the news media are indeed crucial in communicating the values of the status quo, it follows that civil unrest, law and order issues or any events which threaten national security will be articulated through the voices of those who seek to retain it. Easy access to the news media involves the cultivation of on-going contacts between a correspondence and a source, these are often routine contacts who are in a position, because of their status in institutions, to know what is going on. As I show in the case study in Chapter 8, the access granted to United States Government sources ensured that the United States Government line and rationale for the attacks on the Davidian compound in Waco were prioritised. Also the continual and concerted efforts of the anti-"cultist" movement to access the media in the United States illustrates how some

sources can create an aura of credibility and expertise over time. Schlesinger and Tumber (1994) also show how news sources in the criminal justice field of news reporting can establish credibility and expertise becoming routine spokespersons with guaranteed access to the media. It was apparent during my visit to *Newsnight* at the BBC, that even a programme which prides itself in not being mainstream was reliant on the same old sources over and over again. Some of the journalists even commented on the need to find some new ones, but it was “too time consuming and difficult” to do so. 'Again standard reportorial practice legitimates those with institutional power' (Tuchman, 1978: 142).

Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1991) found that in the majority of instances news items only contained one side of the story, or only one source's version. It was necessary therefore to look to follow-up or continuing stories for additional sides and a greater sense of balance. They also found that the bulk of knowledge sources about crime, law and justice are journalists themselves or government officials.

'Journalists work in relation to the "sacredotal" (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1986:88-89) institutions that can be counted on to imprint a designation of the deviance and implant a preferred control solution that represents the dominant value system' (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1991:186).

Other studies have concentrated on the journalists themselves, on their values, assumptions and attitudes. A study by Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman (1976), used a telephone survey of over one thousand journalists and used the mass of information they acquired to try to relate their characteristics to two attitudes amongst their respondents which they called “neutral” and “participant” (terms borrowed from Cohen (1963)). The “neutral” journalists were seen to believe that they were involved in simply transmitting information to the public (in this sense the journalist

is a spectator of events). In contrast the “participant” journalist takes a more active and creative role in the news process. Other researchers have concentrated more on the fundamental world view shared by journalists. Ethnomethodological and phenomenological studies have revealed that,

'all events are socially constructed and their "newsworthiness" is not contained in their objective features' (Molotoch and Lester, 1974:110)

or that judgements journalists make about news are part of the “common-sense” knowledge of everyday journalism. These judgements are themselves organised into typifications which then determine the organisation of work (Tuchman, 1972).

McQuail (1992) identifies the key dilemma of the television news journalists. If the journalists are to exercise their “watch-dog” role and exist in a state of tension with government departments, how can they then rely upon those same departments to provide information which the journalists can then claim allows them to provide impartial and objective news coverage. In reality, journalists are dependent upon government and its agencies for large and more importantly, convenient, supplies of news information. There is concern that the terrestrial broadcast news media does not fulfil a democratic role and that such reliance upon particular sources results in a pre-packaged product. Even though this produced is deemed to be in the “public interest” by governments and regulators it is doubtful that such information really empowers and informs the public.

The study of television newsworthiness is therefore linked to a variety of important issues already highlighted by organisational research.

1) Newsworthiness for reasons outlined above is linked to the attempt by journalists to be objective and impartial in their reporting of events.

2) Newsworthiness is related to some extent to who owns the media obvious examples are seen in the tabloid newspapers every day. It is difficult to discount, therefore, the fact that ownership of television companies may have some bearing on their final output. For example, ITN is proud of the fact that it produces a different news product depending on to whom it is being supplied. One only needs to look at the content of *Big Breakfast News* and compare it with *News at Ten* to see that the rationale and request of the customer (this is not the audience, but the news contractor) are different.

3) The logic of the marketplace and commercial pressure are having an effect on the television news product. *News at Ten* is actively crafted to ensure that the audience stays with the programme after the commercial break. This tinkering with the format has, I would argue, also extended to tinkering with the content. The BBC is also facing difficulties in trying to reconcile public service broadcasting values and culturally-elite notions of quality with the chase of ratings initiated by the commercialization process which is occurring within the institution.

4) The bureaucratic nature of the news providers and the routines of the organisation as well as journalistic attitudes have been shown to be substantial factors in determining which stories are actually selected (Tuchman, 1978; Fishman, 1980, Elliott, 1972, Schlesinger, 1987).

5) The attitude of the broadcast journalists towards the audience is instructive, the audience is seen in problematic terms, something to be appeased or acquired.

6) The regulation of television news in the name of the “public interest” raises issues relating to subjective definitions of what is in the general good (McQuail, 1992).

7) The sources used by journalists are regular, reliable and generally unchallenged. Such reliance on a few voices rather than a plurality of voices in my view reduces the access of many citizens to participation in the public sphere.

iv) Production Context

Assumptions about the production of television news and the motivations of journalists have been drawn by researchers adopting a more qualitative approach to media research (see for example Hall (1977) and the work of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies). However, conclusions about the production and selection of television news which are “interpretive” and based on a “qualitative” approach to the study of media content and process can be challenged on the grounds that they ignore the sociocultural context (McQuail, 1992:13). As I go on to show throughout this thesis an empirical approach to the study of television news is useful in that it considers both the production of television news in the context of the newsroom and the content of television news. Unlike Ang’s (1990) study of the relationship between audience reception of cultural messages and the ethnographic study of the sociocultural context, this study does not exist in a wider theoretical and normative vacuum.

As journalists work for large organisations which have particular cultures and values, it follows that television news is not produced by journalists acting in isolation. Any study of journalistic output, must therefore be in

the social context of the news organisations. Such organisations are themselves part of a larger politico-economic environment and must endeavour to survive within whatever constraints are externally imposed on them. Chapter 7 shows how at the BBC tension and pressure is focused on its relationship to the government, on its accountability to the licence payer to provide value for money, on the new system of management-oriented leadership and on its remit to be a public service broadcaster in the face of increasing commercialization of broadcasting. ITN has a different set of pressures and tensions, it must endeavour to make a profit, to serve its contractors and to keep its advertisers happy. As discussed in Chapter 1, from 1979 onwards the television news organisations, along with many other sectors of British society, have been subject to wide-ranging changes. The Conservative Government which came to office in 1979 had a mission unlike any other Government before it, and the repercussions are still being felt at both BBC television news and ITN today, in the form of efficiency/effectiveness and value for money drives at the former and the business of survival in a ruthless, increasingly competitive market at both.

The changes at the BBC in particular have resulted in organisational struggles with the contradictory missions of becoming more accountable to the licence payer, retaining or improving ratings whilst still being expected to uphold those amorphous values of public service broadcasting (Horrie and Clarke, 1994; O'Malley, 1994).

It is not only the media organisations which have had to adapt and change, however, the political news content itself has reflected changing ideology during the 1980s. The fatal error of the main opposition party, Labour, was to have little or no sense of the epochal changes which were taking place and to restrict its fight against Thatcherism to using its old

ideas and analyses. Thatcherism in contrast did adapt to the changing world of the 1980s and as such 'looked omnipotent, as if it was in command of history' (Hall and Jacques, 1990:15).

The Thatcher years are noted for the numerous acts of censorship which were performed in the name of national interest (Kingdom, 1991), however it is too simplistic and conspiratorial to say that news simply uncritically reflects Government policy, after all there are countless checks and balances in the Parliamentary system. Furthermore, the reporting of such events as John Major's replacement of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1990, or John Redwood's challenge to John Major is implicitly critical and de-legitimizing of the authority of the Prime Minister and government. Ideological changes, resulting both from adaptations in the world in general and from right wing ideology have, however, often been treated by the media as though they were in fact neutral concepts. For example in the 1980s, as the focus shifted to increased expectations by the Thatcher Government of self-help and individual precaution against bad health. This was a precursor to the cuts to come in the National Health Service. By reporting government policies in an "objective" way the television news medium must guard against taking an ideological shift itself. Devices such as the use of sources who are "for" and "against" a particular policy objective can help to provide the audience with some notion of the values inherent in a particular policy but time constraints make it impossible to consider a particular issue in any depth or to analyse all sides. Given that the organisational culture of news organisations have had to adapt to the times, it is possible that their news values adapt as well. If the audience is not in a position to challenge this due to the constraints of the medium as an informational resource then such changes may go unnoticed. If news values reflect the values of society (Gans, 1980), and as Soothill



and Walby (1991) have shown, issues such as the reporting of sex crime can change news agendas over time, the news media can be argued to have unwittingly helped those changes along even while clinging to the claim of impartiality and objectivity. It follows therefore that the notion of what is news and therefore what is newsworthy must also be changing over time.

d) Summary: Assessing the various approaches to the study of television newsworthiness

The various studies outlined in this chapter are useful for identifying some of the key issues and concerns in relation to the study of television newsworthiness. However, there are many gaps and omissions in them and this is often due to their one-dimensional approaches to the analysis of the mass media. Some television news studies have looked at both content and production (Elliott, 1972; Cottle, 1993), but many studies have simply concentrated on one aspect. Furthermore, no studies have looked at television news from a multi-organisational, multi-programme perspective. There has been an implicit assumption in most media research that television journalism is unitary in nature. Therefore much research has concentrated simply on prime-time news on the assumption that this would be representative of the television news genre. However, as I have illustrated in the Introduction and Chapter 1, the television news genre has fragmented into a variety of news sub-genres. News programmes are constituted from a variety of news sub-genres reflecting news organizations' ability to produce diverse array of news programmes in order to adapt to the different demands placed upon them by the changing environment in which television news is currently produced. Any study of television newsworthiness in the 1990s must initially

address the issue of non-unitary television journalism and take into account the diversity of television news programmes.

When conducting academic research into the production, content or audience of television news there is a tendency, much criticised by the journalists themselves, for academics to theorise without witnessing or experiencing journalistic practice first hand. Therefore the value of observation of journalistic practice as a research tool cannot be overstated.

Some of the production studies, whilst offering a valuable insight into the routine practices of everyday journalism have, by emphasising values, attitudes and mental categories neglected to place the journalists in any external context. See for example, studies by Tuchman (1972, 1978) and by Molotch and Lester (1974).

The main weakness of the political-economic approach is that television news content, production or effects cannot be explained purely in terms of political or economic or managerial/ownership factors. This perspective also ignores to a large extent the production processes involved in television news, concentrating mostly on the causal context of the effects of television news. Furthermore, it is also very difficult to prove ideological effects or to test such a broad theory. As a theory therefore it goes largely untested and uncontested. This perspective also tends to ignore examples of dissenting journalism, where journalists do manage to “break-away” from the seemingly all pervading influence of economic or political factors.

However, in the context of this thesis I do make use of some aspects of the political-economic perspective as a convenient theoretical frame

within which to discuss the important economic and political issues currently affecting the media industry. The impact of new technology is resulting in greater competition, increased commercialism and audience fragmentation, loss of loyalty to terrestrial stations and the impact of such changes on the news organizations and news programmes cannot be ignored. Such influences are strongly affecting television news causing news organizations and news programmes to adapt and change their approaches to news gathering, selection and production in response to external technological, political and economic pressures. BBC television news and ITN exist within this dynamic technological, political and economic context and as such these influences must be considered since they have a bearing on the television news product itself. It can, however, be problematic to try to isolate and identify a particular political or economic issue or event which can be traced through from its origins to a direct effect in the newsroom or on the news format or content itself, although more general influences can be detected.

For example, when John Birt became Director-General of the BBC he analysed the position of the BBC in the context of Margaret Thatcher's attitude to public service broadcasting and made a "threat assessment" of the possible actions and outcomes a hostile government could inflict on the BBC. All the management policies which were subsequently pursued were, and are, made on the basis of this analysis. As such the personnel at the BBC have had to work within an organisation which has convinced itself that it must adapt or die. There have been a series of financial freezes, constant threats of redundancy, regional policy directives and the introduction of an internal market. The morale at the BBC is currently deemed to be at its lowest ever (*Media Guardian*, 19/6/95). Such influences on the BBC's culture originated within the Thatcher Government, outside the organisation and are clearly affecting the staff.

My observation at the BBC illustrated how such a climate of fear does affect the news product itself, as the staff are unwilling to risk themselves or be overtly creative in such an austere environment (see Chapter 7 in particular). However, given that the current television news environment is one in which dynamic change and innovation is being forced upon the journalists, for some, particularly the older journalists, the practice of journalism is changing for the worse. In the United States the commercial environment within which television news is selected and produced, it is argued, has resulted in journalism being mainly defined by the consumer and commercial imperatives, rather than the traditional professional values of journalism itself (McManus, 1994). I consider the development of British television news in this respect in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Similarly in the 1980s and 1990s ITN has had to respond to economic constraints and pressures resulting in a large reduction in staff and a leaner, fitter, more competitive workforce. The need to attract audiences and to serve the contractor has always been a preoccupation at ITN, but the current climate of increasing competition as well as the possibility of ITN ceasing to be the sole news provider for independent television, has focused the rationale of ITN more clearly on its commercial goals. The imperatives of such a competitive, profit-oriented environment have already challenged the future security of television news at ITN. The problem it faces is that if it seeks to attract audiences (pleasing ITN and ITV shareholders interested in profits), it is accused of being too down-market or “tabloid” in nature. Within the context of such a changing external environment, it follows that the issue of what is newsworthy is far more complex than it was ten years ago. As I show in Part III, commercial pressures acting upon the television news organisation and particular programmes do result in specific decisions being made in

relation to which stories are deemed to be newsworthy for a particular programme.

The culturalist approach makes an important contribution to a study of television newsworthiness. Unlike the political economic approach, it can accommodate examples of dissenting journalism and examples of small shifts in the power structure (although I would argue that these are usually fairly marginal, and that even amongst the so-called elites there is a hierarchy of access to the media). This approach also considers the interaction between the news organisations, news sources and other social institutions.

A further strength of the culturalist approach, however, is that it, like the political economic approach, locates the source of “bias” and influence on television news in the environment external to the journalistic organisation, but also recognises that the organisational perspective and the political economic perspective are not mutually exclusive. As such it attempts to integrate the two, to some extent providing a broader perspective. A weakness of the cultural perspective, however, is that it has little to contribute to the analysis of the production process in the television newsroom as the “interpretive” and “qualitative” (McQuail:1992:13) approach to the study of the production process often ignores the sociocultural context in which it occurs.

An important contribution of the organisational approach, is that the production process is considered in some detail and it has aided our understanding of the actual practice of journalism from an academic perspective. Journalistic analysis of their own processes and rationale is usually quite different (Evans, 1983; Malcolm, 1991; Tusa, 1992; Glover, 1994; Gowing, 1994). Some studies which are ethnographic in

perspective, such as Tuchman's (1978) study of the news process, can be criticised, however, for neglecting to place the analysis in any kind of political, social or economic context. In her analysis the journalist appears to work in some kind of social vacuum.

News factor research also has some strengths. Most descriptions of the characteristics of an event to make it newsworthy are extremely pertinent and most analysts cite Galtung and Ruge as a matter of course when analysing television news content, production and effects. However, news factors are not adequate as an explanation of newsworthiness. The assumption by some analysts that something inherent in an event can actually cause that event to be news (causal factors), falls down when one considers other influences on the selection of television news such as problems of time constraints, logistical problems, political influences, technological influences, commercial constraints and so on. I will indicate in Part III how most television news stories do in fact contain news factors identified by Galtung and Ruge and others, and that journalists (although they do not use the same language as academic researchers) also indicate the presence of some of the factors as being vital ingredients of a good news story. However, I will also show that some organisational factors supersede some of those news factors and that different specific determining factors constitute newsworthiness and notions of the public interest in different television newsrooms.

The notion of a whole organisation acting as a gatekeeper has some merit. Gatekeeper research is much more credible now that a single individual is not credited with making most of the decisions about what will become news (Shoemaker, 1991). However, as I will show in Part 3, certain key individuals, such as senior editorial staff, do have a good deal of influence on what becomes the news, but the advent of the electronic

television newsroom has actually rendered most journalists copy tasters/gatekeepers.

So far most research on television news, and television newsworthiness in particular, has neglected the influences stemming from the diversity of news programming. Even those studies that emphasise organisational factors rarely focus on programme-based factors and influences. There has been a lack of comparative analysis of how different organisations and newsrooms within the same organisations select and process news, and of their different news content. Often research has just concentrated on the notion of “news” in general (including press, radio and television) or in the case of more specific analysis has concentrated mainly on prime time news programmes. In the case of television news production observation, research has tended to concentrate on a particular organisation such as the BBC, (for example in the studies by Tom Burns, (1969) and Philip Schlesinger, (1987)) or on a local television news producer, (for example Simon Cottle's study of Central Television, Cottle, (1993)). It is necessary in the 1990s to consider the plethora of television news programmes and the fragmentation of the news genre into news sub-genres (see Figure 1, Introduction).

Furthermore, much of the research of television news has been either purely quantitative in the form of content analyses, or qualitative in the form of observation, or just purely theoretical. I argue in Part II that there is a need to use both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in order to compensate for the weaknesses of each method, but also so that findings from one method can complement those from the other.

The key question of this thesis is, “what constitutes newsworthiness in British terrestrial weekday television news in the 1990s?” My aim is to

address this complex question by attempting a close and methodologically rigorous analysis of television news from different television news organisations and different television news programmes. By using a multi-organisational and multi-programme approach I analyse television newsworthiness in different news organisations (both national and regional) and also in different television newsrooms. For example: There are several different types of news programmes produced each day, and my analysis covers, BBC1's *Breakfast News*; *One O'Clock News*, *Children's Newsround*, *Six O'Clock News*, *Nine O'Clock News* and *Newsnight*. ITN produces programmes for Channel 3: *12.30pm News*, *5.40pm News* and *News at Ten*. ITN also produces programmes for Channel 4, *Channel Four News*, and for Planet 24, *Big Breakfast News*. Good Morning Television produces *GMTV News*. Yorkshire Tyne-Tees Television produces *Calendar News* and BBC North produces *Look North News*. These news programmes have several important differences: they are broadcast at different times of the day, they are targetted at different audiences, they are produced by different media organisations or different sub-departments with different aims, goals, perspectives, personnel and budgets. Each programme has a different remit - *Big Breakfast News* for example is a brief update of news stories in the context of an entertainment programme, as is *GMTV News* whereas *Newsnight* and *Channel Four News* seek to provide much more information and analysis.

Although the political-economic, the culturalist and the organisational approaches will not stand alone as explanations of television newsworthiness, they serve to illustrate the complexity of the question "what is newsworthiness?" in Britain in the 1990s, and aspects of these approaches have been influential in my own analysis. As I have indicated in Chapter 1, macro influences acting upon the television news organisation and news programme are important factors in the analysis of



newsworthiness and therefore must be taken into account. Similarly the work on organisational culture, the routines of the newsroom as well as the more detailed studies of television and press news factors have relevance to my analysis of newsworthiness and will be cited throughout the thesis where appropriate. Although individually many studies do fall short of providing an adequate social science account of news production (Schudson, 1991), I hope to avoid the pitfalls of the political economists by including dimensions of organisational influences in my analysis. This recognition of political economic contextual factors also helps to avoid the limitations of organisational approaches which would isolate the research in a purely organisational context.

In Chapter 2, I hope to have shown something of the variety of contributors to the analysis of the media, news in general and television news in particular and their relevance to my research. This research develops a multi-programme and multi-organisational analysis which uses both content analysis and newsroom observation. The research addresses both the content and production of television news in order to complement the limitations of each of these dimensions viewed in isolation. It acknowledges the contemporary fragmentation of the television news genre into a variety of different news sub-genres by looking at different news organisations and different news programmes. The empirical findings of the research are analysed in the light of the external influences and organisational realities of day to day life in different television newsrooms in the 1990s. Its aim is to go some way towards answering the question of what constitutes newsworthiness in British, terrestrial weekday television news in the 1990s.

## **PART II: TELEVISION NEWS RESEARCH**

Part II of this thesis comprises three chapters. Following on from the examination of the broader theoretical concerns of other media researchers outlined in the previous chapter, I now go on in Part II to pursue a two-dimensional research strategy in order to analyse television news. This is via, (i) a detailed analysis of television news output using a content analysis, and (ii) a fieldwork study of the production processes and systems of different television news programmes and organisations. Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of the project design and methodology used to analyse television newsworthiness. In Chapter 3 I discuss the methods of content analysis and observational analysis and outline the advantages and disadvantages of each of the methodologies and their relevance to this study. Chapter 4 provides detailed description and analysis of the results data from the content analysis performed in April 1993. Chapter 5 provides detailed description and analysis of the issues arising from a fourteen week newsroom study spent in six different television newsrooms observing ten different television news programmes in June 1992, February 1994 and April to August 1994.

## CHAPTER 3: PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### a) Introduction: Methodology

This is a multi-organisational and multi-programme approach to the study of television newsworthiness in Britain in the 1990s.

#### I) A Multi-Organisational Study of Television News

My study is a multi-organisational study of news organisations which is the study of BBC, ITN and regional television news production and content. The differences in organisational ethos, history and structure account for some of the distinguishing features of ITN news (whose primary goal is to serve the news contractor) and BBC news (whose stated mission is to inform, educate and entertain). I will show that these distinguishing features do inform the newsroom culture and show how they affect the journalists' conception of newsworthiness in different news organisations.

#### II) A Multi-Programme Study of Television News

My study is a multi-programme study, which is the study of different television news programmes. News programmes, apart from their organisational origin, have, themselves several important differences. For example, they are broadcast at different times of the day, they are targetted at different audiences, both national and regional, and they are produced by different sub-departments with different aims, perspectives, budgets and personnel. A multi-programme study of television newsworthiness is necessary because what is missing from current research is consideration and analysis of the fragmentary nature of television news outlined in the Introduction (see Figure 1). Such an in-depth excavation of what has previously been analysed as a single genre (called "news"), helps to dispel the myth of unitary journalistic practice. In the 1990s journalists working for different television news programmes can and do produce instantly identifiable differences in news output (Cottle, 1993).

### III) A Dual Approach - a Content Analysis and a TV Newsroom Observation Study Combined.

My study uses a two-dimensional research strategy of research. First, it uses a detailed content analysis of the television news output of fourteen different television news programmes, from 19th April 1993 to 23 April 1993 inclusive. Secondly, it uses a fieldwork study of the production processes and systems of ten different television news programmes broadcast from regional and national newsrooms by the BBC, ITN, Yorkshire Tyne-Tees Television in 1994/1995.

#### b) An Analysis of the Advantages and Disadvantages of Content Analysis

A major problem in trying to analyse television news content is that news producers are notoriously vague about the criteria for selecting newsworthy events, they tend to talk in terms of having a “news-sense”, a “gut-feeling”, a “nose for a good story” and so on. Indeed journalistic explanations of newsworthiness are not easily quantifiable, not least because one has to consider the context in which explanations of news selection are given and this can only be done in a newsroom where the production process can actually be witnessed.

However, some researchers have not concentrated on these rather vague premises, but have studied the news messages rather than the news makers, assuming that more could be revealed this way about the unconscious premises, assumptions and frameworks routinely used to construct news. In this sense a complex series of interdependent organisational, technical, professional and textual practices is “read” from the news message. Indeed a good deal of attention has been focused by sociologists on the content of mass communication, and as an alternative (and sometimes as a supplement) to analysing journalistic explanations of news content or newsroom observation, some sociologists have

subjected the output of television news producers to systematic and repetitive content analysis in the search for bias in the news.

Traditionally content research has been focused on the easily quantifiable “manifest” attributes of the message. In its purest form content analysis must strictly analyse what is said and not why it is said in order for it to be objective, systematic and reliable (Berelson, 1971). However, other researchers have broken away from the simple tradition of content analysis, recognising that it was quite limited in conveying the complexity of meaning produced by the media (Woollacott, 1982). They argued that the problem of deciphering and understanding the media's messages was not simply related to the content but had to consider the ways in which that content was expressed or realised, in other words it must be context sensitive (Krippendorff, 1980). The shift from the study of “manifest” news content to the search for more “latent” content changed the focus of the questions which were asked away from simply asking what the messages might mean, but how meaning was produced in the first place, through particular structured and structuring relations internal to the text and in terms of the text's relations to the reader.

However, content analysis as a method has several problems, as well as several strengths. These are outlined briefly below.

#### I) Advantages of Content Analysis as a Method for Analysing Television

##### News Content.

One of the most important advantages of content analysis is its systematic nature, which is an excellent way of protecting the data from the kinds of bias which might result from a “subjective” reading. Furthermore the quantitative data which is generated is more precise and reliable and more “objective” than intuitive or more “subjective” assessments. Indeed,

'foremost among the arguments is the degree of precision with which one's conclusions may be stated. Descriptions such as "45%" or "27 times out of a possible 30" convey information more precisely than statements such as "less than half" or "almost always" (Holsti, 1969:9).

Content analysis may also allow the researcher to refine and clarify ideas as the data may facilitate a step towards the construction of a better theoretical framework, which in turn may lead to a return to a better formulated content analysis. This process of refining and improving both the theoretical and the empirical through systematic content analysis is very advantageous in the clarification of broad or sweeping propositions which are based initially upon intuitive hypotheses or a theoretical construction. Indeed designing a content analysis and running pilot studies helped me to reformulate my analysis in an extremely constructive way, and also led to a more astute observation period in the television newsrooms later in the study. Furthermore, the unobtrusive nature of content analysis is a great advantage, as the analyst need not have direct contact with the originators of the broadcast, which sometimes is not feasible or desirable. In my own case, I felt it was extremely useful to have produced a systematic content analysis without any contact with the journalists and then to take my data into newsrooms to help me pose specific questions and to try to analyse their responses in the context of my own findings. The period of observational study has proven to be extremely effective in clarifying some of the questions which could not be analysed via content analysis.

## II) Disadvantages of Content Analysis as a Method for Analysing Television News Content.

Content analysis as a method has also been widely criticised for important problems which are inherent in the technique (Beardsworth, 1986). One which Beardsworth identifies as being particularly problematic is the assumption that the analyst can actually produce a tool which can objectively measure a

phenomenon. An analyst has to draw upon the resources of his own “common sense” in order to formulate a method to collect the data in the first place, and the coder(s), themselves have to be trained to accept the analyst's view of a phenomenon to ensure coder reliability. Also, this “common sense” which is conveyed via the so-called objective and systematic data coding procedure is only available as a result of the individual's membership of a particular society and of a particular language community. Therefore, in the most rigorous and reliable content analyses the boundaries of the coding categories are specified carefully and made as explicit as possible, coding rules are laid down, coders are trained, checked through double-coding and retrained, pilot studies are held and thus reliability is improved via the minimisation of the coder's dependence upon his own subjective assessments (1).

However, Garfinkel has argued that the attempts to remove the common sense basis of coding by the kind of increasingly rigorous specifications outlined above may be misguided because common sense knowledge is indispensable. He believes that treating the ad hoc features behind coding instructions as a problem to be removed and systematically whittled away is rather like believing that removing the walls of a building will enable one to see better what is holding up the roof (Beardsworth, 1986:387).

A further important problem with content analysis is consideration of just what significance can be accorded to the quantitative findings produced by the technique. Because an assumption is made that the frequency of occurrence of an item is a reliable measure of that item's importance and significance, it follows that the analyst accepts that that item has more significance for the producer or the communicator. The problem with this is that the analyst then tends to assume that because an item appears 50% more times than another item it is 50% more important or significant. Can we actually conclude then that because a television news programme reports violence against women thirty percent more times than

it reports violence against men that the communicator is actually more preoccupied with the former as a news story? Indeed there may be many other explanations for this so-called preoccupation such as how famous the women are, the sex of the editor, the type of news programme, other available stories on the day and so on. Furthermore, content analysis cannot measure what was not actually broadcast. In a busy newsroom stories may be dropped for a variety of ad hoc or logistical reasons, which cannot be identified or even recognised by a content analysis study. The only way this dimension of television newsworthiness can be examined is by spending a period of time in a television newsroom in an observational capacity.

Beardsworth believes that content analysis is inherently paradoxical as a method because its emphasis on hard, quantitative data which is handled by computer programme packages such as the Statistics Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). Such packages are very sophisticated and make the data produced look incredibly systematic and reliable. However, the problem is that it is impossible to specify to a computer package the complexities and contexts of the human communication process one is trying to measure. Therefore the parameters which are set are sometimes inadequate and one finishes up measuring something, but not being sure exactly what has been measured and in what context (Beardsworth, 1986).

In summary, content analysis can be a useful tool as compensation for the vague, subjective and intuitive data which can be produced when theorising about, observing or interviewing journalists at work. However, the method must be treated with caution, and whilst it serves to supplement, enhance and clarify research and analysis, it is unreliable and superficial as a stand alone method.



c) The Relevance of Content Analysis to my Study: Description of the Method Used

1) Relevance of Content Analysis

The shift in the content research tradition has resulted in the emergence of several different types of content research of television news. Some of these techniques are particularly useful to my study as they enhance my research for all the reasons outlined earlier. Broadly speaking, particularly useful examples of use of the technique for analysing television news can be set out schematically for the purpose of this thesis, but in practice it must be recognised that none are mutually exclusive.

i) Some content analyses simply analyse **total story output** on a number of channels, usually over about one or two weeks, in order to determine which categories of news are most or least common, and which priorities are emphasised by the news output. This type of study has been used to measure the degree of conformity in lead stories in early evening network TV newscasts (Foote and Steele, 1986) or to measure topic and story choice of five network newscasts (Stempel, 1988), or to assess content values in television news programmes in small and large markets (Carroll, 1985), or to measure content duplication by the networks in competing evening newscasts (Lemert, 1983). Sometimes such simple measures of content, in terms of story type, frequency, and duration are used as a first stage of a more detailed analysis (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976, 1980; Brunson and Morley, 1978). Studies of news content all tend to show that there is a uniformity of coverage between different news channels in terms of content and presentation and that increased diversity of channels is leading to increasingly similar news coverage. So that rather than there being a broadening of the issues covered, television news output is becoming increasingly similar (Gerdes, 1980). It is this assertion which I wish

to examine further and to challenge in this thesis as most studies to date have taken a fairly narrow range of news programmes and analysis of the different television news programmes have been neglected. As such, a multi-organisational and multi-programme approach is imperative to discover whether this so-called similarity of output is not simply an assumption informed by a limited study of a few television news channels.

In this thesis I use content analysis of the story content of television news to address questions such as: What percentage of television news covers domestic stories and what percentage covers international news stories? What content category do the majority of international news stories fall into? What content category do the majority of domestic news stories fall into? Do different news organisations or news programmes use more “soft” or trivial stories in television news than others? What is the degree of conformity of topic and story choice of the different television news organisations and different television news programmes? Are different news priorities evident in terms of length of time devoted to a story and position of the story on the news agenda degree of repetition accorded to stories in terms of headlines and summaries, exhibited in different news organisations and different news programmes?

ii) Other content analyses have considered the **form** of television news, asking the question of how is news organised to mean what it does? Hartley (1982) has shown that television news, in fact, varies little from other programmes in the overall flow of television output and has some commonalty with fictional programmes and varies little from other news programmes in terms of presentation practices, as well as containing similar narrative properties (Tuchman, 1978). I have analysed the packaging of the news product by using content analysis to address questions such as: Do presentation techniques vary between different news organisations and news programmes, in terms of average length of news stories, use of techniques such as live two-ways (where the anchor

person speaks to a reporter, usually *in situ* outside a building or other location to add a sense of immediacy to the event), by the use of film and library film, or through the role and impact of the presenter. The use and over-use of techniques such as graphics or gimmicks as explanation (or entertainment) tools has also been analysed as such techniques have been questioned. Indeed,

'why bother with investigative journalism when you can have Jupiter as a guest in the studio?' (*J'Accuse the News*, Channel Four, 1/11/94),

iii) Other research using content analysis has started with a particular event which has been deemed to be newsworthy and examined how that specific event is reported as news in terms of themes and presentation techniques. Most studies of this kind concentrated on an event such as a general election, or on the televising of the House of Commons (Franklin, 1992) and on the 1968 Grosvenor Square demonstration in London (Halloran, Elliott and Murdock, 1970; Murdock, 1973). In Chapter 8, I take the 1993 siege in Waco, Texas as a case study in order to examine how different news programmes and different television news organisations handle the same event. I compare the output of fourteen different news programmes and analyse their differences and similarities in terms of news content, news format and news production techniques, in order to examine what particular aspects of an event are deemed to be newsworthy by different television news programmes.

## II A Description of the Method Used

The research methodology involved a content analysis of one week's output of all the main television news programmes (excluding short bulletins) broadcast on British terrestrial television. A week was chosen following Bell (1991) who in turn drew upon the practice of Jones and Carter (1959). Canino and Huston (1986:151) argue that 'a one week sample has been demonstrated to be as generalisable to a year's programming as larger randomly drawn samples'. The programmes recorded were taken from all four terrestrially-transmitted channels:

BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4 and totalled fourteen programmes per weekday. The programmes recorded each day were BBC1's *Breakfast News*; BBC1's *News at 1pm, 6pm and 9pm*; BBC1's *Children's Newsround*; *GMTV News*; ITN's *12.30pm News, 5.40pm News and News at Ten*, Channel Four's *Big Breakfast*, and *Channel Four News at 7pm*; BBC2's *Newsnight*, BBC1's regional news programme, *Look North* and Yorkshire Tyne-Tees Television's regional news magazine programme, *Calendar News*. The one week sample of television news output provided seventy-five hours of recorded television news programmes in total.

The recording period was 19 April 1993 to 23 April 1993 inclusive. The television news broadcasts were recorded using Panasonic and Sony ncam video recorders at half speed enabling eight hours of programming to be captured on a single four hour tape. None of the data were missing from the recorded period as everything was recorded twice. Monitoring of the recording procedure was performed each day on a third video recorder. Each tape was checked to ensure that the correct programmes were recorded. Due to this careful monitoring and double-recording system, the data bank is complete.

#### i) Design of the Project

The focus of the analysis was on television news programmes, and on television news stories. The criteria for identifying what constituted a "news programme" and a "news story" were based upon the following:

##### *The Television News Programme*

A full news bulletin is constructed from a number of items, all linked together in a way which makes the whole programme flow as a totality. These items include the introductory sequence, headlines, the actual news reports (themselves made up of a variety of items), "advertisement" of stories to come, commercial breaks,

weather, summaries, chatty handovers and sign-offs and credits. In order to ensure that the content analysis analysed only the “news” items the other areas of the programme were “disaggregated” (see Brunsdon and Morley (1978:39)), because although the whole programme is termed “news”, part of it is taken up by items not conventionally defined as news stories. Bonney and Wilson (1983) found that a thirty minute broadcast on a commercial station in Australia would on average contain only about seventeen or eighteen minutes worth of main news items.

