

## NEWS AND PUBLICITY

When the first snow flutters down onto the roofs and streets of London, Moscow or Zürich, it is “news”—although the same thing happens about the same time every year. The fact that this (usually very transitory) white splendour is news is demonstrated by the fact that the editors of the local papers in these three cities inform their respective readers of it. The readers—of those of them who live in the area—will have usually already noticed the meteorological event for themselves. Those who live elsewhere, and who read the report and look at the pictures of it, will of course not have noticed the fact for themselves. The two groups of readers will pay a very different degree of attention to the news-item, depending on the importance it has for them. But if this first snow affects international air traffic, due to the closing down of one or other airport in the three cities, then it becomes, through its effects, a piece of “news” for the travel experts, and perhaps even the economic experts, of the mass media, and it is accorded national or even international publicity.

Translated by Nicolas Slater.

1. THE DIMENSIONS OF JOURNALISTIC NEWS

This everyday example, though banal, already allows us to make some basic statements about the relation between news and publicity. At the same time it demonstrates that "journalistic news"—news in relation to the mass media—is the result of multidimensional and complex constellations of elements. The principal elements on which these constellations are founded, and the dimensions into which the phenomenon penetrates, must therefore be recognized and described before proceeding further.

The idea of "news," one may say in the most general terms, is clearly connected with the recognition that an event is important. This means that anything one could conceive of can be news, from the first snow or a famous statesman's gall-bladder operation through the appearance of a new novel by an avant-garde writer to tough peace talks lasting for months on end. The sphere of news is thus certainly not limited to what is actually new, to what is abnormal, to things happening for the first time or to things that are just beginning.

On the other hand, the set of people that feel such events to be news—or at least describe them as such—varies tremendously. The snowed-up Londoner, Moscovite or Zurichier is far more immediately affected by this quirk of the weather than the people who merely read or hear about it. And even among these, there will be some who have booked a flight to one or other of the cities and who will be much more interested in the news than all those between whose existence and this distant event there is no visible connection. And finally, the journalists of the various telecommunications agencies are presented by this early snow-fall with the decision whether they should mention it in their reports, thus commending it to the attention of their public, and if so, how.

The sphere of problems of news and publicity is thus described in the first instance by a constellation of three quantities. Situations (usually events); individual and collective fields of experience and states of consciousness; and mass media, which inform various sections of the public about these situations by means of symbols: these three form the peculiar complex, so particularly characteristic of modern societies and so important for them,

which we will here attempt to analyse. Naturally, these three quantities (which are themselves variable) undergo an endless variety of combinations in the course of history; but these combinations can still be characterized, though this can only be done if certain elementary distinctions have first been drawn and certain basic relationships recognized.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. *The Mass Medium*

News, as one may conclude from what has already been said, can be an immediate or a dependent quantity. The politician mentioned above, for example, finds his gall-bladder a matter of news value for himself quite irrespective of any contribution from the mass media, since it prevents him from fulfilling his political function and occupies his consciousness. On the other hand, the nation that knows that it depends on his actions will probably only realize the relevance of this illness for itself through the mass media, particularly if it causes a fall in share prices and the statesman's deputy does not enjoy much confidence.

The mass media here determine both the fact and the manner of the publication of a piece of news, and this in many ways. In a technical sense, they are the most important vehicle in

<sup>1</sup> In the science of journalism, news is regarded as a constituent element of journalism; but the field of relations between news, journalism and society has hardly ever been comprehensively treated. This is connected with the fact that in recent times the concept of "news" has usually been reduced to its social-psychological dimension. This is not sufficient for a definition of the social importance of journalistic news, particularly as the findings of research on the public have so far produced results that are insufficiently clear-cut.

The following works, among others, reflect a number of different positions with regard to the theory of journalistic news: Roger Clausse, *Les nouvelles. Synthèse critique*, Brussels 1963, p. 181 f.; Otto Groth, *Die unerkannte Kultur-macht. Grundlegung der Zeitungswissenschaft*, Berlin 1960, vol. 1, p. 170f.; Walter Hagemann and Henk Prakke, *Grundzüge der Publizistik*, Münster (Westf.) 1966, p. 30f.; Henk Prakke, *Kommunikation der Gesellschaft*, Münster (Westf.) 1968, p. 121 f.; Michael Schmolke, "Thesen zum Aktualitätsbegriff," in *Publizistik im Dialog. Festgabe für Henk Prakke*, ed. Winfried B. Lerg, Michael Schmolke & Gerhard E. Stoll, Assen 1965, p. 119f.; Urbain de Volder, *Soziologie der Zeitung*, Stuttgart 1959, p. 56f. The Anglo-Saxon literature contributes little to the theory.

In the study that follows, it is intended to produce a synthesis of these approaches, in order to draw conclusions of a macro-sociological nature. For this purpose, the theme will be approached on two levels: (1) a phenomenological and systematic one, and (2) a historical and typological one.

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modern society, broadcasting news beyond the sphere in which it is directly experienced. The optimal imaginable state of this technical service would be achieved if every event of any importance at all was instantly retailed throughout the world to all those who might be interested in it. The technical conquest of distances in space and time must be preceded by a much more problematical achievement in the field of publicity—that of classifying facts. For it is the journalist's task to choose, from the events that come to his knowledge, those that may be of significance for his public; and furthermore to assign those events intended for publication a certain status in his product. This task of classification is a double one: the mass-communicator must first of all recognize the likely news-value, the possible importance of a particular event for his public, and then he must make use of suitable symbols, corresponding to its degree of importance, in handling it.

