

# News Ideology in The Twentieth Century

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## Introduction

Scholars, journalists, and the public share a picture of journalism at the end of the twentieth century. It is a high-pressure activity, in its production processes and its presentation. Coverage is fragmented and episodic, focused on the now, on latest update available. The imperatives of marketing and the limits in the attention span of audiences drive journalism to the briefest forms, following the trends elsewhere in popular culture. Despite its being shorter, there is just too much news, too many events flooding the 24/7 cycle of reporting that reaches through digital networks of communication. Competition among news media pushes journalists to focus more on people, on so-called news-you-can-use, and on local angles. In sum, news today is more densely populated, more action-packed, more up-to-date, more localized, more event-centred, and above all much briefer. Such is the commonsense view.

Two experiences more than a decade ago startled me out of that view. First, while working on a content analysis, coders on a news project began to complain. They had read with enthusiasm the newspaper stories from the early 1900s, even though they had to hand-crank the old machine readers through microfilm rolls containing scratched or negative images. When they turned to news from the late twentieth century, they called the stories long and boring, and, even though they had paper copies, they said the same coding work now seemed overly complicated. My second experience involved broadcast news. While listening to U.S. National Public Radio (NPR), I began to notice journalists interviewing each other. Instead of talking to, say, an Israeli, the host in Washington, D.C, would get the U.S. reporter in Tel Aviv on the line and ask questions. Without any taped actualities, only the scratchy connection of the telephone line (or transmission) gave the story any realism. The host played the reporter's role, and the reporter acted as the source. Once I had noticed this role reversal on the radio, I began to see it wherever I turned, and especially when watching the evening network news and nightly local newscasts.

These activities seemed to contradict what defines news. The newspaper reports were longer, not shorter, and the broadcast reports focused on journalists, not on other persons. When I would mention the contradiction to students, colleagues, and neighbours, they would give me puzzled looks at first, but later come back to say they had started noticing the same thing. Something odd was afoot, and I wanted to find out what. Contradictions between commonsense and experience can reveal interesting changes, but common knowledge is intriguing in other ways. Everyday notions often hide deep-seated ideologies, the shared beliefs that groups use to shape their world, and ideologies almost always involve contradictions. Ideological processes are often at the heart of paradigm shifts as well.

Suspecting a contradiction led me into a large project (Barnhurst 1991), begun in the late 1980s and now comprised of a dozen studies so far (and available on line; see Barnhurst, forthcoming). In our studies, my colleagues and I have been examining commonsense assumptions about U.S. journalism, couched in terms journalists understand. We studied different media separately – newspapers, television, radio, and the internet – we took measurements that journalists take of their own work (column inches and stories, sound bites and packages), and we observed the five W's, the elements of news they use themselves: who, what, when, where, and why. Once the results were in, I then interviewed journalists about their beliefs, showed them the results of the studies, and asked them for their thoughts.

This essay gives an overview of the project. It begins by reviewing the current state of knowledge about ideology and ideological processes. Little is known about how ideologies shape the texts that groups circulate. The literature review points to some key questions and debates proposing how a study of news can shed light on them. The essay then summarizes the results for the length of news stories and for two of the five W's: the *who* and the *what*. For each of these three aspects of news, an outline of commonsense views, as found in popular discussions and among journalists, precedes a summary of results from content analyses designed to measure the trends in news content. My aim is to document whether systematic differences exist between widely accepted notions of news and the texts journalists create, and the three aspects illustrate the pattern found throughout our studies. Finally, the essay returns to the question of ideology in light of the evidence showing those differences. Where contradictions occur, the discussion section explores the institutional settings and work routines – the conditions of production – that give rise to them, drawing on the sociological literature and my own interviews. The essay concludes by suggesting some of the consequences the contradictions produce for journalists, audiences, and society.

## The Ideology Concept

Ideology, which began as the study of ideas from a scientific rather than metaphysical perspective, has had a long and bifurcated career in history, political economy, sociology, literary criticism, and cultural studies. In my survey of the literature on ideology, two books proved especially useful, the assessment of sociologist Jorge Larrain (1979) and the landmark overview of Terry Eagleton (1991). Since Karl Marx employed the term, it has had two principal meanings, one broad and descriptive and the other limited and critical, both of them under attack. Clifford Geertz (1973, 194) characterizes the two definitions as a choice between the “tendentious or mindlessly empirical”.

The broad meaning, preferred among some social scientists (e.g., Barnett & Silverman 1979), defines ideology as any set of shared ideas that order and direct group life. Unlike a culture or a worldview, which may encompass all of the group’s beliefs and activities, ideology operates within the narrower zone of ideas that define, justify, and channel power. Notions involving power – who should wield it and how – have a particularly tortuous existence, often involving open conflict or covert deception and illusion as groups seek to downplay or ignore their own power relations. The negative dimension of ideology gives rise to the second definition.

The narrower meaning, preferred among critical scholars and in cultural studies, defines ideology as the particular set of shared ideas that obscure how powerful groups dominate others. This sense of ideology also predominates in ordinary speech. Eagleton (1991, p. *xiii*) calls it, “what persuades men and women to mistake each other from time to time for gods or vermin”, and he lists six ways that “meaning sustains domination”: by promoting the dominant group’s view of things, making it seem natural, treating it as the universal case, denigrating other views, excluding anyone who holds them, and obscuring all of the above operations (Ibid: 5). The last strategy, sometimes called *mystification*, involves more than the premeditated action of one group upon others. Instead, each person re-enacts the group’s ideology during any interpersonal contact, according to Louis Althusser (1984). Hailing another person, for example, also calls up and re-inscribes a set of power relations for the hailer and the hailed. Althusser calls the process *interpellation*. As Stuart Hall puts it, people are “spoken by, as well as speaking, their culture” (Hall 1980, 30). As a result, everyone may participate in his or her own subjugation to the ideological arena (Foucault, 1980), but dominant groups benefit. They sustain their position through *hegemony*, the maintenance of domination through means other than violence or direct state control (Gramsci, 1971).

In its narrower meaning, the contradiction at the heart of ideology is the distance between one’s own performance and the mendacity of power. Eagleton says these hidden falsehoods are of three orders: *epistemic*, *functional*, and *genetic* (1991, pp. 24-25). Epistemic falsehoods are unwarranted beliefs about the world, functional falsehoods are the unjust benefits and

consequences of those beliefs, and genetic falsehoods are their illegitimate origins. Examining the types of distortions involved in ideological processes shifts the analysis away from criticism, which can become a broadside attack on a group's ideas, and toward critique, which attempts to enter into the group's perspective and find the sources and sense-making that produce patterns of prevarication. Studies that attend to the pattern of distortion in ideas sustaining hegemonic power are *critical* (and sometimes tendentious, in Geertz's phrase).

