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# The BBC and the Troubles: 1968 — 1998

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Submitted in fulfilment of the degree of PhD  
The University of Edinburgh  
2016



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# Abstract / Lay Summary

In 1985, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher declared publicity to be the ‘oxygen’ of terrorism. Speaking from within a climate of domestic terrorism, such a statement draws into question the nature of contemporary media coverage.

The British Broadcasting Corporation, existing as a public sector broadcaster, occupies a unique position in the context of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century mass media. The BBC is central to the creation and direction of national and international news agendas, in the formation of worldwide public opinion, and the brand name and reputation hold connotations of honesty, accuracy and impartiality. It can therefore be positioned as a ‘a microcosm of some larger system or a whole society’ (Gomm et al., 2000, p.99).

Yet, the historical visual output of the organisation in relation to domestic terrorism emanating from the environment of the Troubles — a significant period in social, cultural, political, and media history — has never been subject to rigorous academic scrutiny.

Grounded in the field of media and cultural studies, and drawing upon extensive archival research, this thesis investigates the representation of domestic terror by the BBC in news and documentary format over the three-decade period of 1968-1998 through two interpretive modes of textual analysis: content analysis and semiotics. Throughout, the representation of events is contextualised in relation to media theory, with the words and pictures broadcast by the BBC analysed. The framing of acts of terror as image events is considered, as well as the visual aesthetic, codes, and values, of news reports.

Ultimately, this work argues that BBC coverage of the Troubles has clear and identifiable patterns and symbols. Initial outbreaks of violence, where no corresponding representational referents existed, trended towards the vivid and graphic. Gradually, however, there was an overt movement away from this form; with the notable exception of moments where a method of perception created a disjuncture to established means, coverage was dominated by generic media templates, the rhetoric of euphemism, a concerted lack of contextualisation, and empty symbolism of the absent image.

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# Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that this submission has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Greg S. Campbell  
June 2016

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You will see that this little clicking contraption with the revolving handle will make a revolution in our life...It is a direct attack on the old methods of literary art. We shall have to adapt ourselves to the shadowy screen and to the cold machine.

But I rather like it. This swift change of scene, this blending of emotion and experience — it is much better than the heavy, long-drawn-out kind of writing to which we are accustomed.

It is closer to life.

Leo Tolstoy  
(quoted by Whelehan, 2013, p. 5).



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# Introduction

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I see terrorism as violence for effect.  
Terrorists choreograph dramatic incidents....  
Terrorism is theatre.

Brian Jenkins  
(quoted by Combs, 2013, p. 171).

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## #blamethemuslims<sup>1</sup>

At 15:25 on Friday, July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011, a car bomb exploded in the executive government quarter of Norway's capital city Oslo. Eight people were killed and twenty-six wounded.

Two hours later, at 17:30, police in Oslo were informed of shootings on the island of Utøya, some 40 kilometres northwest of Oslo and the location of the Norwegian Labour Party's annual youth summer camp. Initial reports suggested ten fatalities; overnight this became eighty-five (later revised to 68).

International news media immediately covered the incident, broadcasting footage from the two locations, and interviews with members of the police and government. Leading Western print organisations — both European and American and including *The Guardian*, *The Financial Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post* — along with broadcasters on television, radio and online, sought to identify the perpetrators as Muslim extremists and explicitly, Al Qaeda.

As the weekend progressed however, eyewitness accounts revealed that the perpetrator was a lone 'Norwegian-looking man, tall and blonde, dressed in

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<sup>1</sup> Hashtags are user-created 'groupings' on Twitter (a form of metadata tag) used to identify keywords or topics. #blamethemuslims was created by student Sanum Ghafoor following the July 22<sup>nd</sup> events in Norway where 'the default [response] was to blame Muslims'. Topsy.com (a tweet monitoring site) records more than 165,000 tweets using the tag, for example 'my phones running out of battery #blamethemuslims'.

what appeared to be a police uniform' (BBC 23.07.11). The attacks were homegrown, a domestic act of terror by a right-wing ideologue.

### (Domestic) Terror

The shift from Islamic fundamentalism to white supremacist was marked by a change in language. The original moniker of terrorism — replete with political charge and inherently problematic definition — shifted to the even more problematic “domestic terror”. Domestic terrorism occupies a unique position in the discourse of global terror; in the United Kingdom, such terrorism has been dominated by the liberation movement of the (Provisional) Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Whilst the notion of domestic then — and ideas of inside/outside and “home-grown” — are complicated by the identification of those in, and supporting of, the IRA as Irish (and not British), the Troubles are fundamentally identified as a period of domestic terror. After 9/11 there has been a renewed approach to international terror, with a rising focus on Islamic terrorism as *the* global threat. Yet there remains a continued threat of violence from the two main Republican groups, the Continuity IRA (CIRA) and the Real IRA (RIRA), who both reject the 1998 Belfast agreement. An overall development has accompanied this passage of time, from violence to dialogue. Simultaneously, there has been an associated (and ongoing) shift of terrorist to interlocutor, opening up complex questions of framing.

## The Troubles

The origins of the IRA (in its modern sense) can be traced to its predecessor, the Irish Volunteers, the April 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, and the formation of the Irish State in 1919. Seeking the reunification of Ireland, through the incorporation of the six counties of Northern Ireland, the IRA as an organisation became increasingly fractured, marginalised and essentially ceased to exist in the post-World War II period. Increased violence (on Catholics by the Loyalist Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in 1966), and the growing civil rights movement in 1968 — centred on the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) and demanding an end to discrimination (in housing and employment) and gerrymandering — ultimately led to intense political and sectarian rioting across Northern Ireland in August 1969. More nationalist members of the Republican movement, dissatisfied with the IRA's strategy, split in December 1969, and the Provisional IRA were formed. They would kill some 1,780 people between 1969 and 2001.

## Euro-Terror

The Irish Civil Rights organisation, drawing on the tactics and symbolism of the American Civil Rights movement, occurred at a period of protest and social change on a global level. 'There has never been a year like 1968, and it is unlikely there will ever be again', according to Mark Kurlansky in *1968: The Year That Rocked the World*; 'at a time when nations and cultures were still very different...there occurred a spontaneous combustion of rebellious



spirits around the world' (Kurlansky, 2004, p.xv). Yet the resultant effect was one of violence and domestic terrorism: the birth of what Yonah Alexander terms Fighting Communist Organizations (FCO) (1992). Alongside the IRA's resurgence, the roots of the Baader-Meinhof cells in West Germany and the Red Brigades in Italy can be traced to the turbulent events of 1968. The idea of international terrorism was established at this point:

The actions of the Red Army Faction (Baader-Meinhof gang) in West Germany, the Red Army in Italy, the Angry Brigade and the IRA in Britain, Euzkadi Ta Akatasuna (ETA) in Spain, the Palestine Liberation Organisation in various places, the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the Montoneros in Argentina all fed the view that a new era of terror had dawned (Schlesinger et al., 1983, p.3)

As Sean O'Hagan notes, the catalyst for these events was the advent of television:

In 1968 two technological innovations transformed the nightly news reports: the use of videotape, which was cheap and reusable, instead of film, and the same-day broadcast, which meant that often unedited images of rebellion were disseminated across continents almost as they happened...Indeed, the radicals had a much better grasp of the galvanising power of television than the politicians they were trying to overthrow (2008) .

Bruce Hoffman, identifying the printing press as the first, suggests the launch of a television satellite in 1968 can be recognised as the 'second great revolution in mass communication' (2006, p.178). Both Kurlansky and O'Hagan quote Abbie Hoffman (no relation), co-founder of the Youth International Party, on the subsequent increased importance of a visual narrative: 'A modern revolutionary group headed for the television, not for the factory' (Kurlansky, 2004, p.98). Pierre Bourdieu echoes this sentiment,

highlighting the fact ‘that fifty clever folk...can have as much political effect as half a million’ (cited by Hobsbawm, 1994, p.320).

### The Media and Terrorism

The entire world has then indeed taken, to use W.J.T Mitchell’s phrase, a pictorial turn, where the ‘era of video...the age of electronic reproduction, has developed new forms of visual simulation and illusionism with unprecedented powers’ (Mitchell, 1994, p.15). Superseding the linguistic turn, images and their representation, now resonate across ‘every level of culture, from the most refined philosophical speculations, to the most vulgar productions of the mass media’ (ibid, p. 16).

These “powers” have been harnessed by terrorists and there exists what Jean Baudrillard terms the ‘spectacle of terrorism’ (2001b). Graphic depictions of death, destruction and despair highlight this visual fascination, and terrorists, their violent acts, and the mass media are entwined in a mutually assured symbiotic relationship.<sup>2</sup> Media and terrorism (domestic or international) are therefore inextricably linked; terrorism is by its very nature, a psychological weapon. It relies on the communication of a threat, or representation of the actual act of violence and/or its aftermath, to a wider society (either in a communal, national or international sense) in order to

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<sup>2</sup> Such a relationship similarly exists between governments, the military and the media. Western warfare has been diluted towards hyper-terrorism and “shock and awe”, where virtual victories, the event-instant and pure spectacle dominate the visual spectrum. As Mitchell emphasises in *Picture Theory*, ‘CNN has shown us that a supposedly alert, educated population can witness the destruction of an Arab nation as little more than a spectacular television melodrama’ (1994, p.16).

function. The modern warfare of terrorism then, involves ‘the telegenic qualities of such atrocities constantly reinforcing their evocative power’ (Virilio, 2000a, p.23). Those involved quickly learnt the importance of the spectacle, exploiting the ‘real time of images [and] their instantaneous global diffusion,’ just as civil rights revolutionaries did in 1968 (Baudrillard, 2001a). It also instigated an escalation, where limited resources sought to maximise the resultant representation and visual impact. As real time surpassed real space, reportage of acts of terrorism could be replicated quickly (and eventually instantly) across borders, framing a single atrocity and transforming it into an individual, or sequence of, images causing widespread fear and panic. Joseph Tuman points to the central difference between murder/assault and an act of terrorism being the ‘intent of the latter to communicate a message to a larger set of audiences than those targeted in the attack itself’ (cited by Huxford, 2004, p.9). For Huxford, as the importance of the visual increased, images would become:

as much a weapon as a bullet or a bomb, with news coverage serving as a frighteningly effective delivery system. In a world of relentless images and instant media, the signifier has become even more potent an instrument of war than the acts it signifies (2004, p.2).

Analysis of the nature of representation then, including how such signifiers have been deployed, is a vital component of the media ecology meta-discipline. At its simplest, this refers to the study of communications technologies, including the mass media, as a cultural environment (or more precisely *environments*). Just as ecology as a term corresponds to

environment, we can here identify a connection to the forefather of media study, Marshall McLuhan (1992; 2001; 2008). McLuhan's famous phrase, the medium is the message, similarly contains this link in its very makeup, with the dictionary definition of medium as a noun "an environment". McLuhan's second famous analogy — the global village — points toward the connected world, where media systems change culture, and change us, over time.

Allied to media ecology, and McLuhan himself, can be positioned mediation; what the 'media do, and to what we do with the media' (Silverstone, 2006). Used across education, psychology, sociology and media studies, the central mediating factor is the medium itself; within the media then, this two way process is through selection, organisation, framing and focusing.

In contrast to this term is mediatisation, developed principally by Friedrich Krotz, Winfried Schulz and Stig Hjarvard (cited by Couldry, 2008, p.4). Ben O'Loughlin quotes Hjarvard, who seeks to emphasise the clear distinction that exists between mediatisation and simple "mediation":

Mediation describes the concrete act of communication by means of a medium in a specific social context. By contrast, mediatisation refers to a more long-lasting process, whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of media's influence (2015, p. 169)

With terrorism (alongside war and conflict) now culturally and socially dependent upon media (Awan et al., 2011, p. 5), it is important to investigate these through their mediation and mediatisation; with the BBC central to the media ecology of the United Kingdom, it is important to subject her

broadcasting to analysis; with the Troubles of Northern Ireland central to our historical relationship with terrorism, it is important to study this period as a tool to illuminate the present.

Semantically, both terrorism in general, and the Troubles present significant terminological problems. 'Even before you begin to mention political violence,' according to BBC television reporter Peter Taylor, 'the words you use may betray the political path you seem to be treading':

At the most basic level, where is the conflict taking place?  
Is it in Ulster? Northern Ireland? The Province? The North of Ireland?  
Or the Six Counties?...And once you've sorted out the names, what's  
actually going on there? Is it a conflict? Is it a war? A rebellion?  
A revolution? A criminal conspiracy? Or a liberation struggle?...  
Lastly, and probably most important, how do we describe those involved? Are  
they terrorists? Criminals? The Mafia? Murderers? Or freedom fighters? It  
depends on your perception of the conflict, and who you happen to be  
working for at the time...(cited by Curtis, 1998, p.133).

The British army and the RUC were invariably detailed under the rubric of "security forces" by the media (and initially politicians). Such words carry significant connotations and cannot be used passively. The most controversial rhetoric, as detailed, involves terrorist and terrorism phraseology. Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman would undoubtedly endorse the thesis of Schlesinger, Murdock and Elliot, arguing such words have become semantic tools of the powerful in the West (1994). They suggest deployment of the terms has, and continues, to generally be confined to the use of violence by individuals/marginal groups and not official/state violence.

The importance of considering usage of these terms is due to the implication that one form of violence (and terrorism) is more reprehensible than others.

A 1974 BBC internal memorandum, entitled *Guerrillas and Terrorists* detailed 'terrorist' to be

the appropriate description for people who engage in acts of terrorism, and in particular, acts of violence against civilians, that is operations not directed at military targets or military personnel. Guerrilla is acceptable for leaders and members of the various Palestine organisations of this kind, but they too become terrorists when they engage in terrorist acts (unless raiders, hijackers or gunmen is more appropriate) (cited by Taylor, 1996, p.335).

Even relatively "simple" terms, for example "force" and "violence", are suggestive towards a degree of justification. Therefore,

to prefer 'Northern Ireland' is to grind one axe, the 'north of Ireland', quite another. Each negates, and, at root, seeks to dispossess the opposing allegiance. A deadly result of this inability to communicate, Maurice Goldring observes is that the necessary words have gone rusty, and the only language left is that of violence (Butler, 1995, p.101).

In fact, every aspect of coverage was subject to controversy, particularly amongst the immediate community being broadcast to. Even beyond (or more precisely *before*) word choice, pronunciation (for example of the h in H Block) could reveal a reporter's religious origins, inculcate a stance, and garner critique.

### The BBC

To now further John Huxford's phrase, mass mediated terrorism moves toward an (*the*) image rendering bullet and bomb redundant (see Roger,

2013, p.48). In 1985, at the height of the Troubles, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher would state ‘we must try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend’ (1985).

With the consolidation of power in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by the Western mass media, where a tendency towards extreme partiality and complicity between government and corporate conglomerates arises, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) occupies a unique position. Existing as a public sector broadcaster — funded by a licence fee — the BBC is free from a reliance on commercial revenue. With its mission of “collecting news and information in any part of the world” (as set forth in the Royal Charter) the BBC is the largest broadcast news organisation in the world, with 44 news-gathering bureau (3 in the UK and 41 abroad) producing 120 hours of daily content. Its brand name and reputation hold remarkable connotations of honesty, accuracy and impartiality, and its tri-media journalism — on television, radio and online — grants unprecedented dissemination on a global scale. Director Wim Wenders explains that ‘the most political decision you make [as a filmmaker] is where you direct people’s eyes. In other words, what you show people, day in and day out, is political’ (cited by Levi Strauss, 2003, p.1). The coverage of the BBC then, with the importance and influence it holds, was (and remains) crucial across the media ecology of the United Kingdom, in the formation of public opinion, the creation of myth, and the direction of national and international news agenda(s).

Prior to the explosion of violence in 1968, Northern Ireland was, for mainstream British culture, ‘an obscure and unknown periphery, little acknowledged and rarely featured’ (McLoone, 1996b, p.80). This echoes the words of Philip Schlesinger, who, in his sociological exploration of BBC newsroom operations *Putting Reality Together*, writes,

until 1968 the situation in the Province was ignored by the national BBC...[it was only] with violent clashes between Catholics and Protestants, and the involvement of the police, attention became focused on Northern Ireland...Violence has been the dominant theme of news from the Province since’ (Schlesinger, 1978, pp.206-209).

The role of the BBC as a public service broadcaster must also be considered and it is in this role ‘first and foremost that the BBC has understood and defined its mission ever since 1927’ (cited by Scannell, 1996, p.80). Yet the notion of the BBC as a *British* Broadcasting Corporation can be immediately tempered in exploring its national presence. An initial presumption is then the unity of the culture and identity of the United Kingdom, that which the BBC (re)presents. This is problematised by two nations within a nation – Wales and Scotland – with each instead defined as a regional adjunct. Further, the relationship between all regional varieties, is not simply with England, but rather London. This then highlights the incongruous issue of Northern Ireland; what Rex Cathcart terms “the most contrary region” (1984).

The relationship, particularly regarding autonomy, between the BBC in Belfast and headquarters in London, can be recognised as problematic from



the BBC's inception in the region. The Belfast station was managed and run by non-Irish personnel; the role of local input and local knowledge can be clearly read through criticism of BBC London offered by the *Irish Radio Journal*:

The announcer at the London station caused great amusement to Northern listeners recently by the attempts which he made to pronounce Fermanagh. Lectures from Irish stations on the orthoepy of Irish names should be given for the benefit of officials of English stations. It is hoped that these lectures will be given before Doagh qualifies for a place in the news bulletins (McLoone, 1996a, p.25).

In suggesting the 1994 ceasefire led to an outcome of uncertainty, Des Cranston seeks to draw a parallel with the conclusion of World War Two, where the social, political, economic and cultural shifts affected the dominant media source (radio):

as the BBC Yearbook noted at the time, War reporting had one thing about it that spelt simplicity. There was seldom much difference of opinion on any given week, as to what was the right lead for the news' (1996, p.35).

Television news itself, through the very nature of its construction, is dominated by uncertainty, and the ultimate desire to form some sort of order within. Disparate stories and the order of construction is carefully crafted to draw the audience from one to the next, built to 'hold and build the viewership rather than place events in context or explain issues in depth' (Postman, 2008, p.113). The nature of uncertainty has changed, but the previous twenty-five years, as portrayed through the media, can be recognised as awash with uncertainty; with framing, with representation, with language, with visuals.

Since 1969, British police, armed forces and politicians were engaged in a continuous and evolving counter-insurgency campaign with propaganda a key component. Events within this conflict called into question the very integrity of the state itself. In *Televising Terrorism*, Schlesinger, Murdock and Elliot argue that the representation of terrorism is entwined with the exercise of definitional power, where the media are central to the propaganda war. According to the authors,

television as the medium with the largest news audiences and the highest credibility, has been regarded by all sides as of particular importance. Without doubt, in the debate about censorship, broadcasting has figured far more centrally than press. This is because broadcasting, particularly the BBC, is legitimised by an ideology of public service under which it is seen as owing obligations to the community as a whole (1983, p.121)

### Rationale

Kenneth Jarecke's "Incinerated Iraqi, Gulf War, Iraq," taken on February 26, 1991, exists as one of the most visceral images of conflict photography. Centrally framed by the windshield, and backlit by harsh, bright daylight, it shows, in close up, the charred, deformed remains of a soldier, attempting to lift himself out of a destroyed vehicle. A distorted expression of pain and panic is imprinted on his face, and he is almost staring directly at the camera, and in turn the audience. Rejected by the American press, it was printed by *The Observer* in the United Kingdom under the headline "The real face of War" (01.03.91). The image directly addressed the idea 'war is real and war is terrible' (Taylor 1998, p.75), simultaneously confronting the notion of high-tech bloodless warfare as prompted through the military and media; it would

later become an iconic (and award winning) photo, its iconicity ‘rendered in universal terms’ (Kennedy, 2016, p. 110) of humanity and the desire to live. Jarecke’s remark — ‘if I don’t take pictures like these, people like my mom will think war is what they see in movies’ — served as the direct impetus for this study (Deghett, 2014). As David Perlmutter notes, ‘history becomes telescoped over time. Great, long-drawn-out events are now recalled in collective memory by a few images, facts, and phrases’ (2005, p. 119). Jarecke’s image, as a vision of war, is now a part of society’s collective memory regarding the Gulf War; within a personal and British context, the image of Father Edward Daly — clad in black, waving a blood stained white handkerchief, crouched and leading four men who carry the slender body of a teenager — is one of the dominant images of Bloody Sunday that simultaneously define this idea of a “great, long-drawn out event”.

Across media studies and conflict, much attention is directed at contemporary events, particularly in the post 9/11 period. There is a reluctance to probe deeply into the past; instead a (to be expected) fascination with the present exists, where a surfeit of images are produced and disseminated immediately across the globe. As McQueen notes, ‘The literature exploring British and US media coverage of major armed conflicts is enormous and has grown significantly in recent years, particularly in the aftermath of the controversial invasion of Iraq in 2003’ (2010, p. 117).

Yet, in seeking an understanding of the representation of conflict and terrorism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the overlooked past can provide a unique insight. Furthermore, when issues of domestic (and home-grown) terrorism are central to current security concerns within the United Kingdom, the Troubles of Northern Ireland offer an intriguing parallel. Writing prior to our current mediatised climate, Alan Bairner suggests ‘it is doubtful if any other part of the world has attracted as much sustained media attention as Northern Ireland has done since the late 1960s’ (1996, p.173). This study seeks to probe BBC’s coverage of the Troubles, investigate the representation of domestic terrorism, and discover the nature – and value – of such “sustained media attention”.

No other academic media research exclusively related to the reportage of the BBC and the “long-drawn out” Troubles has been conducted.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as David Butler eloquently states,

Media studies is politics by another name...the purpose is to investigate representation – with a view to interpreting the impact of these upon the popular mind. This is the study of symbolic power; the power of media forms to influence, shape and perhaps define, commonly held belief (Butler, 1996, p.127).

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<sup>3</sup> A limited field exists concerned with general media issues, predominantly propaganda and censorship; see primarily the work of David Miller (1990; 1994a; 1994b), David Butler (1996; 1997), Philip Schlesinger (1979; 1983; 1992), Rex Cathcart (1984) and Liz Curtis (1998). Cathcart’s study of the BBC in Northern Ireland is an invaluable source of factual information from the organisation’s establishment until the early 1970s. The BBC have been accused of both anti-republican (Curtis) and anti-loyalist (Parkinson, 1998) bias. Asa Briggs wrote a five volume text on UK broadcasting from 1922 to 1974; these were essentially a history of the BBC who commissioned the work.

He is here endorsing the words of John Fiske: 'Communication is too often taken for granted when it should be taken to pieces' (cited by Hartley, 1982, p.xiii)

A detailed examination of the nature and evolution of BBC news coverage of domestic terrorism, so crucial to the shaping and dynamics of contemporary British history, politics and social contestation, is therefore a critical element of our media discourse. This work will focus on actuality television: news bulletins, news magazines, current affairs and documentary programming. Television represents the primary sources of imagery (in general) for the public, commanding 'large audiences and is widely seen as having considerable potential influence on public opinion' (Schlesinger et al., 1983, p.35). As communication develops and history progresses, a visual and semiotic vocabulary has been created and codified, with recurrent motifs, symbols and themes established. The representation of an event is never straightforward, with the critical position of visuals shown in relation to terrorism (and the spectacle of modern war) requiring interrogation accordingly.

For Schlesinger et al.,

news bulletins tend to be rendered in a style that conceals the process of selection and decision which lies behind the reporting, and which allow little room for comment or argumentation. The opinions presented are often confined to the holders of power. As a result news is one of the more closed forms of presentation (1983, p.36).

Using this classification, they then divide up the four actuality criteria, categorising the cross-cutting dimensions of the terrorism media landscape. News bulletins (*BBC News*) and news magazines (*Newsnight*, *Nationwide*), typically occurring daily, institutionally authorised and event based, are labelled “closed”, operating from and within the terms of reference of an official governing perspective. Current affairs programming (*Panorama*, *Spotlight*) and particularly documentaries (Peter Taylor’s trilogy *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin*, *Loyalists*, and *Brits: The War against the IRA*), are conversely individually authored, occurring weekly or infrequently and utilising filmed reports, studio discussion, and cinematic/stylistic techniques. These are “relatively open”, offering a space in which ‘core assumptions of the official perspective can be interrogated and contested and in which other perspectives can be presented and examined’ (Schlesinger et al., 1983, p.32). An “event”, in both broadcasting and philosophical concepts, is typically the focus of daily news broadcasts and magazine shows, whilst wider (but generic) “topics” are explored through the documentary medium. Schlesinger’s proposal of an official dominant perspective echoes the mass communication theories of Stuart Hall, and the notion of decoding and interpreting through the prevailing ideology and preferred meaning of a dominant-hegemonic code (Hall, 1981).

Television news then, allegedly stylistically neutral, in fact moves beyond denotation and approaches strict limits of connotation. As Richard Hoggart and the Glasgow University Media Group argued in 1976, ‘what its

practitioners call objective news is in reality a highly selected interpretation of events' (2009, p.x). There is a preponderance of drama, privileging of imagery and overt fetishisation of violence.

The coverage of Northern Irish affairs in the British media has tended to simplify violent incidents and to avoid historical background...the story has been permanently one of violence, and of irrational, inexplicable violence at that (Schlesinger et al., 1983, p.37).

BBC broadcasting, across news, current affairs, and documentary, during the 1968-1998 period reflected national concerns. Footage from this three decade period are the main research focus for this thesis. These dates serve as the popularly accepted dates for the Troubles in Northern Ireland and represent a period where visuals of domestic terrorism dominated. Before the twenty-first century of instantaneous global diffusion, digital warfare, and the international terrorism of Daesh, the Troubles in Northern Ireland exist as a unique situation: homegrown terrorism being broadcast daily directly to the citizens involved, separated only (initially) by a body of water. This thesis will address itself to identifying precisely how the armed conflict in Northern Ireland (and subsequently on mainland Britain) was covered. A full qualitative analysis of every news report and act of terrorism is almost an impossibility; this is not an exhaustive study of all broadcast output over the period concerned. Rather, specific moments will receive sustained attention throughout, arranged largely chronologically, and utilised to consider trends and thematic developments. The most detailed attention will be paid to these incidences where "images, facts, and phrases" have entered "collective

memory” as these offer the opportunity for qualitative analysis and detailed semiotic study.<sup>4</sup>

This analysis, in combination with research of existing literature across media theory and analysis, will be used to chart the nature of coverage and how it evolved. The focus on a single network will allow an investigation of why coverage of the Troubles took a particular form at various identifiable moments. How the BBC represented, and how it coped with representing, (perspectives of) conflict, violence and terrorism is of importance because it will illuminate the institutions role within culture, identify the visuals it selected to embody these acts of violence, and help provide an understanding of the many interconnecting macro and micro processes that shaped broadcast journalism at a time of perpetual domestic terrorism.

Indeed visual imagery can in fact highlight that which certain words — the euphemistic vocabulary of terrorism and war — cannot express, or fail to convey. Friendly fire. Abuse. Rendition. Collateral Damage. Surgical Strike. Ethnic cleansing. Precision Weapon. Black Site. Would the events of Abu Ghraib have received widespread attention and condemnation without the visual documentation? With only Donald Rumsfeld’s proclamation it was simply ‘the excesses of human nature that humanity suffers?’ For artist Trevor Paglen, it is visuals that ‘show you something that can never be captured in words’ (2010). Body bags evolved into human remains pouches

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<sup>4</sup> For further clarification on the selection process see chapter two, which contains a detailed overview of the corpus and associated methodology.



and now transfer tubes. At each stages, there is a further distancing involved in the concrete physicality of the body (to the “human”; to the “transfer”) and here the concept of sanitisation (explored further in chapters two and five) is invoked.

Drawing on original research for a Masters study, and following the conducting of preliminary archival work, a hypothesis, or ‘inference that is formulated and provisionally adopted to explain observed facts or conditions and guide in further investigation’ (cited by Singh and Bajpai, 2008, p.93) was developed. This is expressed simply as

BBC coverage of the Troubles has clear and identifiable patterns and symbols of visual representation.

This hypothesis emerged from initial observation of BBC footage concerning the early and sporadic outbreaks of violence and was reflected in the conclusions reached within a small number of journalistic articles critiquing coverage of the conflict throughout the mid-80s. A main research question lies at the heart of this study:

How did BBC television news represent the “Troubles” over the three decade period of 1968—1998?

Related to this then are overlapping questions:

More specifically, what images did the BBC use to report the Troubles?

What patterns, changes and symbols can be discerned in the nature of the visuals deployed to represent acts (and associated acts) of terrorism?

Why did these changes take place?

Whilst there is a substantial body of research employing textual and/or content analysis based on news and current affairs coverage of conflict, warfare and contemporary terrorism, there is remarkably little focusing exclusively on the BBC and the Troubles; a significant period in social, cultural, political, and media history. This thesis seeks to go some way towards redressing this imbalance, presenting a volume that future scholarship can profitably draw on.

### Chapter Summary

Chapter one provides an overview of key theoretical concepts that will appear throughout this study, including televisuality, liveness, news values, compassion fatigue and sanitisation. Chapter two, focusing directly on the methodology, includes discussion of the textual analysis methodological purposes selected, providing explanation of how these processes were applied. The sourcing and selection of the corpus is detailed.

The first analytical chapter of this thesis — *Origins* — features a historical overview of the divided society, and traces coverage of initial events towards the point in which sporadic acts of violence translated into “domestic terrorism”. A first case study shall concern the astonishing footage broadcast — in both black and white and visceral colour — of the “Battle of the Bogside” in 1969. The framing and determination of the event, alongside the politics of image ambiguity, immediately question purported notions of neutrality and objectivity. Television quickly became *the* central medium of reportage, with

pictures ‘always a better medium for conveying violence and death than the written word’ (Winsby, 1970). It also represented the first instance of the television war (alongside Vietnam) where

the people in whose name the war is being conducted are able to see in their own homes the incidents of battle night after night. There is a sharpness of impact that goes beyond the reporting of all previous wars. The horrors of war do not come distilled through the refined judgment of a trained observer. They come harsh and straight (*The Times*, 18.11.71).

Chapter 4 — *Trouble* — advances chronologically to the 1970s and the openings of “the propaganda war”. Conflict with governmental departments would establish significant divisions in the BBC-state relationship, whilst what Mary Holland calls ‘the British way of censorship’ further impacted representation (1981). The visuals afforded to coverage of what is known as “Bloody Sunday” are central to the chapter and will exist as the second significant case study. Its position as an iconic event, and the nature of this footage — with graphic visuals that would be heavily sanitised if shown regarding a similar act today — is also of note. Coverage of the remainder of this period is permeated with generic images of conflict and terrorism, including riots, shootings, bombings, protests and the military. Reporting contained little explanation of the historical origins of the conflict, and few alternative perspectives were offered (Schlesinger’s closed category).

Chapter 5, *Hunger*, involves a detailed examination of the coverage of the 1981 Hunger Strikes. Initially confined within the prison system (the “blanket protest”, which received minimal coverage), the protest escalated with a

series of Hunger Strikes, notably that of Bobby Sands.<sup>5</sup> The problem of propaganda — from both republican and government/army sources — presented significant difficulties for journalists, whilst the election of Bobby Sands (during the strikes) to the Westminster parliament dramatically increased reportage and news values. There was though, an overall failing (including by the print media) to fully contextualise events, resulting in confusion, ‘conditioned by government policy’ (Tangen Page, 1996, p.170). The BBC dramatisation *Elephant* is particularly enlightening and is considered here, consciously adopting the aesthetics of the broadcast news, whilst BBC coverage of Sands’ funeral, alongside riots after his death, is also surveyed. The Remembrance Day bombing in Enniskillen in 1987, and the prominence afforded to amateur footage captured in the immediate aftermath, is the chapter’s second major case study.

Chapter 6 – *Ceasefire* – moves into the 90s and includes analysis of a crucial rhetorical weapon, the 1988-1994 broadcasting ban. Also of importance is the series of large bombings throughout the decade including London Docklands and Manchester (1996). There was a distinct familiarity to coverage of these events with similar footage being broadcast of each; images of damaged buildings dominated proceedings with a media emphasis placed on the associated monetary value. Such images were ideal for the increasingly spectacle driven media, as there was an overall absence of graphic content

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<sup>5</sup> Whilst Robert A. Pape, who has conducted extensive research on terrorism and particularly suicide bombings, quotes Niebuhr and the notion ‘Hunger Strikes are not ordinarily considered acts of terrorism’, they are included in this work as indicative of an “event” occurring within a terrorism discourse. (2011, 286)

and human fatalities. The chapter ends with coverage of the 1998 Omagh bombing; despite extensive casualties, the reportage was again dominated by footage of damaged buildings, rubble and ruin; however, again, an amateur video significantly altered reportage.

In David Miller's *Don't Mention The War*, he writes

alongside, but intimately connected with the bombings and shootings, the torture and the beatings, runs another conflict. It is waged from the offices of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at Stormont Castle to the Republican Press Centre on the Falls Road; from the offices of the Irish Times in Dublin, the London Times to the New York Times in the USA; From living rooms in Protestant East Belfast and Catholic West Belfast to the English home counties; And from the offices of the British government in Whitehall to diplomatic missions around the world.  
This is the propaganda war (1994, p.12).

This was the BBC.

The rhetoric and representation of their reportage — what was and was not covered, what was and was not said, what was and was not shown — incredibly influenced public opinion in mainland Britain. It continues to do so today in relation to global terrorism. Through an examination of the past, this work will look to the future and the mediatised landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

# Chapter One: Theory

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the history of broadcasting in the twentieth century  
is in a sense...  
the history of everything else

Asa Briggs  
(1991, p.2).



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## Critical Framework

John Corner, in seeking to identify the ‘conceptual schemes which might help to explain its nature, operation and consequences’, divides theories about television into ‘four types – theories of representation, theories of medium, theories of institution and theories of process’ (1998, p.147). Corner identifies the work of Stuart Hall as central to questions of representation. For Hall, ‘representation is an essential part of a process by which meaning is produced and exchanged’ (1997, p.15, italics in original). This constructionist approach, the perspective with the greatest impact on cultural studies, recognises that meaning is not inherent within an object; rather meaning is constructed, using concepts and signs as systems of representation. Use of the term “construction” is of particular relevance here, suggestive of the constructed nature of television news as stories created within a specific narrative frame, then arranged and placed in particular context. The news constantly presents and represents verbal and visual images based on what is identified as newsworthy using concepts of codes, televisuality and liveness.

In a similar vein, Joshua Meyrowitz (1993) has identified a typology of metaphorical constructs that identify the main ways of seeing and conceiving the nature of television (and wider visual media field). The three metaphors are medium as vessel/conduit, medium as language, and medium as environment. The former is the most common in collective perception, and Meyrowitz notes that study of media content is often “medium-free” in that

'the focus on media content tends to minimize the attention given to the nature of the particular medium that holds or sends the message' (ibid, p.57). Whilst the latter recalls the media theory of Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis, and medium as language is essentially a focus on media grammar (expressive variables such as camera angles, or production techniques), study across all three allows for complex and explorative media analysis to occur, building common bridges across critical traditions. Individually these provide 'one clear way of seeing' together they 'flesh-out our understanding of mass media' (Meyrowitz, 1980).

In his 1998 article, where he refers to the 'multi-faceted' and 'multifarious nature of television' as an object of critical study, Corner further identifies five different aspects of television, 'each one of which can receive varying levels of emphasis in a study, or perhaps none at all' (1998, p.148). These have similarly influenced the thinking of this work and it is useful to highlight each (in an abridged form) here:

First of all, there is television as institution, an industry and its organisations, framed by policy and corporate management.

Second, there is *television as making*, the focus on professional culture and professional practice...

Third, there is television as representation and form, an aesthetic framing...

Fourth, there is television as a sociocultural phenomenon, deeply interconnected with high politics, with the shifting circumstances of the public sphere and civil society, with popular culture and with the changing character of the home and of domestic values.

Finally, there is television as technology, a scientific experiment becoming both a household item and the increasingly powerful resource for a changing social aesthetic.

(1998, pp.151-159)

This research — essentially a chronological exploration of BBC coverage of the Troubles ultimately producing a comprehensive but dynamic overview of three decades of broadcasting history — will journey across all five aspects but directs greatest prominence to the primary texts themselves as they pertain to the issue of representation. Representation will be dealt with directly in relation to the source materials, shaped by a consideration and understanding of the content, grammar and wider media environment.

As Halloran has argued:

Over the years there has been a growing appreciation that the whole communication process needs to be studied, and that includes those who provide (including their institutions) as well as the nature of what is provided...[the] intentions, aims, purposes, policies organisation frameworks, modes of operation, professional values, funding, general circumscriptions, external pressures and ideological considerations all need to be taken into account' (1998, p.19).

This checklist serves a useful purpose and indicates a methodological pluralism must be adopted. In so doing, a multiperspectivist approach has been adopted. Douglas Kellner is a strong proponent of such a focus, deploying 'a multitude of theories and methods of interpretation to provide more many-sided readings and critiques' (2003, p.58). As he argues, 'the more interpretive perspectives one can bring to a cultural artefact, the more comprehensive and stronger one's reading may be' (ibid, p.98). In accordance with these ideals, the evidence gathered for this study will be closely read through two interpretive modes of textual analysis, content analysis and semiotics, that draw on established techniques of media and cultural studies

and combine to offer a developed and nuanced close reading. The use of such methods initially provide a body of evidence to draw upon before permitting detailed explication in relation to the research questions proposed.

Collier (2001) outlines a basic structural model for working with image based media that was adhered to throughout research. His four stage circular process advocates commencing and concluding with open ended analysis, while a more analytical focus should occur during the middle phases. This approach then provides the ‘opportunity to respond to larger patterns within the whole that may reveal the new and unforeseen, that provide significant meaning to otherwise chaotic details’ and a complex corpus (ibid, p.39)

During the initial stages, a ‘thorough familiarity with the character and content of the visual records’ was sought, with an initial aim being an understanding of what patterns emerge in BBC reporting of the Troubles and an identification of ‘recurrent and contrastive elements’ (ibid, p.40). The content analysis that occurred was recorded in a detailed database — Collier’s “inventory” — before being subjected to semiotic analysis in the final phase with a search for meaning, symbolism and significance.