The more complex and involved the sociocultural event is, the more individuals and groups involved in it depend on outside sources of information and the less they can test these on the basis of their own experience and understanding—the more arbitrarily can the mass-communicator act in his choice of news. The gamut of possibilities open to the journalist ranges from the simple hoax through the extended serial feature on the private lives of important people to the sensational reporting of political trifles for the benefit of a ruling power-élite. Furthermore, it is largely up to the journalist to decide whether he will handle a particular item as a piece of information or entertainment, whether he will comment on it, or whether he will cover it in the culture section. Since the public expects different things from each of these different types of product and modes of presentation, the mass-communicator can find here, too, a means of giving a piece of news the status he wishes it to have.

Besides this, journalists of course often pick up issues of great weight and public interest and canalize public interest in the same direction to which its attention already seems to have committed it. For instance, if a country (be it Israel or Czechoslovakia) has earned general sympathy through acts of military or political self-assertion, the mass media are usually not slow to feature it for its cultural individuality, its national products or as a holiday

paradise. And here one must not forget that the telecommunications media are constantly picking out and using certain acoustic or optical symbols in preference to others, and thus conferring more or less long-lasting news value on particular turns of speech, such as slogans, or particular types of picture. The wastage in this sort of technique is of course considerable; and the scope that is open to the journalist, his range of choice of subjects for such intensive cover, depends on the nature of the controls governing him and his institutions. The nature of the institutions, the democratic or undemocratic control of mass communications in each political system, delimits the autonomy of the mass-communicators and also their possibilities of intensive cover.

There is one last respect—a dialectical one—in which the telecommunications media play their part in the creation of news. In societies which entrust the press, the cinema, radio and television with the function of watching over the world around them, this surrounding world regularly reckons with the existence of mass media and organizes and styles its events with the express aim of arousing the attention of the mass-communicators and achieving high status in their products. The parades put on by military authorities are as relevant here as are the shows on up-to-date themes put on by department stores. Successful politicians, again, are usually real virtuosos in news-making: they involve themselves in momentous broadcasts or themselves give rise to such broadcasts, e.g. by making spectacular disclosures. The very existence of mass media creates news. The mass media, since they are institutions that continually classify, transmit and provoke a large number of items of news, obviously play a large and far-reaching part in socio-cultural life, being very largely responsible for deciding which events in it deserve what kind of collective attention.

## *2. The Situation*

Obviously, however, their decision as to what to publish does not depend entirely on their personal inclination; it also depends on the facts. Journalistic news, we have said, is the result of the interaction of three quantities, and we must now add that the

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three are interdependent. The event itself consequently has characteristics which enable it to give rise to news, or at least contribute to news. This news-value of the object, as one might term it, is principally measured:

by the direct effect of the event—i.e. by the number of people who are in some way (without any contribution from the mass media) involved in it, or by the objective degree of urgency with which it affects them;

by the course it takes, i.e. by its temporal structure or its quality as an intensive, appellative, or spectacular form;

and by its position among the totality of other pieces of news in competition with it.

A high degree of news-value of the object, e.g. severe regional unrest or a sudden deterioration in the country's fortunes in war, usually therefore finds some sort of expression in the mass media, even if those in totalitarian control of the national system of mass communications would far rather suppress it. The effects of such events are so far-reaching and so intense that the subservient organs of communication must intercept them somehow, so as not simply to leave them for the informal channels of communication, and for rumour in particular. On the other hand, the radical transformation of a scientific theory will not be noticed very much or very fast in the mass media, even if it revolutionizes its particular discipline and even if its application will clearly affect the fate of many people very deeply; because the course taken by the event is such as to restrict radically the circle of those who are able and willing to take it in. Moreover it has too little of the quality of abnormality that so often characterizes items of news.

The competitive position of an event affects its news value to the extent that, as is well known, more recent news displaces that of earlier date, either superimposing itself upon it, or—in the case of a single chain of events—destroying it. Altogether, competitive relationships play a dominant role in the total constellation that gives rise to journalistic news. Since both the consciousness of the audience and the volume that the media can produce are limited in principle, while every conceivable fact can be allowed to have importance, news arises and works in a constant state of competition.

On the other hand, a piece of news can obviously give rise to more news, since the actual event is multidimensional and takes place in a framework of relations with other things. For instance, a school scandal may suddenly turn examination arrangements, the care of pupils, teachers' salaries, and indeed the whole cultural policy of the state, into urgent social issues. Or the presence in the news of an all-powerful Chinese statesman who is invariably shown dressed in a uniform without any decorations may unexpectedly cause revolutionary innovations in the much more innocent sphere of European fashion, in the form of the "Mao look"—which itself then attracted a good deal of attention.

Continued, long-term developments therefore have much less chance, because of their temporal structure, of being regarded as news by the journalists, than do discontinuities and climaxes, what one might call the local condensations of sociocultural processes. The creative struggles of the avant-garde writer alluded to above will therefore only appear as news in the shape of the result—the publication of his book or its sales success.

Regularly recurring events, on the other hand—such as the spring fashions, the prime minister's New Year address, parliamentary sittings or the Olympic games—have a fairly regular place in the mass media's news services. This is particularly true if they are institutionalized events, phenomena under public control and therefore to a certain extent relevant to everyone; and it is true above all because the news feature relating to these events can be planned in advance. But this does mean that their in many ways ritual and ceremonial nature makes them take second place to unpredictable and spontaneous happenings. The journalists try to overcome this disadvantage by overstressing the ephemeral differences between one such recurrent event and its predecessor.