Studies that attend to the ideas that groups share about power, without specific regard to the patterns of distortion involved, are *descriptive* (and open to Geertz's charge of being "mindlessly empirical"). Although the literature suggests that studies of ideology are of two types, critical and descriptive, that distinction may not bear out in practice. One challenge for research is to observe where description leaves off or blends into critique. An important part of analysing ideology is to attend to the imagery associated with power, the picture of power relations (Mitchell W, 1986).

Little is known, however, of how ideology shapes texts. Recent work in the analysis of discourse has suggested doing fine-grained studies of ideological processes, to show "what they actually look like" (van Dijk, 1998, 7). Such semantic analyses must accompany study of the "contexts, situations, participants" and their pattern of power relations (Ibid:12). Theorists suggest the media, as technical and institutional actors that can reach across space and time, play a pivotal role in transmitting the symbolic and economic values underlying ideology (Marcuse, 1964; Thompson 1990). For some scholars, the media bear particular responsibility for severing ideologies from their original, physical locales, enhancing the power of dominant groups (Hawkes 2003). The media also provide the crucible for what Pierre Bourdieu calls *social alchemy*, the process that transforms "arbitrary relations into legitimate" ones (1977, 195). Mass cultural texts do not simply impose power relations but also offer substantial incentives needed to win ideological adherence from an audience (Jameson 1981). Most scholars agree that a central concern is the connection between the ideological process and the relations of production (or between the *superstructure* and *base*, in Marxian terms).

Studying ideology involves some risks. One is that, on the one hand, a study that treats patterns of domination as neutral processes may suffer from relativism, ignoring injustice in an effort to remain objective or above the fray. On the other hand, any claim that a group's ideas contain some form of false consciousness positions the scholar as all-seeing or outside history. Jameson criticized the content analyses of George Lukács, Jacques Derrida, and others, "which explores the inscription of ideology in an ensemble of purely formal categories," unmasking "such categories and their ideological consequences" (Jameson 1981 note 2, 283). He calls the impulse driving their critical practices "an immanent one," because the methods ignore the wider context and assume that the formal properties "always and everywhere bear the same ideological charge" (Ibid: 283).

Another risk is that any claim about what others believe may suffer from the hubris of assuming the scholar has access to the real reality, a pitfall especially likely for those conducting statistical analysis (Hawkes 2003), but also for those claiming to identify distortions. A classic way of describing this risk comes from a French scholar of the Enlightenment, Claude Adrien Helvetius, who “pointed out that insects living on grass eaten by sheep were liable to look on the sheep as ferocious predators but on the wolves, who preyed on the sheep, as entirely beneficent” (McLellan 1986, p. 5). The analyst may avoid these pitfalls by taking wherever possible the viewpoint of the group and revealing his or her own perspective, interests, and allegiances.

An aspect of ideology sometimes overlooked is that even its dark or negative side – the duplicity and unfairness in power distribution – implies the opposite, the shared vision of Utopia a group imagines (Mannheim 1985/1936). Frederic Jameson (1981) proposes that any study of ideology contain two parts, an analysis of how the form and content of texts legitimate class domination (ideology) and also an analysis of how they embody universal values that produce solidarity (Utopia).

Although some critics see little chance of escaping the iron grip of ideology (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972), most authors are more sanguine. The study of ideology then becomes an intervention, proposing a cure or a solution. The fact that, as Antonio Gramsci (1971) suggests, commonsense is the ground where ideology intervenes, itself opens the opportunity for what Hall calls “formative and educative tasks” to effect “a profound revision of the whole social foundation” (1980, 36). The belief that empirical research or critique can influence commonsense is a hopeful one, expressing confidence in the group under study. The challenge is to reveal to the group the “real motives” that “remain unknown” to individual actors, in the words of Frederick Engels (quoted in Williams, 1983, 155). Eagleton (1991, 223) suggests that the process can transform ideological consciousness but requires “active political struggle”.

The literature of ideology suggests several aims for the present study. One is to explore the boundary between descriptive and critical definitions. Another is, wherever distortions seem apparent, to pay close attention to the order of falsehood involved and to adopt the role of offering critique from within rather than criticism from without. A lacuna in the literature is the paucity of close analyses of the texts involved, and research on the media can make an important contribution. Due caution is needed to avoid the risks of relativism, immanence, and hubris. Study involving group members must supplement close content analysis of the text, and the historical context and conditions of production require attention as well. The research must also look for the positive side, the vision of Utopia that even the most dishonest ideologies imply and the ways these also build social solidarity. Finally, ideological research should reveal its own political agenda and expected outcomes.

## News Definitions

The next sections examine three commonsense aspects of news, describing the logic behind them and citing examples of journalists who invoke them. The results of content analyses of the aspects follow, to show whether the texts that journalists produce contradict their assumptions about what they are doing. I return to the ideological analysis later, after documenting the background of common sense and any pattern of contradictions.

### *Length*

Common sense insists that everything is going faster these days. Radio and television have picked up their pace, requiring shorter attention spans. Other technologies – faxes, electronic mail, and text messaging on cell phones – allow speedier communication. Television commercials have gone from a one-minute standard in the 1960s to fifteen seconds, telling mini-stories in an abbreviated style first developed for music videos.

Journalists assume that daily news has gone along with the trend. When Andy Glass, until recently a columnist for the Cox newspaper chain, began working as a journalist at the New Haven (Connecticut.) *Journal Courier* in the 1950s, news came in on a teleprinter hooked to a teletype machine that set the type and justified it in columns. “It was virtually impossible to edit,” he says, and so “stories tended to be longer” back then. “You couldn’t go in and cut a paragraph, other than to go to the stone and physically throw the type away after it had been set” (Glass 2001, n.p.). Since then, changes in technology have allowed editors to make stories shorter, according to his argument.

Critics point to the impact of *USA Today*, which began in 1982. Science writer James Gleick, in his book, *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything*, summarized this view: “*USA Today* caters to your more modern reading habits by keeping copy short. Other newspapers have catered to them by going out of business” (Gleick 1999, 140). In the late 1980s, attention to shorter TV sound-bites during election campaigns furthered the impression that news was getting shorter (see Hallin, 1992). Here again technology plays a role, as faster, more-flexible video replaced slower film techniques. Critics cite a related trend: the rise of images everywhere. As pictures became more prominent, they squeezed out words. In magazines, according to the *New York Times*, “the 4,000-word article has become a relic, first replaced by the 800-word quick take and then further boiled down to a 400-word blurb that is little more than a long caption” (Carr, 2002, p. C-8). Following the trend in magazines, critics say, daily news has gotten shorter.