In line, with the above, it is to be stressed again that this is an archival based research project and the audio-visual television archives form the foundation of this inquiry. To quote Corner, such ‘work is often an intensive, indeed laborious, kind of empirical study, a search for and then a processing of data’;

yet, as he then states, these moments, ‘properly explored and interpreted, can turn contingency and the circumstantial into *pattern*’ (Corner, 2003, p.274).

Clear patterns were discerned in the broadcasting analysed.

These are then supported by a wider body of secondary text literature relevant to the research across the following areas: image/visuals; the media/news; the BBC and the broader political and institutional framework it occupies; conflict reporting; and terrorism. This literature includes academic study, books and journal articles, material written by journalists (including memoirs), material written about the BBC, material written by the BBC (official documents/letters/minutes/transcripts/reports), and additional relevant newspaper cuttings from local and national press.

### Visual Theories

For many theorists, it is the visual sense that dominates. Fyfe and Law claim that ‘depiction, picturing and seeing are ubiquitous features of the process by which most human beings come to know the world as it really is for them’ (cited by Rose, 2016, p.3) and for John Berger, this is because ‘seeing comes before words’ (2008, p.7). Martin Jay (cited by Rose, 2016, p.3) uses the term ocular-centrism to describe the increasing centrality of the visual to Western society, and is here echoing the saturation notion of Asa Burger: ‘we have moved from a logocentric (word centred) to an occulocentric (image centred) world, with sight exercising hegemony or domination over our other senses’ (1995, p.79). According to Kress and van Leeuwen ‘the dominant

visual language is now controlled by the global cultural/technological empires of the mass media' (1996, p.4) and despite suggestions, or what Rose terms assumptions, 'that in premodern societies, visual images were not especially important, partly because there were so few of them in circulation', the power of the image can be traced back to ancient civilisation (Rose, 2016, p.3).

Even when modern humans first started using base pictorial and written systems, messages were created by one for another to view directly. For most of recorded history, communication was conducted without the benefit of mass media of any kind. Early empires, however, desired to distribute messages and promote matters of state and foreign affairs via images to large numbers of illiterate people. David Perlmutter suggests two main remedies for this technological gap; first, pictures could simply be shown to massed groups of people. When the emperors of Rome, for example, conducted triumphal parades, slaves walked the route displaying elaborate paintings showing scenes of battle or foreign lands. Second, most ancient rulers resorted to commemorating and immortalising their position and prestige through mass(ive) communication. Ramses II, the thirteenth-century BCE Egyptian pharaoh, portrayed his actions at the battle of Kadesh on the 100 foot walls of a temple, whilst, the helical relief frieze of Trajan's column shows the Emperor's victorious military campaigns against the Dacians. The Assyrians employed similar images and epigraphs, decorating palaces with

reliefs illustrating the cruelty dispensed to enemy prisoners of war and intended to awe Bronze Age ambassadors (2014).

Perlmutter has identified central developments as the fifteenth-century era of printmaking, facilitating 'the mass production and distribution of identical images' and then 'the invention of photography in the 1840s [that] allowed the "capturing" of an event' (2006, p.52). Rose traces visual developments across multiple fields, from scientific knowledge, to philosophy and tourism, granting particular prominence to Michel Foucault (regarding power and knowledge), Paul Virilio (regarding speed and the vision machine), and Jean Baudrillard (regarding simulacrum and spectacle). All three signify the centrality of the visual to postmodernity and Rose quotes the proclamation of Mirzoeff that 'the postmodern is a visual culture' (2016, p.4).<sup>6</sup>

As part of the major points identified regarding current visual culture discourse, Rose foregrounds the importance of looking carefully at images. The work of John Berger is used to support this analytic stance, advocating a careful look at what is shown, how it is shown, and with what effects (2008). Berger uses art paintings of the female nude in Western art to exemplify this "way of seeing", referring to the fact 'we never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves' (ibid, p.9). It is then the 'specificities of practice' (Rose, 2016, p.21) that are crucial in gaining

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<sup>6</sup> Rose in fact details Mirzoeff's argument that because of the constructed nature of visual experiences in contemporary culture, 'the modern relation between seeing and true knowing has been broken' (2016, p.4) A particularly ripe area of future study beyond the historical period of this text, would focus on the BBC moving into the hyper-visual (to borrow from Baudrillard) era of 24 hour rolling news, digital technologies and the online sphere, amidst the elimination of global boundaries in a post-9/11 mediatised world.



an understanding of an image and Rose accordingly interprets three sites at where meaning is made — the production of the image, the site of the image, and the audience of the image (2016). Three further aspects, termed “modalities” by Rose, can be found in each site and, to quote in full, these ‘contribute to a critical understanding of images:

Technological: Mirzoeff defines a visual technology as “any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision, from oil paintings to television and the Internet”.

Compositional: Compositionality refers to the specific material qualities of an image or visual object. When an image is made, it draws on a number of formal strategies: content, colour and spatial organisation, for example.

Often, particular forms of these strategies tend to occur together...

Social: This is very much a shorthand term. What I mean it to refer to are the range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image and through which it is seen and used (2016, p.25).

It is useful to pursue these “modalities” and relate them to the context of broadcast news, and “specificities of practice”.

Within the production of an image, aspects of form, meaning, and effect are important. These are the technical qualities influencing, and enabling, recording, and impacting directly on output. The compositionality of an image allows classification into a genre, which features shared objects, locations, codes and elements, which will often recur repeatedly in other related images. This allows a visual thesaurus and catalogue to be traced and identified. The social aspect of production are ‘the economic processes in which cultural production is embedded that shape visual imagery’ (Rose, 2016, p.29). Within broadcast news, and the public service broadcasting of

the BBC, a number of economic and cultural aspects drive production and direct the visual ideology.

Rose's second aspect is the site of the image itself and there are significant parallels here with the previous production aspect, particularly across the formal components of an image in the technological and compositional modalities (such as focus, spatiality and subject gaze). This sits neatly with a semiotic approach that probes into the *mise-en-scène* of an image and identifies "myths" or "codes" that seek to pull the viewer 'into complicity' (2016, p.33). Social practices of the (broadcasting) institution — how they present and embody particularly connotations of their own — can profoundly alter the representation of an image (and video).

Finally, Rose draws on John Fiske, who believes the site of the audience (his "audiencing,") is central to the meaning of an image, and how these are 'renegotiated, or even rejected, by particular audiences watching in specific circumstances' (2016, p.38). The composition of an image, including its formal and technical properties, seek to dictate how it is viewed. Within the news, the accompanying interpretation offered by the reporter/journalist seeks to drive understanding through provision of key factual information. The social site of the television in the home, through which the image is disseminated, carries particular ways of seeing, whilst the technological presentation of the news, allied to the serious, important context promoted through codes (discussed below) further impacts how images are looked at.

In adopting qualitative content analysis and semiotic study, there is a strong interpretive approach to this work. Future research, incorporating interviews and ethnographic study, would develop understanding of “audiencing” and “ways of seeing” in relation to the Troubles in greater depth, however, it is beyond the scope of this work. Despite this, Rose’s conclusion to her journey through these methodological tools is appropriate, since

it is possible and necessary to consider the viewing practices of one spectator without using such techniques because that spectator is you (ibid, p.46).

### News: Televisuality

With the image occupying this privileged position, an intrinsic value of modern journalism — across both print and television — is the need for news to be visual. News correspondent Jim Lederman has asserted that ‘television news is enslaved to images’, interestingly declaring that ‘if an *idea* cannot be recorded in the form of an image, it will rarely, if ever, be given extensive time on a nightly network newscast’ (cited by Perlmutter, 2014 emphasis my own). These newscasts, ‘constitute a highly ordered regime that directs, shapes and controls meaning’ (Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2007, p.16). Citing Roland Barthes, Neil Postman wrote that ‘television has achieved the status of “myth” ...a way of thinking so deeply embedded in our consciousness that it is invisible. That is now the way of television’ (2005, p.79). Postman is here suggesting that television exists as (more than) the dominant epistemology, with society unaware of its dominion. The reality (represented by television) is natural, and television is in turn, the natural format for representation.

Caldwell's theory of televisuality argues everything is explicitly designed to be viewed on television; nothing has meaning or context or a basis in reality unless it can be represented through the medium. His conceptual and ideological framework indeed sees the subject of television to be television itself, in line with the thinking of Postman; the style of television 'long seen as a mere signifier and vessel for content, issues, and ideas, has now itself become one of televisions most privileged and showcased signifieds' (1995, p. 5). Caldwell was himself responding to the theoretical work of John Fiske and Henry Jenkins; their audience studies and ethnography focused on deciphering reception/text interactions that moved agency away from the production aspect of television. Caldwell viewed television, 'in several important programming and institutional areas' as moving from a 'word-based rhetoric and transmission' to one of a 'a visually based mythology, framework, and aesthetic based on an extreme self-consciousness of style' (ibid, p.4). His discussion is based around various case studies of the visual excesses of American mass market television throughout the 1980s, which he proclaims to be a function of market conditions (an economic crisis) forcing broadcasters to compete for audience share through a 'self-consciousness of style...a performance of style...television has come to flaunt and display style' (ibid, p.5). Televisuality is then ultimately, for Caldwell, 'a phenomenon of communicative and *semiotic over-abundance*' (1995, p.362, n35, emphasis in original).

Caldwell focuses throughout on the visual elements on television, and whilst based on a range of genres, rather than directly focusing on news, the six guiding principles he details develop his critique.<sup>7</sup> Televisuality firstly offers a stylising performance, where ‘specific visual looks and stylisations could be marshalled for the spectacle’ (1995, p.5). This can include the graphic elements that make up a programme and is particularly evident in the codes utilised to connote authority, immediacy and professionalism in television news, refreshed periodically to reinvent the ‘stylistic wheel’ (ibid, p.6). In addition, it offers a programming phenomenon; a function of audience; a product of economic crisis; a structural inversion, where the ‘presentational status of style changed’; and an industrial product, where the production is ‘a product of shifting cultural and economic needs’ that requires ‘striking visuals and high-tech graphics’ (1995, p.7). Within television news, these are ultimately provided by dominant codes and liveness.

### News: Liveness

Throughout *Televisuality*, Caldwell dismisses the ideology of liveness as myth. He argues that, ‘in high theory’ – across phenomenology in the 1960s, prescriptive aesthetics in the 1970s and poststructuralist analyses of the 1980s – ‘the liveness paradigm will not die’ (1995, p.27). Neil Postman can here again be situated alongside Caldwell, similarly critiquing the phenomenon:

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<sup>7</sup> He does address the increasingly stylistic excesses of television news in a short aside, stating such tendencies ‘continued to rear its ostensibly ugly head – even in the ethically pure confines of Peter Jennings's network news division’ (1995, p.4).

We are by now so thoroughly adjusted to the ‘Now...this’ world of news — a world of fragments, where events stand alone, stripped of any connection to the past, or to the future, or to other events — that all assumptions of coherence have vanished (2005, p.110).

Following the invention of television, broadcasting was a truly live medium where the time of transmission coincided with its inception (Auslander, 1999, p.12). Modelled on the aesthetics of live theatre, early television offered a temporal connection for the viewer, and Auslander foregrounds these theatrical origins of liveness as a search for intimacy. After the advent of recording technologies, the televisual practice evolved, however the principle of liveness as part of the ontology of television was retained (Marriott, 1995; Feuer, 1983). The term “live” was itself altered in its reference; ‘it is broadcast and received in the same moment and so always appears as “immediate”’ (Ellis, 1992, p.132). Caldwell notes the influence of McLuhan on the theory, with transmission and reception over distance breaking down boundaries of time and space and moving towards an ‘all at oneness’ (1995, p.28), and the idea of global village; Hoskins similarly identifies this debt owed to McLuhan. He, however, seeks to stress the fundamental *importance* of liveness as part of the

attraction of the live “experience” [which] has led to its appropriation by television news...highly constructed through news scripts, broadcast talk, and a whole range of visual cues (2004, p.50).

As a code, liveness does not require the programme to actually be broadcast live; television news of course features live components (granted authority through specific codes and “cues”) and supported by pre-recorded packages

broadcast as if live. Bourdon identifies four types of live television, locating news reports, edited after shooting, inherently factual, and recorded in real life, within the “edited” sphere (2000). Yet with television news seeking to connote relevance, significance, factuality, and reliability, liveness persists as ‘the dominant mode of orientation by broadcast news to events’ (Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2007, p.34). The content of a news broadcast — the language, the facts, the images presented as bearing witness (of the aftermath initially; increasingly of the act itself in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century) — foreground an air of immediacy through their technological transmission across the airwaves. As a medium, television enhances intimacy by detailing what is going on, to who, where and when. The latter points towards the concept of time, a defining characteristic of the nature of television news, with the basic rhythmic self-renewal cycle focusing on recapping events of the preceding hours.<sup>8</sup> Time itself, through the “when” of a story, is a primary element of a journalist’s reporting rubric, and liveness then manifests itself through the visual and aural style of television, and through the apparatus itself.<sup>9</sup> Indeed even when television is not broadcasting genuinely live (as in the recorded segments of news), it mythologises the act in order to access reality.

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<sup>8</sup> This cycle has of course diminished over the last two decades to the extent liveness entails ‘the decreasing of the temporal distance between event, recording, transmission, and reception’ to a point where such moments now ‘become simultaneous’; Hoskins and O’Loughlin further identify problems caused by this relationship as leading television towards ‘exploitation as a tool of terrorism’, citing the example of the second plane hitting the World Trade Centre Towers in 2001 (2007, p.25).

<sup>9</sup> ‘The spoken mode of television news narrative usually carries the answers to the factual questions of five Ws (who, what, when, where, why) and one H (how) in the story. These so-called facts and figures fulfil the role of narrative...television news narrative does not display ambiguities or uncertainties, and this makes television news appear both authoritative and omniscient’ (Tomaščíková 2010, p.265). Further discussion of codes utilised in television news features later in this chapter.

Paul Virilio has drawn extensive parallels between visual technologies and military developments (1989, 2002); a shared metaphor between the camera and gun exists and Paul Landau states ‘the technologies of the gun and the camera themselves evolved in lockstep’, pointing to George Eastman of Kodak as a pivotal figure (2002, p.147). Stephanie Marriott, in her phenomenological study on live television, instead draws comparisons between live television and advancements in transportation (alongside communication); the two have compressed ‘distance through increased velocity’ and ‘places the one with the other’ (2007, p.33). Her case study analysis of ten live television events, from the Kennedy assassination of 1963 to the London bombings of 2005, ultimately argues live television construct a simulacrum of liveness, dependent upon the presenter, images and sounds, and pre-recorded elements that, citing Tolson, are ‘embedded within and subordinate to this overarching live framing’ (ibid, p.44).

Liveness for Jane Feuer is a model of how television continually (re)presents itself to an audience, and ‘positions the spectator into its “imaginary” of presence and immediacy’ (1983, p.14). This imaginary discourse is what allows programming to construct an effect of continuity and coherence — a ‘temporal ordering on events’ (Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2007, p.24) — amidst a multiplicity of discreet elements. This is the paradox of television news; in order to connote order, and hold the values it desperately seeks, it must be broadcast live, yet (much of) the actuality it utilises (depends on) has been recorded (Bourdon, 2000, pp.544-545). Crisell points towards the codes



relied upon to sustain “liveness” when he identifies the components that television news programmes are characterised by:

that of the film clips they contain, which were shot in the recent past, and the live context and simultaneous commentary provided by the newsreader or correspondent. The effect is to absorb the past into a kind of expanded present, the images seeming to be part of the same moment as the live asseverations of the news staff (2012, p.45).

### News: Codes

Television news constructs, promotes and performs liveness through a number of codes, Bourdon’s ‘textual indices of liveness’ (2000, p.53). This includes aspects of televisuality, camerawork, editing, and broadcast talk that combine to establish authority over time and space. The latter has received significant attention on a sociolinguist level and its importance to liveness is stressed by Marriott (2007) and Hoskins and O’Loughlin:

often it is the manner of telling that further dramatises news stories. Changes in pace, tone, and fluency of talk, for example, all contribute to the immediacy and urgency of reporting (2007, p.39).

During the early experimental phases of television news broadcasting, ‘there were no guidelines’ as to the nature of the broadcast;

Should television try to cover the significant news of the day comprehensively like first-class daily newspapers? Or should it restrict itself to reporting events for which it had film or other illustrative materials? When film or graphics were not available should they use the ‘talking head’ format and read the story straight into the camera? (Mickelson, 1998, p.8)

Sig Mickelson was the first producer of CBS News, and, in identifying ‘the pre-war news show [as] not much more than radio dressed up with a few

stills and maps and some scratchy film' (ibid), he sets forth what became persistent and dominant codes. These visual conventions derived from radio and theatre (as Auslander previously notes) and central to this is the seated anchor, directly addressing viewers and securing continuity. This serves the function of ritual, with news providing 'variation' alongside this requisite 'continuity' (Hjarvard, 1994, p.314). Continuity exists in the fixed, privileged status of the news broadcast in the daily schedule, marking 'the transitions from one type of aggregated audience to another'; whilst variety is provided by 'new stories...perpetually introduced and pointing ahead to the next news slot' (cited by Allan, 2010, p.135).<sup>10</sup> Indeed 'even the pre-scripted historical coverage of pre-recorded actuality footage involves the newsreader in the production of talk at the emergent now of the live transmission' and live news reports, in addition, involve a 'constantly moving out to and speaking from the space of unfolding events' (Hjarvard, 1994, p.316). These two modes exemplify the discourse space and a story space of Morse as invoked by Marriott:

Story and discourse ... are two planes of language, the former suppressing subjectivity in order to refer to an objective and separate realm of space and time inhabited by others (he, she and it), the latter a plane of subjectivity in which a person, "I," adopts responsibility for an utterance and calls for intersubjective relations with a "you" in the here and now (2007, p.66).

This up-to-the minute narrative (the now) projects a particular place (here) where, as Hall et al. explain:

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<sup>10</sup> Allan uses Morse to further elaborate on the dynamics of scheduling; news broadcasts 'occur at key thresholds in the day between work and leisure...which aid the transition between one reality and another' (2010, p. 135).

The facts must be arranged, in the course of programming, so as to present an intelligible “story”: hence the process of presentation will reflect the explanations and interpretations which appear most plausible, credible or adequate to the broadcaster, his [or her] editorial team and the expert commentators he [or she] consults. Above all, the known facts of a situation must be translated into intelligible audio-visual signs, organised as a discourse. TV cannot transmit “raw historical” events as such, to its audiences: it can only transmit pictures of, stories, informative talk or discussion about, the events it selectively treats (2007, p.339).

The process of presentation uses codified linguistic and visual definitions of reality, and myths of immediacy and authority (and liveness), designed, on an ideological plane, to promote a process of representation. A viewer must recognise and understand such codes and conventions in order to participate in the construction of sense and reality.

Within the discourse space, then, exists the news presenter, who adopts a formal dress code and is thus coded as professional and authoritative. These individuals avoid ‘gestural signs which might connote emotion or involvement in the news stories they present...the mythic meaning that news presenters are neutral and authoritative is constructed from these connotations’ (Bignell, 2002, p.110). Steadily addressing the camera (constructing liveness and demanding attention of the viewer) head-on, in medium/close up, and neutrally lit, signifies the presenter's role in mediating between the viewer and the other components of the programme’ (ibid, p. 111). The presenter, as omniscient narrator, exists as a physical representation of the broadcasting ‘institution which, in ideological terms, is to be preserved and reaffirmed by the “personality” of the newsreader’ (Allan, 2010, p.115); This ‘institutional voice’ (Hartley 1982, p.110) speaks resolutely

with solemnity (and with received pronunciation on the BBC for the three decade period of this study). Invariably there will be a familiar (and expected) greeting or opening remark – “good evening” – and the language is always in the present tense; even when providing a bridge towards pre-recorded segments, it remains so – “Mark Devenport reports from Belfast.” Further deictic features serve to anchor the articulation of time and space, supporting and enhancing liveness.

Authority is marked by the televisuality of the title sequence, both loud and dramatic; dominated by major brass and percussive chords, it is an urgent demand for attention connoting the importance and drama of what will follow and this then is a ‘syntagms of signs’ (Bignell, 2002, p.110). The sequence further establishes the mythic status of news (through sophisticated computer graphics, ticking clocks, spinning globes, and constant movement) that provide a ‘recognisable “brand image” which differentiates it from its competitors’ (ibid, p.113). As noted above, such sequences are refreshed and updated, maintaining Caldwell’s stylistic wheel.

Early BBC news reports were initiated by a static shot of a communications mast with a repeated multitude of radiating rings extending far out into the sky, signifying the transmission reaching a vast audience. Circling this was the title “BBC NEWS” in bold, capital letters, here signifying the importance of the organisation and the broadcast. This would soon evolve into a static shot of a particular area on a map, indicative of the headline story which was to follow. Across the lower third of the screen the titular letters “BBC NEWS”

were displayed and repeated, akin to a typewriter or teletype moving across the screen with constantly updated information. This gradually fades to be replaced by a large “NEWS” which is accompanied by the presenter (in voice over) providing summaries of key headlines. Further updates led to inception of a constantly ticking clock, shaped akin to a globe. As this fades, a studio shot dominates showing the presenter(s) gathering scripts and ready for imminent duty.

Such visual updates were initially infrequent; as the BBC moved through the 1980s, updates occurred more regularly and there was a preponderance of fast moving digital graphics. In the 1990s for example, the nine o'clock news featured a revolving globe ‘connoting worldwide coverage, and as the camera pulled back and panned to the right the globe was revealed as the centrepiece of a huge shield set in a coat of arms, connoting authority and tradition’ (Bignell, 2002, p.115) As the camera continues moving, revealing the sheer scale of the set (a spectacular theatrical space approaching excess and hyperbole), the dim outline of presenters can be seen, lit by a warm blue light, connoting control and authority (the police), eminence (blue blood) and quality (blue ribbon) (Feisner and Reed, 2014, p.187).

All the above sits within the studio mode of John Corner (1985), where broadcasting is live and located within the studio itself. This contrasts with his location mode where the focus is on actuality film, edited to create a coherent entity. Altering between modes engages the viewer and encourages them to ‘actively assemble these segments for himself or herself’ (Bignell,

2002, p.126). For Fiske, the codes that aid in this entire process have been shaped, shared, and formulated through culture over time. He proposes three social levels of encoding a television event that are used to generate and disseminate meaning:

Level 1: Reality: appearance, dress, make-up, environment, behaviour, speech, gesture, expression, sound, etc.

These are encoded electronically by *technical codes* such as those of:

Level 2: Representation: the camera, lighting, editing, music, sound which transmit the *conventional representation codes* which shape the representation of narrative, conflict, character, actor, dialogue, setting, casting, etc.

Level 3: Ideology: aspects which are organised into a coherent and socially acceptable form by such *ideological codes* as individuality, patriarchy, class, race, materialism, capitalism, etc.

(Fiske, 1987, p.4-6).

### News: Values

Simultaneously with the encoding that takes place across these levels, every story covered as part of television news has been judged using a criterion of newsworthiness. Hoskins and O'Loughlin advocate a 'medium-specific alternative to Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge's (1965) "news values" paradigm' (2007, p.23); this paradigm, based on a seminal article exploring the selectivity criteria of three major international crisis in four Norwegian newspapers, remains an important concept in journalism, media studies and communication studies today. Suggesting these disciplines have failed to 'think outside of this framework or to comprehensively challenge it,' Hoskins

and O’Loughlin instead position ‘liveness’ as central to the nature and impact of contemporary television news (ibid, p.31). Their challenge focuses on the first of Galtung & Ruge’s eight main (“culture-free,” a profoundly problematic phraseology) and four supplementary (“culture-bound”) hypotheses. Using an extended radio metaphor throughout their paper, Galtung & Ruge position frequency as the:

time-span needed for the event to unfold itself and acquire meaning...the more similar the frequency of the event is to the frequency of the news medium, the more probable that it will be recorded as news by that news medium (1965, p.66).

Writing forty years after Galtung and Ruge, during which time ‘the media world has changed from one of scarcity to one of abundance’ (Meissner, 2015), it is the transformation of production and presentation (what can be identified as media convergence; see (Jenkins, 2006) that leads Hoskins and O’Loughlin to argue immediacy reigns and liveness dominates.<sup>11</sup> It is useful to note here, that, despite their work being accepted and validated by empirical research, Galtung and Ruge actually critique the news practices of Western media and sought to ultimately use their article as impetus for change; ‘The policy implications of this article are rather obvious: try and counteract all twelve factors’ (1965, p.84).

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<sup>11</sup> Further issue with Galtung and Ruge is taken by Harcup and O’Neill: ‘Galtung and Ruge began by suggesting a list of factors and then put forward hypotheses—rather than beginning with an empirical study of what actually appeared in newspapers’. Harcup and O’Neill sought to test the initial supposition of 12 news value factors through close examination of some 1,200 UK news stories, identifying a number of issues and proposing an alternate ten requirements. Of particular note is ‘when dealing with something as “opaque” as news values (to use Hall’s term), it appears there can be little escape from *subjective interpretation*’ (2001, p.8, emphasis my own).

Regarding frequency, and with the focus on newspapers, Galtung and Ruge suggest a murder sits neatly into the daily news cycle; a number of deaths in a prolonged battle, however, would be framed in the context of the battle and not the individual life (a preliminary removal of the body from combat). Watson similarly uses the example of a murder, stating it is more 'newsworthy than the slow progress to prosperity of a Third World country' (2008, p.134) and it is here possible to identify early parallels with the nature of BBC coverage of the Troubles.

With this first factor, Galtung and Ruge identify threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, and composition, along with reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons, reference to something negative.<sup>12</sup> These are cumulative and compensatory; a story is more newsworthy if it meets multiple factors, whilst the absence of one can be compensated by the presence of another. Reports with a high news value will therefore generally appear near the beginning of a news bulletin. After presenting these factors, three hypotheses are declared:

1. The more events satisfy the criteria mentioned, the more likely that they will be registered as news (selection).
  2. Once a news item has been selected what makes it newsworthy according to the factors will be accentuated (distortion).
  3. Both the process of selection and the process of distortion will take place at all steps in the chain from event to reader (replication)
- (Galtung and Ruge, 1965, p. 71).

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<sup>12</sup> As Charlotte Ryan states, 'there is no end to lists of news criteria' (1991, p.31). Caple and Bednarek provide a useful overview survey of the similarities and differences across theories concerning the news value concept (2013).



In drawing on theoretical foundations based on principles of human behavioural research, Galtung and Ruge claim the first eight news value factors of their taxonomy are general aspects of perception psychology; they, by extension, propose journalists use the same logic, employing these selective and distortive behaviours in identifying and “tuning into” the news “phenomena” by virtue of human nature. The analogy is concluded by suggesting the newspaper reader replicates this process at the final stage in the chain. The overarching factors have faced a range of contestation, particularly in the overlapping nature of several binaries (a point coincided in the original article), and in the oppositional nature of others. Palmer (1998) relates continuity with consequence (the latter can lead to a story being extended into the former); McQuail points to the fact events involving elite nations or elite persons often fulfil the threshold category, whilst the negativity of a natural disaster allows frequency, lacks ambiguity and produces many examples of personification; he similarly suggests that truly unexpected events will by their very nature be a central news event due to their lack of consonance (2010, pp.259-283). Watson believes questions of unexpectedness and consonance sit together in unresolved opposition (2008, p. 136-137).

Jeremy Tunstall’s *Journalists at Work* was one of the first texts to comprehensively address Galtung & Ruge. He stressed the limitations of the original study, pointing towards the impact of news agencies on the news

items examined, and an absence of consideration for the 'regional element' of the '*editionizing* phenomenon' (1971, p.21, italics in original). Yet, whilst critiquing an ignorance of the visual aspect of news, Tunstall also identified a strength, in that the 'coherent set of hypotheses' could be applied across other news contexts, including 'local coverage in weekly newspapers' and television news itself (ibid, p.21-22).

Transposing this taxonomy on to television news, Tunstall identifies four points of difference:

1. In TV the visual is given pre-eminence.  
The possession of film footage of an event will often increase the prominence given to a news story.
2. News items which include film of "our own reporters" interviewing or commentating on a story are preferred.
3. TV makes use of a smaller fraction of the number of stories the newspapers carry, and even major items are short compared with newspaper coverage.
4. There is a strong preference for "hard" stories or actuality on TV news.  
(ibid, p.22)

For the determinist view of Conley & Lamble, news values exist in the 'chemistry of an event, comment or circumstance that combine to produce news...

....News values will determine whether stories are to be pursued.  
They will determine whether, if pursued, they will then be published.  
They will determine, if published, where the stories will be placed in news presentation (Conley & Lamble, 2006, p.42)

Stuart Allan has identified the wider concepts of gatekeeping and agenda setting as overlapping with news values, and acknowledges that whilst these 'are always changing over time and are inflected differently from one news

organisation to the next', they have remained 'relatively consistent criteria' (Allan 2010, p.74). It is therefore possible to append a final *determination* to Conley and Lamb: visualisations are central to news values in the broadcasting sphere. In utilising carefully composed, edited, and presented visuals, reporters can provide a sphere of understanding to events, and as Gaye Tuchman succinctly states, 'routinize the unexpected' (1973). This idea was reiterated by Bell who

identifies homogeneity in the format of all news stories and writes generally about the similarity of the use of the lead or the lead paragraph and its structure, the use of headlines, the use of news sources, and journalistic devices such as the who, what, when, where, why and how, which ensure that all news stories basically contain a certain type of information (cited by Harrison, 2000 p.109).

This homogeneity is a step towards the mythologising of news, where a certain type of information is replicated across all stories and each has therefore achieved the magical minimum standards of news value. Herbert Gans, states 'the values in the news are not necessarily those of journalists' (2004 p.39) and indeed what is important to a reporter on the ground (for example the Falls Road) may be different to what is important to the editor and producer in the newsroom (for example in Belfast). This may in turn differ from the controllers and directors (for example in London) who are operating at the discretion of Governors and a board (for example ensconced in Broadcasting House). This then leads to a fundamental problem for the concept of news values: that of ideology. Bell attributes these news values to the 'ideologies and priorities held in society' (1991, p.156) which

echoes the views of Stuart Hall who sees a professional ideology within television news operating on two levels of signification.

For images, this involves the formal news value of the visual sign itself and the second level of signification is then the ideological level of connoted themes and interpretations. For Hall,

news values appear as a set of neutral, routine practices:  
but we need, also, to see formal news values as an  
ideological structure – to examine these rules as the  
formalization and operationalization of *an ideology of news*  
(1973, p.182, italics in original).

Curran and Seaton identify a different ideology operating within the news; some stories that meet the value criteria of an important event are rather created and staged solely for the benefit of the news media; these ‘items of news are not events at all, that is in the sense of occurrences in the real world which take place independently of the media’ (Curran and Seaton, 1997, p. 330). Whilst primarily referring to the public relations ‘organisations, professions and skills aimed at manipulating the media’ (ibid, p.330), here we can observe a link to terrorism and its symbiotic relationship with mass media.

Hoge, implicitly identifying terrorism as satisfying the news media factors of Galtung and Ruge, argues the mass media cover terrorism because

it is different, dramatic, and potentially violent. It frequently develops over a period of time, occurs in exotic locations, offers a clear confrontation, involves bizarre characters, and is politically noteworthy. Finally it is of concern to the public (cited by Farnen, 1990, p.103).

Whilst perhaps presenting a rather romantic description of the act, terrorism is inherently newsworthy; because a hierarchy of broadcasting must exist by the very nature of the medium (and the BBC present stories in top to bottom hierarchy) all events cannot be covered equally and some such events must be more significant than others. Shoemaker sees news values as varying in intensity from one event to another and, whilst terrorism events as media events approaches a tautology, an event being newsworthy does not equate to it being guaranteed coverage by the media (2006). Daniel Schorr astutely observes that ‘many people have found the royal road to identity is to do something violent,’ (cited by Farnen, 1990, p.103), foregrounding the religious and political motivations of the Troubles in Ireland. Amidst the three decades of violence, higher levels of human and infrastructure damage (both in numerical sense of threshold and meaningfulness and in relation to elite persons and elite locations) resulted in greater news coverage.

Peter Vasterman, in seeking to move from media events to “media hypes,” ultimately takes issue with the use of such news value criterion:

This approach is based on the presumption that  
journalists actually report events. But news is not out there,  
journalists do not report news, they produce news.  
They construct it, they construct facts,  
they construct statements and they construct a  
context in which these facts make sense.  
They reconstruct “a” reality (1995).

This constructed reality of violence, terrorism, conflict and war — that results in a product called “news” being formed through signs, codes, and ideologies — is complicated by issues of framing, sanitisation, and compassion fatigue.

### News: Framing

The notion of media events — the embodiment of liveness, occurring in real time, and pre-planned around personality — as conceived by Katz and Dayan neatly sets forth three categories: coronation, contest, and conquest (1994). Coronations include monarchic events, funerals and commemorations; contests are sporting and political ceremonies where identifiable parties compete; conquests are rare but consequential, dramatising major political or diplomatic initiatives. All embody the ‘transformative function’ (ibid, p.20) of television. Stephanie Marriott modifies these categories slightly, proposing the alternatives of ‘ceremonial occasions, sporting matches, catastrophes, one-off spectacles...’ (Marriott, 2007, p.41). The common element between these classifications are the implicit use of Erving Goffman’s framing theory.

Broadly, framing analysis addresses cognitive structures, using elements of organisation and analysis of human experience (from a sociological background) that guide representation and perceptions of reality (Goffman, 1974). Within the field of communications, the application of concepts of framing to the mass media seeks to understand what is included within the text, and what interpretation the creator (individually or institutionally, consciously or unconsciously) is seeking to promote. This promotion can be

by a process and identification of inclusion, emphasis or exclusion — who to quote, what to quote and where to quote for example — with the frame providing

analytic resources to address the important distinction between what is said and what is meant. Frames could be said to provide the appropriate context to make appropriate sense of what is said (Smith, 2006).

A media frame is then what can usefully be deemed a dynamic organising mechanism, and, across literature, Entman's definition of a media frame is widely cited. Identifying selection and salience as central, Entman declares the act of framing is to

*select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.* (1993, p.52, italics in original).

Notions of subjectivity, objectivity, persuasion and bias thus apply, in this desire to delimit a news event. At this stage, news values can be invoked as contributing directly to media frames in the determination of what and how stories are covered. Pan and Kosicki have focused on news discourses as verbal texts (yet acknowledge the 'commonalities between visual and verbal languages' (1993, p.71.n1) and identify four categories of framing devices, representing four 'structural dimensions...syntactical structure, script structure, thematic structure, and rhetorical structure' (ibid, p.59). Reese seeks to move beyond this, proclaiming frames to be more than just phrases; they are rather the 'organizing principles that are socially shared and

persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world' (2001, p.9).

These frames — the angle, or “lens” of the story — are vital in media, and in the reporting of terrorism, conflict, and war. How a story is covered is shaped by the aforementioned news values, by ideology, by previous incidences and future intentions, through the available visuals (including use of iconic images), and ‘the interpretation of events offered by credible sources, to convey dominant meanings, to make sense of the facts, to focus the headlines, and to structure the story line’ (Norris et al., 2004, p.4). Furthermore, cultural associations impact; what can be framed as a “freedom of the press” incidence by (much of the) West, is rather viewed in Arabic media through a frame of “respect” (cf. coverage of the Mohammed cartoons). Norris et al., further suggest ‘that terrorist events are commonly understood through news “frames” that simplify, prioritize, and structure the narrative flow of events’ (ibid, p.10); the Troubles, as will be detailed, were repeatedly presented through a frame that abbreviated and condemned the complexity of the background of events. Once this failing had occurred and progressed (across the media landscape, print and broadcast) it was impossible to rectify. Whilst strictly factual, and stylistically neutral, information about an event can be provided (the when and where of a shooting or bombing), the meaning and motivation behind an act remains complex and contested. The *‘assemblages of words, visual images, and action*



patterns' that are utilised to create coherence and frame these events are important to consider (Levin, 2003, p.28, italics in original).

Related to Goffman's framing is the agenda setting theory refined by Cohen; this is in turn tied to news values and notions of "gatekeepers" where the press are 'stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about' (Cohen, 1963, p.13). The audience — whether reader or viewer — is, and was, invariably presented with a social reality where terrorism, conflict, and war are absent of the image of death.

### News: Sanitisation

The destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City was 'totally unexpected...the unimaginable impossible' (Zizek, 2002, p.15). Yet the attack existed in fantasy; alluded to by the news media, occurring in the "reality" of popular cinema. Virilio's city of the instant emerged on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001; the second attack and subsequent collapse were watched live — and continuously replayed — across the world. In the mass-mediated world of modern warfare the spectacle dominates, from the ruin of the World Trade Centre, to the "shock and awe" aerial bombardments of Baghdad and Belgrade. The currency of terrorism is the manipulation of images and 9/11 exists as a global media event, Marriot's "catastrophic event," staged for its visual and symbolic impact. Accompanying this "absolute" event was an 'even more real eruption of death' (Baudrillard, 2001). However this was entirely symbolic; despite the death toll being some 3,000, little was witnessed,

visible, or presented. Those that were (the falling bodies; see conclusion) were redacted from visual representations, too graphic and unexpected to frame.<sup>13</sup> The dead therefore existed as abstractions in this mediated act of terror, where ‘the telegenic qualities of such atrocities constantly reinforce their evocative power’ (Virilio, 2000a, p.21). David Campbell emphasises this aspect:

We saw these tragic victims, small specks against the vast towers, leap from their offices, and then disappear into the realm of imagination. People spoke of appalling sights, but we did not see them. Witnesses revealed the presence of many body parts in the rubble, but television did not show them. Reports referred to “streets slick with blood,” but the video did not disclose it (2011).

Military doctrines of force dominance and pure spectacle have been inverted, utilised by the other as a form of weaponry. This was the climax of escalation, where limited resources seek to maximise the resultant visualisations. It also signified a turning point: ‘a single man may well be able to bring about disasters... One man = total war’ (Virilio, 2000b, p.19). In September 2001, that man became Osama Bin Laden. Following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, reality was further de-realised with Saddam Hussein subjected to treatment similar to Bin Laden, his metonymic double. The destruction of a statue in Farduz Square Baghdad, occurred, and existed, solely as a media event, ‘televised live and in a loop, before the eyes of the world’ (Virilio, 2005, p.