This already gives one an idea of what kind of course in time is most likely to put an event in a favourable position as compared with other items of news. The more dramatic its structure, the more spectacular an impression it makes, and the more possibilities of identification it contains, the more attention it commands on the part of a large section of the public, and also on the part of the mass-communicators, who are concerned with

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watching over the world around them and providing rapid satisfaction for the needs of the public in this sphere. It is clear here that the course taken by an event is particularly important in the case of indirect news; with direct or immediate news, the degree of its effect is the deciding factor in its newsworthiness. Drought and famine, for instance, generally take a course that is more or less epic and which therefore is less striking for the distant public that hears about it from one or other medium than, say, the disorderly private life of a star of the entertainment world, whose drama and luxury provide immediate vicarious satisfaction. The tragedies that wear down their victims unobtrusively, and which are of disastrously long-lasting significance for those who gradually succumb to them, usually shrivel up into a mere fifth act by the time they reach the mass media. The reason is precisely that the concordance between the form of the course that the events take, the form in which the mass media produce and present them, and the form in which the widely scattered public experience them, is too strong for the actual degree of effect of these events to be able to break through.

### *3. The Public*

In the third place, the public also plays a part in the genesis of news, according to its various situation and interests. Everything it feels to be important is news for it: news of relevance to the public, and thus a constellation of consciousness. Everything that interrupts or disrupts the everyday course of events, the sphere of things that are self-evident, must therefore arouse a certain amount of interest on its part. This is demonstrated clearly enough by the well-known fact that a single breakdown in the public services, for example in the electricity supply, makes infinitely more headlines and arouses infinitely more indignation than the trouble-free years of service aroused enthusiasm on the part of journalists or contentment on the part of the public. That which is objectively improbable has a good chance of becoming journalistic news; and in the same way, so does that which is subjectively unexpected. As a general rule one could go on to say that the more numerous and intimate are the contacts between an event and the life of the recipients—whether it be in the



temporal, spatial or spiritual sphere—the more strongly the recipients feel it to be news.

But not every experience of news on the part of an individual or a group can serve as the basis of journalistic news. Indeed, the news at the subject level (as one might term it) has first to fulfil a number of conditions before it acquires journalistic relevance. A declaration of love by one person to another, for instance, is important in the first place because it dramatizes their mutual personal relationship, in a happy or a critical way; furthermore, it arouses a certain amount of attention among their friends and acquaintances; but it scarcely goes beyond the bounds of private interest, except perhaps for its legal consequences if any. But if one of the two lovers belongs to an ostracized minority, or is a prominent personality, then the number of people interested increases by leaps and bounds, because the event now no longer belongs to the sphere of common and natural human experience, but to the sphere of sociocultural negotiations. This is clearly within the realm of collective interest and of the social symbols known as publicity<sup>2</sup>; and in this respect the *mésalliance* alluded to above represents an infringement of social norms, and the marriage of the prominent personality is at least a more-than-private act of display, in which human symbols, be they politicians or playboys, demonstrate a particular way of life.

The conditions in which a piece of news at the subject level ceases to exist only in the awareness of small or insignificant groups of people, and occupies the awareness of large or important groups—ceases, in fact, to be a private piece of news and becomes a public one—are extraordinarily many and varied, just as are the numbers of different life situations that a large society gives rise to, and the numbers of common interests, and conceptions of what is important, that are shared by its members. One can see, too, that there can be a number of different publics in one and the same society, and furthermore that these publics are each in a process of change: there is one public consisting of atomic physicists, one of greengrocers, one of Paris, one of Catholics, one of Great Britain, one of the whole world. In each

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Neuwied 1962.

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case they constitute a common mode of orientation, in which certain symbols are understood in the same way by everyone and certain states of affairs are given a similar meaning, and possibly a similar degree of urgency. To some extent these different publics are arranged in a hierarchical manner, and to some extent they merely exist side by side; in any case they constitute the sphere in which a communication—which is always something *published*, made public—is played out.

As far as the question of communication is concerned, then, the difference between private and public is wholly relative—as is shown, incidentally, by the very different way that different mass media interpret the terms, and also by the existence of local, regional, national and international mass media. The fact that a particular telecommunications medium has seized on a piece of private news does not by any means signify that it has become public news, however. There has to be a public that is both able to take it in and interested—at least in principle—in doing so. Different people are led to expect similar pieces of news, or to react in a similar way to the news they hear, on the basis of a shared life-situation, and this may be brought about by the locality they are in, their social stratum, their job, or by e.g. a war (or any one of a large number of phenomena that influence their situation). Thus the potential public for a piece of news is always predisposed to receive it. Indeed, in a way its state of mind already contains news in a latent state, and this state of expectancy may exert a real kind of pressure on the mass-communicator to bring out this latent news, as soon and as fully as possible, in his product.

This “pressure of expectation” may arise from the fact that the public has itself experienced some news event and now desires further information about it in the mass media. But often it is the result of previous indirect news, of which the public can never have enough. The journalistic technique of personalizing items of news is particularly suitable here, for producing this sort of fixation of conscious attention—whether it is on a man with a transplanted heart, an empress who has lost her post, or a tornado with a girl’s name.

In this respect in particular, and also in more general sense, it is clear that the shocking, surprising or new element (which

is usually regarded as one of the principal features of news) only fulfils itself conditionally, because a double process of stereotyping only allows it to come into partial existence. The sharing of life-situations and life-experiences means that not only people's expectations in respect of news, but also their modes of perception and reception are similar. In order for a happening to be felt, expected and experienced as news, therefore, it must correspond to these largely group-specific ways of spiritually coming to terms with the world. In other words, every public only expects and receives news to a limited extent, which is the extent to which the stereotyped nature of its consciousness allows it to.<sup>3</sup>

The mass-communicator for his part, though he usually has better sources of information at his disposal than the public does, has on the whole the same mental stereotype as his public, and indeed as far as the events of the news are concerned he is "the public" as well. His own job is to classify events as news by means of generally understood symbols for a specific public; and this task obliges him *a-priori* to make a conscious comparison between new events and existing mental structures and communications structures. So that even if almost every public draws important confirmatory conclusions from its news, it is also true that even the most aggressive, avant-garde presentation on the part of the mass-communicator still links the new, the news, with old relationships. The ordinary everyday news report, which is called for by the dictates of rapid mass-production, and which is therefore very standardized, has a particularly strong neutralizing effect on what is actually new. And, on the other hand, very many events—particularly those concerning prominent personalities—that are produced by the journalists as news, due to the pressure of expectation on the part of the public, are actually not events at all, but merely self-perpetuating stereotypes.