Therefore in this study television news is defined as that part of the news programme which deals with those events of the day deemed to be newsworthy by the journalists. This allowed the filtering out some of the more conventional and routine parts of the programme, in order to study the differences and similarities occurring in those items designated newsworthy in any given news day. Sport was included because the lengths, content and sometimes the format of the reports vary from day to day and sporting events are news in the traditional sense of something new happening and sometimes make headline news in their own right. Headlines and summaries were addressed separately as their content changes every day and tells us a good deal about the priorities of the news programmes with regard to certain types of story. This allows comparison of difference and similarity of decisions about newsworthiness.

### *The Television News Story*

One of the major problems I encountered in analysing television news output using a content analysis, was the definition of the actual news story. It was not sufficient to simply say that the BBC news programmes broadcast a story about the end and aftermath of the Waco siege on 20 April 1993. To have recorded it as one story would have simply ignored the complexity of the influences on news content (see Figure 1, Introduction). Furthermore, it is the finer distinctions which each television news programme makes between the same event which is

under scrutiny in this thesis. Therefore each content category of a news story has been coded as an individual “story” in order to escape from the rigid format and content categories already imposed on the audience by the presentational style of the news. This has also allowed the examination of the finer distinctions of television news content and format style which have often been ignored by other researchers. As already indicated the purpose of this study is to examine the *differences* as well as the similarities in television newsworthiness across a range of television news programmes, therefore this degree of detailed analysis is vital.

I decided to focus on weekday rather than weekend news because weekday news programmes are usually longer, are presented by familiar well known presenters in contrast to the weekend reports which are often shorter and more sports orientated, with irregular or less well known presenters.

The indicators for the content analysis fall into two main categories for data collection:-

### Content Categories

These categories have been selected after considering several other studies (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976; Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1991; Wallis and Baran, 1990, Hartley, 1989, Stempel, 1989, Bell, Boehringer and Crofts, 1982, Langer, 1987). Segmenting news broadcasts into categories or types of news stories has great variability across studies, with little comparability since each system of categorisation seems to depend on the particular problem being addressed. Categorising news stories usually starts from a classification process based upon manifest content, that is, what the story ostensibly appears to be about. Some classification schemes are very dense. For example it has been argued that news has only six main preoccupations (Hartley, 1989), while others have argued that there is a greater range and degree of differentiation. The Glasgow University Media Group (1976) used nine major groupings with

fourteen sub-categories, whilst Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1991) only addressed aspects of crime, deviance, legal control and justice but had eleven content categories. Wallis and Baran (1990) had seven quite broad categories, whilst Stempel (1989) used fourteen and Bell, Boehringer and Crofts (1982) used forty.

The content categories used in this research were defined partly on the basis of such research, but also drew upon my own experience of content analysis in 1991 (2). I conducted two full pilot days to study the output of fourteen different television news programmes on 12 October 1992 and on 7 December 1992. These pilot studies improved and clarified the data collection method, the coding schedule, the television news code book and helped to reformulate the questions I was attempting to answer by using content analysis as a technique. In the end the question which was addressed when sorting the television news stories into content categories was what is this story “about” in order to carefully differentiate between different story categories (see Appendix 1 for a full list of the fifty content categories I used in the Television News Code Book). The frequency and percentage of different types of news story were coded onto a coding schedule (see Appendix 2) for all television news programmes over all channels. The data were then analysed for each of the four channels separately and for each of the fourteen different television news programme in relation to content criteria (see Chapter 4).

### *Format Categories*

Initially it was my intention to have two categories, the temporal structures and processes of each story (those parts of this sub-category which are measured in terms of time, such as duration of a live two-way or a headline) and the atemporal forms used in each story (those parts of this sub-category which are measured by counting or noting their existence, such as attribution to sources, use of icons and symbols, use of spokespersons etc.). In the end I have included full

analysis of the former only in the content analysis. It was apparent that to try to measure so many indicators was actually very confusing and would enlarge the content analysis to unmeasurable proportions. One of the pitfalls of content analysis is to underestimate the amount of data one can collect and the length of time it can take to analyse.

The form which news items take on a news programme is one measure of how news programmes can differ. I outline below the rationale for choosing the following format categories for detailed study in the content analysis. The results data are analysed in Chapter 4 where they are also presented in tabular form.

***The proportion of national and international news shown by each news programme and by each channel.***

The purpose of this analysis was to determine the commitment each channel and each programme gives to domestic and foreign news stories. By combining the proportions of coverage with findings relating to the content of the stories, it has been possible to analyse if news stories were reported differently on different channels and by different news programmes. Furthermore, if one news programme has shown more domestic or national news than another then it illustrates some of the priorities of that particular newsroom, and therefore intimates that there are different conceptions of newsworthiness in operation.

***The proportion of the news programme that is dominated by the presenter.***

These data have illustrated the amount of priority the news programme accords to the presenter. Programmes which are presenter-led may be seeking to lend greater authority to their stories by distancing them from the more partial observations of the reporter in the field, or their task may be to inject their own personality into the news presentation.



Early BBC news broadcasts were simply programmes which first summarised the main news stories of the day, read by an announcer over still words, followed by a newsreel of latest pictures. When this was replaced by television news bulletins, they were still a radio bulletin with some illustrations, read to camera (Hood, 1967). The introduction of commercial television and the subsequent battle for ratings initiated a competitive duopoly and a transformation of the news broadcast. Independent Television News presented the news programme with a style imported from America, with the programme constructed around the presenter, challenging the traditional solemnity of the BBC style of presentation. In the 1990s the two styles of presentation have long since merged. Both ITN and the BBC marry the concepts of authority and entertainment. The BBC has an impressive studio created almost entirely from graphics, whilst ITN celebrates the ostentation of its own building by using it in the introductory shot of ITN's *12.30pm News* and *5.40pm News* Programmes. *News at Ten* uses the Big Ben clock tower, perhaps in an effort to persuade us that the news it broadcasts is as solid and as reliable as the clock itself. *Channel Four News* shows short films of the day's events, whetting our appetite, *Newsnight's* introduction looks like a trip through cyberspace, *Calendar* and *Look North* illustrate their programmes using shots of the region. In all cases (with the exception of *GMTV News* and Channel Four's *Big Breakfast News*, which occur within a programme), the introductory sequence and the face of the presenters are as familiar to the viewer as their favourite soap opera.

The importance of assessing and analysing the way in which television news is being presented is directly related to the concerns for quality and context of television news. If news programmes resort to increasing the popularity of the programme and entertaining the audience with gimmicks or by converting the presenter into a "star", then it is likely that this will be at the expense of the less popular concentration on important issues which cannot be paraphrased by an attractive presenter. The BBC however, is much more reticent about its chase for

ratings, or about its mission to entertain the audience than ITN. In spite of this both appear to be pandering to the same commercial ethic with negative consequences for the informational quality of the news. The BBC's 1993 refit, resulting in a studio largely composed from graphics, challenges the so-called reality of the news product. The origin of the news itself seems to have no substance, the news product is simply,

'wrapped in trust (and) has a magnificent ersatz authority' and  
*News at Ten* packaging 'screams light entertainment'.  
(*J'Accuse the News*, Channel Four, 1/11/94).

On the face of it, the BBC presenters do appear to be less interested than ITN's presenters in entertaining the audience. The latter move from camera to camera, use pop-up televisions, and swing around in their chairs. However, BBC presenters also spend a good deal of time presenting direct to camera or talking over film. The presentation devices used by the different news programmes have been most illustrative of the commitment that programme has to the actual content of the news story. If the presenter has spent a good deal of time distracting the audience then it implies that the programme sells the news as if the coverage were more important than the news content. This has important implications for the concept of newsworthiness itself, and for the prioritisation of the newsworthy by the news programmes. If the news has to be as entertaining as the introduction and the presenter, then it follows that the story content, that is what is deemed to be newsworthy, will be picked more for its visual, entertaining qualities than for its actual content. Stories without such qualities will either be marginalised, not included, or if possible re-packaged.

***The proportion of the news programme that is devoted to "live two-ways".***

Another way of entertaining the audience is via the use of so-called "live two-ways", where the presenter in the studio and the reporter at the scene discuss the day's events. This often results in an interview between the presenter and a shivering reporter who stands outside a building, to tell us about the meeting that

is going on inside. The device appears to make the news more immediate and authoritative, as the audience can actually see where the news is coming from. Unfortunately the device is often over-used and becomes an excuse for news. Some news programmes fill out the programme with such devices, which actually contain very little information.

*The proportion of the news programme that is devoted to interviews with spokespersons.*

Interviews with spokespersons are usually carried out by the presenter, either via a television screen, a telephone or in the studio. The location, in some senses is immaterial, but the choice of spokespersons and the length of time devoted to seeking their expert opinion can be very illustrative. However, it is important to note that the frequency with which a source is cited is not necessarily instructive about how the source is represented by the media. It has been shown that some sources which appear frequently, may not be represented particularly favourably (Gitlin, 1980; Glasgow University Media Group, 1980; Tracey, 1984; Schlesinger, 1987). Indeed it has been argued that the bulk of knowledge sources are often the journalists themselves, in the case of reporting of crime, (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1990). The Glasgow University Media Group (1980), found that nearly twenty per cent of the copy read out by newscasters and reporters was reported speech, using government sources predominantly. In the United States Sigal (1973) found that seventy-eight percent of all stories involved government officials. Others have also found that in different types of reporting on subjects such as industrial strikes (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976, 1980), political movements (Gitlin, 1980), or environmental disasters (Molotch and Lester, 1974) and that government institutions often dominate, set the agenda and promote the preferred account.

Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1991) went on to show that in broadcast news, journalists, as sources of information, dominate. The presenter in particular

holds a pivotal position in the programme and provides a lot of knowledge without attribution to others. The presenter will frame a news report in an authoritative voice and then will speak to a reporter (via the use of a live two-way link) or outside source. In the case of the former, the reporter becomes the source or spokesperson for the event, and in a sense is the “expert”. This device is used frequently by all news programmes so that often the only voices the audience hears are the authoritative interpretations of the event by the presenter and the reporter.

### *Use of Film.*

As television is a visual medium (Tunstall, 1971), it is imperative that the journalists acquire film to accompany any news report. Film is always accompanied by a voice-over. This may be the presenter's voice or more commonly it is a piece that is gathered and edited by a reporter, producer and video tape editor (VT editor), following guidelines from the programme editor. Measuring a programme's commitment to film can illustrate the degree of importance it places upon the visual as a means of communicating, particularly as filmed packages generally contain more context and information and are more expensive than other ways of reporting the news story. The use, or lack of use of attributed library film by the television news programmes can be illustrative in reaffirming the lack of historical perspective accorded to most film reports.

### *Use of Graphics.*

From a positive perspective graphics can be seen as an attempt to help the audience to understand complex issues by simplifying them into explanatory phrases, pictures or diagrams. However, they can also be used in an entertaining and confusing way. Technology has progressed to such an extent that a talented graphics designer can create a visual representation of almost anything on screen within a few hours. The temptation is to always include the graphics because they are so clever and entertaining, even though 'no one knows what the hell they

mean' (*J'Accuse the News*, Channel Four, 1/11/94). An analysis of the use of graphics by different television news programmes can be a useful indicator of the attempt to simplify the complex. However, a content analysis alone cannot tell us anything about the intention of the news producers, so this has to be supplemented by observation.

### *Use of Headlines and Summaries.*

When a television news programme headlines or summarises certain news stories, it is because its journalists (usually the programme editor) have decided that those stories are the most crucial in terms of their journalistic assessment of what constitutes newsworthiness for that particular programme and organisation. Furthermore, such use can tell us something about their notion of the importance of the headline or the summary as a device for highlighting such decisions.

Headlines usually reflect the main running order and the top two or three stories, although they can also be used to draw the audience in and keep them until after a commercial break. Headlines, therefore can serve a variety of devices, and are no longer simply a reflection of the main priorities of the programme in terms of newsworthy value of the stories. However, it is generally the case that the first two headlines are reflected in the running order. It is a sure sign that something has gone wrong when a programme flags a story as priority headline (number one or two), and it does not appear until later in the programme. Often this causes the editor much distress, and other journalists watching a news programme always comment on the obvious logistical breakdown that has occurred.

Summaries can also be useful as a device for reclaiming time at the end of a news programme. When a programme is over-running the summaries can always be shortened to ensure the bulletin finishes on time.

Both headlines and summaries in terms of their format and structure are indicative of the structured nature of the news programme, different news programmes routinely use different numbers of headlines and some do not use summaries at all. However, to study their content too closely can actually be misleading because as observation of newsrooms has clearly shown stories can become leads for reasons other than the inherent newsworthiness of the story. The study of headlines and summaries is included in this study simply as one possible indicator of some of the different priorities of the different news programmes and news organisations.

#### *Mean length and frequency of news stories broadcast by each news programme*

The average length of a television news story can be illustrative of the degree of information that is included in that story, and the type of image the programme is working to. John Simpson, Foreign Affairs Editor at the BBC, claims that a news programme that consistently broadcasts stories of less than two minutes is going down-market (Simpson, 1994). Upon these criteria ITN has already been accused of working to a “tabloid” agenda given that its average story length on the *5.40pm News* has been measured to be one minute and thirty seconds (Barnett and Gaber, 1993).

#### *The Coding Procedure*

The coding schedule is shown in Appendix 2 and is divided into two parts. The first part was completed for every news programme and obtained general information about the programme itself. The information collected concentrated on such criteria as the channel on which the news programme appeared, its transmission date, its start time, the overall programme length in minutes and seconds. The analysis excluded all advertisements, weather forecasts, newspaper assessments, handovers, chatty exchanges between presenters, technical problems, musical introductions and end titles. Headline and summary content

categories were drawn from the code book and the total length in seconds devoted to the headlines and summaries were recorded. Finally the total length of national news and total length of international news in the programme was calculated, in minutes and seconds (both of which when added together equalled the overall news output time).

The second part of the coding schedule contains information about each television news story (subject to the definition above). In order to ensure that stories were correctly allocated in relation to their appropriate content category some stories ostensibly about the same thing, i.e. the story about the ending of the Waco siege in Texas, might have been coded under three different categories. For example, on BBC1's *Nine O'clock News* on 20 April 1993 the lead story was about the ending of the Waco siege. Three separate reporters, each framed by an introduction by the presenter, presented three pieces of film. The first was about President Clinton's announcement that he took full responsibility for the decision made by the FBI to attack the compound. This "story" included an introduction by the presenter, John Humphrys, which lasted for forty-seven seconds, plus a further twenty-eight seconds of graphics describing the "cult's" compound. The reporter's film then lasted a further two minutes and forty-four seconds. This "story" was coded as "international politics", number 35 in the TV News Code Book (Appendix 1). The second Waco "story" followed immediately. John Humphrys again introduced the reporter, this time with a short twelve second piece accompanied by a still photograph of the compound in flames. The second reporter then presented a piece relating the aftermath of the fire, this was filmed at the Waco compound and the pictures showed the FBI tanks attacking the compound and the fire starting and quickly taking hold until the building was completely engulfed. This piece lasted two minutes and twenty two seconds and was coded as "international violence", number 40 in the TV News Code Book (Appendix 1). The third "story" devoted to the Waco siege followed immediately after the second "story". Again John Humphrys gave a short introduction lasting

for nineteen seconds, again accompanied by a still photograph at his side. The third reporter then presented a piece about the British families of the “cult” members living in Britain, and their distress at the violent end to the siege. This was coded as a domestic story “human interest-serious”, number 17 in the TV News Code Book (Appendix 1).

Each news story identified was given a story number and general information relating to the television news programme was included in order to contextualise each individual news story within the appropriate channel and news programme. Information was also obtained as to whether the particular news story described was a headline or summary story in order to gauge the importance and prominence the news programme accorded particular story categories. Each story length was also recorded, again to act an indicator of the importance of the story in relation to other news stories and its position in the news programme.

On the Coding Schedule, Story Information, Item 3.5 (Story Identifier) was included in order to allow the identification of particular story categories quickly using SPSS. All local news bulletin stories which occurred within national news programmes (i.e. *Look North* during BBC Breakfast News and *Calendar News* during GMTV News) were indicated by placing 700 in the boxes. All stories relating to the end and the aftermath of the Waco siege which occurred on the national news were recorded using the number 800. On the occasion where a Waco victim was identified by *Look North* to live within its region, the story was identified by the number 870.

All the coding was performed by me. A sports stop-watch was used to record first, all the component parts of each news story, and second the whole news story. Time was recorded to point ten of a second. All the content categories were allocated on the basis of the television code book. Due to problems of bias in this kind of operation, I ran a checking procedure to ascertain how accurate my



data collection procedure was. Another person coded seven hours of the programme data (ten percent of the total output). His recordings of the data were very consistent with my own, with an error margin of less than one percent on time recording and three percent on content category allocation. However, as I alone have allocated the news stories to all the content categories throughout the content analysis there is far more consistency in this study than in larger scale studies where coder error and coder discrepancy has to be taken into consideration. As I have provided an intellectual argument for allocation of the news stories into particular content criteria then I accept that any criticism levelled at my coding procedure will be levelled at the content category rationale, rather than at the systematic nature of the coding procedure.

#### Data Analysis

The information from the coding schedule was then analysed using a Statistics Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) on a 486 pc. My analysis featured frequencies, cross-tabs and the calculation of some means and percentages. Frequencies were computed on programme information, the length of each news programme, content of headlines, total length of headlines, content of summaries, total length of summaries, total length of national news output and total length of international news output. Frequencies were also computed on content information for each individual news story in order to analyse whether that particular story was a headline or summary, the content category of the story, the total length of time devoted to the story. Frequencies were also computed on format information for each individual news story to ascertain the length of broadcast time devoted to coverage by the presenter, the reporter, spokespersons, use of computer graphics, film and library film.

Means and percentages were computed on the average number of stories per programme (total number of stories divided by total number of programmes, and then for each programme), on the average duration of a news story per

programme, on the percentage of stories containing live two-ways (total number of stories containing any two-ways divided by total number of stories). Analysis was repeated individually for each programme and for each channel in turn, on the percentage of stories containing graphics (total number of stories containing graphics divided by total number of stories). Analysis was repeated individually for each channel in turn (for all programmes and for all channels), on the total amount of time occupied by film for all programmes coded (for all programmes and then for all channels), the total amount of time occupied by the anchor person, by headlines, by summaries, by graphics, by studio interviews and by each content category. All the data were analysed and converted to tabular form (see Chapter 4).

d) An Analysis of the Advantages and Disadvantages of Observation

News selection processes have been analysed from a variety of perspectives, most of which help towards our understanding of the complexities of the process. Analyses which have concentrated on one single perspective have been inadequate when subjected to further scrutiny by researchers. For example, as outlined in Part I studies about the selection and production of news have moved their level of analysis from concentration on isolated newsmen (early “gatekeeper” studies, (Lewin, 1947; White, 1950), from concentration on causal factors inherent in the news story itself (news factor research, where characteristics of a news event are identified which determine its chance of passing through various media “gates” Galtung and Ruge (1965), to consideration of the wider organisational life where journalists work with both their internal and external environments. This work has centred upon broad themes such as bureaucratic constraints on news making, (Tuchman, 1978; Fishman, 1980; Altheide, 1976), the pressures placed upon the news operation by news organisations which are becoming larger and increasingly complex (Schlesinger, 1987; Golding and Elliott, 1979) and the study of the journalists as professionals (Tunstall, 1970; Schlesinger, 1987). Cottle (1993) argues that regional news is

informed by some traces of organisational features, but that it is actively created by journalists who are collectively working towards a known result which is a shared programme visualisation.

1) Advantages of Newsroom Observation as a Method for Analysing Television News.

The kind of organisational and extra-organisational complexity and human input outlined above cannot be measured by content analysis alone because the technique is inadequate as an indicator of the plethora of variables which help to constitute television newsworthiness. Observation is the only method by which the normally invisible world of journalistic activity and media production can be recorded and analysed. Just one example out of many of the important and significant kinds of information one might gain regarding newsworthiness is the dropping of television news stories either during the day or actually during transmission. It is vital to understand the kinds of formal and informal decisions which are made in the newsroom on a day-to-day basis if one is to gain any real insight into what constitutes television newsworthiness. Although journalists' own accounts of their practices and judgements are of value and interest, they are of course insider views. As such, the journalists' own immersion in the professional and institutional values of news production and selection may prevent them from reflecting effectively on their own profession. Newsroom observation by an outsider is therefore important as it permits the theoretically informed observation of the social practices of cultural production - that is the study of journalistic practices which sustain it. It also aids in the understanding of the complex nature of editorial systems and the taken-for-granted assumptions made by media professionals.

Newsroom observation helps to illuminate the subtleties of a mode of organisational control. For example, Schlesinger (1987) found that the BBC operated an effective system of transmission downwards of "guidance" after

retrospective examination of output and activity by the Management Board. This contrasts or contradicts the assertion by the BBC that it in fact operates a system of referral upwards, and that this is the main procedure for decision-making. Newsroom observation is particularly useful because it allows examination of how these systems may sustain belief and particular activity in the newsroom and allows observation of the statics and dynamics of cultural production via the study of newsroom behaviour.

Importantly observation can also reduce the temptation to make broad sweeping assumptions elicited from a critical reading of media content, towards rather extreme conclusions about the motivations or intentions of working journalists. Actually watching the journalists at work can help to refine and clarify initial hypotheses or conclusions by revealing the complex range of forces behind media production and selection.

Observational analysis is also a very thorough way of studying an organisation because it actually involves a variety of methods, including observation of meetings and work routines, informal conversations, interviews and access to a number of organisational records such as documents, papers, and computer systems. This allows for a great deal of cross checking and investigation (triangulation). Differences and similarities of opinion and explanation can be checked further and the reasons behind such consistencies and inconsistencies are open to further interpretation and analysis by the observer, providing a wealth of information about the organisation, its practices and its personnel tensions and cohesions. Observation illustrates that the complexity of cultural production can be studied, but that some of the more sweeping grand theoretical claims about such issues, although of some value, often present the phenomena as being more simple and easily definable than is the experience of both the participant and of the observer.

## II) Disadvantages of Newsroom Observation as a Method of Analysing Television News

One of the main problems with acting as an observer is that the means of access to information are controlled by those who are being observed and no sociological study to date has been published on the higher reaches of policy making and corporate planning by media owners and controllers (Curran and Seaton, 1990). Only a few studies have tried to concentrate on this aspect of the impact of control on the journalists from the higher echelons of the news organisation (Burns, 1977; Schlesinger, 1987; Cottle 1993). However, this type of analysis brings its own difficulties, as organisations can become extremely complex and difficult to understand. For example, Schlesinger (1987) found that his understanding of the BBC was further complicated by the fact that it was, and still is, trying to restabilise itself in the face of the divergent logics of the market versus public service broadcasting. Similarly, Epstein (1973) had to modify his study of ABC News as it was undergoing substantial reorganisation. Such organisational dynamics can serve to complicate an analysis of a particular organisational product, which in this case was television news. These issues will be discussed in much greater detail in Part III of this thesis.

A further difficulty which can be encountered when undertaking any form of observation, especially when it does not involve participant observation, is that it can take time for the observer to be accepted. Tom Burns, felt that he was seen as an ineffectual don (Burns, 1969). When Woods (1986), undertook a long term observation period in schools, he reported feeling lonely and bored, but devised ways of coping with such feelings by analysing them as being part of the work involved in organisational analysis. He advises the observer to keep the mind active and plan new ways of gaining access to new areas, to formulate new questions and to look for liaisons and key informants. In some instances, as reported by Elliott (1972) the temptation to become involved in the work of the newsroom, or to contribute, may become quite powerful, particularly as the

journalists are often very busy and require help and sometimes a contribution from the observer.

Sometimes situations may be arranged specifically for the observer, although the chances of this actually happening may diminish the longer the researcher is visiting. However, of course, one has always to be on guard against being manipulated by others in the organisation, or being sucked into “going native” (although the latter is only likely to occur in long-term studies). Therefore, in order to ensure that the experiences witnessed are as close to the “reality” of the lived experiences of day-to-day newsroom life as possible, the observer must seek to ensure that those observed do not feel threatened, intimidated, irritated, or beholden to the observer in any way. In order to be unobtrusive it is necessary to adopt an air of interest, be available at all times to listen to information (and advice), but not to be side-tracked by trivia, or personal information. This, of course, is not easy and it is a well acknowledged problem that the presence of the observer always changes the behavioural context to some extent. One strategy which was adopted by Johnson (1975), to minimise the effects of the presence of an observer was to construct a front of humility, play it safe in terms of conversation topic, avoid contentious issues, change one's biography accordingly, and to “normalise” social research by making anodyne comments about it.

Also, an observer must ensure that he or she does not ignore extra-organisational forces by focusing attention purely upon the immediate organisational phenomenon of news production. Indeed Tuchman (1978) can be criticised for neglecting to contextualise her work in this way. However, most studies which have been conducted in a newsroom have recognised the importance of the interaction between the news organisation and wider society.

e) The Relevance of Newsroom Observation to my Study and a Description of my Method

1) The Relevance of Newsroom Observation

In order to analyse the complexities of what constitutes newsworthiness it is vital to gain a greater understanding of the cultural realities of the television newsroom. As these realities are inherently without objective meaning they can only be understood by interpreting the newsmakers' subjectively meaningful interpretations of their experiences in the newsroom and by observing journalists at work at all levels in the organisational hierarchy. My observational study was for fourteen weeks in six different television newsrooms, observing the production of ten different television news programmes at ITN and BBC in London and at Yorkshire Tyne-Tees Television (*Calendar News*) and BBC North (*Look North News*) in Leeds.

The reasons for the observational study were two-fold: First, in recognition of the fragmentation of the television news genre (see Figure 1, Introduction), which has enabled a proliferation of different television news programmes to develop, each constituted from the combination of a variety of different news sub-genres. This indicates that the news values informing story selection of television news can be different in different newsrooms. This has been demonstrated by some differences in the content and format of television news as the results data from my content analysis show in Chapters 4, 7 and 8. Therefore, whilst there seems to some extent to be a shared set of values by journalists about what constitutes news, it does not necessarily mean that these news values prevail when they are subject to the constraints or the requirements of the organisation (Epstein, 1973), or the specific news programme. The reasons and rationale for such diversity needed to be examined much more carefully by observational analysis in different television newsrooms.

Secondly, content analysis and theorisation are not sufficient to allow one to understand the formal and informal processes of television news production and selection, or to understand the nature of journalistic culture operating in different television newsrooms.

As such my period of study in television newsrooms was specifically useful to this study as it has allowed the examination and analysis of three broad areas:-

i) Organisational Culture

This includes the specific things which make the BBC distinctive and the ITV system distinctive. Tom Burns, for example, discovered that there was a kind of “BBC manner” which exemplified a normative system composed of specific elements of language, bearing, lines of talk and social skills which are sometimes present in society, but at the BBC were combined to form an organised code of conduct and values (Burns, 1969, 1972, 1977).

Although much of the formal information about an organisation can be obtained from books, internally produced booklets or from newspapers, the ethos of the organisation is grounded in its history, goals, aims, hierarchical structure and personnel. However, the nature of an organisation is organic, it changes and adapts over time and so it is vital to examine and understand it from within. For example, it was helpful to listen to (and interpret later) the comments made by journalists to each other over lunch. This kind of informal information about organisational culture can only be obtained from observation, conversations and interviews (although one has to recognise that there may be some reluctance to share some confidences, it can sometimes still be possible to pick up important information through simply observing and listening as unobtrusively as possible). The kind of information to be gained in this way includes the real location of power in the system, dissatisfaction/alienation, opinions about leadership, institutional morale, informal channels of communication and so on. Such



insights are useful for building up a more realistic picture of the institution with regard to its weaknesses and its strengths and indirect or direct influences on news production. (For example, a journalist at Sky news told me that although the BBC had more staff than Sky the BBC was, in his experience, far slower at turning out news stories due to lack of cohesion and team spirit). After a period of observation at the BBC I was able to analyse this statement more carefully and concluded that there was some truth in the assertion.

ii) Particular Newsroom Culture (Peculiar to Different Television News Programmes)

As indicated, there has been little comparative research across a variety of television news programmes. Most studies which have examined television news in a comparative way have concentrated on prime-time programmes, or compared television with the radio or the press. My study observes the various “house styles”, format considerations, technical and financial resources, audience considerations and production and selection practices which occur in different television newsrooms. The observation period was vitally important as I was able to witness at first-hand how the journalists believe that their product is different from that of the opposition. This results in an interesting contrast to assertions by some academics using content analysis, that there is a uniformity of coverage between different news channels in terms of content, presentation and editorial decision-making and that increased diversity of channels is leading to increasingly similar news coverage (Buckalew, 1969; Clyde and Buckalew, 1969; Gold and Simmons, 1965; Schiltz, Sigelman and Neal, 1970; Sasser and Russell, 1972; Glasgow University Media Group, 1976; 1980).

iii) Journalistic Culture

The advantage and importance of newsroom study and interviews with journalists was demonstrated by Epstein (1973). Epstein found in his study of CBS/ABC and NBC newsrooms that the journalists' definition of news value was grounded

in a loosely defined prior consensus between news media of what news is. He also noted that news organisations are not actually set up for the kind of reporting that journalists often cite as being the primary goals of journalism. For example, all the journalists he interviewed defined news value in terms of time/immediacy. However, his content analysis revealed that most of the news is actually delayed for a day or two to facilitate organisational logistics. However, since Epstein performed his research the use of electronic news gathering techniques and satellite transmissions have speeded up the transmission and news gathering processes. Even so, some news takes days to gather, especially foreign news which may be put together as a two or three minute “feature”. Secondly, journalists defined news as being the unexpected or the extraordinary, the “man bites dog story”. Again Epstein found that most news is actually planned ahead. Furthermore, the journalists interviewed by Epstein cited originality and “scoops” as being an important news value, whereas in reality news organisations generally do not have investigative researchers on their staff, so there are few exclusives.

The BBC, has set up specialist units and expects the journalists to go out and “find” stories, whereas in reality they still mainly follow stories which are preplanned or released from press offices. Indeed Boorstin (1964) argues that many news events are actually “pseudo-events”, that is events which are actually created for the news media, such as press conferences and this reflects the type of stories that journalists tend to report. Schlesinger (1987) also found that most news is in fact “olds” or pre-planned in a news diary.

Therefore, it has only been by actually observing journalists at work in television newsrooms, that academics have been able to come to the conclusion that to some extent journalists labour under a misapprehension regarding the reality of their own job. Instead they use the notion of time pressures, coping with a proliferation of arbitrary events and achieving objectivity as a “survival strategy”.

Academic research has been able to focus on and challenge the journalistic mythology which presents the journalists' role as solely being one of creating order out of chaos and making ad hoc decisions in the important quest for truth. Such research has shown how journalistic practice, is to a large extent, extremely routinized and repetitive, relying on precedent and adherence to organisational rules and routines.

## II) A Description the Method Used

The following newsrooms were observed:-

### National newsrooms:

BBC television newsrooms, 25 April - 27 May 1994: *One O'clock News* desk (one week); *Six O'clock News* desk (one week); News Summaries Desk (two days); *Nine O'clock News* desk (one week); Newsgathering - Home and Foreign News and Forward Planning (one week and two days) and *Newsnight* (three days).

ITN television newsrooms - 6 June - 8 July 1994: *12.30pm News* desk and News Summaries (one week); *5.40pm News* desk (one week); *News at Ten* (one week); Intake - Home and Foreign News and Forward Planning (intermittent observation over a three week period); *Channel Four News* - Intake (one week); Output (one week).

### Regional newsrooms:

Yorkshire Television newsroom, 3 - 9 June 1992; 4 November 1993; 14 - 18 February 1994. *Calendar News* (two weeks).

BBC North regional newsroom, 18 July - 29 July 1994. *Look North News* (two weeks).

In total ten different news programmes were closely observed in six different newsrooms. The newsgathering or input processes and the output processes were closely observed in each case.

Interviews were conducted in each television newsroom for each television news programme. In all cases I interviewed the chief-editor or his equivalent, the deputy, the programme editor, the editor for the day, the chief-sub editor, the news editors (home and foreign news), producers, specialists correspondents, correspondents/reporters, production assistants, programme directors and presenters. I had no particular interview routine, but systematically worked through a list of key people in each newsroom, subject to their availability. Targetting key people to talk to formally in each newsroom ensured that an interview portfolio for each news programme and news organisation was built up which could be directly compared with other organisations and programmes. Sixty-two formal interviews in total were recorded and transcribed, and eighty-three informal interviews were conducted, accompanied by note-taking. General conversations were also conducted daily with staff at all levels of the organisations.

#### *Preparation for Observational Analysis: In Search of a Method*

Simon Cottle (unpublished paper) has listed six analytically distinct (but in practice overlapping) stages to observation which were useful in preparation for observational analysis of the television newsrooms outlined above.

#### *Design of the project*

It was following my content analysis and a close reading of the extant literature (3), that I was able to formulate the specific areas of interest I wished to pursue in the newsroom study and to conclude that the main character I wished to shadow was the programme editor. Other researchers have spent different lengths of time in newsrooms, Gans (1980) for example, visited newsrooms and magazines for

several years before he finally wrote up his study in 1980. Tuchman (1978) also spent about ten years observing and interviewing at a television station and a newspaper office. Other researchers have spent less time observing in newsrooms, Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1987) spent only eighty-six days with a television station over a seven month period. Clearly there is no hard and fast rule as to how long one should observe. Therefore when I was granted access into a variety of television newsrooms for specific periods of time I accepted the opportunity gratefully.

Preparation undertaken before my fieldwork study was vital to ensure that I had adequately determined the important classes of persons, events and activities to be studied. Earmarking the programme editor for special observation was, I felt, vital to ensure that I kept a complete as possible understanding of the processes being undertaken in the newsroom. The programme editor also attends (and sometimes leads) the major conferences and meetings of the newscast, (s)he is in the newsroom before anyone else on his or her team, and is able at any one time of the day, to explain where everyone should be and what they should be doing and why. It is also the programme editor who liaises with editors in the Newsgathering or Intake departments of the newsroom. Such conversations which are conducted on an on-going basis between the news gatherers and the news selectors are obviously an important part of the decision processes being conducted regarding what is or is not newsworthy and why. Listening to the formal and informal conversations between the programme editor and other members of staff of all levels in the newsroom was a useful way of getting an understanding of how decision processes operate.

Furthermore, I found it vital to set myself a set of personal rules and goals before I ventured into the newsroom, to ensure that my period of observation would be used to its maximum potential. For example, I quickly learned to trace crises in the newsroom, to see how they were handled and which agents are mobilised to

deal with them and what resources are brought to bear. This, highlights significant features of the social organisation (Strauss, Schatzman, Bucker, Ehrlich and Shabshin, 1981). There is also a need to keep making it clear to everyone what one's purposes in the newsroom are (Burns, 1977), as such I formulated a brief but consistent line of explanation about my work and what I was looking for. I found this very useful as I had to explain to everyone I met (sometimes twenty or more people a day). Any ambiguity or changes in story-line may have seemed unprofessional or shady, or at worst suspicious. It was vital to ensure that the journalists knew that I had no intention of making a specific search for conflict, bias and had no spirit of expose (Strauss et al, 1981).