These arguments make sense and seem to have the support of evidence: common experience among audiences, direct involvement in productive processes by journalists, and observations of the outcomes by critics. The pattern seems clear, and so it may seem quixotic to question the texts jour-

nalists produce within media organizations. That step, however, reveals a contradiction. A series of analyses measuring the content of journalism texts shows that news – at least in the United States – is getting longer.

For newspapers, we examined the changes in two different studies of the contents over a century. One measured the number of stories that fit on the page (Barnhurst & Nerone, 1991). We selected three newspapers for study: the San Francisco *Chronicle*, to represent metropolitan dailies; the Springfield, Illinois, *State Journal-Register*, to represent smaller urban dailies; and the *Peterborough* (formerly *Contoocook*) *Transcript*, of New Hampshire, to represent small-town weeklies. No selection of newspapers is representative of all the U.S. press, but these three papers covered a range of newspaper sizes – small, medium, and large – and geographic locations, including the West Coast, Midwest, and East Coast of the country. We sampled a reconstructed week of the dailies and a reconstructed month of the weekly, balanced among the four yearly seasons, at ten-year intervals. As part of the larger study, we took a simple count of the number of items and the number of stories (groups of items related to the same event) on front pages.

The front pages clearly became less dense, with fewer items and stories. In 1885, the newspapers ran about fifty items and about twenty-five stories on their front pages. In 1985, they ran about nine items in six stories. The average number of items (such as images, heads, and blocks of text) on the front page declined from a high of 58 for the *Transcript* of 1885 to a low of 7.29 for the *Chronicle* of 1985. The average number of stories on front pages declined from a high of 32.3 for the *Register* in 1895 to a low of 5.25 for the *Transcript* in 1985. These data show a dramatic decline in the number of stories that newspapers publish on their front pages, which, after some ups and downs early in the century, have fallen steadily since the 1930s. But other factors might account for the changes. Over the same period, the physical dimensions of newspaper pages shrank, and publishers also enlarged the sizes of type and illustrations.

To eliminate other factors, we ran another study that measured the length of individual stories (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997). Very few U.S. newspapers published continuously over a century, but we identified three others with differing circulations originating in geographically dispersed cities of varying sizes: the Portland *Oregonian*, serving a small city on the West Coast; the *Chicago Tribune*, reaching a wider region in the Midwest; and the *New York Times*, distributing eventually to a national audience from the East Coast. We drew independent samples from random weeks at twenty-year intervals, drawn to include a balanced number of stories on three different topics. We studied accidents, crime, and jobs – topics general enough to persist over a long time period but narrow enough to allow reliable coding. As part of the larger study, coders rated the length of each article on a five-point scale, from very brief to very long (their coding proved highly reliable on this item).

The news stories clearly got longer from 1894 to 1994. The overall trend was positive and statistically significant, and for each topic and each newspa-

per the average length of articles increased. Stories in the *New York Times* tended to be longer than those in the other two newspapers. Across all three newspapers, jobs stories also tended to be longer, and accident stories shorter. But regardless of the differences between topics and newspapers, all the articles grew longer gradually and consistently, and statistical tests confirmed the trend. U.S. newspapers did grow bulkier, with more pages and sections, during the century, but the results held up even after correcting for the more ample space available in what journalists call the news hole by the end of the century. The trend toward longer stories was in every case highly significant. Newspaper journalists wrote longer stories, and editors and publishers allowed stories to expand in length, despite what they believed they were doing.

But what about television news? Overall, news reports on television have also grown longer. Studies of national broadcasts show that the number of news stories has declined (Riffe, 1996; Riffe & Holm, 1999; Riffe & Budianto, 2001). The overall length of newscasts shrank, however, just as newspaper front pages did. One study that measured story length found that the average report on the network evening news declined from the 1960s to the 1980s, but most of the change resulted from the shrinking sound bites for sources (Hallin, 1992). The length of television news reports then grew from the 1980s to the 1990s (Jones, S. n.d.). To explore more closely what journalists themselves did within their texts since the 1960s, when television news came into its own in the United States, we conducted two studies, one to examine the content of their stories and another to look at the ways they presented themselves visually – an important dimension in television.

The first study replicated the original sound-bite research, but this time focusing on what journalists said, rather than on what politicians said (Steele & Barnhurst, 1996). The original study of U.S. news from the three broadcast networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, included political stories during quadrennial elections from 1968 to 1988. Using the original sample videotapes, we took several measurements of length for journalist speech: how long they went on each time they talked, how often they talked in a report, and what share of the total time they spent talking in a report. By these measures combined, journalists gained ground. Although their segments of speech ran slightly shorter over time, they spoke more than twice as often, and their share of the average election report grew significantly. In other words, when the sound bite for sources became a household term, the debates among media critics and journalists obscured another trend: journalists themselves were consistently talking more throughout the period since the 1960s. One final note on the study: it found that over the period the substance of journalist speech shifted in focus away from giving information and toward expressing opinions about events.

The second study used the same sample again, but added the 1992 election and measured the visual aspects of the journalists' text (Barnhurst & Steele, 1997). Over the period, the number of times journalists appeared on screen more than doubled. In the 1960s, a typical report included the news

anchor alone reading the text and perhaps showing a filmed actuality, and a correspondent appeared in only half the stories. By the 1990s, the anchor would appear twice during an election story, usually at the beginning and at the end, and the reporter who was covering the campaign would appear twice during the middle of the story. That means the correspondents were appearing four times as often as they did twenty years earlier.

Whether examined in their textual utterances or in their visual presences, journalists became more prominent and took more of the viewer's time. Their longer speech and on-screen time during news reports accompanied the declining number of news stories in a typical evening newscast, in which the average report grew somewhat longer.

Newspapers and television are main sources for daily news in the United States, but both were losing audience numbers (circulation and ratings) during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Meanwhile, other venues grew in authority and popularity. To discover whether the trends toward longer news extended to newer venues, I conducted two additional studies, one of public radio and one of the Internet.

The first study examined National Public Radio news in the context of its institutional development in U.S. history (Barnhurst, 2003a). In the 1970s, the network established its main news programs, "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered," and began to reach an audience of commuters during the morning and afternoon rush hour traffic in major cities. Affiliate stations existed in every state and expanded to blanket many rural areas. The two programs have consistently enlarged their audience numbers and their authority as national news outlets. From the earliest broadcasts, NPR news programs preferred extended reporting, rather than the kind of headline service available on most of commercial radio. NPR informational programming tended to take alternative and creative forms at first, but as news operations grew, attracting establishment journalists and mainstream audiences, and one might reasonably expect to find that the formats for news stories became more standard and perhaps shorter. A study of NPR seemed one likely place to find a counterexample to the trends in television and newspapers.

The research drew a randomly reconstructed week for each election year from 1980 through 2000, and as part of the comprehensive study, coders also measured the length of each day's broadcasts, reports, and individual speech acts. Because transcripts and audiotapes provided actual measurements of length, the coding proved highly reliable.