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<sup>13</sup> Amidst the English language press of the Western media; the footage was shown live and replayed on Telemundo and Univision, Spanish-language broadcast networks in the United States. This opens up significant questions, beyond the scope of this work, of cultural relationships with bloody imagery of violence, terror and war. As a further example towards this idea, Andrew Hoskins reproduces an extract of Robert Fisk’s *Independent* article concerning images of Uday and Qusay Hussein following their deaths: ‘Arabs have never been squeamish about death. They see too much of it. It is we Westerners...who agonise over moral sensitivities at the mere sight of a mortuary mugshot’ (Hoskins, 2004, p.103).

88).<sup>14</sup> It was the symbolic overthrow of a dictator (and response to the twin towers collapse) utilised in the figurative sense due to his absence. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is not visions of combat or the dead that dominate; rather these individual moments, fleeting instances of non-events, provide the illusion of reality and the illusion of war.

The framing of terrorism and warfare by the media serve as a distance technology, removing the body and bloody consequences from the eyes of the audience, desensitising and subverting the truth. Graphic footage, such as that from the Gulf War is never publicly broadcast; showing men

like ghostly sheep flushed from a pen — bewildered and terrified, jarred from sleep and fleeing their bunkers under a hellish fire. One by one, they were cut down by attackers they could not see...blown to bits by bursts of 30mm exploding cannon shells (Robins, 1996, p.65).

During the Falklands War of 1982, the Ministry of Defence were, by nature of the island conflict, able to control the entire image environment. Watson runs an extended metaphor through this act of gatekeeping, as

it became near impossible to breach the walls of Fortress Information. Press and television were obliged to queue up at a drawbridge manned by the Ministry of Defence...It is significant that Don McCullin, one of the world's best photographers of war, was gatekept throughout the Falklands War. While other reporters and photographers were permitted at least into the outer courtyard of Fortress Information, McCullin was not even allowed to cross the moat (2008, p.127)

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<sup>14</sup> Virilio quotes a French foreign correspondent in the vicinity: 'It was the American's who knocked it over to start with. At two in the afternoon there were only about twenty Iraqis in the square. Two hours later, after a lot of rallying by loudspeaker, there were about a hundred — just enough for the television pictures...from the balcony you could see the scenes being set up expressly for us' (Virilio, 2005, p.88-89).

Watson then summarises the pessimistic view of Phillip Knightley, who argues

that news management by military authorities and the governments they serve has created in the public a desire not to know the truth. Seeing the actualities of war on TV — its barbarism — is seen as too upsetting (ibid, p.127).

Knightley is here pointing towards the framing and news values imposed by an overarching public consciousness, and this presents a moral crisis for journalists and a body paradox for television (Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2007, p.19). Whilst staged and simulated sex, death ,and destruction are permissible (and even promoted), ‘television news is subject to intense debates concerning the depiction of graphic scenes from human conflict’ (ibid, p.19). Hoskins and O’Loughlin chart this issue through David Campbell’s three ‘economies’ of context: indifference, taste and decency, and display (ibid, pp.118-137).

It is in the latter, where ‘the meaning of images is produced by the intertextual relationship of captions, titles, surrounding arguments and sites for presentation’, that Campbell similarly moves toward Levin’s “assemblages” and Goffman’s framing (2004, p.70). Campbell argues that it is important to see the body unobstructed and unedited in death; ‘narratives that are un-illustrated can struggle to convey the horror evident in many circumstances’ (ibid, p.71). The absence of the body — with notable exceptions — from the BBC’s representation of the Troubles exemplify the

collective (mis)understanding which propagated. A central part of this obfuscation is the idea of compassion fatigue.

### News: Compassion Fatigue

The core component of Red Nose Day, raising funds for the charity Comic Relief, is the biennial telethon broadcast on the BBC. It draws an audience of millions and has raised over £1 billion in its twenty-seven year history. As part of the live event, a number of pre-recorded appeal films packages are broadcast, interspersed throughout the “entertainment” proceedings; in 2015, nineteen films were shown, featuring celebrities visiting various locations and endeavours across the United Kingdom and Africa. This included Dermot O'Leary spending 24 hours sleeping rough with three boys in Kenya, Idris Elba interacting with three volunteers who have survived ebola, and Trevor Noah visiting sports clubs helping disadvantaged children in Cape Town. The dominant visual discourse is framed around the suffering, the malnourished, and the impoverished. Accompanying each ‘conscience-pricking report’ is a persistent telephone number seeking donations from the audience at home (Phillips, 1999).

The 1995 broadcast, raising some £22 million (2015 was just under £100 million) remains famous for its film of Billy Connolly in Mozambique. His words introduced compassion fatigue to the wider public consciousness:

Like me you've probably read in the newspaper, or heard from some branch of the media or other, about compassion fatigue...let me tell you something. You have been impressive so far with the money you've given, the time and

the energy you've given to these amazing causes and it isn't easy — it's a long-term commitment — whether it's because of war or some political disturbance or famine or natural disaster. It is a very long-term commitment.

Even right here, for instance, in Mozambique the water's very dirty and people wash their clothes and animals go in it and all sorts and they used to drink it. But now there's little wells being dug for fresh drinking water and this kind of thing goes on and on and on. It's a long-term project and it's great to stand here and say I'm very proud of you. Don't listen to talk about compassion fatigue (BBC Comic Relief Red Nose Day; 17.03.95)

Simon Cottle cites the double hermeneutic social processes of Anthony Giddens, where academic concepts move beyond the analytic sphere, 'enter into lay knowledge and even inform the thinking and actions of those caught up in the phenomenon that such concepts were originally designed to make sense of' (2008, p.132). He firmly positions compassion fatigue within this sphere, charging Susan Moeller as central to contemporary popularity of this "wooly" movement. Moeller believes

Compassion fatigue is the unacknowledged cause of much of the failure of international reporting today. It is at the base of many of the complaints about the public's short attention span, the media's peripatetic journalism, the public's boredom with international news, the media's preoccupation with crisis coverage (Moeller, 1999, p.2)

It is the immediacy of the medium, and the visuals supplied, that are central to the success of Red Nose Day and the Comic Relief appeal. French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut, who echoes the central thesis of Moeller, believes the mass media environment means

public indifference can no longer be attributed to ignorance as it once could... The more suffering that people see on their TV screens, the less concerned they feel. Current events demobilize them; images kill the feeling of obligation within them (cited by Tester, 2001, p.5).

Through study of famine in Ethiopia and Somalia, the death camps of Bosnia, and the Rwandan genocide, Moeller argues that a nation failing to act decisively (and with haste) is a result of compassion fatigue on behalf of the media and public. Imagery is central to her concern – the death and horror of ‘threatening and painful images cause people to turn away’ (2002, p.35) – with the overwhelming and saturated nature of news coverage psychologically numbing an audience. David Campbell has vociferously critiqued Moeller and the compassion fatigue myth at length; amidst the limited studies supporting the idea, ‘contradictions outweigh [] coherence’ (2014, p.118).

Further,

We could point to the way these claims necessarily invoke a past golden age in which attention spans were supposedly long and nobody was bored. Or we could argue that these commonly repeated assumptions about audience behaviour are contradicted by Pew Research Centre evidence which shows that “people are spending more time with news than ever before.” (ibid, p.17).

Keith Tester similarly takes issue with the concept, identifying a basic problem of logic: ‘what is the “normal” level of compassion that is presumably being fatigued?’ (2001, p.2). John Taylor provides a more thorough repudiation; directing attention away from the visuals and on to the wider framing system surrounding this which

provides viewers with victims and then presents them as “under”, “outer”, or otherwise “marginal” to “normal”, centered society, while punishing them either directly or through moral inaction and indifference. The indifference of people to the suffering of others is not an effect of photography but a condition of viewing it in modern industrialized societies (1998, p.148)

Trending towards speculative statement (and as Taylor notes the ‘moral high ground’ (ibid)), compassion fatigue as a concept also saw rejection from one of its earliest originators, Susan Sontag. Her 1977 polemic *On Photography* famously proclaimed ‘images anaesthetise...in these last decades, “concerned” photography had done at least as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it (1977, p.21). Sontag herself drew much of the impetus for the idea from her discovery as a child of a book of Holocaust victims; limited in her comprehension and understanding, she ‘felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead’ (ibid, p.20). This ‘negative epiphany’ was so strong, Sontag goes so far as to suggest her life could (at that point) be divided in two; a before and after (ibid). Notions of a ‘first encounter’ are important and Campbell takes further issue here, ‘not least because each of us will experience our epiphanies on a timescale at variance with Sontag’s’ (2014, p.104).

Almost a quarter of a century after *On Photography*, Sontag revisited many of her initial suppositions, reversing her original stance and declaring ‘harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock’ (2003, p. 89). Whilst she repeats the original assertion ‘as one can become habituated to horror in real life, one can become habituated to the horror of certain images’ (ibid, p.73), she does concede that the idea of a first encounter no longer fixes the relationship:

there are cases where repeated exposure to what shocks, saddens, appalls does not use up a full-hearted response. Habituation is not automatic, for images (portable, insertable) obey different rules than real life (ibid, p.82)



Succinctly moving away from compassion fatigue, whilst simultaneously setting down a preliminary oppositional stance towards sanitisation, Sontag states ‘For photographs to accuse, and possible to alter conduct, they must shock’ (ibid, p.81). Assisting in so doing, as Campbell notes, is the fact images within the mass media do not sit alone. They ‘are made available with an intertextual setting – where title, caption and text surround the particular content of the photograph – [and] they are read within an [sic] historical, political and social context (2004 p.62-63). This framing allows images to determine ‘how important conflicts are judged and remembered’ (Sontag, 2004) and returns our thinking to news values and the BBC.

#### News: The “troubles” of today

The image is evidence, bypassing any rhetorical concerns with truth. This is precisely why the Chinese government ban the image of a man standing in front of a tank in Tiananmen Square. Images hold a persuasive power – the ability to present prima facie evidence – and construct implied propositions, that is unrivalled in other mediums. Maxims stressing such significance are now cultural cliches; “seeing is believing” and “a picture is worth a thousand words”. Indeed in the hyper-visual multi-media age, the proverb *one showing is worth a hundred sayings* is increasingly appropriate. David Levi Strauss, in highlighting the role of visuals in the news as ‘evidence...pure “objective” truth’ (2003, p.16), is echoing the words of Susan Sontag; ‘Photography furnishes evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when

we're shown a photograph of it' (1977, p.5). Sontag preempted the mediatised landscape of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century and were she writing today, it would undoubtedly be rephrased as *something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown visual evidence of it.*

The notion of the camera as witness can be regarded as *the* central tenet of broadcast news (and photojournalism). Each is underpinned by, according to Philip Geffer, former picture editor at *The New York Times*, 'an unwavering adherence to fact' (2009, p.1).<sup>15</sup>

As Jean Baudrillard explained in *The Transparency of Evil*,

in earlier times an event was something that happened —  
now it is something designed to happen. It occurs,  
therefore, as a virtual artifact, as a reflection of  
pre-existing media-defined forms (1993, p.41).

Cinema is held as the prime example of these “forms” and Baudrillard invokes *Apocalypse Now* as retrospectively operating on a war that was a 'succession of special effects...filming itself as it unfolded' (1994, p.59). Simulacrum and reality implode, where 'the war becomes film, the film becomes war', resulting in 'marvellous in-differentiation'; historical reality is both erased and deterred in a global victory (ibid). Throughout this period, Baudrillard drew inspiration from the work of Elias Canetti and the claim that 'past a certain point in time, history has not been real' (1990, p.14). That

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<sup>15</sup> Rigid adherence to truth and fact is the media's central defence against criticism of bias, slanting and manipulation; 'The photojournalist will shoot an event as it transpires without altering its anatomy with his or her presence'. The camera as witness then is 'the profession's essential rule of thumb' (Geffer, 2009, p.1) A breach of this “truth” threatens the notion of the camera as evidence, and in turn the objectivity/factuality/reliability of an individual/institution.

moment was the fall of the Berlin Wall, the 'last great "historic" event' (Baudrillard, 2000, p.39). What followed became 'ghost events', 'phantom-events' and 'vanishing events' (Baudrillard, 2000, p.49-50), removed from the real with reality instead a product of simulation. Both Baudrillard and Canetti in turn evoke Nietzsche, who predicted in *Twilight of the Idols* (1889) that the epoch of the future would be one in which the "real world" would become "a myth" (Merrin, 2005).

The "War on Terror" was an attempt to produce a response to 9/11, effectively erasing one cultural memory with another, crafting a renewed, carefully framed, real world myth, 'where power is as much a function of time and space [and] 60/60/24/7/365 are the key coordinates' of the news media landscape (Der Derian, 2009, p.160). The attacks on the WTC in 2001 marked the effective 'dawn of a new war' (Virilio and Lotringer, 2002, p.155). The opening of this "pandora's box" was declared by Virilio as an 'intercine war...that has nothing to do with the Clausewitzian form' and renders army and air force redundant (Virilio, 2002, p.79). With the July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005 attack on London, the British military were similarly impotent.

Furthermore, just as many of those who watched planes fly into the World Trade Centre towers understood it in a cinematic sense (a notion suggested by Žižek (2002) amongst others), a visual connection can be made by those watching coverage of the London attacks. As Awan, Hoskins and O'Loughlin note, BBC

television news presented the viewer with news they had already seen. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the BBC offered regular drama-documentaries of simulations of security situations, with a programme on...terrorist attacks on London(2011, p.67).

Having just completed a pilot project involving user generated content (in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami) the BBC were growing adept, through their online platforms, at harnessing audience input. The nightly news in July 2005 was then led by amateur camera phone footage recorded by an individual aboard a tube train directly behind one of those attacked. It initiates in darkness, gradually moving out of the wrecked tube train and along the tunnels towards safety (07.07.05). Shaky, grainy video — identical in style to the reportage of the Enniskillen and Omagh bombings — carried a strong immediacy. The audio fades in and out, picking up fragments of conversation and dialogue and the frame is frequently dominated by the rear of the individual walking in front. Bright fluorescent lighting overhead reveals a harsh contrast to the black tunnel ahead. For John Berger, ‘people underground are both sheltered and helpless. Tunnels are ways of escape and terrible traps (2008, p.101). There exists a marked contrast here with the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>; in that instance, there were two elements to the attack: the literal death caused by the impact and collapse, and the larger symbolic value of this occurring to such a structure live on television. What is central here was the magnitude of the event, both the witnessing and the destruction.

Of course the martyr-pilots knew that bringing down the Twin Towers would do nothing, or next to nothing, to stop the actual circuits of capital. But

circuits of capital are bound up, in the longer term, with circuits of sociability — patterns of belief and desire, levels of confidence, degrees of identification with the good life of the commodity. And these, said the terrorists, thinking strategically, are aspects of the social imaginary still (always, interminably) being put together by the perpetual emotion machines. Supposing those machines could be captured for a moment? (Boal et al., 2005, p.26)

In London, however, what occurred was both hidden and public, attacking the iconic transport system of London, yet doing so unseen, deep underground.<sup>16</sup> Here the obscured is key, with this absence of visuals forcing a public contemplation and consideration of the horror committed below. Just like news on the radio, as Tarantino does in cinema, a lack of visuality forces the imagination. In attacking the underground, there was a deliberate attempt to cause confusion and fear, invoking humanity's worst fears.<sup>17</sup> The amateur footage from within this environment dominated the media discourse.

In utilising reportage in this way, harnessing public modes of perception and representation, traditional media are then better referred to as “renewed media,” a term deployed by Hoskins and O’Loughlin to signify ‘mainstream news organisations harnessing citizen or participatory journalism to enhance their news provision (2010b, p.84). Analysis of three decades of traditional BBC reporting on the terrorism of Northern Ireland provide a lens for the

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<sup>16</sup> Regarding the iconic, note the attempted humour recorded on the amateur video — “literally mind the gap please”, by one of the underground train staff assisting with the evacuation of passengers from the carriage to the tracks below.

<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to highlight here that Hasib Hussain, who detonated his bomb on the No. 30 bus that exploded in Tavistock Square, was ‘originally supposed to hit a Northern line Train, but on the morning of 7 July 2005, the Northern Line was temporarily suspended. Instead, he hit a number 30 red double-decker bus’ (Roger, 2013, p.90). The image of this destroyed bus — a symbol of London culture and British identity — became a powerful visual signifier of the attack, an iconic signifier of both the attack and resolve.

renewed BBC of today, where new, accessible and affordable modes of communication influence.

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# Chapter Two: Methodology



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We must study the media.

Roger Silverstone  
(1999, p.12)

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## Methodology

As Andrew Hoskins recently noted, in a general critique of the two primary paradigms impacting study of the relationship between contemporary media and warfare, ‘the mediation of war is a matter of an ongoing set of dynamics: remediation, translation, connectivity, temporality, reflexivity, across and between media and their multiple modalities’ (2013, p.4). Tracing developments back to the pioneering studies of scholars in the 1970s, including the work of Greg Philo and the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG), Hoskins suggests the ‘seductiveness of volume’ leads to issues regarding ‘validity, reliability and generalizability’ (ibid). In this study, however, a ‘certain fullness of data’ (ibid) *can* be claimed.

The Glasgow University Media Group were able to coherently analyse television news coverage of industrial relations in 1976’s *Bad News* because their data set was limited to television in the UK which, at that point, consisted of only three channels. Channel 4 began broadcasting in 1982, and this updated grouping was further explored by the GUMG, in relation to coverage of the Falklands War in *War & Peace News* (1985). Jackie Harrison would later focus on the context of the production of broadcast news through an analysis of television news across the output of the four channels (BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4) during a single week in April 1993 (2000). This narrow focus was again necessary to avoid an overly large, and entirely unmanageable, corpus, identified as one of the key dangers in content analysis (see Stokes, 2012). In restricting the focus of this study to a singular,

pre-eminent news organisation, similar criterion applied; as Wilson notes, 'Broadcast news in the UK is dominated by television, which, in itself, is dominated by the BBC' (Wilson, p.18). Whilst it inevitably opens up further questions and future areas for analysis and comparison (suggested in the conclusion), focusing directly on a single institution and broadcasting framework allows a limited but definable data set to be collated, analysed and deconstructed.

The primary research for this thesis is largely confined to the years 1968 – 1998 and this is for both historical and methodological reasons. 1968, as detailed later in chapter three, was a period of significant political, social and cultural unrest across the world; *The Times* declared it "this lunatic year". The year is also popularly accepted as the start of the Troubles in Northern Ireland (see Bew and Gillespie 1999; Coogan, 2002; Prince 2007; Prince and Warner 2011; McKittrick and McVea 2012) and has been commemorated on several anniversary occasions since.<sup>18</sup> The conflict was formally ended with the Belfast (Good Friday Agreement) of 1998, a year that also saw the single worst incident of the conflict on Northern Irish soil, the Omagh bombing.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the introduction of *Newsroom*, early in 1968, marked a significant step for BBC TV and exists as the first half hour bulletin, broadcast on BBC at half past seven each evening. Methodologically, the video holdings of the

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<sup>18</sup> Indeed the history section of the BBC's own website identifies the 5th October 1968 as the "day the Troubles began"; the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC) and Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) commemorated the 40th anniversary in 2008.

<sup>19</sup> An incident identified by Rose as the first time an image of every victim of a single event was collated and pictured in the press (2009, p.50).

various archive collections consulted, including the Northern Ireland Political Collection (NIPC), combined to present a comprehensive catalogue of this period.

### Methodology: Corpus

A neutral space, the NIPC is self described as a ‘unique resource. No other institution in a localised conflict has systematically collected material from all sides’ (Murphy et al., 2001, p.10). Allied to their literary (books, pamphlets, manifestos) and ephemeral (stickers, leaflets, posters and Christmas cards) holdings the collection is home to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI; successor of the defunct Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)) audio-visual archive consisting of some 2,000 documentaries and news bulletins covering the early 1980s to 1997.

The NIPC operates a simple paper based cataloguing of the PSNI video archive, however, prior to accessing materials, the “Peter Heathwood Collection” database was utilised to identify relevant programmes.<sup>20</sup> Part of the Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN, a joint project of the United Nations University and Ulster University and based within the International Conflict Research Institute), the Peter Heathwood Collection is a searchable database collated by the author. Heathwood was ‘shot and paralysed in a gun attack on his home in 1979. Since 1981 he has recorded daily television news items, documentary programmes, history programmes, and current affairs

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<sup>20</sup> For further details regarding the selection process see below.

programmes, about Northern Ireland' (Heathwood, 2015). His database, whilst not comprehensive, contains:

Details of news programmes (4,348) broadcast between May 1981 and January 2005, including most of the major British and Irish documentaries (479), history programmes (51) and current affairs programmes (693) about Northern Ireland networked between 1981 and November 2008 (ibid).

The searchable digital catalogue contains tabular data about each programme, including the series/programme title (for example RTE News, UTV News, BBC News), date of broadcast, a short description (for example: report by Jon Snow on Armagh blast in which five British soldiers killed) along with a duration for the programme or news report.

With both covering a similar time-period, there was an overlap of data and this proved invaluable in identifying relevant footage to then be sourced from the NIPC. Yet, with the NIPC archive focusing on the post 1981 period, it was necessary to obtain material for the preceding decade. With 1968, as detailed, historically identified as the start of the Troubles, and with newspaper cuttings suggesting initial coverage included particularly graphic imagery, this absence required addressing. A further archive was therefore consulted to eliminate this anomaly.

CAIN contains a searchable database focusing on television programmes related to the Troubles and originally part of the Film and Sound Resource Unit (FSRU) at The University of Ulster. Now stored at the Centre of Media Research (CMR), and based at the Coleraine campus of the University, the holdings of this archive begin in 1968 and furnished the additional footage

necessary. This was supplemented by use of “The Belfast Bulletin's list of British television programmes about the conflict 1968 to 1978”, similarly archived on CAIN, which features a (non-exhaustive) list of television programmes devoted wholly or primarily to the conflict, networked between October 1968 and December 1978. It is based on research compiled by the Belfast Workers Research Unit and published in the now-defunct *Belfast Bulletin*.

In cross referencing details and data from the various sources and archives, there was an attempt to negate any institutional bias which may have existed in each. However, in functioning as repositories of information, and seeking to present their documents in a neutral manner, there are overt attempts by each to function as apolitical social history.

Materials from these sources were supplemented by footage obtained from additional private collections. Furthermore, there is a range of BBC news broadcasts, bulletins and documentaries available through various online resources, including YouTube, the preeminent video sharing website that has ‘revolutionized the archiving of audiovisual material’ (McKee, 2011, p.155). Much of the content on YouTube has been uploaded by individuals, however there are some instances of media corporations offering their own material. This open access policy has allowed it to become a considerable repository of information and footage, realising ‘much of the internet’s potential to circulate rare, ephemeral and elusive texts’ (Hildebrand 2007, 54). There are therefore a number of full length documentaries available, particularly



regarding key moments from the Troubles (for example Bloody Sunday), as well as shorter clips that function as a synecdoche for wider moments and popular memory. However, allied to issues of permanence, longevity and copyright, YouTube will often lack the production details (such as transmission date) necessary for academic scholarship; as McKee notes, ‘the kinds of information about a clip that are presented in YouTube do present a problem to researchers of television history’ (ibid, p.169). Where information could not be accurately verified through searching additional databases, it was excluded from analysis.

#### Methodology: Selection

Due to practicality and time constraint, and even with this sustained focus on a single broadcasting institution, it remained necessary to limit the corpus. Despite the wealth of content analyses studies focusing on television news, ‘sampling studies to find valid and efficient sampling methods are practically nonexistent’ (Riffe et al., 2014, p.87). There are a number of possible approaches, with the choice particularly important when, as Prasad notes, ‘the body of content is excessive’ (2008, p.183). Krippendorff introduces a range of approaches, including random, stratified, systematic, and cluster (2004); whilst Riffe, et al. detailed specific examples, for instance, the use of constructed week and consecutive day sampling (ibid, p.85-90). As they then explain, these variations ‘reflects the absence of guidance from sampling studies about television news’ (ibid, p.116). One of the weaknesses identified

in many news content analysis is that results are distorted by a major story that dominates the sampling period (2011, p.253); the very nature of this work — centring around events of enormous historical significance — mean this is an unavoidable issue. However, in exploring reportage across three decades of the BBC, and seeking to identify the patterns in coverage, through a focus *on* major stories, these wider problem can be negated to some extent.

In focusing on multiple major news stories, embodying Gamson et al's concept of 'contested' content (1992), a small set of texts offer a rich potential in identifying patterns, symbols, and meanings. Bent Flyvbjerg espouses the power of example, using Aristotelian principles to correct five 'misunderstandings or oversimplifications about the nature of the case study as a research method' (2006, p.3). Flyvbjerg's notion of an information-oriented selection was followed, with cases selected 'on the basis of expectations about their information content' (ibid, p.34). Terrorism has long been considered a deviant act and Flyvbjerg believes, an extreme case can 'often reveal more information...in the situation studied' since

when the objective is to achieve the greatest possible amount of information on a given problem or phenomenon, a representative case or a random sample may not be the most appropriate strategy. This is because the typical or average case is often not the richest in information (ibid, p.13)

This also mirrors the approach of Hoskins and O'Loughlin, who borrow the term *perspicuous instances* from Jalbert in their study of television news and security events 'intersecting in ways that exemplify or point towards

regularities that characterise contemporary dynamics of news and security' (2007, p.6).

Prior to accessing archives, a wealth of literature was examined in order to identify what incidents – what “deviant cases” or “perspicuous instances” – featured prominently across texts. This included overview histories of Ireland (including Bardon, 2009; Foster, 1990); histories of the Troubles (including Dixon, 2011; Edwards, 2011; Edwards and McGrattan, 2010; Feeney, 2014; Fraser, 1999; Kennedy-Pipe, 1997; McKittrick and McVea, 2012; Tonge, 2001); histories of various factions and nationalism (English, 2012; Kee, 2000; Moloney, 2002; O'Brien, 2007; Taylor, 1998; Taylor, 2000; Taylor, 2002); and journalistic accounts (Bolton 1990; Devenport, 2000; Winchester, 1971). In each text, the incidents earning attention were identified; these were then cross referenced across the breadth of this wide body, resulting in around a dozen incidents being selected as central to a consideration of the Troubles. This was finally followed by keyword searches across the archive databases, with an expectation that such instances would have correspondingly garnered considerable media attention. Along with providing the core corpus, this also pointed further towards Jalbert's idea of the 'regularities that characterise contemporary dynamics of news' (cited by Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2007, p.6).

By collecting all (or rather as many as theoretically possible) bulletins and broadcasts related to each event – as opposed to sampling individual instances – it was possible to track stories and follow their coverage over

consecutive nights, generating data for each entry. Whilst it was then necessary to sample within that material for particular purpose, this granted considerable research flexibility; Hall's suggestion of a 'long preliminary soak', followed by use of this preliminary "reading" 'to select representative examples which can be more intensely analysed' applied (1975, p.15)

This was valuable not least because it was difficult to anticipate the volume of work which analysis would entail, nor the potential for study which the material would reveal. Perhaps most importantly, this decision enabled a parallel journey with the journalists (or perhaps more accurately *institutions*) own reportage, tracing 'the way particularly stories were presented, what themes were present...and what visual aspects were evident' (Eldridge, 2013, p.10).

The "events" selected and examined became the primary log, that is the log of all news items: from individual bulletins, to wider news broadcasts and documentaries. The research that is reported here is based upon a sub-sample of the full data, 'a gigantic empirical archive of human sense-making' ripe for coding and semiotic study (Fiske and Hartley, 2004, p.xviii).

### Content Analysis

Mirzoeff's 'glut' of imagery, based upon the past as a stable text disconnected from the flux of the present, allows a cumulative effect to be gathered (cited by Rose, 2016, p.163) Content analysis, spanning disciplines, fields, and subject matter, is a methodological approach and method of textual analysis

and empirical investigation, designed to identify, enumerate and analyse occurrences of specific messages and characteristics embedded in a text or texts (Frey et al., 1999). Systematic analysis of mass communication content dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century; Speed's 1893 longitudinal analysis of four New York newspapers used a simple metric of measuring column inches devoted to specific topics (Diefenbach, 2001, p.17). It has been applied across the evolution of each communication medium, from print to radio to film to television, and by 1969, 25% of all content analysis studies were examinations of communications media (cited by Diefenbach, 2001, p.18). According to Babbie, content analysis can proudly be defined as the 'study of recorded human communications' (2011, p.356).

The ultimate goal of content analysis is 'to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study' (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314). If the focus is to be television, the starting-point of any study...must be with what is actually there on the screen' (Fiske and Hartley, 2004, p.8). Content analysis then seeks to analyse primary data by coding information into nominal categories; this is what Ryan and Bernard deem to be the true 'heart and soul' of the process (cited by Packer, 2011, p.58).

The close relationship that now exists in academia between mass communication and content analysis is due to two related aspects: the nature of the latter to generate objective data about the former, and because it is seen as a method capable of coping with, and addressing, the sheer scale at which the mass media operated (Rose, 2016). Coding the complex

manifestation that is audio-visual media demands general, yet precise definitions. Following identification of the corpus, it is necessary to devise the categories to be used in coding and this involves attaching a set of descriptive labels or categories to each sample. For Gillian Rose this is a crucial stage in the research process; she paraphrases Slater and proclaims that

much of the rigour of classic content analysis relies on the structure of categories used in the coding process, because the categories should be apparently objective in a number of ways and therefore only describe what is “really” there in the text or image (2016, p.92).

The coding operation is the ‘process of transforming raw data into a standardized form’ (Babbie, 2011, p.361) and in its initial inceptions at least, content analysis ‘referred only to those methods that concentrate on directly and clearly quantifiable aspects of text content, and as a rule on absolute and relative frequencies of words per text or surface unit’ (Titscher et al., 2000, p. 55). Ryan and Bernard echo this formulation; in viewing content analysis as comprising ‘techniques for reducing texts to a unit-by-variable matrix and analyzing that matrix quantitatively to test hypotheses’ (Ryan and Bernard, 2000, p.785), they position classical content analysis as essentially a quantitative method.

However, as Rose explains, if the results of content analysis are to be interpreted through an understanding of the codes in an image and how they connect to the wider context in which they make sense, qualitative skills are required (2016). Siegfried Krakauer’s paper *The Challenge of Qualitative Content Analysis* sought to advocate the benefits of a qualitative approach,

contending that a purely quantitative, and one-sided orientation neglected the particular quality of texts and reduced the accuracy of overall analysis (1952, p.631).<sup>21</sup> According to Krakauer, who still acknowledges the importance of categories, ‘what is relevant are the patterns, the wholes, which can be made manifest by qualitative exegesis and which can throw light upon a textual characteristic’ (ibid, p.640).

One of the key strengths of qualitative research is the fact the process is ‘less driven by very specific hypotheses and categorical frameworks and more concerned with emergent themes and idiographic descriptions’ (Cassell and Symon, 1994, p.4). Amidst approaches, it is the sequential case study model of Philipp Mayring that ‘has achieved popularity’ (Titscher et al., 2000, p.62). Kohlbacher (2006, p.14-16) charts Mayring’s proposal, identifying three distinct analytical procedures which may be carried out independently or in combination. Moving through a process of summarising to explication (explaining, clarifying and annotating the materials), Mayring concludes with structuring, a procedure similar to, and derived from, classical content analysis. At this stage, the texts can be catalogued according to form and content into the identified system of categories. The overall procedure will be explanatory in nature; of Yin’s three strategies, the explanatory approach, deriving from research questions rooted in the *what* and *how*, explore ‘a

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<sup>21</sup> Krakauer’s text was in itself a response to Bernard Reuben Berelson. Berelson’s book *Content Analysis in Communication Research* (first published 1952) was the first compendium of the methods and goals of quantitative content analysis and initiated a controversy ‘about research strategies in content analysis’ Titscher et al. (2000, p.62).

contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control.” (2003, p.9)

In regard to the media texts of this study, form is the shape of the text and the way it appears onscreen. Content includes what is actually within the frame, including the subject and how it is presented; within film parlance, this is referred to as the *mise-en-scène*, or “placing on stage”. Allied to these aspects, are the movement of the camera and editing.

In taking a qualitative approach, there is a desire to uncover the wider phenomenon of the nature of BBC broadcast news. Through use of the initial data collected, viewed, and catalogued in line with the qualitative procedures above, it is the patterns, codes, signs, meanings and emergent themes that are of interest, as opposed to a statistical and numerical approach that reveals the number of times each variable occurs. Due to the inherently difficult nature of classifying content accurately, Casey et al. note that content analysis ‘tends more often to be used as a starting point or in conjunction with other methodologies than as a method standing along’ (cited by Hartley, 2012, p. 45).<sup>22</sup> Therefore, in the interests of further methodological diversity, the nascent data gathered in the initial phases of Collier’s structural model and catalogued in line with Mayring’s analytical procedures was then examined through the principle of semiotics, allowing a higher level of interpretive analysis to occur. As Fiske and Hartley note, ‘the reading of television must

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<sup>22</sup> Utilising a second coder, as detailed by Macnamara (2005) would have increased reliability.



progress from the *manifest* content to the *latent* content' (2004, p.10). In so doing, there is a desire to deconstruct the texts and fully understand each through identification of meaning and pattern.

### Methodology: Coding

Rose details three overarching criterion for coding categories: exhaustive, exclusive, and enlightening; she quotes Slater in regard to the latter, who says categories must produce 'a breakdown of imagery that will be analytically interesting and coherent' (2016, p.92). Working with an ex-BBC producer and director, a spreadsheet was created to collate enlightening information, complete with coding criterion.

This included general criteria about the programme itself, including information such as channel (BBC One, BBC Two or BBC NI), transmission date and time, and the length in minutes and seconds of the programme (if a complete documentary) or news item (if a discreet item contained within a wider broadcast). The database also contained more detailed information about the broadcast, including whether it was a headline or summary story, in order to provide a general gauge of the importance and prominence of the news item. Given the nature of the key events identified in literature and selected for analysis, these were inevitably the lead item for news broadcasts, often persisting for a number of bulletins across multiple days.

As detailed, each story length was also recorded, again to act as an indicator of the importance of the story in relation to other news stories. Whilst this

was carried through over the course of the archival research, it became clear early in the process that this was an area warranting substantive attention in and of itself and exists as a possibility for future (quantitative research).

A numerical story identifier was selected and used as a searchable shorthand for the various deviant events identified through literature and the database searches as being key to the focus of this study. This was, however, open ended, allowing inclusion of any additional moments and events discovered and watched whilst conducting research. It also allowed events to be 'tagged' with numerous identifiers; for example a BBC News Report (09/02/96) directly concerned with the Canary Wharf bombing is also identified as referencing the (end of the) IRA ceasefire.

The core of the analysis was then contained in the visuals field (and supported by a rhetoric field capturing the associated dialogue, interviews and commentary). Whilst it is the images disseminated by the BBC as part of its actuality programming that are the central focus, the associated text and aural elements that accompanied these will also feature throughout. This invokes the stance of Barthes (that an understanding of imagery requires a consideration of their associated text) yet simultaneously moves beyond this and towards the multimodal semiotic process of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2001). Four types of sound were identified in the audio portion, in line with Lacey's framework: dialogue; sound effects; ambient sounds; non-diegetic sounds (including voiceover and (rarely) music) (Lacey, 1998, pp. 52-53).

Entries in this visual field quickly became verbose and complex, however, as a method of gathering information on the imagery and allowing semiological analysis to take place, it ensured full information was transcribed. This included a break down of what was shown, how it was shown (camera angles, camera position, shot types, edits) and for how long (both of individual shots and the item). Allied to this was information on the reporter, along with description of any graphic specification and visual intertextuality.

A wealth of replicable data was collated, charting what signs appear when, and how these change and evolve over time. Allied to a chronological historical framework, patterns were seen to emerge. Whilst precisely how material was categorised may not cohere with the choices of another researcher, a pilot process was undertaken and in adopting an inductive approach, categories were allowed to develop directly out of the materials. During this phase textual materials were processed recursively, ensuring codes were 'revised and tried again until they are exhaustive and exclusive' (Rose, 2016, p.94). This marks a small step to negate (some of) the impact of an absence of a second coder.

### Semiotics

In the posthumous publication *A Course in General Linguistics*, Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure sets forth what can be read as the foundation stone for semiology:

Language is a system of signs that express ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, military signals, etc. But it is the most important of all these systems. A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable it would be part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from Greek, semeion "sign") Semiology would show what constitutes signs (1983, p.15-16)

Semiology, simply defined, is the science of signs; how they work and the ways in which we use them. The need for such a science was predicted both by Saussure, with whose work the term semiology is associated, and by the American philosopher C. S Peirce (1931–58), who coined the term semiotics. Whilst the two are now popularly considered synonyms, and “semiotics” is invariably used as an umbrella term to embrace the whole field (cited by Chandler, 2007, p.3-4), there are key differences it is important to note.

For Saussure, there are two parts to a sign: the signifier (material form) and the signified (mental concept). Since the relationship that exists between these is arbitrary (based on convention or what Saussure terms the “unmotivated”) codes are developed to learn and understand such signs. The signifier and the signified are ‘intimately linked and each triggers the other’ (Saussure, 1983, p.66).

In contrast with the dyadic Saussurian ontology of semiology, Peircean semiotics is based on a trichotomy of icons, indices, and symbols that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In iconic signs, the signifier represents the signified by holding a likeness to it; indexical signs feature an inherent, often culturally specific, relationship between the signified and signifier; symbolic signs in turn have a conventionalised but clearly arbitrary relation between

signifier and signified (Peirce, 1991). According to Peirce, thinking (now) only takes place in the form of signs, and, with roots in medieval philosophy (as opposed to Aristotle and neoplatonist knowledge for Saussure), the value of the sign is no longer constrained between signifier and signified. Whilst the *representamen* is similar in meaning to Saussure's *signifier*, and the *interpretant* can be aligned with the *signified*, Peirce's model of the sign includes an *object* or referent, which does not directly feature in Saussure's model. Linking the Peircean triadic model (1991) to the context of this study then provides a useful explanatory indicator:

The Representamen: the form which the sign takes; for example the words Provisional Irish Republican Army or Ulster Defence Association in a media text.

