

NEWS AND IDEOLOGY

Graham Knight
McMaster University

This paper discusses the relationship between news and ideology in light of recent studies of newswork and theoretical developments in the understanding of ideology. News, it is argued, is a representation of wider relations of power and tends to reproduce those relations in a relatively uncritical fashion. As these relations are themselves characterized by contradiction and conflict, the function of news cannot be reduced to the role of merely reproducing a closed, internally integrated social system.

Ce journal parle de la relation entre les nouvelles et l'idéologie à la lumière d'études récentes faites sur les travaux d'information et les développements théoriques dans la compréhension de l'idéologie. On soutient que les nouvelles sont une représentation de relations d'un pouvoir de plus grande envergure. Elles tendent à présenter ces relations de façon plutôt favorable. Comme ces relations sont elles-mêmes caractérisées par la contradiction et le conflit, la fonction des nouvelles ne peut être réduite au rôle de simple présentatrice d'un système social clos, intégré de façon interne.

The question of news and ideology has recently been raised in a number of studies focusing both on news as a social system of produc-

tion, and on news as a particular type of message or text.[1] At first blush, these works appear to have little in common with one another as they draw on a wide range of established perspectives that embraces organizational and occupational control theory, symbolic interactionism and phenomenology, structural linguistics, Franco-Italian semiology, and neo-Marxism.[2] An underlying concern with ideology, whether explicitly stated or not, does, however, bind these works together and distinguish them from earlier perspectives and research. It is now generally accepted that news must be seen as a social process of production resulting in a finished product that simultaneously informs and obscures. This puts some distance between these recent works and the "dominant paradigm" of research into "gatekeeping", "agenda-setting", and media effects of the 1950's and 1960's.[3] The concern of more recent studies of news has been to get at the underlying practices and assumptions on which the mundane activities of newsmaking and news reading are constituted and reconstituted in an otherwise unproblematic and taken-for-granted fashion. By showing how routine newswork practices create accounts that systematically rely on and reinforce certain types and forms of social knowledge to the exclusion of others, these studies begin to point to the ways in which these underlying practices and assumptions register the broader relations of domination that inform social life, and our intellectual appropriation of it.

In this context the orthodox concept of ideology becomes inadequate. The notion of a 'system of values and beliefs' is overly restrictive in that it separates the substance of knowledge from its form, the immediately apparent from its relation to underlying realities, and ideas from their relation to political and economic structures. Ideology must be seen

as more than simply a set of values and beliefs. It is a way of knowing and, obversely, not knowing about the world that is structured by broader relations of power and control. It is the organization of social consciousness such that the process of inclusion and exclusion comes to seem quite natural. Ideology is the socially 'naturalized' intelligence of a society of domination.

I.

Once we begin to examine the question of news and ideology we are returned initially to familiar territory, the question of news bias. Inasmuch as the mundane sense of ideology connotes distortion and inaccuracy - information manipulated for purposes other than to inform - then the association of news and ideology brings us face-to-face with the question of biased news accounts. Bias in this sense is a concept that we employ in everyday reading of the news to judge its trustworthiness, and that journalists apply to each other's work to evaluate its professional quality. This presupposes not only that bias is undesirable, but also that its genesis and substance are unproblematic. Journalists know, usually implicitly, what bias looks like, and they do not have to question why it is undesirable or why it is defined in a particular way in order to put it to use. For the social scientist, however, the form and substance of bias do have to be treated as problematic. The constitution of biased and unbiased accounts have to be seen as part of a particular social process, that of professional journalism, embedded in and shaped by a wider historical, political, economic, etc., context. It is the task of social scientific inquiry to look behind bias to the taken-for-granted norms and practices through which both bias and its absence are ideologically constituted.

In empirical terms, the criterion against which bias is identified and thrown into relief is that of impartiality. 'Good' journalism normally attempts to get 'both' sides of the story in order to construct a 'balanced' account. Impartiality is the operational definition of the more abstract value of objectivity. Like other occupations which aspire to provide professional services to their clients, modern journalism ideally strives to be neutral, detached, disinterested, at least in its presentation of the 'facts' of the story.[4] This implies three things. The first is the separation of 'fact' from 'opinion': reporting the news is separated from interpreting it. The second is that the news can be presented as a story, that it is amenable to the narrative form with a beginning, middle, and end. The third is that news stories have two sides to them.