### Access

Gaining access to the newsroom is often one of the most difficult parts of performing any kind of fieldwork. I was fortunate to be granted observational access to all the newsrooms I approached.

Access to ITN has been difficult. Indeed Schlesinger (1980) was not accorded access to ITN, for a variety of reasons when he conducted his study of the BBC in 1977. Access to study a variety of different organisations and newsrooms, has enabled me to make a comparison between the differences and similarities exhibited by BBC News and Current Affairs and ITN, and by regional and national news organisations, both in terms of the news organisations and the particular news programmes they produce. Furthermore, it has allowed me to assess whether or not different journalistic cultures do exist in different news organisations or in relation to different news programmes, or whether the similarities of news production are much greater and more important than any differences. In order to ensure that I could properly compare my time at BBC News and Current Affairs with my observation period at ITN I asked to spend the same amounts of time watching programme editors, producers, correspondents and so on. As a result I feel that the observation periods are directly comparable.

I employed exactly the same strategies at the two regional organisations as at the national organisations, to ensure that I obtained first-hand experience of newsroom processes in the regions which could be directly compared with those of the national television news organisations based in London, and with each other.

### Field Relationships

I found that the editorial role really was the nub of all the processes, and whenever possible I spent a whole day with the editor, following him or her around to meetings, into editing suits, small conferences with individual correspondents, listening into telephone conversations, attending the morning conference and even having lunch with them on some occasions. This helped me to understand the complexities of the processes and the formal and informal dynamics at work in a television newsroom. However, to ensure that I did not only see the production and selection of television news from one perspective, I ensured that I sometimes spent time following up a particular editorial decision with a conversation or informal interview with the recipient of the decision. During this time I occasionally went out on stories with correspondents, watched producers, directors, production assistants and special production assistants at work in order to understand all the working practices of the newsrooms. In each case however, the main focus of my work, concentrated on watching the programme editor and/or (editor for the day) at work, shadowing him/her throughout the day and attending all editorial meetings and conferences. In order to ensure that I could obtain as clear a picture as possible of what everyone in the newsroom was doing at any particular moment, I ensured that I arrived and left the newsroom just before and just after the programme editor, which usually involved working at least a twelve hour day, as most editors work three or four twelve hour days per week. As I observed every weekday I also had the advantage of watching different editors at work on the same news programme,

and was therefore able to assess to what extent the editor himself/herself makes a difference in terms of news stories chosen.

In order to understand the full newsroom process it was vital to spend time with the Intake/News-gathering Department and with the News Output Department in each television newsroom. As I will discuss much more fully later in the thesis, the kinds of insights I gained into the processes, dynamics and logistical expediency involved in the production and selection of television news, could not possibly have been gained from either my theoretical work or my content analysis alone.

#### Collecting and Recording Data

Sixty-two formal interviews were conducted, which I recorded and fully transcribed and eighty-three informal interviews from which notes were made immediately afterwards. The line of questioning at each interview was open-ended, some interviews lasted over one hour, most lasted for about thirty minutes. Many more informal conversations were also conducted which were not recorded. Informal information gained over lunch or from general chats about the organisation was often the most illuminating. Often conversations were especially animated, particularly as the BBC staff conducted two strikes during my observation period. These more informal conversations were conducted continually, and would have lost their spontaneity if they had been recorded. However, I carried a notebook with me at all times and wrote in it fairly incessantly, lest I forgot anything. The notebooks are filled with description, interview notes and some impressions gained from interactions which I would appear not to notice and then write down later.

Every evening I transcribed my notes onto a laptop computer to ensure that none of the impressions gained on a day to day basis were lost. This turned out to be a vital activity, because re-reading them has been an excellent *aide memoire*. These



notes are fairly copious and form the basis for a good deal of Part III of this thesis.

Other advice to be gleaned from other academic observational analysis of television processes comes from Silverstone (1985) who studied the making of an Horizon programme at the BBC. He usefully advises that the pathological is often better at illustrating the normal than the normal, and tells the observer not to write anything off that does not seem to conform to the norm. This argument can be particularly useful when coming across issues which did not conform to expectations. For example, when conducting my own observational analysis, it was apparent that the journalists were far more analytical of their own practices and routines than I had expected and to my surprise were very quickly offering me plausible explanations of their understanding of the routinised nature of journalistic practice.

#### *Analysing Data*

This period of research and analysis was conducted in the main after the observational period in the television newsrooms, following the advice of Schlesinger (1980:355) to take time for a “disengagement” from the fieldwork scene. It was the re-reading, re-consideration and interpretation of the copious collection of field notes, transcripts and other documentation which have formed Part II and Part III of this thesis.

In summary, the period of observation in the different television newsrooms was invaluable to the analytic content of this thesis. The data and information gained from the observational analysis supplements, clarifies and at times contradicts the empirical data gained from a systematic content analysis. Data from both methodologies have therefore informed my analysis and discussion of what constitutes newsworthiness in weekday, terrestrial television news in Britain in the 1990s.

f) Summary: The Strengths and Limits of the Dual Approach to Methodology

I) A Dual Approach to Methodology: Its Importance and Its Strengths

One of the most important aspects of this study is that it is a multi-programme, multi-organisational study of television newsworthiness. As outlined in more detail above, this kind of comparative study is rare (Cottle, 1993), and detailed and systematic research is needed to study both differences and similarities in television news output and content from different news organisations and news programmes. This is necessary because the increasing proliferation of different types of television news programme renders the central question of this thesis, what is television newsworthiness?, meaningless unless that diversity is recognised and incorporated as part of the study.

The importance of using both content analysis and newsroom observations has been articulated strongly by Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch and Weaver (1991:183-184), and has formed the intellectual basis for the use of a dual methodological approach in this thesis.

II) A Dual Approach to Methodology - its Current Weaknesses and Future Research Strategies

One weakness of this particular study of television newsworthiness is that it concentrates on the four existing terrestrial television news channels only, BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel Four (due to time and resource constraints). Obviously due to increasing diversity of news programming being transmitted via the satellite system (for example, Sky News and CNN and cable television's *Live TV* news) and the possibility of even more diversity with the further development of cable television, digital broadcasting multiplexes and the introduction of Channel 5 news, it would be very interesting to extend this type of study to a comparison

of terrestrial and cable/satellite television news programmes in the future. Indeed the influence of Rupert Murdoch in broadcasting in this country cannot be underestimated in relation to the future and quality of television news output and content. The study of terrestrial, satellite and cable television newsworthiness in such a changing competitive environment would be most useful to our understanding of how news values differ between the increasingly diverse array of television news organisations and news programmes in Britain, and would enable us to consider the implication for the future of television news.

The concentration on television news broadcast during the week in this study excludes weekend news. This was for two reasons, first, weekend news is different in terms of the audience it is aimed at, its production personnel and to some extent its news values differ from weekday news. Second, the domination of sports news at the weekend would have distorted my results. The comparison between weekend television newsworthiness and weekday newsworthiness would make an interesting study in the future.

This study concentrates on British television news only (due to time and resource constraints). However, it would be very interesting to do a comparative study with other countries at some point in the future and to assess whether news values are truly different between different countries or whether their differences and similarities fall into the same kind of categories as those found in British television news (Wallis and Baran, 1990).

Only one week of television news was analysed, although methodologically this is acceptable (Jones and Carter, 1959), it would be interesting to analyse newsworthiness temporally to see if, and how, newsworthiness changes over time, particularly in relation to changing news values due to increased competition, deregulation and satellite news programmes.

In summary, although the methodology adopted in this thesis could have considered more perspectives and dimensions it is, nonetheless, comprehensive in scope. Indeed, the main strengths of this study lie in the fact that it recognises that the analysis is taking place at a time when television news can not simply be treated as a unitary concept. This thesis challenges the approaches of those researchers who have analysed television news as a single entity, or as a unitary journalistic practice, through their observation of only prime-time news programmes for example. It also questions those studies which have only used one type of methodology, which no matter how rigorous or systematic, is insufficient to address the complexity of the question what constitutes television newsworthiness in British television news in the 1990s.

# APPENDIX 1: TELEVISION NEWS CODE BOOK

## TELEVISION NEWS CONTENT CATEGORIES

### DOMESTIC TELEVISION NEWS

<u>CODE</u>	<u>CONTENT CATEGORY</u>	<u>CATEGORIES USED IN OTHER STUDIES AND NOTES</u>
01-06	Parliamentary Politics	The generic category of politics was used by Hartley (1989).
01	<u>General conflicts and disagreements between government and other parties or inter party conflict. Everyday Parliamentary conflict and activity in the Houses of Parliament, or campaigning for elections.</u>	Gans (1980) used the category "Government conflicts and disagreements". I have widened this to include "all parties". The Glasgow University Media Group (1976) listed each party separately. I further widen this category to include "crime, scandals and investigations" (Wallis and Baran, 1990). However, this does not include personal scandals which will be coded under category 05. Examples of 01 are the Matrix Churchill arms to Iraq investigation once it had focused on the Government. Also Parliamentary scrutiny of Bills, proposals Calcutt Reports I and II, Clive Soley's Private Member's Bill on Press Freedom, disagreements in Parliament about the Maastricht Bill. Discussion of White and Green papers and so on. The campaigning for elections, i.e. the "democratic" parliamentary process.

- 02      Government Policies which are actually enacted and announced as *fait accompli* by Government and the media.      For example, the Broadcasting Bill 1990, Government allowing private companies to invest in the NHS etc.
- 03      Government Reports of Official Information      See Wallis and Baran (1990).  
For example papers released containing Government facts and figures, such as statistics on crime or single parents and so on.  
If the Reports or figures specifically refer to education, health, the economy, crime or the environment then they are coded under those headings in the appropriate content category.
- 04      Personnel Changes in Parliament      Gans (1980) used the category, "Government personnel changes", I have widened the category to include Parliamentary changes e.g. John Smith being replaced by Tony Blair and so on.
- 05      Politicians - Personal Lives      See the Glasgow University Media Group (1976)  
For example, David Mellor and Antonia de Sanchez, Norman Lamont and his credit card debt. Politicians on holiday or retiring. The death of John Smith, Labour Leader, when it focused specifically on him as a person. Once the story was devoted to the implications for the Labour Party, and the Leadership contest, it would be coded as 01.  
Other multifarious examples are: Peter Lilley forgetting his job title, Anne Widdicombe becoming a Catholic, and more recent stories such as the Tory Party and the allegations of sleaze and corruption. These are not classed as Social Affairs or Law and Order because the actions of politicians often have implications for politics.

- 06      Politicians on Official Business Abroad      When the focus is on the British Politician and not on the host country. Where British interests are being represented abroad. For example, John Major visiting Saudi Arabia and India, the British Ambassador visits China, British political statements on Bosnia or the Waco siege.
- 07      Everyday Local Government activities and conflicts      When the focus is purely on the local government and not on central government's actions relating to local government. For example, a story specifically about financial crisis in Western Isle Council.
- 08-10      **Economics**      The generic category of economics was used by Hartley (1989); Carroll (1989); Stempel (1989).
- 08      Economics and Government      The enactment or the direct impact of Government policies or Government action, such as tax increases, adjustments to the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (PSBR) or direct arrangements with other countries such as USA/UK Open Sky talks, or membership and withdrawal of British membership of the ERM, and its effects on the economy and Opposition statements regarding Government action.

- 09      Economics, City and  
Currency News
- This category is an amalgamation of The Glasgow University Media Group's (1976) two separate categories, "Economy, City" and "Economy, Currency". In my study this category 09 refers to the specific spot in the news programme which is devoted to "city" news when the exchange rates are given and FTSE Index, usually accompanied by graphics.
- 10      Industrial/Public Sector  
and Business News
- An amalgamation of two categories "Business" and "Industry" identified by The Glasgow University Media Group (1976). This category covers CBI business forecasts, industrial and public sector redundancies, industrial reports, industrial disputes, general recession and recovery stories, announcements of profits and losses, high street spending, retail figures and so on.
- In order to separate variable 08 from variable 10, the story will be classified as 08 ONLY if it is totally slanted towards the Chancellor and Government policy.
- 11-12   **Education**
- 11      Education and Government
- The enactment or the direct impact of Government policies on education. Where the direct focus is on the Minister for Education, i.e. Questions in the House of Commons or Opposition statements.



- 12      Education and Schools,  
Colleges and Universities      General education stories about educational institutions and teachers or school children putting Government policies into action, or boycotting them. For example, stories about school teachers boycotting testing in schools.
- 13      Official Reports and Statistics      Non-Governmental reports on education.
- 14-15    **Law, Order and Crime Stories**      Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1991) studied aspects of crime and deviance legal control and justice in television news. They selected eleven categories under the heading of Law and Order, my categories below take these into account.
- 14      Acts of Violence and Control  
of Violence      For example, “terrorist” attacks, violent demonstrations, mass random killing (the Hungerford Massacre), riots. Control by armed forces or police in a violent confrontation (Brixton riots), British Army in Northern Ireland, police control during the miners' strike in 1983, British role in the rest of the world if it is has a violent role (Falklands' War) or has a remit to control violence (peace keeping forces, or British UN forces under attack in Bosnia). Also covers violent crime, hit and run, murder, armed robbery, shooting, stabbing incidents, rape or other reports of violent action.



This category reflects the more serious side to human interest stories, which tend, as illustrated above, to be portrayed as always being light-hearted and humorous. However, some stories about “ordinary” people are often told for their tragic content, and often the “ordinary” person is simply a victim of circumstance. For example, the British survivors of the Waco Siege who were pursued purely for macabre reasons, and to try to glean more information about the “insane” cult leader, David Koresh. Also stories about victims such as the Hillsborough survivor, Tony Bland who was on a life support machine until his parents agreed, in the face of much publicity and opposition, to cut off his food supply and allow him to die. Also, stories about victims of crime, which have been criticised for making it appear that such crime is on the increase, for example, the death of Jamie Bulger was extensively reported, and became part of the national psyche increasing the fear of such crime and searching for spurious connections such as video violence as a way of explaining a phenomenon which has neither increased nor decreased over the last hundred years. In all these cases as well as in many more, the “ordinary” person is pursued, not for having done something extraordinary, but often for just surviving a catastrophe. This, is an important distinction from the above category which quite often deals with trivia, sometimes the serious side of human interest can be very intrusive indeed, leading to a wide debate about the notion of public interest versus the right to privacy.

- 18      Individual or Community Action      Stories about members of the community or individual campaigning for their rights. For example, Somali women campaigning for housing rights, petitions to parliament, lobbying and so on.
- 19      Sport      For example, sport at home, fixtures and results, or British sport, the British cricket team abroad. Stories about British sporting personalities at home and abroad.
- 20      Royalty      Langer (1987) listed the category, “Vice-Royalty and Monarchy” as “other” or “soft” news.  
For example the break-up of the marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales, the visit of Prince Charles to Egypt, “Camillagate”, “Squidgygate”.  
British royal family stories at home and abroad.
- 21      British Forces      Informational stories specifically about “our lads” at home and abroad
- 22-25      **Health**
- 22      Health and Government      Stempel (1989) included the category of “Health and Welfare”.  
This category covers the enactment or the direct impact of Government policies on the NHS and Opposition statements, speeches by the Health Secretary, launch of Government schemes etc.
- 23      Scientific Medical Discoveries      Stempel (1989) included the category of “Science and Invention”.  
This category covers stories about breakthroughs in health and medical care or glamorous medical feats such as lung and liver transplants

- 24      Official Reports and Statistics  
or General Health Stories      Non-Government Reports on Health  
For example, the reporting that  
midwives give extra care to pregnant  
women in the South Yorkshire region.
- 25      Private Health Organisations  
and Charities/Help Lines      For example stories about the opening  
of national help lines for cancer, or  
Action Asthma survey
- 26-27    **Environment**
- 26      Environmental Pollution and  
Disasters      For example the Braer Tanker oil spill,  
where the primary concern is about  
pollution. Using foreign examples the  
distinction I am making is between a  
concern for pollution e.g. Chernobyl,  
where, in spite of deaths, the main  
concern was about the environmental  
consequences compared with a  
concern for injury and for loss  
of life, e.g. Bhopal. The latter would  
therefore have been classified under  
International Disasters and Accidents  
and Chernobyl under International  
Environment. If similar incidents  
occurred in the UK, the same distinction  
would be made between concern by  
the media for environmental  
consequences and concern for loss of  
life.

- 27      Official Reports, Meetings and Forums      For example, the coverage of British political activity and representation at the Rio Summit in June 1992. However, much of the latter reporting was actually political in content (Harrison, 1992), and would be coded under the category 06, where the focus was on the politician and not on the environment. However, aspects of the reporting was environmental and would be coded as 27 when it related particularly to British Environmental issues.
- 28      Conservation and Animal Rights      For example the activity of Green Peace, debates on deer hunting, and fox hunting. General stories about the state of the environment which are instigated not by a report or official forum, but by the news media itself
- 29      Scientific Discoveries and Research      For example inventions, or new technological breakthroughs.
- 30      Disasters and Accidents      This category was used by Wallis and Baran (1990); Gerdes (1980); Langer, (1987) and in various forms by others. The Glasgow University Media Group, (1976) had the category 'Disasters', which coded all deaths which are accidental even if there is only one fatality. Also includes aircraft near misses. Gans (1980), had the category of "Disasters, actual and averted". Stempel (1989) had the category, "Accidents and Disasters". This category therefore includes any stories relating to natural disasters, man-made disasters, car/rail crashes, motorway pile-ups (not joy-riding), air crashes, fires, gas leaks and explosions, floods, storms and so on.

- 31      Religion
- Stories which are particularly about religion, church or church services. Not when the service is part of a larger story, for example the funeral of Jamie Bulger would not be coded as a church service, even though much of the news story was filmed in church. Similarly the story about Anne Widdecombe converting to Catholicism focused mainly on her as a personality and would be coded as 05. However, other more general stories about the ordination of women priests and its repercussions would be coded as "Religion".
- 32      Weather
- This is not the weather forecast, which has been excluded from this analysis, even when it appears in the news programme. It also does not include stories about violent and damaging weather such as floods or storms, which are coded as accidents and disasters. This category would include stories such as "this is the hottest summer for two hundred years", or this is the "mildest December" on record etc.
- 33      Other
- Langer (1987); Grundy (1980), both used this category for items which do not fit into any of the existing categories, but are not sufficiently represented to warrant the creation of a separate category. This category was included, to avoid having missing content category data.

## INTERNATIONAL TELEVISION NEWS

<u>CODE</u>	<u>CONTENT CATEGORY</u>	<u>CATEGORIES USED IN OTHER STUDIES AND NOTES</u>
34-35	International Politics	
34	<u>European/EEC Politics</u>	This category relates to <i>the Annan Report</i> of 1977 which argued that television news should include more EEC news. This category therefore includes items such as Denmark's rejection of the Maastricht Treaty, the debate and referenda re entry to the European Union, European Parliamentary affairs and meetings, and other European political stories such as the Italian referendum
35	<u>Politics in the Rest of the World</u>	For example the United States elections and coverage of President Clinton's policies, Russian politics, elections in India and South Africa and so on. Also the political implications of actions, for example, following the fire at Waco, Texas when the FBI's tactics were debated in the political arena, and some news programmes such as <i>Channel Four News</i> chose to reflect that, whereas other programmes tended to ignore the development, preferring to simply cover Waco as a violent and exciting event.



- 36      International Economy      For example, stories about Russian inflation, international trade talks when the focus is not on the British economy or Chancellor. Also stories about the EC economy in general
- 37      International Business Affairs      For example, the German Rail Strike, a three day air strike in Spain etc.
- 38      International Law, Crime and Criminal Proceedings      Coverage of all non-violent crimes and subsequent proceedings. For example reports about the Managing Director of Fiat on a corruption charge. Violent crime, such as shootings, riots and so on would be coded as international violence.
- 39      International Disputes      For example the negotiations which take place between different countries in the world. For example talks between the United States and Russia. This category does not include Britain, (which would be coded as domestic news). This category covers the non-violent aspects of peace keeping or reconciliation and may occur at the beginning, end or in the middle of conflict situations.  
For example peace talks on Bosnia where the reporting emphasises the peace and reconciliation process and does not report the violence which has occurred or is occurring.
- 40      International Violence      For example, "terrorism", war or deaths due to human intervention, (the war in Bosnia) and law and order enforcement. (US troops in Somalia), the FBI and the ending of the Waco Siege in Texas Also includes the funeral of someone killed violently (Chris Hani's funeral) and the demonstrations and anger filmed which occurred at the funeral.

- 41      International Human Interest  
(Light)      Includes all light human interest stories, such as stories about international pop celebrities, a story about a German actress and so on. (See domestic category 16 for a finer distinction).
- 42      International Human Interest  
(Serious)      Includes all serious human interest stories (see domestic category 17 for a finer distinction). For example the story about the blinded Bosnian boy who was flown to the United States for eye surgery. He became a “celebrity” by being the victim of war. Also stories about issues such as Ethiopian Jews being denied entrance to join their families in Israel, i.e. stories about “ordinary” people being the victims of circumstance or crime.
- 43      International Health      For example, stories about Aids in Africa, kidney transplants and donations in India etc.
- 44      International Environment      For example stories about pollution, such as Chernobyl, or the Rain Forest, the Rio Summit, when the focus was on the international environment and not on the political delegates. (See the distinction made in category number 26 between environmental disasters and general disasters and accidents, where the former concentrates on the environmental consequences at Chernobyl and the latter on loss of life at Bhopal which would be classified as an International Accidents and Disasters under category 36 above).

- 45      International Science      For example international scientific breakthroughs, such as improvements on the Stealth Bomber, or Nasa technology etc.
- 46      International Accidents and Disasters      For example earthquakes, floods, typhoons, cyclones (Bangladesh 1992) or any violent deaths or damage caused by accident either man-made catastrophe such as Bhopal or “Acts of God” causing famine and drought. Famine caused by war in Sudan would be coded as 35, as the violence to another human being began from malevolent or intentional action by another, and therefore cannot be classed as an accident. Where the cause of the famine is not spelt out it has been coded as an “Act of God” under code number 46.
- 47      International Education      For example stories about the Education system in America, but does not refer to stories which cover education from a political perspective, such as government reforms (these would be classed as either 34 or 35).
- 48      International Sport      For example a story which covers a cricket match between Australia and South Africa played in Sydney.
- 49      International Religion      For example a story about the Pope's visit to Bangladesh or any other country but Britain. Or a story about a convent in France etc.
- 50      Other      Items which do not fit into any of the above categories but are not sufficiently represented to warrant the creation of a separate category.

PENDIX 2: TELEVISION NEWS CODING SCHEDULE

PROGRAMME INFORMATION

Programme Number	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(1-2)
Channel:	BBC1 <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> BBC2 <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> ITV3 <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> C4 <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(3)
Transmission date	<input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(4-7)
Time Start	<input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(8-11)
Prog Length - <b>News Stories Only</b> (ie excluding all adverts/weather/papers/chat/handovers/fillers etc)	<input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(12-16)
	mins      secs	
Headlines (Content Category)	1) <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(17-18)
	2) <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(19-20)
	3) <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(21-22)
	4) <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(23-24)
	5) <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(25-26)
Total Length of Headlines (Secs)	<input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(27-29)
Summary (Content Category)	1) <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(30-31)
	2) <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(32-33)
	3) <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(34-35)
	4) <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(36-37)
	5) <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(38-39)
Total Length of Summary (Secs)	<input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(40-42)
Total Length National News	<input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(43-47)
	mins      secs	
Total Length International News	<input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/>	(48-52)
	mins      secs	

**STORY INFORMATION**

Story Number  (1-4)

Programme Number  (5-6)

Channel: BBC1  BBC2  ITV3  C4  (7)

Transmission Date  (8-11)

Time Start  (12-15)

Prog Length (Mins and Secs)  mins  secs (16-20)

Was this story a headline? Yes  No  (21)

Was this story a summary? Yes  No  (22)

**ORY CONTENT (Time in Secs)**

Story Categories  (23-24)

Total Story Length  (25-28)

**ORY FORMAT (Time in Secs)**

Presenter  (29-30)

Presenter and Spokesperson(s)  (31-33)

Presenter and Reporter (2-way)  (34-36)

Presenter and Film (OOV or Ulay)  (37-39)

**Story Identifier**  (40-42)  
 (Local News Bulletins in National News Programmes = 700, Waco Stories = 800,  
 Local News Bulletin stories about Waco victims = 870)

Computer Graphics  (43-44)

Reporter and Film  (45-47)

Library Film  (48-49)

## **CHAPTER 4:      CONTENT ANALYSIS: RESULTS DATA**

### a) Introduction

This content analysis has been designed to carry out a study of television news content and format on terrestrial television in Britain. The aims of this research method, in relation to my particular study were as follows:

- \* To provide a quantitative assessment of the distribution of stories by their content across a wide range of terrestrial, weekday television news programmes in Britain.
- \* To provide a quantitative assessment of the structure, format and presentation styles of television news stories and television news programmes across a wide range of terrestrial, weekday television news programmes in Britain.
- \* To compare the quantity and type of news content portrayed by different television news channels.
- \* To compare the types of news presentation techniques and styles used by different television news channels.
- \* To compare the quantity and type of news content portrayed by different television news programmes.
- \* To compare the types of news presentation techniques and styles used by different television news programmes.

As outlined in Chapter 3 and as indicated in the Television News Code Book (see Chapter 3, Appendix 1), my methodology draws upon a variety of news studies which examine story output and story form. The analysis which follows is simply an outline of my key findings from the analysis using SPSS and an indication of the main areas of importance in the results. These findings are used, where relevant along with findings from my newsroom observation to perform a much more detailed analysis of television newsworthiness in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 of this thesis.

## b) Definitions

### Content Categories

As detailed in Chapter 3, I designed the content category list after consideration of several other important news content studies, upon my own experience of a content analysis (Yorkshire Television study, see Chapter 3, Footnote 2) and on the basis of two pilot studies. The resulting list of definitions, listed in the Television News Code Book (Chapter 3, Appendix 1), was used as a constant *aide memoire* during the coding sessions.

The frequency and percentage of different types of news story, as defined in the Television News Code Book (Chapter 3, Appendix 1) were analysed for all television news programme over all channels, for each of the four channels separately, for each of the fourteen different television news programmes and for the content of headlines and summaries (see section (d) of this chapter).

### Format Categories

As outlined in Chapter 3, consideration of story and programme format was also based on a variety of other television news studies, my own

experience and on two pilot days. The form which news items take on a news programme is one measure of how news programmes can differ. The following format categories and issues have been analysed:-

The proportion of national and international news shown by each programme and by each channel. The proportion of the news programme that is dominated by the presenter. Use of film. Use of live two-ways and spokespersons. Use of graphics. Use of headlines and summaries and the mean length and frequency of news stories broadcast by each news programme (see section (d) of this chapter).

#### *The Television News Programme*

A full news bulletin is constructed from a number of items, all linked together in a way which makes the whole programme flow as a totality. However, in this study television news has been defined as that part of the news programme which deals with those events of the day deemed to be newsworthy by the journalists. This involved filtering out some of the routine parts of the programme, such as the introductory sequence, commercial breaks, weather forecasts, “advertisement” of stories to come, chatty handovers and sign-offs, in order to ensure that the content analysis concentrated on the “news” part of the programme. Sport was included as sports stories can be considered as newsworthy by the journalists, and headlines and summaries were measured in order to ascertain the priorities of the news programmes analysed.

#### *The Television News Story*

One of the major difficulties in analysing television news output using a content analysis, was the definition of the actual news story. As outlined in Chapter 3, it was not sufficient to say that BBC1’s news programmes simply broadcast a story about the end and aftermath of the Waco siege



on 20 April 1993. To have recorded it as one story would have ignored the complexity of news content. Furthermore, it is the distinctions which each television news programme makes between the same event which is under scrutiny in this thesis. Therefore my decision to code each content category of a news story as an individual “story” is an attempt to escape the rigid format division into specific news categories which is already imposed on the audience by the presentational style of the news. It is also an attempt to examine the finer distinctions of television news content and format style which is often ignored by other researchers. As outlined in the example below the purpose of this study is to examine the differences and similarities in television newsworthiness across a range of television news programmes, therefore this degree of detailed analysis is vital.

#### c) Coding Schedule

The coding schedule is shown in Chapter 3, Appendix 2 and is divided into two parts which measure both the format and content structure of the news programme and news story. The first section of the coding schedule was completed for every news programme and obtained general information about the programme itself, such as the channel on which it appeared, its transmission date, start time, overall programme length in minutes and seconds (excluding all advertisements, weather forecasts, newspaper assessments, handovers, chatty exchanges between presenters, technical problems, musical introductions and end titles and so on), and information about the content and length of headlines and summaries. Finally the total length of national news and total length of international news in the programme was calculated, in minutes and seconds (both of which when added together equalled the overall news output time). The second part of the coding schedule was completed for every news story (subject to the definition of the television news story given above).

d) Main Findings: The Characteristics of Coded Programme Output

Over the week of analysis a total of seventy programmes were video-recorded and coded. This amounted to a total of seventy-five hours of programme output. Table 4.1 below shows the breakdown of coded programming by television channel.

**TABLE 4.1 DISTRIBUTION OF CODED PROGRAMMES BY CHANNEL**

	N	%
<b>BBC1</b>	30	42.9
<b>BBC2</b>	5	7.1
<b>ITV</b>	25	35.7
<b>C4</b>	10	14.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	70	100.0

A total of 1700 "stories" were coded. These were distributed across the four television channels in the following ways: BBC1 = 856, BBC2 = 46, ITV = 550 and Channel 4 = 248.

Cumulatively, the news output broadcast from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, for all the news programmes occupied 2430.18 minutes (40.50 hours) of programme time.

Clearly from Monday to Friday, BBC1 transmits more hours of television news per week (21.05 hours) compared to ITN (11.55 hours), Channel Four (4.21 hours) and BBC2 (4.07 hours). None of these times include any of the short two or three minute national or regional news bulletins given out during the day or ITN's *5.30am News Programme* which is

scheduled prior to *GMTV* as a “spoiler” for BBC1’s *Breakfast News*. If these extra bulletins and programmes are included the counts would go up to the following *approximate* figures for hours of television news per week (Monday to Friday): BBC1 (23.01 hours); ITN (13.15 hours); and BBC2 (6.57 hours) and Channel Four would remain at (4.21 hours).

#### I) National/International News

*Analysis of the Distribution of National and International News (Tables 4.2 and 4.3)*

Domestic television news coverage refers to all stories which occur in the United Kingdom, or stories about British nationals abroad (for example British man receives twenty lashes in Saudi Arabia, or British cricket team wins in Australia, British Prime Minister visits Japan, horror for British troops in Bosnia, the plight of the British victims' families).

International television news coverage refers to all stories which occur outside the United Kingdom and do not refer to the activities of British nationals abroad. (For example, township massacre in South Africa, Bosnian boy flies to the United States for an eye operation or the All Blacks win in Australia).

Analysis of the distribution of national and international news over the four terrestrial channels reveals that more national news (56.44%) was broadcast than international news (43.56%) over the week the news was recorded (see Table 4.2 overleaf). However, it is possible that the international news figure is disproportionately high for this particular week as there were three major international news stories being covered by all the news programmes. During the week 19th-23rd April 1993, the so-called Waco Siege ended in an inferno, and all the news programmes

**TABLE 4.2 - FORMAT AND CONTENT ALL  
TERRESTRIAL TELEVISION NEWS CHANNELS**

Table to show the distribution of national and international news on all television news programmes broadcast from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive.

<b>Channels</b>	<b>News Type</b>	<b>Mins/Secs</b>	<b>Percentage Distribution of amount of time Nat/Int News is shown over each Channel from 19th-23rd April 1993</b>	<b>Percentage Distribution of Nat/Int News as defined by the Code Book content category shown over each Channel from 19th-23rd April 1993</b>
<b>BBC1</b>	<b>All News</b>	1263.13	100.00	100.00
	Nat. News	715.28	56.63	69.10
	Int. News	547.45	43.37	30.90
<b>BBC2</b>	<b>All News</b>	220.38	100.00	100.00
	Nat. News	97.02	44.23	50.00
	Int. News	123.36	55.77	50.00
<b>ITV</b>	<b>All News</b>	693.33	100.00	100.00
	Nat. News	450.14	64.92	78.90
	Int News	243.19	35.08	21.10
<b>Channel 4</b>	<b>All News</b>	252.54	100.00	100.00
	Nat. News	109.06	43.19	65.70
	Int. News	143.48	56.81	34.30
<b>All Channels</b>	<b>All News</b>	2430.18	100.00	100.00
	<b>Nat. News</b>	1371.50	56.44	71.30
	<b>Int. News</b>	1058.28	43.56	28.70

devoted a good deal of coverage to the spectacular end of the Branch Davidian headquarters in Waco, Texas. This is analysed in the case study in Chapter 8. Furthermore, Chris Hani's funeral in South Africa, plus the violence which erupted during the ceremony was heavily reported, as camera crews and reporters were already there to cover the funeral. Finally, in Bosnia, British troops discovered the worst atrocities of the civil war to date, and the coverage of this was variously spread between the appalling violence in Bosnia, and the plight of the British soldiers there. It is possible that the international coverage during this particular week was therefore slightly higher than normal. Indeed a study I performed in April 1992, elicited a figure of 40% international news and 60% national news over one week (see Footnote 2, Chapter 3). With this in mind I will now go on to analyse the findings in more detail.

In terms of air time devoted to coverage of national news, ITN has the much larger percentage. This confirms my previous findings (Harrison, 1992), but does not go so far as Barnett and Gaber (1993) who found that BBC television and radio bulletins contained twice as much foreign news as ITN.

Both BBC2 and Channel Four, devoted more air time to international news than to national news.

If international and national news coverage is assessed and measured, not in terms of air time, but in frequency of occurrence of the story category defined as national or international news, the results are somewhat different. Again a high percentage of ITV's news stories fall into the content category "domestic news", but Channel Four also broadcasts a much higher number of stories falling into the "domestic news" content category. The reason for this discrepancy is that Channel Four tends to

broadcast fewer, but longer, international stories than the other channels. BBC1 also has a large commitment to domestic news stories, so only BBC2 splits its coverage evenly between the two categories.