But why is the public nevertheless interested in hearing and talking about such things—about the latest radio hit-parade or the Regatta (first put on by the mass media and then taken over by them)? In such cases the element of news at the subject

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Berelson and Gary A. Steiner, *Human Behavior. An Inventory of Scientific Findings*, New York 1964, p. 527f.; Joseph T. Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication*, Glencoe 1960, *passim*.

level probably simply amounts to the elementary need to be drawn, by communication, into the sphere of happenings and of people—as is implied by the root “communis” in the word “communication.” Even if what purports to be news, which one will hear about and discuss with one’s friends, is nothing but a series of clichés, the fact of knowing about it and talking about it gives one an ever-renewed certainty that one is living in the same present day as everyone else around one, near and far.

Thus, apart from the information it contains, news also provides the public with entertainment; and sometimes it provides it with an impetus to build up a store of ordered knowledge—which we call education; in any case, it always provides the public with the chance of developing opinions and co-ordinating them in a collective way. The public makes four types of demands upon the mass media—it demands that they should inform, produce ideas, teach and entertain<sup>4</sup>; and hence it establishes at least these four kinds of relationship with the news, and in consequence is provided by the mass media with news in all four categories—information, comment, education and entertainment. The ever-changing conditions of life of the members of the public mean that different phenomena and different aspects appear important to them, and therefore they make demands upon their news on a number of different levels—though always within the limits of the only half-transparent mesh of their own fixed mental structures.

## 2. TYPES OF JOURNALISTIC NEWS

These three basic elements of journalistic news achieve manifold kinds of expression in historical reality, and yet they are all permeated by the sociocultural totality of their time, and they reflect the processes at work in it and the structures that are characteristic of it. The totality of the phenomena of communication in general, and of mass-communication in particular, manifests itself here. The historical reality of journalistic news must therefore be described as a specific constellation, in terms

<sup>4</sup> Charles R. Wright, “Functional Analysis and Mass Communications,” in *People, Society and Mass Communications*, ed. Lewis A. Dexter & David M. White, London 1964, p. 92f.

of dimensional analysis of the many-sided relationships between mass-media, events and the public; it is a constellation which exists in indissoluble relationship to others around it.

The richness of historical phenomena can be typified most objectively, and at the same time most completely, from two aspects which have in part already been referred to. The first, "the public," is the aspect of the general social communication structure. Different societies have a different "general public," depending on what mass-media are available; and therefore they have different constellations of news. The second aspect is that of "institutionalization"; that of society's regulation of mass-communication. Different systems of social control of the mass media correspond to different dominant types of news and different mechanisms for turning an event into news.

This only allows us to get a view of very general historical realizations of journalistic news. On the other hand, with them we are dealing with truly basic constellations in which journalistic news is realized in a social way. They are viewed principally on the plane of whole systems of communications media. To be more comprehensive, our picture ought probably to include the aspect of "production" as well; under this heading one would then discuss the typical expressions of journalistic news in relation to the various media—press, film, radio, and television—or in relation to the various sectors of production—information, commentary, education and entertainment.<sup>5</sup>

### *1. The Type of Public*

1. Journalistic news depends on the existence of mass communications media. The general social significance of the massive processes of classification, mediation and provocation of news on the part of these mass media can therefore best be brought out by comparison with other social systems that do not have such mass media at their disposal. The structure of the public in three different types of society will be discussed in this connection: these are the societies that are generally designated as "traditional," "modern" and "transitional."

<sup>5</sup> The following types are not average but ideal types, in Max Weber's sense. By this are meant constructions in which real relationships are overemphasized for purposes of recognition. For the theory of ideal types, cf. Judith Janoska-Bendl, *Methodologische Aspekte des Idealtypus*, Berlin 1965.

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The characteristic feature of the *traditional*, pre-industrial society is a public which communicates almost exclusively or at least very largely by word of mouth; the written word being the monopoly of an élite. There is no decisive difference between the degree of effect of an event and the set of people that will communicate about it; for in these relatively isolated small communities news is very predominantly internal news. And its relationship to the very stable sociocultural norms is usually in the foreground. These norms, in their turn, owe a great deal of their inviolability precisely to the fact that they are constantly being incorporated into news on every possible occasion.

A small area, isolation, stable norms and word-of-mouth communication are factors that give rise to a particularly rigid and narrow structure of mind; there is little capacity to take in anything new and assimilate it. The population does not look out for the shock of something unheard-of, but for the preservation of its own self-confidence through things that are old and tried. Cyclic, ceremonial types of news predominate; they are often made to appeal to the public's "concretizing" sentiment by means of rituals. News from outside penetrates the traditional society only to a small extent, belatedly and in a distorted form; and within it, if it does not uphold the society's traditional lore, it takes on a marvellous and mysterious character.<sup>6</sup>

News of socio-cultural change is generally taken as tidings of disaster—particularly as the ruling élite has, as a rule, the privilege of interpreting the news and can thus lay a taboo on what is new and strange, as a threat to its supremacy. The introduction of letters and numbers into such an orally structured society naturally brings about decisive changes.<sup>7</sup> For with it it becomes possible in these isolated and static societies to give a character of immediacy and urgency to events taking place elsewhere, and in a massive and abstract way. It is only the written word that makes it possible to receive indirect news on a large scale; and

<sup>6</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29, n. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Marshall McLuhan gives a very vivid picture of such changes in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, London 1967<sup>2</sup>; the conclusions that he draws from them are of course extravagant and exaggerated.

initially of course this only serves the literate élite. For the élite's broader and more flexible awareness allows it to see through the prevailing traditionalism, see it as an ideology and exploit it purposively as an instrument of power; and its monopoly of news in the same way enables it to follow a news policy that serves its own purposes. But with the dissemination of the ability to read and write, the written word sets the whole traditional society on the path of change, and we see the beginning of the round-the-world news race which is now bringing about the destruction of provincialism as a sociocultural system at an ever-increasing pace.