The Interpretant: the understanding or sense granted to the sign; for example “terrorists” or “freedom fighters”.

The Object: to which the sign refers or stands for; for example “militant group/guerrilla fighters” or “legitimate organisation”.

Television use all three forms: icon (sound and image), symbol (speech and text), and index (as the effect of what is filmed) and the film theorist Peter Wollen argues that:

the great merit of Peirce's analysis of signs is that he did not see the different aspects as mutually exclusive. Unlike Saussure he did not show any particular prejudice in favour of one or the other. Indeed, he wanted a logic and a rhetoric which would be based on all three aspects (2013).

Whilst the two approaches therefore vary, the central concern of semiotics — the relationship between a sign and the meaning, and the way signs are combined into codes — can be elucidated from the above. Allied to this, the work of Roland Barthes offers another insightful account and builds on these foundations. It also, as Jonathan Bignell notes, ‘take us closer to the semiotic analysis of contemporary media’ (2002, p.16), and thus the nature of this research. Barthes applied ideas of semiotics, developing it from the linguistic roots of Saussure, to the visual, including advertising and photography. He termed the initial and immediate visual impact, of a sign consisting of a signifier and a signified, the denoted meaning (first order of signification) and the cultural meaning attached to this the connoted meaning (second order of signification).

The analytic distinction that exists between the *denotative* signified and the *connotative* signified is the guiding idea of Barthes' semiotic theory, and connotation is the primary method for the mass media to communicate ideological meaning.

Denotation is the strict definitional and literal meaning of a sign, for example a dove is a dove — a small wild bird related to the pigeon family. The denotation of a visual image, for Erwin Panofsky, is what the “reader”, regardless of culture and time, would recognise the image as depicting (cited

by Chandler, 2007, p.138).<sup>23</sup> In television and film, the denoted meaning is conveyed through the digital or mechanical reproduction of twenty-four frames a second.

Connotation in contrast is expressive and subjective, carrying what Rose would suggest are higher level meanings (2016). In this order, signs signify values, emotions and attitudes. In arguing this, it is insinuated 'the camera is never neutral; the representations it produces are highly coded' (Tagg, 1988, p.63). John Tagg would then identify connotation as a reference to the socio-cultural and personal associations (whether ideological or emotional) of the sign (ibid, p.4). Signs are "polysemic," more open to interpretation in their connotations than their denotations; Wilden's analogy is particularly insightful here as he proposes denotation be regarded as digital and connotation as analogue (1987, p.224). The dove is therefore a symbol of peace, a messenger, or, in Christian iconography, the Holy Spirit.

In audiovisual media, this connotation is directed as a result of human intervention, for example technical aspects including camera angle, focus, colour, and depth-of-field. John Fiske succinctly summarises the two aspects:

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<sup>23</sup> Such a notion does of course raise questions regarding audience, and whether it is possible to state *all* viewers would respond in such a manner. As Chandler notes, this likely excludes the very young and the insane, and trends instead to the 'culturally well-adjusted' (2007, p. 138). Here there is a movement towards Stuart Hall and his reception theory framework for the reading of a text (Hall et al., 1980). Based on the assumption that the latent meaning of the text is encoded in the dominant code, Hall suggested three hypothetical interpretative positions: the dominant (hegemonic) reading; the negotiated reading; and the oppositional (counter-hegemonic) reading; Chandler frequently argues these notions of a preferred reading can arguably be applied more easily to news and current affairs than to other mass media genres (2007).

With semiotics essentially a subjective and interpretive method, this research, in seeking to unpack the complexity of the BBC news reporting as a textual structure, should be strictly read as advocating the preferred reading of one individual only. Areas of future research are, however, opened up by this approach.

‘denotation is what is photographed, connotation is how it is photographed’ (1982, p.91).

According to Barthes, signs in the second order of signification operate in two distinct ways: connotation and myth (termed the third order of signification by Fiske and Hartley (2004)). It is in the combining of signs with their connotation, in order to craft a particular message, that an ideology is espoused. This ideology is mythical, and these can essentially be seen as extended metaphors; as myths, signs seek to obfuscate ideology through making dominant cultural and historical values, attitudes and beliefs seem entirely natural and self-evident, promoting the ideological interests of ‘the bourgeoisie’ (Barthes, 1972). Myth takes hold of an existing sign, and makes it function as a signifier on another level.

In the famous essay *Myth Today* (essentially a Marxist political tract), Barthes illustrated the concept of myth through analysis of the front cover of an issue of *Paris Match*, a French magazine depicting a ‘a young Negro in a French uniform [is] saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour’ (1972, p.125-126). Barthes read the signs contained within the image as showing a young boy giving a salute (denotation) yet it simultaneously also signifies ‘that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag’ (ibid). Connecting mass media culture to French colonialism, Barthes here moves through the denotation of the first order signifier (the photo itself), the signified (the soldier), the sign (saluting), and towards the second order



signifier of French imperialism. He concludes with the connotation of the connoted sign itself: the French empire is positive and welcoming to all. Through a similar approach, the “second order” connotative structure of contemporary mythology can be revealed.

The wider system of semiotics utilises signs in a number of ways and Rose highlights the variety; the mythology of Barthes (1972) is the referent systems of Williamson (1978) and the codes of Stuart Hall (1980). A code is a way of making meaning that is specific to a medium, a process, a particular group of people. In the context of making television news programmes, for example, Stuart Hall comments on what he calls the “professional code” that is mobilised in the work of producers, editors, lighting and camera technicians, and newscasters. This guides such things as ‘the particular choice of presentational occasions and formats, the selection of personnel, the choice of images, the staging of debates’ (Hall, 1980, p.136). It has a ‘techno-practical nature’ according to Hall because it operates with ‘such apparently neutral-technical questions as visual quality, news and presentational values, televisual quality, “professionalism” and so on’ (ibid).

The concept of the code is therefore fundamental in semiotics and Daniel Chandler’s tripartite framework breaks down the range of code typologies across semiotics and media studies. Social codes, textual codes, and interpretive codes

correspond broadly to three key kinds of knowledge required by interpreters of a text, namely knowledge of: the world

(social knowledge); the medium and the genre (textual knowledge); the relationship between (1) and (2) (modality judgements) (2007, p.150).

It is the mass media aspect of the second category (concerning textual or representational codes) that are primarily explored in this work and John Fiske and John Hartley exemplify these connotative mass media codes in their seminal text *Reading Television* (2004). They detail a news broadcast which reported on troop reinforcements in Northern Ireland, and showed British army soldiers patrolling Belfast, then ensconced in sandbagged positions, before culminated with shots of passing army helicopters and armoured troop carriers. Analysing each stage, across this series of images which the state show the 'visual thesaurus of war', they state this series of 'signs activate a myth chain' (2004, p.27). In so doing, the British soldiers are presented as a coherent, well trained, technological advanced entity. Furthermore, in "shooting" footage from 'over the soldiers' shoulders, we share their position, and thus their role as one-of-us, defending us and ours, is immediately identified' (ibid). The ultimate purpose of semiotic analysis is a search for understand through the meaning of an image; a similar process will occur throughout this study.

There are of course drawbacks to this form of analysis; it is laborious, technical, and as footnoted, there is a strong interpretive component at work. Furthermore, this is primarily concerned with the textual structure itself, and not the audience or categories of viewer. Nonetheless, as Allan reminds us 'critical researchers have borrowed a range of conceptual tools from various

approaches to textual analysis' (1998, p.98); whilst there are dangers in drawing from diverse critical methods,

real life — is multi-faceted, and its adequate study requires various theories and approaches applied together. No single approach is capable of providing more than the partial picture of social reality permitted by its own narrow perspectives and conceptual limitations. In this sense we should welcome eclecticism, not apologise for it (Halloran, 2010).

### Methodology: Semiotics

Corner suggests that we must 'develop closer and better micro-analysis, of the language and image of the media' if we are to explore our relationship with a news text (1995, p.143). This semiotic analysis will then follow the theory of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), who advocate identifying the sign in line to three principle dimensions (representational, meta-functional and compositional) determining what these signify, and finally exploring the meanings of the signs in a cultural context (in this case, the context of the Troubles). Using semiotics to augment the content analysis qualitative data allows extra depth to be gained in this research; whilst a long shot can therefore show a location and people from a distance, on a semiotic level it can decrease their individuality (being unable to discern individual features) and transform them into types. Depicting people in groups can similarly decrease individuality, particularly if similarity is enforced and enhanced by the use of similar poses (particularly for Barthes), gestures, costume, or synchronised action. Therefore to again draw on the example provided by Fiske and Hartley, the myth of the army itself is propagated by the sign of

fatigue clad soldiers on the news 'issuing from the heavy double gates of the fort into a suburban street. They move in a ritualistic, crouching glide, in a predetermined order to predetermined positions' (2004, p.27) Such an image would become a familiar sight across BBC reportage of the Troubles; conversely, the IRA would seek to subvert the sign by creation of their own ritualistic, performative acts (i.e. staged funeral proceedings).

Semiotics as a tool for analysis attempts to qualitatively place content in a larger cultural context of meaning. As Rose suggests, semiotics 'confronts the question of how images make meanings head on. It is not simply descriptive..nor does it rely on quantitative estimations of significance' (2016, p.106). Rose is here consciously echoing Corner's desire for "closer and better micro-analysis" when she states semiotic analysis requires 'taking an image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning' (ibid). Hall similarly argues that in so doing, we are looking for the patterns that point towards meaning (1975). It is through such a process (explicitly in an academic sense; implicitly in a passive viewer sense) that understanding is possible. It can also be stressed that this study focuses on existing materials and images; as Jensen argues, 'the data are "found" rather than 'made' through the researcher's intervention in the field' (2002, p.243).

With the content analysis coded data providing denotative details, it is then necessary to identify what signifiers have been created. The expansive corpus of footage will be examined for signs and themes within patterns of coverage. Amongst the subject matter clues sought were the presence (absence) of

religious and cultural symbols, Fiske and Hartley's visual thesaurus of war, iconography of terrorism, images of warfare, violence, and the security apparatus of the state. Each was investigated within the overarching perspective of the news, a constructed entity, carefully composed of a number of items, all linked together in a coherent and recognisable manner to ensure the whole programme flows as a totality. These include, as detailed, the introductory sequence (central to myth forming), headlines, the actual news reports (themselves made up of a variety of items), summaries, sign-offs and credits. As Bignell notes 'the representation of reality offered by TV news is not reality itself, but reality mediated by the signs, codes, myths and ideologies of news' (2002, p.112). Throughout the following chapters, the visual thesaurus of the Troubles will be identified and traced.

# Chapter Three: Origin

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Kill one,  
frighten ten thousand.

Sun Tzu  
(quoted by Clutterbuck, 1994, p. 3).



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## Terrorism

Today we were unlucky, but remember we only have to be lucky once  
(cited by Hoffman, 2004, p.254)

On October 12<sup>th</sup> 1984, a bomb exploded at the Grand Hotel, Brighton, England, in an attempted assassination of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her cabinet. Provisional IRA member Patrick Magee — who served fourteen years in prison for planting the bomb — would however repudiate the nomenclature *terrorist*. For Magee, the term is a

debased currency...more often applied tendentiously or pejoratively, not to explain or clarify but to obscure. “Terrorism” has become a non-explanation designed to perpetuate injustice, repression, and many gross asymmetries of power’ (English, 2009, p.1).

The phenomenon of terrorism is ‘shrouded in terminological confusion’, one which surpasses mere semantic contestation; as Schlesinger et al. note, ‘real political outcomes are at stake’ (Schlesinger et al., 1983, p.1). As detailed in the introduction then, the very term *terrorism* is value laden and in constant modulation. Whilst Hoffman declares the design of terrorism is to ‘instil fear within’, the dividing line where fear slips into terror is particularly unclear (2013, p.40). Indeed it will never be clear since these subjects are intensely contested. Similarly, the manner in which the public relate to the term is shifting as the line fluctuates. Philosopher Michael Walzer suggested three-forms of terrorism in 2002: national liberation/revolutionary movement (e.g. the IRA, PLO, Eta), state (e.g. the Argentine “disappearances”) and war (e.g. Hiroshima) (Walzer, 2004, pp.130-131). However grouping together

disparate organisations under such rubric, including the common “international terrorism”, effectively eliminates the ‘complexity and specificity of the circumstances which have produced these movements...they are detached from their particular history and redefined as part of a general phenomenon’ (Schlesinger et al., 1983, p.3). As Jason Burke points out, ‘there are multiple ways of defining terrorism, and all are subjective...none is satisfactory and grave problems with the use of term persist’ (2003, p.22).

What can be recognised is the contemporary connection to media. Yet, even prior to the communications age, the relationship between terrorism and publicity was apparent. In its earliest manifestations, for example, zealots and assassins, attacking in the midst of crowded market places deliberately played to an audience far beyond their immediate victims (Chaliand and Blin, 2007).

## Ireland

The “Troubles” in Northern Ireland are

generally understood to refer to a murderous dispute which for the past quarter century only, has come to involve the English and the Irish in sectarian quarrel in the north-eastern part of Ireland commonly, but erroneously referred to as “Ulster” (Coogan, 2002, p.1).

Whilst such a euphemistic colloquialism is itself somewhat reductive, it is popularly accepted and will be used throughout this work to refer to the terrorism and violence of 1968 to 1998.

Any treatment must first address the origins of the ethno-political conflict, dating back to at least the twelfth century. Nationalists point to the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169 as the first instance of colonisation, ‘the starting point for eight hundred years of British oppression’ (ibid, p.2). The Plantation of Ulster in 1606 and 1609, the latter controlled by King James I of England (VI of Scotland), resulted in the forced confiscation of land and further displacement of the Irish population. The nationalist narrative is dominated by the Irish confederate wars (1641-1653), the Williamite war (1689-1691), the formal annexation of Ireland and incorporation into the United Kingdom with the Acts of Union 1800, and the Great Famine of the 1840s.<sup>24</sup>

Attempts to introduce Home Rule took place throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and three years after the 1916 Easter Rising, the first Dáil Éireann (Assembly of Ireland) parliament issued the Irish Declaration of Independence and the Irish War of Independence began. The following year, representatives of the British government and Irish Nationalists signed the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 (effectively the Fourth Home Rule Bill), which partitioned Ireland into two devolved administrations; the Six Counties in the northernmost part of the island became Northern Ireland.

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<sup>24</sup> Bardon (2009) provides a general introductory overview to Irish history. Specific accounts of the Easter Rising include Coogan (2005) and Townshend (2011). Townshend (2014) details the immediate aftermath, Patterson (2007) explores the post World War Two period, whilst Ferriter (2005) delves deeply into the complete century. Taylor’s trilogy (1998, 2000, 2002) are useful for an understanding of the central factions involved in the Troubles, including details on the origins. The political situation is detailed by Aughey and Morrow (1996) and Bew et al. (2002); Craig provides a particular focus on politics and diplomatic relations at the start of the Troubles. This historical overview is a synthesis of these texts.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 then established the Irish Free State (comprising the twenty-six southern counties) as a dominion on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1922. Fifteen years later, the 1922 constitution was replaced by referendum, and the entirely sovereign state of the Republic of Ireland was formed.

Northern Ireland was a unique construct; not coinciding with any traditional boundaries, it reinforced the power of Protestants holding the majority share of population (in the six counties, a minority community on the island). The architecture of the political structure replaced initial proportional representation with a first-past-the-post arrangement. Coupled with judicious electoral boundary changes, Unionists were able to guarantee around 40 of the available 52 seats in the Stormont parliament. The use of such gerrymandering saw Nationalist controlled councils decrease from twenty-five in 1920 to just four in 1925.

Systematic economic discrimination against Catholics occurred with Unionist politicians controlling all aspects of social and economic activity, including housing and industry. Areas of Catholic majority suffered high unemployment and rampant poverty. Prior to 1969, only those who owned houses and businesses could vote; those in the former received two votes, whilst the latter was calculated according to the number of staff. Due to restrictions on Catholic housing and employment they were therefore restricted in voting rights. The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) police force and an armed reserve paramilitary force of the Ulster Special Constabulary,

(commonly called the “B Specials”) supported this Unionist control. Both were protestant dominated, with representation of Catholics in the RUC not exceeding 20%. Security forces could also utilise the provisions of the Special Powers Act 1922, which allowed wide-ranging powers of search and arrest and detention without trial.

*A Report of the Commission appointed by the Governor of Northern Ireland* would detail the causes of disorder in 1969, detailing decades of systematic discrimination:

(1) A rising sense of continuing injustice and grievance among large sections of the Catholic population in Northern Ireland in respect of (i) inadequacy of housing provision by certain local authorities (ii) unfair methods of allocation of houses built and let by such authorities, in particular; refusals and omissions to adopt a 'points' system in determining priorities and making allocations (iii) misuse in certain cases of discretionary powers of allocation of houses in order to perpetuate Unionist control of the local authority.

(2) Complaints, now well documented in fact, of discrimination in the making of local government appointments, at all levels but especially in senior posts, to the prejudice of non-Unionists and especially Catholic members of the community, in some Unionist controlled authorities.

(3) Complaints, again well documented, in some cases of deliberate manipulation of local government electoral boundaries and in others a refusal to apply for their necessary extension, in order to achieve and maintain Unionist control of local authorities and so to deny to Catholics influence in local government proportionate to their numbers  
(Lord Cameron, 1969).

### The IRA

Claiming lineage to the Irish Volunteers (who staged the 1916 Easter Rising), the Irish Republican Army underwent a schism following the signing of the Anglo-Irish treaty. Opposed to the treaty, due to its failure to create a united

free Irish republic, the IRA fought free state forces during the Irish civil war. However they were not equipped nor trained to fight conventional warfare and quickly resorted to guerrilla tactics. The internal oppositions and fractured politics of the group however are highlighted by the fact IRA units within Northern Ireland largely supported the Free State forces. Indeed Peadar O'Donnell, a left wing IRA commander is recorded as saying 'we don't have an IRA battalion in Belfast, we have a battalion of armed Catholics' (Engeland and Rudolph, 2008, p.54). Outlawed by President Éamon de Valera in 1936, and suffering from reduced numbers, the remainder of the organisation attempted a bombing campaign in Great Britain, collaborated with the intelligence agency of Nazi Germany, and commenced a "Northern Campaign" across the border. This proved disastrous and concluded barely three months after it began. Internment effectively crippled the organisation and in 1950, the IRA renounced military attacks and 'all types of aggression in the Twenty-Six county area', focusing instead on a policy proclaimed the prior year:

The aim of the army (IRA) is simply to drive the invader from the soil of Ireland and to restore the sovereign independent Republic proclaimed in 1916. To that end, the policy is to prosecute a successful military campaign against the British forces of occupation in the Six Counties  
(Coogan, 2002, p.256).

This military action began with a Border Campaign in 1956, a series of attacks that proved limited in their impact; again, internment (and military courts in the South) drastically affected operations, morale and funding. Tim Pat Coogan suggests that the *campaign* is more accurately referred to as

incidents, 'because that is in fact what it was: a series of incidents along the border, impinging very little on Belfast, and annoying rather than terrifying the Northern administration' (2002, p.303). David McKittrick (2005) suggests it 'petered out ignominiously, apparently consigning the organisation to history' and a formal declaration of campaign's conclusion was announced in 1962:

The leadership of the Resistance Movement has ordered the termination of the Campaign of Resistance to British occupation launched on 12 December 1956...It calls on the Irish people for increased support and looks forward with confidence — in co-operation with the other branches of the Republican Movement - to a period of consolidation, expansion and preparation for the final and victorious phase of the struggle for the full freedom of Ireland (Jordan, 2002, p.28).

For the remainder of the decade, the IRA was inactive; 'the green sea of support had largely dried up (Bowyer Bell, 1997, p.334)'. However with Loyalist anger at the reforms of Prime Minister Terence O'Neill resulting in increased attacks and unrest, the IRA — with a stated aim of defending the Catholic minority — quickly returned to violence.

### Civil Rights and Television Sights

Throughout the world, the 1960s became a decade of radical change; in Africa, 32 countries gained independence from their European colonial rulers whilst in America, the peace movement and opposition to the Vietnam War gained popularity. Across countries, support for social protest groups — including civil rights, women's rights, welfare, environmentalism, against racism and for gay liberation — rapidly increased. A student movement



resulted in numerous protests across West Germany whilst Martin Luther King, prominent leader of the African-American Civil Rights Movement was assassinated in 1968 and is positioned as a defining event in black politics and the (continued) quest for equality (Dyson, 2008). In France, the May 1968 protest almost resulted in the collapse of President Charles de Gaulle's government.

In 1958, the Nationalist party of Ireland, alongside the Northern Ireland Labour Party, introduced a resolution at Stormont, announcing Northern Ireland to be 'the only part of these islands which denies universal adult suffrage in local government elections' (Edwards & McGrattan, 2000, p.16). Several years later, the first generation of Catholics to grow up after the Second World War were benefiting from the 1949 Education Act, gaining a greater education and in turn demanding greater rights. In November 1966, in the War Memorial building in Belfast, members of various Wolfe Tone societies gathered to hold a public meeting on the issue of civil rights.<sup>25</sup> Two main speakers spoke on the topics of 'Civil Liberty – Ireland Today' and 'Human Rights, An International Perspective'; overall support led to a second meeting in January 1967, attended by over one hundred people, including representatives from all Northern Ireland political parties. Three months later, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association officially came into existence. NICRA would later write, 'after 47 years...the question of civil

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<sup>25</sup> Theobald Wolfe Tone was one of the founders of the Society of United Irishmen and is generally regarded as the father of Irish Republicanism; see Macdermot (1968).

rights was tackled seriously for the first time in 1967. It was...the beginning of a new era for Northern Ireland' (1978).

Television made all sides aware of the power of mass demonstration in 1968, including the March 17 anti-war demonstration in Grosvenor Square, London, May in Paris and August in Chicago at the Democratic National Convention. In Ireland, members of NICRA 'deliberately sought to create the same kind of atmosphere in the North' (Feeney, 2004, p.17). They would consciously model their tactics of direct action, non-violence and peaceful protest on the American Civil Rights movement, appropriating the anthem 'We Shall Overcome' on their first civil rights march from Coalisland to Dungannon on Saturday August 24, 1968.<sup>26</sup> The significance of this association, both tactical and aurally, cannot be understated: it was not an Irish Nationalist song selected. The Civil Rights campaign disoriented the majority population who were witnessing a clear victory in the propaganda battle.

The original 'rights' claims were about issues of participation — how can we become accepted members of society? — and of distribution — how can we enjoy the full civil and social benefits entailed in being citizens. In short the campaign produced a revolution in rising expectations. When these could not be delivered speedily enough the criss became a ore fundamental one of identity and legitimacy (Arthur, 1996, p.16-17).

Educated and articulate, the Civil Rights movement adopted a sophisticated model of rhetoric and representation, invoking the universal language of rights. Protestors had six particular demands:

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<sup>26</sup> The 2002 film *Bloody Sunday* also shows the song being sung prior to the events of 30<sup>th</sup> January 1972 in the Bogside area of Derry.

An ending of the plural voting system in council elections,  
simplified into a call for ‘one man, one vote’;  
an end to discrimination and gerrymandering;  
machinery to deal with complaints against public authorities;  
the disbandment of the B-Specials;  
fair play in public housing allocations;  
and an end to the Special Powers Act (cited in Coogan, 2002, p.67).

Despite some 4,000 attending this first march, it failed to gain significant attention. Instead the eyes of the world’s press were focused on the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia three days prior. As such, without a crucial visual element – the arresting image of thousands marching in solidarity – there was no sustained media coverage across the BBC. Indeed the march was ignored; Pierre Bourdieu is again relevant: ‘Successful demonstrations are not those which mobilise the greatest number of people, but those which attract the greatest interest among journalists’ (cited by Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 320). Two months later represents the moment the world became aware of Northern Ireland, as the Troubles, the people and the country received a new context and setting: the television screen.

The campaign proved impossible to repress or ignore...That pressure operated on the ground and also, via media coverage, through Westminster and Dublin. Perhaps the central success of the campaign was to attract outside attention and to bring outside pressure to bear on the Northern Ireland government (Ó Dochartaigh, 1997, p.19).

October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968

Home Secretary (and later Prime Minister) James Callaghan, in an interview broadcast by the BBC, believed 1968 to be ‘a remarkable year...a general air of disturbance existed throughout the world’ (archival footage, *The Battle of the*

*Bogside* 07/01/08). Following previous marches, NICRA were invited to march in Derry by the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC) and an ad-hoc committee set the march for Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October. On October 1<sup>st</sup>, the Apprentice Boys of Derry declared they would also march along the same proposed route, on the same date, at the same time. William Craig, then Home Affairs Minister, banned both marches under the Public Order Act. Such a tactic was used several times, both before and after the Derry march, with possible conflict between the two providing the necessary justification for an overall ban. On Friday 4<sup>th</sup>, a NICRA delegation in consultation with local organisers, decided their march would go ahead.

Accompanied by several Stormont ministers and members of the London Parliament, including Belfast MP and founder of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) Gerry Fitt, the march proposed to walk from Duke Street to the centre of the city. Following violence at the August march, Gay O'Brien, a cameraman for RTE (Raidió Teilifís Éireann, state broadcaster for the Republic of Ireland) was also present. Around 400 people marched, with a further 200 observing from the street, however upon departure, they were stopped by a blockade of the RUC and there were brief clashes between the two groups. Simultaneously, RUC forces moved into position behind the marching column, preventing an exit back along Duke Street. Betty Sinclair, NICRA member and one of organising committee, addressed the crowd and advised dispersal.

The RUC however attacked the crowd, baton charging marchers. According

to one historian, 'There was a huge innocence about the day...no one had any sense that the police would attack' (Keenan, 2008). Following the initial baton attack, water cannons drove demonstrators across Craigavon Bridge. Seventy-seven were injured, including several politicians. Shooting with an Auricon 16mm film camera, Gay O'Brien's presence transformed a small-localised campaign into a mass movement. He recorded twelve minutes of astonishing black and white footage, from the beginning of the attack, to the panicked confusion that followed. He also captured the aftermath of MP Gerry Fitt deliberately allowing blood from a baton wound on his head to pour down his ashen face. The propaganda campaign had begun:

Gerry Fitt was interviewed by television reporters as he stood at the scene of the RUC's charge, his jacket, tie and shirt spotted with blood. This image of a member of the British Parliament, wounded during an unprovoked police charge as he attempted to march in support of one person/one vote, was flashed into millions of British homes and all around the world that October evening. English people, almost totally ignorant of the situation in the Six Counties, could hardly believe what they were seeing on their "tellys". This was part of the United Kingdom in the year 1968? Peaceful demonstrators were being beaten and arrested for demanding the passage of anti-discrimination laws? What sort of place was Northern Ireland anyway? And why was it that the marchers' complaints had never once been fully discussed at Westminster? (Kelley, 1981, p.104)

Having recently joined the newly established news-film pooling system, RTE's footage was broadcast to the wider world by the BBC; according to historian Rex Cathcart, it 'featured prominently on the BBC network news... [and] proved sensational' (1984, p.208). This footage then, as detailed, indicates the commencement of television coverage of Northern Ireland conflict and the propaganda war. With strong, on-the-scene, *cinéma vérité*

style documentary reportage, startlingly raw and unrestrained in a visual sense, it captured attention and set forth Sontag and Levi Strauss's "evidence".

Two days of serious rioting followed in Derry, with the first petrol bombs thrown in anger. 20,000 people joined a reprisal march along the same route the following month. Broadcast by the BBC, it carried an enormous effect, with images of British forces attacking civilians flashing around the globe:

The campaign proved impossible to repress or ignore. It exerted pressure on the Unionist government of Northern Ireland, not only as a huge media spectacle, but also through sheer force of numbers on the streets. That pressure operated on the ground and also, via media coverage, through Westminster and Dublin. Perhaps the central success of the campaign was to attract outside attention and to bring outside pressure to bear on the Northern Ireland government (Ó Dochartaigh, 1997, p.19).

Simon Winchester, a reporter for *The Guardian*, was dispatched to the country in 1970. His description of BBC footage is masterful. To quote in full:

There was terrible, terrible trouble. For the first time the men and women in England who watched the news that misty Saturday night with the day's football over and the teapot or the tankard dry, saw something they could never forget. They saw grim-faced policemen battering student girls to the ground – the constables with long batons, the officers with gnarled, shiny sticks known as blackthorns. They saw water cannons trundling through the streets firing volley after volley of cold water to smash through a crowd not very different from the crowds who gathered almost every weekend in Trafalgar Square or at Hyde Park. They saw that the policemen carried guns... few can have known that any British policemen were armed. They saw a Westminster MP – or a man who was identified as such – named Gerry Fitt, being led away with blood streaming from a cut in his head...they saw recognisable British MPs, who had gone across to Londonderry to observe a march whose origins they did not know and of whose repercussions they had no idea, seething with anger at the 'brutality' of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, as they police were named. And they saw notices with curiously African and Asian requests, like 'One Man – One Vote', a request they were sure had not been recently denied in the British Isles (1974, p.28-29).

At the end of November, with the footage resulting in increased public attention and awareness, the Stormont Government announced the appointment of a reform package, including the abolition of the Special Powers Act and the allocation of housing by local authorities based on need. In turn, NICRA would announce a ban on marches for one month. Terrence O'Neill appealed for calm in what would become known as the "crossroads speech". He questioned

What kind of Ulster do you want? A happy and respected province, in good standing with the rest of the UK, or a place continually torn apart by riots and demonstrations? (Bruce, 2007, p.96)

Formed in the aftermath of October 5<sup>th</sup>, The People's Democracy (PD) was a radical student led movement based at Queen's University Belfast. Inspired by the actions of similar student movements, the PD planned a one-hundred-and-twenty-kilometre long march from Belfast to Derry, modelled on the American civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery. Harassed along the way, as they provocatively marched through Loyalist districts, violence exploded at Burntollet Bridge, five miles from Derry. 200 Loyalists, including off-duty members of the 'B-Specials' ambushed marchers, attacking with clubs and stones. The RUC, who had accompanied the fifty or so marchers from Belfast, did not intervene in the attacks, standing by and observing. Indeed the nature of the police cordon, directed the marchers into a lane where attackers waited.<sup>27</sup> Again, members of the media were present, recording footage that would lead to the formation of the Cameron

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<sup>27</sup> See eyewitness accounts in Egan and McCormack (1969).

Commission, an investigation into the causes of the disturbances. The Reverend Ian Paisley, founder of the staunchly Protestant Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), would call this ‘a betrayal of the Ulster people to the rebels’ and with O’Neill contemplating reform, Unionists believed Stormont was capitulating to the Catholic community (Bruce, 2007, p.96). Historian and Professor of Irish politics Paul Bew believes the ambush at Burntollet Bridge was ‘the spark that lit the prairie fire’, remarking

It could be argued that the march marks the pivotal point at which the Troubles changed from being primarily about civil rights to being about the more traditional disputes concerning national and religious identities (Bew, 2007, p.493).

According to Peter Taylor, in a BBC documentary, ‘the flames spread from Derry to Belfast...marching gave way to murder and a more sinister phase began’ (*Timewatch*, 27.01.93). Tim Pat Coogan suggests the violence came upon the two countries ‘both gradually and suddenly...bursting upon an unsuspecting population with appalling suddenness’ (Coogan, 2002, p.1). The BBC — indeed the world’s media in general — would similarly be caught unaware. Coverage of NI prior to the cataclysmic events of 1968 was minimal and incidental. What broadcast journalism did not do was explain or investigate the connections between the various disquieting, but apparently discrete episodes occurring during the second half of the decade. What was missing, in other words, was real analysis of the background causes of the disturbance, a historical and religious framing.



Within days of Terence O'Neill's departure in April 1969, the BBC directed that all reporting would now go via the controller of NI region, desiring that television coverage should not exacerbate the situation. The fear that television pictures might contribute to a breakdown of public order became the primary concern of management and senior broadcasters. Here there was already a tacit recognition, amongst politicians and broadcasters, that the visual representation of events would be crucial.

In addition, because the BBC had a "no opting out" editorial policy, all network programs had to be presentable on BBC NI, effectively allowing circumstances in Belfast to define the frame of reference for *national* news. This was the tail wagging the dog. Military intervention and media intransigence transported NI to the centre of British politics and primetime on the television screen.

### BBC

Prior to the explosion of violence in 1968, Northern Ireland was, for mainstream British culture, 'an obscure and unknown periphery, little acknowledged and rarely featured' (McLoone, 1996, p.80). It was convention for BBC reporting to be separate: Ireland reported on Ireland whilst the mainland reported on mainland issues; the affairs of the province were never discussed in the House of Commons and were therefore not broadcast to the wider British public. When the first BBC radio station was formed in 1926, the Unionist hierarchy sought to establish a symbiotic relationship, initiating

this audio-visual partition; Gerald Beadle, former Director of BBC television:

Mine was a task of consolidation, which meant building the BBC into the lives of the province and making it one of their public institutions... I was invited to become a member of the Ulster Club; the Governor, the Duke of Abercorn, was immensely helpful and friendly, and Lord Craigavon, the Prime Minister, was a keen supporter of our work. In effect I was made a member of the Establishment...  
(Schlesinger, 1983, p.206).

During the early years of radio broadcasting, for example, results of Gaelic football matches were not aired. This was combined with a general trend of avoiding news regarding provocative Unionist activities, such as the Orange Order July 12<sup>th</sup> demonstrations. Throughout World War Two, and in the immediate post-war period, it was BBC policy to not admit any attack on the constitutional position of Northern Ireland; when such programming arose (as in the case of an interview with an actress expressing sympathy for IRA internees) it was not broadcast in the North. BBC programming essentially drew direction from a 1930 document on the position of the BBC regional service, which 'reflects the sentiments of the people who have always maintained unswerving loyalty to British ideals and British culture. Northern Ireland relies on broadcasting to strengthen its common loyalties within Britain' (cited by Curtis, 1998, p.19).

Following the broadcast of a *Tonight* current affairs episode in January 1959, the BBC received particularly strong criticism. Presented by Alan Whicker, the series consisted of eight ten-minute episodes, the first focusing on betting shops. However the opening sequence, amidst location setting shots of

Stormont and Belfast City Hall, featured graffiti — “No Pope Here” and “Vote Sinn Féin” — alongside a mention of armed policing and the absence of conscription. The following day, a bishop flew to London to complain, a BBC crew covering a football match were attacked, Stormont threatened to remove broadcasting rights from the BBC, and the controller issued an apology at the distress and indignation caused (Curtis, 1998, p.21). The remaining seven episodes were not shown; the BBC would not present another programme on the Six Counties for several years.

The BBC then entered into a major news story, one demanding immediate and detailed media attention, quite unprepared for the complexities of coverage. They were effectively broadcasting to two distinct communities, two cultures within one province, where ‘due to the double-codedness of local political cultures, every utterance has a dual interpretation attached and, quite often, a dual intent’ (Butler, 1996, p.134). Every broadcast would, and continues to a lesser intent, to be underscored by these difficulties. Prior to 1968, few programmes regarding with the region had been broadcast to a national audience. Those that did, proved problematic; Alan Parkinson points to the example of Richard Dimbleby’s interview with the premier of Northern Ireland Basil Brooke which saw the former ask the latter, ‘What exactly is this I-R-A?’ (cited in Parkinson, 1998, p.71).

Initially, media organisations, particularly the BBC due to its place in the political domain and role as national broadcaster, were constrained into a patriotic stance of supporting the “national interest”. For example, violence of

the security forces would be situated in a legitimating framework, emphasising its necessity. Northern Ireland controller Richard Francis, in a 1977 lecture pointed to the BBC's name as inherently problematic since 'the very title creates an expectation on the part of some people on the loyalist side that we should overtly support British institutions... on the other hand, the "British" in our title creates an air of suspicion among republicans' (Francis, 1996, p.57).

Until ITV (in the form of Ulster television) arrived in the North in 1959, the BBC monopolised broadcasting. Gaining a significant audience proportion, UTV forced the BBC into a measure of liberalisation during the 60s. However, Unionists continued to exert fierce pressure on programming, constraining reportage. Liz Curtis details a *Tonight* reporter who quit because 'he was not allowed to make a film about gerrymandering' (Curtis, 1998, p. 22). She also suggests that members of the broadcaster feel the failing of the BBC to report on the earliest incidences of the civil rights movement 'contributed to the conflict by forcing nationalists to pursue their legitimate aims outside the democratic framework' (ibid, p.23).

It was only with the broadcast of footage of the October 5<sup>th</sup> March however, that matters changed; as the *Irish Times* declared, 'Let's make no mistake about it...the marches would not have mattered two pence if the TV cameras had not been there' (Cathcart, 1984, p.209). Such a sentiment was to be echoed by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons; when the Grand Master of the Ulster Orange Order William Orr suggested the debate was

‘mischief making’, Harold Wilson responded (and perhaps revealed a little of his own sympathies): ‘Up till now we have perhaps had to rely on the statements of himself and others on these matters. Since then we have had British television’ (Coogan, 2002, p.73). This represents an implicit endorsement of the aforementioned Sontag (along with explicit endorsement of the framing of the BBC) and simultaneously stands in opposition to Davis and Walton: it was the representation of events, and not the associated framing, lacking in contextualisation and comprehension, that demanded attention.

Lord Hill, the chairman of the BBC, would later write, ‘one of the hardest tests in the history of the BBC came in 1969, when we were broadcasting to the people of Northern Ireland at a time when argument had burst into the violence of stones, petrol bombs and firearms’ (cited by Cathcart, 1984, p. 214).

To quote BBC reporter Keith Kyle in full:

Nevertheless, to come to Northern Ireland at that particular time was to experience quite a shock. Having been a foreign correspondent in the United States during the civil rights’ movement, in Africa and in the Middle East, I was hardly a stranger to political breakdown and civil strife. Yet this had always been a matter of reporting from abroad, of seeking to convey to a British audience the elements of a situation that was exotic; now a comparable situation was occurring *at home*, but in a setting with which the vast bulk of the audience could not be expected to identify indistinctly as a domestic one. Some of the actions displayed and opinions expressed must, indeed, have appeared to people on the mainland as coming from the dark side of the moon. It was going to be no easy task to explain how a domestic political crisis in a part of the United Kingdom in the mid-twentieth century could involve the extensive use of violence, the burning of houses, the expression of political views in vehemently sectarian terms. On the one hand,

it was necessary to ensure that British people felt it was their crisis, not someone else's that they were looking in at; if they were to take it seriously they must sample the depth and intensity of the passions involved. Yet at the same time we were going to have to bear in mind that what was transmitted nationally could be received locally, what we said and what we showed could directly affect the course of events (Kyle, 1996, pp.105-106).