Table 4.3 (overleaf) shows how national and international news is divided over the individual news programmes. The data here are far more revealing as they show quite clearly which news programmes show the most domestic or national news. With the obvious exception of the regional news programmes (although BBC1's *Look North News* sometimes ends on the main national news story of the day), the programmes aimed at younger viewers are clearly more committed to national news stories (for example BBC1's *Children's Newsround* 74.31% and Channel Four's *Big Breakfast News* 70.95%). ITN's *12.30pm News* and *5.40pm News* also reveal a high commitment to national news stories and interestingly, BBC1's *Six O'clock News*, in spite of claims by the Editor, John Morrison, during an interview in June 1994, of a commitment to increase domestic news to try to appeal to the audience, has a quite low figure of only 53.61% domestic news. This may be an indication that the BBC cannot escape from its mission to be a journal of record and world affairs. Both *Channel Four News*, BBC2's *Newsnight* and ITN's *News at Ten* broadcast more international than national news during the week. However, as I will go on to show, *News at Ten* concentrated on very different aspects of the three international stories dominating the week's news than did *Channel Four News* and *Newsnight*.

**TABLE 4.3- FORMAT AND CONTENT - ALL TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the differences in quantity and length of news stories in different television news programmes broadcast from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive.

Prog.	News Type	Mins/Secs	Average Amount of News per Programme Mins/Secs	Percentage of amount of time Nat/Int News was shown on each Programme from 19th-23rd April 1993	Percentage of Nat/Int News stories as defined by the TV News Code Book shown on each Programme from 19th-23rd April 1993
<b>BBC1's Breakfast News*</b>	All News	708.30	142.06	---	---
	Nat. News	376.10	75.22	53.10	70.50
	Int. News	332.20	66.44	46.90	29.50
<b>GMTV News*~</b>	All News	259.51	52.30	---	---
	Nat News	144.28	29.26	55.60	81.70
	Int News	115.23	23.04	44.40	18.30
<b>Channel 4's Big Breakfast News*~</b>	All News	40.28	8.01	---	---
	Nat News	28.58	5.35	70.95	70.90
	Int News	11.30	2.26	29.05	29.10
<b>ITN's 12.30pm News&gt;</b>	All News	135.11	27.02	---	---
	Nat News	91.58	18.32	67.78	71.20
	Int News	43.13	8.30	32.22	28.20

**TABLE 4.3 CONTINUED**

<b>Prog.</b>	<b>News Type</b>	<b>Mins/Secs</b>	<b>Average Amount of News per Programme Mins/Secs</b>	<b>Percentage of time Nat/Int News was shown on each Programme from 19th - 23rd April 1993</b>	<b>Percentage of Nat/Int News Stories as defined by the TV News Code Book shown on each Programme from 19th- 23rd April 1993</b>
<b>BBC1's 1pm News</b>	All News	129.17	26.23	---	---
	Nat News	61.12	12.22	47.32	52.70
	Int News	68.05	13.61	52.68	47.30
<b>BBC1's News-round</b>	All News	36.40	7.28	---	---
	Nat News	27.05	5.41	74.31	75.00
	Int News	9.35	1.47	25.69	25.00
<b>ITN's 5.40pm News</b>	All News	72.20	14.44	---	---
	Nat News	46.03	9.21	63.75	71.10
	Int News	26.17	5.23	36.25	28.90
<b>YTV's Calendar News<sup>^</sup></b>	All News	111.43	22.29	---	---
	Nat News	111.43	22.29	100.00	100.00
	Int News	-----	---	---	---



**TABLE 4.3 CONTINUED**

<b>Prog.</b>	<b>News Type</b>	<b>Mins/Secs</b>	<b>Average Amount of News per Programme Mins/Secs</b>	<b>Percentage of time Nat/Int News was shown on each Programme from 19th - 23rd April 1993</b>	<b>Percentage of Nat/Int News Stories as defined by the TV News Code Book shown on each Programme from 19th-23rd April 1993</b>
<b>BBC1's 6pm News</b>	All News	135.31	27.06	---	---
	Nat News	72.54	14.51	53.61	55.90
	Int News	62.37	12.15	46.39	44.10
<b>BBC1's Look North*</b>	All News	115.27	23.05	---	---
	Nat News	115.02	23.00	99.78	98.40
	Int News	0.25	00.05	00.22	1.60
<b>Channel 4's 7pm News~</b>	All News	212.26	42.45	---	---
	Nat News	80.08	16.02	37.73	52.20
	Int News	132.18	26.43	62.27	47.80
<b>BBC1's 9pm News</b>	All News	137.48	27.50	---	---
	Nat News	63.05	13.01	45.86	51.60
	Int News	74.43	14.49	54.14	48.40
<b>ITN's News at Ten~</b>	All News	115.02	23.00	---	---
	Nat News	56.36	11.05	49.00	54.70
	Int News	58.26	11.55	51.00	45.30

**TABLE 4.3 CONTINUED**

Prog.	News Type	Mins/Secs	Average Amount of News per Programme Mins/Secs	Percentage of time Nat/Int News was shown on each Programme from 19th - 23rd April 1993	Percentage of Nat/Int News Stories as defined by the TV News Code Book shown on each Programme from 19th- 23rd April 1993
<b>BBC2's Newsnight</b>	All News	220.38	44.08	---	---
	Nat News	97.02	19.40	44.02	50.00
	Int News	123.36	24.28	55.98	50.00
<b>All Channels</b>	<b>All News</b>	2430.18	486.06	---	---
	Nat News	1371.50	274.30	56.44	71.30
	Int News	1058.28	211.36	43.56	28.70

Key to Table 4.3

- \* All weather forecasts occurring during the programme have not been included in the analysis.
- ~ All advertisement breaks occurring during the programme have not been included in the analysis
- ^ This week included a short programme of only sixteen minutes due to a football match schedule after the programme. This has reduced the mean length of *Calendar News* from 23.59 minutes to 22.25 minutes.
- > In 1993 ITN's *12.30pm News* was broadcast for thirty-five minutes and contained both an advertisement break and a daily studio interview "Talking Point", this has since been discontinued and the programme now lasts only twenty-five minutes.

## II) The Presenter

### *Analysis of the Role and Impact of the Presenter in Television News Output (Table 4.4)*

All the television news programmes were presented by a familiar presenter(s). Most programmes operated on a rota system so that several presenters become associated with the news programme. For example BBC1's *Six O'clock News* always had two presenters from a team of four, Jill Dando, Anna Ford, Moira Stewart and Martyn Lewis. In contrast, programmes such as ITN's *News at Ten* have become so associated with the presenter, Trevor McDonald, that it has been accused of being 'The Trevor McDonald Show' (*J'Accuse the News*, Channel Four, 1/11/94). Presenters are often seen on other programmes, or become newsworthy in the same way that celebrities do. Presenters, however, represent the solemnity, impartiality and authority of the news itself, therefore if a presenter breaks this it can cause a furore. For example, Martyn Lewis made explicit statements about news content and in so doing challenged the authoritative role of himself as the impartial presenter. In contrast, Peter Smith, the presenter of *Big Breakfast News* has no qualms about challenging the solemnity of news during the broadcast itself. For example, after one broadcast he got up from his chair and revealed that he was not wearing trousers, on another occasion he had a chat with the presenter of *The Big Breakfast* about whether or not he had ever been a male model. This mockery of the solemnity of the news is most apparent when comedy programmes such as *Not the Nine O'clock News*, *Drop the Dead Donkey* and *The Day to Day* exaggerate both the content and format structures of news programmes in order to highlight some of the excesses of the process and the people involved.

**TABLE 4.4 - FORMAT STYLES - ALL TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the differences in FORMAT styles of all news programmes broadcast from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive.

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Presenter % of News output time dominated by the Presenter speaking direct to camera</b>	<b>Presenter Number of stories introduced by the Presenter direct to camera</b>	<b>Presenter and Film (OOV or Ulay) % of News Output</b>	<b>Presenter and Film (OOV or Ulay) Frequency of occurrence</b>
BBC1's Breakfast News	16.88	460	9.92	139
GMTV News	18.92	252	25.07	127
Channel 4's Big Breakfast News	39.70	179	53.05	158
ITN's 12.30pm News	13.51	60	2.46	10
BBC1's 1pm News	12.45	56	2.44	12
BBC1's Newsround	17.58	24	9.15	8
ITN's 5.40pm News	15.76	45	0.51	4
YTV's Calendar News Magazine	17.12	68	4.77	19
BBC1's 6pm News	14.06	58	1.59	5
BBC1's Look North	16.05	58	11.48	52

**TABLE 4.4 CONTINUED**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Presenter % of News output time dominated by the Presenter speaking direct to camera</b>	<b>Presenter Number of stories introduced by the Presenter direct to camera</b>	<b>Presenter and Film (OOV or Ulay) % of News Output</b>	<b>Presenter and Film (OOV or Ulay) Frequency of occurrence</b>
C4's News at 7pm	11.07	63	3.50	23
BBC1's 9pm News	14.34	61	1.69	5
ITN's News at Ten	11.76	57	3.07	18
BBC2's Newsnight	10.37	33	9.22	14

*Presentational Styles: Presenter and Live Two-Ways, Presenter and Spokespersons (Table 4.5)*

The data from the content analysis reveal that presenters do in fact dominate different percentages of total programme output time. For example, the presenter of *Big Breakfast News* fronts a programme which comprises a series of very short news stories. The presenter therefore speaks direct to camera and also over film, the use of a reporter is rare on this programme. The demands made upon the presenters of *Newsnight* and *Channel Four News* are much greater than those working in other television news programme. These presenters spend time not only presenting direct to camera, but also speaking over film (see Table 4.3) (known as “out of Vision” or “OOV” at the BBC or “Underlay” or “Ulay” at ITN and Yorkshire Tyne-Tees Television) and chairing studio discussions with spokespersons, or perhaps interviewing two or three spokespersons. In this instance the presenter is obviously much more involved with the content of the news and is not simply reading a set of pre-prepared scripts which he or she had no part in writing. Presenters, such as Peter Snow, Jon Snow, Jeremy Paxman, Kirsty Wark, and Sue Cameron are therefore in a much better position to interrogate spokespersons and to make comments about the nature of the news story, and to go into more depth of analysis. *Children's Newsround*, *GMTV News* and *Calendar News* have slightly higher percentages of presenter input direct to camera than the rest of the news programmes. This is for a variety of reasons, *Children's Newsround* is, in the main, aimed at children, although it does have an adult audience. The presenter speaks more slowly in his or her introduction, therefore dominating a larger percentage of the programme time. At *Calendar News*, the main presenter in particular presents from a variety of locations, either from a couch surrounded by potted plants, perched on the edge of a desk in the newsroom or standing next to a giant

**TABLE 4.5 - FORMAT STYLES -ALL TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the differences in FORMAT styles of all news programmes broadcast from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive.

Programme	Presenter and Reporter (Live 2-Way) % of News Output	Presenter and Reporter (Live 2-Way) Frequency of Occurrence	Presenter and Spokesperson % of News Output	Presenter and Spokesperson Frequency of Occurrence
BBC1's Breakfast News	3.30	14	7.63	21
GMTV News	11.85	22	14.40	13
Channel 4's Big Breakfast News	----	---	0.32	1
ITN's 12.30pm News	4.54	3	35.13*	13
BBC1's 1pm News	5.51	4	18.66	9
BBC1's Newsround	----	---	----	---
ITN's 5.40pm News	11.87	9	1.41	1
YTV's Calendar News Magazine	----	---	11.76	5
BBC1's 6pm News	6.41	4	1.61	1
BBC1's Look North	0.22	1	8.07	5
C4's News at 7pm	3.07	5	13.91	7

**TABLE 4.5 CONTINUED**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Presenter and Reporter (Live 2-Way) % of News Output</b>	<b>Presenter and Reporter (Live 2-Way) Frequency of Occurrence</b>	<b>Presenter and Spokesperson % of News Output</b>	<b>Presenter and Spokesperson Frequency of Occurrence</b>
BBC1's 9pm News	5.15	6	----	---
ITN's News at Ten	6.20	4	1.17	1
BBC2's Newsnight	1.12	2	29.68	15

Key: Table 4.5

\* The high percentage figure for ITN's *12.30pm News* is due to the studio interview session "Talking Point", this was discontinued in 1994, so any analysis of ITN's *12.30pm News* would now have a much lower count for the Presenter and Spokesperson category.



screen. In all cases the style is relaxed and chatty and the presenter takes his or her time over the introductory sequences.

*GMTV News* is presented in a separate slot in a studio setting away from the main presentational studio. The former is a more traditional presentational setting, where the presenter is flanked by rows of television screens, is seated behind a desk and speaks direct to camera. The general presentation studio for the *GMTV* programme is a set containing sofas and coffee tables, where the presenters lean back and chat and the style is more relaxed and informal. However, the clear distinctions between the presentational settings blur on occasions when the programme presenters initiate further discussion and reportage of important news stories of the day. For example, during the aftermath of the Waco Siege, the news bulletin reported details of the inferno and showed film of the devastation. The programme presenters then went on to talk to the *GMTV News* reporter, via a huge television screen in the studio, to interview relatives of the victims, studio guests and discuss superficially amongst themselves the “issues” behind the inferno. It is this particular presentation style, where news items are dealt with in a slightly different way from the traditional news formats, which relates very strongly to the type of news content produced. As I will show in the content section (section IV) of this chapter, programmes with particularly entertaining or news magazine format also have a particular content style.

The use of live two-ways as a device to give the news audience a sense of the immediacy of the event is, I would argue, abused by two programmes, *GMTV News* and ITN’s *5.40pm News*. Both these news programmes have a presentational style which tries to reach out to the audience, to entertain it and to hold its attention. The use of live two-ways is a way of including the audience in the event itself, to involve it in the “excitement”

of the moment. In reality this event is often obscured from the audience's view, but the intention is to let the audience know that the action is going on "right now", even if they cannot see it. The device is used by most television news programmes, for the reasons outlined above, but in general it is used with some restraint. Both *GMTV News* and ITN's *5.40pm News*, however, appear to have built it in to their programme format to such an extent that a live two-way will occur in most programmes regardless of its suitability. Once a programme format becomes so rigid, the use of such devices can be counter-productive, the audience is not being entertained by the use of an exciting live link to action, but is probably being bored by the predictable news format style. It is cheaper to use a live two-way link than it is to film, edit and produce a video-tape package. Therefore the use of such devices might also be related to the financial situation of the news programme in question.

Analysis of presentational styles of television news programmes is therefore very useful as an indication of the type of news content they are likely to favour, the amount of resources the programme has available and therefore is an illustration of what is deemed to be newsworthy by that particular news programme.

### III) Reporting Styles: Format of the News

#### *The Use of Film (Table 4.6)*

When Jeremy Tunstall (1971) stated that possession of film increases the prominence given to a news story, he was in a sense stating the obvious. Any television newsroom journalist will admit that television news is picture-led. That is where the simple availability of pictures and/or the dramatic nature of those pictures can dictate the inclusion of that news event within a news bulletin running order. Unfortunately, as a content

analysis can only record those stories which were actually included in a news bulletin it is impossible to tell what might have been included had pictures been available, or indeed what other criteria have dictated a story's inclusion or exclusion. This depth of analysis can obviously only be performed by observation of the news process. However, a content analysis does reveal the degree of commitment different news programmes have to the use of film (see Table 4.6 overleaf). Therefore, it may follow that news programmes which have a high commitment to the use of film, such as BBC1's *Nine O'clock News* (72.35% of the programme), or BBC1's *Six O'clock News* (70.63% of the programme), may reject stories if film is not available, whereas programmes such as *Newsnight* (45.01% of the programme), may work around the lack of film by using other devices to analyse the issue such as the use of the presenter, interviews with studio guests and use of graphics. Furthermore, as outlined above, it is possible that use of devices like the live two-way, may also be a way of avoiding the use of expensive film-making techniques.

**TABLE 4.6 - FORMAT STYLES - ALL TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the differences in FORMAT styles in the use of film by all television news programmes broadcast from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive.

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Reporter and Film % of Total News Output</b>	<b>Reporter and Film Frequency of Occurrence</b>	<b>Use of Library Film % of Total News Output</b>	<b>Use of Library Film Frequency of Occurrence</b>
BBC1's Breakfast News	55.51	245	0.08	2
GMTV News	41.67	98	0.32	7
Channel 4's Big Breakfast News	----	---	----	----
ITN's 12.30pm News	42.52	34	----	----
BBC1's 1pm News	55.39	38	1.64	3
BBC1's Newsround	58.79	15	0.88	2
ITN's 5.40pm News	65.24	34	----	----
YTV's Calendar News Magazine	64.81	41	0.38	1
BBC1's 6pm News	70.63	52	0.13	1
BBC1's Look North	63.43	37	----	----

**TABLE 4.6 CONTINUED**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Reporter and Film % of Total News Output</b>	<b>Reporter and Film Frequency of Occurrence</b>	<b>Use of Library Film % of Total News Output</b>	<b>Use of Library Film Frequency of Occurrence</b>
Channel 4's News at 7pm	59.42	33	1.96	8
BBC1's 9pm News	72.35	49	----	----
ITN's News at Ten	66.40	37	----	----
BBC2's Newsnight	45.05	19	----	----

It is worth noting at this point that ITN's *12.30pm News*, at the time of recording was a thirty-five minute news programme, which included a commercial break and a "Talking Point" section where studio guests would discuss one of the main issues of the day. Since April 1993, however, the programme has been redesigned, it is now a twenty-five minute programme, with no commercial break or "Talking Point". This content analysis shows that, ITN's *12.30pm News* has a high percentage figure for presenters interviewing spokespersons (refer back to Table 4.5). In 1993 this figure was almost entirely due to the studio discussion and did not reveal much about the nature of the whole news programme. As such I would argue that the philosophy of the programme is not to work around the notion of the unavailability of film by expanding upon issues using other means, as the later redesign of the news programme will testify.

The level of use of film by the different television news programmes, therefore goes some way towards indicating the priorities of different news programmes. Indeed, programmes with a high commitment to the use of film above other devices such as live two-ways or studio interviews are probably much better resourced than those programmes which fill their time differently. In essence television is a picture-led medium, it stands to reason therefore, that at the heart of television journalism lies the ideal of always having good pictures to accompany the story. At the BBC, it is clear that both the *Six O'clock News* and the *Nine O'clock News* are both sufficiently well resourced to be able to run a good deal of film footage of the day's events. As analysis of the content categories will further bear out, these programmes cover a wider range of stories than ITN's Channel 3 news programmes or regional news programmes, especially more obscure international ones, on a regular basis. The *One O'clock News*, which is also well resourced is able to show less film

because at the time it is broadcast, most pre-scheduled events of the day have not occurred, or the film has not been edited or produced by the time the programme is broadcast. It is noticeable that the programme therefore fills this time with interviews with spokespersons and with live two-way links to reporters standing outside buildings where something is *going to* happen.

Both the flagship programmes BBC1's *Nine O'clock News* and ITN's *News at Ten*, show a good deal of film, as they are the most well resourced programmes. Although the *5.40pm News* at ITN appears to have a relatively high use of film it is important to remember that this is a short programme of only fifteen minutes so the percentage of film used indicates a smaller amount of actual film time.

The regional news programmes, *Calendar News* and *Look North News* both have a relatively high use of film, although they have fewer staff and financial resources than the national television news providers. Regional programmes are less expensive to produce, however, as there is no commitment to coverage of international news or news outside the region. If a regional news organisation does wish to follow a regional story abroad (such as the story about the missing baby, Ben Needham, who disappeared in Kos several years ago), then the editor must carefully cost the enterprise as it would use a large percentage of the overall funds. As such, this type of story is rarely covered by regional news.

The use of library film (Table 4.6) by different television news programmes is also illustrative. Most programmes use very little library film, reconfirming the notion that news is actually a-historical and that most news stories are not framed in any historical context. However, *GMTV News* and *Channel Four News* both used library film on more

occasions that the other news programmes during the week recorded. In the case of the former, the library film was often relatively recent and not always attributed, which may indicate an effort to save money and effort by reusing old film as an illustration for a new story, such as shots of a government minister walking into a building the week before, or general shots (GVs) of Westminster used repeatedly. In contrast *Channel Four News* used clips of black and white historical footage as an illustrative background to the some news stories, showing some commitment to an attempt to contextualise certain issues within a historical perspective.

#### *Use of Graphics (Table 4.7)*

Graphics were used by every television news programme, although the motives for using them were probably different in every case (see Table 4.7 overleaf). For example, BBC1's *Breakfast News* used graphics to illustrate the City News. The local news bulletins broadcast during *Breakfast News* from *Look North* used them to illustrate the weather and local sports results. This programme used graphics as an informational tool to provide the audience with details which were aimed to help it throughout the day. Both *GMTV News* and *Big Breakfast News* followed a similar pattern, although both BBC1's *Breakfast News* and *GMTV News* used graphics to illustrate the pattern of destruction at the Waco compound.

Both BBC1's *One O'clock News* and ITN's *12.30pm News* used graphics moderately, to illustrate complicated points or in the same way as the breakfast news programmes, to try to explain the events at Waco. Such an attempt at "explanation" was ambitious as the inquest held in January 1995 was still not able to conclude how the fire was caused. Graphics used on these two programmes were often updated or improved for use by the later programmes.



Both *Children's Newsround* and ITN's *5.40pm News* used graphics simply as an aid to simplification. The small amount of political coverage on the latter was almost always accompanied by explanatory graphics. Both these programmes avoided unnecessary complications in their news coverage and this was reflected in the length of news stories and in the news content.

In contrast *Channel Four News*, BBC1's *Nine O'clock News* and BBC2's *Newsnight's* use of graphics was much more complex. It appeared that the producers of the programmes did not wish to insult the intelligence of the audience and their graphics were a feast of technological wizardry.

The use of graphics can be an important indicator of the news programme's perception of its audience. The contrasting uses and reliance on graphics by different news programmes relates very strongly to the degree of explanation and simplification the news programme is prepared to go into and this in itself is a reflection on the types of issues which will be tackled by the programmes. Whilst ITN's *5.40pm News* might briefly attempt to simplify a complex political issue using graphics, *Channel Four News* or *Newsnight* may attempt to go into much greater depth, broaching other content categories using spokespersons and graphics, not necessarily as an aid to simplification, but as a means of exploring the issue further. Examination of the content categories later in this chapter will show how issues are broadened and developed in this way. It is this different treatment of issues by different news programmes which is pertinent to the question asked by this study, which is, what constitutes newsworthiness in different television newsrooms and for different television news programmes?

**TABLE 4.7- FORMAT STYLES - ALL TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the differences in FORMAT styles of all television news programmes broadcast from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive.

Programme	Use of Graphics % of Total News Output	Use of Graphics Frequency of Occurrence
BBC1's Breakfast News	6.51	121
GMTV News	5.44	54
Channel 4's Big Breakfast News	0.32	2
ITN's 12.30pm News	2.38	12
BBC1's 1pm News	2.38	13
BBC1's Newsround	5.71	10
ITN's 5.40pm News	0.43	3
YTV's Calendar News Magazine	0.19	2
BBC1's 6pm News	3.78	16
BBC1's Look North	1.31	4
Channel 4's News at 7pm	5.90	27

**TABLE 4.7 CONTINUED**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Use of Graphics % of Total News Output</b>	<b>Use of Graphics Frequency of Occurrence</b>
BBC1's 9pm News	4.42	24
ITN's News at Ten	4.53	18
BBC2's Newsnight	4.61	17

*Use of Headlines and Summaries (Tables 4.8 and 4.9)*

All the television news programmes studied used headlines as a means of highlighting the stories they deemed to be most important (see Table 4.8 overleaf). Although the three breakfast news programmes showed a high count of headlines, this was due to repetition of a few important headlines approximately every twenty to thirty minutes which tended to remain the same throughout the programme.

There was, however, a discrepancy between the number of stories headlined over the week by the rest of the news programmes. This phenomenon has important implications for the study of newsworthiness. If there was actually a simple unitary journalistic criterion for assessing newsworthiness then we would expect to see that all the news programmes had a similar number of headlines and that all these headlines were very similar in content. In reality the choice of headlines appeared to be fairly arbitrary. Programmes such as ITN's *12.30pm News*, BBC1's *Six O'clock News*, *Channel Four News*, BBC1's *Nine O'clock News* and *Newsnight* all highlight a large number of stories as being the most important of the day. Indeed, *Newsnight* deemed 63% of its news stories to be headline stories (although this of course was also due to the lower number of news stories covered). One explanation for this discrepancy is that there are very different perceptions of the importance or relevance of certain news stories in different television newsreels.

Similarly, there was a wide variance in the use of summaries as a device for marking the stories deemed to be most important (see Table 4.9 overleaf). However, lack of use of them can in part be explained by the time constraints of the programme itself.

**TABLE 4.8 - HEADLINE FORMATS - ALL TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the differences in quantity, duration and frequency of occurrence of news headlines broadcast by different television news programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive.

Programme	Headlines % of Total News Stories which are included in the Headlines	Headlines Frequency of Occurrence of Headlines	Headlines Total Length of Time Headlines are Broadcast (Mins/Secs)	Headlines % of the Total Programme Output
BBC1's Breakfast News	26.5	156	26.33	3.72
GMTV News	36.3	109	3.63	1.40
Channel 4's Big Breakfast News	33.0	59	0.57	1.42
ITN's 12.30pm News	63.6	42	3.55	2.63
BBC1's 1pm News	46.4	26	3.67	2.84
BBC1's Newsround	50.0	12	1.10	3.02
ITN's 5.40pm News	51.1	23	2.55	3.53
YTV's Calendar News Magazine	21.3	16	1.42	1.27

**TABLE 4.8 CONTINUED**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Headlines % of Total News Stories which are included in the Headlines</b>	<b>Headlines Frequency of Occurrence of Headlines</b>	<b>Headlines Total Length of Time Headlines are Broadcast (Mins/Secs)</b>	<b>Headlines % of the Total Programme Output</b>
BBC1's 6pm News	50.8	30	2.42	1.79
BBC1's Look North	29.7	19	1.39	1.21
Channel 4's News at 7pm	43.5	30	5.14	2.42
BBC1's 9pm News	45.3	29	1.32	0.96
ITN's News at Ten	42.2	27	1.24	1.08
BBC2's Newsnight	63.0	29	6.50	2.95

**TABLE 4.9 - SUMMARY FORMATS - ALL TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the differences in quantity, duration and frequency of occurrence of news summaries broadcast by different television news programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive.

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Summaries % of Total News Stories which are included in the Summaries</b>	<b>Summaries Frequency of Occurrence of Summaries</b>	<b>Summaries Total Length of Time Summaries are Broadcast</b>	<b>Summaries % of the Total Programme Output</b>
BBC1's Breakfast News	----	----	----	----
GMTV News	----	----	----	----
Channel 4's Big Breakfast News	----	----	----	----
ITN's 12.30pm News	48.5	32	6.32	4.68
BBC1's 1pm News	35.7	20	3.28	2.54
BBC1's Newsround	----	----	----	----
ITN's 5.40pm News	20.0	9	1.03	1.43
YTV's Calendar News Magazine	----	----	----	----
BBC1's 6pm News	40.7	24	1.38	1.02
BBC1's Look North	1.6	1	1.04	0.90

**TABLE 4.9 CONTINUED**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Summaries % of Total News Stories which are included in the Summaries</b>	<b>Summaries Frequency of Occurrence of Summaries</b>	<b>Summaries Total Length of Time Summaries are Broadcast</b>	<b>Summaries % of the Total Programme Output</b>
C 4's News at 7pm	24.6	17	6.16	2.92
BBC1's 9pm News	20.3	13	2.01	1.46
ITN's News at Ten	9.4	6	0.27	0.23
BBC2's Newsnight	6.5	3	0.39	0.18



As observational analysis has shown (see Chapter 5), programme editors often have to make changes during transmission of the news programme, if the programme is running over or under time (and the former is more likely), then the time allotted for summaries (which is built into the programme format), can be adjusted to ensure the programme finishes on time. Programmes which also include the weather forecast such as the breakfast programmes and *Look North News* can also use this unstructured time period as a way of adjusting the programme length. However, the content categories which are highlighted in the summary are also indicative of the perception of importance or relevance of that story to that particular news programme and therefore indicative of what is deemed to be newsworthy by that particular programme.

Table 4.10 (overleaf) shows the four most common content categories for lead headlines for the five days which were analysed. No programmes had more than four different categories during the week except for *Children's Newsround* which had a different lead category every day, the last one "international environment" has been excluded from the table. Most programmes tended to concentrate on "international violence", due to coverage of Chris Hani's funeral riots, a massacre in Bosnia and the end and aftermath of the Waco siege. *GMTV News* often highlighted the serious human interest implications of such actions, targetting victim's families such as the sisters of one of survivors of the Waco Siege. *Children's Newsround*, in its remit to target an audience of children, followed a different news agenda from the adult news programmes. For example, it led with a story about a cancer helpline for teenage cancer victims, on a day when all the other news programmes led with Chris Hani's funeral in South Africa (until seven o'clock when *Channel Four*

*News*, followed by all the other news programmes led with the fire at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas).

All the headlines relating to Chris Hani's funeral were similar, concentrating on the violence before, during and after the funeral. The dramatic headline tone left the audience in no doubt that the journalists were highlighting the international violence aspect of the ceremony, 'violence expected at the funeral of Chris Hani' (BBC1's *Breakfast News*, 19/4/93); 'township massacre in South Africa ahead of Chris Hani's funeral' (*GMTV News*, 19/4.93); 'more deaths in South Africa' (BBC1's *Big Breakfast News*, 19/4/93); 'South Africa - violence last night in South Africa' (*ITN's 12.30pm News*, 19/4/93); 'South African violence at Chris Hani's funeral' (BBC1's *One O'clock News*, 19/4/93); 'South Africa and a possible race war' (*ITN's 5.40pm News*, 19/4/93); 'South Africa - violence at Chris Hani's funeral' (BBC1's *Six O'clock News*, 19/4/93).

**TABLE 4.10 - HEADLINE CONTENT - ALL TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the differences in most common lead headlines broadcast by different television news programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive.

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Headlines First most common lead category</b>	<b>Headlines Second most common lead category</b>	<b>Headlines Third most common lead category</b>	<b>Headlines Fourth most common lead category</b>
BBC1's Breakfast News	International Violence	International Disputes	-----	-----
GMTV News	Human Int. Serious	Control/Acts of Violence	World Politics	International Violence
Channel 4's Big Breakfast News	International Violence	Human Int Serious	World Politics	British Forces
ITN's 12.30pm News	International Violence	Industrial News	-----	-----
BBC1's 1pm News	International Violence	Industrial News	-----	-----
BBC1's Newsround	Help Lines	Conservation	International Violence	International Health
ITN's 5.40pm News	International Violence	Industrial News	World Politics	-----
YTV's Calendar News Magazine	Control/Acts of Violence	Industrial News	Court Inquests	Human Int. Light
BBC1's 6pm News	International Violence	Industrial News	-----	-----
BBC1's Look North	Disasters and Accidents	Control/Acts of Violence	Court Inquests	Human Int. Serious

**TABLE 4.10 CONTINUED**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Headlines First most common lead category</b>	<b>Headlines Second most common lead category</b>	<b>Headlines Third most common lead category</b>	<b>Headlines Fourth most common lead category</b>
Channel 4's News at 7pm	International Violence	World Politics	Economics and government	-----
BBC1's 9pm News	International Violence	Industrial News	World Politics	-----
ITN's News at Ten	International Violence	World Politics	Economics and Government	-----
BBC2's Newsnight	International Violence	International Disputes	Economics and Government	-----

The regional news programmes' lead stories were, with the exception of the concentration on local business news, more concerned with "human interest" stories, such as 'Bradford, challenged as the curry capital of the North' (*Calendar News*, 19/4/93), or 'Pools winner from Pontefract who saw her win in her horoscope' (*Calendar News*, 21/4/93). Or concerned with "court cases/inquests", 'the Beverly Allitt case comes to trial' (*Calendar News*, 20/4/93); 'Rampton nurses accused of murdering patient in court' (BBC's *Look North News*, 21/4/93). Or with "control/acts of violence", 'Doncaster school boy set on fire'; 'men shot in Sheffield pub' (*Calendar News*, 22/4/93). Or with "disasters and accidents", 'house fire, two children die' (BBC's *Look North News*, 19/4/93).

Whilst there was pretty unanimous agreement between most news programmes (with the exception of the regional news programmes and BBC1's *Children's Newsround*) on the first lead, the second, third and fourth leads were much more varied and reflected a different set of priorities with regard to newsworthiness. Similarly, those programmes which included a summary were all in unanimous agreement regarding the most important story of the day, but were less committed to their choice of second, third and fourth most important stories (see Table 4.11 overleaf).

**TABLE 4.11 - SUMMARY CONTENT - ALL TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the differences in most the common closing summaries broadcast by different television news programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive.

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Summary First most common closing category</b>	<b>Summary Second most common closing category</b>	<b>Summary Third most common closing category</b>	<b>Summary Fourth most common closing category</b>
BBC1's Breakfast News	-----	-----	-----	-----
GMTV News	-----	-----	-----	-----
Channel 4's Big Breakfast News	-----	-----	-----	-----
ITN's 12.30pm News	International Violence	Industrial News	-----	-----
BBC1's 1pm News	International Violence	Industrial News	-----	-----
BBC1's Newsround	-----	-----	-----	-----
ITN's 5.40pm News	International Violence	Industrial News	British Forces	-----
YTV's Calendar News Magazine	-----	-----	-----	-----
BBC1's 6pm News	International Violence	Industrial News	-----	-----

**TABLE 4.11 CONTINUED**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Summary First most common closing category</b>	<b>Summary Second most common closing category</b>	<b>Summary Third most common closing category</b>	<b>Summary Fourth most common closing category</b>
BBC1's Look North	International Violence*	Disasters and Accidents	-----	-----
Channel 4's News at 7pm	International Violence	Education and Schools	International Disputes	Industrial News
BBC1's 9pm News	International Violence	World Politics	-----	-----
ITN's News at Ten	International Violence	-----	-----	-----
BBC2's Newsnight	International Violence	-----	-----	-----

\* *Look North News*' update on the main news story of the day reported by the national BBC news in London.

*Mean Length and Frequency of News Stories Broadcast by each Channel (Table 4.12), each News Programme (Table 4.13) and by each News Programme within a similar Scheduling Slot (Table 4.14)*

Table 4.12 (overleaf) clearly shows that the average lengths of news stories broadcast by ITN on both Channel Three and Channel Four are shorter than those on BBC1 and BBC2. This confirms findings by Barnett and Gaber (1993), but also fuels the debate about programmes or channels going down-market (Simpson, 1994). If such criticism has validity then it is surprising to find that BBC1's average length of news story is only one minute and forty eight seconds, given John Birt's commitment to alleviate the "bias against understanding" (Birt and Jay, 1975; 1976; *BBC Annual Report*, 1992; 1993; 1994; *BBC Producer Guidelines*, 1994). However, Table 4.13 (overleaf) actually reveals that the average length of programme figure is reduced by BBC1's *Breakfast News*, *Children's Newsround* and BBC1's *Look North News* and not by the more mainstream news programmes such as the *One O'clock News*, the *Six O'clock News* or the *Nine O'clock News*. The low average figure for BBC1's *Breakfast News* results from the large number of bulletin-like up-dates of the day's main news stories. Also this figure (as does the *GMTV News* figure) includes the regional television news bulletins which are very brief and filled with short news stories.