2. In a *modern* society, it is predominantly the four mass media of press, film, radio and television—and, of course, books—that are predominantly responsible for defining the public, as the sum of many partial publics. The great society—differentiated, industrialized, quickly changing, allotting status largely on a basis of criteria of achievement, and allotting also much more general rights of participation in itself—this society can no longer do without these intermediaries if it is to have awareness of itself and of the world around it. And these few features of modern society just mentioned already make it clear how enormously important journalistic news must be within it.

The size and differentiation of these societies mean that an ever-increasing number of people comes into ever more numerous and varied relations of functional dependence on each other; and at the same time, that they live in ever more diverse spiritual milieux. The systematic community of achievement would therefore have as its counterpart a fragmented consciousness, if there were no mass communications media or, for example, no schools. But schools, and also jobs and the family as an institution only provide fundamental instruction—vocational training, elementary education, in other words basic knowledge. But meanwhile, the modern society's increased susceptibility to upsets and its rapid growth lead constantly and very rapidly to new states of affairs, and it is essential both for the continued existence of the whole apparatus of social achievement and for individual progress that these states of affairs should be understood as widely as possible. Anyone and anything that wants to survive therefore has to possess a broad knowledge of what is going on,

and outside the sphere of personal experience it is practically only the mass media that supply such knowledge. Objectively, far more news takes place; and subjectively, far more news has to be taken in; and the mass media, as large-scale mediators of news, are essential for the functioning of modern society and are among its most important integrating forces.

It is of course true that a public that is supplied principally by mass media is also not without its problems, as has been shown earlier. In spite of, or in part even because of, its constant broadcasting of news, many developments take unequal courses in the various sectors of society. The ultimate reason why the coordination of changing sociocultural trends does not fail is that the journalists choose their news rather one-sidedly on the basis of the form and course it takes more than on the basis of the degree of its effect.

At the same time, although people's empathy—their capacity for vicarious experience—is increased under the influence of the media of telecommunication, their capacity for storing this feeling within them remains limited. What they expect from the mass media—that is, the news at the subject level—bears very inadequate relation to the rapid change of social constellations, and forces—or allows—the mass-communicators to throw masses of stereotyped events on the market in the guise of “news,” though they may be out-of-date or irrelevant to the actual state of affairs. The fact that modern societies allow their members a much greater degree of participation than ever before means that the members take a broad interest in the news, since knowledge of it is a precondition of social intercourse. But since the news is at least as much a matter of entertainment as anything else, people continue to be informed about truly important news—and to adapt themselves to it—only to a very modest extent.

The fight for public attention in a great modern society makes competition among items of news so intense that the journalists whose decisions determine what becomes “public”<sup>8</sup>—have great

<sup>8</sup> Mass-communication theory therefore speaks of journalists as “gate-keepers”; cf. David M. White, “The ‘Gatekeeper’: A Case Study in the Selection of News,” in Lewis A. Dexter & David M. White, *op. cit.*, p. 162 f; Gerhard Maletzke, *Psychologie der Massenkommunikation*, Hamburg 1963, p. 93 f.



difficulty in selecting and classifying their material. The result of this increased competition is, furthermore, an ever more rapid succession of areas that are over-illuminated by the mass media; and, over against them, other areas and other aspects that the media scarcely ever dredge out from total obscurity. This fact, for which the structure and subdivision of the news agencies is also responsible, naturally leads to a situation in which whatever does not make the headlines is neither supported nor watched, over by the collective. The frequently observed disappearance of traditional patterns of behaviour in modern society is also in part a result of this rapid alternation of areas illuminated by the communications media. Of course, journalistic news can also help to build up stable mental structures in the public, by introducing stereotyped criteria of classification and standardized methods of presentation.

3. The *transitional* type of society lies between the traditional and the modern; it is characteristic of the underdeveloped countries. The urban zones with their modern way of life on the one hand, and a large peasant hinterland in a traditional state of subordination on the other, give rise more often to sharp contrasts and conflicts than to mutual complementarity. In these societies, the total public is a mixture of elements of the old oral culture and the new culture of the communications media, combined in the most contradictory ways.<sup>9</sup> The decisive factor in this situation is that the telecommunications media work in and upon a sociocultural milieu which hardly capable, or only partially capable, of creating them or even putting them into action. It is above all the existence of cheap radio that can turn a pre-literary society directly into a post-literary one—admittedly under great tension. Journalistic news, in particular, when it suddenly breaks

<sup>9</sup> The descriptions of the relationships obtaining in transitional societies are based principally on the following works: *Der Beitrag der Massenmedien zur Erziehungswarbeit in den Entwicklungsländern*, ed. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Hannover 1960; Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society*, Glencoe 1962<sup>2</sup>; Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*, London 1964, and *op. cit.*; *Communications and Political Development*, ed. Lucian W. Pye, Princeton 1963; Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, Glencoe 1962; Wilbur Schramm, *Mass Media and National Development*, UNESCO, Paris 1964.