These implications obviously entail a number of practical assumptions. The separation of fact and opinion, for example, assumes not only that each has an independent existence, but also that the facts of the news are finite and identifiable as such. Similarly, the organization of news in the narrative form presupposes the ease with which it is possible to abstract from the continuous 'strip' of social life a set of discrete newsworthy 'events' whose boundaries are relatively clear and unproblematic. And, finally, the dichotomization of news subjects into two sides presupposes that there is not a multiplicity of interacting, overlapping positions and interests that are fluid and changeable. While these assumptions are not explicitly raised in actual newswork, their problematic status is implicitly recognized and resolved by reliance on news sources as the "primary definers" of the news.[5] In this way, journalism operationalizes objectivity, and deflects external criticism of bias.

Reliance on sources as the primary defin-

ers of news displaces to a deeper level the way in which news is a fundamentally ideological construct. It simply begs the question: what are the factors determining the selection and use of news sources, and with what consequences for the final product? In the first respect, the news media rely heavily on sources that are formally accredited as the bearers of newsworthy information, such as official spokespersons and professional experts.[6] Their accreditation stems from their being the appointed representatives of powerful institutions, which relation is simultaneously reinforced by their use as news sources. Here we begin to see how stratification mediates the relationship between news and ideology. Whether it is because professional journalists feel more comfortable with sources of similar background and status, whether it is because professional journalists are more likely to assume the credibility of those with prestige and education, or whether it is primarily the result of structural necessity, the need for the media to respect the power of the powerful, the outcome is largely the same: reliance on officials and experts reinforces the form and substance of news talk along class lines.

Concretely, this tendency has two important implications. The first is that news is structured more favorably towards sources representative of bureaucratic organizations. The work of Molotch and Lester on the representativeness of issue specific environmental and citizens' groups, or the work of Tuchman on news of the early stages of the women's movement in the U.S., point clearly to the fact that social movements are not accorded such legitimacy as credible news sources as more formalized organizations, largely because they do not possess bureaucratic-institutional structures and are therefore assumed to be transient, less reliable, and simply less important features of the

social and political landscape.[7] The general effect of this is a double-edged filtering of news sources: on the one hand access to the news media is structured differentially in favor of the powerful and bureaucratically organized; on the other hand, the news media seek out powerful and bureaucratic sources of news more actively and persistently than other sources. Access to the public by the media and to the media by the public are skewed in self-reinforcing ways.

Secondly, although access to and by the news media are differentially structured in that this skewedness is reproduced in eventual news accounts, the views of officials and experts are normally universalized as the views of those they are assumed, often unquestioningly, to represent: either particular institutions or rational society at large. This universalization helps to objectify a fundamental consensus of views; even where the various parties to a news story are in conflict or disagreement, that divergence continues to be represented by and as the views of official spokespersons who are assumed to speak for the constituencies they are thought to represent. What this points to are the unquestioned assumptions made by journalists about the workings of bureaucratic order: the legitimacy of what Max Weber called "legal-rational" forms of authority in which 'leadership' can lead and act with the assumed consent of those who follow.[8]

Yet despite this universalizing tendency, news accounts consistently represent certain perspectives at the expense of alternatives. Most significantly, as Gans has stressed, the world of news is essentially upper middle-class.[9] The recent renewal of Marxist theory in the social sciences has given rise, at its functionalist extremes, to a quasi-conspiratorial view of news - indeed of cultural production as a whole - which dismisses it uncritically as

a simple reflection of the interests of the dominant class. This observation may, in certain instances, be well taken, but it generally ignores the extent to which the 'new' middle classes of salaried, 'intellectual' labor - professionals, managers, scientists, officials, etc. - now mediate and refract relations between economic elites and the working-class. Indeed, as the Ehrenreichs have noted, the role of these new occupations extends to the reproduction of social order beyond the economic sphere, and can be seen to represent new forms of social control whose perimeters embrace politics and culture, and whose substance is less coercive and more consensual or 'hegemonic'. [10] Notwithstanding the differentiations wrought by internal occupational stratification, modern journalism is firmly part of this 'new' middle class, and draws heavily on others of the same class for its raw materials and occupational values. There is, as Tuchman has rightly emphasized, no "crude" conspiracy in the news. Nor, in most cases, is there a particularly sophisticated one either. The middleclassness of the news is, rather, part of a more fundamental process of cultural stratification and exclusion which operates not at the level of more or less conscious conspiracies, but at a far deeper level of taken-for-grantedness. The 'bias', if you like, of the news towards the middle-class is part, in other words, of the whole process whereby the standpoint of the latter comes to be universalized as the 'natural' standpoint for society as a whole.

This association between journalism and the 'new' middle-class serves to remind us of the historically specific character of the commitment to objectivity as a desirable goal, and throws into relief the relationship of ideas and values to the political economy. The modern commitment to journalistic objectivity stands in contrast to the competitive, 'partisan' press

that flourished until the latter part of the nineteenth century. Each journal or paper catered primarily to the interests and outlook of a particular constituency of readers. News was framed in an openly partisan manner complete with the deliberate distortion or suppression of information when it did not serve the interests of the main body of subscribers.[12] This situation began to change chiefly as the result of two interrelated developments: economic consolidation and the professionalization of journalism.