In every dimension, journalism on NPR lengthened. The broadcasts expanded from ninety minutes to two hours. Contrary to expectation, the length of all kinds of reports grew over the period. Political coverage grew longer as well, so that reports in 2000 were a third longer than in 1980. Speech acts during all reports on NPR declined by about a fifth in length, and the same occurred within political coverage. The length of journalist speech, however, remained about the same, so that they became more prominent as others' sound bites shrank. Their speech grew longer relative to others' speech.

In the substance of their talk, the NPR journalists shifted away from giving information and from asking questions. Instead, they moved toward expressing opinions, just as had occurred on television news. The data also show that the journalists talked to each other more. Journalists interviewed other journalists more often, as the frequency and share of reporters acting as sources or experts more than doubled. In other dimensions of speech, providing background information declined by half, and offering interpretations of events more than doubled. In short, journalists became more prominent on NPR, talking more in longer stories.

The second study examined another new venue for news, the Internet (Barnhurst, in press) On-line information is so new that historical analysis is impossible. To allow some comparison to previous trends, the research sampled on-line sites from three newspapers studied previously (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997). The three represent a range in the spectrum of the on-line press. The *New York Times* attempts to reproduce the authoritative quality of its print edition in an interactive setting, the *Chicago Tribune* comes closer to a comprehensive city-based web portal, and the Portland *Oregonian* exists as a separate news site that provides local content without being fully integrated into either a city portal or its interactive setting.

The study drew a purposive sample of stories during three consecutive weeks in July 2001, a period selected to avoid the predictable distortions of major holidays and other regularly occurring major events. The sampling of stories followed the protocol established in the previous study, and coders used the same procedures, rating the length of stories using the same scale with similar reliability.

As the newspapers moved onto the Internet, their stories continued to grow longer, following the trend established over the previous century. By 2001, news stories had grown even longer, as measured on the scale. The increase matched an earlier jump in the 1970s and continued the trend that had levelled off between 1974 and 1994. Although the Internet environment can accommodate unlimited amounts of text, on-line users must scroll or click through screens to read, a process that discourages lengthiness. In other words, the technology did not itself push the news text in either direction. U.S. newspapers have tended to reproduce their print copy on line, and a comparison of printed and on-line versions of the stories in the study confirmed that there were very few changes. The study concluded that the trend toward longer stories had continued, even as news organizations ventured into cyberspace.

In newspapers, on television, on public radio, and on web sites, the news has grown longer during the past century. The trends found within the texts (visual, audio, and printed) contradict widespread assumptions among audiences, critics, and journalists about the first aspect under study, the length of news stories. The contradictions between common sense and observed textual products deserve further ideological analysis.

*Who*

A growing element in the media landscape of the past quarter century has been so-called people news. The trend began in magazines during the 1970s, spread to newspaper human-interest stories, and became the focus of prime-time shows on television in the 1990s. Time, Inc., founded *People Weekly* in March 1974, and the Family Circle group brought out its first edition of *Us* magazine in late 1976. Other media outlets followed suit, increasing the number of people feature coverage. By the 1990s, a growth area for U.S. television networks was the news magazine, a genre oriented to people stories (Committee, 1998). News can't happen without people, and the commonsense assumption is that daily journalism increased attention to people, going along with the rest of the media.

These widespread beliefs do not turn up in the texts journalists produce. Studies show that people have been disappearing from the front page for decades (Danielson & Lasorsa, 1997). References to people have fallen by more than a quarter since 1900. Here the same caveats apply, because pages have gotten smaller, and fewer stories now fit on them. To find out whether the numbers of persons declined within stories required further study. Several of my studies with colleagues, described earlier in this essay, also included a measurement of the *who*, counting the number of appearances of persons *per story* to avoid the problems of other research.

In our study covering a century of newspaper content (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997), we coded every individual and group in each story and indicated whether reporters merely named or also described each one in further detail. Coders noted what role each person played, such as actor or victim in the story, official directly or indirectly involved, expert observer, or bystander. We found that fewer named individuals appeared in newspaper stories in the course of the century. In 1894, the typical newspaper article referred by name to more than one person, but by 1994 only about one story out of four referred to an individual by name alone. As named individuals disappeared, groups became more prominent. Over the period, the number of groups went up by more than half, and when mentioning individuals, reporters more often used group affiliation as a form of identification. Fewer individuals stood alone.

In the roles they played in the news stories, individual actors or victims declined, while official sources increased. A century ago, outside experts almost never appeared in the news, and an official source turned up in only one of every four stories. Today, fully one fifth of the actors or victims have disappeared from the average story, replaced by experts and officials. Almost every story includes an official source, and outside experts appear in one fifth of the stories. The changes understate the magnitude of these changes because, at the same time, stories grew longer. From the perspective of the reader, the landscape of grey text had become depopulated beyond what

these average figures suggest. The results show why other studies have found that persons have been vanishing from the front pages.

Studies of other news outlets show similar trends. On television, experts multiplied. In the decade from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, the number of analysts, consultants, and the like almost tripled on the three national broadcast networks (Soley, 1992). The well-known sound-bite study, documenting the decline among politicians' speech on television from 1968 to 1988 (Hallin, 1992), also observed a large growth in what journalists call *wrap comments*, the concluding words that summarize the correspondent's expert conclusions. My own detailed study of journalist speech on National Public Radio also found more journalists acting as experts (Barnhurst, 2003a). NPR journalists began interviewing each other on the air, and the share of talk by all experts, journalists and others combined, grew from 15 to more than 25 percent of all speech from 1980 to 2000. Meanwhile, reporters shifted away from using as sources the citizens involved directly in the events being covered (Barnhurst, 2003b).

On the Internet, the trends for the *who* of news continued. My follow-up study that looked at web editions in 2001 found the patterns for U.S. newspapers continuing (Barnhurst, in press). Named individuals have all but vanished from the stories, and groups continued the upward trend that had paused briefly in the 1970s. Reporters described individuals according to group affiliation even more often. The number of officials kept growing, and more than two officials appeared in the average story (the internet data also include political stories). Officials and other sources now outnumber individual actors in the average story.

Once again, the impression – of more reporting on people and personalities – does not square with news content, which included fewer people overall but emphasized group affiliations, official status, and expertise. Such a contradiction suggests the operation of ideological processes in the background.

### *What*

Since the early twentieth century, the number of news outlets has grown. Although many newspapers have closed their doors, radio expanded its news reporting, and then television news came on the scene. The outlets for news grew with the advent of cable and satellite systems. The conveyances for news also multiplied over the century. Early in the century, telegraph lines expanded their reach, air flight made airmail possible, and transoceanic cables were laid and the first transcontinental telephone calls placed in North America. Later fax and teletype machines allowed instant document transmission. The reach of news organizations grew as well. By mid-century, the news-wire services had built networks that circled the planet. Although some newspaper and television network bureaus began to shrink late in the cen-

tury, the rise of the Internet and cellular telecommunications gave reporters access to ever more remote events.