**TABLE 4.12 - FORMAT STYLES - ALL TELEVISION NEWS CHANNELS**

Table to show the differences in quantity, duration and frequency of news stories broadcast by different television news channels from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive.

Channels	Total Number of News Stories per Channel (Over all Five Days)	Mean Number of News Stories per Channel (Daily)	Mean Length of News Stories per Channel (Mins)
BBC1	856	171.20	1.48
BBC2*	46	9.20	5.19
ITV	550	110.00	1.26
CHANNEL FOUR*^	248	49.60	1.02

\*The high number of short news stories which are included in the *Channel Four News* programmes under the category of a "quick look at the day's other news" brings the story count up and therefore reduces the mean length of news story in the programme.

^Due to the large number of very short stories in *Big Breakfast News* the mean length of stories is further reduced for Channel Four.

**TABLE 4.13- FORMAT STYLES ALL TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the differences in quantity, duration and frequency of news stories broadcast by different television news programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive.

Programme	Total Number of News Stories per Programme (Over all Five Days)	Mean Number of News Stories per Programme (Daily)	Mean Length of News Stories per Programme (mins)
BBC1's Breakfast News	589	117.80	1.22
GMTV News	300	60.00	0.53
Channel 4's Big Breakfast News	179	35.80	0.20
ITN's 12.30pm News	66	13.20	2.00
BBC1's 1pm News	56	11.20	2.16
BBC1's Newsround	24	4.80	1.50
ITN's 5.40pm News	45	9.00	1.46
YTV's Calendar News Magazine	75	15.00	1.42
BBC1's 6pm News	59	11.80	2.18
BBC1's Look North	64	12.80	1.53
C 4's News at 7pm*	69	13.80	2.58
BBC1's 9pm News	64	12.80	2.13
ITN's News at Ten	64	12.80	1.44
BBC2's Newsnight*	46	9.20	5.19

\* The high number of short news stories which are included in the news programmes under the category of a "quick look at the days other news" brings the story count up and the reduces the mean length of news story in the programme.

BBC1's mainstream news programmes, therefore, are retaining their up-market position, if we assess that by John Simpson's criteria of the two minute story being a measure. In contrast, based upon the same criteria, the regional news programmes, ITN's *5.40pm News* and *News at Ten* are all in danger of being labelled down-market.

*Channel Four News* and *Newsnight* both had higher average story lengths, which were actually reduced in this analysis due to *Channel Four News'* section on "the rest of the day's news", read by another presenter and *Newsnight's* "brief look at the day's other news". Both programmes produced much more in-depth coverage of stories, but unlike the mainstream news programmes enjoyed the luxury of being able to pick and choose a small number of issues for their attention.

When news programmes scheduled at similar times were analysed by average story length it was immediately apparent that BBC1's news programmes had a higher mean length of news story, than *Channel Four News* and *Newsnight* (see Table 4.14 overleaf). Mainstream news programmes on ITN were therefore, with the exception of the *12.30pm News* in 1993, all falling below the two minute benchmark for an up-market news story.

**TABLE 4.14 - FORMAT STYLES - ALL TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the differences in quantity, duration and frequency of news stories broadcast by different television news programmes, at similar scheduling times, from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive.

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Total Number of News Stories per Programme (Over all Five Days)</b>	<b>Mean Number of News Stories per Programme (Daily)</b>	<b>Mean Length of News Stories per Programme (Mins)</b>
<b>BREAKFAST NEWS</b>			
BBC1's Breakfast News	589	117.80	1.22
GMTV News	300	60.00	0.53
C4's Big Breakfast	179	35.80	0.20
<b>LUNCHTIME NEWS</b>			
ITN's 12.30pm News	66	13.20	2.00
BBC1's One O'clock News	56	11.20	2.16
<b>CHILDRENS' NEWS</b>			
BBC1's Newsround	24	4.80	1.50
<b>EARLY EVENING NEWS</b>			
ITN's 5.40pm News	45	9.00	1.46
BBC1's 6pm News	59	11.80	2.18

**TABLE 4.14 CONTINUED**

<b>REGIONAL NEWS</b>			
YTV's Calendar News Magazine	75	15.00	1.42
BBC1's Look North	64	12.80	1.53
<b>MID EVENING NEWS</b>			
C4's 7pm News*	69	13.80	2.58
BBC1's 9pm News	64	12.80	2.13
ITN's News at Ten	64	12.80	1.44
<b>LATE EVENING NEWS</b>			
BBC2's Newsnight*	46	9.20	5.19

\*The high number of short news stories which are included in the news programmes under the category of a "quick look at the day's other news" brings the story count up and therefore reduces the mean length of news story in the programme.

#### IV) Reporting Styles: Content of the News

*Television News Content - the News Priorities of different Channels and different Television News Programmes (Tables 4.15 to 4.33)*

Television news content was classified according to 50 specific categories (Chapter 3, Appendix 1). Table 4.15 (overleaf) shows the distribution of content categories over all channels and all programmes. Clearly, the most common type of news category during the week studied was that of “international violence”. As I discussed earlier in the chapter, it is likely that the week chosen was slightly unrepresentative, in the sense that three major international violent events occurred. However, from the perspective of analysing newsworthiness as a concept, this is not particularly important because it is now obvious that international stories which have significant violent impact will always be reported ahead of other domestic stories. Furthermore, it is interesting to note how the different news programmes treated what were ostensibly the same stories in a variety of different ways.

For example, a massacre in Bosnia was reported from a variety of perspectives on the same day, Friday 23rd April 1993. BBC1’s *Breakfast News* reported that the members of the self-proclaimed Serb Parliament were to meet regarding the latest Vance-Owen peace plan, with the likely response of none acceptance. *GMTV News* did not bother to cover the story at all, preferring to concentrate on the police search in London for a caller to the Samaritans who seemed unable to communicate leaving a distressed child on the telephone trying to explain where she lived. *GMTV News* treated the story as an emergency, giving out telephone numbers and updates throughout the morning and involving the audience with the drama as much as possible. Channel Four’s *Big Breakfast News*

variously led on the Samaritan's story, but also reported that 'British troops have admitted there is little they can do about the Bosnian Blood Bath in Vitez'. ITN's *12.30pm News* was far more dramatic about the so-called blood bath, reporting that 'Bosnia, scenes of horror that confronted British troops when confronted with a Muslim village destroyed by the Croats' and 'in Bosnia, sickening evidence of the murder of Muslim citizens by Croat forces has been uncovered by British forces', with the added caution that 'you will find the pictures in this report particularly disturbing'. The focus of the report was initially to show images of the violence by the Croats, but to then go on to concentrate upon the plight of the British Forces in Bosnia, and their feelings about the atrocity. BBC1's *One O'clock News* also concentrated on reporting the violence and showing film of burnt houses, and, like ITN focused in upon a curled burnt hand of a corpse on the staircase. In both cases the film was carefully edited to ensure that the audience did not see more than a fleeting glimpse of the body.

**TABLE 4.15 - TV NEWS CONTENT - ALL TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of different types of news story content category on all television news programmes broadcast from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence	Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	01 - 33 incl.		
Political-General	01	57	3.3
Gov. Policies	02	13	0.8
Politicians-Personal	05	4	0.2
Politicians Abroad	06	28	1.6
Local Government	07	7	0.4
Economics + Gov.	08	39	2.3
City News	09	62	3.6
Industrial News	10	187	11.0
Education + Gov.	11	10	0.6
Education + Schools	12	15	0.9
Violence Acts/Control	14	112	6.6
Court Inquests	15	157	9.2
Human Int. - Light	16	75	4.4
Human Int. - Serious	17	137	8.0
Community Action	18	56	3.3
Sport	19	110	6.5
Royalty	20	5	0.3
British Forces	21	10	0.6
Health + Government	22	1	0.1
Medical Discoveries	23	3	0.2
Health Reports	24	2	0.1
Help Lines	25	13	0.8
Environmental Disaster	26	2	0.1



**TABLE 4.15 (DOMESTIC NEWS) CONTINUED**

<b>Story Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
Conservation	28	17	1.0
Scientific Discoveries	29	2	0.1
Disasters + Accidents	30	48	2.8
Religion	31	17	1.0
Other	33	22	1.3

**TABLE 4.15 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	34 - 50 incl.		
European Politics	34	31	1.8
World Politics	35	65	3.8
International Economy	36	46	2.7
Internat. Bus. Affairs	37	6	0.4
International Law	38	11	0.6
International Disputes	39	52	3.1
International Violence	40	233	13.7
Internat. Human Int.- Light	41	4	0.2
Internat. Human Int.- Serious	42	17	1.0
International Health	43	6	0.4
Internat. Environment	44	10	0.6
Internat. Science	45	5	0.3
Internat. Disasters	46	1	0.1
Internat. Sport	48	1	0.1
		1699	100.0

Valid Cases 1699

Missing Cases 1

Martin Bell of the BBC, however, demonstrated the BBC's mission to protect the audience from the reality of the situation when he said,

'what happened here can frankly not be shown in any detail - there is a roomful of charred bodies and they died in the greatest of agony' (Bell, BBC1's *One O'clock News*, 23/4/93).

What is particularly interesting about this is that ITN's film showed the room in which the people had died. The viewer could only see what appeared to be charred wood and rags, but none the less the audience were shown an image of the atrocity which the BBC would not allow it to see. The BBC in its lunch time report also went on to develop the story, moving away from the dramatic scenes in the Bosnian village and the distress of the British Forces, which it did not dwell upon, then on to film the Bosnia Parliament meeting the day before. The BBC report speculated whether the peace plans which were dismissed out of hand yesterday could be revived in view of the Croat atrocities. The story was then developed further, to Tuzla, where Kate Adie reported on a team of senior UN Ambassadors who were apparently on their way to investigate reports that food supplies were not reaching the village. There was no film of the Ambassadors, but plenty of shots of hungry and miserable looking villages in Tuzla.

BBC1's *Children's Newsround*, chose to ignore the events in Bosnia and led with a story about a world health campaign to fight tuberculosis. ITN's *5.40pm News*, opened with the usual dramatic lead. The presenter, John Suchet, from his swivel chair greeted the tea-time audience with the words,

'Hello. They were given no mercy, men, women, children, burned alive in their homes. In Ahina, British Forces came upon the massacre, proof that atrocities are being committed by all sides - some of the pictures in this report are particularly disturbing' (Suchet, ITN's *5.40pm News*, 23/4/93).

Once again ITN stressed the dramatic, the human tragedy, the plight of the British forces and the horrific violence. They also inserted a teaser 'Paul Davies' *full* report will be on *News at Ten*', just in case the audience was so hooked by the macabre events, it wished to watch more of them "in full" later in the evening. In this way, human tragedy and horror were promoted as a hook for the next programme.

BBC1's *Six O'clock News*, reported the story in the same style as the *One O'clock News*, but included a new piece about Lord Owen arriving in Belgrade for further talks. *Channel Four News*' film of the Bosnian village was very similar to that shown by the BBC and ITN earlier in the day. However, it had not been as heavily edited as the film for the mainstream programmes and the audience was allowed a more lingering look at the human remains in the village cellar, accompanied by the rather clever shot of the burnt hand used by the other programmes. The accompanying narrative however was not particularly sensationalist in content or style, but simply allowed the audience to see more of the situation than the paternalistic BBC or the peak-time ITN programme. Both these mainstream early evening programmes would have had to be very careful not to show anything too horrific at tea-time to a large mass audience of children and adults. In contrast *Channel Four News* is watched by a very small audience and has more freedom to be challenging. Its Foreign Affairs correspondent in London went on to

report on the continuing diplomatic wrangling over the Bosnian conflict, with the Foreign Affairs Committee spokesman on a live link.

However, the BBC, once past the nine o'clock watershed, was still showing the film of Martin Bell telling the audience that he could not possibly let them see the results of what had occurred, followed by the same report used for the *Six O'clock News*, of Lord Owen arriving in Belgrade. The only new addition to the report was a small oov (out of vision) report that President Clinton said he would decide on a tougher policy towards the Serbs in the next few days (which was a tenuous link to the story about *Croat* atrocities). ITN's, *News at Ten*, however, took advantage of the post-watershed slot and treated the audience to the promised report "in full" accompanied by lingering shots of the bodies in the cellar and a variety of shots of the burnt hand (and arm) on the stairs. ITN introduced this news report with the caution that,

'we must warn you that our report by Paul Davies contains pictures of those burnt bodies. They are deeply disturbing images which illustrate the horror of the Bosnian War' (McDonald, ITN's *News at Ten*, 23/4/93).

*Newsnight* did not linger on the bodies in the cellar, preferring to move away from what was now the mainstream news story of the day, towards a more unique package. This was supplied by Jeremy Paxman who was in Tuzla, claiming that the village epitomised the complexity of the Bosnian War.

Clearly the ingredients emphasised by each news programme indicate the types of news priorities those programmes have. ITN's *12.30pm News* and *5.40pm News*, simply reported the violence as it had occurred and concentrated on the human suffering and impact of the atrocities, using

the macabre and extreme nature of those events as an “advertisement” to draw viewers to the *News at Ten* programme when the euphemism “*in full*”, really meant, the audience would get to see those burnt bodies.

In contrast the BBC chose to protect its audience from the horror of the situation, by acting as a censor, allowing the audience to catch a small glimmer of the horror, by showing a burnt hand, but assuming that for reasons of taste and decency, BBC viewers would not want to see anything further. There is a “no blood” policy at the BBC, so viewers are similarly not allowed to see shots of blood stains on pavements or walls, let alone on the victim. *Children's Newsround* by ignoring the massacre and concentrating upon stories about “international health”, “international environment”, “international disasters and accidents” and “human interest”, illustrated its remit to be different from the mainstream news.

The two minority audience programmes, *Channel Four News* and *Newsnight*, both covered the massacre and atrocities in a rather matter of fact way, moving quickly onto different dimensions of the Bosnian issue.

Table 4.15 also shows the other important areas of news coverage for the week studied. “Industrial news” was highly covered, as were “violent acts/control of violence”; “court cases/inquests”; “sport” and “human interest”. General political stories were relatively light that week compared to the other categories. This may have been because the high impact, dramatic international events were more visually exciting, or because it was generally a quiet week in politics. As content studies can only consider news output and do not take into consideration the data which has been rejected as not being newsworthy (Lemert, 1974; Dominic, Wurtzel and Lometti, 1975; Carroll, 1989; Canino and Huston, 1986; Foote and Steele, 1986; Stempel, 1989), it is unfortunately

impossible using content analysis to identify accurately the criteria which were taken into account when selecting one story and rejecting another during this particular week. Rosengren (1970, 1974, 1977) claimed that analysis of intra-media data, even when it extends to observation and analysis of rejected data, is insufficient because it does not adequately represent what he refers to as “reality”, presumably meaning by that, an “objective reality” which can be used to check the criteria of news selection against. Alternatively expressed, the only way the “real” event can be compared to the media event is by obtaining extra media data (i.e. government records, official letters and official data and so on). Indeed, Sande (1971) argued that ideally an analyst should register all the events taking place and compare the news output with the “not news”.

However, the purpose of this particular content analysis, with its inherent weaknesses recognised, is to try to establish a starting point for analysis of the content and format of television news against which, and with the help of which, a more detailed analysis of television newsworthiness can be performed.

Thus, the following discussion of the content category output of all the different television news channels and all the different television news programmes, is meant to act as a useful tool for analysis in the following chapters, where the findings from the lived experience of the newsroom are compared with the systematically gathered data from television news broadcasts. Table 4.16 (overleaf), which analyses the different types of story category broadcast by BBC1, shows clearly that during the week under study the channel prioritised stories about “international violence”, followed by “industrial news”; “court cases/inquests” and “sport”. Again politics as a generic category got little coverage.

**TABLE 4.16 - TV NEWS CONTENT - ALL BBC1's TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by BBC1's news programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Story Occurrence	Percentage of Story Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	01 - 33 incl.		
Political-General	01	34	4.0
Gov. Policies	02	7	0.8
Politicians-Personal	05	1	0.1
Politicians Abroad	06	14	1.6
Local Government	07	6	0.7
Economics + Gov.	08	18	2.1
City News	09	39	4.6
Industrial News	10	99	11.6
Education + Gov.	11	4	0.5
Education + Schools	12	5	0.6
Violence Acts/Control	14	55	6.4
Court Inquests	15	80	9.3
Human Int. - Light	16	28	3.3
Human Int. - Serious	17	44	5.1
Community Action	18	27	3.2
Sport	19	63	7.4
British Forces	21	3	0.4
Help Lines	25	8	0.9
Environmental Disaster	26	2	0.2
Conservation	28	8	0.9
Disasters + Accidents	30	33	3.9
Religion	31	10	1.2
Other	33	3	0.4



**TABLE 4.16 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Story Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Story Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	34 - 50 incl.		
European Politics	34	19	2.2
World Politics	35	29	3.4
International Economy	36	37	4.3
Internat. Bus. Affairs	37	6	0.7
International Law	38	6	0.7
International Disputes	39	34	4.0
International Violence	40	110	12.9
Internat. Human Int.- Serious	42	5	0.6
International Health	43	5	0.6
Internat. Environment	44	8	0.9
Internat. Science	45	4	0.5
Internat. Disasters	46	1	0.1
		<b>855</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Valid Cases 855

Missing Cases 0

Table 4.17 (overleaf) shows that BBC2 had the highest proportion of coverage of “international violence”, but also concentrated on “world politics” and “industrial news”. Table 4.18 (overleaf) shows that ITN has a similar commitment to “industrial news” and “international violence”, but also covers over twice as much “human interest” as the BBC. Table 4.19 (overleaf) shows that Channel Four also had a high percentage of “international violence” categories and “industrial news” but also had more stories falling in the “human interest” content categories than the BBC, showing that ITN, in spite of its claims to diversity of news coverage, does produce programmes with a propensity to cover stories falling into similar content categories.

All the news programmes on BBC1, ITV and Channel Four covered a similar number of different content categories and although these varied in category type overall the three channels showed a similar tendency to variety and spread of coverage, with each channel covering approximately thirty-four categories out of the fifty identified in the Television News Code Book (Chapter 3, Appendix 1). In contrast BBC2 with its single programme, *Newsnight*, showed less diversity of coverage, with only seventeen different content categories being covered during the week studied.

Most content categories appeared at least once in the news, with areas such as “health and government”; “environmental disasters”; “scientific discoveries”; “international disasters” and “international sport” being reported least

There were no stories during the week studied, which fell into the categories of “government reports of official information”; “personnel changes in parliament”; “official reports and statistics on education”; “official reports, meetings and forums on the environment”; “weather”; “international education”; “international religion”, or “other” international stories. These had all been included in the Television News Code Book (Chapter 3, Appendix 1), as possible categories, on the basis of two pilot studies and other content analyses of television news. One can only assume that nothing sufficiently relevant enough occurred in any of these areas during the week in question (see Sande (1971) above).

**TABLE 4.17 - TV NEWS CONTENT - ALL BBC2's  
TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by BBC2's news programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

<b>Story Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>Domestic News</b>	01 - 33 incl.		
Political-General	01	1	2.2
Politicians Abroad	06	3	4.3
Economics + Gov.	08	3	6.5
City News	09	4	8.7
Industrial News	10	5	10.9
Education + Gov.	11	1	2.2
Education + Schools	12	2	4.3
Violence Acts/Control	14	1	2.2
Court Inquests	15	1	2.2
Human Int. - Serious	17	1	2.2
Community Action	18	1	2.2
Religion	31	1	2.2

**TABLE 4.17 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	34 - 50 incl.		
European Politics	34	2	4.3
World Politics	35	5	10.9
International Disputes	39	5	10.9
International Violence	40	10	21.7
International Science	45	1	2.2
		46	100.0

Valid Cases 46  
 Missing Cases 0

**TABLE 4.18 - TV NEWS CONTENT - ALL ITN'S CHANNEL THREE TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by ITN'S Channel Three news programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence	Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	01 - 33 incl.		
Political-General	01	9	1.6
Gov. Policies	02	4	0.7
Politicians-Personal	05	2	0.4
Politicians Abroad	06	6	1.1
Economics + Gov.	08	13	2.4
City News	09	16	2.9
Industrial News	10	56	10.2
Education + Gov.	11	3	0.5
Education + Schools	12	5	0.9
Violence Acts/Control	14	50	9.1
Court Inquests	15	58	10.5
Human Int. - Light	16	28	5.1
Human Int. - Serious	17	73	13.3
Community Action	18	24	4.4
Sport	19	29	5.3
British Forces	21	5	0.9
Health + Government	22	1	0.2
Medical Discoveries	23	2	0.4
Health Reports	24	2	0.4
Help Lines	25	5	0.9
Conservation	28	5	0.9
Scientific Discoveries	29	2	0.4
Disasters + Accidents	30	13	2.4
Religion	31	4	0.7
Other	33	19	3.5

**TABLE 4.18 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	34 - 50 incl.		
European Politics	34	6	1.1
World Politics	35	17	3.1
International Economy	36	6	1.1
International Law	38	1	0.2
International Disputes	39	5	0.9
International Violence	40	74	13.5
Internat. Human Int.- Serious	42	7	1.3
		550	100.0

Valid Cases 550

Missing Cases 0

**TABLE 4.19 - TV NEWS CONTENT - ALL ITN's CHANNEL FOUR TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMES**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by ITN's news programmes shown on Channel Four from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence	Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	01 - 33 incl.		
Political-General	01	13	5.2
Gov. Policies	02	2	0.8
Politicians-Personal	05	1	0.4
Politicians Abroad	06	6	2.4
Local Gov.	07	1	0.4
Economics + Gov.	08	5	2.0
City News	09	3	1.2
Industrial News	10	27	10.9
Education + Gov.	11	2	0.8
Education + Schools	12	3	1.2
Violence Acts/Control	14	6	2.4
Court Inquests	15	18	7.3
Human Int. - Light	16	19	7.7
Human Int. - Serious	17	19	7.7
Community Action	18	4	1.6
Sport	19	18	7.3
Royalty	20	5	2.0
British Forces	21	2	0.8
Medical Discoveries	23	1	0.4
Conservation	28	4	1.6
Disasters + Accidents	30	2	0.8
Religion	31	2	0.8



**TABLE 4.19 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	34 - 50 incl.		
European Politics	34	4	1.6
World Politics	35	14	5.6
International Economy	36	3	1.2
International Law	38	4	1.6
International Disputes	39	8	3.2
International Violence	40	39	15.7
Internat. Human Int.- Light	41	4	1.6
Internat. Human Int.- Serious	42	5	2.0
International Health	43	1	0.4
Internat. Environment	44	2	0.8
Internat. Sport	48	1	0.4
		248	100.0

Valid Cases 248  
Missing Cases 0

Tables 4.20 to 4.33 inclusive (overleaf), analyse the week's news output for each individual news programme in order to ascertain whether similarities or differences occur in the coverage of television news by different news programmes.

Table 4.20 clearly shows the commitment of BBC1's *Breakfast News* to stories about the economy. This is in large part due to *Business Breakfast News* shown from 6am to 7am every morning which concentrated mainly on business news at home and abroad. Often these stories were used again during the day by the BBC's other news programmes. For example, a piece broadcast on retail figures and improvements in the economy was broadcast by every BBC television news programme during the news day, but the same story was not covered at all by ITN. This may indicate that sometimes a criterion of newsworthiness may be simply that the film is already prepared and needs to be used to make it cost effective, or conversely, it may simply show that the BBC has a very strong commitment to economic news and ITN does not.

**TABLE 4.20 - TV NEWS CONTENT - BBC1's BREAKFAST NEWS**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by the BBC1's Breakfast News programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Content Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence	Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	<b>01-33 incl.</b>		
Political-General	01	27	4.6
Gov. Policies	02	6	1.0
Politicians-Personal	05	1	0.2
Politicians Abroad	06	9	1.5
Local Government	07	2	0.3
Economics + Gov.	08	10	1.7
City News	09	37	6.3
Industrial News	10	69	11.7
Education + Schools	12	4	0.7
Violence Act/Control	14	41	7.0
Court Inquests	15	55	9.3
Human Int.-Light	16	13	2.2
Human Int.-Serious	17	29	4.9
Community Action	18	20	3.4
Sport	19	50	8.5
Help Lines	25	5	0.8
Conservation	28	1	0.2
Disasters + Accidents	30	28	4.8
Religion	31	5	0.8
Other	33	3	0.5

**TABLE 4.20 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
International News	34 - 50 incl.		
European Politics	34	15	2.5
World Politics	35	14	2.4
International Economy	36	32	5.4
Internat. Bus.Affairs	37	6	1.0
International Law	38	5	0.8
International Disputes	39	23	3.9
International Violence	40	67	11.4
Internat. Human Int.- Serious	42	5	0.8
International Health	43	1	0.2
Internat. Environment	44	4	0.7
International Science	45	2	0.3
		589	100.0

Valid Cases 589

Missing Cases 0

Table 4.21 shows that *GMTV News* covered a much smaller range of content categories than BBC1's *Breakfast News*, and covered "international violence" to a similar extent as the other news programmes. However, *GMTV News* showed a much stronger commitment than the BBC breakfast programme, to "human interest" stories and to stories about "control/acts of violence". The concentration on the serious side of human tragedy was apparent when the programme covered, in more depth than any other, the victims and the families involved in the events following the end of the Waco siege (Chapter 8). It also covered unique stories such as 'Briton in Saudi sentenced to 120 lashes' (*GMTV News* 20/4/93); as well as headlining stories such as 'police in London combing the area to try to find a woman and two young children after Samaritan's call', (*GMTV News*, 23/4/93).

**TABLE 4.21 - TV NEWS CONTENT - GMTV NEWS**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by GMTV News programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>Domestic News</b>	<b>01-33 incl.</b>		
Political-General	01	3	1.0
Economics + Gov.	08	7	2.3
City News	09	11	3.7
Industrial News	10	32	10.7
Violence Act/Control	14	37	12.3
Court Inquests	15	28	9.3
Human Int.-Light	16	12	4.0
Human Int.-Serious	17	54	18.0
Community Action	18	14	4.7
Sport	19	14	4.7
Conservation	28	4	1.3
Disasters + Accidents	30	10	3.3
Other	33	19	6.3

**TABLE 4.21 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	<b>34 - 50 incl.</b>		
European Politics	34	4	1.3
World Politics	35	11	3.7
International Disputes	39	1	0.3
International Violence	40	38	12.7
Internat. Human Int-Serious	42	1	0.3
		300	100.0

Valid Cases 300  
 Missing Cases 0

Channel Four's *Big Breakfast News* (Table 4.22), emphasised the "human interest" aspects of the news, concentrating on both the light-hearted, 'old policemen are retiring to the Costa Del Sol' (*Big Breakfast News*, 23/4/93); 'what a fringe says about a man' (*Big Breakfast News*, 20/4/93) and the more serious; 'has Dennis Thatcher got cancer?' (*Big Breakfast News*, 22/4/93). It also covered the highest percentage of "royalty" stories, covering those ignored by the other news programmes for example, 'Di Palace Break-in' (*Big Breakfast News*, 20/4/93). As with all news programmes during the week studied, *Big Breakfast News* also concentrated on the "international violence" in South Africa, the United States and Bosnia.



**TABLE 4.22 - TV NEWS CONTENT CHANNEL FOUR'S BIG BREAKFAST NEWS**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by the Channel Four's Big Breakfast News programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Content Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence	Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	<b>01-33 incl.</b>		
Political-General	01	11	6.1
Gov. Policies	02	1	0.6
Politicians-Personal	05	1	0.6
Politicians Abroad	06	3	1.7
Economics + Gov.	08	1	0.6
Industrial News	10	18	10.1
Education + Gov.	11	1	0.6
Education + Schools	12	3	1.7
Violence Act/Control	14	3	1.7
Court Inquests	15	13	7.3
Human Int.-Light	16	19	10.6
Human Int.-Serious	17	17	9.5
Community Action	18	4	2.2
Sport	19	17	9.5
Royalty	20	5	2.8
British Forces	21	2	1.1
Medical Discoveries	23	1	0.6
Conservation	28	4	2.2
Disasters + Accidents	30	2	1.1
Religion	31	1	0.6

**TABLE 4.22 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	<b>34 - 50 incl.</b>		
European Politics	34	1	0.6
World Politics	35	7	3.9
International Economy	36	1	0.6
International Law	38	1	0.6
International Disputes	39	4	2.2
International Violence	40	27	15.1
Internat. Human Int.- Light	41	4	2.2
Internat. Human Int.- Serious	42	5	2.8
Internat. Environment	44	1	0.6
International Sport	48	1	0.6
		179	100.0

Valid Cases 179

Missing Cases 0

ITN's *12.30pm News*, (Table 4.23), with the exception of the high "international violence" coverage, had a much wider range of categories than *Big Breakfast News* and a fairly even spread of coverage, although there was some concentration on stories falling into the serious "human interest" category. In contrast, BBC1's *One O'clock News* (Table 4.24), concentrated more heavily on "industrial news", often using the story lines identified by BBC1's *Business Breakfast News*

BBC1's *Children's Newsround* (Table 4.25), had a much smaller range of content categories, and as outlined earlier set its own agenda each day, often only picking up on *one* of the main news stories of the day. The intense concentration of stories of a light "human interest" nature and "sport", reflects some of the optimism of the programme, it is often a "good news" programme. It also casts the ordinary person in a more favourable light than the other mainstream news programmes, which often only cover the ordinary person when he or she becomes a victim or an eye witness to a disaster. As such children heard about 'the first woman to walk to the North Pole' (*Children's Newsround*, 20/4/93); 'children learn to look out for fire; 'the Hazard Alley Project in Milton Keynes' (*Children's Newsround*, 22/4/93); or about 'the world's luckiest tortoise' (*Children's Newsround*, 20/4/93); or the 'Shakespeare play to be put on for the first time for hundreds of years at the New Globe Theatre' (*Children's Newsround*, 23/4/93). This alternative type of news is an indication of how news agendas could be different if there was not a propensity to concentrate on the more pessimistic nature of world events. However, as BBC news presenter Martyn Lewis found to his cost, to try to tell seasoned journalists that it would be better to try to look for good news stories is akin to asking them to cease to be journalists.

**TABLE 4.23 - TV NEWS CONTENT - ITN's 12.30PM NEWS**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by ITN's Lunchtime News programme from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Content Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence	Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	<b>01-33 incl.</b>		
Political-General	01	3	4.5
Gov. Policies	02	2	3.0
Politicians-Abroad	06	3	4.5
Economics + Gov.	08	1	1.5
City News	09	5	7.6
Industrial News	10	5	7.6
Education + Gov.	11	2	3.0
Education + Schools	12	2	3.0
Violence Act/Control	14	3	4.5
Court Inquests	15	5	7.6
Human Int.-Serious	17	6	9.1
Community Action	18	1	1.5
Sport	19	1	1.5
British Forces	21	1	1.5
Medical Discoveries	23	1	1.5
Health Reports	24	1	1.5
Help Lines	25	1	1.5
Scientific Discoveries	29	2	3.0
Religion	31	2	3.0

**TABLE 4.23 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	<b>34 - 50 incl.</b>		
World Politics	35	1	1.5
International Economy	36	2	3.0
International Disputes	39	3	4.5
International Violence	40	11	16.7
Internat. Human Int.- Serious	42	2	3.0
		66	100.0

Valid Cases 66  
Missing Cases 0

**TABLE 4.24 - TV NEWS CONTENT BBC1's ONE O'CLOCK NEWS**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by the BBC1's One O'clock News programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Content Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence	Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	<b>01-33 incl.</b>		
Political-General	01	2	3.6
Politicians-Abroad	06	2	3.6
Local Government	07	1	1.8
Economics + Gov.	08	1	1.8
City News	09	2	3.6
Industrial News	10	6	10.9
Education + Gov.	11	1	1.8
Violence Act/Control	14	2	3.6
Court Inquests	15	3	5.5
Human Int.-Serious	17	3	5.5
Community Action	18	1	1.8
British Forces	21	1	1.8
Help Lines	25	1	1.8
Conservation	28	1	1.8
Religion	31	2	3.6

**TABLE 4.24 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	<b>34 - 50 incl.</b>		
European Politics	34	1	1.8
World Politics	35	5	9.1
International Economy	36	2	3.6
International Disputes	39	4	7.3
International Violence	40	12	21.8
International Health	43	1	1.8
Internat. Environment	44	1	1.8
		55	100.0

Valid Cases 55

Missing Cases 1

**TABLE 4.25 - TV NEWS CONTENT - BBC1's CHILDREN'S NEWSROUND**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by the BBC1's Children's Newsround programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>Domestic News</b>	<b>01-33 incl.</b>		
Human Int.-Light	16	9	37.5
Human Int.-Serious	17	1	4.2
Sport	19	4	16.7
Help Lines	25	1	4.2
Conservation	28	3	12.5



**TABLE 4.25 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	<b>34 - 50 incl.</b>		
International Violence	40	2	8.3
International Health	43	1	4.2
Internat. Environment	44	2	8.3
Internat. Disasters	46	1	4.2
		24	100.0

Valid Cases 24  
 Missing Cases 0

It would seem then, that good news and trivia are fine for children, although the programme is also peppered with worthy stories (such as a piece on the rain forest), or mainstream serious news stories, if they are deemed to be sufficiently important (such as the death of John Smith in May 1994). Conversely, serious news is for adults, and programmes which seek to include too many good news stories, such as those in ITN's *News at Ten's* "and finally....." slot are accused of going down-market. High quality, up-market news is obviously perceived as a *serious* concept, and for some critics good news or news which is entertainingly or sensationally presented, moves too far away from that principle. As I will discuss in much more detail in the concluding chapter, the concept of what is news is actually defined by whoever is selecting or producing it and as such the concept of what is news, has itself to become broader and less focused in relation to the increasing array of news programmes which have developed over recent years. Any attempt to define television newsworthiness, must take into consideration such diversity.

Surprisingly, ITN's *5.40pm News*, (Table 4.26), had a relatively low concentration of "human interest" type stories, with the highest proportion of stories which fell into the "court cases/inquests" and "international violence" categories. These data were interesting as observation on the *5.40pm News* desk at ITN revealed the editor's commitment to "human interest" stories and a genuine preference for the domestic news story rather than the international one. I assume therefore, that the high number of stories falling into the "international violence" category during the week studied, shows that the ending of the Waco siege story in particular (which accounts for most of the "international violence" coverage by this programme) must contain ingredients which make it unquestionably newsworthy for the *5.40pm News*.