The 'Great Depression' of the 1880's and early 1890's saw the large scale consolidation of capital - centralization and concentration - into a fewer number of larger hands. Markets became monopolised, and the form of economic organization began to shift from the small entrepreneurial firm to the large corporation. The press was not spared the economic or political consequences of this change. Economically, consolidation meant the growing need for the press to create mass markets as increasing dependency on advertising for revenues and profits dictated the need for expansion and growth. This effectively began to eliminate 'partisan' journalism, replacing it with the beginnings of the modern ideology of objectivity: the cultivation of particular constituencies of readers was no longer possible. The need to create expanding mass markets meant that the news had to appeal to 'everyone' and offend 'no-one'. The overall effect of both consolidation per se and the concomitant need to generate mass markets has been generally to homogenize news production - its substance, format, and sources.

This change from partisan to objective journalism was compounded by the political effects of economic consolidation. As the press became increasingly concentrated in the hands of a smaller number of large newspaper [later media] chains, so it became increasingly vulnerab-

le to the charge of limiting opportunities for freedom of speech and diversity of opinion. Commitment to objectivity, then, served to displace such criticism by eschewing an overtly partisan orientation, by separating 'fact' from 'opinion', and by relying on formally accredited sources as the primary definers of news content. The potential contradiction between a monopoly press and the ideology of free speech was blunted by a commitment to practical objectivity-through-impartiality.

Taken alone, the political and economic effects of consolidation provided the structural context for the ideology of objectivity to arise. The motivation for this opportunity to be realized came from the increasing division of labor in the press and the subsequent professionalization of journalism as an occupation. Economic consolidation led to a re-shaping of the class structure by hastening the demise of the 'old' middle class of independent, self-employed commodity producers, including many small newspaper proprietors. At the same time, it brought about the growth of a 'new' middle class of salaried, 'intellectual' labor. The composition of this 'new' middle class was forcefully shaped by the growing application of scientific values, in an organized manner, to work organization in all spheres.[13] The growing prestige and power of science and the new scientific professions, such as engineering, led to the 'spill-over' of scientific principles and values into other areas of intellectual labor. Of particular importance is the appropriation of objectivity and rationality in the quest for 'truth'. These values served an important professional function in that their association with the new intellectual forms of dependent 'wage labor' gave the latter a basis on which to lay claim to professional autonomy, and thereby resist the rationalization of their skills on the part of the capital that employed them.

Journalism was no exception to this movement; as it became a separate, full time occupation in the employ of large-scale capital, so the claim to professional status in general, and objective practice in particular, developed as a basis for autonomy and prestige. Commitment to objectivity, then, served a dual purpose: on the one hand it enabled owners to fend off potential political interference on the grounds that press monopolies contravened freedom of speech; on the other hand it enabled employee journalists to fend off editorial interference on the grounds that objectivity meant professionalism, and professionalism meant self-control.

Hence the association between news and the new middle class: these strata emerged from the turn of the century onward as a new dominant agency of social power with the growth of the corporation and [later] the state as the principal institutions of political and economic life, and with the gradual shifting of the mechanisms of social control from coercion to consent. Globally, this change is registered most clearly in the emergence of bureaucratic and professional rationalism in which the organizational principles of objectivity and ethical neutrality became, as Max Weber well appreciated, the 'ideal' basis of work orientation and career commitment in a class that was economically privileged yet essentially propertyless. The upper middle-classness of news, then, is more than a 'bias' of news contents: it is a particular structuring of the forms of social knowledge - generally and specifically - from which a limited array of contents is able to arise. The 'on - the - one - hand - on - the - other-ism' to which objectivity is, in practice, reduced, represents the bureaucratic balancing of alternatives in a way that appears to dispense with arbitrary judgment and the one-sided imposition of a particular set of views

and opinions at the expense of another. The methodology of objective empirical inquiry unearths the 'facts' [whose pertinence is unlikely to be brought into serious question], on the basis of which [universal] reason can draw reasonable conclusions.

II.

The practice of objectivity-through-impartiality comprises only one element of the broader ideology of professional journalism. There are further elements germane to the question of ideology and news that require discussion. If we break news production down into its component stages it becomes clear that objectivity pertains largely to those of data collection and story construction. Both stages presuppose what aspects of the real world are already newsworthy and therefore warrant the attention of the journalist as potential news. Although the repertoire of news content must be viewed as a social institution rather than a matter of purely personal journalistic choice, it nonetheless represents a continuous production and reproduction of newsworthiness in accordance with practical norms of discrimination.