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into isolated and stable milieux, often causes all kinds of disintegration.

For here, even more than in a modern society, the mass media are basically urban phenomena; it is in the towns that they are produced, that they recruit their staff; and even the foreign news that they frequently carry bears one-sided witness to modern ways of life. Hence the news that the mass media pick on and report is also overwhelmingly urban news and is related to a modern way of life. The backward regions of the transitional society are not presented by the mass-communicators as an urgent problem to the urban élite, i.e. to that sector of the population that is in the best position to advance them. Thus the public in the traditional milieu is continually confronted with news that questions the very foundations of its ancestral way of life.

And the news that arrives by radio in the bush, the desert, the out-of-the-way village, is received not so much as information of the day but rather as a myth. The world from which this news originates is regarded by the backward inhabitants of the transitional society in many ways as the real, happy world; and the new way of life that the mass media display to the provincials is now only seen by the eldest among them as the Devil's works; the younger generation generally regards it as an ideal.

In this way, journalistic news above all sets in motion immensely extensive cultural learning-processes in a transitional society. The majority of the tradition-bound dwellers of the hinterland will for instance find the day's news newsworthy; they will find the same value in old Hollywood films, and indeed in anything that the telecommunications media supply them with. The state of mind that meets the products of the mass media here, in fact, is a whole culture away from the state of mind that produces them. And this means that the provincials learn quite different things from the films and broadcasts from those that their creators intended; an age-old Hollywood romance, for instance, might teach them the emancipation of women, though the films are in fact basically conformist; or they might teach the provincials that there are such things as refrigerators. Above all, it is cupidity and at the same time frustration at the unattainableness of the new desires that acquire news-value; while the genuine, urgent social needs of the milieu are lost sight of.

## 2. *Types of institution*

1. Since the mass media fulfil extremely important functions in society as a whole, they are not set up by society in a chance, random manner; they follow quite definite and identifiable patterns. In other words, they are institutions of mass communication, and as such they carry out their essential functions of surveillance, comment, education and entertainment in a socially regulated way. The type of institution that they constitute is very largely a function of the sort of control under which they operate, and the mode of control also naturally decides to a large extent what kind of journalistic news predominates in any particular society.

The heading "Types of institution" therefore refers to the constellations of forces that are characteristic of each social system and whose influence plays a decisive part in determining both the structure of the general public, and, in particular, the news policy of the mass media. Among the numerous ways in which societies have, over the course of history, controlled their mass communications media, four basic possibilities stand out—two extreme and two moderate. The former two are the liberal and the totalitarian type of control, and the latter are the authoritarian and the democratically regulated.<sup>10</sup>

*Liberal* control implies the renunciation, to a large extent, of state control of the mass media and its transfer to non-state forces. Only the most general legal framework protects society—always in these cases a democratic society—against the gross abuse of the mass media; at the same time society gives them

<sup>10</sup> Although these four types are frequently distinguished in the literature, it is usually only the liberal and the totalitarian type that are given some sort of unitary identity and description. This is because the authors—mostly Anglo-Saxon—are unfamiliar with the methodology of ideal types in general. The authoritarian type is therefore classified by Wilbur Schramm (*Responsibility in Mass Communication*, New York 1957, p. 62 f) as an historical type belonging to the early period in the history of the mass media, and its typical presence in underdeveloped societies is only mentioned in passing. The democratically regulated type, on the other hand, he postulates in the framework of a "social responsibility theory," instead of seeing it as a reality on the basis of already existing attempts at its realization and, at the same time, as a theoretical model. Cf. also Frederick S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press*, Urbana 1956.

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almost no public financial support. The market and its laws become the social regulating system in such cases, as the example of the USA demonstrates; and the telecommunications media obey these laws most closely of all. The controlling forces here are the industries that advertise in the media and the public; and there is of course the possibility of a mass-communications firm wielding industrial power of its own.

Under these circumstances, the products of the mass media in general, and journalistic news in particular, become goods for which purchasers have to be found, if production is to continue and if the mass medium is to remain in existence. Paradoxically, it is not the public that pays for what is produced for its benefit; it is the advertiser or sponsor, who uses the mass medium simply as a means of reaching a public and thus a market for his own product. The mass-communicator's most urgent task is therefore to maximize his public; and this principle governs his handling of the news. The competition among mass media to maximize their public takes a particularly bitter form in such conditions of control. Large amounts of prior information, extorted by the mass-communicators or distributed by interested persons even succeed in accelerating events and may in addition, in the guise of warnings or words of encouragement, influence the course of events. At the same time there is an unmistakable, predominant tendency to reduce the news to the plainest and most uncontentious common denominator, under the assumption that this approach will be acceptable to the largest possible number of recipients.

Furthermore, one characteristic of the liberal type of institution is the sentiment subscribed to by many journalists, that information costs money and entertainment makes money. It is true that commercials even interrupt news bulletins, and thus achieve equal status with events of worldwide importance. In the gloomy catalogue of catastrophes, the overwhelmingly negative balance sheet of news which the mass-media regularly present in their news services (for only the abnormal, i.e. almost always the bad events, count as news for them), the quickly interpolated, always marvellously intact and brilliant world of consumer goods acquires the appearance of something ideal; it is the comforting

news, the good news.<sup>11</sup> Only the “positive events” put on by the public relations specialists can perhaps vie with it—those events by means of which various organizations, authorities or firms sometimes succeed in appearing as benefactors of humanity in the news sections of the mass media. At the same time, in general, production budgets cut down on spending on information services or else transform these into entertainment.