The inherent nature of the medium lends itself to visuals, and as such, it became difficult for television news to be both impartial and responsible. Indeed television is a crucial weapon for the non-violent campaigner; it is needed to provoke through the act of exposing "evidence". Television is then a very visible presence on any scene, with symbolic gestures (often directly concerning other symbolic symbols) becoming a de facto visual language for all. In one early BBC broadcast covering the civil rights campaign, an Irish Republic flag was displayed in the nationalist Bogside area of Derry. The broadcast shows, a point reiterated by the reporter's language, a well known IRA veteran removing the flag (17.10.68). Interestingly, without the rhetorical framing accompanying the broadcast, an entirely different situation, and symbolic image, would have been suggested.

Such an act echoes the deliberate campaign song selection, a carefully crafted act of propaganda, aimed at both the immediate community and the wider television audience. Yet television broadcast news was profoundly unprepared for the violence that was to follow. Unsure of how to proceed visually, the BBC introduced a 'temporary departure from normal journalistic considerations' where events could only be explained and not shown (Kyle, 1996, p.109). This then highlights multiple key issues: images were

recognised as a central component of broadcasting; the BBC were unsure how events should be represented visually; description should take precedence over analysis; (self) censorship was a means of response. The failure of BBC reporting in the early months was then a failure to initiate appropriate journalistic principles, a failure to grasp the underlying political reality, and a failure to frame these events appropriately.

On July 14<sup>th</sup> Francis McCloskey, a 67-year-old Catholic civilian died after being attacked by the RUC in County Derry. His death, two days after the traditional July 12<sup>th</sup> Protestant celebrations of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the victory of William of Orange at the 1690 Battle of the Boyne, would be the first of the conflict. Republicans in nearby Derry subsequently established the Derry Citizens' Defence Association (DCDA) prior to the annual Apprentice Boys of Derry march on 12<sup>th</sup> August at the height of the "marching season".<sup>28</sup> As Citizens Defence Associations gave way to paramilitary organisations, the British public received little explanation on the underlying issues of sovereignty, territory and identity.

### The Battle of the Bogside

Based in Derry, The Apprentice Boys is a Protestant fraternal society, formed to commemorate the 1689 siege of Derry by the Catholic James II. Whilst the

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<sup>28</sup> The DCDA (consisting of local residents, activists, members of the Republican Club and several individuals associated with the IRA) stated their aim was to keep the peace, and defend the Bogside, a predominantly Catholic neighbourhood outside the city walls of Derry. The marching season is a period from June to September during which some 3,000 marches by the Orange Order occur. Many of these were marred by violence. (See McCann, 1993).

majority of political marches were declared illegal, exceptions were made for Orange Order marches deemed to be “traditional”. On 12<sup>th</sup> August 1969, the march passed close to the junction of Waterloo Place and William Street where trouble flared. Initial taunts gave way to the throwing of stones, continuing for two hours, before the RUC (and Loyalist marchers) charged Nationalists, pushing them into the Bogside itself. As the confrontation escalated, large crowds in the Bogside manned pre-prepared barricades, throwing petrol bombs and forcing the police forces and Loyalists out of the area. The RUC, with armoured cars and water cannons, again attempted to enter the Bogside using CS gas; some thousand canisters were released in the densely populated residential area (McLean, 1997).

On the second day, activists in Derry and from NICRA appealed for demonstrations across Ireland, officially in support of Nationalists in Derry but ostensibly ‘to divert police resources away from the city’ (and in particular, the Bogside area); Bishop and Mallie note that this increased tension placed both communities

in the grip of a mounting paranoia about the other's intentions. Catholics were convinced that they were about to become victims of a Protestant pogrom; Protestants that they were on the eve of an IRA insurrection (1987, p.77)

Jack Lynch, Taoiseach of the Irish Republic , further exacerbated the situation, stating he ‘could not stand by and watch innocent people injured and perhaps worse’. He duly promised to send the Irish Army to the border to provide medial assistance (Jordan, 2002, p.88). Whilst nationalists believed



troops would support them, Unionists across Northern Ireland feared imminent invasion. Rioting spread across the Six Counties, stretching the abilities of the RUC; police stations were attacked in Belfast and Newry before rioting deteriorated into sectarian conflict.<sup>29</sup> Loyalists began burning homes and businesses and mass Catholic evacuations occurred from central Belfast (particularly Bombay Street) to Andersonstown on the western periphery of the city. Believing they were under attack in Divis Street, the RUC opened fire on a high-rise tower block; thirteen flats were hit as Browning machine guns mounted on Shorland armoured personnel carriers fired high-velocity .30 caliber bullets. Tim Pat Coogan:

The sound of these weapons, magnified in built-up areas, spread panic. The bullets tore through walls as if they were cardboard. A nine year old boy, Patrick Rooney, was killed as he lay asleep, leaving his distraught father to scrape his brains off the wall with a spoon and saucer (2002, p.92).

The Nationalist opposition walked out of Stormont when the Deputy Home Affairs minister announced the mobilisation of 11,000 Protestant B-Specials. However before they could deploy in the Bogside area, the Prime Minister of NI, James Chichester-Clark requested Harold Wilson send troops to the city. At 4.45pm on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1969, a company of soldiers, under orders to not breach the barricades nor enter the Bogside, relieved the RUC. The following day, British armed forces took up duties on the streets of West Belfast. Their arrival marked the first direct intervention of the London government since Ireland's partition. Ten people would be killed, over one

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<sup>29</sup> In Derry, fighting was largely between the RUC and nationalists; in Belfast, it predominantly occurred between the two religious groups.

hundred and fifty treated for gunshot wounds and seven hundred others injured during the course of the rioting. In a subsequent inquiry, Mr. Justice Scarman found that 83% of premises damaged belonged to Catholics and of some 1800 families displaced, 1500 were Catholic (Feeney, 2014).

The Battle of the Bogside was a pivotal event in the Troubles. “Peace-lines” began to proliferate, evolving from wood and barbed wire obstructions to ten-meter high concrete barriers, as polarisation intensified across Belfast. RUC reorganisation occurred under a former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Direct and direct rule by proxy was in effect established with the arrival of two civil servants from London to direct Stormont affairs. British home secretary James Callaghan was, to all intents, governing Northern Ireland. The resurgence, split, and future violence of the IRA, can also be directly attributed to the events of August 1969;

republican mural depicting a phoenix and the words "From the ashes of Bombay Street rose the Provisionals" appeared in the street. A mural on the site today declares: "Bombay Street - never again" (McKittrick, 2005).

These events also represented a significant moment in the increasingly mediatised conflict. Following Burntollet Bridge in January, journalists had flooded into the province. In August, amongst the Protestant marchers descending on Derry, were ‘some two hundred journalists from around the world, including several specialists in civil disorders and guerrilla warfare’. As a *Times* photographer later told the Scarman Tribunal, ‘I was here because I knew there was a fair chance that a riot would erupt in the city on the

twelfth' (Stetler, 1970). The expectation of violence created an expectation of visuals.

Much of the footage captured and broadcast by the BBC during the "Battle" tended towards the spectacular but was in reality relatively meaningless. Images from the Bogside would become familiar signs — bonfires, burning vehicles, flames — and over time, these would become the dominant tropes of media coverage in Northern Ireland. During initial outbreaks of violence — the throwing of stones etc — the RUC did not seek to intervene, and in contrast to previous conduct at earlier confrontations, did not retaliate by replying in kind. Several have attributed this to the presence of television cameras; 'there was greater candour in the lower ranks who simply admitted being conscious of the television cameras around them' (ibid). Footage broadcast on the BBC reveals reporters inside the ranks of the security forces as stones and missiles are directed at them, smashing off the road and the shields of the RUC. This footage is however descriptive, absent from particulars, "sanitised" to ensure all violent outbursts, inflammatory and violent accusations were not screened' (Cathcart, 1984, p.211). Indeed, when startling black and white images of destroyed houses was shown on the BBC News (14.08.69) — footage of homes on fire, people salvaging objects, footage of refugees at a railway station, and concluding with the charred remnants of houses — 'the reports gave no indication who these refugees were'. According to Martin Bell, BBC reporter, 'we made a mistake...[we] just spoke of refugees. The public was not to know whether they were Catholic or

Protestant...who was attacking whom' (ibid). This lack of context, of illustrative information would reoccur throughout the Troubles.

Television quickly became *the* central medium of reportage for the conflict, with pictures 'always a better medium for conveying violence and death than the written word' (Winsby, 1970). Such images of violence proved attractive for the media, allowing (a version of) reality to be shown. However, there was again a failing, with the profound absence of context and clarity restricting the power of the corresponding visuals. Despite this, the Battle of the Bogside represented the first instance of a television conflict, where

the people in whose name the war is being conducted are able to see in their own homes the incidents of battle night after night. There is a sharpness of impact that goes beyond the reporting of all previous...(The Times, 18.11.71)

Such horrors would appear throughout the 70s as these initial sporadic acts of violence translated into "domestic terrorism". Internal conflicts would arise within the BBC, particularly between staff on site in Ireland and their London based colleagues. The *Observer* details two-newspaper reporters, invited to give eyewitness accounts of the August riots, in fact turned away at the behest of the controller. The split in the IRA on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1969 — into the Provisional IRA (PIRA) and Official IRA (OIRA) factions — would bring daily terror to the streets of Northern Ireland. In attempting to report this escalation, the BBC would in turn face dispute with elements of the London and Stormont Governments, who both favoured a greater impetus towards censorship. Dramatic pictures dominated coverage with an emphasis

on the immediacy of the report rather than explanation of the underlying causes of the event, even on “open” modes of programming and the periphery of television news (late night magazine shows as opposed to the mass audience BBC One Evening News broadcasts).

The framing and determination of an event, alongside the politics of image ambiguity, immediately created questions of neutrality, hierarchy, legitimacy and objectivity. Such questions would come to dominate coverage as Ireland faced a decade of death, destruction and despair. The words of Glasgow University academics Greg Philo and Mike Berry, writing regarding media coverage of Israel-Palestine in 2008, are both relevant and appropriate here, indicating the value of this study (and exemplifying the infamous “doomed to repeat history” aphorism of George Santayana)

The emphasis here is on “hot” live action and the immediacy of the report rather than any explanation of the underlying causes of the events. One BBC journalist who had reported on this conflict told us that his own editor had said to him that they did not want “explainers” — as he put it: “It’s all bang bang stuff.” The driving force behind such news is to hold the attention of as many viewers as possible, but in practice, as we will see, it simply leaves very many people confused (2004, p.102).

# Chapter Four: Trouble

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Violence is news, whereas peace and harmony are not.  
The terrorists need the media, and the media find in  
terrorism all the ingredients of an exciting story.

Walter Laqueur  
(2000, p. 44)



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We use Facebook to schedule the protests and Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world (Howard, 2011).

The 2011 Arab Spring moved “social media” to the forefront of public consciousness. Facebook, twitter and live online blogs have been credited with facilitating a dialogue, ushering in a new age of revolutionary movements and citizen journalism. Whilst such a view has diminished somewhat — with the impact of television itself gaining greater prominence amongst academics — social networking tools transformed political discourse and the reporting of (24 hour rolling) news (see Alterman, 2011) through effectively validating these protests in their early stages, granting meaning and framing through the repetition of semiotically connotative imagery (see Werbner et al. 2014). Yet the instantaneous nature of this web 2.0 — elevating Paul Virilio’s global speed to an almost hyper-real nature — sets it in direct conflict with the mainstream news itself (Armitage, 2001). Traditional news values, including impartiality and fact (however tenuous these may actually be) are obliterated in the online environment where freedom reigns.

On April 15th 2013, at 2.49pm EDT, two bombs exploded at the finish line of the Boston Marathon. As legacy media attempted to maintain relevance with new media, CNN and Fox News, citing unnamed law enforcement sources, erroneously reported an arrest had been made. Yet online, users at crowd-sourced news site Reddit (along with the New York Post) wrongly named

several people as suspects, including theorising a missing Brown University student was one of the bombers. Twitter quickly followed this story, alive with misinformation and strident critiques of old media's failings. A fog of news war was occurring;

real life moves much slower than these technologies. There's a gap between facts and comprehension, between finding some pictures online and making sense of how they fit into a story. What ends up filling that gap is speculation' (Manjoo, 2013).

President Barack Obama would pre-empt such sentiments, stating:

In this age of instant reporting and tweets and blogs, there's a temptation to latch on to any bit of information, sometimes to jump to conclusions. But when a tragedy like this happens, with public safety at risk and the stakes so high, it's important that we do this right. That's why we have investigations. That's why we relentlessly gather the facts (2013).

Former director of BBC News, Richard Sambrook would similarly agree 'in the digital age, social media will always win the race to be first (if not always the race to be right)' (Sambrook and McGuire, 2014). Forty years ago, with daily acts of terror on the streets of Ireland, the BBC was required to be both.

### Words War

Throughout August 1994, the BBC broadcast sixteen programmes exploring *25 Bloody Years* in Northern Ireland. The series sought to reframe events through a historical perspective with *A Soldier's Tale* revealing "the Troubles [as] observed through the eyes of serving British soldiers", and detailing the arrival, deployment, of troops on the streets of Belfast; initially the army had been welcomed by the Catholic community, with one paratrooper stating,

'always tea and coffee from the Catholics...we felt like knights in shining armour, like Sir Galahad' (cited by McCleery, 2012, p.412). Presenter Peter Taylor would however state "In July 1970, the honeymoon ended...this was the watershed". (07.08.94) Accompanying this voiceover were the recurrent motifs established during the preceding two decades, including a camera panning across a burnt out house, mythologising the symbolic "flames" of violence.

For Simon Winchester, journalist for *The Guardian* newspaper, early '1970 was a time of words, not war...For the reporters it was a time to try and absorb some of the atmosphere of this curious little corner of the world, to drink in its history and its mystery' (Winchester, 1974, p.34). Per contra, there is a recognisance that July signified this watershed period:

What happened on the afternoon on Friday, July 3, threw the last vestiges of hope for Northern Ireland out of the window. It was the start of a weekend now known as the 'Falls Curfew': it was one of the most clearly identifiable steps on the road that led, eventually and inexorably, to the downfall of the Stormont government nearly two years later (ibid, p.68).

British policy towards Northern Ireland markedly changed emphasis following the election of a new Conservative government in June 1970. Historically supportive of the Unionist position, the government prioritised security by giving the British army a greater role. On Friday July 3<sup>rd</sup>, a fortnight after the election, such resources were put to use as British soldiers entered the terraced streets of the Catholic dominated Falls district, searching and seizing illegal weapons. This minor incident quickly escalated;

for Simon Winchester, 'by 6.30pm it really had turned into war...the Lower Falls was going noisily and rapidly berserk' (ibid, p.70).

As rioters harassed the army detachment, Lt. Gen. Sir Ian Freeland, commander of British forces in Northern Ireland, ordered 3,000 troops — two-thirds of all those stationed in Belfast — backed by helicopters and armoured cars, to conduct house-to-house searches of the entire Catholic neighbourhood of the Lower Falls Road and declared a curfew of the area. It was the largest military engagement in Ireland since the Easter Rising of 1916, a 'continuous moving riot' according to J. Bowyer Bell (1993, pp. 178-179). By Sunday, 5 July, four civilians were dead and over 60 wounded, including 15 soldiers. The army seized a number of weapons in addition to ammunition and explosives. After the curfew was lifted, the army escorted two ministers from the Unionist government in Stormont through the area to view 'the pacified Falls,' an act that further enraged the nationalists of the area (Williamson, 2010, p.201). The following months saw multiple explosions and numerous deaths; by the new year, daily rioting was occurring across Belfast. Media coverage increased, with images of violence on repeat. Many programmes were extended, particularly on BBC NI, with *Scene Around Six* regularly broadcasting for forty-five minutes. Yet there was almost a perverse interest in these broadcasts, with reports dominated by visceral images of the dark night skies illuminated by burning buildings and intense and attractive flames. Repeated throughout the troubles, and in

London during the 2011 riots (see the conclusion), such sights would reach their apex in August 1971 following the introduction of internment.

### Internment

In 1971, the conflict descended into chaos. ‘Friction became even more embittered. Curfew, house searches and the introduction of internment precipitated endless violence’ (Cathcart, 1984, p.222). One evening BBC news report detailed an incident in West Belfast, with a report made from the scene (23.10.71). Local people disputed the army account and journalist Keith Graves interviewed two witnesses onscreen, a resident and the driver of a vehicle involved. They offered an alternative perspective (one of the last that would be offered in a bulletin prior to reform by Waldo Maguire), but in the structure and framing ‘and editing of the piece...the last word [went] to the officer in charge of the troops’ (ibid, 1984, p.223). The sight of a military officer, in uniform and granted this important position in a report, automatically connotes truth and denotes authority, particularly for an audience favourably disposed to the military. In recognising precisely how such an image was conveyed and precisely how it would be interpreted, the BBC can be identified as pointing towards the ban on IRA members/representatives appearing onscreen – and therefore made real to an audience – later in the decade.

Significant uproar, across Conservative and Unionist ministers, followed the bulletin, and the incident and its reportage were raised in the House of

Commons. Even with the framing structure of the interview and news report implicitly granting credence and credibility to the official security services version of events, complaints were made. Lord Hill, chairman of the board of Governors of the BBC, in response stated 'we see it as our overriding responsibility to report the scene as it is in all its tragedy to all the people of the United Kingdom (ibid, p.224).

Such tragedy would be made visible in BBC reporting of the violence surrounding the launch of internment. Simon Winchester again offers an astonishingly candid account of the visuals witnessed:

Tuesday saw some of the most tragic burnings in Belfast, when over two hundred houses — mostly Protestant homes that sat beside Catholic terraces from which, it was claimed, gunfire was raging continually — were destroyed by fire. There was a terrible fascination for some of the reporters who went up to Farringdon gardens that night: row upon row of houses were blazing, totally out of control. Smoke was blowing down the streets. Gunmen scuttled for cover from lamp post to lamp post. Soldiers, crouching flat on the glass-strewn pavements, fired sporadically into the darkness. Figures moved in and out of the blazing houses, snatching what they could from the wreckage. Lorries, piled high with belongings, lurched away from the area to the safety of friends. Cameras clicked away. Men and women dashed to and fro, there were screams, buildings collapsed in showers of sparks and tongues of fire.

The noise was continual, deafening-banging, screaming, shooting, explosions, shouts, cries, orders, radio messages, crashes and all the time the fierce crackling, sizzling sound of the flames. It was a dreadful, satanic night — and a time when many of us thought that the very fabric of civilised life was coming away at the edges, and some sort of Armageddon was upon us all (Winchester, 1974, p.167-168).

The footage broadcast by the BBC is again astonishing in its visceral *cinéma vérité* style. The early years of the Troubles are dominated by such reporting. With no prior incidences of framing to consider and utilise, no existing visuals to contrast against (particularly in regard to a conflict on British soil),

there is an incredible human and “real” atmosphere communicated. Here in particular, television highlighted its benefits against print and radio broadcasting where a lack of visuals, for such a graphic event, affected the impact.

The BBC reports, particularly on the Monday and Tuesday evening news bulletins, rely entirely on the visuals to tell the story (09.08.71 and 10.08.71). Footage often began with an establishing shot, a cinematic term in cinema, described by Bordwell and Thompson as one which ‘shows the spatial relations among the important figures, objects and setting in a scene’, to frame the narrative and set our scene (Bordwell and Thomson, 2008, p.504). This functioned in a narrative role, but with little context provided, largely meant little.

In addition, a rhetorical aspect of reportage regarding the Operation must be noted. The first female victim of the conflict was killed on the 10<sup>th</sup>, shot, according to police, by a “terrorist sniper”. Such a linguistic phrase could *only* be applied to a terrorist; as has been noted, the term sniper could not be utilised to refer to the security services due to its suggestive connotations (Cathcart, p.221).

The political atmosphere of the Troubles had now altered, with an associated alteration of the media context. Wider interest grew, particularly with the dramatic visuals of the Falls Road and Internment engaging attention. The Westminster Government directed greater attention to media coverage and



its means and methods of representation. Whilst BBC reporters were initially conscious of the various perspectives available, and frequently attempted to offer two accounts, 'viewing audiences in Britain, like Loyalist audiences in Ireland were prone to believe the army case and dismiss all counter claims' (Curtis, 1998, p.65). Criticism of the BBC increased, and Controller of BBC NI Waldo Maguire implemented a technical revision imposed on all news and current affairs reportage. Maguire, evidently placing a degree of faith in the media-as-incendiary argument, dictated that every report should be self-balanced, that is representing a weighted balance *within the division of opinion*. Such a ruling elevated reported speech above filmed interviews (later to impact a filmed report during Operation Motorman), and required journalistic copy to be filed direct to camera shot in medium close up. In removing the background from the shot, there was a concerted attempt to reduce visual output, whilst simultaneously recognising its importance.

The aim was to restrict all possible signification other than the reporters summary description of what had actually happened (or in Barthes' words to contest the terror of the uncertain signified). As the records shows, the result was...a lopsided view of events (Butler, 1995, p.63).

Here again is Philip Elliot's idea of the official ideological perspective presented as framing structure by the media. Yet, there is also tacit endorsement it is the visual component of representation that dominates. This represents what Curtis (1998), Butler (1995), and Miller (1994) declare to be the British way of censorship, operating indirectly, and carefully limiting the way in which a news story could be presented on television.

The escalation of restrictions would eventually force reporters into a form of self-censorship. Politicians were however concerned with television (above print and radio) due to the size of the available audience and particularly because of the visual impact of footage. In addition, the BBC held notions of impartiality and respectability across the world (continued to this day); Curtis quotes a *Times* survey of 'a representative sample of people listed in *Who's Who* found that a majority thought that the BBC was more influential than Parliament, the press, trade unions, the civil service, the monarchy and the church' (Curtis, 1998, p.8).

Self-censorship, identified as a tool early in proceedings, would prove effective, being subtle and concealed from general public (and other media) attention.

As the Secretary of the Federation of Broadcasting Unions, Tom Rhys put it in a letter of protest to Lord Hill in 1972, the "checks and balances" introduced by the BBC were "becoming as effective as censorship, probably more effective, because they were not known outside the circles immediately involved, were superficially merely an intensification of normal safeguards, and were too vague and distant a target for public criticism. Frustrated staff were beginning to "avoid items on which they ought to work", or *avoid Irish subjects altogether*. (Curtis, 1984, p.13, emphasis my own).

Violence then dominated the first four years of BBC coverage of Northern Ireland. A Philip Elliot survey found that most stories were about acts of violence or the enforcement of the law and that only a third of stories dealt with politics and other subjects. It is important to stress here his findings regarding Irish media: not only did they carry five times more stories on the North than British media, they were more concerned with serving an

analytical function and exploring the political dimension (1976, pp.398-401). The British media conversely, concentrated on violence, with a visual shorthand used as a substitute for context or explanation. As specific case studies will suggest, and echoing the findings of Jay G. Blumler, comment was rigorously excluded from news broadcasts, with strategic assessments avoided (1971). Whilst the media would then provide factual information, masquerading throughout as objective framing, it revealed nothing little about the root cause.

Liz Curtis argues that the amount of attention paid to acts of violence depended on the circumstance, however this can be clarified further. The amount of attention paid to acts of violence depended instead on the related visuals/images available. BBC war correspondent Martin Bell succinctly details why this fascination exists with the visual: 'The devil has all the best fireworks' (p.231). Attacks taking place in Britain, the murder of particular people (for example Lord Mountbatten) and bombs that resulted in "civilian" deaths received greatest coverage. However again, each of these can be qualified: attacks taking place in Britain inevitably garnered greater coverage due to greater visuals (geography and accessibility); attacks on prominent individuals could utilise library images to humanise and concretise the person whilst colleagues provided elegiac eulogies; bombings invariably allowed strong visuals. These reflect considered judgments against news values, particularly the "elite" principles of Galtung and Ruge, that over time create precedent for future events.

## Domhnach na Fola

The media invariably reported violent incidents in “human interest” terms, concentrating on the experience of individuals rather than groups. There was also an overall tendency to dramatise a single event, treating it as an isolated occurrence, as opposed to exploring the background and situating it within a context. However the media (and it is notable precisely how this differs amongst media outlets, particularly the printed press) are particularly selective about those they take an interest in.<sup>30</sup> Reportage of violence in Northern Ireland, presents “our” lives as more valuable and important. This notion of two distinct categories would return in the post 9/11 World, where radical Islam is posited as the “other”. British/Loyalist violence usually featured victims as a cipher, with little details provided, often including an absence of even a name. Victims of Republican violence however were regularly detailed, fleshed out, humanised and given a concrete identity and personality. The commentary on a BBC *Tonight* sequence neatly illustrates this contrasting treatment. Amidst footage of Bloody Sunday, a voiceover reveals:

In January 1972, British paratroopers shot dead 13 unarmed civilians during a civil rights march in Londonderry. In retaliation, the Official IRA bombed the paras’ Aldershot headquarters. The explosion killed five woman canteen workers, a Gardner and a Catholic padre. (15.02.77)

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<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, animals (such as Sefton the horse and Rats the war dog mascot) can be placed above (certain) humans in the hierarchy of death.

Fewer people were killed at Aldershot than on Bloody Sunday, yet as presented here, one group of deaths held greater prominence. Whilst three pieces of information are revealed about the Bloody Sunday victims — they were unarmed, they were civilian, they were taking part in a civil rights march — they are presented as an amorphous lot, a singular grouping in a singular incident.

Bloody Sunday occurred on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 1972, during a march against internment in the Creggan and the Bogside areas of Derry. The march included many families and children, with the IRA promising they would stay away from the march. It was intended as a civil rights march, evoking the intent and spirit of 1969. The army had however sealed off entrances to the city centre area, re-directing marchers, and there were subsequent confrontations with soldiers in the William Street district.

Culturally existing as one of the most famous events in the Troubles, Bloody Sunday featured particularly graphic coverage that exists as the last instance of what can be identified as the initial, unclear and undirected visual representation. A deliberate movement away from this form of iconography occurred in the aftermath. To again deploy the reportage of Simon Winchester as illustrating events:

four or five armoured cars appeared in William Street and raced into the Rossville Street square, and several thousand people began to run away... Paratroopers piled out of their vehicles, many ran forward to make arrests, but others rushed to the street corners. It was these men, perhaps 20 in all, who opened fire with their rifles. I saw three men fall to the group. One was

still obviously alive, with blood pumping from his leg. The others, both apparently in their teens, seemed dead (cited by Curtis, 1998, p.40).

The first news bulletin in the aftermath of the incident featured minimal visuals, using an on-screen map to illustrate the area involved, and a short description of events (30.01.72). Following this, an unidentified man provides an account of events, explicitly from an official perspective:

Young hooligans started a heavy barrage of missiles against barrier 14, reached unacceptable levels and at that time the brigade commander decided to launch his arrest force with the purpose of grabbing as many as possible of these hooligans. They dispersed to Rossville flats area where they were leading us on to an ambush.

It is only with a second report, later the same day that visuals are shown, effectively undercutting this account (30.02.72). The graphic footage, even today, is startling; steady, careful and edited to reveal a presentation of events that can be considered full. Diegetic audio is played throughout and there is no reporter voiceover. Instead, the report plays in its entirety before progression to eye-witness interviews.

Beginning with footage of the crowd marching, shouts and chanting can be heard, along with a number of children's voice, including laughter. People holding hands are visible before an edit to a second camera position, behind the ranks of British Soldiers, occurs. The march is preceding parallel along the street ahead. Marshals are attempting to direct them down the street and avoid direct confrontation with soldiers. The shot changes again as we return to the crowds and marchers with renewed chanting. Two camera crews were

evidently in attendance and the footage has been edited together carefully to create a semblance of cohesion and a narrative framing.

It changes again to the perspective of the soldiers where noise levels have increased considerably. People are addressing the soldiers, gesticulating and waving at them. The soldiers have vehicles next to them. An edit occurs, to the same camera, now positioned behind soldiers next to an armoured personnel carrier. Bottles are being thrown, and a soldier can be seen dodging some that smash audibly in the centre of the frame. More missiles are thrown with the sound of impact on the metal hull of the APC. Back to marchers at barricade, where they are attempting to engage (orally) with soldiers. A sharp cut shows the same moment from the soldiers perspective and they walk away from the protestors before using a loudspeaker to give directions. Two soldiers are visible to the left of the frame, using a vehicle as cover. Ahead and dominating, almost overwhelming the frame are people throwing rocks and bottles. A cameraman is visible surrounded by marchers, with the camera moving around wildly. Shouts and swears can be heard. Then two people, a woman and a man can be seen, the man lying on the ground and the woman attempting to lift him up. She is shouting for help.

More footage from the previous position with the APC and a volley of missiles being thrown. A zoomed in shot shows a number of individuals involved with one man holding a very long stick which he throws. Back to the perspective of the marchers, centre of frame and flanked by two vehicles. A soldier can be seen moving from the right and there is an audible crack of a gunshot. Several

more shots occur and the marchers scatter in chaos. The camera remains steady and focused. Cut to the military perspective, with soldiers hiding behind vehicles. Multiple shots are fired and there is a brief sight of soldiers gathered in riot gear. Close up image of soldiers, with riot guns clearly visible. Audible dialogue: “how many? 3?”

More soldiers can be seen advancing to street corners. Some are standing, taking aim and gunfire can be heard. Soldiers running. Cut to what became the iconic shot of the day, repeated across the world in newspapers, and a visual shorthand, to this day, of Bloody Sunday. It continues to be used in retrospective, historical pieces as a central motif for human interest, death and The Troubles itself. A priest can be seen advancing down the street. He is leading four people who are carrying someone. Blood is visible on their clothes, with one top stained red. He is waving a handkerchief and ducks whenever there is the sound of gunfire.

Cut to soldiers running with more gunfire heard. A burnt out van can now be seen, however, there is little context available or provided. No flames are (or have been) visible. To the rear is an army vehicle with a soldier using it as cover and situated in an offensive firing position. The camera zooms in and he can be clearly seen with his gun raised and his finger on the trigger. More soldiers enter from right of frame and a female voice can be heard, however it is unclear what she is saying. Fragments can be captured: “What the hell are you....?’ Fuck off...What do you want me to do now”.



Edited to compress the narrative of time, the next sequence shows soldiers searching a number of people positioned against a wall, and there is a hard cut to ambulances which have arrived. Crowds of people surround one, and there is a body being put in the back. A close up shot focuses on a bloody rag laying in the middle of the road. The camera gradually pans to show rocks, rubble and debris across the entire street. It pans back around, revealing the same ambulance and a body can be seen on the adjacent ground, covered by a blanket. A cut reveals a second body however it is unclear if this is the same from a different angle. Arms and legs can be seen outside the blanket and there is a pool of blood near the right arm.

Gunfire is heard and the crowd scatter however the camera stays focused on the body as people hide behind the front of ambulance. In the foreground of the frame a group are lifting another body slowly toward the ambulance. One man has his arms raised aloft in surrender while another is waving a white handkerchief. The footage ends on this white handkerchief, a medium close up, showing it in the centre of the frame. On a semiotic level, it is a symbolic image, mythologising the deaths through a connotative allusion to peace, loss, and grief.

Following this section, two interviews are played. One with the Priest previously visible, and the second with an elderly senior soldier. Each provides their account of events, however the army officer reveals he was not present: "My information at the moment, and it is very immediately after the incident, is that the paratroop battalion fired 3 rounds". Concluding the

report with this interview, as a dramatic reveal and tacit endorsement of official ideology, carefully juxtaposes it against the visuals and the language of Father Daly moments before: “I can speak of this without any difficulty whatsoever, because I was there”.

During the footage a number of shots were audible, with the camera in, and amongst, the soldiers at various points. Without deliberately asking, there is a suggestion, through the manner of the reports structural framing and the contrast of words and pictures, that one particular account is false. The camera is the witness; Sontag’s evidence abounds. The authoritative images provided undercut the account of one man (speaking as a figure of the military, the Government, and the State); this further initiated a movement from graphic imagery of violence.

As such, images would, for the foreseeable future, alter to a focus on the motifs and verbal cues established during the subsequent Operation Motorman, with a military perspective and visuals thesaurus existing as the sole avenue of representation. Aftermath footage, emphasising the impact of bombs, and a human interest angle, similarly began its trend towards facile tropes and symbolic instances of terror related visual shorthand. Furthermore, frequent repetition and re-framing of key television images and discourses, like the sequence involving Father Daly, extends the past into the present in new ways, though the creation of ‘media templates’ (Kitzinger, 2000) with which to measure, interpret and reinterpret the present. Such templates are, as Hoskins and O’Loughlin note, television’s ‘principal

mechanism of instant comparison and contrast' (2013, p. 91), reintroduced at particular moments in order to 'shape the way we make sense of the world' (Kitzinger, 2000, p. 81). In the digital age these (are forced to) change through digital remediation, editing and remixing, but for the BBC and the Troubles, media templates were used as a closed (rarely disputed but problematised through lack of impetus) visual shorthand to direct the news narrative through the past, present, and future.

### Motorman

In the immediate aftermath of "Bloody Friday", a series of IRA bombings across Belfast, the British Army would launch Operation Motorman on July 31st. Almost 30,000 troops, in the biggest British military operation since the Suez crisis in 1956, would seek to dismantle barricades and retake 'no-go' areas controlled by IRA factions in Belfast and Derry. The operation, due to its intense scope, would receive significant media coverage with one central aspect particularly important: the accompanying visuals broadcast.

Some 300 vehicles were involved, including Centurion tanks to clear the barricades; these represent the only heavy armoured vehicles to be deployed operationally by the British Army in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. With the turrets traversed to the rear and main weaponry covered by tarpaulins there was an overt attempt to emphasise the vehicles were being utilised in a non-lethal sense.<sup>31</sup> However it is noticeable that on no occasion

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<sup>31</sup> Indeed some cannons were removed completely. (See Dustan, 2003, p.47)

were the modified tanks visible in news coverage. Due to the scale of the operation, and the daily build up of troops and resources, it would appear that a conscious policy decision was taken to avoid the visual analogy of tanks in city streets — akin to events in Hungary or Czechoslovakia; ‘Not since Russian troops entered Budapest and Prague in the 1950s and 1960s to suppress risings of the Czechoslovakian and Hungarian people, have [such] sights been seen’ (McCafferty, 1989, p.26). Of further interest here is the fact that evening newspapers carried pictures of the tanks; the immediate conclusion here is that still images have less impact than moving footage.

A *Panorama* news crew filmed during the operation and the dismantling of barricades. The on the scene footage — in accompanying Coldstream Guard soldiers and therefore framed from an official perspective (akin to the embedded reporting of the Iraq War in 2003) — was contrasted with interviews filmed later that day with local residents reacting to the prior events. The *Panorama* film, precisely the relatively open programme identified by Schlesinger et al. as an arena for contrasting viewpoints, was suppressed on the orders of a senior BBC executive (Curtis, 1998, p.280).

In addition, there evolved a fierce official and governmental resistance to interviewing members of the IRA in the media; this quickly became a form of self-censorship. Peregrine Worsthorpe, Associate Editor of the *Daily Telegraph* believed the media

have a very important job in assisting the army to beat the IRA and that means resisting IRA propaganda, and I would like to see

[journalists] who work in Northern Ireland quite clear in their own mind that they are not there as neutral observers...[they] should make absolutely sure their heart is in the right place (*The Editors*, 28.06.81).

This argument seeks to delineate sides and asks the media to set forth a particular stance, promoting (and not reporting) the news in a specific manner. Worsthorne would state that the idea

you actually need to go and give them an opportunity to put their propaganda across to millions on the British television, or the British radio, or the British newspapers, is just a load of old rubbish...any kind of high minded justification for this thing seems to me completely unacceptable (ibid).

### UWC

Despite the coverage afforded to Bloody Sunday, ennui can be identified as settling in, with the Troubles gradually becoming less prominent as a news story. Setting 1975 as a significant marker, Schlesinger et al., suggest two entwined primary reasons focusing on news judgement (and a third of financial consideration): general public boredom/dissatisfaction and a decline in genuine narratives (1983). With violence, death and destruction becoming a regular occurrence — no longer a phenomenon — the resultant images, in moving away from the graphic representation, were reduced to facile sequences, motifs and an accompanying literal reporting: the who, what, where and when. As one editor states, ‘the main heat was now out of the story’ (Clark, 1977, p.10). Consequently, there was therefore a distinct absence of the spectacular necessary to sustain the visual nature of television news. Parkinson agrees, explaining ‘media treatment of the conflict...declined

somewhat from the mid 1970s. This was due to the monotonous nature of Ulster news stories and the lack of progress in both political and security fields' (1998, p.71).

He echoes the remarks of Home Secretary Reginald Maudling, suggesting:

there was a growing recognition by the media of the unofficial political line of an "acceptable level of violence". Consequently the media duly reported incidents involving serious injury or loss of life (although the degree of space allotted to the killings of soldiers inevitably declined to a brief mention on a news bulletin or a short paragraph in a national paper), only concentrating in greater detail on large-scale security incidents or on signs of political development (1998, p.72).

It is necessary here then to highlight coverage of the 1974 Ulster Workers' Council (UWC) strike. Whilst not an act of terror, it was framed within the overall context of the Troubles and is unquestionably an important event; Parkinson's "sign of political development". The strike was called by Loyalists and Unionists opposed to the December 1973 Sunningdale Agreement seeking to establish a power-sharing Northern Ireland Executive and initiate a cross-border governance Council of Ireland;

the modern rebellion of 1974 is one of the most significant — and intriguing — events of the last 25 years of conflict...It was an episode of complex political, social and military events (Anderson, 1994, p.ix).

As Robert Fisk explained,

a section of the realm became totally ungovernable. A self-elected provisional government of Protestant power workers, well-armed private armies and extreme politicians organised a strike which almost broke up the fabric of civilised life in Ulster. They deprived most of the population for much of the time of food, water, electricity, gas, transport, money and any form of livelihood (1975, p.13).