The multiplying modes of communication (physical and virtual), the growing number of news conveyances, and the expanding reach of news gathering suggest a commonsense assumption: that the public today can get access to more events than ever before. When people believe a thing to be true, they tend to act on that belief, and it becomes true in its consequences. In the case of news events, public opinion polls report that more U.S. Americans, especially those attentive news, feel overloaded (Pew, 2000). There seems to be just too much going on. Critics argue that “people are intellectually and emotionally capable of absorbing only so much” (Rosenblum, 1981, 14). And some studies indicate that television news has become more episodic, that is, more focused on events (Iyengar, 1991).

Journalists call the flow of events a deluge, a glut, or a blizzard. Even a century ago, when Will Irwin, the famed muckraker for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *New York Sun*, wrote an assessment of U.S. journalism, a huge number of events entered the flow of news. “Every night,” he said, “there happen in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago a thousand events which fit the definition of news,” and then he added with great confidence, “information on most of them reaches the newspaper offices” (Irwin, 1969, 34). Fifty years later, the wire editor of the morning *Peoria Star* in Illinois reported receiving twelve thousand inches of wire copy during the week. A well-known study of news described his work as *gatekeeping* – what journalists do to manage the flow of occurrences (Reese & Ballinger, 2001).

Commonsense, critical observations and practitioner knowledge suggest that news has become more centred on events. The growth in technology and communication points to more events being covered in news reports, people say they feel overwhelmed, critics and some studies agree, and journalists say they are covering more. The texts that journalists produce, however, show the opposite. Fewer events get reported.

Studies that demonstrate the declining number of articles and items on the front page imply that fewer events get reported, but longer stories might themselves include more events. To find out whether each newspaper story combined multiple events, our one-hundred-year study counted them (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997). We found that the number of events per article declined significantly, regardless of which newspaper we examined. The two large newspapers in the study, the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune*, moved strongly away from including more than one event in a story, and even at the smaller *Portland Oregonian*, the trend was significant. Events in crime stories stayed about the same, but accident stories included fewer events, and the number within stories about employment declined sharply. No topic went against the trend. The general consistency for newspapers and topics indicates a pervasive change.

We then turned to television. One way to measure broadcast event coverage is simply by counting the number of stories in the average show. The

thirty-year analysis of ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news cited earlier found a consistent decline on all three networks, toward fewer and fewer items each year (Riffe & Budianto, 2001). “World News Tonight” on ABC, for example, included a dozen stories on average in 1970, but had fewer than eight in 2000. The negative trends were statistically very strong.

But once again, it seems possible that the number of stories might not give a complete picture of how many events they include. Another way to examine event coverage is to look inside each story to take stock of the elements of news reporting. In our twenty-year study of network newscasts (Steele & Barnhurst, 1996), we measured how often journalists gave information about current events and found that event coverage continued the trends found in print. On U.S. network news, the share of event coverage went down in journalist voice-overs, stand-ups, and other speech. In 1968, they stuck entirely to giving information about occurrences at least a third of the times they spoke on the air, but that share of event coverage declined over the next two decades. The data followed a saw tooth pattern, going up and down – the study looked at four-year intervals during national elections – but the negative trend was statistically significant. Television journalists became less involved in the basic informational task of communication, spending a greater share of their activity on other things, such as offering opinions, showing agreement, and voicing reactions.

On the radio, NPR news faced less market competition and fewer advertising pressures, but its programs also followed the trend (Barnhurst, 2003b). The 1980 election was the first when “Morning Edition” and “All Things Considered” were both on the air. Over the next few elections, NPR journalists managed to stick to informing the audience about events nearly half – or even more – of the times they spoke. But then a steep decline began, dropping the share of information to nearly a third. The averages went up and down for the next few elections, but the pattern was clear and significant. The archetypal activity for journalists – reporting what was happening – declined during the NPR political coverage. From 1980 to 2000, NPR journalists moved away from the denotative focus on events.

Again the texts of U.S. news reporting contradict the commonsense assumptions that the public, news workers, and critics share. Although ample evidence and argument seems to suggest a greater access to more news events, the texts journalists have produced during the last century have increasingly done just the opposite. Here again the contradiction suggests the need to explore what ideological processes might be at work.

Although I cannot go into detail about them here, the *‘where’* and *‘when’* of news followed the same pattern. Common sense suggests a growing emphasis on the local (even stories about the U.S. invasion of Iraq take a hometown angle) and a growing emphasis on the now (the immediate, latest events, especially on the internet). These assumptions also fail to pan out within the texts of reporting. My studies with colleagues cited earlier in this essay demonstrate that news stories during the past century have moved away from the

immediate surroundings and toward ever-larger domains. The reports have also shifted more and more away from the present, to speak in the future tense. A similar pattern, although much more pronounced, occurred in the *how* and *why* of news. A standing criticism since the Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947) assessment at mid-century has been the failure of news to put events in a context that gives them meaning. Journalists and critics continue to cite the lack of explanatory reporting, and they say that faster, briefer news limits their ability to fill that need. But measurements of news texts show dramatic increases in analysis, interpretation, and explanation.

Across the board, journalists, critics, the public, and even some researchers assume the five Ws of news to be one thing, but common sense in each case proves contrary to what journalists have done in the texts they produced. In the course of the century, news became *less* densely populated, *less* event-packed, *less* up-to-date, *less* localized, and *much less* brief. The contradiction is stark and runs deep, with strong statistical significance across news media and news topics.

### Ideology in Context

Some scholars consider news a natural response to biological needs, springing from the urge within the human organism to survive by keeping the world under surveillance (Shoemaker, 1996). Except in the glacial sense of evolutionary change, the natural science conception considers the news appetite something beyond history. In this view, the news instinct may require neuropsychological rather than sociological study and cannot be ideological. The measurements my colleagues and I have taken indicate otherwise. Whatever its relation to the organism, news is a product of social life which changes through practice. If not, its core definition would have remained unchanged, but my studies with colleagues have shown the opposite. Historical studies have found similar long-term changes in what news has meant since the colonial era in U.S. history (Schudson, 1982; Barnhurst & Nerone 2001). The direction of change that the studies summarized here reveal is away from the places and sources of current events. Instead of what dictionaries define as journalistic – the “direct presentation of facts or description of events without an attempt at interpretation,” to quote Merriam-Webster – news today has become primarily a location of interpretation, a place where journalists explain *and offer opinions about* events. News is a product of human meaning making, and journalists have taken the manufacture of social meaning as their primary task.