**TABLE 4.26 - TV NEWS CONTENT - ITN's 5.40PM NEWS**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by the ITN's Channel Three 5.40pm News programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Content Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence	Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	<b>01-33 incl.</b>		
Political-General	01	1	2.2
Gov. Policies	02	1	2.2
Politicians Personal	05	1	2.2
Politicians-Abroad	06	1	2.2
Economics + Gov.	08	2	4.4**
Industrial News	10	4	8.9
Education + Schools	12	2	4.4
Violence Act/Control	14	1	2.2
Court Inquests	15	7	15.6
Human Int.-Light	16	1	2.2
Human Int.-Serious	17	3	6.7
Sport	19	3	6.7
British Forces	21	1	2.2
Medical Discoveries	23	1	2.2
Help Lines	25	2	4.4
Religion	31	1	2.2

\*\*Although this was a story about the British economy in relation to the fall in unemployment figures, it was reported and "analysed" by the political correspondent and not the economics correspondent (See Chapter 7).

**TABLE 4.26 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	<b>34 - 50 incl.</b>		
World Politics	35	1	2.2
International Economy	36	1	2.2
International Violence	40	9	20.0
Internat. Human Int.- Serious	42	2	4.4
		45	100.0

Valid Cases 45  
Missing Cases 0

The Regional news programmes, *Calendar News*, (Table 4.27) and *Look North News* (Table 4.28), both showed a propensity towards coverage of “court cases/inquests”, “control/acts of violence” and “sport”. The major difference between the two programmes, lay in the tendency for *Calendar News* to cover more trivial light “human interest” stories, 'the policeman who keeps winning quizzes' (*Calendar News (Calendar South Op-Out)*, 20/4/93); and the bizarre 'farmer who makes pig models' (*Calendar News*, 20/4/93); 'the oldest bowling green in the UK - opened today by the Mayor of Chesterfield' (*Calendar News*, 22/4/93); and the 'sixty-sixth flower show in Harrogate' (*Calendar News*, 22/4/93) compared with the much more serious type of “human interest” story on BBC's *Look North News*, 'solvent abuser victim's funeral - father has made an emotional appeal and the vicar has warned other children' (*Look North News*, 20/4/93); 'gift of Life: two Yorkshire boys who died after a fire last week gave their organs to a baby' (*Look North News*, 20/4/93), or 'community in mourning - funeral today of two young children killed in a house fire' (*Look North News*, 23/4/93). The tone of the two programmes was markedly different, *Look North News*' presentational style was much more like the BBC's national news programmes, the presenters sat behind a desk and talked direct to the camera. *Calendar News* on the hand was either presented from the studio, where the presenters sat on couches next to potted plants, or from opt-outs, small five minute bulletins presented from specific parts of the region. The latter were presented formally, and the contrast between a trivial news story presented in the studio could often jar when the harder local news was read out in a traditional style. The hybrid nature of the *Calendar News* set was also reflected in its news content categories.

**TABLE 4.27 - TV NEWS CONTENT - YORKSHIRE  
TELEVISION'S CALENDAR NEWS PROGRAMME**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by the YTV's Calendar News Magazine programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Content Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence	Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	<b>01-33 incl.</b>		
Politicians Abroad	06	1	1.3
Industrial News	10	10	13.3
Violence Act/Control	14	7	9.3
Court Inquests	15	13	17.3
Human Int.-Light	16	15	20.0
Human Int.-Serious	17	6	8.0
Community Action	18	9	12.0
Sport	19	8	10.7
Health + Government	22	1	1.3
Health Reports	24	1	1.3
Help Lines	25	1	1.3
Disasters + Accidents	30	3	4.0
		75	100.0

Valid Cases 75  
Missing Cases 0

**TABLE 4.28 - TV NEWS CONTENT - BBC1's LOOK NORTH PROGRAMME**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by the BBC1's Look North Regional News programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Content Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence	Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	<b>01-33 incl.</b>		
Local Government	07	1	1.6
Industrial News	10	5	7.8
Violence Act/Control	14	7	10.9
Court Inquests	15	15	23.4
Human Int. -Light	16	6	9.4
Human Int. -Serious	17	9	14.1
Community Action	18	6	9.4
Sport	19	6	9.4
Environmental Disaster	26	1	1.6
Conservation	28	2	3.1
Disasters + Accidents	30	5	7.8
NATIONAL NEWS UPDATE	40	1	1.6
		64	100.0

Valid Cases 64  
Missing Cases 0

Table 4.29 shows that BBC1's *Six O'clock News*' commitment to particular types of content category was almost a mirror image of its *One O'clock News* (see Table 4.24). This was particularly revealing, as the editors of both programmes have claimed that they are actually very distinctive in content. (Interviews with the programme editors of BBC1's *One O'clock News* and BBC1's *Six O'clock News*, May 1994). However, since 1993, the *Six O'clock News* has made a concerted effort to become more domestic news orientated and to reflect the audience's requirements more closely. John Morrison, the programme editor, was, in April/May 1994, the only editor at the BBC who was committed to such audience measurement, perhaps this was due to his ITN origins. It is possible, that a content analysis of the *Six O'clock News* in 1995/96 might reveal a greater commitment to domestic news. Although this change (if it has actually resulted in a different type of news programme) is important, for the purposes of this thesis it is enough to note the similarities of news coverage between the *One O'clock News* and the *Six O'clock News* programmes, illustrating that in 1993, the BBC still had a tendency to speak with one voice.

It is interesting to note the similarities of coverage in terms of content categories between *Channel Four News* (Table 4.30), and the BBC's *Nine O'clock News* (Table 4.31). It is possible that this may, in part be explained by the similar aims of the two programmes to be a "journal of record" (interviews with Malcolm Balen, *Nine O'clock News* Editor, May 1994; and Richard Tait, Editor, *Channel Four News*, June 1994), but it could also be partially explained by the fact that the BBC's current *Nine O'clock News* editor used to edit *Channel Four News*. If the spread of news categories shared by *Channel Four News* and the *Nine O'clock News* are indeed the mark of a "journal of record", then these two programmes



are good bench-marks against which to assess the this particular criterion of newsworthiness, but also indicates how an editor can be chosen for his or her views or editing style. Without doubt, the *Nine O'clock News* editor was not overtly challenging the BBC's news rationale in April/May 1994.

*News at Ten* (Table 4.32) was deliberately constructed to be different from ITN's *5.40pm News* (interview with Robin Elias, *News at Ten* Editor, June 1994). As (Table 4.32) shows, in the *News at Ten* programme there was a tendency to move away from the *5.40pm News'* court/inquest reporting, towards a slightly increased coverage of political and economic news. However, there was also, during the week studied, an increase in the amount of "international violence" covered, in fact a quarter of all news broadcast during that week was devoted to "international violence". In part this was due to increased footage of the Bosnian atrocities being shown on the later programme, but there was also a tendency by *News at Ten* to dwell more on the violent nature of the day's events. During the week studied, there was little room for the light and trivial "and finally ....." slot. This too is relatively unrepresentative as the news was dominated by the events at Waco, Texas for two days. Again it is interesting to note under what circumstances a programme will drop part of its traditional and established format, the ending of the Waco siege, obviously contained the right ingredients to motivate such a change.

BBC2's *Newsnight* (Table 4.33), in common with the other BBC news programmes, had a commitment to economic news and devoted twelve minutes to a story about Government borrowing on a day when no other news programme reported it (20/4/94). *Newsnight* also dwelt on the "international violence" in Bosnia, the United States and South Africa, although in all cases it tended to follow-up the original violent story with

an analysis of the background or the causes and did not just report the violent event in isolation. For example,

'Bosnia, more fighting in central Bosnia between Croats and Muslims. The cease-fire seems to be holding in Srebrenica. Rifkind in the United States says that selective air strikes are preferable to ending the arms embargo and the United States seems impatient to take further action on Bosnia', (*Newsnight*, 19/4/93).

This was followed and supplemented by a live interview by satellite link to a Democrat politician in the United States. If this is compared with ITN's *5.40pm News*, earlier report on the same the day it is possible to see the different interpretation of events.

'Bosnia, and British peace keepers in central Bosnia can do little but retrieve bodies as fighting between Muslims and Croats continues. Also the Bosnian boy blinded in fighting has a nine hour operation'. (*ITN's 5.40pm News*, 19/4/93).

**TABLE 4.29 - TV NEWS CONTENT - BBC1's SIX O'CLOCK NEWS**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by the BBC1's Six O'clock News programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Content Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence	Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	<b>01-33 incl.</b>		
Political-General	01	2	3.4
Politicians Abroad	06	1	1.7
Local Government	07	1	1.7
Economics + Gov.	08	3	5.1
Industrial News	10	9	15.3
Education + Gov.	11	2	3.4
Violence Act/Control	14	3	5.1
Court Inquests	15	4	6.8
Human Int. -Serious	17	1	1.7
Sport	19	1	1.7
British Forces	21	1	1.7
Help Lines	25	1	1.7
Environmental Disaster	26	1	1.7
Conservation	28	1	1.7
Religion	31	2	3.4

**TABLE 4.29 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	<b>34 - 50 incl.</b>		
European Politics	34	1	1.7
World Politics	35	6	10.2
International Disputes	39	3	5.1
International Violence	40	13	20.0
International Health	43	1	1.7
Internat. Environment	44	1	1.7
International Science	45	1	1.7
		59	100.0

Valid Cases 59  
 Missing Cases 0

**TABLE 4.30 - TV NEWS CONTENT - ITN's CHANNEL FOUR SEVEN O'CLOCK NEWS**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by the ITN's Channel Four Seven O'clock News programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>Domestic News</b>	<b>01-33 incl.</b>		
Political-General	01	2	2.9
Gov. Policies	02	1	1.4
Politicians-Abroad	06	3	4.3
Local Government	07	1	1.4
Economics + Gov.	08	4	5.8
City News	09	3	4.3
Industrial News	10	9	13.0
Education + Gov.	11	1	1.4
Violence Act/Control	14	3	4.3
Court Inquests	15	5	7.2
Human Int.-Serious	17	2	2.9
Sport	19	1	1.4
Religion	31	1	1.4

**TABLE 4.30 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	<b>34 - 50 incl.</b>		
European Politics	34	3	4.3
World Politics	35	7	10.1
International Economy	36	2	2.9
International Law	38	3	4.3
International Disputes	39	4	5.8
International Violence	40	12	17.4
International Health	43	1	1.4
Internat. Environment	44	1	1.4
		69	100.0

Valid Cases 69  
 Missing Cases 0

**TABLE 4.31 - TV NEWS CONTENT - BBC1's NINE O'CLOCK NEWS**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by the BBC1's Nine O'clock News programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Content Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence	Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	<b>01-33 incl.</b>		
Political-General	01	3	4.7
Gov. Policies	02	1	1.6
Politicians-Abroad	06	2	3.1
Local Government	07	1	1.6
Economics + Gov.	08	4	6.3
Industrial News	10	10	15.6
Education + Gov.	11	1	1.6
Education + Schools	12	1	1.6
Violence Act/Control	14	2	3.1
Court Inquests	15	3	4.7
Human Int.-Serious	17	1	1.6
Sport	19	2	3.1
British Forces	21	1	1.6
Religion	31	1	1.6

**TABLE 4.31 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	<b>34 - 50 incl.</b>		
European Politics	34	2	3.1
World Politics	35	4	6.3
International Economy	36	3	4.7
International Law	38	1	1.6
International Disputes	39	4	6.3
International Violence	40	15	23.4
International Health	43	1	1.6
Internat. Environment	45	1	1.6
		64	100.0

Valid Cases 64  
 Missing Cases 0



**TABLE 4.32 - TV NEWS CONTENT - ITN's NEWS AT TEN**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by the ITN's Channel Three News at Ten News programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Content Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence	Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	<b>01-33 incl.</b>		
Political-General	01	2	3.1
Gov. Policies	02	1	1.6
Politicians-Personal	05	1	1.6
Politicians Abroad	06	1	1.6
Economics + Gov.	08	3	4.7**
Industrial News	10	5	7.8
Education + Gov.	11	1	1.6
Education + Schools	12	1	1.6
Violence Act/Control	14	2	3.1
Court Inquests	15	5	7.8
Human Int.-Serious	17	4	6.3
Sport	19	3	4.7
British Forces	21	3	4.7
Help Lines	25	1	1.6
Conservation	28	1	1.6
Religion	31	1	1.6

\*\*Although this was an story about the British economy in relation to a fall in unemployment figures it was reported and "analysed" by the political correspondent and not the economics correspondent (see Chapter 7).

**TABLE 4.32 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	<b>34 - 50 incl.</b>		
European Politics	34	2	3.1
World Politics	35	4	6.3
International Economy	36	3	4.7
International Law	38	1	1.6
International Disputes	39	1	1.6
International Violence	40	16	25.0
Int. Human Int-Serious	42	2	3.1
		64	100.0

Valid Cases 64  
 Missing Cases 0

**TABLE 4.33 - TV NEWS CONTENT - BBC2's NEWSNIGHT**

Table to show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of different types of story content category broadcast by the BBC2's Newsnight/News programmes from 19th-23rd April 1993 inclusive, as identified in the Television News Code Book.

Story Content Category	Code Book Number	Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence	Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence
<b>Domestic News</b>	<b>01-33 incl.</b>		
Political-General	01	1	2.2
Politicians Abroad	06	2	4.3
Economics + Gov.	08	3	6.5
City News	09	4	8.7
Industrial News	10	5	10.9
Education + Gov.	11	1	2.2
Education + Schools	12	2	4.3
Violence Act/Control	14	1	2.2
Court Inquests	15	1	2.2
Human Int.-Serious	17	1	2.2
Community Action	18	1	2.2
Religion	31	1	2.2

**TABLE 4.33 INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

<b>Story Content Category</b>	<b>Code Book Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of Content Cat. Occurrence</b>
<b>International News</b>	<b>34 - 50 incl.</b>		
European Politics	34	2	4.3
World Politics	35	5	10.9
International Disputes	39	5	10.9
International Violence	40	10	21.7
International Science	44	1	2.2
		46	100.0

Valid Cases 46  
 Missing Cases 0

*Newsnight* obviously pieced together a set of events without seeking to report each one as a separate news story. In contrast ITN selected two particular aspect of the events in Bosnia and reported them as two separate stories. *Newsnight's* version provided much more information and context about the situation in Bosnia and did not seek to simplify it by denying the audience knowledge of the complexity of the issues. This is something that the mainstream news programmes usually cannot reconcile, so the individual news stories which are finally transmitted are often lacking in context.

Taking issues and turning them into single events is the essence of much of journalism. However, it has long been recognised that this can be misleading. Stuart Hall et al's (1978) study of the reporting of mugging by the news showed that the news, by decontextualising the issue and simplifying it to a series of one-off events gave the impression that mugging was happening continually and that no one was safe. The BBC, following John Birt's abhorrence of the "bias against understanding", has long attempted to try to explain issues. This has resulted in a phenomenon called the "twin pack", where the issue was reduced to a straightforward descriptive story about the main event, perhaps a massacre or a riot, but was then followed by a second piece on the issues behind the event. Many of the BBC's reports in 1993 were dealt with in this way. In contrast ITN may simply report two separate stories on the same theme. This crucial difference in reporting style and content was apparent when the news programmes were studied in depth and compared to each other.

For example, on 22 April 1993, the Government released its employment figures revealing that unemployment had actually fallen. This occurred before lunch, in time for ITN's *12.30pm News* to use it as their lead. ITN

divided the reporting of the story into three categories. The first was a straight report of the fall in unemployment figures for the second month in a row, accompanied by film and seven seconds of graphics. The second was a totally different “human interest” story about some unemployed people setting up their own labour exchange, and the third was a live link to Gillian Shepherd who said how marvellous the drop in unemployment was for everyone concerned. BBC1’s *One O’clock News*, on the other hand, also reported the drop in unemployment as a straight story, but followed it up, not with a “twin pack” in this case, but with a studio/television screen discussion. It set up a live-link between the Shadow Employment Secretary, Gillian Shepherd, the Employment Secretary in 1993 and a Liberal Democratic spokesperson. There then followed a much more lively debate during which Gillian Shepherd’s confident assertions were challenged. Finally, the presenter and the Economics correspondent had a studio discussion.

ITN’s report of the event was less challenging or informative than that of the BBC. The latter attempted to engender debate and to broaden the issues and reasons for the drop in unemployment. ITN in contrast simply reported the facts straight, gave the Employment Secretary chance to celebrate and then told a “human interest” story, about how some people were coping with unemployment. This was a story focused on ordinary people but constructed around the extraordinary routines of these ordinary individuals.

#### e) Summary

Chapter 4 has shown that undoubtedly there are *differences* between the news output of the different television news programmes and television news organisations. It has shown that these differences also apply to television channels, where, for example, BBC2 and Channel Four both

have a higher commitment to international news output than BBC1 or ITN on Channel 3. Furthermore, it has shown that sometimes different news programmes have different interpretations of the news value potential of the same event and extract different stories or story lines from that event. However, as I also show in Chapters 6 and 8, there are some substantial *similarities* between all television news programmes. In particular, the reporting of the events at Waco in Texas, illustrate how television news programmes can take a similar “media-line” when interpreting certain types of events.

However, as this chapter has shown, and Chapter 7 will continue to indicate, different news programmes have *different* levels of commitment to explanation of complex issues, with programmes such as the *Big Breakfast News*, *GMTV News*, ITN's *12.30pm News* and *5.40pm News* telling the story straight without elaboration or diversification. This causes some concern for the informational quality of these television news programmes and their lack of contribution to the empowerment of their viewers to participate competently in the public sphere.

In contrast *Newsnight*, *Channel Four News*, and BBC1's *Nine O'clock News* in particular are less inclined to offer such simplistic explanations for an event, preferring to explore other relevant issues relating to the occurrence. Both *Newsnight* and *Children's Newsround* tend to follow a different news agenda from the other news programmes, and *Channel Four News* tends to report international news in fewer but longer sequences than domestic news. This chapter has also indicated how the different format and content structures of the different news programmes can be used as indicators of their particular criterion of newsworthiness and shows how different notions of what serves the public interest is at work in different television newsrooms.

Having shown the differences and similarities of news output measured using a content analysis and empirical statistical techniques, I will now go on to outline the second part of my methodology, newsroom observation, and to highlight where the findings from the content analysis challenge or support those from the observational analysis.



## **CHAPTER 5: FIELDWORK: NEWSROOM OBSERVATION STUDY**

### **a) Introduction**

This field study was undertaken in order to carry out a production study of different television newsrooms, different television news organisations and different television news programmes. An observational study was carried out to analyse the complexities of what constitutes newsworthiness by acquiring a greater understanding of the cultural realities of the television newsroom. Furthermore, the fragmentary nature of the television news genre itself has enabled a proliferation of different television news programmes to develop, each constituted from a combination of different news sub-genres (see Figure 1, Introduction). It was therefore necessary to broaden the newsroom analysis to take into consideration the programme diversity operating within the television news industry. The content analysis alone could not provide sufficient data to facilitate the understanding of the formal and informal processes of television news production or the nature of the journalistic culture operating in the different television newsrooms. The observational study therefore is intended to supplement, challenge and complement the data acquired from the content analysis. As Chapter 3 has already shown there is already a substantial amount of academic literature and precedent-setting studies offering insights into this type of study (see Chapter 3, Footnote 3).

b) Newsroom Observation Periods

The newsroom observation study can be divided into three broad areas as follows: observation at the BBC in London, observation at ITN in London and observation at regional newsrooms in Leeds.

Observation at the BBC Television Newsrooms, 25 April - 27 May 1994 inclusive

The observation period was divided up as follows:

*One O'clock News* (Output) - One week;

*Six O'clock News* (Output) - One week;

News Summaries (Output) - Two days;

*Nine O'clock News* (Output) - One week;

Newsgathering (Home and Foreign News and Forward Planning) - One week and two days;

*Newsnight* - Three days.

Observation at Independent Television News (ITN), 6 June - 8 July 1994 inclusive

The observation period was divided up as follows:

*12.30pm News* (Output) and Summaries (Output) - One week;

*5.40pm News* (Output) - One week;

*News at Ten* News (Output) - One week;

ITN Home and Foreign News (Intake) - Intermittent observation and interview over the three week observation period at ITN Channel 3;

*Channel 4 News* (Intake) - One week;

*Channel 4 News* (Output) - One week.

Observation in the regional newsrooms, June 1992, November 1993,  
February 1994 and July/August 1994

The observation period was divided up as follows:

Yorkshire Tyne-Tees Television, *Calendar News* (Output and Intake)

- Two weeks;

BBC *Look North* (Output and Intake) - Two weeks .

c) The Main Findings:

I) The Newsroom Routine

The observational study showed that there was a remarkable degree of similarity between the procedures and practices in all the different television newsrooms and that once one had visited one newsroom, it was only a matter of picking up and recognising those practices and routines in different newsrooms. Using a lunch time news programme as an example I illustrate how a “newsday” operates in all television newsrooms. This outline is intended to clarify some of the mystique of newsroom chaos, and aims to be useful as a contextual guide to the analysis which follows in Chapters 6 and 7 and in the case study in Chapter 8. I have indicated where different newsrooms exhibit divergences from this general theme and in Part III of this thesis, illustrate how particular determinants in news processes and procedures affect the concept of newsworthiness in different television newsrooms.

On a typical newsday in all the newsrooms, the programme editor/producer and/or the chief-sub/special duty editor arrive first. Obviously, the earlier the broadcast the earlier the staff have to arrive. Those producing and editing a lunch-time news programme at ITN, for example, would arrive at about 7am and the first meeting with Intake (or

Newsgathering at the BBC) and the producers and correspondents, is at 7.30am. Therefore anyone arriving in the newsroom at about 9am would not immediately realise what was actually happening. Any observer of television news must therefore endeavour to work the same shifts as the programme editor. Once the first people arrive, they shuffle through the notes and paper left by the overnight producer/editor, have a quick glance at the diary and a look through the pile of newspapers and then have the first meeting of the day. In the above example, by 7.30am most people attending the meeting have read the papers, looked at the “wires” (news agency material fed into the newsroom via computer terminals) and listened to the radio on the way in to work. The programme editor has often flicked through several channels to make sure he/she is not missing anything.

The choice of radio station made by the programme editor is illustrative as it tells us something about which news agendas (s)he feels are most important. At the national newsrooms in London, the most important radio programme was always deemed to be Radio Four's *Today* programme, although the editor of ITN's *12.30pm News* also listened to the local London radio stations. At the BBC, where there is a policy to try to avoid too many parochial London-based stories, local radio was ignored by the programme editors (although some journalists working in bi-media Newsgathering were obviously listening in, so if anything important happened the programme editor would be told). At the regional newsrooms the local radio stations were seen as more important than Radio Four, and the programme editors tended to listen to Radio Leeds, Radio Sheffield, Radio Hallam and Radio Aire. At *Look North News*, which is also bi-media, journalists were also listening in to Radio Hull, Radio York and Radio Humberside. At *Look North News* the journalists commented that as viewers in their region do not generally watch both

*Look North News* and *Calendar News*, it is appropriate that both programmes are aimed at entirely different audiences. It is taken for granted by the journalists that *Look North News* mainly serves the A, B and C1 social groups in the region and *Calendar News* mainly serves groups C2, D and E. As such the two programmes do not really try to compete with each other for stories and journalists at either organisation would not be too dismayed if the programmes did not cover the same stories on the same day. All notable local events are covered by both programmes, but because each programme fully intends to give a different flavour to the coverage, the competition is never particularly rife. In fact the journalists from the two programmes seem to be quite friendly towards each other (unless there is a genuine “scoop”) as only true non-competitors can be.

During the first meeting, the programme editor and the Intake editor (Home and Foreign in the case of the London news organisations) exchange ideas and information. Often facilities have already been set up and organised for a substantial amount of the items on the Prospects list because they have been known of in advance and planned for. However, there are always odd items which have happened overnight or need “an eye keeping on”, so there is some reallocation of resources and negotiation regarding story coverage. Some of the correspondents and reporters are despatched, some had their briefing the day before and will go to their venue straight from home and others are telephoned at home.

At 8am the programme editor is back listening to Radio 4 News (or its regional equivalent), or whichever programme is seen by journalists in the particular news organisation to be most important in setting the agenda for the rest of the day, particularly in relation to political matters or local events.

At 9am the Morning Meeting is held, and is attended by the senior editorial staff, the programme editor, producers, someone from Graphics, the chief sub/special duty editor and the editor from Intake/Newsgathering. This pattern of attendance and briefing is consistent throughout all the news organisations I visited, except that in the regional newsrooms this meeting was not chaired by the most senior editorial staff, but by the programme producer/editor, and did not have such a diverse range of staff. At this meeting the editor runs through all the items on the Prospects list. On a typical day the editor allocates two or three stories to each producer (the quantity varies between ITN and the BBC) and tells him/her what the correspondent/reporter, who has already been despatched, is doing. The stories which are already planned (days or even weeks in advance) usually shape the news programme to a large extent. For example, on a typical day, the programme editor may be duty bound to do a piece on say, the Green Party, during the election period (in accordance with the Representation of the People Act, see Chapter 6 in Part III). The other items on the Prospects list are often underway as a result of the earlier meeting at 7.30am. Sometimes there is an odd unexpected piece of news, such as two Britons have been killed in a Chinese air crash, or job losses at Anglian Water, both of which might come via the "wires", another story may be added to the pool by the editor himself on this occasion he may have found a story he finds particularly interesting in one of the broadsheet newspapers. It could be something as bizarre as a story about a tiny cog that has been developed which can carry drugs around the body and repair it (ITN's *12.30pm News*, 7/6/94).

At 9.30am, the programme editor and the Head of News (or his equivalent in different newsrooms), have a chat, they may even disagree a little over

the programme editor's interest in the cog story, the Head of News prefers the one about the bugs in salad dressing! All of the important stories are fixed and running, and there is usually little or no dissent about the most important stories or the lead story.

At 10.00am, the programme editor starts to allocate the times to the news stories and tell the producers how long these must be. Every editor when asked how he knows how much time to allocate to the story, replies in terms of "feelings" or "parts to the story", or "experience", or "how much there is to it". The conversation with the producer often goes 'it's a busy day so don't go over', but it is a certainty that in two hours time when the correspondents and producers are in the editing suites, they will begin to lobby the programme editor for more time for their pieces. Each news programme has a different length of time it generally allocates for story lengths and this is built into the format structure of the news programme. On most days the programme has a similar structure, *Newsnight* for example, will have three long stories followed by a quick look at the other main stories. ITN's *News at Ten* has a much more carefully crafted structure than ITN's *12.30pm News* or ITN's *5.40pm News*. ITN's *News at Ten* always leads with the most important story of the day, the Editor-in-Chief and the other editors are firmly convinced that the second story is the vital story which must hold the viewers who are most likely to turn the programme off at this stage. Therefore a lot of consideration goes into selection of the *second* story which must have the right ingredients to keep the audience interested. The story before the commercial break is also seen as important, as is the first story after the commercial break. Times are allocated to these stories therefore with the specific intention of ensuring the audience will be riveted for every second they are running.

The editor of ITN's *5.40pm News* prefers shorter pieces and routinely allocates one minute and thirty seconds to each story, whereas the editor of ITN's *12.30pm News* routinely allocates one minute and forty-seconds. This highlights a discrepancy between the findings of the content analysis (see Chapter 4, Table 4.13) and the newsroom observation where a record of story lengths was kept. Furthermore, I found that there was no real commitment to explanation of issues, which the figure of two minutes for ITN's *12.30pm News* (see Chapter 4, Table 4.13) might imply. However, the larger than expected figures for story length shown during the week examined were partly due to ITN's *12.30pm News* in 1993 being ten minutes longer in duration with a four or five minute discussion at the end. Also three of the main stories in April 1993 were "big" stories which occurred at the same time and, as such, some news programmes such as ITN's *5.40pm News* had to devote longer time to coverage of these stories than was the case during my observation period in June 1994 when there were less "big" news stories.

At the BBC, most stories are allocated a time between one minute and forty-five seconds and two minutes and thirty seconds. Most stories are approximately two minutes and ten seconds in length, and the findings from my content analysis, in this case do not challenge the findings from my observation period, as the BBC always tends to allocate more time to whatever stories *it* deems to be "big" on the day.

The different lengths of news story, identified both in the content analysis (Chapter 4) and in the newsroom observation period therefore relate very strongly to the type of news programme being studied, the nature of the big news stories around at the time and the type of content that particular programme routinely broadcasts.



At 10.30am, the programme editor walks around and talks to the producers and to the Intake editors and then types out a draft running order. At the moment he is the only one with any overall picture of how the programme will look. Editors talk in terms of crafting the programme, ensuring it all flows well together, that stories follow on well after each other and so on. This is an important part of the editorial role and programme editors will agonise all day about which story should go first or second or third. At ITN's *News at Ten* in particular the structure of the programme is seen to be vital. Ratings studies have been performed on *News at Ten* and the Editor-in-Chief and other senior staff spend a good deal of time considering the rise and fall in audience ratings which are printed out in five minute intervals. It is possible for them, to tell from such data, which story caused the viewers to turn off. Editors of other news programmes often had to move stories around during the transmission period itself. It was very rare that any such movement occurred at *News at Ten*. This is because the running order can be set quite early in the evening, and the programme can be finely crafted, as most of the news of the day is well established by the time the programme is transmitted. Other journalists at ITN refer to *News at Ten's* running order as 'being set in tablets of stone by seven o'clock', and nothing I saw would dispel this observation. Obviously the programme appears to be more flexible when reporting a parliamentary vote or result of a vote, but in reality this too is very carefully planned and can be easily accommodated into the programme format.

All the editors when planning the running order usually invite comments from other senior producers and presenters to help them decide, but they always ensure that they are seen to actually "make the final decision" about the running order.

By 11.00am, more news often comes in and the programme editor working on a lunch time programme adjusts his running order accordingly, sometimes correspondents are quickly called in, or more often are asked to cobble together something from existing material and graphics if there is no chance of getting to the event. Sometimes film is quickly acquired from other sources such as other regional offices and companies, or via EuroVision and sometimes it is purchased from CNN or other American television companies.

By 11.15am, the programme editor will be tinkering with the running order, dropping some stories to make room for others. Some stories may be shortened, where the presenter reads the words whilst film is being shown (at ITN such a procedure is referred to as "Underlay" and usually shortened to "Ulay", at the BBC it is referred to as "Out of Vision" or "OOV").

By 11.25am, exchanges between the correspondents and the programme editor become more heated and terse, as the editor increasingly asserts his authority in terms of format requirements and logistical possibilities. The creative inclinations and whims of the correspondent are often squashed at this stage as the primary objective of the editor is increasingly becoming focused on ensuring that all the stories are in on time for transmission and that the programme does not over-run. Increasingly, offers of news stories are turned down and the nearer it gets to transmission time, the better the story has to be in order to be worth the effort of broadcasting it. This particular news value is very apparent and important as a working reality of the newsroom. Good stories sometimes have to be missed simply because it would be too difficult to get them on air in time or it would cause too much disruption to a carefully planned programme. Editorial priorities change during the day from an interest in

the content and value of a story at 7.30am to pure concern with the logistics of production of the news programme by one hour before the programme is broadcast.

By 11.45am, it is noticeable by now that the programme editor's main concern is indeed with logistics and the overall programme success. This is reflected by the type of people he starts to liaise with. He is more involved with the programme director and the production assistant at this stage and obsessed about the length of the stories which are coming in.

At 11.50am, the printed running order arrives, in this example the news is to be broadcast at 12.30pm, so the tension in the newsroom is increasing. The programme editor is rushing around trying to view part or some of the packages and will watch a package he is worried about two or three times. Sometimes at this stage he will, because he is particularly worried about the style of one of the correspondents, sit in for a few minutes and even have quite major aspects of the story changed if he feels the correspondent has made errors or is giving the wrong impression. Some correspondents are left to produce the package with much less supervision, but these correspondents, and the producers who are helping and liaising with the programme editor, have in the past, proven themselves to be reliable and able to follow a brief. It is via this method that the programme editor ensures a uniformity of style, format and content for his programme, in turn he is also making sure that there is nothing in the programme which will offend or annoy the senior editorial staff, because it will be he who is accountable. Indeed

'dissidence and non-conformity are not the accepted style in "hard news" production. While newsmen in other areas of broadcast journalism - notably some current affairs teams - may be permitted a more maverick approach, "the news", with its flagship function, is the home of the conformist' (Schlesinger, 1987:161).

At 11.55am, the chief sub/special duty editor will re-read and correct the story introductions which will be read by the presenters. Often the presenters have worked on aspects of these introductions themselves, changing words around and so on.

At 12 noon there is a crisis, a funeral which is to be covered has not started yet and the film will be late; on this basis the programme editor has to decide not to lead with this story and moves it to fourth in the running order, simply to allow time for the film to come in. This is a second important news value which is a part of most news programmes. Often the actual running order is not broadcast on the basis of the programme editor's choice, but simply because the film required for a story is not in on time and the transmission of the story is delayed until it arrives. When one does a content analysis of television news output, this is one of the major problems inherent in the analysis as it is impossible to tell if the running order is a reflection on the organisation and the editors' assumptions regarding how newsworthy something is, or whether it is simply a matter of expedient management in response to a crisis of logistics.

Newsroom observation therefore was vital as an illustration of why and how so-called newsworthy stories were dropped. For example, on 26th April 1994 the editor for the day at BBC1's *One O'clock News* dropped three stories. He dropped two court stories which were ninth and twelfth

in the running order 'because there were too many court stories in the programme', and he kept the one which was about a civil action, running as story number thirteen simply by virtue of it being the *biggest* case ever. This news factor was identified by Galtung and Ruge (1965:263), as a criterion for newsworthiness, whereby they stressed the idea of amplitude. Therefore, they argue that the more violent the murder the bigger the headlines it will make, or the bigger something is the more likely it will be in the news. It was interesting to see that on this particular occasion the criterion was that the civil action was the *biggest* ever, and that journalists do talk in terms of the news factors identified by academics. The third story he dropped was about the M11, owing to this road being in the South East, as he felt he would get complaints about geographic bias in the news. Finally, a story came in over the wires during the transmission about a plane crash in Japan, which he chose not to broadcast. This was an unfortunate decision because it was the second worst aviation disaster in Japan and the first crash of this type of plane with two hundred and thirty people killed. The story later ran second in the *Six O'clock News*. The editor was defensive about not covering this story, saying that he had no information about the number of deaths or casualties, but he obviously felt he missed a good story and was rather depressed about it. Indeed this was made worse because by the time the story was broadcast by the BBC at *Six O'clock*, its rival ITN had already covered it in their *5.40pm News*. Dropping stories or making decisions to include stories can therefore be one of the most nerve-wracking decisions for the programme editor, particularly as (s)he must take full responsibility for the decision, unless a (fairly rare) directive comes at this stage from the senior management.