Although it is impossible to give any single, all-embracing definition of newsworthiness, we can identify controversy and extraordinariness as its principal, practical criteria. News is, by definition of course, about what is novel and recent, but such a definition only narrows down so far the range of potential newsworthy data. What is of crucial importance is novelty that is at the same time unusual or controversial in its character and effects. So far as political journalism is concerned, controversy is the prime consideration. The institutionalization of opposition in the party-based systems of parliamentary democracy tends to spill over and color most aspects of political news with a sense of controversy. This arises from the

widespread dependency of journalists on politicians as news sources, and from the formal need to balance accounts in pursuit of objectivity. For news outside the directly political sphere, the principal criterion of newsworthiness - the "primary or cardinal news value" - is unusualness: happenings out of the ordinary.[15] In practice, the application of controversy and unusualness as the benchmarks of newsworthiness occurs against a background of assumptions about what is, obversely, unnewsworthy - normal, ordinary, uncontroversial - whose form and substance are generally shrouded in silence. The implication of this is that because of its noisy preoccupation with the controversial and extraordinary, news contributes to the strengthening of a fundamental social, political, and economic consensuality in which the 'outcome' of ideology consists.

While this consensuality is a fundamentally moral construct, the outcome of social relations of power and conflict, it does not generally appear openly as such. Through the agency of myth sociality becomes 'naturalized', evacuated of its relational and historical specificity, and de-formed into an attribute of nature.[16] The effect of this naturalism is crucial to the 'work' of ideology: once naturalized the substance of moral consensus takes on the appearance and import of something timeless, eternal, inevitable, necessary. Those groups and activities excluded outside its perimeters are further marginalized and devalued, contaminated in the social consciousness as unnatural. Through the agency of myth, dominant ideology appropriates and socializes nature in order to deny the existence of the social as distinct and self-produced.

Empirically, the definition of newsworthiness in terms of the extraordinary and controversial has proven to be both relatively stable and selective in substance as well as form. It

is selective in that extraordinariness is typified, and these types limited in scope and format. Only certain categories of extraordinary event routinely receive news coverage, such as strikes, crime, disaster, scandal, crisis and so on. There is an implicit topography of power in this pattern. The activities of economic elites, for example, are relatively immune to journalistic inquiry by virtue of the privacy accorded to private property. Only when the activities of capital become clearly associated with the major categories of established news talk, such as crime or crisis, are they covered as general news. Otherwise, news of capital is generally segregated and confined to those sections of specialist coverage such as the 'business' news. Strikes by labor, for example, particularly if they involve physical or verbal violence, receive general news coverage - along with crime news, disaster news, and other types of bad news. 'Strikes' by capital, on the other hand, usually do not. They are presented either in the business sections, or in more abstract terms as news of the 'economy'. Indeed, the very notion that action on the part of the propertied to withhold investment capital is akin to the withdrawal of labor by striking workers, is generally alien to the received assumptions and concepts of newswork. For labor to strike [a term that carries obvious connotations of force and violence] suggests a range of situations whose legitimacy is questionable - desperation, lawlessness, greed, etc. For capital to reduce investment, on the other hand, appears simply as a 'natural' decision in light of "natural" economic rationality.

Historically, these regular categories of news have been fairly stable, though new examples have often been incorporated into their formats. Strikes, crime, and politics, in particular, have been standard news fare since the permanent advent of the daily press in the last

century. This stability pinpoints something of a contradiction whose ideological value is important. While controversy and extraordinariness may be the principal ways in which newsworthiness is defined, the concrete types of controversial or extraordinary event that constitute news copy are themselves routine and predictable. The empirical incidence of strikes or crime, for instance, may be unpredictable; their newsworthiness, however, is not given their relative size and impact. Ideologically, both the ordinary and the extraordinary have a familiar and predictable cast to them; each may be recognized socially in a readily 'obvious' and unproblematic way. In making the unusual as routine as the normal, news talk represents a general commitment to the desirability of order and stability. It also serves to blunt the threatening character of bad news by confining its contents to routine, familiar groups and activities: bad news may be bad, but there is some comfort in knowing that its badness is routine and obvious.