On day eleven of the strike, Prime Minister Harold Wilson made an astonishing speech on the BBC news at 10.15pm. It would be, for Peter Taylor, 'the most scathing attack on the majority community ever made by a British Prime Minister' (1999, p.194). Wilson accused the UWC of seeking 'to set up there a sectarian and undemocratic state'. In effect,

those who are now challenging constitutional authority are denying the fundamental right of every man and woman the right to work. They have decided, without having been elected by a single vote, who shall work in Northern Ireland and who shall not. They seek to allocate food, to decide who shall eat and who shall not...By their use of force and intimidation they have condemned hundreds of thousands of workers to involuntary unemployment...[the strikers] now viciously defy Westminster, purporting to act as though they were an elected government; people who spend their lives sponging on Westminster and British democracy and then systematically assault democratic methods. Who do these people think they are? (ibid, p.253).

Richard Francis, BBC Controller, agreed the events were 'unprecedented and unexpected. Coverage of the strike made for exceptional difficulties' (Francis, 1996, p.61). These difficulties were compounded by the reluctance of the Northern Ireland Office and Executive to publicly communicate, appearing increasingly irrelevant. Broadcasting played a crucial role in the crisis; just as the civil rights depended on "British" broadcasting as witness, and the IRA recognised the intrinsic power of the media, the UWC knew it would be similarly vital during the strike. Indeed during planning, they had made arrangements to launch a radio station to promote their daily messages. Shipyard union leader Harry Murray would later highlight such awareness, declaring success hinged upon the media and

the BBC were marvellous — they were prepared to be fed any information. They fell into their own trap that “the public must get the news”. Sometimes they were just a news service for us; we found that if the media was on our side we didn’t need a gun (Fisk, 1975, p.127).

Francis would repeatedly ask ministers to respond to the UWC and provide an alternate viewpoint but to little avail. In ceding the narrative, they ‘in effect forfeited their functions’, allowing the UWC unfettered access to every moment of BBC airtime Cathcart (1984, p.231-232). Robert Fisk has explored the BBC’s role in depth, detailing a number of broadcasts and highlighting the BBC’s treatment of the strike as a straight news story. To quote in depth:

the early Northern Ireland news bulletin had carried a report which cast more than a little doubt on the ability of the authorities to maintain any kind of order in the streets of Belfast. Only seconds after the news reader had repeated Stormont’s promise to keep the roads open, Brian Walker, one of the BBC’s most able reporters in the city, was stating, “We’ve just heard that new road-blocks are going up in Belfast.” He named the locations of eight new highjacking incidents, referred to “gangs of men roaming around the Greenisland estate highjacking vehicles” and to barricades in Carrickfergus, Newtonards, Bangor and South Belfast. It was a style of reporting — fast, dramatic and in Walker’s case completely accurate — that made Rees, Faulkner and their respective ministers look fools. how could people be expected to believe Stormont’s earnest promise to maintain order if the BBC was saying that the facts did not accord with what the Government was promising? (Fisk, 1975, p.127)

Yet in this daily race to provide the latest updates and the newest developments — foreshadowing the nature of 24 hour rolling coverage — the BBC failed to challenge and question the UWC. There was repetition without analysis, reporting with criticism. As Rex Cathcart notes, ‘the news machine ran away with itself and all the participant reporters were intoxicated by the process’ (Cathcart, 1984, p.232). UWC assertions, intimidation was absent,



leaders were elected democratically and the UDA were uninvolved, went unchallenged. To again quote Fisk

staff were forced by circumstances — principally the sheer amount of time devoted to live broadcasting — to abandon any attempt at examine the political and constitutional implications of the strike. They used up their talents in composing the unending stream of special news bulletins which detailed the location of road blocks, the political statements, the problems of the social services, the availability of bread and transport; constantly trying to keep this information up to date and searching for a new angle to make their summaries more informative, they could do no more than scratch the surface (1975, p.137).

*RTÉ*, whilst acknowledging the prevalence of violence in the overall representation, would later echo the BBC's justification for the overall nature of coverage:

This means presenting violence, sometimes of the most horrific kind...it also means that we present political gimmicks and men on mountaintops threatening the world with bits of paper in the dead of night. We present political bickering and statement and stalemate and argument...  
Ireland's problems won't go away if they're ignored —  
indeed they would increase and intensify (Clark, 1977).

Therefore whilst acknowledging the unbalanced nature of coverage, Richard Francis would seek to highlight the Governmental role in fostering such a situation:

To have refused to carry UWC statements unless or until government retorts were forthcoming would have implied a power of veto. The UWC initiatives affected the daily lives of everyone in the province and the public had a right to know what was happening. In the face of Government inactivity and official silence, our coverage was inevitably somewhat unbalanced (Francis, 1996).

The BBC therefore implied strike leaders held momentum, initiative and consequently authority.

However it is important to note here, such coverage, when repeated three years later, would play a vital role in limiting the impact of a second Loyalist strike. Protesting against Direct rule, and keen for the imposition of greater security measures, the 1977 strike was organised by The United Unionist Action Council (UUAC) and led by Ian Paisley, then leader of the Democratic Unionist Party. It aimed, amongst other measures, to close newspapers and restrict media reportage.<sup>32</sup> As the press did not comply, choosing instead to report on the large turn-out of workers to factories and offices across the region, numbers increased on subsequent days.

If that fact had not been reported, I believe that the fear and suspicions which the calling of the strike aroused, particularly the expected intimidation and violence, would have scared people into staying at home (Clark, 1977).

In broadcasting informational news, dealing solely with public statements, the BBC were unable (and unwilling) to analyse the root causes and the ultimate intentions of those dictating events. What was a political – insurrectionary, indeed (counter)revolutionary – strike was instead treated as little more than an industrial dispute. Yet this was primarily encountered within the Six Counties; Fisk details coverage within the province in May 1974: ‘a minimum of six local news broadcasts each day...during the course of the stoppage these were extended and multiplied as the political situation grew more serious’ (1975, p.130). On the mainland however, beyond the importance granted to Wilson’s speech, coverage was minimal. The strike

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<sup>32</sup> A curious tactic, given the role of the media in the UWC strike. It can be read as indicative of Paisley/Loyalist attitudes to the BBC at this point.

presented an opportunity for the background to be explored and greater context provided but in the absence of arresting visuals, it was inherently lacking the vital ingredients necessary. As Trevor MacDonald stated, ‘Last week was a good example of the pressures where one can’t work...one problem is representing that in a cinematic sense — so much of the information is not terribly filmable’ (cited by Clark, 1977). The predominantly reactive nature of news reportage — a difficulty compounded upon broadcasting but trending towards zero in the age of true “liveness” — illuminates precisely why the BBC so freely utilised the daily statements of the UWC. Indeed there was a general failing to comprehend the amorphous and continually changing landscape, particularly the increasing importance of the strike as it progressed; in the minutes of a BBC NI Advisory Council meeting, the Controller specifically noted: ‘on Day One we were dealing with an industrial stoppage, by Day Fifteen it had brought down a government and shaken the very fabric of the State’ (BBC Controller’s Report, 1974).

As Francis noted,

One thing everyone in Northern Ireland still wants is news of the situation. Whenever there is trouble in the streets or the sound of an explosion rocks the town, people turn to the BBC to find out what is happening. Our task must be to limit that concern as quickly and precisely as possible. During the UWC strike in 1974, half the telephone calls received by the BBC were either offering or requesting further information about the situation. If we fail to report incidents of violence invariably we will attract criticism from people in the vicinity (1996, p.57).

Indeed the UWC Strike was, as described by David Butler, ‘as oppositional in their [Loyalist] orientation as the ballot box and armalite strategy pursued by

the republican movement' (1995, p.10). It was an act conducted, just as the Civil Rights Marches were in 1969, for both the immediate community and the wider televisual audience. Reporting was descriptive, with journalists from across the broadcast media, presenting a literal reading of events. As Butler notes, in a period of just over five years, the function and role of television journalism had been eroded and undermined to such a significant extent that there was no analysis possible, no consideration of "why", and in essence, no alternative means of representation.

Yet BBC inaction — and it is the BBC that received criticism regarding this — can be interpreted and accepted for geographic reasons. Whilst the corporation failed to oppose the anti-constitutional stance of the strike, it was able to do so because the integrity of the *British* State, beyond the Irish Sea, was not threatened (Butler, 1995). The very nature of the strike, contained within Northern Ireland, ensured the BBC's stance was tenable to the ruling (London) government. Daily news broadcasts featured weak images, dominated by passivity and inaction and an absence of connotation; information was purely factual and denotative. Such footage lacked impact for an audience beyond those affected and interested as a purely information based economy.

The Ulster Workers Council strike then, can be taken as a reference point for the second phase of media coverage of Northern Ireland. With the "war" active for some six years — longer at this stage than World War Two — the monotonous nature of coverage was becoming ingrained in both broadcasters

and the audience. The second phase, active until around 1981 and the Hunger Strikes, saw a decrease in the conflict's intensity resulting in a related marked reduction in media interest, particularly amongst mainland media coverage.

Jim Dougal, RTE Northern Correspondent:

The Northern Ireland problem was reported throughout the world...until the fall of the power-sharing Executive in 1974. Internment, Bloody Sunday, the Shankill Butcher killings, Sunningdale, were all major stories. When the Executive fell however, the story declined in importance (Irish Broadcasting Review, 1983).

In Britain, over subsequent years, the story would seldom again reach beyond the spectacular.

#### Question of Ulster

The aftermath of *Question of Ulster*, a three hour television special, would see decision making powers regarding BBC broadcasting officially moved from Belfast to London. The programme, mimicking Senate hearings in the United States, was an inquiry based ceremonial (even contested) event, with a variety of individuals from across the political and religious spectrum being questioned, offering solutions, calling witnesses and generally 'review[ing] the range of proffered options' (Cathcart, 1984, p.226). Immediately Home Secretary Reginald Maudling, and the Stormont Government, attempted to block proceedings and the BBC quickly conceded to restructure the programme and grant greater emphasis to the ruling party's stance (the IRA were not asked to participate). According to *The TV Mail*,

what they were afraid of is “that any point of view other than their own will be expressed, and that the viewing public might realise that there is another point of view at all”.

Maudling publicly rebuked the BBC and Lord Hill, however this in fact effectively forced continuation: ‘The BBC had little option but to go ahead with the programme since as an independent corporation it could not be seen to give in to political pressures’ (Curtis, 1998, p.17). Seven and a half million viewers watched live on BBC One, including two-thirds of the population of Northern Ireland, whilst RTE broadcast the programme throughout The Republic of Ireland. The *Financial Times* later declared the programme ‘typical of the BBC at its most sober’ and British viewers found the programme so boring that half of them switched over to a football match on ITV’ (ibid).

“What they saw,” Francis (*Richard Francis was BBCNI Controller*) reported, “was a cool, at times laborious, examination of eight different solutions to the problems of Ulster. Inevitably it was an anti-climax but more than half the viewers who started stayed through to the summing up at a quarter past midnight” (BBC, 1979).

Whilst Curtis mocks the decline in audience, Francis seeks to emphasise those who remained. Yet neither acknowledges the limitations of the format; as a studio based, quasi-judicial hearing, (with limitations on the agenda – Lord Devlin, chair of the panel, only appeared on condition internment was not discussed), there was a distinct lack of visuals. The central aspect was rhetoric, but without a strong related image, it was inevitable for the audience to decline. However as Cathcart notes, ‘it is rightly regarded as a significant occasion when the BBC asserted its independence’ and sought to conduct an

examination — however stilted and limited it was — on the “why” aspect of the conflict (Cathcart, 1984, p.227).

### Impartiality

For Schlesinger, ‘it is especially worth considering what happened in 1971 and 1972 because those were crucial years which have had an enduring impact on the BBC’s approach’ (Schlesinger, 1979, p.10). Since inception, and until the 1950s, the BBC within Northern Ireland ‘sought to portray a society without division: the very mention of “partition” was precluded’ (cited by Miller, 1990, 37). As Miller notes, this parallels coverage of conflicts elsewhere, including Oman (ibid).<sup>33</sup> Indeed the BBC regional news service established following World War One would ‘reflect the sentiments of the people, who have always maintained unswerving loyalty to British ideals and British culture’ (cited by Curtis, 1998, p.19).

During the initial years of BBC broadcasting, Home Secretary Reginald Maudling would object on several occasions to the nature of coverage, particularly *how* events were represented (including the previously detailed *Question of Ulster*). At this point then, the conflict (insofar as it can justifiably be termed a conflict) was transitioning from a civil right and discrimination focus, to terrorism as the central concern. Here then,

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<sup>33</sup> Between the conclusion of World War 2 and August 1969 (circa the outbreak of the Civil Rights Movement in Ireland), the army were involved (‘had experience’) in 53 counter revolutionary operations. (See Miller, 1990, p.43n3).

To all intents and purposes, analysis of the deeper causes of the violence was barred. In journalistic terminology, the “who, what, where and when” could still be reported, but the context, the “why”, could not’ (Butler, 1995, p.63).

The nature of coverage was reduced to what was ultimately a descriptive function, a fact particularly overt during the UWC Strike in 1974. Therefore whilst viewers received vital information — a factual gathering of the events of the day — it was devoid of any political discussion regarding the wider context and issue. Using the phrase *the aperture of consensus* to describe the permitted valve for discussion, widening and narrowing depending on the government's wishes, Butler believes the media (BBC) model of broadcasting was implicit in a failure to present adequate expression (ibid).

Such a notion can be traced throughout BBC broadcasting of events within Northern Ireland, beginning in 1971 with the words of Christopher Chataway, Minister for Posts and Telecommunications and accountable to Parliament. Chataway effectively sought to set forth a prescription that broadcasters were not required to strike an even balance between the IRA and the Stormont government, or between the army and the “terrorists”; they instead stood within the consensus ‘of the values and the objectives of the society they are there to serve’ (cited by Schlesinger, 1992, p.211).<sup>34</sup> The speech echoed an earlier demand made by the Defence Secretary Lord Carrington for the BBC to prevent the repetition of reports which are ‘unfairly loaded to suggest

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<sup>34</sup> The speech echoed an earlier demand made by Defence Secretary Lord Carrington for the BBC to prevent reportage unfairly loaded to suggest improper behaviour by troops.



improper behaviour by British troops' (cited by Coogan, 2002, p.353). In the mythological construction of the British soldier, visual motifs were vital.

Lord Hill, Chairman of the BBC responded to the charges by writing to Maudling: 'between the British Army and the gunmen, the BBC is not and cannot be impartial' (cited by Braun, 2014, p.173). Whilst his letter included a defence of the BBC and a particularly strong indictment against censorship, the impartiality remark requires attention. In effect setting the British Army and the gunmen as good versus bad/black versus white (setting aside the immediate difficulties the term "gunmen" raises), the issue was profoundly more complex, particularly for journalists on the ground. The second clause of the National Union of Journalists Code of Conduct states:

A journalist shall at all times defend the principle of the freedom of the press and other media in relation to the collection of information and the expression of comment and criticism (Alia, 2004, p.191).

There is then a duty to explain the motivations of the gunmen, the context from where they came and the result of their actions. Within Northern Ireland, this posed significant complexities in the framing of an event; how could the BBC deal with politicians and the public who supported violent means? What if the terrorist transitioned to the ballot box for validation and election? Representation was then directly related to journalistic freedom and media independence. The notion of impartiality arose again following the UWC strike, with the minutes of a BBC NI Advisory Council meeting recording the Controller remarking 'I suggest to you that we are not impartial

actually, we are not impartial towards undemocratic means, we are not impartial towards violence, nor incitement to violence' (BBC Controller's Report, 1974). Francis stated he understood emotional calls for the BBC to 'treat paramilitaries for what they are — thugs, murderers and bombers by any other name' (1996, p.63). Yet as noted, if the government allowed organisations like Provisional Sinn Féin to remain legal, then the BBC had a clear duty to cover their activities. This period also encompassed the UDA as a legal organisation; the indirect argument then becomes if the government would not ban such organisations, how could the BBC not report their actions?

One episode of *Panorama*, in July 1970, did contain a number of interviews with relatives of six people killed in Belfast, including a 'widow crying out for vengeance for her dead husband, shot by terrorists'. Deemed inflammatory by the BBC NI region (Madden, 1979, p.10) it was therefore transmitted to the mainland UK, on the primary BBC network, but BBC NI opted out, believing its broadcast could lead to further violence. This, the first instance of "opting-out" was recognised as deeply problematic, further setting apart communities and adding to the creation of two distinct communities (in this case, mainland and island audiences). In this period, with Hugh Carlton Greene as Director-General, it was decreed that content of BBC's programmes should be identical in Britain and Northern Ireland. As detailed, the effect of this policy — to make BBC networked programmes on the

'Troubles' acceptable in Northern Ireland — was detrimental and inhibitive to coverage.

For Richard Francis, speaking in 1977, after continued and protracted clashes between the BBC and the Government,

The experience in Northern Ireland, where communities and governments are in conflict but not in a state of emergency or a state of war, suggests a greater need than ever for the media to function as the "fourth estate," distinct from the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. But if the functions are to remain separate, it must be left to the media themselves to take the decisions (within the limits of responsibility) as to what to publish, as to when, and as to how (1996, p.58).

During BBC reporting — both radio and televisual — an overall trend can be recognised: the governmental/military position dominates. Invariably granted precedence by journalists, these sources also regularly benefited from a greater time allocation. The official account is therefore granted undue weight and an implicit credibility gap is created.

During October 1971, two sisters were shot dead in the Lower Falls area of Belfast. The evening BBC radio bulletin granted precedence to an army spokesman, allocated some seventy-seconds of airtime; the opposing account, provided by the driver of the vehicle involved received less than forty-seconds (23.10.71). It is interesting to compare this to the morning bulletin, broadcast at 7am and shortly after the incident occurred. During this coverage — before official and eyewitness testimony were gathered for inclusion — the reportage tended towards the factual. However this information was received by a telephone call to Colonel Maurice Tugwell,

general staff officer in charge of the army's "informational policy". Therefore the immediate BBC account, based on information provided by the military, announced 'two woman — dressed as men — had been shot and killed by the army after they, or someone else in the car in which they were passengers had fired two shots at the troops' (Winchester, 1971) Such connotations were similarly apparent in the print coverage by the *Sunday News* — Unionist and Loyalist in editorial tone — who sought to emphasise the masculine nature of dress. Whilst the immediacy of television and radio reporting may contribute to the problems of establishing events as quickly as possible, notions of impartiality become highly suspect when scrutinised in this manner.<sup>35</sup> Indeed Schlesinger quotes a BBC television news sub-editor — 'the official line is we put the army's version first and then the other' — and a BBC radio news organiser — 'You don't always have time to check out the army's account... after all, it is the British army, and we are on their side' (1992, p.225). This echoes the earlier interview structure detailed, when instead of putting the army's view first, it was allowed to be presented last, effectively responding to the previous two charges.

This policy was recognised as problematic by a number of journalists who would tacitly begin using attributions. These in turn established a precedent acknowledged by Richard Francis in 1977: 'Generally, therefore, we will report that "the Army say", whereas the paramilitaries "claim" or "allege". Wording is crucial' (1996, p.62). This can be explored in an analysis of the

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<sup>35</sup> Such an issue will be compounded in the digital age.

rhetoric, which supports a view the military were recognised as the “correct side”. In one instance, a reporter used the descriptive term ‘army sniper’; this was flagged as incorrect, with ‘army marksman’ deemed the correct terminology. Members of the British army could not be referred to as snipers by the BBC (Cathcart, 1984, p.220).

This reliance on official accounts — often reporting/repeating unquestioned — would continue throughout future years. A bomb in the Falls Road in 1976 for example, would initially be assumed as a Loyalist reprisal attack. The army press desk at military headquarters in Lisburn would however declare the bomb a Provisional IRA construction that had detonated early, a “fumble finger”. This was duly repeated on the BBC Nine O’Clock news. When the PIRA identified the car as one stolen from a Protestant area, a fact confirmed by the RUC, the original suggestion had already reached mainstream acceptance and the army achieved a public relations success (Stephen, 1976). The media, courted by all, were increasingly susceptible to being used as a propaganda tool; indeed on many occasions they directly allowed such an occurrence. On the problem of broadcasting where particular individual accounts are inevitable, the complexity of Ulster issues and the high sensitivity of both politicians and public, meant a deliberate awareness to avoid gross over-simplification. Due to the superficiality of television news coverage, particular difficulties arose.

The BBC also displayed an overt tendency to broadcast images which, due to the eye of the reporter (subconsciously) reflecting the attitudes and

prejudices of the intended audience, can be interpreted as allied to the official narrative and supportive of the official position. Burning buildings (initially), people abandoning their homes, and, following deployment, daily footage of troops patrolling (invariably deserted) streets. Within Britain, such images would be presented as brave restrained soldiers, with evil overtones of abuse by civilians and violence from gunmen; what BBC director Colin Thomas would later describe as ‘an army calm, patient and natural’ (Thomas, 1979, p. 11).<sup>36</sup> Similar footage broadcast to Ireland, particularly on the RTE network, would instead trend towards a presentation of the army as suspicious and sinister; burly troops searching children, armoured vehicles speeding roaring through lower class neighbourhoods and smashing amateur barricades - ‘the impression here was of a terrified community cowering behind closed doors’ (Holland, 1971). At this point in media coverage then, the BBC can be seen as stepping away from the earlier visceral-vérité style, effectively moving towards a more united, tacit support of the dominant discourse through coded images supportive of the security services. Troops would often be seen patrolling on foot (and not in vehicles), with weaponry pointed towards the ground and cradled across folded arms. The non-threatening visuals, passive in execution and intent, are in marked contrast to the images dominating the initial years of coverage. They would become a shorthand for terrorism representation for the significant future.

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas, a BBC film director, would resign in 1978 in protest at the censorship of two documentaries.

## The Fourth Estate

What can then be termed this Golden Age of Northern Ireland reportage, spanned from 1968-1973. During this period, it dominated coverage across the United Kingdom, consistently leading BBC broadcasting news bulletins with arresting visuals of genuine peril and distress.

What started as a localised protest over social and political discrimination quickly developed into a violent inter-communal conflict which at times verged on open civil war. Almost as quickly, it was transformed into an open military conflict between sections of the nationalist community and the British Army (Hamilton-Tweedale, 1987, p.412).

By the mid-70s, political violence had however gained such significant levels of coverage that it struggled to capture the public consciousness, and was moving beyond an ability to shock. In essence, the conflict was over-reported but under-contextualised; bombs and murders had, with almost constant repetition, become predictable and mundane for the audience. The BBC in moving away from such footage, trended towards more neutral, supportive, daily life imagery.

In a BBC lunch-time lecture, Desmond Taylor, editor of News and Current Affairs, would seek to emphasise the precise role of a BBC journalist:

He must not try to change people's minds, or confirm their beliefs; he must give them the untainted information they need to make up their own minds.

He cannot aim to move events, from however worthy a motive and for however worthy an end. He can report possible abuse, not campaign for its abolition; call attention to what seems like law breaking, not advocate prosecution; give an account of a demonstration without making a judgement as to whether its aims of conduct are right or wrong; say there was a strike and what it was about, without taking sides between employers and employed. In other words, he reports and in doing so he implies neither

approval nor disapproval. He is merely saying to the public: “This has happened, and we feel you might be interested in it – or alternatively, that you ought to know about it and the arguments it has aroused. What you do with the information is up to you and your judgement as to how you should act as a citizen” (Taylor, 1975, p.3)

Yet by 1977, despite this movement of the visual landscape, Airey Neave, Tory front bench spokesperson on Northern Ireland believed the Government to be losing the propaganda war:

a review of present attitudes to media freedom is needed therefore to take account of a desperate emergency. Some of the media deny that we are really at war with terrorism. Some of their actions actually stimulate the hardcore terrorist mentality. The BBC in particular pronounce on the security situation in Northern Ireland with studied grandiloquence and ignore the true dangers (Curtis, 1998, p.55).

Within this propaganda war, broadcast news is inherently reactive. The BBC news schema is constructed as central to the television schedule and event based, following a specific agenda, with a hierarchy of stories.<sup>37</sup> Within this then, instead of searching, investigating, analysing and reporting, there is a tendency to report that which is offered directly, i.e., the daily press releases of the propaganda offices. Despite the statement of one BBC Director General: ‘I believe we have the duty to solicit, to go out and find those stories that will throw a perspective on the whole situation’, the perspective invariably offered was limited (Trethowan, 1981). The visual representation, in the late 70s, was lacking.

Philip Elliot, working from the Mass Communication Research Centre at Leicester University would critically examine reportage from the region in

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<sup>37</sup> Agenda is not used here in a pejorative sense.



(the tellingly entitled) *Misreporting Ulster: News as Field Dressing*. Elliot suggested that reporting acts of violence has a function of social cauterisation, where the

emphasis of current affairs output has shifted almost exclusively to “objective” factual news reporting...This provides information which is casually unrelated to the incidence of violence. It is descriptive not explanatory...Posing as value-free it is heavily value-laden. It emphasises those facts which make the violence less rather than more explicable (Elliot, 1976, p.400).

One possible method of explanation would remain absent. The IRA were unseen and unheard for almost the entire decade. Representatives of the organisation, along with the INLA, were virtually excluded from the television screen. The British consensus view, again to repeat the supposition of Schlesinger et al., of a terrorist rationale (or lack thereof), went unchallenged. Terrorism as criminal was the dominant framing device. This is due to an absence of the representation of the IRA, beyond superficial connotations raised by combat fatigues, volleys of gunfire and masked men of violence. The BBC (alongside other media organisations) ensured that could be no possible humanisation of the organisation. The image of an IRA member, attempting to justify their acts, would have been a powerful visual, engaging on a number of levels, in both the violence implied and absent.

Two interviews with members of the IRA were however screened by the BBC, both on *24 Hours*, and both in early 1971. They would only appear once more (a press conference by Joe Cahill) following implementation of an internal rule that such interviews were to be referred upwards to the Director General.

In his 1977 lecture *Broadcasting to a Community in Conflict*, Richard Francis would detail the interviews with Sin Féin and Loyalist Paramilitaries however he would focus his attention on the BBC NI channel (1996). What was a very rare visual on Northern Ireland television was extinct on the mainland.

According to Brian Jenkins' metaphor, terrorism is theatre, with the intended audience being those watching on television (1975, p.15). His language is echoed by Walter Laquer who notes:

Terrorists have learned that the media are of paramount importance in their campaigns, that the terrorist act itself is next to nothing, whereas publicity is all...Terrorists will always have to be innovative. They are in some respects, the super entertainers of our time (1977, p.144).

Terrorists are here portrayed as the cause, organisers of spectacular events to engage with a wider, distant audience. Selected journalists sought to oppose this governmental and broadcasting authority stance, believing there was a public right to know and a journalistic duty to report.

BBC reporter Bernard Falk argued it was in the public's interest both for the security forces to pursue the IRA and for journalists to accordingly report on IRA activity: "if one assumes that this organisation is an enemy of Britain then the public must have a right to know why it is waging war against Britain and what methods it is using" (cited by Curtis, 1998, p.149).

Yet in removing the person of the enemy, the ability to gain an understanding on the desires of others, was removed. As Hawthorne states,

it would be naive in Northern Ireland to assume that people are always trying to be truthful, and we have to balance one set of lies against the other', removing a set of voices from the discourse and a physical personality from the representation entirely limited a notion of balance (1981, p.13).

*Death on the Rock*, a *This Week* documentary, aired on ITV/UTV in April 1988. Edited by Roger Bolton (a previous BBC editor on both *Panorama* and *Nationwide*), the programme examined the deaths of three PIRA members in Gibraltar, killed by members of the British Special Air Service. Existing as one of a few analytic programmes created and broadcast in the immediate aftermath of an incident, *Death on the Rock* presented evidence that the three were shot without warning and/or whilst attempting to surrender. Prior to broadcast, the programme received significant attention (particularly from tabloid newspapers) for questioning the official Government and security services narrative. It subsequently became the first documentary to be the subject of an independent inquiry (in which it was largely vindicated) and would later win a BAFTA Award for Best Documentary.<sup>38</sup>

Edited to refocus on Mairead Farrell, the programme was broadcast in the United States with the title *Death of a Terrorist*, where the understated observation is 'there was a strong air of Government cover-up and disinformation' (O'Conner, 1989). What is important to note about this programme, was the visual representation of Farrell, one of the three IRA members killed. Footage of Farrell, shot for a previous (and unaired) Channel 4 documentary, effectively undermined the ideological governmental frame of terrorists as irrational. Indeed it is a humanising portrayal, encapsulating the demands of Bernard Falk above. As such, it could not be included and shown on British television, existing as outside the dominant hegemonic

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<sup>38</sup> David Miller's *Truth on the Rock* (1988) and *The Damage Was Done* (1989) provide an analysis of general media coverage of the incident.

frame. Whilst *Death on the Rock* could ultimately be broadcast, it's focus was rather on Governmental/security acts, particularly the shoot-to-kill policy, and not an exploration of IRA methods or justifications. American audiences were therefore shown a representation of an individual who

wouldn't have fitted into the stereotype of the terrorist she was portrayed as in the British media. I think people would have seen an intelligent, articulate, attractive woman on their screen. It might have raised questions about their notions of what is a terrorist. It might have raised questions about the manner in which she was killed. And it also probably would have made people think, "What makes someone who looks like the girl next door take up arms? She looks intelligent. She must have some rational reason for that?" (Miller, 1994b, p.85).

Indeed audiences on mainland Britain were poorly served by BBC coverage of the incident. BBC NI produced an episode of weekly current affairs show *Spotlight* which echoed the findings of *This Week*. Garnering similar criticism, the BBC restricted transmission to Northern Ireland, despite a clear national (and international) interest. "The preservation of the Institution came before its journalistic duty" (Bolton, 1990, p.246). A later *Panorama* programme, coinciding with the conclusion of the inquest into *Death on the Rock* was postponed by BBC Director General Michael Checkland and his deputy, John Birt, yet Roger Bolton quotes Daily Telegraph coverage of internal BBC staff reaction: 'Everything had been referred along the line. It was probably the most careful programme ever made' (ibid). Two moments in BBC coverage can be identified as root causes of this need for "care".

INLA

The media, particularly reporters operating in Ireland at the height of the conflict, struggled with both objectivity and truth. In essence, archival research of BBC output suggests, that in the ‘practice of journalism, it is more a matter of striving to get things right by reliance on sources that can be cited and evidence that can be confirmed by an accredited authority’ (Tumber and Webster, 2007, p.68). This is particularly crucial for the BBC, with the connotations its reportage carries (on a global level).<sup>39</sup>

It is evident there was an unwillingness amongst the media, for the initial decade of the crisis, to admit that beneath the civil rights troubles lay a more profound dispute: the very nature of Northern Ireland sovereignty. There was no desire to explore such underlying issues, however it is also clear that for initial years, the nature of violence — framed in a civil/human rights perspective — was unexpected. Caught off guard, with no comparable events, the BBC were unsure how to report events. Reportage began in one direction, before gradually moving away from the visuals shown and towards a generic code representative of “terrorism”.

Television coverage was therefore only interested in Ulster when conflicts and personality provided strong words and stronger pictures. Whilst this invariably lends itself to reportage of violence, where related visuals are strong yet simple, events featuring similarly strong footage can gain prominence: witness the Enniskillen bombing in chapter five. However, it was the images of death and destruction that framed coverage for initial years

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<sup>39</sup> Of course what is “right” raises a multiplicity of further questions.

— amidst successive political failures and initiatives — that led the British media, establishment and population to become wary. Further, whilst Peter Taylor does not invoke compassion fatigue, he rather feels a weariness was prevalent, with a lack of context, understanding, and resolution, affecting attitudes (23.01.03).

BBC reporters then, were challenged with covering a complex and multi-faceted event in a short three minute piece on the nightly bulletins. Philip Schlesinger details BBC production, organised to serve the two channels with three bulletins on BBC One, 1.45pm (15 mins), 5.45pm (15 mins) and 9.00pm (25 mins), and two on BBC Two, 7.30pm (10 mins) and 11.00pm (15 mins) (1987, p.48). By their very nature, such broadcasts offer little room for analysis and scant space for subtlety. In turn, viewer knowledge of the situation, and concern for the future, is prohibited and limited.

Indeed, in a conflict recognised for these strong pictures and strong words, the figure of Ian Paisley has been argued as “created, and reflected by, the media itself (cited by Taylor, 1977). However if the media had ignored Paisley — a stunning orator with ‘a searing, acerbic approach to religion’ who guaranteed intense and provocative language (Dillon, 1998, p.183) — he would not have been diminished nor granted less influence. Instead it would have further ill served the enlightenment of the public, and so the journalistic point of departure was re-situated as ‘Paisley exists because Ulster exists’ (Taylor, 1977). To understand the nature of the Loyalist strike, and Paisley’s subsequent success at the polls, context and perspective were

required for the viewer. Where a bold approach was needed, with provocative questioning, a search for knowledge, and a desire to further understanding, the media failed, promoting arresting visuals.

There can be silence on the screen: no words, no music, no sound effects: but there must be pictures (Schlesinger, 1992, p.128).

To fully understand the environment the BBC was operating within, it is important to consider the broadcast of two episodes of the *Tonight* programme, broadcast in 1977 and 1979. The first, broadcast on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> December 1977, featured the inclusion of interviews with members of Provisional Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA and was termed an explanatory piece by producer Sean Hardie. For Airey Neave, Conservative MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and vociferous critic of the BBC, the programme was a Party Political Broadcast for the IRA, ‘the most dangerous programme shown for many years...which will inevitably give new encouragement to terrorism’. He asked BBC’s Director General, Ian Trethowan

do the BBC want to prolong the “armed struggle” in Northern Ireland...by glorifying violence and fostering a new generation of killers. The terrorists are using your Corporation for their own propaganda’ (BBC NI Chronicle, p.30).

The programme however sought to attempt to place a *form* of visual recognisance on the deaths that had occurred, and it is difficult to reconcile the footage with Neave’s proclamation it glorified violence. A list of the dead in the printed press is profoundly lacking an associated visual, some “thing” simultaneously making real Barthes pseudo-presence and token of absence of

the dead. Beginning with a slow montage of shots, panning across hundreds of small white crosses — with the associated peaceful connotations — commemorating those killed, the film sought to detail IRA violence frequently, particularly in the reporter's questioning of the interview subjects. The programme concluded with a second visual motif again symbolising violence through footage of various memorials across three groups: the IRA itself, British military personnel, and civilian victims. Such footage was rich in connotations, seeking to evoke considerable sympathy in the audience.

Whilst the speakers sought to justify their actions, and promote the actions of the IRA, they were balanced, or more accurately, undercut, by an emphasis that the Republican movement was fractured, limited in numbers and financially suffering. It is worthwhile then detailing the response of Ian Trethowan, Director General of the BBC, who highlights the precise issue the broadcast was problematic:

what is really at issue is what the public can be trusted to be shown. You seem to take the view that the public should not be shown, in any serious form, what is happening among the Republican groups, even at a moment of change. We disagree. We believe that the public can be trusted to make its own judgement, even in Northern Ireland. It is sending 14,000 of its sons to risk disablement, even death, on the streets of Belfast and in the hedgerows of South Armagh...The public is entitled to expect that we recognised that reporting in Northern Ireland is very different from reporting in Norfolk  
(written reply to Neave, 20.12.77).

The second programme, aired on July 5<sup>th</sup> 1979, featured an interview with a member of the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) who claimed the organisation was responsible for the death of Airey Neave, assassinated in



March 1979 in a car-bomb attack at the House of Commons.<sup>40</sup> Whilst several newspapers had previously interviewed members of the INLA (at the time it was not a proscribed terrorist organisation) it was only when the BBC featured the spokesperson on television that issues arose, highlighting Margaret Thatcher's awareness that television was a more powerful medium than the printed word (or radio), transmitting but not interfering with the visuals, the experience.

Following an introduction, including an explanation of the circumstances in which it was shot and the history of the INLA, David Lomax presented his twelve and a half minute interview with the disguised INLA member. With a disagreement on terminology, the INLA member denying Neave had been assassinated/executed and not murdered, the tone is markedly hostile. The interview was followed by a studio discussion, featuring both Protestant and Catholic guests, and both disagreed on future policy regarding terrorism in Ireland. There was a clear lack of engagement with the political content of the interview, indeed an overt rejection of all proposed. Two oppositional perspectives were instead submitted: the criminality of the act (Robin Day) against the sub-humanising reactionary populism of Robert Bradford MP — 'this creature will be pursued by us', referring first to Loyalists, and then the security forces (Schlesinger et al., 1983, p.52).

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<sup>40</sup> This would be the last episode of Spotlight however it was not as a result of the content of the episode.

It is however also important to note that Gerry Fitt MP, present on the panel, introduced a third reading of the interview: it was irresponsible. This, the standard official argument, is that which would garner attention on an official level. A BBC audience investigation by the broadcasting research department found four-fifths of respondents believed it was right to broadcast the item, with most claiming to be more hostile to the INLA and IRA as a consequence. Indeed,

Those who favoured our decision to broadcast the programme said that people needed to be informed about the situation in Northern Ireland...and that viewers were capable of making up their own minds (Bolton, 1990, p.47)

As Tim Pat Coogan highlights, there ‘was no particular outcry until Airey Neave’s widow wrote to the Daily Telegraph complaining that the “terrorist had been given ample scope to besmirch the memory of my husband”’ (2002, p.367). Margaret Thatcher herself spoke in Parliament, stating ‘I am appalled it was ever transmitted and I believe it reflects gravely on the judgement of the BBC and those responsible’ (cited by Curtis, 1998, p.164). Despite challenging the comments of the INLA spokesman in the interview, contradicting his allegations frequently and strongly defending Neave’s stance on torture, the printed press joined the Prime Minister in criticising the BBC. However as Roger Bolton, producer of Spotlight, notes

The public has a right to know what is happening in Northern Ireland, and what motivates those involved, including the paramilitaries. Such interviews should be rare, thorough and carefully planned in context but they should be

done. The emotional reaction of politicians ought not to be the decisive factor (Bolton, 1990, p.50).<sup>41</sup>

At the point of broadcast then, security forces had been operating in Northern Ireland for a decade. Army assessment — shared by several politicians — was that terrorism could be contained but not eradicated. The INLA was emerging at this point as a new terrorist organisation (not yet proscribed) with a Marxist ideology. *Tonight* sought to examine this emergent threat in light of the current political situation, with context provided by the subsequent discussion. Therefore whilst audience aggrievement was muted, a concerted effort by a vocal minority led to significant uproar against the BBC. Such was the intemperate feeling fostered by this group and elements of the printed press, the Board of Governors issued a statement in the 1980 annual report:

The Board recognised the existence of two legitimate viewpoints on this matter. It respected the feelings of those who considered the interview and others like it to be abhorrent, but believed in balance it was right for the BBC to give the audience this insight into the mentality of terrorists. This informative aspect weighted more with us than the suggestion that the group might gain propaganda advantage from the interview. We believe our audience to be adult and intelligent in these matters (1980).