After all, the mass media are competing for the leisure market, and it is well-known that entertaining and amusing matter, such as will counteract the frustrations of workaday life, is wanted more than anything else. Among their four basic functions of information, co-ordination of opinion, cultivation and entertainment, publicists therefore stress the last; only thus can they show the sort of mass circulation that their sponsors will pay well for. And they must take into account the very important fact that the leisure public is only willing to make a very modest effort to assimilate their product.

As far as the mass media in this sort of system are concerned, therefore, the element of news at the object level resides primarily in those events which can stimulate the receiving public by a dramatic course, an appeal to sentiment, easy comprehensibility—or which have already shown themselves previously to be public favourites. The degree of effect of an event is generally seen by journalists as only an accessory factor, and is principally taken into account when there is a high degree of news-value at the subject level, that is a large element of public demand for it. This is how it comes about that, on the one hand, even the bad news that the mass media regularly produce in their news services is presented as entertainment, and on the other hand that a deep concern for long-standing and conditioned expectations on the part of the public continually causes a large number of similar, objectively often irrelevant, sensational stereotypes to be presented by the telecommunications media as news. If these societies did not possess some mass media subject to other forms of control, and if the legal framework did not impose a certain degree of correction of this onesided approach,

<sup>11</sup> Dog Bites Man isn't news—Man Bites Dog is. So says an old definition. The relationship between information and advertisement has been reduced by McLuhan to the motto: “Hell in the headlines, heaven in the ads.”

then the population would still be poorly informed about the true news in spite of a fantastically intensive news-mediation service.

2. *Totalitarian* control of the mass communications media obtains in societies which have been obligatorily subjected to state control, e.g. in National-Socialist Germany or in Mao Tse-tung's China; the same applies to the dictatorship of the proletariat in the USSR.<sup>12</sup> The mass media are here monopolized by the numerically usually very small group that possesses political power, and it is exploited by this group predominantly as an instrument of domination. The effect this has on journalistic news is, of course, to make it too, as an instrument of control of the first order, serve strictly to uphold and increase the power of this group. It is extremely important in this connection that in such totalitarian societies the field of politics is extended so as to be practically boundless, and hence every conceivable happening is "public," as long as it can be brought into any kind of relation with political domination. In addition to this, the power élite regularly justifies its actions by means of a particular ideology, in other words a political programme that finds its defence in a philosophy, a world-view or occasionally even in science.

If journalistic news in a democratic society has a predominantly expressive function, relating to events as the public does, in a totalitarian society it has an instrumental function and works in the service of the power élite described above. The principal effect of this is that the needs of the power élite, and not the news-value at the object and subject levels, determine more than anything else what becomes journalistic news.

In this way events are chosen and classified basically according to what is considered to be their political relevance and opportuneness. In particular, they have always to prove the rightness of the government's actions and of the official ideology. Whereas in a liberally institutionalized mass medium it is precisely the irre-

<sup>12</sup> The picture of journalistic news in totalitarian-controlled systems of mass media is based principally on: Walter Hagemann, *Publizistik im Dritten Reich. Ein Beitrag zur Methodik der Massenführung*, Hamburg 1948; James W. Markham, *Voices of the Red Giants*, Ames 1967; Heinz Pohle, *Der Rundfunk als Instrument der Politik*, Hamburg 1955; Frederick T. C. Yu, *Mass Persuasion in Communist China*, New York-London 1964; see also: Alex Inkeles, *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia*, Cambridge 1950.

gular and abnormal that creates most news, in a totalitarian institution it is the normal, the norm-fulfilling. This sort of news policy, with all its tactical deviations, is obviously very reminiscent of the relations obtaining in a traditional society, and it too comes up against considerable difficulties in a modern one. The character of political confirmation that such news carries deprives it of much of its credibility and interest in circumstances of accelerated sociocultural change and amid the growing onslaught of events that marks the transitional and modern society. The journalists generally attempt to make up for this by particular techniques of presentation, particularly by dramatizing events or approaching them in an easy entertaining manner; in this way they hope to interest the public in their new-and-old news. But the attraction of this news remains so modest that the population has to be forced to receive it, unless it is actually of vital importance to it.

Naturally, the population is also rigorously protected against any news that is not authorized by the state. The efforts to this end meet with varying degrees of success, for informal channels of communication within a country, and also the representation of foreign media, are constantly breaking through the barriers. Failures of government policy, which cannot (for this reason, among others) be passed over in silence, instead get intercepted and embellished for public consumption, and their dangerous content is de-fused by interpretation in accordance with the official ideology. In the most general terms, the moment for publishing an event is chosen according to strategic and tactical considerations, and not according to when it actually happens. This practice of time-manipulation stands in sharp contrast to the ideal of immediate news-reporting in the liberally instituted mass media.<sup>13</sup>

The news-value at the subject level, in other words public interest, is only taken into account by the totalitarian-controlled telecommunications media insofar as it does not conflict with any of the ruling interests; and given the enormous extent of these

<sup>13</sup> Of course, mass media under liberal or democratically regulated control also try to manipulate the time factor. Owing to the constant state of intensive competition between the media, such efforts are however largely without effect.

ruling interests, this means that very little account is taken of it. It is true that there is often a highly differentiated system of mass media, each watching over the particular environment of a number of different publics, subdivided by locality, education or culture, and supplying them with information about their respective environments; but these sectors of the population are also, and in no less degree, objects of the vigilance of the same media. The public reacts to this by behaving in a camouflaged manner, which considerably complicates the task of the telecommunications media. Their principal aim, after all, is not to fulfil their function as an information medium, but that of a coordinator and controller of public opinion. The chief goal, to which the news policy of the totalitarian society is also linked, is precisely that of ideological education. The supply of news in the totalitarian-controlled mass media is therefore dominated by ideological stereotypes, just as that of the liberally instituted mass media is dominated by sensational stereotypes. In this way, journalistic news is meant to contribute to the building of public attitudes in accordance with the ideas of the leadership.