The effect of this particular definition of newsworthiness is superficially paradoxical. In a world that generally considers itself the best of possible worlds, news is preoccupied with 'things - going - wrong'. Crime, terrorism, strikes, disasters, scandals, corruption, crisis - the standard categories of news talk share a common focus on social and natural disorder, the potential threat to and breakdown of the normal routines that characterize the mundane. It is important to emphasize here that the media do not create 'bad news' from scratch. The substance of bad news is received, and does not normally need to be explicitly identified as such to be recognized for what it 'is'. [17] The source of this reception is the dominant ideology, of which news forms but one part. The raw materials for bad news are given in the basic features of the dominant ideology, and are

worked up into the news product by the media. By virtue of their infringement on the values of private property and individualism, strikes, for example, initially acquire their status as bad news outside the actual apparatus of journalism. As the latter appropriates its material from the dominant ideology, it therefore works with the limitations already built into those materials. Much like parliamentary democracy, on whose practices journalism's attempts to 'get-both-sides-of-the-story' is modelled, this does not mean that the media always agree on the causes and effects of bad news; it does mean, however, that they normally can and do take for granted what is bad about bad news.

Bad news, then, is generally premised on a consensus about its badness. To recognize this is to unravel the paradox, at least in part. Functionally speaking, the ideological value of bad news lies in its ability to identify, in a relatively uncritical way, the forms which threats to the dominant ideology and its social order assume. By expelling threats to the margins of the consensus those who deviate from its principles, bad news does make for good ideology: it re-affirms implicitly the normalness of normality and the naturalness of nature. In this respect, the very fact that news accounts may not necessarily agree upon the specific causes and effects of bad news actually strengthens the consensus at a deeper level of taken-for-grantedness. The fact that different news accounts may disagree, for example, about whether labour or management is 'really' to 'blame' for a particular strike helps to displace our attention away from asking why the cause of strikes is a matter for 'blame' in the first place. Like parliamentary democracy, this points to a fundamental consensus of goals, displacing dissent and conflict to the question of means whose range of legitimate alternatives

is already limited by that very consensus.

III.

The third element of journalistic practice that contributes to the ideological character of news is empiricism. In some respects, this overlaps with both objectivity and the criteria of newsworthiness. The separation of 'fact' and 'interpretation', for example, is central to both empiricism and objectivity, and highlights the fact that both derive ultimately from the ideology of scientific rationality appropriated at the turn of the century by the ascendant class of 'intellectual' labour. Similarly, the emphasis in news story construction upon 'drama', 'action', and 'conflict/confrontation' points to the ways in which the empiricism of news presentation is blended into the emphasis upon extraordinariness as a primary criterion of newsworthiness. It also points to the conflation of 'reality' and 'fiction'. By resorting to the dramatic metaphor to emphasize the extraordinariness and impact of news events, this empiricism simultaneously betrays its mythical roots: the realism of the news text consists precisely in its remoteness from everyday life. The empiricism of the news is fundamentally abstract.

This is clearly illustrated through two major ways in which empiricism plays a direct role in the ideological construction of news. The first is the emphasis upon 'immediacy' and 'actuality'. By definition, the news is about novelty and recency: events-as-they-are-happening-in-the-here-and-now. In many respects, the whole development of news technology- photography, sound recording, film, etc. - is a history of accentuating the realization of immediacy and actuality. It is paralleled, moreover, by changes in the social self-conception of journalism that also speak to a heightened preoccupation

with documenting the immediate as it actually happens: "live-eye news", "eyewitness news", etc., register this concern with little ambiguity.

The ideological import of this concern with immediacy and actuality is double-edged. By attempting to realize immediacy in the temporal sense, news accounts play down the question of historical connectedness and development. To be sure, news stories of major proportions are normally accompanied by some attention to 'background', in which relevant details from previous occurrences are provided to 'fill in' the current story and assist reader understanding. What this amounts to, however, is the appropriation of the past without history. The past is called up to bear witness, but only in the sense that it is a repository of other discrete 'events' and occurrences.[18] News empiricism collapses the past into the present, evacuating real history of its historical specificity, and homogenizing its substance into more-of-the-same strikes or crimes or scandals or crises and so on. The past becomes a less immediate version of the present.

As news empiricism dehistoricizes history, so it de-socializes and naturalizes the social. Immediacy in its second sense connotes un-mediation: directness of communication in which actuality is conveyed in uncontaminated, pristine form from actor to reader. The development of both news technology and the practice of reporting the 'facts' have been directed towards heightening the extent to which news is seen as a faithful representation of the actual, and thus reducing the extent to which it is seen as mediated by news professionals in its transmission from source to receiver. The latter is inserted directly into the news discourse as-it-appears-to-happen: seeing film and photographs, reading direct quotations from sources, all encourage us to read the news as a direct pro-

duction, not as an abstracted account of what took place. The effect of this is an ideological, i.e. uncritical, naturalism: viewing time and time again violence and disruptiveness of strikes, for example, we 'naturally' come to assume strikes mean violence and disruption.