But to be ideological – a set of shared ideas that organize group life – news must also invoke, justify, and guide power. Journalists do not hold public office and do not have executive power within political institutions. They do not have the force of state apparatuses over life and death, but they do work through hegemonic means. They can highlight events and issues, bringing them to the

attention of legislators, courts, and executives as well as the public. Stuart Hall and his colleagues found that the “media define for the majority of the population *what* significant events are taking place” (Hall *et al.* 1978, p. 57). Journalists hold an advisory and adjunct power, but it is power nonetheless. When news reports interpret war as a reasonable alternative, for example, the impact of such ideas can contribute to state action that destroys lives. Journalists and critics began documenting such cases after World War I (e.g., Lippmann & Merz, 1920), and during the last three decades John Hartley (1996) others in cultural studies have analysed how news constructs public priorities. Journalists also exert control within their own institutions, as editors and managers, and within their profession and their industry.

To say journalists hold power and exert influence does not make their productive activities – the manufacture of news – ideological. The way they live out the definition of news must also direct the operation of that power. In the case of news during the twentieth century, the changes in their practices, as registered in the news texts they produced, have in most cases shifted attention away from politicians and citizens and toward journalists. By redirecting attention, journalists exercise their advisory and highlighting influence to change the balance of power. Such shifts clearly move news into the realm of ideological processes.

The next question, then, is which definition of ideology holds in the case of journalism. A sociological description of news ideas would outline journalistic notions of power and show how the ideas guide news workers as a social group, in their relations among themselves and with others such as politicians and audiences. One would expect that such a description would map fairly faithfully onto the ground of common sense, if it had the neutral qualities the broader definition of ideology requires. In this instance, news work from day to day, as our studies measured in their output, reveals processes that contradict commonsense beliefs. Those processes are not only ideological, but they fall within the narrow (and negative) definition of ideology. It is the presence of contradictions between the ideas surrounding power and the ideas held as common sense that define the boundary between the two definitions of ideology. The task in light of those discrepancies is to critique the hidden operations that sustain power.

The distortions are readily apparent. Commonsense beliefs in shorter news, in a greater focus on people, in more access to more events, and so forth suggest a closer tie between audience members and the persons involved in news events. That is not the direction news texts have taken. Furthermore, journalists, in the commonsense picture, are at the mercy of events and serve as mere go-betweens in a transaction connecting citizens with social and political actors. That is not where news texts have gone. In commonsense belief, the prime movers driving news include impersonal market forces, such as the competition for news scoops and audience attention, and impersonal technological developments. These forces have not driven news in the commonsense direction, toward briefer, person-centred, more-replete reports.

Each of the contradictions relies on at least some factual basis. A series of technical changes *has* buffeted journalists: metal to photo to digital typesetting and printing for newspaper journalists, film to video to digital image processes for television journalists, and tape to digital processes for radio journalists. Internet journalists surf a constant wave of technical innovations. In the experience of news workers, pressures from competitors include macro – those new outlets, faster conveyances, and wider networks for journalism – and micro sources, such as the individual reporters who cover the same beat. Competition is a process in which journalists construct a narrative. Each competitor makes moves that the news institution or industry must counter, and journalists experience those moves as a series of feints, bobs, pot-shots, and knock-outs. The actions may exist in fact, but they emerge as journalists frame their work as a competition. The narratives of competition and technologies not only guide but also explain and justify the craft of news work. Markets and innovations that buffet journalists also supply a ready rationalization, because such stresses, journalists argue, inevitably prevent calculated and self-interested activity. Concrete change in technology and market conditions thus absolves journalists from responsibility for making whatever the changes occurred in the text of news.

A continued belief in the commonsense picture has other consequences. First, it unifies the audience with the journalist, both of whom confront similar changes in work and everyday life. In the face of an information deluge, the journalist proposes to overwhelmed viewers and readers a spurious identification. We are just like you, the journalist implies. Our common enemy is impersonal: markets and technological changes. These forces seem natural and universal, at least in the industrialized world. The assertion denigrates any outsiders who have no access to technology and the market, excluding them as the Other while universalising the commercial subject. The belief then rationalizes whatever journalists do as the immediate, unintentional response to indifferent, intractable forces. The product is nobody's fault (except, perhaps, for the audience and its insatiable hunger for fast news served with plenty of spice). Finally, the commonsense picture obscures the textual practices that do just the opposite of what the picture holds to be the case. These devices – unification and spurious identification, naturalization and universalization, denigration and exclusion, rationalization and mystification – are classic ideological moves (Eagleton, 1991).

On their face, the unwarranted beliefs about the world belong to the epistemic order of falsehood (Eagleton, 1991). All sorts of individuals participate, and even scholars accept the picture of fast-paced, eventful, person-laden news, although that is not what U.S. journalism produces anymore. The beliefs do not involve genetic falsehood, because their origins in an earlier, factual journalism were not necessarily illegitimate. Event-centred news, in which journalists sought to find occurrences happening to nearby persons and tell above all a lively story, did not exist independent of partisan news at the end of the nineteenth century, but it was an ideal that the

Progressive Movement, among others, proposed and that journalists followed, more or less, to judge from the numbers and contents of stories in *fin de siècle* newspapers.

The falsehood also belongs to the functional order, because it distributes the benefits and consequences of those beliefs unjustly among groups. Scholars have amply demonstrated that politicians and political institutions have lost ground and attention in the press (Patterson, 1993), and audience members have weaker connections to news (as circulation and audience ratings figures show), while receiving the blame for getting the news they deserve. As the changes in news took place, journalists themselves took control, talking or writing longer. Even as they closed down space for others to speak, my studies show that they focused on their own judgments and opinions. Interpretation replaced denotative news of people and events. The commonsense beliefs, then, are an “interested fiction” that excuses journalists and presents an honourable account of their condition (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 196), while serving their specific interests. Although they form a “body of specialized agents” (Ibid: 184), journalists do not themselves gain wealth in the classic sense of ideological influences on the means of production. In advancing their interests, they help constitute wealth for corporate owners who control capital, the institutional equipment and mechanisms to function in their field and appropriate profits. Through the action of journalists as agents, the system reinforces existing power as a matter of course. In other words, although journalists promote their own interests through their symbolic activity, the falsehoods involved arise more from external conditions than from conscious dissimulation.