Centring coverage of terrorist acts around a human interest angle, however, promotes a tendency to exaggerate the actual terror qualities of such events: unpredictable and irrational. The lack of attention to possible explanations of the motives and politics of those responsible, results in an associated framing

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<sup>41</sup> Bolton would produce *Panorama*, and *Nationwide*, being fired twice over his coverage of Northern Ireland. He would later move to Thames Television (ITV) where he would edit *This Week*, including the famous episode *Death on the Rock*, regarding the deaths of three Provisional IRA members in Gibraltar as part of Operation Flavius.

of those involved as similarly unpredictable and irrational. In turn then, there is a movement towards placing the relevant individuals/groups as outside society, and the most appropriate responsive strategy is one of defeat (destruction) as opposed to dialogue. This sits with the response of Thatcher throughout the Troubles, who subscribed to the maxim there can be no dealings with terrorists.<sup>42</sup> Selected politicians in turn attempted to impress on the media – particularly broadcasting since it is the visuals which grant credence to any cause – a similar view, and refrain from granting publicity (Thatcher's oxygen) to terrorists. The media then can be seen as being generally dependent on the governmental/political situation in which they operate. Stepping outside this sphere leads to concerted attacks by a political/printed press dualism.

### Carrickmore

Described by Ed Moloney as 'one of the IRA's most spectacular propaganda coups to date', and just six months after Margaret Thatcher's election, the Carrickmore incident further set the BBC against the Conservative government (cited by Curtis, 1998, p.166). Exaggerated reporting prompted allegations of collusion between the BBC and IRA, and as such, the planned *Panorama* programme, intended as a historical study and critical assessment

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<sup>42</sup> At least in public. Of interest here in the recent kidnappings of Westerners in the Middle East; several countries, including many in Europe, have paid ransoms to terrorist organisations to secure release of citizenry. Britain and the USA continue to refuse to negotiate any such financial settlements. See Alexander and Alexander (2015).

of the organisation (including interviews with senior Republicans) was cancelled.

In the midst of filming the episode, BBC reporters were directed to Carrickmore, where they filmed an IRA roadblock for approximately ten minutes. No interviews were conducted, and the footage available online now shows children cycling around and through the sequence, locals casually leaning on walls observing and armed men, wearing duffle coats and balaclavas stopping cars asking for driving licence identification. It was a clear publicity stunt, an attempt to present an air of legitimacy as a organisation, yet wildly distorted press reportage caused concern. Liz Curtis details the London Standard as describing 140 armed men occupying the village for three hours and offering to hold the village if it was better television (Curtis, 1998, p.166); producer David Darlow, interviewed in the Ulster Herald, recounts other printed press headlines:

According to one paper we had marched with gunmen into the post office in Carrickmore, filming the holding up of the staff. Another had us directing the IRA men like actors on a film set (2013).

In the House of Commons Margaret Thatcher condemned the BBC and reminded the corporation that it was not the first time she had asked it to 'put its house in order', whilst the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, James Molyneaux, spoke of the BBC's 'treasonable activity' (both cited by Curtis, 1998, p.167) . At the end of the decade then, the BBC was in open conflict with the Government. This would continue with the Hunger Strike, as the

BBC faced a choice between representing a global incident and representing an official perspective.

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# Chapter Five: Hunger



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He has chosen death:  
Refusing to eat or drink, that he may bring  
Disgrace upon me

W. B. Yeats  
(2010, p. 122)

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## Kiev

Communication is everything. Skype, Google Chat, e-mail, text messages, and video were all part of our daily crisis-management response.

We are wired to support each other.

A turn in history across an ocean felt as though it was next door.

(Malloni, 2014).

In February 2014, violence exploded in Kiev, Ukraine. Part of the Euro-maidan movement, the protests called for the resignation of President Viktor Yanukovich and his government. In the space of one forty-eight hour period, eighty-eight people were killed. Amateur cell phone footage, released online and through news organisations, showed incredible images of uniformed snipers shooting protesters using makeshift shields and home-made armour.

The origins of the violence can be traced back to the previous November and a governmental decision to abandon a trade deal with the EU for closer relations with Russia. This can be traced back to 2010 and the arrest and imprisonment of Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, and in turn, back to the Orange Revolution of 2004. The overall root cause however, must include examination of the 1991 declaration of Ukrainian independence from the USSR.

For media organisations, this was an extraordinary period, with strong visuals and graphic footage being released daily. Yet, they were each unable to summarise the background effectively in a three minute report at the head of the news. The BBC attempted to explain the origins through an online explainer video, *The Ukraine Crisis explained – in 60 seconds*, which also

appeared on the BBC News 24 channel frequently. Yet amidst images of flames, violence, gunfire and riots, overlaid text explains ‘protests started when the President refused to sign a trade deal with the EU’. No further background is offered. What is, reveals very little, and raises more questions than answers.

### Initial Failings and the Propaganda War

Since the mid 1970s media interest in Northern Ireland diminished significantly. As a consequence, events — particularly in relation to those that can euphemistically be reduced to “routine” acts of violence — would garner limited news coverage. Indeed, in a number of instances, post-1974 UWC strike, it was obfuscated, with important moments, including the rare appearance of IRA leader David O’Connell, completely erased from the wider British audience on BBC One nightly news.

According to Jonathan Dimbleby,

There has not been a serious detailed account of the history of Northern Ireland because it is a delicate political issue...the reason is because the political institutions, BBC, IBA and the British Government don’t wish us to know about the situation in Ireland (cited by Schlesinger et al., 1983, p.132).

Dimbleby is also quoted as speaking at the inaugural public meeting of the Campaign for Free Speech on Ireland in March 1977:

Those who have access, anywhere, at any time, to our media, should be pressing to ensure that in those media Northern Ireland is put in context, the events are explained, the possible future analysed. Otherwise we will continue to deny the British public the kind of information it need on which

to form a judgement about the most important political issue  
that any government has had to face  
(The Campaign for Free Speech on Ireland, 1979, p.3).

The media consistently failed to explain the situation and its developments in an appropriate manner. As in Kiev, once original failings were made, it would become increasingly difficult for the media to accurately and appropriately delineate events. Instead, a short-hand came to dominate, with a civil rights origin offered as a common explainer.

TV companies and newspapers must start to provide the in-depth coverage that is needed. They must put the situation in its historical perspective, fully explain the motivation of all parties to the conflict, and ensure that all views on how lasting peace can be achieved are given a full and equal hearing  
(Clark, 1977)

Certainly within news bulletins, it was impossible to preface each three minute report with a summary of Irish History, from plantation to the Battle of the Boyne and beyond. Since such motivations were however never fully detailed and explored, there was a resultant cascading effect on all news and current affairs programming. The news would instead be reduced to a series of snapshots, a nightly catalogue of death and destruction unrelieved by explanation and isolated of wider context. Current affairs would seek answers to questions never posed. Television as a medium — with the advantages it provides — then becomes particularly culpable. As Clark would state,

it is hard to understand why the BBC for example can...clear BBC for four and a half hours to show a complete investigation of the French resistance and the role of the French public...and yet not devote its resources to a similar exercise on Northern Ireland (1977).

Whilst many politicians believed reportage would contribute to an increase in terrorism, Anne McHardy, *The Guardian's* Northern Ireland correspondent during the 70s, interviewed on BBC One's *The Editors* would instead argue it is

a fallacy to think that the situation would go away if it wasn't reported. I don't think that it will ever go away unless it's thoroughly and deeply reported...I recommend more reporting of the background, if the reasons why people do these things, which inevitably means more talking to terrorists (28.6.1981).

As detailed in earlier chapters, such a practice did (and could) not occur. Instead, there was a tendency to equate terrorism with violence and criminality. 1985's *At the Edge of the Union* documentary for example, received significant criticism and was delayed for two months. As a documentary, and not a straight news broadcast, it utilised a different interview approach, allowing the two key participants, Martin McGuinness and Gregory Campbell, to speak for themselves entirely unchallenged. However footage of McGuinness at home with his children was seen as indicative of this humanising concept. The Government encouraged, and ultimately the BBC acceded to, the addition of 19 seconds of aftermath footage of an IRA bombing in Belfast, undercutting a nonviolent portrayal and retuning representation to the familiar iconography established.

The overarching nature of the conflict then, is as a propaganda war. The public functioned as an asset desired by all participants, with each seeking to manipulate media representation. The position of the BBC — as a national (state) broadcaster — therefore situated it on the front line, as a target for the

RUC, the Army, paramilitaries, political parties, opinion leaders, lobby groups, and the viewing public itself, each with their own intrinsic beliefs and alliances. All of these — including the public — fight the propaganda war with varying degrees of skill and success.<sup>43</sup> Every story, whether directly related (i.e. a bombing or murder), or “simply” a housing crisis/industrial dispute would instead become a minor engagement for each group, and a new dilemma for the reporter. The concept of news values is in turn distorted by the very nature of what is being reported and subject to a series of filters prior to broadcast.

Peter Taylor, reporter on ITV's *This Week* throughout the 70s, and BBC's *Panorama* from 1980 onwards, encountered difficulties when covering Ireland, including a decrease in ratings.

What I have to try and do, is to explain a highly complex situation to a British public which increasingly knows little and cares even less about what is going on there...It's still a foreign war to some of our audience (Clark, 1977).

The Irish Sea divide can certainly be held partially accounted for this nature; despite the IRA initiating attacks on the mainland, for most, it was an “over there” phenomena. News and political analysis was contained within the environs, only occasionally engaging with the mainland public and media, i.e. with particular shootings, bombings or acts of violence. ‘Even when such events hijack the headlines they are reported in an inadequate and partial way, explanation and context are omitted’ (Curtis, 1998, p.275). This

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<sup>43</sup> The public in the sense of a pressure group (whether individual or collectively).



underlines Richard Francis' notion of a divided community, where multiple levels of coverage were necessary and simultaneously occurring.

It was a unique situation for all parties: the population, the government, the media. Within Britain, whilst political divides exist, there was, and is, a general agreement on the institution of Government, its role in society, and indeed the very existence of the state/the fact that the state should exist. Within Northern Ireland however, that consensus was absent. Violence and political upheaval of grand proportions followed.

At the outbreak of violence, the BBC had neither the newsroom or the staff to copy with the story; 'we were not equipped in any way for a story of such magnitude' (Baker, 1996, p.119). Once such difficult was in how to frame the visuals emanating from the environment, with no previous standards to judge content against. Initial visuals were graphic, brutal pictorials of the reality of violence, however this was soon followed by a movement away from such sights towards a more neutral series of motifs and recurrent tropes, where reality was sanitised.

### Body Horror

According to Taylor's *This Week* producer David Elstein 'We aren't supposed to broadcast things which will offend, outrage or conflict with the sense of decency of the public' (Clark, 1977). On a surface level this can initially be interpreted as related to interviewing and broadcasting those belonging to proscribed terror groups or organisations (witness the frequent, organised

and vocal criticism that would accompany early instances of reportage), however, it must also be analysed as prohibiting graphic coverage and attempting to impinge representation. Whilst “the sense of decency of the public” is inherently an abstract concept, it is frequently cited as the overarching concern for not showing graphic depictions (ergo the reality), of terrorism (and warfare).

John Berger believed that whilst images of violence ‘record sudden moments of agony—a terror, a wounding, a death, a cry of grief,’ they are ‘at best useless...at worst, narcissistic, leading the viewer to a sense of self-conscious helplessness rather than to enlightenment, outrage or action... the issue which has caused the moment is effectively depoliticised’ (cited by Linfield, 2011, p.6). Linfield however stresses, imagery of the Vietnam War (which Berger was commenting on) did not foster feelings of moral inadequacy. ‘On the contrary, they mobilised political opposition’ (ibid).<sup>44</sup>

Particularly in relation to warfare, there has been an overt synthesis of the military and media, with a desire to portray a certain “image” of warfare (as just, virtuous and necessary) and terrorism (as criminal and outside cultural norms). There was, and is, repeated attempts to present the military as clinical, with death for the “enemy” quick and painless. Civilians are the euphemistic “collateral damage” within warfare (and state terror), where to detail their death would make them real. Instead they may only become

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<sup>44</sup> I would however suggest that this mobilisation of opposition merely echoed an overall trend in American culture that was politically turning against the Vietnam War. Images alone cannot be attributed as the root cause (see also Hallin, 1986).

visible when deemed necessary (i.e. as a propaganda tool in relation to terrorism). As society progressed to a multi-programme/multi-channel/multi-media age, audiences became incredibly fragmentary; the media then argue they resist showing such images since it can lead to audiences turning off (a corporate concern) or result in overexposure. This is what Thomas Keenan calls the ‘dark side of revelation...sometimes we call it voyeurism, sometimes compassion fatigue, sometimes the obscenity of images’ (2004, 438). Invoking the notion of compassion fatigue, Keenan is here echoing the language of Susan Sontag and Barbie Zelizer. For Sontag, such imagery can,

vivify the condemnation of war, and may bring home, for a spell, a portion of its reality to those who have no experience of war at all...yet they may [also] give rise to opposing responses. A call for peace. A cry for revenge. Or simply the bemused awareness...that terrible things happen (2003, p.12).

Yet, as Susie Linfield explains:

it is the camera — the still camera, the film camera, the video camera, and now the digital camera — that has done so much to globalise our consciences; it is the camera that brought us the twentieth century’s bad news.

Today it is, quite simply, impossible to say, “I did not know”:  
photographs have robbed us of the alibi of ignorance (2011, p.46).

However, whilst denouncing the desensitisation argument of Alfredo Jaar — the ‘bombardment of images...has completely anaesthetised us’ — as wrong, Linfield’s *alibi of ignorance* is inherently problematic (ibid). She suggests,

We know of suffering in far-flung parts of the world in ways that our forebears never could, and the images we see — in some places, under some conditions — demand not just our interest but our response (ibid).

Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* — qualifying and largely retracting her earlier *On Photography* work — seeks to stress 'harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock', but are instead undercut by this *bemused awareness* (2003, p.76).<sup>45</sup> The complexity of mediated scenes of terrorism, violence and horror then is problematised by the structure of broadcast news. Granting precedence to one shot, image or sequence can imply a hierarchy exists whilst the very need for some contextualisation and hermeneutical analysis is limited by the organisation, journalist and time. In the case of Kiev, twenty years of history and months of violence are unable to be summed up in a sixty-second video where the visuals strongly outweigh and supplant the associated narrative. In the case of Ireland, several years of violence and decades of injustice could not reach a consensus in a three hour staged trial where the rhetoric outweighs and supplants a complete absence of visuals. What then would our understanding of warfare, terrorism and conflict be if we had never seen reportage? Would the language of cinema dominate?<sup>46</sup> 'What is wrong with revealing such suffering: what is right with hiding it? Why is the teller, rather than the tale, considered obscene?' (Linfield, 2011, p.41).

Pre-censorship, to borrow a term from Walter Cronkite, results in Baudrillard's precession of simulacra, 'a real without origin or reality: a

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<sup>45</sup> *On Photography* was pivotal to the idea of compassion fatigue as a concept, detailed in chapter one.

<sup>46</sup> Such questions are beyond the scope of this work, however it is important to note the impact of cinema on both media reportage of conflict and the conduct of warfare itself. See Paul Virilio, 1989.

hyperreal' (1994, p.1). The military and media, uniting for such projects as embedded reporters, create hyper-real war, devoid of reality. There is 'the capture of death itself in the inescapable confines of rhetoric'; death is denied a material referent. The conditions imposed upon embedded reporters create unspoken forms of censorship; as Gay Talase argues, 'correspondents who drive around in tanks and armoured personnel carriers who are spoon-fed what the military gives them...become mascots for the military' (2007). Escorted into green zones and fortified compounds, where reporters cannot function as eyewitnesses, results in a cloud of obscurity settling over the battlefield.

According to one photographer, images of conflict and warfare 'convey a useful moral: It shows the blank horror and reality...here are the dreadful details! Let them aid in preventing such another calamity' (quoted by Narcos, 2014, p.44). In May 2011, the Taliban killed Pakistani police recruits at a paramilitary training centre in Shabqadar, northwest Pakistan. The BBC evening news report explained 'Human body parts could be seen scattered about. There was a lot of blood' (13.05.11), yet not one of the eighty dead was visible in coverage. The raw imagery forever remained obscured, fundamentally obfuscating terror, war and reportage. Conversely, pictures from the Hezbollah media unit during the Israeli incursion in 2006 were 'bloody, clear illustrations of the situation'; pictures of 'mother's sons dying', of 'wounded soldiers so close up we could hear their moans', helped change public opinion (Harb, 2011). In the Western World, such footage — the image

of the dead — is to paraphrase reporter Martin Bell a “postage stamp-sized cameo” (2008, pp.221-231). The most vivid pictures of terrorism, the imagery of the dead, was redacted from the majority of coverage, particularly after 1973. A disparity existed (and remains today, particularly regarding cinema) in the limits allowed for fictional violence and news violence. The horrors of terrorism (and the horror of war) were sanitised, undercutting any news account. A rhetorical account of death does not hold the fullest impact, lacking the actuality of representation.

The camera then is an instrument of evidence, for Roland Barthes, David Levi Strauss and Susan Sontag. All were writing regarding the still picture camera however their comments are relevant to any consideration of the visual. A connection exists between the image and its origin; for Roland Barthes,

“every photograph is somehow co-natural with its referent”.

What the photograph asserts is the overwhelming truth that “the thing has been there”: this was a reality which once existed, though it is “a reality one can no longer touch” (cited by Tagg, 1988, p.1).

According to Tagg however, this connection is somewhat tenuous. He posits photography to have no identity of its own. Rather, it depends entirely on the

institutions and agents which define it and set it to work...its products are meaningful and legible only within the particular currencies they have. it is a flickering across a field of institutional spaces (ibid, page 63).

This is particularly useful to consider in light of imagery of terrorism (and war), with Tagg suggesting an alliance between the nascent state and image. The camera becomes a mimic, and

like the state, the camera is never neutral. The representations it produces are highly coded and the power it wields is never its own. As a means of record, it arrives on the scene vested with a particular authority to arrest, picture and transform daily life, a power to see and record; a power of surveillance that effects a complete reversal of the political axis of representation (ibid, p.64).

The power implied here is then the power of those who both wield and deploy the resultant images and visualisations. In airing footage, of the aftermath of a bomb or the burning of a street, the BBC is seeking to elevate the imagery whilst simultaneously endorsing the images constructed, framed and represented, as evidence or register [of] a truth.

Whilst images and footage then stand as a symbol of the camera's privileged presence, challenging the viewer to replicate the act of observing this "guaranteed" event, Tagg believes photo-journalism only partially holds the power of authority. Susan Sontag would suggest photography (and the moving image) offers itself as an object of manipulation, and Tagg instead believes that the mass media are not categorised as one such ideological apparatus, being unable to provide the necessary binding quality. The mass media, in the reportage of conflict in Northern Ireland, served multiple roles, particularly that of ideological apparatus as extension of government. However, there was an overt failure by many, including the BBC, to even attempt to provide this "binding quality," whether it was through the obfuscation of footage, moving away from a realist aesthetic and towards a series of motifs and symbols that communicated little, or simply through the (re)framing of a visual narrative.

Originally published in 1968, *Understanding a Photograph* saw John Berger similarly argued that images are an (automatic) record of events, and that they have no language of their own, relying instead on that which may be assigned to them (2013). The only relevant decision — particularly appropriate for a news cameraman — is the choice of moment to isolate and record. This is crucial in regards television news, mediated through a number of levels. Before an image can even reach consideration of a censor or the authorities, a mediating agent (the cameraman, often accompanied by a reporter) must make their own decisions, influenced by framing and news values, regarding what to film (what not to film) and precisely how to film it: from what angles, what distance, what direction. It is then subject to further mediation in the editing process, where a sequential clip can become non-linear, ordered to accompany a narrative, an agenda.<sup>47</sup> Every sequence of events, including a complete news broadcast, has been ordered, and intertwined, depending on ‘code, caption and context’ (Griffin, 2002, p38).

Umberto Eco similarly situated a rendezvous between photography to perception, with both coded, and existing in a world of objects, already

constructed as a world of uses, values and meanings...the meaning of the photographic image is built up by an interaction of such schemas or codes which vary greatly in their degree of schematisation. The image is therefore to be seen as a composite of signs, more to be compared with a complex sentence than a single word. Its meanings are multiple, concrete and most importantly constructed. In common too with other language like systems, photographs may be exhaustively analysed as protections of a limited number of rhetorical forms in which a society’s values and beliefs are naturalised (Tagg, 1993, p.187).

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<sup>47</sup> On this occasion, intended in the pejorative sense.



With television news existing as a rhetorical form (which seeks to naturalise society's values and beliefs), a useful analogy here is that suggested by Neil Postman.

As an example, consider television's presentation of the uprising by Chinese students in Tiananmen Square...it was television journalism at its best. But if that were all someone knew about the student uprising, it wouldn't be very much. One would have to know something about who rules China, and where those rulers came from, and by what authority or ideology they claim to rule, and how the students interpreted the meaning of freedom and democracy. These are complex matters that are beyond the scope of simple newscasts (2008, p.x).

This then links the idea of visuals (either photographic or video) as 'constructed as a world of uses, values and meanings' through its relationships (either existing or to be established) with 'schemas or codes' (Tagg, 1988, p187) provided by the institution. Meanings, in regard to the photography of Trevor Paglen, an image in a newspaper, a sequence on a news bulletin, a digital video on YouTube, are both multiple and constructed. A BBC news sequence, analysed with the visuals at the forefront, demands comparison with, to adapt Eco's statement, a complex series of movies as opposed to a single motion picture. Each BBC broadcast news report does not exist alone, instead building on that which preceded it; the institutional frame it occupies connotes authority whilst simultaneously establishing codes for the future.

Of course precisely what is news, is a crucial question. If the definition attached is one of important and interesting events, a subsequent clarification on exactly what these important and interesting events are is

created. Embedded within an understanding of this notion, is an individual's definition of news and therein lies a central aspect: this judgement is made on the basis of what *the* journalist believes important, or perhaps, what the journalist believes their audience thinks is important. Once a story/event is then selected, what details are to be included? The journalist must

choose what about it is worth seeing, is worth neglecting, and is worth remembering or forgetting. This is simply another way of saying that every news story is a reflection of the reporter who tells the story. The reporter's previous assumptions about what is "out there" edit what he or she thinks is there (Postman, 2008, p.14).

It is then fruitful to adjust Postman's original analogy:

Let us suppose that a fourteen-year-old *Catholic* boy hurls a Molotov cocktail at two eighteen-year-old *British* soldiers. The explosion knocks one of the soldiers down and damages his left eye. The other soldier, terrified, fires a shot that kills the *Catholic* instantly. The injured soldier eventually loses his sight in the damaged eye. What details should be included in reporting this event? Is the age of the *Catholic* relevant? Are the ages of the *British* soldiers relevant? Is the injury to the soldier relevant? Was the act of the *Catholic* provoked by the mere presence of the *British* soldiers? Was the act therefore justified? Is the state of mind of the shooter relevant?

The answers to all these questions, as well as to other questions about the event, depend entirely on the point of view of the journalist (ibid, p.15).

The point of view of the journalist, the strictures they operate within as a member of a broadcasting corporation, and an awareness of the "values" and "desires" of said organisation, fundamentally affected the visual representation of domestic terrorism regarding Northern Ireland.

In May 1980, British public attention was fixated on the Iranian Embassy siege in London. An act of international terrorism, the final moments were screened with a short delay by the media (4 minutes by ITV/8 minutes by the

BBC) due to an awareness the terrorists had access to televisions inside the embassy. Such an incident, an almost live presentation of the “dramatic end”, showing black clad special forces of the Special Air Service (SAS) assaulting the embassy in glorious colour, replete with gunshots, screams, and explosions “ripping through the building, a pall of smoke cover[ing] the front”, brought ‘the conflict between terror and counter-terror to the centre of the media’s attention’ (dialogue from BBC One News, 05.05.80; Schlesinger et al., 1983, p.24). The 1981 Irish hunger strike would similarly gain media prominence, returning the Troubles to the forefront of the news agenda with a series of stark visualisations. It is also important to note here the masked man in black, the anonymous state agent deployed in the Iranian Embassy siege, who became the quintessential symbol of counter-terrorism. Identity shrouded for reasons of national security, this “image”, promoted by the state, exists on a similar level to the masked members of the IRA.

### Ten Men

It was over ten years before television began examining the background of the conflict. For many, this would be ten years too late. The intervening period is then dominated by superficial coverage. Instead of endeavouring to educate the audience on the origins, it in essence toed the establishment line, notably in regard to ‘iconic’ events such as Bloody Sunday. By 1981, and the Hunger Strike, the background would be considerable.

Within Britain, the mass media would proclaim the end of the Hunger strikes as a victory for Margaret Thatcher and her hard line policies. However, as Moloney suggests, in Ireland, it was viewed as a significant defeat for the Conservative government; whilst Thatcher did not concede political status, prisoners were granted the trappings (the associated rights in all but name), and the IRA as an organisation gained political legitimacy, increased recruitment and significant support, funds and armaments (Moloney, 2002). This dichotomy then, between general public sentiment and the mass media must be examined.

Journalists within the British press reported events in alliance with the Governmental position; indeed there was considerable exasperation at the global condemnation of Margaret Thatcher's intransigence. At its conclusion, *The Daily Telegraph* would declare the deaths "senseless", *The London Times* "wasted" whilst *The Sun* believed the demands in the first instance were "absurd". Yet whilst Thatcher declared 'I shall never give them political status, never', the Government acceded to every demand: prisoners wore their own clothes within two weeks, prison work was eventually dropped, the men were allowed to associate freely, and they were given educational facilities. 'The strike was hugely influential outside the Maze. Again, the British people did not realise that, because their newspapers did not tell them' (Greenslade, 2011).

On the BBC, the death of Bobby Sands, the first hunger striker, received significant coverage. As the strike progressed, and deaths increased, there

was less coverage; this indicates a belief the news value of each was decreasing. Whilst print journalists reported on the funerals in considerable detail, the media encountered the problem of visual propaganda: members of the IRA conducting ideologically potent performative rituals: full dress uniform (military fatigues and balaclavas), graveside orations and volleys of gunfire.

This was the full pageantry of a republican funeral, both for the community and the cameras: the primary audience (participants and those present) informed a secondary audience receiving images through the mass media. Conceived then as events, to be consumed in both a mediated and mediatised sense, the funerals carried meanings not limited to the immediate primary audience. They were instead simultaneously directed towards the mediated macro-political arena. In a performative sense, especially taken from the standpoint of reading the propaganda war as a mediatised conflict, the Hunger Strikes marked a success for the Provisional movement. Images of dead hunger strikers coffins draped with the Irish Tricolour, the open casket at their wakes, adorned with beret and leather gloves, and volleys of gunfire at the graveside, exist as internal and external shows of defiance captured and reproduced by the global media. Crucially, they also contributed to a period of mass support for the republican struggle from the Catholic community, representing 'a means of rallying the faithful and presenting an image to the world' and thus holding 'a number of social functions and multiple meanings for participants and observers' (Bean, 2007, p.126). The

mise-en-scène of the republican funeral is then important in this instance, connoting the symbolically performative nature of events. Indeed as McLoone notes, the ‘funerals reflected the military nature of their struggle’ (2005, p.211). The resonance of the funeral rites of republican *martyrs* remain powerful symbolic presences within established republican identity, with Bobby Sands particularly central to the modern republican folk memory.

In broadcasting footage from the funerals — so carefully were they staged — the BBC received fierce criticism that it was indulging the propaganda machine of the IRA. A dilemma then exists for the press: how can such a moment be framed and represented? In reporting the salient points, there will inevitably be a contribution towards the propaganda value of the moment; as the pre-eminent story of the period, returning the Troubles to wider prominence, if the Hunger Strikes were to be reported, what took place must be presented, regardless of the ultimate impact.

To quote Greg Philo and Mike Berry, regarding the Israel and Palestine conflict:

Funerals are often linked to the fighting/conflict and the coverage of them frequently included powerful and emotionally charged images. The screen is filled with images of passion and rage but with little opportunity to understand how the situation has come about (2004, p.103).

Whilst BBC television coverage of the Hunger Strikes was extensive, with these “powerful and emotionally charged images”, there was little opportunity (or endeavour) to explain the complex background (i.e. the

blanket protest stretching back to 1976 or the wider socio-political context). Reporting was extensive but descriptive; BBC One News on May 5<sup>th</sup> devoted 16 minutes (of 30) to the Strike/Sands, whilst BBC Two's *Newsnight* allocated 33 (of 50) minutes. Both avoided the analytical, but with the movement of Sands into Westminster, there was a direct engagement and confrontation with the British State (unlike the 74 UWC Strike). At this point, 'however much they disliked it, the Sands affair became an international event which had to be reported to the British public' (Butler, 1995, p.74). As Curtis notes,

the world's press flooded into Belfast. Some 23 nations sent camera crews, and the American TV networks, ABC, CBS, and NBS, sent 16 camera crews. There were at least 400 reporters in the North, and 300 photographers covered his funeral (1998, p.202).

Of import here is BBC meeting minutes expressing concern with the misleading impression a 'combination of *Bobby* Sands and a smiling photograph gave...of a convicted felon'. (ibid, p.204). Whilst Curtis then proclaims this to be representative of 'the anxiety of BBC chiefs to discredit the Hunger Strike', it must instead be considered in the context of the previous decade and the repeated failure of visual representations of IRA members on BBC broadcasts. The use of "Bobby", and the availability of a smiling image, certainly can be interpreted as humanising, but at that point, the sheer symbolic nature of coverage had supplanted such a notion.

In the aftermath of the "incident" at Carrickmore, a modified code of practice was established, forcing journalists to seek explicit approval prior to any

investigation of Northern Ireland related affairs. Such a rule extended existing directives, expanding out from prohibiting contact with terrorist identified groups, to now include all those who may be associated with such organisations. Martin McGuinness for example, in the years leading up to the Hunger Strike, could not be interviewed on either NI or mainland BBC television.

Yet the nature of the Hunger Strikes, existing as a local, national, and international news *event*, forced an engagement with those previously prohibited.

Amongst republican sympathisers and anti-H Bock campaigners appearing onscreen, Sands election agent Danny Morrison and Owen Carron were unambiguously persons who may be associated with the IRA...Through 1981, official broadcast positions were thus overtaken and outmoded by an extraordinarily newsworthy turns of events (Butler, 1995, p.75).

The Hunger Strikes generated a massive amount of media coverage, particularly for the Republican position. Simultaneously there was a political breakthrough, with Bobby Sands being elected to Westminster as MP for the constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone. In entering the legitimate political sphere, there was also an overt movement of the Republican philosophy and strategy to one of violence *and* politics: by ballot and by bullet (see McAllister, 2004). It was a deliberate attempt to counter the growing sophistication of propaganda by the British Army and the Government.



The period then, replete with international coverage, contrasts the conspicuous absence of the previous decade. However, coverage, particularly radio and television was dominated by what was happening, the descriptive style. It was akin to the commentary on a sporting event, with the rare occasional foray into speculation about what *might* happen. Reports on the condition of the hunger strikers were interposed with statements from British and Unionist politicians. Indeed during much of the coverage, there was a repeated stress that the events were part of the IRA propaganda war, and therefore warranted a degree of scepticism. Conversely, the statements of Unionists and the Government itself were presented as straight, with no related corollary. Repeated highlighting of the IRA propaganda machine, and a stress that it was manipulating and managing events, could in turn be recognised as itself an act of the British propaganda machine.

Fintan O'Toole of the Irish Times would identify the strike, in Peter Taylor's *25 Bloody Years*, as a struggle over self-definition (16/08/1994). The Hunger Strikes were calculated as an attempt to impose a definition of Republicanism on the media and in turn the world. It sought to semantically, semiotically, and visually move away from associations with criminality and towards a notion of a freedom fighter.

The death of Sands, as detailed, resulted in phenomenal levels of coverage, and his death was exploited by Sinn Féin. Particularly throughout this period, Sinn Féin learned a vast degree of media control, and an awareness of straightforward propagandistic purposes. There was also a recognition that

the story was so powerful it did not matter how it was presented by most elements of the media. Instead, it functioned on an emotional level, where an orchestrated public show of ritualised funeral proceeds was able to dominate BBC proceedings. The Hunger Strikes brought with them massive funeral set pieces and a high level of street violence. With media attention already focused on the province, such events carried strong visuals that captured and dominated coverage, replacing the staid motifs and symbols that had come to symbolise terror and conflict in the latter half of the decade.

### The Origins

This harnessing of the media can be traced in exploring the origins of the Hunger Strikes. Initially, paramilitary prisoners enjoyed a special status and a number of privileges, including wearing their own clothes as opposed to prison uniforms. A 1975 committee identified such concessions as problematic; in offering a degree of legitimacy to acts, this conceded they were committed for a political cause.

In removing the Special Category Status in 1976, a five year campaign began, with progressive escalation from Blanket to Dirty to Hunger. This final stage sought to restore political status for paramilitary prisoners, focusing on five key demands:

1. The right not to wear a prison uniform;
2. The right not to do prison work;
3. The right of free association with other prisoners, and to organise

educational and recreational pursuits;

4. The right to one visit, one letter and one parcel per week;
5. Full restoration of remission lost through the protest.

The Hunger Strike then, according to one participant quoted in a BBC *Timewatch* production in 1993, was a weapon of raising the political stakes (13/10/93). Whilst seeking to garner media attention, the strike sought to move towards a theoretically unacceptable moral limit. Indeed the initial blanket strike can be identified as a refusal to conform and was initially confined within the prison system. With no strategy to mobilise sympathy or develop the cause outside the prison environs, there could be limited impact; the lack of visuals hindered the cause. Escalation was then a natural progression, with the media strategy a central component. Failure of the prison protest to change Governmental policy or gain public sympathy led directly to this point.

Indeed during the first series of hunger strikes, from October to December 1980, there was no staggered beginning and so seven of the men reached death at the same time. The media were unable to concentrate on each and the impact was diluted; in beginning the second strike at phased intervals, the media were forced to focus on one individual in turn, making each human and transitioning them from imprisoned criminal to human being; there was an overt making visible of the body. There would then also be a related period after each death and funeral where the British government could attempt to

resolve matters. The strike, as a coordinated and calculated media event, was therefore targeted at multiple audiences, initiating decoding on various levels.

### The Media

100,000 people attended the funeral of Sands with the drama played out in front of the world's media. BBC News coverage of the event was juxtaposed with Ian Paisley declaring each vote for Sands 'a vote for the gun, bullet and bomb and a vote against the Protestant population' (07.05.81). During the following month, three more hunger strikers died and after each, there was a wave of associated rioting. News coverage of each death was then dominated by footage of rioting, ferocious noise and flames illuminating the night sky. A petrol bomb is shown in one bulletin striking a policeman and setting him alight. Despite his colleagues quickly extinguishing the flames, the footage is astonishing in its visceral impact, a return to the early uncoordinated and unexpected footage of the Troubles.

BBC News coverage during the Hunger Strikes utilised the existing visuals created within the community: the murals and images of Bobby Sands on street walls. Crowds of people were shown on buses going to the funeral, and the narration specifically mentions moderate middle-class Catholics. A sequence of shots shows the coffin of stickler Patsy O'Hara in a house, the surroundings turned into a 'shrine, to heighten emotion and play on Catholic reverence for the dead' (23.06.81). Paramilitary guards surround the open

coffin but there is no visibility of the body. Rather, a lingering shot of a single guard serves as a mythic replacement of the dead.

The night of Sands' death, during riots, the report opens with a sequence of dustbin lids being beaten (05/05/81). Sharp cuts show the event from different angles and mimic the auditory sensation of a cacophony of noise. The sequence is then intercut with shots of crowds of women saying the rosary, and youths erecting barricades. A close up shows a number of petrol bombs being made. The voiceover narration leads on to the next sequence: "Thrown in their hundreds at the army/police who had moved in to the fringe of the area at first with discretion. Youths are often able to find their target [cut to shot of an armoured vehicle catching fire] and so were the army" [cut to shot of a youngster being carried away]. There is no blood visible, no apparent injury, and no explanation, however the narration states "he was shot in the leg by the army". The framing is of the dominant ideology. The sequence ends with more footage of rioters, deliberately framed in a similar fashion to previous riots (the Falls Road Curfew/Internment Riots), and finally, several army vehicles travelling in procession along the road and out of shot. This final aspect, denotive of the security services but connoting order, concludes the news report. There is a tacit suggestion that order will prevail and authority persevere; the slow, cyclical movement of the vehicles suggest gradual movement toward solution, out of sight of the media and public gaze.

In the four months since the strike began, nineteen police officers were killed. One nightly BBC bulletin featured the widow of one officer making a statement that the strikers had chosen to die whilst her husband had no such choice. Her language echoes that of Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Humphrey Atkins who would remark 'If Mr. Sands persisted in his wish to commit suicide, that was his choice. The Government would not force medical treatment upon him' (Taylor, 1999, p.282). During the same nightly BBC news bulletin, the reporter would conclude the report stating 'Violence to the self is violence. The problem in NI is how to break the cycle of violence' (12.05.81).

The Hunger Strike of 1981, a major component of this cycle, secured steady coverage, and at this point, the media was in a position to place The Troubles into their proper context, explaining to the audience why the British public and military have been involved in such a protracted and seemingly unresolvable conflict for some twenty years. The BBC failed to do so, building a (re)new(ed) visual library of Republican visuals that served to illustrate, but not illuminate, a spectacle.