Related to the effects of this striving to capture immediacy and actuality is a second aspect of news empiricism that contributes to its abstract, and ideological, character: the tendency to personalize news events. This has two implications. The first is that it highlights the inability of news empiricism to deal with social process; news accounts reduce the continuous, cross-cutting flux of social life to specific, discrete actions with identifiable, verifiable - in short: obvious - parameters. This is accomplished by selecting those who appear to 'make' the news, i.e. the most readily identifiable agents to whom newsworthy events can be visibly attributed: it is in this sense that strikers, rather than management, 'cause' strikes, criminals crime, and so on. The effect of this dovetails with that of immediacy and actuality, reinforcing the tendency to de-contextualize their subject - matter. This process of abstraction is compounded, secondly, by the tendency to individualize news subjects. Even in cases such as strikes where the acting subject is conceivably a collective one, news empiricism reduces this to the actions or statements of individual subjects: the collective subject, by implication, exists only temporarily and in some sense artificially, as the conjunction of separate individual subjects sharing something partial in common. In this respect, the personalization of the news reflects the wider ideology of individualism that sustains it and is sustained by it: the only permanent reality of the world is the reality of individual subjects.

The import of this empiricism is not, as

Philips has argued, that news is confined by a "logic of the concrete".[19] To the contrary, the effect of this empiricism is to render news highly abstracted; news accords with a logic of abstracted empiricism. The logic of the concrete is a logic of the totality, of interrelatedness - concrete: concrecere: to grow together. News accounts are limited precisely in their ability to capture the 'concrete' in this sense; they de-contextualize, abstract their subject matter from its real interrelations, presenting it as a discrete, self-contained narrative with discernible parameters-abstract: abtrahere: to draw out/remove.

IV.

To grasp this abstractedness is to grasp what is fundamentally ideological about news accounts. Combined together, empiricism, objectivity, and the criteria of newsworthiness comprise what has been variously called a "news perspective" a news "frame" and "net" and a "dominant view".[20] In different ways what these point to is that news accounts are ideological in that they are both selective and occlusive. Clearly, news abstracts its raw materials from the continuous, intersecting processes of everyday social life, an activity that necessarily entails selection from an infinite stream of potential data. This selection, as we have noted, takes place in accordance with norms that are so deeply embedded in the practical routines of professional journalism that they are largely taken-for-granted by the practitioners themselves. The selectivity of news, in other words, is institutional rather than personal. Its effect, nonetheless, is that news accounts are partial accounts, structured according to the regnant rules of newsworthiness and format, rules which 'automatically' include certain data and exclude others.

The partiality of news accounts points, obversely, to their occlusiveness. By itself, however, this does not tell us much: all accounts are partial inasmuch as they must necessarily abstract the pertinent from an infinite stream of potential data - what is included therefore stands in [usually silent] relation to what is left out. The ideological-ness of news consists in more than the fact that certain forms of knowledge and ways of knowing are devalued as unnatural. Despite, indeed because of modern journalism's commitment to narrative 'realism' and objectivity-through-impartiality, the accounting procedures of newswork generally presuppose dominant social forms as quite natural. The practices for which academics criticize news - personalization, preoccupation with conflict and confrontation, radical empiricism, abstraction from historical and structural context, emphasis upon the deviant, and so on - are all elements of a received methodology that militate against the development of a critical mode of inquiry capable of penetrating beneath the surface of immediate appearances. To reiterate: the partiality and occlusiveness of news accounts must be understood as the function of a particular methodology for knowing and not knowing about the world, and more than simply the preference of journalists for certain types of news stories over others.

By stressing that the ideological-ness of news is embedded at the level of form and methodology we are able to grasp how news tends uncritically to reproduce relations of domination, without succumbing to functionalist oversimplification. The ideological character of news does not wrap it up in a kind of simple [i.e. uncritical] closure that reduces it - indeed ideology in general - to a pure mimetic function, faithfully representing and reinforcing the 'status quo'. To equate ideology and the 'status quo' is to fall prey to the limita-

tions of an abstracted empiricism similar to that for which newswork itself is criticized. Ideology does not represent the 'status quo'; indeed, the very notion of the 'status quo' is fundamentally ideological inasmuch as it depicts social reality as frozen, thing-like, rather than as a process of continual movement in which there exists a tension or contradiction between stability and change. Ideology reproduces dominant social forms without 'merely' reproducing their historically specific contents. That it can do so points to the inherent contradictions that permeate a society of domination, contradictions that ideology necessarily registers though not necessarily in any obvious way. To say that news is ideological, then, means that news too registers these contradictions, but does so in ways that mystify rather than deny them. Contradiction is mystified as discrete conflict, and displaced away from the level of ends to that of means; change is mystified as novelty; and both are mystified as 'events' with effects but no real causes beyond the motives of the immediate participants.