Journalism has, in the wider historical context, actively exercised at times – and at other times recoiled from – its power. After World War I, critics began to identify a tendency away from reporting events in newspapers. In 1920, *The Brass Check*, Upton Sinclair’s best-selling attack in the press, called the newspaper a mental “munitions factory” that was building the “bombs and gas-shells” used to impose ideas on and instil fear among the people (Sinclair 1936, 412). The progressive solution he proposed was a different kind of newspaper, not “a journal of opinion, but a record of events pure and simple” (quoted in Goldstein, 1989, 157, from a final section of Sinclair, 1920, that was omitted from subsequent editions). The following year, Walter Lippmann, who would later become the dean of intellectual columnists, and Charles Merz, who eventually left the *New York World* to become editorial page editor of the *New York Times*, published “A Test of News,” in *The New Republic*. Their article examined three years of the *Times* – more than a thousand newspapers – for coverage of the Russian Revolution, documenting the handling of copy and other text. The two young journalists called the paper’s coverage “nothing short of a disaster” (Lippmann & Merz, 1920, p. 3). In its news columns, the *Times* had reported events that never happened. And the stories and accompanying headlines and captions also emphasized unsupported (and, as it turned out, unsupportable) interpretations. How, the

journalists asked, did such systematic misrepresentations occur in the *Times*? Driven by the wish for an outcome favourable to the Allies in World War I, the *Times* published not news of actual occurrences but “semi-editorial news dispatches” based on “what men wanted to see,” wrote Lippmann and Merz. They concluded that “a great people in a supreme crisis could not secure the minimum of necessary information on a supremely important event” (Ibid: 2). In the decades following these critiques, the number of events covered in the average report appearing in the *New York Times* and other newspapers increased slightly, but then fell after 1934.

During the downturn, fear of propaganda gave way to another urgent concern: that giving bare-bones information about occurrences could itself become misleading. This notion grew in reaction to the Great Depression and World War II, pioneered oddly enough by the wire services, first United Press and then the Associated Press (Mott, 1952). The crisis that finally solidified thinking against event-centred news was the McCarthy hearings. When Senator Joseph R. McCarthy mounted his virulent attacks in early 1950, accusing the Truman Administration of harbouring Communists in the State Department, the press simply reported who said what. After the Republican Party won the 1952 election and took control of the Senate, McCarthy became committee chair and expanded his attacks, going after defence industries, universities, and the broadcasters themselves. ABC Television came into national prominence by airing the hearings about supposed Communist infiltration of the U.S. Army, riveting national attention with the live proceedings.

But the events could not really speak for themselves. Every name named exacted a human cost, as McCarthy dragged innocent people into the public eye, and his baseless accusations harmed their relationships and destroyed their livelihoods. Under the existing definition of news, the front pages could report a rebuttal to Senator McCarthy only when another *usable occurrence* took place. It happened in front of the camera on June 9, 1954, when Special Counsel for the Army Joseph N. Welch, in his now-famous testimony before the committee, challenged McCarthy’s needless defamation of a young lawyer. “Until this moment, Senator, I think I never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness,” he said, and then, after further exchanges, concluded, “Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator. You have done enough. Have you no sense of decency sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?” (Red Scare, 1998, 149–50).

Prominent broadcasters took up a spirited critique of news in light of the McCarthy hearings. Eric Sevareid, who had started at CBS News as one of Edward R. Murrow’s “boys” covering World War II, observed that “the warp and woof of what the papers print and the broadcasters voice – our flat, one-dimensional handling of the news, have given the lie the same prominence and impact that truth is given” (Casey, 1963, 84). Elmer Davis, who left reporting for the *New York Times* to become a commentator on CBS Radio, in a speech to the Newspaper Guild criticized “this kind of dead-pan reporting – So-and-so said it, and if he is lying in his teeth it is not my business to say

so" (Ibid: 62). He proposed that journalists instead provide "a mixture of news and interpretation" to "illuminate and explain the news for the customer" (Ibid: 63).

The interpretative approach to news has held sway since then, so that stories ran ever longer, included fewer persons but more officials and experts, and gave more of the journalist's judgments about an event. Rick Kaplan, who started out as a copy boy in Chicago and rose to become president of CNN News, says journalists now offer knowledge, not just events. "Ted Koppel is one of the smartest people I've ever met," he says. "I *want* his knowledge. This is a respected, trusted colleague, and he knows what he's talking about" (Kaplan 2001, n.p.). Kaplan produced national programs with Koppel, as well as with Walter Cronkite and Peter Jennings, among others, but he felt very uncomfortable with being interviewed for publication (although he did grant permission). His comments typify the responses from other journalists I interviewed. News has become a body of interpretation about a small number of events, which takes its authority more from the journalists themselves than from their sources or their access to occurrences.

### Contradictory Conditions

The conditions of news production encourage Kaplan's assessment of journalistic authority. Individual journalists experience contradictions within their work lives. On one hand, the work in corporations, many of them very large conglomerates, reduces journalists to piece-workers, under pressure to manufacture a stream of product units or stories. Young journalists start out labouring long hours in unpleasant conditions, requiring constant travel and encounters with persons more powerful and sometimes less than cooperative. If they succeed in getting insider knowledge, their stories may endanger relationships with the sources they depend on. They work for unpredictable supervisors, move frequently (especially those in broadcasting) to unfamiliar cities, and wash out of news-work in large numbers, going on to take other employment. A notable quality even among the elite journalists I interviewed was their skittishness about what their bosses, present and future, might think. They believe in the power of the published word. In short, working journalists face job insecurity and instability and do repetitive, high-speed, risky work on tight deadlines. These conditions encourage them to think of their output as short and event-centred.

On the other hand, they are knowledge-workers, who create original symbolic output. In his 1975 essay, "Writing News and Telling Stories," historian Robert Darnton concluded that reporters "bring more to the events they cover than they take away from them" (1975, 192). Their output is in that sense literary. As knowledge workers, journalists aspire to or have acquired elite status. Their educational levels have increased, so that the re-

quirement for entry went from little or no education a century ago to a college (and sometimes a graduate) degree today. Sociologists have confirmed that, as a group, journalists occupy a higher economic and cultural standing than any mere piece-worker (Gans, 1979). Their claim to professional rank institutes a different set of material relations. Within corporations, journalists as knowledge-workers help accumulate symbolic capital. They deal in the currency of public awareness, making their sources notable or notorious, and each article they write gives a gift of exposure, at the same time amassing symbolic credit, which is “a sort of advance” against “material and symbolic *guarantees*” of other institutions and powers – an arrangement between social actors and media institutions as holders of a “symbolic patrimony” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 181).

These conditions encourage journalists to produce the kind of copy found in our studies. They write longer stories because longer stories win immediate praise and garner prizes. They focus their attention on fewer people because the very powerful among elites and the most unusual among non-elites win space on the front page in top stories. They concentrate on fewer events, chasing the main story of the day to find a unique angle because a scoop or exclusive about the big news event makes them stand out from the pack. They make assertions about the future because prescient statements enhance their standing among peers. They avoid events at the level of the street address because authority flows to those who talk about larger domains. And they infuse their stories with their own opinions because individual judgments mark events as their own and lend events the quality of branding so valuable in a corporate setting. Given the material conditions of knowledge-work, these outcomes seem predictable.