By 12.15pm, the programme editor is still trying to see some of the pieces which are being edited, but because he will have to be in the gallery in ten

minutes, he will not be able to see some of those which are still being edited during the programme, which will be eighth or ninth in the running order. Similarly, there is likely to be a feed coming in from somewhere booked to run during the programme, containing material he has not seen. He really has to trust his team of people, and as such any mistakes made by them will be severely reprimanded. This is a big incentive not to let him down again. The conformity to the programme editor's wishes is therefore quite a complex affair, those journalists who rebel against him will be allocated unimportant stories, double-checked and severely penalised for being too innovative. In contrast those who conform to his wishes will do well and will get the more important stories. It is easy to see why the journalists follow the rules.

At 12.25pm, the programme editor rushes to the gallery. By this time people are running in the newsroom and there is a great atmosphere of tension. In the gallery the programme editor is facing problems, the second story package is not in yet so he has to move the story order around whilst the programme is on air. In the end his carefully crafted programme which was designed to be balanced and flowing, is reduced to a reaction to logistical difficulties. The presenter has to be briefed a couple of times to aid the movement from one story to another, by adding words and changing tone and demeanour. For example, she now has to follow a very tragic story about a death with a very light-hearted story about someone who has won the pools. She transforms smoothly from one to the other, by adding after the first story 'Jane Johnson, who died today in tragic circumstances, and now.....!'

The scene is truly professional, all the actors help each other, and no one visibly panics. After the programme there is a brief post-mortem where the programme editor thanks everyone, apologises to those journalist's

whose stories were dropped and points out errors and problems. The Head of News joins the gathering at this stage, fresh from watching the television broadcast in his office and adds a few comments. Everyone leaves and the early evening news team moves onto the desk, throwing away used cups, sandwich wrappers, paper and newspapers and the whole process starts again. However, this new team have already got something to go on and can use and update some of the packages left by the previous team. Their first meeting involves a critique of the programme just broadcast and the programme editor, or editor for the day, lets it be known that he did not like several aspects of it so they will re-edit some of the packages, and do the whole thing differently and better!

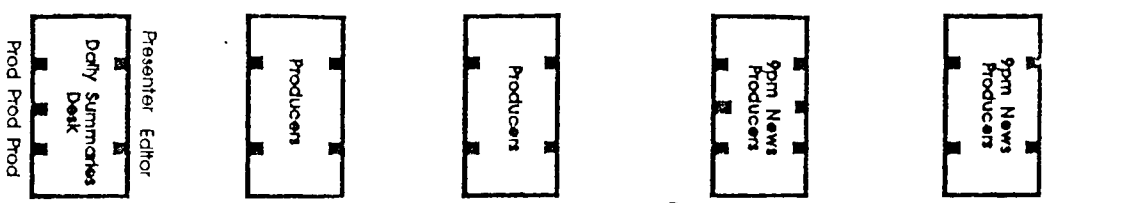
## II) Newsroom analysis

### (i) The BBC Newsroom Structure and Layout:- Figure 5.1

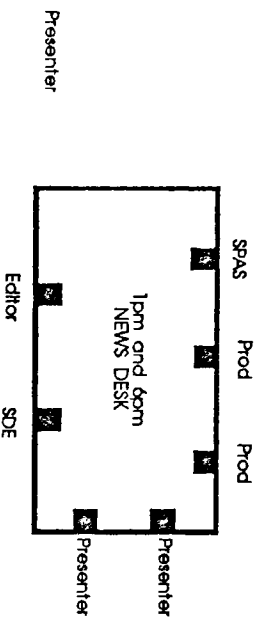
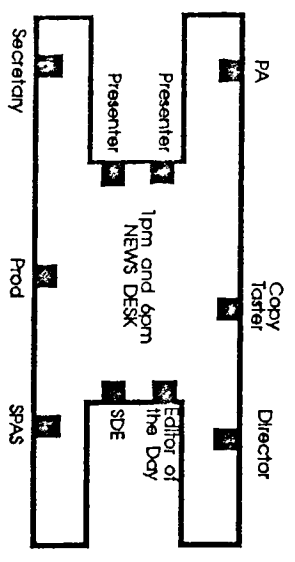
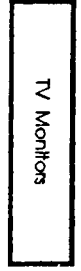
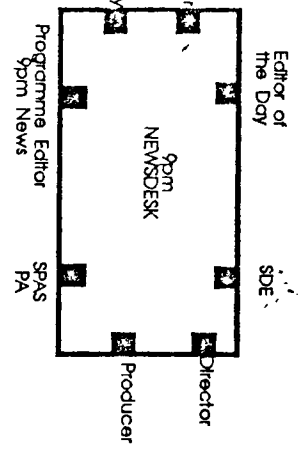
The newsroom at the BBC is enormous and is now divided into two separate areas: Output and Newsgathering. Newsgathering is the department which is responsible for planning, gathering and delivering all the BBC's network news coverage on radio and television, providing the diary, and co-ordinates and pays for the use of resources such as crews, editing and location facilities. It also provides the means of delivering material via radio cars, links vehicles and satellite feeds (the logistics of the news operation). Newsgathering at the BBC operates as an Independent Business Unit reporting directly to the Managing Director of News and Current Affairs. The Newsgathering Department has a staff of three hundred people, two hundred of whom are broadcast journalists, one third are at Television Centre, one third at Broadcasting House and one third in the regional centres or foreign bureaux (one hundred of these are

Editor TV News  
Programmes

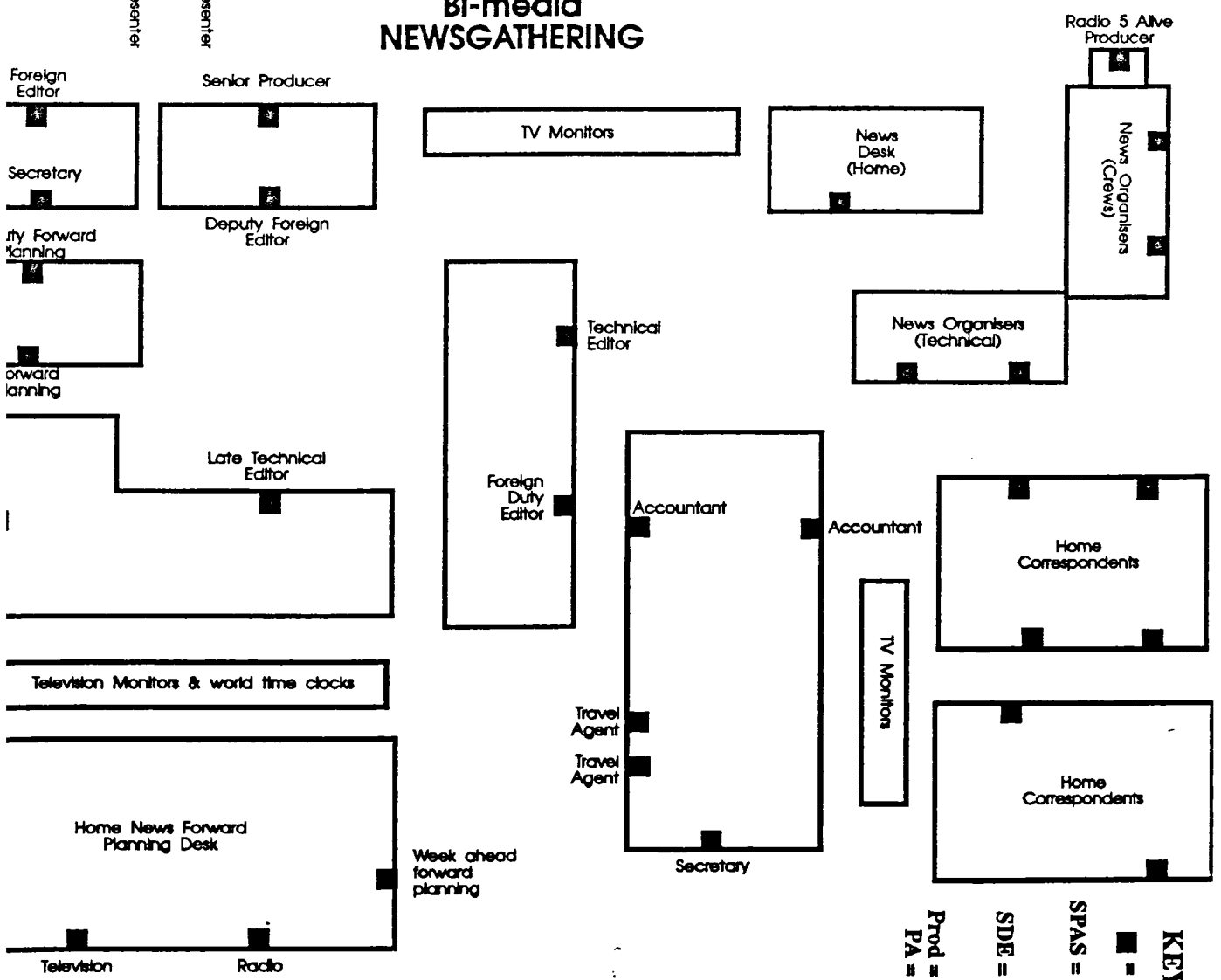
Figure 5.1 Newsroom 1, 6 & 9pm News  
THE BBC



**Television OUTPUT**



**Bi-media NEWSGATHERING**



- KEY**
- = Computer Terminal
  - SPAS = Special Production Assistant
  - SDE = Special Duty Editor
  - Prod = Producer
  - PA = Production Assistant

**MANAGERS**





specialist correspondents). Newsgathering costs over £40 million a year to run (BBC Guide to Newsgathering, 1994).

When Schlesinger (1987) and Burns (1969) were observing at the BBC, the news gathering operation was called Intake, which defined its role. Since John Birt's arrival as Director-General at the BBC, however, the operation has been re-named Newsgathering. Furthermore, in April/May 1994 the news gathering operations of Radio News were merging with those of television news and the integration process was taking place during my visit. The problems that this had caused between the Output section and the former Input section, as well as between radio and television journalists was indicated to me on several occasions. The initial main effect was to increase the power, resources and importance of the Newsgathering section over and above the Output section. As such there was a tendency for Newsgathering staff to present stories to the programme editors/editor for the day as a *fait accompli* which they had to accept, taking away a good deal of editorial choice. However, Director-General, John Birt in an effort to have clearer lines of organisation and accountability has appointed an overall head of each news programme, the programme editor. The programme editors have now been allocated their own programme budget which means they can now commission stories from Newsgathering and do not simply have to take what it offers, shifting the power back into the Output Department. This means programme editors can hold several stories in reserve and drop them at will if something more newsworthy happens. The Forward Planning meeting, held by Newsgathering is therefore increasingly becoming a forum in which the programme editors tell Newsgathering what they would like to do. This, as will be outlined below, contrasts with ITN and the formal structure of the newsroom at the BBC has produced a particular news process and influenced news output and newsworthiness.

The *One O'clock*, *Six O'clock* and *Nine O'clock News* programmes in 1994 were all produced from one television newsroom, and broadcast from the same studio. *Children's Newsround* and *Newsnight* on the other hand were produced from two separate newsrooms and shared a studio in a separate building. The physical isolation of these two programmes from the mainstream programmes, may account for some of the diversity of content and format identified in Chapter 4. *Breakfast News* at the BBC, was also produced in a different newsroom, but used the same studio as the mainstream news programmes. There was more constant dialogue between *Breakfast News* and the *One O'clock*, *Six O'clock* and *Nine O'clock News* journalists. Often journalists working on pieces for these programmes said '*Breakfast News* want this piece too', or the day-time programmes took pieces from the *Breakfast News* programme which were included in the Prospects list from the beginning of the day. Neither *Newsnight* or *Newsround* had this type of relationship with *Breakfast News* or the *One O'clock*, *Six O'clock* and *Nine O'clock News*. It was noticeable that there was some rivalry between the *Nine O'clock News* and *Newsnight* with regard to film or stories commissioned by the editors of either of the programmes. Whilst visiting *Newsnight* I witnessed them deliberately withhold information from the Basys computer network system until the *Nine O'clock News* had gone on air, so that the latter could not spoil their story which was based on a poll they had commissioned for themselves

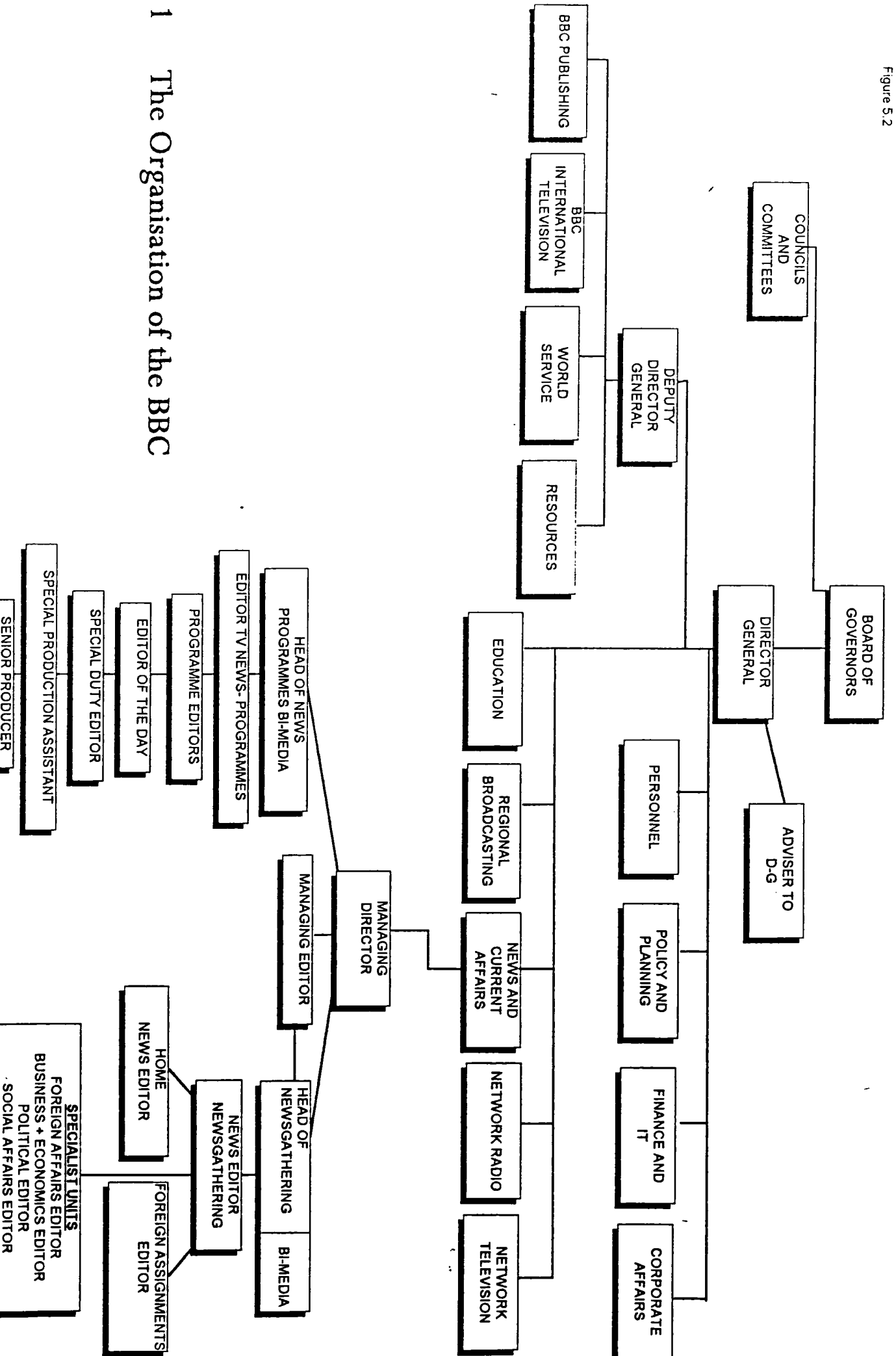
It is obviously important to understand both the physical geography of the newsroom structure at an organisation as well as its formal and informal dynamics. Often these are good indicators of the perceptions journalists working on those programmes hold regarding their role, function and objectives.

(ii) The BBC Organisational Hierarchy:- Figure 5.2

Once the structure and hierarchy of news desks and newsrooms are clarified it is easier to understand the rationale behind much of the activity in the newsroom. Furthermore I found that sitting with the editor, and observing all the activity from that perspective was the most useful as the editor is the only one with an image of the overall programme and seemingly arbitrary decisions regarding a news story are often based on a set of logistical or political considerations which are not apparent to other journalists working on the same programme. As all the other news desks at the BBC operated on the same broad principles and hierarchical arrangements, this principle of observation was the most logical and useful one to follow.

A second formal process which must be understood is the relationship of the television newsroom to the rest of the organisation and senior management and the structure and hierarchy of the organisation (Figure 5.2). Again, once the formal structure is understood, as well as its historical origins and development (see Part III), the observer can then start to watch for and analyse the informal relationships and processes operating between senior management, middle management and the journalists. A great deal of the informal information about the management style and the power structures at the BBC and problems with them was made accessible to me by journalists. Furthermore, observing at meetings between editorial staff and middle management staff was informative as many of the organisational tensions and differences were evident in such a forum.

Figure 5.2



# 1 The Organisation of the BBC

### iii) The BBC Newsroom Personnel

A television newsroom can appear superficially to be undisciplined and chaotic. It is important when conducting observational analysis to prioritise the acquisition of an understanding the newsroom layout, and to find out (at least by job title) what everyone's role is. This is not always an entirely simple task because some people have overlapping duties, a journalist working on the lunchtime news programme may also work on the early evening news programme. A first priority in any observation situation should be to try to speak to as many members of the newsroom as possible to gain an understanding of their general roles and to make introductions.

The newsroom staff structure at the BBC appeared quite complex. There were some journalists who were correspondents and others who were specialist correspondents. Some of the former worked on a variety of general stories, but the specialists worked within one of the four specialist units (Politics, Economics, Foreign News and Social Affairs), which were recently set up by Director-General, John Birt in an effort to improve the quality of journalism at the BBC, and to perform an investigative role, broadening and deepening the stories which are covered, towards the consideration of issues. This is still a keystone of the current BBC philosophy towards news and current affairs and will be discussed in more depth in Part III.

A producer was allocated two or three correspondents each day, and was the main link between the correspondent in the field and the programme editor/editor for the day. This important role was centred round reconciliation and compromise between the programme editor's requirements, logistical possibility, time and cost constraints and the artistic temperament of the correspondent. The special duty editor sat

next to the programme editor and was his/her eyes and ears for the day, following up loose ends the editor may have missed, and sub-editing a lot of the reports coming in from the correspondents via the producers. The special production assistant (SPAS) aided the SDE in his or her role. At the BBC, each news programme, such as the *One O'clock News*, *Six O'clock News* and *Nine O'clock News* had a programme editor who also had an office away from the news desk. Sometimes the programme editor edited his (they were all men at the BBC in April/May 1994) programme, but usually this was done by more junior staff who were senior producers and were known as editor-for-the-day or on-the-day-editor. These senior producers operated to a rota which involved them editing or being the special duty editor or the special production assistant.

The presenter(s) sat opposite the editor and the special duty editor, each presenter had a different style and mode of working, some liked to be very involved with the activity of selecting and producing the news and wrote their own introductions to stories and so on, whereas some assumed a more passive role and simply spent the day reading through the stories as they came in and chatted to the editor. However, it was obvious that the presenters at the BBC were all very knowledgeable about current and world affairs and the image of the empty-headed presenter, Sally, in Channel Four's comedy programme '*Drop the Dead Donkey*', was certainly not applicable at any of the television newsrooms. The director of the programme ensured that the programme was broadcast without a hitch and occupied a key and important role in the gallery during transmission liaising between the technical production staff and the journalists. The director was aided by the production assistant in the gallery, who ensured that the programme did not overrun.

The copy taster worked a full newsday from 9am to 9pm, watching the wires, watching television news, listening to the radio and reading the papers in order to alert the editor to any changes or developments on stories, or to give him/her new ones. Often the same information came in from the Newsgathering part of the newsroom. This was because the role of the copy taster had changed since newsrooms became electronic. In 1994 all journalists had a computer terminal and access to the "wires" and were all in a sense acting as gatekeepers. The copy taster's most important time was about one hour before transmission onwards when the editor was busy. When it was a long time until transmission (s)he chose to pass even marginally interesting stories on to the programme editor or chief sub. However, nearer to transmission time the copy taster had to exercise more judgement and only passed on things which were important so as not to bother the editor with trivialities.

#### iv) The BBC Meetings

Attendance at formal meetings was also a vital part of my observation period at the BBC. I was granted access to all the Morning Conferences, held by the programme editor, to the Editorial Conference, held by the overall editor of the *One O'clock*, *Six O'clock* and *Nine O'clock News* and attended by editors and specialist correspondents. At the BBC these were those correspondents who head up their own specialist unit, Peter Jay (Economics); Polly Toynbee (Social Affairs); John Simpson (Foreign News) and Robin Oakley (Politics). Other meetings I attended were the weekly forward planning meeting, held by the Head of Newsgathering and other more general planning meetings and post-mortem meetings held on a daily basis in the newsroom. Indeed, it seemed to me that there was always a meeting going on somewhere.

I conducted twenty-two formal interviews which were recorded and then fully transcribed with senior members of BBC staff and thirty-one informal interviews were made accompanied by note-taking. Finally numerous general conversations were conducted with other journalists at every level of the newsroom organisation.

v) The ITN Channel Three Newsroom Structure and Layout:- Figure 5.3

Following the experience of observing at the BBC, I prioritised acquiring an understanding of the ITN newsroom layout and the roles the personnel played there. At ITN five news programmes were produced in 1994, three for Channel Three (*12.30pm News*, *5.40pm News* and *News at Ten*), as well as the short daily bulletins which lasted for two or three minutes, and two programmes for Channel 4 (*Big Breakfast News* bulletins and *Channel Four News*). *Big Breakfast News* was produced for Channel Four, for a contract it held with Planet 24, from the Channel Three newsroom but *Channel Four News* had an entirely separate newsroom, personnel and rationale and was divided by some fifty feet of space from Channel Three. The journalists from Channel Three and Channel Four ITN news rarely met and had entirely different views about what constituted newsworthiness and the role and function of their news programmes.

The newsroom at ITN was much smaller than the one at the BBC. The senior editorial staff were situated in offices to the side of the main working area, but the newsroom itself was open and had a different atmosphere from the one at the BBC. The most obvious difference between the BBC and ITN was the role and prominence of "Newsgathering". At ITN this function was called "Intake", and the Home and Foreign Intake desks were situated next to the two main output



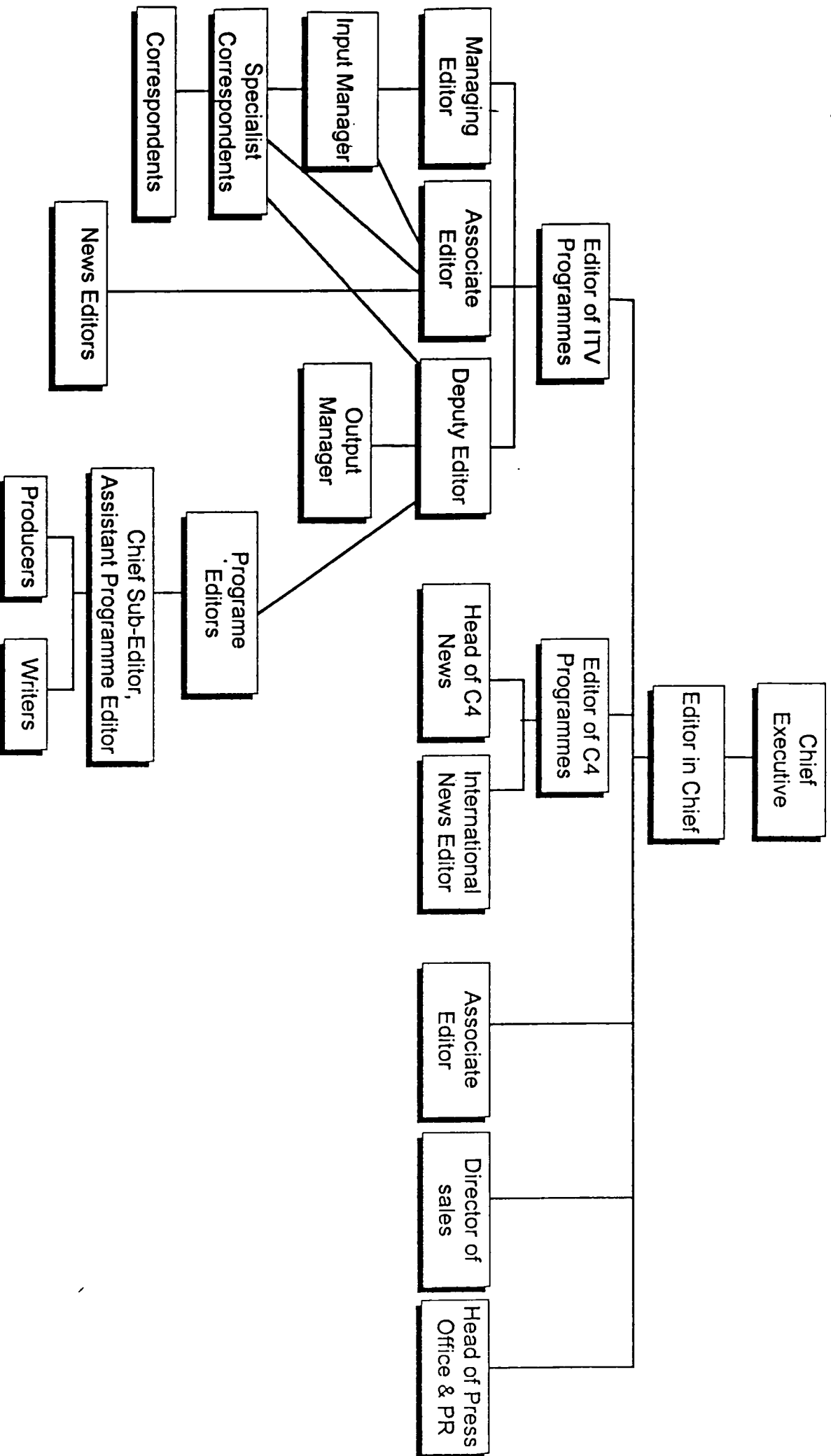


news desks. Therefore the editors of Intake and Output were able to shout across to each other constantly, as well as to laugh and joke, this meant that my observation of the process of dialogue between Intake and Output was much less structured and on-going than at the BBC, where I had to go and observe in another distinct area of the newsroom, isolated from the Output section. The whole process of news gathering and selection at ITN was more flexible and pragmatic than the process at the BBC. At ITN, the programme editors had more influence over the stories and type of stories they would like to cover and hence there was greater diversity at ITN in the types of programmes that were produced than was the case at the BBC. Even the architecture of the buildings which house ITN and the BBC were markedly different. The open and airy, glass and steel, Norman Foster building, within which ITN was housed contrasted markedly with the warren of corridors, lift shafts and closed doors at the BBC. ITN was so pleased with its own building that it even featured it in the opening sequence of ITN's *12.30pm News* and *5.40pm News*. Also at ITN the studio itself was actually in the newsroom, and the journalists were, it seems in this way, made to feel part of a whole news process, far more than they were at the BBC.

vi) The ITN Hierarchical Structure: Figure 5.4

At ITN it was easier to understand the formal relationship of the television newsroom to the rest of the organisation than at the BBC, as all the senior managerial staff were constantly present and accessible. At the BBC, in contrast one got the impression of an enormous hierarchy and inaccessibility to senior staff. However, ITN did become more complicated than the BBC when one addressed issues such as its relationships to advertisers and to the other television companies. At ITN staff were reminded of such obligations by senior editorial staff in the form of daily posters containing ratings and viewing figures compared

**Figure 5.4**  
**The Organisation of ITN**



with those of the BBC and with those of the day before. Therefore, at ITN the notion of ratings and audience viewing figures were taken far more seriously than at the BBC, and this manifested itself in the daily poster display in the newsroom.

vii) The ITN Newsroom Personnel

At ITN, Channel Three there were both general reporters and correspondents. The general reporters, as their title implies, were sent out on a variety of stories and those reporters gained no particular expertise in any one area. The correspondents on the other hand, were often more senior, had their own specialisms and belonged to bureaux. The bureaux at ITN were similar to the specialist units at the BBC, but covered some different specialities such as Health and Sickness, Diplomatic News, Business News and Home Affairs News. These indicated ITN's and the BBC's differing areas of newsworthy priorities.

As at the BBC, ITN had producers, who worked with and “looked after” the correspondents and reporters and who liaised with the programme editor. At ITN the individual who helped the editor was not called the special duty editor, but was called the chief sub-editor. His/her role was exactly the same as the SDE at the BBC. However, one difference was noticeable; at ITN the chief sub also spent the morning editing the Summaries, whereas there were other staff dedicated to this task at the BBC. ITN had less resources than the BBC and its producers often looked after more correspondents and reporters than those at the BBC. They also had to fight for more limited resources in terms of editing suites and graphics facilities. Furthermore, there was no special production assistant at ITN, the producers and senior producers had to help the editor as requested. The programme editor, usually was the actual editor of the

programme. Unlike the BBC there was not a rota which resulted in three or four different people taking it in turns to edit the programme. At ITN the programme editor usually edited for four days a week and spent one day planning and attending meetings, whilst the chief sub edited the programme. The programme editor did not have his (they were all men at ITN in June 1994) own dedicated office space and they seemed to be lucky to find a desk and a terminal on their “days off” from editing. It was apparent that the news programmes at ITN had acquired certain editorial quirks which were solely related to the personality of the programme editor who interacts with the staff every day of the week in a journalistic role. For example the *5.40pm News* often featured animal stories because “Phil likes dogs”. No such identification seemed to be so apparent at the BBC where some of the programme editors were away from the Output Desk at meetings for hours or days at a time.

As at the BBC, the ITN presenters sat opposite the programme editor, and similarly some were more involved in the process of news selection and production than others. Trevor McDonald, presenter of *News at Ten* for example, attended all the editorial meetings and conferences and consistently tried to exert some influence over the handling of certain stories. Several times he made comments that a sports story should be broadened to consider racism in sport. This was never undertaken during my visit, although in February 1995, following the televised clash between the English and Irish fans at a football match in Ireland, *News at Ten* did an “analytic” piece asking why there were no black faces in the crowd at the match. Several black citizens were interviewed by vox pops in the street, all of whom said they would not go and watch a football match because of racism on the terraces. It was very likely indeed that Trevor McDonald campaigned for this angle to be taken. Undoubtedly

however his enthusiasm for such subjects only seemed to be considered by the senior editorial staff when there was a “fat peg” to hang it on.

The director of the programme, as at the BBC, ensured that the programme was broadcast without a hitch and was aided by a production assistant. The latter was under more pressure at ITN than at the BBC, because any news bulletin had to finish exactly on time due to the advertisements immediately following the programme, or during it, in the case of *News at Ten*. As such the PA had to ensure that the programme was running exactly to the second, or the advertisements would suddenly cut into the programme before it was completed, or a gap would be left at the end if the programme finished too early. The BBC did not have this same problem; the programme was allowed a leeway of several seconds either way, but when it was running over by more than a minute the editor can negotiate with “Pres” (Presentation Department) for a little more time. Indeed I witnessed the editor for the day ring “Pres” at the BBC and negotiate a returned favour (he'd filled time for them before by running an extra story). Of course these different relationships to programme length had some bearing on the content of the programme, and an effect on what was subsequently broadcast.

As witnessed at the BBC, the copy taster had the role of alerting the editor to any changes or developments on stories, and picked up new ones. Similarly, as the newsroom at ITN was electronic, the role of the copy taster had to a great extent been expanded to become part of everyone's remit.

viii) The ITN Meetings

Formal meetings at ITN were described to me as follows by the Editor of ITV Programmes: Policy Meetings - those chaired by either the Editor of ITV Programmes or the Deputy Editor. All other staff in the newsroom were directly accountable to these two senior editors who ensured that one or the other were at all the following meetings: The Prospects Meeting (possible news stories for the day, held at 9.30am for the *5.40pm News* and *News at Ten*), attended by the programme editor and producers; Planning Meetings (held at 3.30pm every day and called the "Lookahead"), attended by the programme editor and senior producers and senior editorial staff on the Intake Desk; and Running Order Meeting for *News at Ten*, attended by the programme editor and the programme presenter. This ensured that the senior editorial voice was heard at all times in the television newsrooms and it was interesting to note which aspects of the newsday were deemed to be the most important to control. In contrast, at the BBC the main senior editorial figure was the Editor, TV News Programmes and when he was not available for meetings he was replaced by the Head of Newsgathering, or the News Editor, Newsgathering. This further indicated the importance of Newsgathering as a section at the BBC, because at ITN his equivalent, Head of Intake would not step in to oversee the Prospects meetings which govern the news output and intake policy for the day.

Further meetings were held, as at the BBC, by the programme editor with his own producers and with Input staff. Such meetings occurred during the newsday and were often precursors to the larger and more important policy meeting chaired by the senior editorial staff, or in the case of *News at Ten* to keep the producers updated during the very long newsday.

Important routinized weekly meetings at ITN were also attended by senior editorial staff: For example, every Monday at 3pm there was a Foreign Coverage Meeting; on Tuesday at 11am there was a Weekly Management Meeting; on Tuesday at 2.45pm there was a Special Reports for the *News at Ten* Meeting; and on Thursday at 3pm there was the Weekly Lookahead. As was the case at the BBC there were a large number of regular and routine meetings at ITN which helped to structure the newsday and allowed the senior editorial staff, including the programme editor to instruct the journalists about their requirements and their vision. As I noticed at the BBC some input was encouraged from the more junior journalists and good ideas acknowledged. It was, however, apparent that there was really not enough time to allow someone to experiment and pontificate if it jeopardised the programme in anyway and senior editorial staff quickly stamped out any ideas or tendencies which would waste time or be too radical.

Each of the three news programmes produced by ITN's Channel 3 had slightly different structures. The *12.30pm News* (in 1994) usually comprised eight or nine news stories of approximately one minute and forty-five seconds each, and contained one or two live interviews. The programme usually ended with sport, followed by City news. The stories were intended to run in order of newsworthiness, although as I will show in Chapters 6 and 7, this pressure to meet such an early deadline can often result in a programme which runs in no particular order.