News as ideology is therefore both closed and open. It is closed in that news accounts contribute implicitly, through their presuppositions about what news is and how newswork is done, to the reproduction of order and consensuality. At the same time, news is open in that order and consensuality are not fixed or frozen, but are fluid, their contents on the move, since they are premised upon contradiction and conflict. Ideology works, as functionalist theory stresses; but it does so only at the price of having to continue to work. Ideology cannot finish its work once and for all, and retire from the scene. The contradiction of relations of domination is that the production of order from conflict sets in motion a continual labour of ideology; ideology is open because it is perpetually inchoate.

Objectivity, newsworthiness, and empiricism form the central methodology of news as ideology, the instrument through which news takes on its ideological character. While the form of their operation is constrained structurally, they do not determine news content in any absolute sense, but guide the process towards certain outcomes at the expense of others. The apparent openness of any text is, in reality, limited by the tendency for it to convey certain 'preferred' or 'dominant' readings without negating entirely the [hypothetical] possibility of other interpretations. It is precisely this nebulous mixture of openness and closure, of freedom and constrain, that enables ideology to 'work'. The ideological-ness of news consists in both allowing and requiring the reader to insert him/herself into the text to produce actively preferred meanings as a thinking subject. The reader is not simply a 'consumer' of predetermined content, but rather an active agent, an accomplice of ideology, decoding the text in a seemingly independent way, but with tools and methods fashioned and imparted by others.[21] And it is precisely because of the requirement and allowance of subjectivity that ideology can deny itself as a relation of domination, and portray itself as 'merely' a system of 'values' and 'beliefs'.

V.

In discussing the relationship between news and ideology this paper has sought to emphasize two points. The first is that despite the commitment of newswork to objectivity and empirical realism, news accounts are necessarily selective and occlusive. They are partial representations of reality in that what they impart stands in relation to what they omit. Preoccupation with controversy and extraordinariness and an orientation to impartiality, immediacy, personaliza-

tion, and the narrative form all structure news accounts in a particular direction that obscures as it reveals. The second is that this structuring cannot be treated as 'innocent', since it registers implicitly the relations of power and control that underlie social order. To say that news is ideological is to say that news reproduces dominant social forms in that it takes these relations generally for granted as quite natural. Ideology, then, is fundamentally a way of knowing and ignoring that is uncritical, rather than a body of knowledge that is untrue.

The corollary of this is that ideology cannot usefully be viewed as a monolithic force acting upon patient recipients in uniform, behavioristic fashion. It should be viewed as a process of uncritical intelligence that enlists the reader as an active subject who subjectifies him or herself in and through the process of interpretation. This is particularly so in the case of news where the 'on-the-one-hand-on-the-other-ism' of practical impartiality allows and requires the reader to arrive at meaning and judgment in a seemingly independent and individual way. That this form of balance signifies an idealist dialectics of the new middle-class, the individualism of marketplace exchange where equivalence reigns, remains concealed. Whether reading the news or watching T.V., to be an accomplice of ideology the subject must think 'naturally'.

Footnotes

1. For studies of news production see Altheide, D., **Creating Reality: How Television News Distorts Events**, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1976); Fishman, M. "Crime Waves As Ideology", **Social Problems**, 25, 1978: 531 - 543; **Manufacturing the News**, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980); Gans, H. **Deciding What's**

News, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979); Golding, P. and P. Elliott, **Making the News**, (London: Longmans, 1979); Schlesinger, P. **Putting Reality Together: BBC News**, (London: Constable, 1978); Tracey M. **The Production of Political Television**, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977); Tuchman, G. "Objectivity as strategic ritual", **American Journal of Sociology**, 77, 1972: 660-679; "Making News By Doing Work: Routinizing the Unexpected", **American Journal of Sociology** 79, 1973: 110 - 131; **Making News**, (New York: Free Press, 1978).

For studies of news content see: Chibnall, C. **Law and Order News**, (London: Tavistock, 1977); Gitlin, T. **The Whole World is Watching**, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Glasgow Media Group, **Bad News**, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1976); **More Bad News**, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980); Hall, S. et. al. **Policing the Crisis**, (London: Macmillan, 1978); Molotch, H. and M. Lester, "Accidental News: The Great Oil Spill", **American Journal of Sociology**, 81, 1975, 235 - 260.

2. The sources for organizational and occupational control are numerous but spring from two main traditions of research. The first is the response to the Weberian theory of bureaucratic organization, the second the theory of professionalism and its relation to bureaucratic control.

The phenomenological tradition found particularly in the American studies cited above - those by Altheide, Fishman, Molotch and Lester, and Tuchman - draw upon the works of Alfred Schutz, (**Collected Papers**, 3 vols., ed. by M. Natanson, The Hague: Mouton Nijhoff, 1962, 1964, 1966; **The phenomenology of the Social World**, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), Erving Goffman, **Frame Analysis** (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974), and Harold Garfinkel, **Studies in Ethnomethodology**, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice - Hall, 1967).