Journalists, however, face both sets of material conditions at once. Each set is incompatible with the other, and the contradictions between the two complicate journalists’ lives. Piecework is exhausting, knowledge-work exhilarating, and news workers experience both. Under stress, they show hypersensitivity to any slight (Bourdieu, 1977). As a result of the contradictions, they identify with the person-on-the-street, and they share common but counter-factual beliefs about news. Their commonsense assumptions about news may sometimes approach a kind false consciousness. The contradictions also help explain why the oppressed (journalists as piece-workers) may participate in their own subjugation. They simply don’t believe they are doing what they do. When presented with the charts and data showing how the content of their texts has changed, the journalists I interviewed expressed scepticism. It looked like statistical fakery to them.

On the positive side, journalists project a vision of Utopia. In it, they do public service when acting as go-between for government and citizens. This Fourth Estate vision sees its mission as explanatory, in that is, giving a clear and simple account of the complexity of government, economics, and society in the industrialized nation. Politicians benefit by having watchdogs that prevent incursions of falsehood onto public truth – even those caught and

exposed provide an example of what to avoid. Citizens benefit, as they require less of their busy lives not only to sort out the complexity of political and other aspects of life, but also to make rational choices in the voting booth and elsewhere. The positive vision of the new, long journalism builds social solidarity among all parties to the social contract. The one check or balance journalists see as necessary to their role is their own honesty and professional commitment. As befits knowledge work, journalists are idealistic about their prospects and modest about their own power in this vision of news.

The conditions differ for a researcher studying news. Reporters have said bluntly to me that I have no business writing about news because I've never been a journalist. I explain to them that I'm a member of the audience, not the press corps. I love newspapers and hope for their success, and I can't go a day without watching a newscast, if only to find out the weather report. As an audience member, I have the unusual privilege of asking questions about news and having the resources to pursue some answers. My own political agenda has become less sure along the way. I started out confident that the new long journalism was entirely harmful, but close work with the texts of news has moderated my view. The long news is different, but the results of such formal changes are not entirely predictable. In newspapers, the longer stories driven by ideas rather than events probably discourage reading, and they may have lost a generation of young audience members. In television, the longer stories with a greater variety of visual images and faster pacing probably encourage viewing, although they may also discourage critical thinking (Graber, 1990). On the radio, every aspect of NPR news seems preferable to what commercial stations – even the all-news variety – serve up, but I have found my patience wearing thin as journalists talk more and more among themselves. Recent innovations have amounted to alliances in which NPR reporters team up with another medium and present their cross-talk as news (as in the new midday program involving the on-line magazine *Slate.com*). The internet, so far, has had little net effect on newspaper content but has damaged the presentation of television news, especially on cable, where clutter and confusion prevail. The formal characteristics of news can serve almost any political agenda. Longer, larger formats (for books, images, and other cultural productions) in Western culture, despite their consistent association with authority since the early modern era, need not retain that affiliation. Conditions of production reiterate those older definitions, in a cycle that has proved difficult to break.

## Consequences & Outcomes

Forms of news, however, do track with power (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). My project shows *how* journalists used news form to increase (whether consciously or not) their control over the selection, definition, discussion, and analysis of issues in the public airwaves and in the press, the principal ven-

ues for citizens to seek information. As the unannounced project of new long journalism advanced, news became more uniform, offering a wider range of brand options but fewer substantial differences between outlets or venues. While attempting to remain honest, and, to the degree possible, neutral, my description of the changes cannot ignore the injustices they permit. There is no risk of relativism here: politicians and citizens have lost space, time, and attention in the news. My analysis is also anchored in history and avoids using formal categories as markers with unchanging ideological alignments. The limits of measuring news text do not presume access to an external reality – as against the risks of immanence and hubris. Instead, our studies demonstrate the articulation of form with ideology, “which binds the inner discourse” of news “to the ideological universe of the society” (Hall, 1981, p. 234).

Stuart Hall has called news, that is, its operational practices or news values, “one of the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society” (Ibid.). Journalists acquire a nose for news, but they cannot describe its smell. News seems to happen to them, “as if events select themselves,” says Hall. “We appear to be dealing, then, with a ‘deep structure’ whose function as a selective device is un-transparent even to those who professionally most know how to operate it” (Ibid.). My project does, I hope, open the ideology of news to observation. Ideology advances the power of some groups (such as journalists) in support of power elites (who may

My project is also an intervention with a few expected outcomes. One tool for disarming ideological processes is exposure. There are many examples of recent work that exposes the ideological workings of news. For example, in a 1920s scandal, New York socialite Leonard Rinelandier sued to annul his marriage to Alice Beatrice Jones, a working-class girl from New Rochelle (Ardizzone & Lewis, 2001). The case turned on the question: Did Leonard know Alice’s race? At the trial, reporters scrutinized Alice and called her *fair* or *slightly tanned* or *dusky* or *ebony*, depending on who seemed likely to win. At one point Alice had to disrobe partially before the court (baring her breasts, back, and legs) to prove that Leonard must have known that she wasn’t white. Journalists along the way constructed ‘race’ to fit their idea of what would happen. Scholars continue to examine race as a category in news, to show that reporters are active agents in its construction. The same is true of other aspects of news.

Sometimes journalists observe the ideological dimension of news-work. In New York during the mid-twentieth century, Nora Ephron, then a young reporter for the *New York Post*, recalls standing outside, waiting and waiting. And then, when the *New York Times* reporters arrived, the activity would begin, and she would stand there wondering, “How do they always know when an event will really start?” (Ephron 2001, n.p.). One unexpected result of my research has been an epiphany for some of the journalists I interviewed, who came to recognize the constructedness of news. A *New York Times* staffer during the reign of the first George Bush recalls the Washington bureau re-

ceiving advance warning that the Gulf Conflict was about to begin. The tipster said, "Don't leave for dinner yet," and they stayed, scooping the competition and reconfirming the power of the *Times*.

Despite the limits to what scholars can do in an active struggle against deception, one way to counterbalance the ideological drift of journalism might be to measure it, document it, and make it public. Current measurements of news – circulation and ratings – are entirely in the service of advertising. No ratings system exists for news content. If media executives had to face data showing they were covering fewer events, fewer people, and fewer nearby places, the numbers might get them thinking. These formal markers might assert wider authority for a news organization and its staff. They might appeal more to upscale audiences that attract more advertisers and generate more revenue. Or they might distance the general public from events and from their hometown newspaper or news broadcast, resulting in shrinking audiences, business failures, and the silencing of a variety of voices, journalists among them. As it stands, few seem to recognize what is happening, least of all the public. The power of news will not go away, but perhaps commonsense understanding might catch up with what journalists actually do in practice as they manufacture news.

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