The *5.40pm News* (in June 1994) in contrast always started with the most newsworthy story, which was made more dramatic by using several devices. First, by the lead-in words spoken by the presenter; second, by running the first story before the rest of the headlines; and third, by the amount of time devoted to the story, which was often accompanied by a



live two-way or other interviews. The *5.40pm News* was notorious at IITN for its dramatic lead in and the journalists themselves occupied their spare time writing spoof lead-ins such as, 'Hello, it happens to us all, death that is, and it has happened to Di's Dad, and he's an Earl'. The rest of the *5.40pm News* programme was comprised of another five or six stories, each only lasting approximately one minute and ten seconds. *News at Ten* (in June 1994) was the most structured programme of the three (1). This is because the journalists had all day to consider which stories to include, and did not generally have to rush to get the story ready in time, paying more attention to the flow and running order of the programme.

*News at Ten* always led with what was considered to be the most newsworthy story, but other newsworthy stories were highlighted by the headlines, read to the dramatic chimes of Big Ben. These headlines were known in the newsroom as "the bongs". The editor and the senior editors spent all day considering which stories would become the bongs, and short film was prepared to accompany the presenter's words. The bongs were usually recorded in advance of the programme as it was very difficult to get the timing precisely correct. As such the headlines had to be decided an hour or so before the news programme. The bongs usually contained a "teaser" for a story which would occur in the second half of the programme after the commercial break, due to the priority of keeping the audience interested for the whole programme. As research has shown that viewers often only stay with the programme for Part One, *News at Ten* was redesigned so that important and interesting stories were included in Part Two. This structure differed from that of other news programmes which endeavour to run the stories in order of their criteria of newsworthiness. It was the practice at *News at Ten* to place a very interesting and important story second in the running order. Sometimes this may not be the most newsworthy story, but was likely to contain a

live two-way or an interview and was often a subject which would affect many people, such as pensions or a rail strike. Advertisements of stories to come after the commercial break, the “precoms”, were described by the *News at Ten* editor as vitally important as they advertised stories which were interesting enough to keep the audience loyal throughout the commercial break. The precoms therefore had a rather dramatic tone such as ‘.....and coming up after the break, the Hollywood star suspected of murder. A dramatic development tonight’ (*News at Ten*, 23/6/94).

After the commercial break the editor aimed to have two or three “hard” news stories “saved” for Part Two these were presented individually and as a “Newswrap”,. This was primarily to avoid the criticism that the second half of the programme was simply devoted to human interest and feature stories. Often a *News at Ten* Special Report was included about eighth or ninth in the running order. This would have been commissioned in advance by the programme editor and could take several days to film and edit. In a traditional sense this story was not particularly newsworthy but dealt with interesting issues or events in some detail (often four minutes was dedicated to this slot). Storylines were often about unusual events or happenings, such as the mystery of corn circles, about animal cruelty, rhino hunting in Africa or pseudo-issues such as whether tennis was more boring to the public in June 1994 than it was ten years earlier. None of these specials were particularly investigative and were not worthy or particularly important, but dealt with issues which might be found in an average magazine or Sunday tabloid newspaper supplement, this was usually followed by sport and a reminder of the day’s headlines. The “and finally.....”, slot ended the news programme and was designed to cheer the audience up. ITN research had shown that the audience preferred the programme to end on a high note and as such some time and effort was devoted to fulfilling their wishes. These stories were generally

of a very light human interest nature or were about a famous persons, for example,

'.....and finally, they are chanting that name again in Buenos Aires tonight. Diego Maradona. Argentina's controversial captain scored a spectacular goal in their first World Cup match tonight.....', (McDonald, ITN's *News at Ten* 21/6/94).

The different structures and format requirements of the news programme go some way to determining the content priorities and newsworthy criteria which were accorded the plethora of events and issues which were available during a television news day.

I conducted twenty-four formal interviews which were recorded then fully transcribed, with senior members of ITN staff (Channel Three and Channel Four) and thirty informal interviews which were accompanied by note-taking. I also conducted numerous conversations with other journalists at every level of the ITN organisation.

ix) The ITN Channel Four News Newsroom Structure and Layout:-

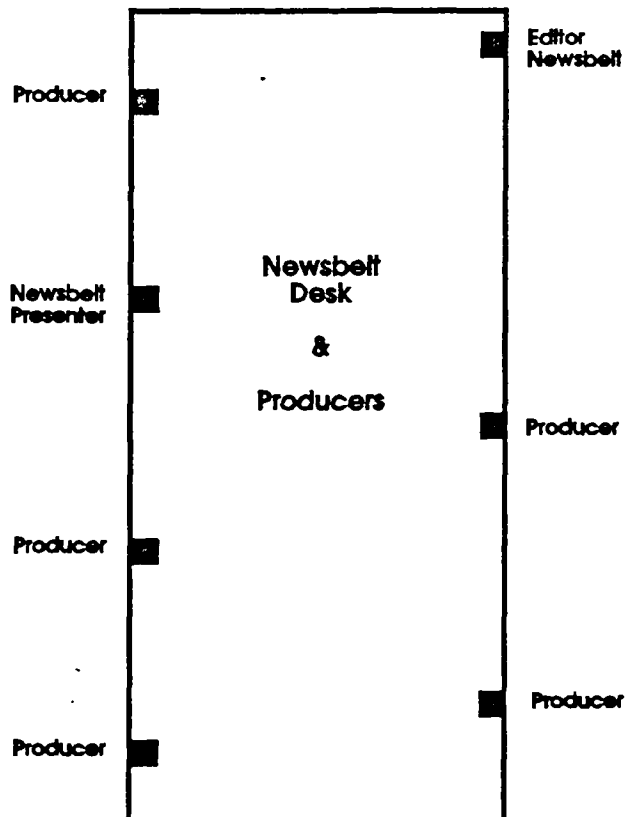
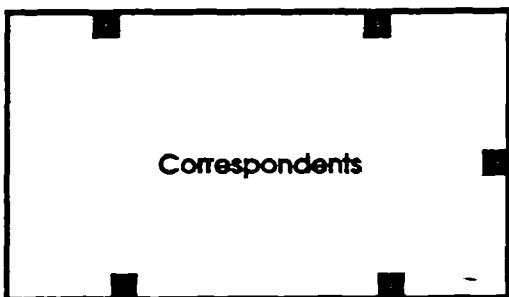
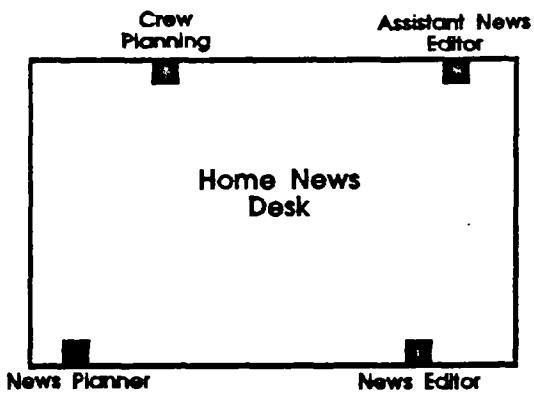
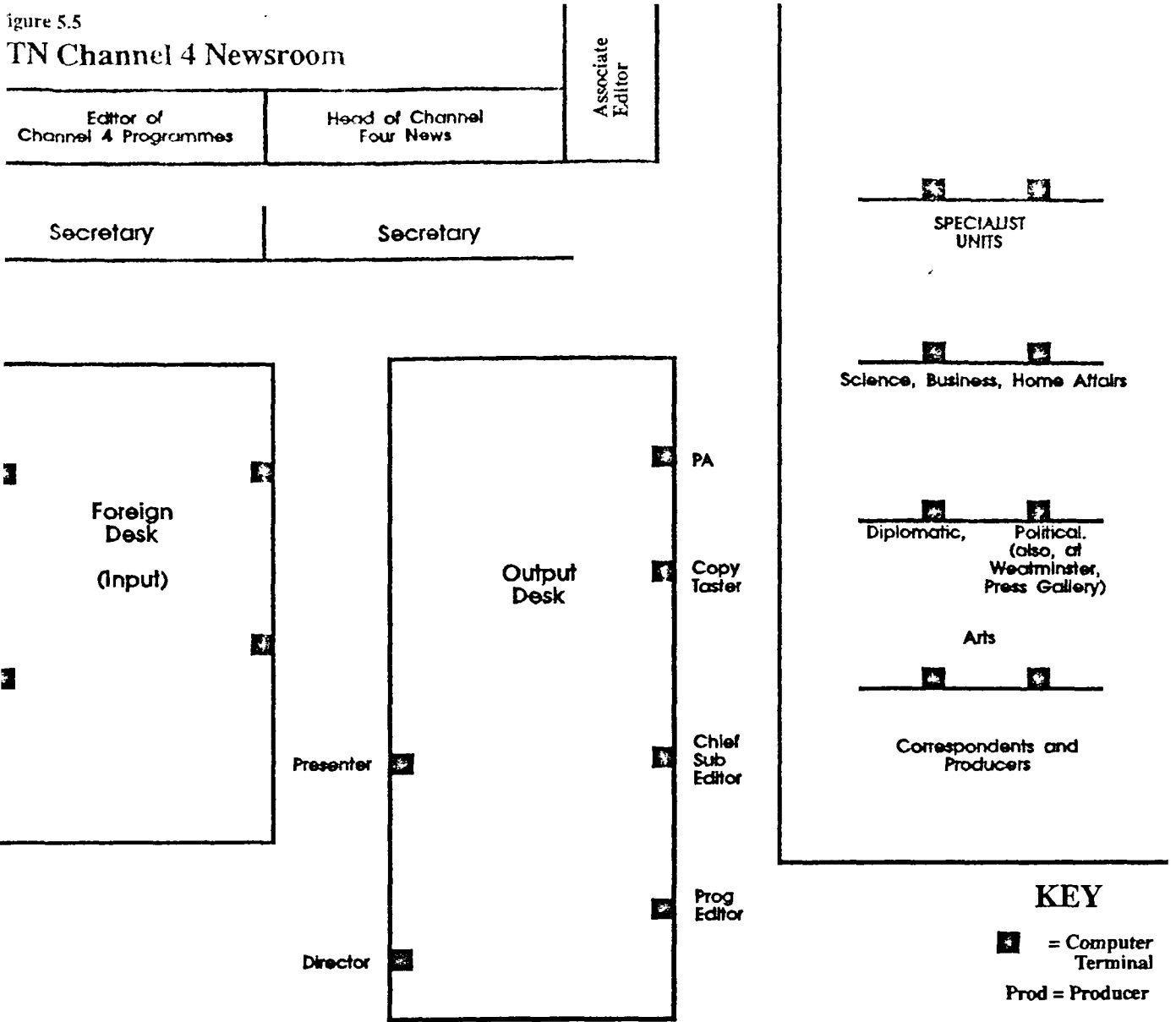
Figure 5.5

The Channel Four newsroom in 1994 was smaller than the Channel 3 newsroom at ITN, but was still divided into similar work desks such as; the Home News Desk and Foreign News Desk (Input), Summaries Desk, Output Desk, correspondents, producers and Specialist Units.

There were six specialist units these were, the Science Unit, Business Unit, Home Affairs Unit, Diplomatic Unit, Political Unit and Arts Unit. All the units have specialist correspondents and specialist producers. Some of the specialists were very senior and well-respected, such as

Figure 5.5

# TN Channel 4 Newsroom



Eleanor Goodman, Political Editor, based at Westminster and the Diplomatic Editor, Nik Gowing, and both consistently advised the programme editors.

x) The ITN *Channel Four News* Hierarchy:

The hierarchical structure of the *Channel Four News* Newsroom was headed up by the Editor of Channel Four Programmes (refer back to Figure 5.4).

xi) The ITN *Channel Four News* Personnel

The correspondents at *Channel Four News* were usually involved in working on stories which had been well planned in advance (see Chapter 6), and did not really approve of being assigned stories by the programme editor. The correspondents at *Channel Four News* were similar to the specialist correspondents at the BBC as they tried to “offer” stories rather than be allocated them. Also *Channel Four News* correspondents produced stories of four or five minutes in length, and unlike BBC packages, *Channel Four News* pieces of such length routinely attempted to both tell and analyse the story in the same package, it followed therefore that the producers at *Channel Four News* had a different role to those working on Channel Three news programmes. The latter were more like administrators, sorting out and organising correspondents, ensuring that all the astons (words on the screen which denote name and title) occurred at the right time, finding pictures to drop into pieces the correspondents have already partially prepared in the field, as well as updating scripts and ensuring that the programme editor's wishes were complied with. At *Channel Four News* the producers were much more involved in the story content and had more of an editorial role in producing the packages. Also general producers moved around quite a lot, perhaps acting as assistant editor on the News Desk on one day and

editor of the summaries the next. Thus producers at *Channel Four News* were much more in tune with the editorial role as well as its constraints and problems than those working on Channel Three news programmes.

*Channel Four News* had three overseas bureaux in Washington, South Africa and Moscow and was therefore poorly resourced in comparison to the BBC, which had nineteen fully-staffed bi-media foreign bureaux. However, *Channel Four News* did have an "Independents Fund", with which it could commission freelance journalists to help cover international stories. During my observation period *Channel Four News* commissioned Catherine Bonds in Nairobi to cover the events in Rwanda. At *Channel Four News* it was obvious however that any coverage of foreign affairs usually had to be planned well in advance, or, as I witnessed during my observation period, Nik Gowing, the foreign correspondent, had to have a suitcase packed in the office ready to take the next available flight. *Channel Four News* therefore tended to consider very carefully the type of foreign stories it would cover itself. Mainstream overseas news stories which went into the news belt were often based on Channel Three film (which itself may have been obtained via Eurovision) with a *Channel Four News* voice-over done in London.

On 28 June 1994 for example, the Editor of Channel Four Programmes, suddenly decided that it was imperative that *Channel Four News* should cover the vote of The Legislative Council in Hong Kong on Chris Patten's democratic reforms the following day. He felt that the implications were enormous if Patten's plan was rejected as it would undermine his role in Hong Kong, and if it was accepted it would still be an interesting story. Nik Gowing was despatched immediately so he could arrive in time for the vote. What was particularly interesting about this story was that no other news programme bothered to cover it in any depth at all. Similarly

on 4 July 1994, *Channel Four News* sent presenter Jon Snow to Jerusalem to cover Yasser Arafat's inauguration where twenty-three minutes of the programme were presented from Israel (a good example of demands placed on the presenter by *Channel Four News*). As the editor pointed out,

'...had that been the BBC's *Nine O'clock News* there would only have been room for sort of two or three quick stories and then they would be off the air, as its a half hour programme, whereas we have still got twenty minutes and we can do lots of other things as well, that is a great benefit, a great advantage' (Editor, Channel Four Programmes, 5/7/94).

Therefore, *Channel Four News'* relationship to international news was one where it could deliberately aim to cover different types international news stories and issues on the basis that it had longer time in which to do so. It had also developed a Part Three to the programme which was designed to take a longer more unusual feature piece. The mainstream international stories were usually covered but sometimes in the news belt. This was a positive decision by the Editor of Channel Four Programmes who described *Channel Four News'* remit as,

'...a programme of news and analysis, it's meant to be a programme which has space for specialist reporting, which has a wider range of foreign coverage than is available elsewhere and which treats news in a serious and analytical way' (Editor of Channel Four Programmes, 4/7/94).

#### xii) The ITN *Channel Four News* Meetings

As was the case in BBC, ITN Channel 3 and regional television newsrooms, *Channel Four News* structured its day via series of meetings and briefings. The first Planning Meeting (Morning Conference) was at

9.30am and was the result of analysis of the forward planning prospects lists and overnight handovers, and discussions and decisions between the programme editor, the home news editor and the foreign editor which began at about 8am. The Planning Meeting was chaired by the Editor of Channel Four Programmes, or in his absence, his deputy. Once the Planning Meeting was underway, it was apparent that all the editors had a very firm grasp upon what would happen during the day and the provisional structure the news programme would take, if nothing else happened. At this meeting the foreign news editor and the home news editor briefed the rest of the journalists (correspondents, producers and the presenters) about the stories, which camera crews were available and where and what other crews would be filming.

At 11.30am each day there was another Planning Meeting and Lookahead for the rest of the week, a check on the current programme, followed by another meeting at 2.30pm. The main weekly lookahead was held at the same time each week, and was accompanied by a working lunch. All the senior journalists and correspondents were encouraged to attend this meeting so that everyone knew what would be happening over the following week.

In June 1994 *Channel Four News* was the most rigorously planned of all the news programmes. This, in part, was due to the length of the programme, but also related very strongly to its relatively small financial resources and its remit to be different. As the longer and more unusual pieces did not follow the mainstream news agendas the programme had to commit its resources to initiating a piece from the beginning and could not share the costs with Channel Three. Also because its pieces were longer and more complex it often took two or three weeks to produce some of the packages (the notion of the immediate did not apply to all



stories as a criterion of newsworthiness at *Channel Four News*). At *Channel Four News*, planning could be divided, broadly speaking, into short-term and long-term. Short-term planning concerned the day-to-day decisions such as which news event had to be covered and how, and what resources and facilities would be needed to do this. Obviously, every potential story could not be covered to the same extent, so some events were deemed to be more newsworthy than others. However, one of the major conditioning factors on this process was the effect of decisions made regarding long-term news planning. Long-term planning at *Channel Four News*, as I have already outlined, was necessary due to the structure of the programme. However, once long-term planning had tried to pinpoint likely areas of newsworthiness, the journalists had in effect created their own momentum. In other words, if resources have been allocated, there was pressure to use them and to some extent this was regardless of what else was happening.

The necessity for such rigorous planning was also related very strongly to the structure of the *Channel Four News* programme. The news programme was divided into three parts and contained two commercial breaks. Therefore, like *News at Ten*, programme planners tried to retain audience loyalty throughout the programme. However, unlike *News at Ten* it only had a very small audience of about seven hundred thousand viewers (down to half a million in the summer), most of whom were dedicated *Channel Four News* watchers, and the programme makers did not have to seek to be quite so single-minded in their quest to retain high viewing figures, (at least it was not spoken about so often). Part One of the programme always contained two packages and a live interview. If stories one and two were similar in terms of newsworthiness, then the editor would tend to lead with the story which contained the interview. Part Two contained one package, which was usually something quirky or

interesting enough to keep the viewers after the break, followed by the newsbelt (where the main news events of the day were quickly read by another presenter) followed by another package. Part Three contained one package. This package was known in the newsroom as “a Part Three piece”, which marked it out from the rest of the packages and the newsbelt. Part Three would not necessarily be based upon a topic which was currently in the news, but be devoted to something which interested one of the specialist correspondents or the senior editors. For example such stories may be about, a mutant virus affecting plants (*Channel Four News*, 4/7/94); a profile on Margaret Beckett when everyone else was looking at Tony Blair as a possible leader of the Labour Party, (*Channel Four News*, 5/7/94), or a profile on open cast mining, (*Channel Four News*, 7/7/94). These Part Three feature stories as well as the allocation of a longer time period to all the other news packages in particular have given *Channel Four News* a distinctive style which has differentiated it from the other mainstream news programmes on ITN Channel Three and BBC1.

As such the *Channel Four News* Newsroom was very different in cultural terms from the Channel Three newsroom at ITN. Also it appeared that the relatively low audience rating of the *Channel Four News* programme dictated that it had a poor standing in the eyes of the Channel Three journalists producing the mainstream programmes. Indeed, unusual overseas news items which appeared on the wires were often referred to by Channel 3 journalists in a derisory fashion as a “*Channel Four News* story”. It seemed appropriate therefore that Channel Four's *Big Breakfast News* programme was not produced by the Channel Four News team, but by journalists working for Channel Four but housed in the Channel 3 newsroom, where they were obviously much more at home.

### xiii) The Regional Television Newsrooms Layout and Structure

The newsroom layouts in regional television news organisations were more compact than their London counterparts and were less well resourced. *Look North News* was also bimedia and housed Radio Leeds. Obviously there was no foreign desk and the Intake or Newsgathering process was much more integrated into the whole process of news selection in contrast to the system at the BBC in London. At both *Look North* and *Calendar News* the Newsgathering editor/Intake editor sat opposite the programme editor (Output) at the same desk. Also, staff often moved around between the different roles. For example, the editor for the day at *Look North News* variously acted at the Newsgathering editor and performed a forward planning role and other journalists took it in turn to plan ahead or to produce the short bulletins which occurred throughout the day. This rationalisation of human resources at a regional level meant there were no great divides between the different sections of the newsroom, although personality differences and differences of opinion between editors and producers still existed, of course. *Look North* was particularly interesting to study because the national influences from the BBC newsroom were apparent, as was BBC policy, such as having specialist correspondents. However, I also expected that there would be a critical distance from London and a reluctance to refer problematic stories to be assessed. On the contrary I found that referral upwards as a BBC policy was much more apparent in the region than in London. The editor at *Look North News* was on the telephone on a daily basis to Richard Ayres, the Controller of Editorial Policy, based in London. It appeared that the regional editors were much more cautious about offending BBC managerial sensitivities than the editorial staff in London. Reasons why this might be the case will be assessed in more detail in Part III.

xiv) The Regional Newsroom Personnel

The specialist correspondents at Leeds reflected the different type of news covered by a regional organisation and they specialised in Education, Transport, Community Affairs (mainly ethnic), Health, Business and Industry and Environment. They were currently waiting to appoint someone as a Local Government Correspondent. The role of these correspondents, as in London, was to seek out and generate stories and to provide in-depth analysis of the issues surrounding events. In practice, such correspondents were generating few such stories and were often allocated stories to cover via the Forward Planning Desk or the Newsgathering editor. The rest of the journalists in the *Look North News* Newsroom were either called regional journalists, who filled in, acted as fixers, reported a variety of news stories and forward planned, or were called reporters and had their own geographic patch to cover. It was noticeable at *Look North News* that there was no chief sub and no copy taster, but the director and news technical assistant (PA in London), performed the same roles as their counterparts in the London newsrooms. There were three main presenters at *Look North News*, and a main Summaries presenter. As at *Calendar News*, other regional journalists occasionally presented bulletins.

The programme structure at *Look North News*, strongly reflected the Birtian philosophy of the twin-pack, where the top story was always told straight in one package and then analysed in a backgrounder or second package. In this second package an “issue” was extracted from the event for further consideration and was usually followed by an appropriate interview with an expert. As I will show in Chapter 7, this can sometimes be incredibly problematic in the regions as there is far less diversity and

choice in terms of available stories. Often journalists struggled to fill a regional news programme with something interesting, and to try to extract the important issues behind such events could be very difficult. However, it was noticeable that *Look North News* was less flexible in approach to its own particular interpretation of Birtian philosophy than the London newsrooms where there was a pragmatic easing of the heavy approach to news in response to both journalistic and perceived audience wishes.

At *Calendar News*, the programme editor was called the programme producer, and he or she was flanked by two news editors. Because *Calendar News* operated an opt out system, whereby different parts of the region received different news stories for certain parts of the programme, both news editors were needed, one to cover the stories in the Emley transmitter area and one to cover the stories in the Belmont area. The programme was much more complicated to produce than *Look North News* due to the opt out facility and therefore several technical staff sat at the main news desk. The studio, like ITN in London, was in the newsroom, but because of the style of the programme, which had a magazine format, the presenter was even more integrated into the newsroom area because he or she wandered around and often sat on the edge of a news desk to present part of the programme. The rest of the newsroom was devoted to regional programming, so the area devoted to news alone was relatively small and compact and had different layout from other newsrooms.

The differences between the layout and rationale of *Look North News* and *Calendar News* manifested themselves in the both the content and the format of the programmes. *Calendar News* sometimes seemed to struggle to reconcile “hard” regional news with the softer magazine items, and the programme set was a curious hybrid of potted plants and computer

terminals. In 1996 the studio set was redesigned and the programme currently has a more conventional presentation style with two presenters sitting very close together behind a desk. This particular style is very similar to the format that Sky News currently uses and the two presenters laugh, joke and touch each other during the programme. On the contrary, as *Look North News* took its remit direct from its London headquarters it aimed to impart information and explore issues, and therefore its style of presentation was much more traditional. Although *Look North News* updated its studio and introductory sequence in 1995, it still follows a very traditional format and has not deviated markedly from its original style of presentation. In common with its counterpart in London, the studio was hidden among the dark corridors away from the main newsroom, so staff could only be aware of transmission by watching the programme as it was broadcast on television.

The structure of the *Calendar News* programme was, and still is in 1996, very different from that of the *Look North News* regional programme. The producer of *Calendar News* looked for two good stories to lead the programme with a chatty feature type story which would lead into the break, with lighter pieces breaking up the serious hard news opt outs. Unlike *Look North News* and the BBC programmes in general, the lead story did not necessarily have to be serious, the main criterion being that it could be developed into a three minute piece. A reflection of the different approaches of the two regional programmes was compounded by the observation that journalists at *Calendar News* watched *GMTV News* in the morning whereas journalists at *Look North News* watched BBC1's *Breakfast News*.

#### xv) The Regional Meetings

Meetings at regional level were similar to those held in national news organisations. Morning meetings were held at both *Calendar News* and *Look North News* to run through the daily Prospects. It was noticeable that these meetings were chaired, not by the Head of News (*Calendar News*) or the Head of News and Current Affairs (*Look North News*), although both were in attendance, but by the editor/producer of the news programme. However, the senior editor's wishes in both cases had already been conveyed to the programme editor/producer during an earlier meeting. Both *Calendar News* and *Look North News* held Weekly Planning Meetings as well as informal post-mortem meetings after a news programme had been transmitted.

I conducted sixteen formal interviews with senior members of staff at both organisations (eight at *Calendar News* and eight at *Look North News*) which were recorded and then fully transcribed. I conducted twenty-two informal interviews with staff at both organisations (ten at *Calendar News* and twelve at *Look North News*), which were accompanied by note-taking. I also conducted numerous conversations with other journalists at every level of the two news organisations.

#### III) Broad Programme Typology Analysis

It was clear both from my fieldwork experience and from my content analysis, that programmes broadcast at different times of the day have a different remit, briefly these are as follows:-

i) Breakfast News Programmes were not agenda-setting in the same way as Radio Four's *Today* programme. The news which was broadcast was rolling news and the programme was not considered to be as important as the organisation's mainstream news programmes by the journalists or the

organisation. Many of the news stories were “left-over” from the day before or marked forthcoming events in the day. They were all padded with other activities such as an analysis of the daily papers, the weather, travel information, local news, and permitted more general chat than the mainstream bulletins.

ii) Lunch-Time News Programmes ITN's *12.30pm News* and BBC1's *One O'clock News* were broadcast to an older, less well-known audience. Furthermore, the programmes were much greater victims of time constraints than the other news programmes broadcast later in the day, so it was often a scramble to get the programmes on air at all. Often the programme editors had to take almost any story which was on offer just to fill the programme.

iii) Early Evening News Programmes ITN's *5.40pm News* had a very distinct character and style. This, unlike other news programmes was in part due to the personality and origins of the programme editor, who undoubtedly has populist news values. The programme was very successful in terms of audience appreciation and the editor was often left to make his own judgements about this relatively low status ITN programme. The programme only lasted for fifteen minutes and was distinctive for its constant use of the live two-way and human interest stories. The programme editor confirmed this view when he admitted that the programme's remit was to *interest* the audience.

BBC1's *Six O'clock News* grew out of the ending of *Nationwide* and the failure of its current affairs successor *Sixty Minutes* in the mid-1980s. Therefore it originally sought to be a bridgehead between news and current affairs, with a “news plus analysis” remit. In a sense it was Birtist before Birt. However, in April/May 1994, this programme had recently



moved towards a more domestic news agenda and included some human interest and lighter pieces aimed at interesting the audience. The latest programme editor was more committed to audience research than the other programme editors and often rejected a news story on the grounds that it was boring and was therefore no longer so newsworthy according to the programme's new remit.

iv) Late Evening News Programmes BBC's *Nine O'clock News* and ITN's *News at Ten* were both flagship programmes and were both described to me as being a journal of record, although many BBC journalists also expressed doubts about ITN's *News at Ten* deserving such a title. Both programmes had better resources than the other news programmes shown during the day and both attempted to show something different from what had already been shown. One of the most striking differences between the two was the programme editor's awareness of the audience. At *News at Ten*, the attempts to retain the audience's interest had been turned into a science, where audience ratings were analysed every five minutes during the programme. In contrast the programme editor at the *Nine O'clock News* did not believe that it was 'useful or healthy to try to give the audience what it thinks it wants' (programme editor, *Nine O'clock News*, 15/5/94).

v) Minority Audience News Programmes Both *Channel Four News* and BBC2's *Newsnight* attempted to set their own agenda far more than the other news programmes studied. *Channel Four News*, however, was more constrained than *Newsnight* in doing this because it had to broadcast during the news day and therefore had to reflect some of the main news stories being broadcast by the other news programmes. Often *Channel Four News* newsbelt stories were simply written from the wires and film acquired from Channel Three. The lower status accorded to many of the

mainstream news stories of the day was compounded by *Channel Four News*' in-depth attention to stories which were not currently on the national news agenda. Coverage of such "off-beat" stories was rather hit and miss. Occasionally *Channel Four News* may set the news agenda by discovering a newsworthy story, but in general some of *Channel Four News* coverage was regarded by the rest of the broadcast media as not particularly newsworthy, or the other journalists criticised *Channel Four News* for staying with one story for too long, past its newsworthy "sell-by date".

vi) Regional News Programmes BBC1's *Look North News* was controlled rigorously by TV Centre in London. The programme also still adhered quite strongly to a Birtist philosophy and the journalists spent a good deal of time trying to work out an interesting issue behind the latest local crime story. In contrast Yorkshire Tyne-Tees' *Calendar News* was a news magazine programme, filled with a variety of trivial nonsensical stories. The programme had a hybrid format of serious hard news delivered straight in a local opt out, followed by fun and games in the studio. What was deemed to be newsworthy at *Calendar News* therefore depended entirely on which part of the programme it was aimed at.

#### d) Summary

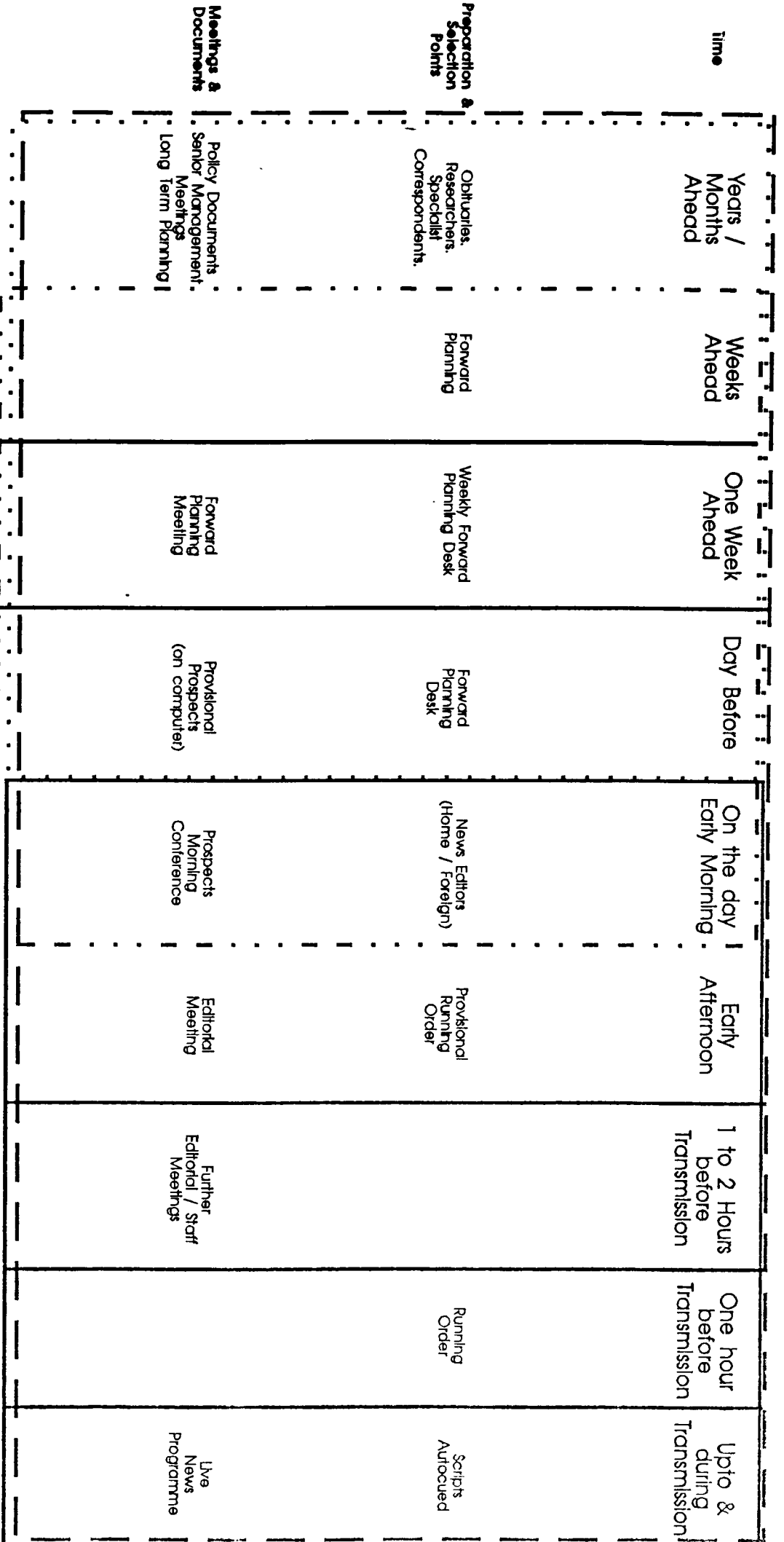
In Chapter 5 the main findings from the newsroom observation periods have been outlined. In common with other observers of newsrooms I was able to quickly ascertain that beneath the apparent chaos, and claims by journalists of the unpredictability of news, that a very structured approach to news production, selection and transmission does exist (Epstein, 1973, Tuchman, 1978; Schlesinger, 1987; Cottle, 1993). Furthermore, the opportunity to study the news selection process at first-hand, and the

component parts of the procedure has gone a long way towards contextualising the findings from my content analysis as well as providing a more solid backdrop against which to analyse the complexities of the concept of newsworthiness in the multi-programme environment in Britain in the 1990s.

The observation period was of great use as a way of understanding the dynamics and processes of the newsrooms and enabled further contemplation and analysis of the meaning of such operations and of their impact upon the final product. It also illustrated and clarified the overlapping and inter-related nature of many of the journalistic roles in the newsroom as well as the procedures undertaken when selecting, processing and producing a news story (see Figure 5.6, television news flow chart). In Part III of thesis, I now go on to analyse these findings in relation to the question posed by this thesis of what constitutes newsworthiness in television news.

Figure 5.6

The Flow of TV News: All Newsrooms



— = Newsgathering / Input Department: Main Activity

- - - = Support duties which overlap with the main duties of the Output Department