The linguistic roots of news analysis draw upon the works of Halliday, M. "Language Structure and Language Function," in Lyons, J. (ed.) **New Horizons in Linguistics**, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970); Austin, J. **How To Do Things With Words**, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

The semiological tradition stems primarily from the works of Umberto Eco, **A Theory of Semiotics**, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1976), **The Role of the Reader**, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979); and Roland Barthes, **Elements of Semiology**, (London: Cape, 1967), **Mythologies**, (London: Palladin, 1973), **Image, Music, Text** (London: Fontana, 1977), **The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies** (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979). See also Coward, R. and J. Ellis, **Language and Materialism**, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977); Fiske, J. and J. Hartley, **Reading Television**, (London: Methuen, 1978); Hall, S. "Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse", occasional paper, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1973, "The Determination of News Photographs", in Cohen, S. and J. Young (eds.) **The Manufacture of News**, (London: Constable, 1973).

The neo-Marxist contributions stem primarily from the theory of ideology as developed by Louis Althusser and his followers. For a statement and critique see Coward R. and J. Ellis, op cit, 1977; also Sumner, C., **Reading Ideologies**, (London: Academic Press, 1979).

3. Gitlin, T. "Media Sociology: The Dominant Paradigm", **Theory and Society**, 6, 1978: 205 - 253.

4. The attainability of objectivity is, to be sure, a question that journalists recognize as problematic. In a recent editorial in **MacLean's** (May 11, 1981) the editor states that the most "common complaint" levelled at journalists is that they are "so seldom objective." He

continues that "absolute neutrality is as undesirable (and uninteresting) as it is impossible ...". What is desirable (and interesting) then? Relative neutrality? Partial neutrality?

The point is that however candid journalists may be about the actual achievement of objectivity, they none the less continue to try to be impartial and formally balanced in their accounts. In this respect the rather cynical tone that affects Canadian news - magazine and so called 'life style' journalism represents a radical attempt to generate moral distance from sources and subject. Cynicism (and sarcasm) are the very embodiment of a striving for objectivity.

5. Hall, S. et. al., op. cit.. See also Chibnall, op. cit.; Fishman, op. cit., 1980; Gans, op. cit.; Molotch and Lester, op. cit.; Tuchman, op. cit., 1978.

6. ibid.

7. ibid.

8. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. I. (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968).

9. Gans, op. cit..

10. Ehrenreich, B. and J. Ehrenreich, "The Professional - Managerial Class," in Walker, P. (ed.) *Between Labor and Capital*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1978).

11. Tuchman, op. cit., 1978.

12. For discussions of the demise of the "partisan" press and the development of "objective" journalism see Elliott, P. "Professional Ideology and Organizational Change: The Journalist since 1800" in Boyce, G. et. al., Newspaper History, (London: Constable, 1978); Rutherford, P. *The Making of the Canadian Media*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978); Schudson, M. *Discovering The News*, (New York: Basic Books, 1978); Smith, A. "The Long Road to Objectivity and Back Again," in Boyce, G., op. cit..

13. For a discussion of the relationship between economic concentration, the growing application of science and scienticism, and the growth of the 'new' middle class of professionals and managers see Noble, D. *America By Design*, (New York: Knopf, 1977).

14. Weber, Max. *Economy and Society*, Vol. III, (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968).

15. Hall, op. cit..

16. On the concept of myth see Barthes, R. op. cit., 1973, 1977, 1979.

17. The vehicle for this is source dependency. For an extended discussion of how journalists normally take for granted the veracity of bureaucratic information see Fishman, op. cit., 1980.

18. For an example of this see Knight, G. and T. Dean, "The SAS: Myth at a Price", paper presented at the conference of the Canadian Communication Association, Halifax, Nova Scotia, May 23 - 26, 1981.

19. Phillips, E. B. "Novelty Without Change", *Journal of Communication*, 26, 1976, 87 - 92.

20. Respectively Altheide, op. cit.; Tuchman, op. cit., 1978; Glasgow Media Group, op. cit., 1980.

21. For the 'consumer' view of the news reader see Tuchman, op. cit., 1978. For the idea of the reader as an active subject see Eco, op. cit., 1979; Coward and Ellis, op. cit., 1977; Williamson, J. *Decoding Advertisements*, (London: Marion Boyars, 1977).

Graham Knight (Ph.D., Carleton 1978) is Assistant Professor of Sociology at McMaster University. His research interest is in the study of news production and content in relation to ideology and political economy.