3. *Authoritarian* and *democratically regulated* control of the mass media are in part characteristic of underdeveloped countries, or of fully industrialized democracies such as e.g. the German Federal Republic, Great Britain or Switzerland; and it is above all the radio and television subject to democratically regulated control that are most characteristic. Both types can be regarded as incompletely realized or modified expressions of one or other of the two extreme types described above, and they determine the nature of journalistic news again each in its own particular way.

Authoritarian control here means the subordination of the telecommunications media to the directives of a political, cultural or economic élite. Since the societies concerned are not in a comparable state of obligatory subjection to state control as the totalitarian societies are, and are also not as modernised as these latter, a number of different élites continue to compete within them, possessing means that are inadequate to secure the sort of radical control of the mass communications media that is found in totalitarian societies. The news policies of authoritarianly controlled mass media therefore play a far less instrumental role than



those of the totalitarian type. This is particularly closely related to the great differences of culture that are typical of these transitional societies.

The modernising élites therefore have limited opportunities to further their ambitious projects by means of the mass media. It is true that a suitable supply of journalistic news can serve to turn e.g. the national element or economic production into a burning social issue; but where this news cannot build on a pre-existing foundation of similar ideas and attitudes, the intended effect of mobilising public opinion remains an ephemeral one.

Even traditionally-minded élites can use the telecommunications media for their own purposes with almost as much success in such conditions; for instance, they can exploit the particularly strong narcotic effect that the media have in such environments.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, goal-directed cultural instruction through journalistic news is generally likely to meet with very little success in transitional societies, because the sort of radical unification of effort on the part of the media that is found in totalitarian societies is not possible here, and the public is little disposed to accept teaching about modern ways of life through its news. Proper programmes of instruction, unrelated to any event, are much more likely to succeed in their aims of cultural education; their adequate reception by the public is, moreover, guaranteed by organized group discussion of them.

Finally, mass media are subjected to democratically regulated control in order that they should not be dominated by particular social forces at the expense of society at large, as often happens under a liberal system of institutions. This type of control takes into account not only the structure of social influences, but also the principles of the state order, which in these cases are democratic ones. The various groups in these societies are generally represented, according to the number of their members and what is considered to be their importance, on supervisory bodies which ensure that private and public interests are represented in democratic proportions in the products of the media concerned. Of course, it is true that the authorities and organized social forces

<sup>14</sup> Paul F. Lazarsfeld & Robert K. Merton, "Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action," in *The Communication of Ideas*, ed. Lyman Bryson, New York 1964<sup>2</sup>, pp. 105-106.

regularly profit far more from this distribution of power than do unorganized private interests. To make up for this, in this system the telecommunications media are preserved from too total dependence on the market by suitable financial arrangements.<sup>15</sup>

The principle of proportionality that lies at the heart of this democratic regulation sets the mass-communicators the task of evolving a news policy in which the news-value at the object and at the subject levels is brought to equilibrium in their product. For according to the ideas on which democratically regulated control is based, the public has the right to find its demands in the spheres of information, comment, education and entertainment satisfied by radio and television in democratic proportions, since these agencies are considered to a certain extent to be public services.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the events, too deserve to be passed on to the public according to their importance for the democratic society; the public depends on the orientating, opinion-coordinating, educative and recreative content of these media in order to carry the democratic system further on its way.

In selecting their news, therefore, the journalists ought to consider above all the degree of effect of each item, its objective relevance. It is well known, however, that this may not correspond to any course of development such as would arouse the public's interest; and here the mass-communicator gets into difficulties. He often gets round these by transferring events that are not on-time happenings to his commentary or educational sections, and incidentally thus deprives them of much of their urgency and many of their repercussions. Furthermore, according to the idealistic basic concepts of this system, the presentation of news ought to be "objective," its classification by the journalists ought to reflect its true relevance (a parameter for which very few firm criteria exist), and the technique of communication used

<sup>15</sup> The postulates of a democratically regulated control system were circumscribed by the Commission on the Freedom of the Press, *A Free and Responsible Press*, Chicago 1947, and Wilbur Schramm, *Responsibility in Mass Communication*, above all. The practice of a democratically regulated mass medium is treated in e.g. *Fernsehen in Deutschland*, ed. Christian Longolius, Mainz 1967.

<sup>16</sup> The scarcity of frequencies and channels gives rise to fundamentally democratic claims being made on all the productions of the mass media, not merely on their political ones in the narrow sense of the word.

should not be basically aggressive, as in the liberal system, but should be graded according to the objective urgency of the event.

At the same time, the public is supposed to be satisfied, not merely manipulated as in the totalitarian control system. The principle of proportionality here comes to mean an underprivileged status for the more demanding groups, as in the liberal system.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the public's demands in the sphere of news under a democratically regulated system of control are by no means all aimed at increasing its knowledge; it is also out for entertainment, under this system no less than any of the others. This demand has therefore to be met by a large-scale supply of dramatic and sentimentally appealing stories,—quite apart from the fact that e.g. American agencies anyway bring in a mass of sensationally stereotyped, liberal-type news into the news services of the democratically regulated telecommunications media. There are, however, other reasons why this has to be so: if it were not, it would be impossible to arouse enough public interest in these events, which the members of the democratic society simply have to know about; otherwise they would simply change to the liberally-controlled mass media which are usually present and competing in these societies.

The full realization of the ideals of democratically regulated control of news policy is obviously just as insoluble a problem as the squaring of the circle. Nevertheless, this system is still closest to providing a type of journalistic news that benefits the whole of democratic society.

<sup>17</sup> After all, less differentiated demands find themselves offered, for democratic reasons, a far wider choice of goods from the mass media.