Northern Ireland again became a lead world news story during this period. As violence decreased during the late 70s, accompanying media interest, and representation declined, settling into a comfortable existence of dominant tropes. With the passage of time, even coverage of the Hunger Strike became dominated by its own self-consuming series of visuals, reaching critical mass where it too failed to generate attention. Padraig O'Malley explains the death

of Mickey Devine, the final hunger striker to die, was ‘a statement of futility and meaningless rather than purpose. Nor did his death excite much interest. Media coverage was cursory’ (O’Malley, 1990, 133). Two further key moments during the decade can be identified as integral to a consideration of representation; the 1982 Hyde Park bombings, and the 1987 attack on Enniskillen.

### Bandstand

When a major incident occurred, the news would “lead” proceedings with a short summary, explaining the “who, what, where and when”. On the early evening BBC One News of 20<sup>th</sup> July 1982, the reporter began with a headline announcing ‘IRA bombers return to London’:

Their target — British soldiers, but civilians die too. At the bandstand in Regent’s Park six people are killed at an army concert and three more die in Knightsbridge as the household cavalry ride past to change the guard, Injuries are terrible. Nearly 50 people are taken to hospital (20.07.82).

Other headlines are quickly presented, a mini-summary that essentially functions as a “contents” for the programme, before returning to the main story. Additional details are provided before an on-the-scene report from both locations. There is an emphasis on the death of both animals and humans, the latter repeatedly referred to as people (and not soldiers).<sup>48</sup>

An aerial shot and map show the location and proximity of the locations, and subsequent images show the aftermath. The road seeps with blood. Cars can

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<sup>48</sup> No civilians did in fact die in the two explosions, despite the reporter’s initial hook.

be seen damaged, with their windows destroyed whilst the warped and heavily distorted charred frame of another vehicle can be seen in one shot, with the camera slowly zooming in; there is an insinuation this was the car concealing the explosive device. The sequence ends with a static shot of a nearby building, zooming in on the shattered window panes. As Schlesinger et al. note, 'the bulletin, therefore established the dreadful effects of the bombing, the loss of both human and animal life, the disruption of everyday life and the destruction of property' (1983, p.43). This final image section points towards the more general movement in media representation of terrorist attacks to an economic and structural focus in the post-Cold War period. During the report a voiceover provides further illumination, focusing on the publicity aspect of the attack on the mainland, 'worth several in Belfast or Londonderry'. This initial report then, ties the incident to the dramatic visuals, underscoring both its symbolic nature and propaganda value but providing little narrative framework, interpretation or analysis.

The late evening broadcast of *Nationwide* (a news magazine), however did seek to explore the "why" aspect. Avoiding a focus on the visuals, it instead utilised guests to consider the reasons and implication of the attack. Space was available for an alternative view to be presented, supporting Schlesinger's thesis that a movement from relatively closed to relatively open spheres opens up a different space for consideration. Whilst both programmes facilitated exploration through a human interest avenue, the news broadcast harnessed attention through its strong visuals. Thus, it lacked



an effective space for articulation of theoretical and academic questioning. Conversely, such opportunities existed on Nationwide, yet the thrust of the interview would remain consistent with an “official premise of irrationality, inhumanity’ (Altheide, 1987, p.170). Overall, the visuals deployed by the BBC, and their methods of framing (literally and metaphorically), continued to implicitly endorse the official Governmental discourse through representation of terrorism as criminal and societally perverse.

### Enniskillen

Throughout the Troubles, several incidents occurred in Enniskillen, a small town in County Fermanagh. The early 80s saw a number of shootings, and near the close of the decade, a Provisional IRA bomb exploded near the town’s war memorial during a Remembrance Sunday ceremony. Eleven people were killed (ten civilians) and a large number injured. The bombing is seen as a turning point, ‘undoubtedly the single incident of terrorism within the province which made for a prolonged period the greatest impression on British public and politicians alike’ (Parkinson, 1998, p.51). Richard English, interviewed by Peter Taylor for the 2007 documentary *The Poppy Day Bomb* would state:

There is no doubt the Enniskillen bomb was a disastrous own goal for the IRA. They were an organisation that presented themselves as being a non-sectarian guerrilla army fighting against a military opponent and here they were killing Protestant civilians at a religious service, it ran contrary to everything they presented themselves as doing. There were clearly supporters in the United States who felt that this was a disastrous

event, in terms of being the wrong kind of operation  
(BBC 11.11.07)

### The Background

Enniskillen can be identified as a garrison town since the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, holding a long history as an army base and home to two regiments. With IRA morale low following a number of arms interceptions, impacting the organisation both militarily and in a propaganda sense, they deigned to commit a terrorist act rooted in the “spectacle”, attacking both the literal military town and the symbolism of the Remembrance Day parade.

The device was relatively small, 30-50lb yet its placement, in St. Michaels Catholic memorial hall, magnified the devastation, with falling masonry and collapsing buildings. As David Hearst would write in *The Guardian*:

For a few seconds it looked as if the town had suddenly been plunged into a thick fog. But the fog was dust settling on a scene of carnage. Children screamed for their parents and the injured screamed for help. Those who were still on their feet began to pull frantically at the rubble to free bodies  
(cited by Parkinson, 1998, p.53).

*Daily Mirror* photographer Michael Martin was also an eyewitness and his visual eye is betrayed in his account:

Smashed wreaths were trampled under foot, old soldiers were helping rescuers in the rubble and children were wandering in a daze looking for friends or parents. They'd all been spruced up in their smartest Scouts, Guides and Brownies uniforms. Now they were covered with dust and blood. The dust coated everything like shroud and through it all the cries of the wounded drifted like some terrible nightmare (ibid).

The bombing garnered such attention due to a recording of the immediate aftermath, filmed on VHS by a local shopkeeper and revealing powerful images of confusion and chaos. This ‘catastrophic event, had a profound effect, particularly on external audiences whose experience of such an event would have been minimal’ (ibid).

A curious combination of factors combined to elevate the impact of the incident and ensure its longevity. During BBC news, it received the contextual analysis (the arms interception) commonly absent from the closed news bulletin. This provided some depth, including the signing of the recent Anglo-Irish agreement. The BBC One evening news on 8<sup>th</sup> November was devoted entirely to the bombing, divided into five sections, or mini-reports, as detailed by Alan Parkinson: the scene in the town as darkness fell on the aftermath, the amateur video recording, the political response, a memorial service in the town, and the security background to the attack (1998). The second of these segments will be the focus of the subsequent sustained analysis.

### The Media

The news bulletin opens immediately on the amateur video footage, with presenter Nicholas Witchell stating in voiceover

A remembrance day atrocity in NI, a bomb has killed eleven, and injured more than sixty. It was planted a few yards from the war memorial in Enniskillen. It went off without warning, as the crowds were gathering.

The video continues to play throughout, with the audio slightly muted but still audible; the footage has been edited somewhat, with cuts evident. A still image of Buckingham Palace is shown whilst a comment of the Queen is relayed and then Margaret Thatcher gives a piece to camera condemning the attack.

Human interest is stressed by Witchell in the BBC studio, particularly regarding the number of children and married couples involved. The BBC pinpointed the military significance of the town early in their coverage, highlighting its role in British military history. The first report from an on-the-scene reporter is then played, with the amateur video footage immediately repeated. Chaos, rubble and ruin are the dominant images, with the camera constantly moving, almost unsure where to look. Here is the form of evidence, as detailed previously, with the camera functioning as both witness and recorder.

As the time of the explosion is detailed, the visuals changes to the very start of the footage recorded by the shopkeeper. People can be seen at the far end of the street confused but there is no sign of panic. The dust and smoke, as identified by Hearst and Martin, can be sign in the extreme distance. As the cameraman progresses towards the scene of the blast, it pans left and right, scanning across the injured sitting and standing on the pavement edge. Voice-over narration again seeks to underscore the human interest angle, explaining 'they were pensioners, woman and children, the respectful onlookers'. The camera reaches the blast site, strewn with rubble and debris.

A number of individuals, including soldiers with torn clothing, can be seen digging by hand through the ruins. The voiceover details, the air was filled 'flying rubble, which killed most of those who were buried'. At this exact moment, the camera has panned from the building, to an injured female being tended to at the side of the road, and back around, looking directly down at the street. A single body can be seen, lying face down, the upper half concealed by a tarnished jacket. The footage has been edited here (by the BBC) and it cuts to a shot of the destroyed buildings roof, an amorphous mass of gnarled timber. The voiceover fades out, and the on-scene sound is raised slightly; a number of voices can be heard shouting calmly, organising a means of removing the rubble. As the camera pans back and forth a number of times over the main blast site, several individuals can be seen approaching from out of frame and assisting with a search for survivors.

Two further edits have been made, the first moving the footage on to an ambulance departing, and the second showing a civilian being carried away by a number of others. As the camera follows, a pensioner, with long red wool coat and black leather gloves, reaches out a hand whilst simultaneously being supported by an elderly male.

The voiceover fades out one last time, with the video audio again increasing in volume. In this instance, as the video cuts back to a shot of the ruined school, a police officer can be seen to the left of the frame holding an intact poppy wreath, whilst the sound of piercing screams and crying can be heard. The final words of the reporter, explaining the bomb was hidden in a place

'no-one thought to look' is represented visually by one final cut showing a juxtaposition of the War Memorial soldier sculpture and the destroyed Catholic memorial hall in the background.

To further endorse the power of these visuals, and at the same time confirm the IRA were aware of their propaganda value to the dominant hegemony, it should be noted that in the immediate aftermath, no IRA representative was prepared to provide a response or attempted justification. The images denoted terrorism in its basest form; little connotations existed beyond sheer horror. In this moment, the images were, to adapt Margaret Thatcher's proclamation, the carbon monoxide of publicity. The media coverage of Enniskillen, particularly the amateur video presenting a vivid, objective, first-hand representation of the aftermath, carried a particularly strong resonance. As Miller notes, 'coverage of this was an important element in allowing British people to identify with the experiences of victims of violence'; consequently 'In 1987 support for British withdrawal dropped from 61% in January of that year to 40% by November. Enniskillen appears to have had a marked impact' (1994, p.279). Initial outbreaks of violence were unexpected and the BBC were unsure of how to visualise them, leading to an initial exuberance of images and representation of reality; similarly, the bombing in Enniskillen was so shocking, so removed from events which preceded it, that the BBC again lacked an understanding of how it should be reported. Using only the setting of a live on the scene report, they allowed the amateur video — grainy and unsure where to look next — to speak for itself. In so doing, it

stands as one of the few moments during the Troubles where the thesaurus of terrorism, so carefully cultivated by the institution, was unable to signify an event.

### Ballygawley

The importance of visuals to a news story can again be highlighted by the Ballygawley bus bombing in 1988, less than a year after the Enniskillen attack. Just after midnight on the 20<sup>th</sup> August, an unmarked 52-seat bus was destroyed by a roadside bomb whilst transporting 36 Light Infantry troops from RAF Aldergrove to a military base near Omagh. The bomb contained 200 pounds of semtex, catapulting the bus thirty metres and leaving a crater six feet deep. Eight soldiers were killed and a further 28 wounded. In the immediate aftermath, and with no images available in the dark night for the morning bulletins, pieces to camera were recorded by the on-scene journalists. Two local farmers, 'both literally shaking...gave moving accounts of their attempts to help the survivors, but we still had no pictures to match the horror of the accounts we were hearing' (Devenport, 2000, p.50). Ken Maginnis, Ulster Unionist MP and representative of the district would later arrive and according to BBC journalist Mark Devenport,

he'd been on the phone to the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, telling her what had happened and he said she wanted the world to see and hear it too. He lifted the [police] tape and marched us through...We drew close enough to see the wreckage of the bus thrown across the road and the debris still strewn all around...we had gathered enough pictures to tell the story' (ibid).

Alan Rainey, the first of the two farmers to arrive would describe the scene on the morning BBC bulletin and in daily newspapers: 'I heard screams of agony...the road was littered with the dead and the dying, they were scattered and sprayed across the road, behind hedges; and one poor soul I found wrapped around a telephone pole' (Lohr, 1988).<sup>49</sup> Macginnis would quickly and vocally endorse selective internment as a response (targeted against individuals and not communities (as in 1971)), whilst the BBC evening news bulletin the following day would detail alternative possible measures:

The government is thinking of other options: copying the anti-drugs legislation in the United States to seize terrorists lifeblood: money; they might change the law on a suspects right to silence in terrorist cases, and there could be efforts to make it difficult for Sinn Féin to stand at elections by introducing an anti-violence declaration for all candidates (22.08.88).<sup>50</sup>

The 1980's would see the conflict descend into a propaganda war, largely due to the Hunger Strike in Maze Prison. In published material, the Northern Ireland Office went to great lengths to depict the Hunger Strikers as mere criminals; the Provisional IRA similarly sought to depict each as a freedom-fighter martyr.<sup>51</sup> They tried to utilise the children of hunger strikers as a image weapon, yet this is itself an appropriation of the media's use of a human interest angle as an avenue of interpretation. Further, they are directly mimicking the tactic of the NIO, who, in the 1972 document *The Terror and the Tears*, published by the Unionist government (in the wake of

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<sup>49</sup> Rainey would be flown to London the following day to meet Margaret Thatcher.

<sup>50</sup> All were introduced over the coming months.

<sup>51</sup> The act of a Hunger Strike also has significant symbolism within a Celtic perspective; (see Fields, 2004)



Bloody Sunday), would present a series of photographs of victims of the IRA, notably children, on the front page. According to one information officer,

we thought that the IRA were being portrayed as freedom fighters — glamour boys in trench coats. We hope this dossier will show them to be what they really are — thugs with blood dripping from their hands  
(Miller, 1996, p.228).<sup>52</sup>

Whilst there was sustained support of an official perspective the BBC would typically avoid overtly stylistic and aesthetic choices, moving it away from a news focus and towards an emotional interpretation. In 1989, in the aftermath of a Royal Marine bombing, the BBC One main evening news concluded with visuals of slow motion footage showing a young boy laying a wreath in memory of the dead. Carefully edited, overlaid audio features the Royal Marine's brass band playing (23.08.89). Television news then directly (or indirectly in this case) highlighted the perpetual violence; it did not create it but it did highlight it, hinting at the symbiotic relationship so popularly theorised. Instead, due to the series of short-comings exposed at the conclusion of the decade, it was the only means of representation available. The Ballygawley bombing can be interpreted as a fragment of twelve months that represent the apogee of violence and would ultimately contribute to imposition of the broadcasting ban, 'one of the most embarrassing attempts to censor coverage of the most important domestic political story of post-war years' (Williams, 1994).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Miller notes that whilst some 120,000 were distributed, and a further 130,000 printed, they were viewed with "distaste" by the British government. General distribution was ceased the day direct rule was introduced (1994).

<sup>53</sup> See chapter six for a discussion of the broadcasting ban

# Chapter Six: Ceasefire

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Terrorist violence is merely the springboard for real terrorism,  
which is communicated terrorism.

José Desantes Guanter,  
(quoted by Schlesinger et al. 1983, p. 12).

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## Post Cold-War War

The moment of euphoria at the end of the Cold War generated an illusion of harmony, which was soon revealed to be exactly that. The world became different in the early 1990s, but not necessarily more peaceful.  
(Huntington , 1996)

For Zaki Laïdi, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the revolutions of 1989 and the end of the Cold War ‘saw an empire collapse...in no time at all and with a limited cost — in historical terms — in human lives’ (1998, p.3). The Gulf Conflict signalled the end of this brief ‘moment of euphoria’ (Coker, 2001, p.47). Ironically designated the “perfect” war by Douglas Kellner, it exposed a collapse of global narratives where traditional methods and conduct of warfare did not apply (1992, p. 386). It was not a conflict between adversaries and did not satisfy the dialectical model of Clausewitzian war; Noam Chomsky highlights, ‘as I understand the concept “war”, it involves two sides in combat, say, shooting at each other. That did not happen in the Gulf’ (cited by Stahl, 2010, p.32). With no declaration of war, the US-led invasion of Iraq in 1991 was implemented by UN mandate and the military/media synthesis launched “modern war”, presented not as ‘blood and guts spilled in living colour on the living room rug’, but through a ‘radically distanced, technologically controlled, eminently “cool” postmodern optic’ (Cummings, 1994, p.103).

Marshall McLuhan posited that Vietnam saw America ‘in the midst of our first television war, the television environment [is] total...it has altered every phase of the America vision and identity’, however it was not until the live

coverage of the Gulf, that there was a true shift in the visualised, and actual, nature of warfare (2001, p.134). Citizen access to the event was mediated with real-time coverage transforming warfare to *spectacle*. Jean Baudrillard believed the primary cause of this to be the deluge of images provided by the mass media, a virtual, sanitised, pure media event (1995). In addition, the new means and manner of conducting military operations saw the utilisation of technologies granting force dominance, superiority and death from a distance. In *Strategy of Deception*, Paul Virilio points to the government-military-media synthesis and the reduction of modern warfare to ‘flickering images on a screen’ (2007). The Gulf conflict could not therefore be understood as war in any sense of the traditional. What occurred was rather an unreal experience, a deadly video game that, despite a surfeit of imagery, was carefully conducted, composed, represented and presented. ‘Video footage of the “real war” merged seamlessly with computer-generated simulations, both appearing as real, unreal, or “hyper-real” as the other’ Carruthers, 2000, p.133). Allied with the military, and the official/governmental dominant discourse — this notion of Schlesinger, Murdock and Elliot’s “official perspective” — the media were promoting ‘promotes... bloodless, humanitarian, hygienic wars’, utilising identical technology to that of the defence industry and mediating vision on a techno-cultural level (Der Derian, 2009, p.xxxi).

The revolution of military affairs (crucial to Paul Virilio’s work), alongside what James Der Derian terms the “military-industrial-media-entertainment

network” (MIME-net), has affected not only how war is conducted, but its presentation to the third core element of Clausewitz’s “remarkable trinity”: the populous. Chad Harris (2006) highlights the media’s capacity to commingle ‘the mundane and the monstrously violent’ where a ‘cascading series of translations’ from ‘images into data, data and images into targets, targets turned back into data, and thus back again to images’ serves as an obstruction to violence, effectively obfuscating it from public view (2006, p. 102). What can then be termed the “pixilation of war” involves the replacement of projectiles and missiles with pictures and a digital soldier. As the Western world entered this post-Cold War period, a new form of warfare developed. This was ‘one sided [war]...without an enemy, without resistance...without Western casualties’ (Merrin, 1994, p.451).

It was instead a spectacle created a priori by the military-media synthesis: pre-planned, pre-determined and pre-visualised. The media promoted the war, the war in turn promoted the media. Both Baudrillard and Virilio hold modern warfare to be unimaginable without the visual, caused and strengthened by the mass media. As early as 1984 Virilio wrote that ‘a war of pictures and sounds is replacing the war of objects’ (1989, p.4). Seven years later he would ask ‘how can we fail to recognise, after a month of standoff, that the true intervention force in the Gulf is television?’ (2002, p.20). Extraordinary numbers of journalists and depths of technology were deployed during the media sustained (and sustaining) event, occurring (and



won) on the television screen. With this, the Gulf War became Virilio's global real-time international war,

thanks to CNN and The Pentagon. This is a new form of war,  
and all future wars...will be live wars  
(quoted by Wilson, 1994).

### Interventionism and the Humanitarian Spectacle

The Gulf Conflict initiated this 'drug for the eyes' and military action without coverage (to this day) cannot hold any form of meaning (Virilio, 2002, p.92). A disproportionate focus on the spectacle dominates the "newsworthy" nature of an event. As Thomas Keenan notes for example, 'we cannot talk about what happened in Bosnia or Somalia or Rwanda without talking about the media...

Contemporary military strategy now counts on the presence of the cameras, the light of the flash and the green glow of the night-scope, as a fundamental component of armed operations (no date).

The deployment of US Marines to Somalia was met by the international media, at the invitation of the Pentagon, who 'made little effort to disguise the fact that the dawn landing had been set up' (Hammond, 2007, p.39). Visualisations of the humanitarian crisis initially provided catalyst for intervention, before 'military debacle' ultimately forced withdrawal. As Mark Bowden suggests:

On Oct. 4, 1993, mobs of outraged Somalis dragged the bodies of American soldiers through the streets of Mogadishu, mutilating and dismembering them...The crowd, no matter how enraged, welcomes the camera — Paul Watson, a white Canadian journalist, moved unharmed with his camera

through the angry mobs in Mogadishu on Oct. 4, 1993. The idea is to spread the image. Cameras guarantee the insult will be heard, seen and felt. The insult and fear are spread across continents (2004).

The Clinton Administration subsequently became increasingly reluctant to intervene militarily in conflicts, particularly in “failed states” where they had little control over the resultant visualisations. Failure to intervene in Rwanda the following year can in part be attributed to the visuals of Somalia. Clinton also refused to deploy ground troops in Bosnia (1995) and Kosovo (1999). The latter conflict is the first in history conducted solely from the air and it has been analysed on several levels. For Virilio it was orbital, waged solely with aerial power; Michael Ignatieff is in agreement, declaring it a ‘virtual war’, where the visual presentation meant it ‘looked and sounded like a war’ yet people were ‘mobilised, not as combatants, but as spectators’ (2001, p.3).

Pilots therefore occupied a similar space to the television viewer, with a particular level of perception, powerless to intervene and reduced to the role of spectator. The risk-averse manner of virtual warfare, and the virtual consent provided by those watching, could not save human life and uphold human rights in a supposed humanitarian war. Throughout the 78-day aerial campaign, no coalition personnel were killed; here Ignatieff states his conclusion that the war must therefore have been virtual: ‘war without death...is war that ceases to be fully real to us: virtual war’ (ibid, p.5). Removing death from visual presentations — this fascination with a supposed “clean” war — seeped into reality, where any possibility was isolated and eliminated. Footage similar to that of the Gulf War dominated proceedings:

...everyone remembers the television images of bombs going down the ventilation shafts of buildings and long-range cruise missiles turning street corners on the way to their targets (BBC News Online, 20.02.1998).

Whilst the army 'watches the battle from the barracks', complicit television viewers suffered from inertia, 'the imprisoned and impotent state of... technological monks' (Armitage, 2001, p.191). The excess of information and a desire for real-time footage and instant updates made critical distance and analysis impossible. The media lacked the space or time to conceptualise and comprehend world events.

Amidst this new form of conflict then, time and space are distorted, in both a military and mediatised sense. Satellite technologies would allow immediate awareness of violence and terror attacks across the globe, Baudrillard's "instantaneous global diffusion", an effect that, by the close of the decade, would reach hyper-real proportions with the advent of the internet.

The image consumes the event, that is, it absorbs the latter and gives it back as consumer goods. Certainly the image gives to the event an unprecedented impact, but as an image-event (Baudrillard, 2001).

Perceptions of terrorism (and increasingly modern warfare) were/are shaped by television.<sup>54</sup> Perception is vital, to the public, to politicians, and to participants. 'It is through media', as Hoskins and O'Loughlin note, 'that perceptions are created, sustained or challenged' (2010b, p.5). They draw here on Virilio's notion of "appropriating" the immateriality of perceptual fields', a replacement for territorial or material gains. What increasingly

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<sup>54</sup> And increasingly the online environment.

mattered, as exhibited in the Gulf War and during the propaganda battles in Northern Ireland, was the battle for ‘symbols and representations’ (ibid).

For Mary Kaldor, ‘We are more aware than ever before of violence taking place in different parts of the world and often know more about what is happening far away than is taking place in our immediate vicinity’ (2006, p.vii). This violence, on a political level, is now omnipresent, and, according to Kaldor, directed at civilians. Yet she avoids recognising precisely how (and why) it is directed in this manner. ‘Terrorism has to be understood as one variant of new wars, the logical outcome of the tactics developed in contemporary conflicts’ (ibid, p.ix). The tactics of note here are the digital and media technologies that have subsumed representation of a terrorist event, ‘the battle for how things are seen and perceived’ (Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2010b, p.5). Attacks are directed at civilians at the level of a victim, but more importantly, at the level of an audience, where the outcome is “consumer goods”.<sup>55</sup> It is with the image — as repeatedly stressed — that an event gains the Baudrillardian “unprecedented impact”.

Kaldor uses the term “new war” to as an overall descriptor, foregrounding identity politics and centring around organised violence, whilst seeking to move away from an overemphasis on technology and the media. Each word can be broken down further; new to simply identify these terrorist acts and

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<sup>55</sup> Hoskins and O’Loughlin also highlight a third audience, that of the wider terrorist/military group. This is particularly apparent and highlighted in analysis of the Enniskillen bomb (chapter five), conducted partly as a symbol for IRA morale in the aftermath of high profile arms interceptions (in turn a symbolic victory for the security services). Similarly, the internal logic of the RIRA splinter group bombing of Omagh (1998) can be analysed as directed against a town with a Sinn Féin mayor and traditionally Provisional in support.

warfare as different from previous perceptions, and war to signify the political nature of such violence, where there is an overt blurring of boundaries, with crime, terrorism and warfare seeping together.<sup>56</sup>

By 1999 and Operation Noble Anvil in Yugoslavia, the world had descended into a form of warfare that was no longer war. 'War as a phenomenon disappears from the eyes of the world' (Virilio, 1989, p.66). It would be replaced by a global terror that was no longer domestic in nature and no longer directed towards a domestic audience. A series of bombings on mainland Britain: Warrington and Bishopsgate (1993), London Docklands and Manchester (1996) would mark a resurgence in the IRA terror campaign, a movement towards an economic campaign with both symbolic and deleterious effects. Combined with

emergence of the Hume-Adams process and the revelation of government contacts with the Republican movement, media reporting entered a new phase...there was a real sense in which the story changed. Northern Ireland became an attractive news story once again (Miller, 1994b, p.283).

### Malaise

Chris Dunkley, television critic for the Financial Times, would suggest that by the late 70's, 'viewers have watched as television has contained its Irish coverage more and more tightly within a catalogue of bomb blasts, casualty

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<sup>56</sup> The three have effectively merged in 2014 with the rise of the Islamic State (IS, also referred to as ISIL and ISIS) as a military force in the Middle East and Libya. IS earns significant revenue from oil operations, kidnaps and executes Western journalists and aid workers, and is in open military conflict with Kurdish militia in and around the city of Kobani. The group has harnessed social/new media to distribute its (graphic) propaganda and circumvent traditional media outlets. Cockburn (2015) details the background and rise of the organisation.

figures, and laundry lists of sectarian murders' (1979, p.8). With notable exceptions, including the violence accompanying the initial Civil Rights marches (so unexpected it can be situated as an anomaly) and the Enniskillen bombing (unique due to the amateur video aftermath) — instances of concerted violence that attracted significant representation outside the system of iconography established — very few graphic images of violence have been broadcast. Invariably, coverage has trended towards a litany of what can be termed the *event spectacle*: the pageantry of a “military” funeral, tropes of the troops, marching bands, and generic shots of destruction, (initially) burning houses and progressing to more passive shots of ruined buildings and destroyed cars (where there is no “action” occurring in the frame). Such images are visually arresting (in an aesthetic sense) whilst being devoid of the human reality of the conflict and terrorism.

This became the visual shorthand for the Troubles. What was shown instead became ‘a very skewed and unintelligible picture of the conflict’ (Heskin, 1986, p.97). This can also be read as sitting within Maudling’s notion of “an acceptable level of violence”. Since 1969 however, 3568 people have been killed due to the conflict, including 1879 civilians and 1117 British security (including 502 soldiers). A further 47541 have been injured.<sup>57</sup> How was each death represented? How is it remembered? For Susan Sontag, ‘Remembering is an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself...Memory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead. Heartlessness and amnesia go

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<sup>57</sup> All figures are taken from the Sutton Index of Deaths, a digital archive that is part of CAIN.

together' (Sontag, 2003. p.73). Such amnesia was prevalent as the years passed and each death became relegated to a small footnote on the printed page, or a brief mention in the broadcast news. By removing the human cost, the public was unable to comprehend events, visualise the dead and seek a form of resolution. Just as during the Hunger Strike period, images were sanitised with justification on grounds of taste and decency; a fact that continues today with broadcasters announcing they are ever 'mindful of the sensibilities of our audience'. Lester Crystal, executive producer of *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer* would use a similar argument in relation to the Iraq Conflict in 2004 saying 'for taste purposes, you don't show people in agony on the air. You don't show a lot of dead bodies' (cited by Amy Goodman, 2004, p.199).<sup>58</sup> A visual discourse of the full human consequence of terrorism in Northern Ireland was similarly absent, with reality obfuscated.

Indeed coverage of military personnel was frequently restricted to that of the noble warrior, Mary Holland's brave soldiers. Footage would show celebratory montages of heroic soldiers whereas the dead remained perpetually absent. Similarities are often highlighted between Ireland and Vietnam; ever present in the Government's mind were the

assertions that the war was going well were undercut by the nightly pictures of bloodied soldiers on stretchers being evacuated by helicopters, other scenes of carnage and reports from the battlefield (Liebovich, 2000).

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<sup>58</sup> However it must be noted that a dichotomy exists. The US Government in particular utilise the body as a weapon, publishing photographs of those killed under the auspices of the Global War on Terror, utilising such images as this notion of "evidence". The mutilated visages of Uday and Qusay Hussein for example were released, along with images of their reconstructed cosmetically repaired faces a day later.

David Carr sought to stress in *The New York Times*,

If the government chooses to over-manage the wages of war in Iraq, there is a real danger that this new generation of veterans, whose ranks grow every day, could come home to a place where their fellow Americans have little idea what they have gone through (2007).

Whilst the American press therefore covered the 4,000th combat death, it meant little, a theoretical number of the haunting dead.<sup>59</sup> Sontag, echoing Barthes, suggested a 'photograph may be both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence', representative of the return of the dead (2003, p.12). Such a notion was recognised as early as 1862. In an article regarding the Civil War images of Matthew Brady, *The New York Times* wrote:

We see the list [of the dead] in the morning paper at breakfast, but dismiss its recollection with the coffee. There is a confused mass of names, but they are all strangers; we forget the horrible significance that dwells amid the jumble of type. Mr. Brady has done something to bring home the terrible reality and earnestness of war. If he has not brought bodies and laid them in our dooryards and along the streets, he has done something very like it (cited by LARB, 2013).

As Neil Postman notes,

the whole problem with news on television comes down to this: all the words uttered in an hour of news coverage could be printed on one page of a newspaper. And the world cannot be understood in one page. Of course, there is a compensation: television offers pictures and the pictures move. Moving pictures are a kind of language in themselves (2008, pp.106-107)

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<sup>59</sup> According to photographer Zorah Miller 'During the entire Iraq war, only five images have been published showing dead US service members...With over 4,000 US service members dead, and countless Iraqi civilians, it is shocking how little of this reality has been presented to the public' (New York Times, 2008).



## The Media

The Troubles then exists as the first instance of a conflict where the British public received television coverage, this moving pictures (of violence and terrorism) affecting and involving British troops on home territory. Yet this notion of “the terrible reality” was absent from an overwhelming majority of coverage. An analogy with Vietnam, raised on numerous occasions by journalists and politicians, is also not quite ideal. The conflict occurred on British soil, and, to some extent, was a civil war. The problems this created resulted in confusion for the public (and media) as to the nature of coverage. It was the first time that the British Army was subjected to reporting of its actions. The implication here is that the public were not suited to the idea of the *British* army being held up to a microscope. Despite there being limited questioning of their conduct, increased attention, in the eyes of the Government, raised the possibility of judgment. There was now a need for an army propaganda office.

The issue then complicating factors was this divided community. Whilst self-imposed censorship, and later the Broadcasting Ban, would limit such voices, there was a constant underlying question: how much airtime should be given to terrorists and their sympathisers. The Catholic third of the Northern Irish populous, were unable to have a voice heard. ‘They are still entitled to be heard, and anyway, it is presumably in the national interest that the views of the IRA be known’ (Winston, 1979). As Winston stressed,

the BBC has to perform an unenviable balancing act, such as no newspapers has to perform...between...the men who are making the news — the gunmen, terrorists, demonstrators, stone throwers, objectors and pamphleteers — and the social pressures upon it to support law and order (ibid).

Repeatedly the images deployed, tropes of the troops, would give an impression of favourability to the army; footage would regularly present mobs hurling stones at soldiers, the latter crouching behind shields whilst holding automatic weapons yet restrained from engaging. The army propaganda office, finely practiced and honed in the art of propaganda, would quickly offer spokespeople to answer question and question allegations. Over two decades, they became media literate and adroit at publicity.

The reportage of violence changed considerably from the early period of Civil Rights and Burntollert Bridge. At that point, the violence was open, emotive and easily interpreted by an uninvolved and passive observer. What was a civil rights issue, arising during a similar period worldwide, however evolved into a hidden form, unexpected and invariably unexplainable (and indeed unexplained in/by the media). Commitment became confusion as an acceptance to violence evolved.

### Elephant

It is of worth here, highlighting one particular BBC dramatised production that sought to expose this acceptance. 1989's *Elephant*, directed by Alan Clarke and produced by Danny Boyle, 'drew an unprecedented number of

complaints from across Britain and Northern Ireland’ (McLoone, 2009, p. 5).<sup>60</sup> A short forty minute avant-garde/experimental piece, the film re-enacts eighteen murders, presented without context, narrative, structure, plot or motivation. The title, according to the BBC, is a reference to Northern Ireland and ‘that it is as difficult to ignore the Northern Ireland Troubles as it is to ignore the presence of an elephant in your own sitting-room’ (McLoone, 1996, p.75). However upon examination, the film in fact suggests the opposite: the elephant has been present for so long, and an explanation for its presence continually withheld – media failure to provide an analytic function – then it no longer excites nor attracts attention.

This can therefore be directly read as a commentary on news coverage, and its reportage of violence rendered into a nightly catalogue of aimless, unmotivated and unexplained atrocities. Essentially, the catalogue of violence, removed from any “why” framework, ‘becomes an unpleasant and totally misunderstood phenomenon that people accept as part of the mental, and social, landscape’ (McLoone, 2009, p.6). It reveals no prospect of resolution where representation is reduced to tropes and symbols no longer “extraordinary” and only the spectacle dominates.

Indeed there is a direct engagement with the nature of news media coverage, with *Elephant* taking its criticism one stage further: the who, what, where and when – criteria that quickly became the foundational (and only) basis of

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<sup>60</sup> *Elephant* served as direct inspiration for the 2004 Gus Vant Sant film of the same name (and minimalist aesthetic style) dealing with a school shooting similar to the Columbine massacre.

news bulletins — are entirely absent. Long takes, wide shots, minimal editing and a constantly moving camera are in contrast to the framing and editing techniques of news broadcasting, where each report attempts to present a neat package of information, rhetoric and representation. *Elephant* is observational yet does not function as an act of witnessing. Rather it presents a commentary, with each murder revealing nothing about the victim nor the attacker (beyond that which can be inferred). There is a foregrounding of the victim and the dead body, again in contrast to the news media. The camera remains stationary after each murder, lingering for several beats in a static shot, and forcing an engagement with the event witnessed and the human reality. The body is positioned in the centre of the frame, literally placing it at the heart of the camera's gaze. The drama does however highlight two crucial aspects utilised by the media. The first is the human interest angle, where identification of the murderer and the victim is unclear until the pivotal moment, a reminder that terrorists do not wear a hideous mask or disguise and that anyone can become a victim. Second, an act of terror can strike anywhere, with no delineated battlefield and no specific killing grounds. The executions happen in a variety of naturalistic, real world locations and situations: on a football field, in a swimming pool, on a street, or in a house.

Clarke's contemporary David Leland encapsulates the central thesis of the film:

I remember lying in bed, watching it, thinking, "Stop, Alan, you can't keep doing this." And the cumulative effect is that you say, "It's got to stop. The

killing has got to stop.” Instinctively, without an intellectual process, it becomes a gut reaction (cited by Gallagher, 2010).

Within Ireland then, the conflict which arose manifested itself in a violent form. With television quickly becoming the central medium for reporting Northern Ireland, and for the reporting of terrorism itself, there was a need to address the killings and seek an alternative. Pictures are the pre-eminent medium for conveying violence and death, far surpassing the written word, yet there was no intellectual process nor gut reaction possible.

### Bombings

Paul Virilio, in identifying the post-Cold War period as an age of imbalance, sets forth the 1993 attack on the World Trade Centre as illustrative of a “mutation of terrorism”. This evolution centred around the destruction of a strategic symbolic target, an ‘attempt to devastate the major cities of the world’ (Virilio, 2000b, p.19). What was now important was the sheer devastation wrought, where the resultant representation would indicate the impact and extent across a cosmopolitan environment. This notion of large scale destruction, with emphasis on levelling buildings, smashing windows and industrious ruination, also served a dual function of obfuscating any human casualties, an acknowledgement of the military-media synthesis of a “bloodless” aesthetic.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Following the attack on the World Trade Centre in 1993, President Bill Clinton effectively “smothered things” in the manner of Marshall McLuhan’s advice to prevent a catastrophe; he prevented the media dwelling on the event. It was the absence of a visible spectacle that allowed an act of forgetting; since no defining image existed there was no spectacle, therefore no event.

The truck bomb detonated beneath the North Tower was 1336 pounds (606 kg); in Britain, a series of bombings on either side of the 1994 ceasefire can be identified as continuing this trend of terrorism deployment.<sup>62</sup> On 24<sup>th</sup> April 1993 a truck bomb of 2200 pounds (1000 kg) exploded in Bishopsgate, a major thoroughfare in the financial district of London. A series of telephone warnings with a recognised IRA codeword were made. The emphasis is clear: “[there’s] a massive bomb... clear a wide area”.

Three years later, the seventeen month ceasefire ended with the Dockland’s bombing, a 1100 pound (500 kg) device in London’s secondary financial district. This was followed four months later by the bombing of Manchester’s main city centre Corporation Street, on 15<sup>th</sup> June. The 3300 pound (1,500 kg) detonation targeted the city’s infrastructure and a major shopping centre. The Enniskillen bomb, as noted, was *just* 40-pounds (18 kg).

### Canary Wharf

In the immediate aftermath of the explosion, reporter Peter Sissons would present a breaking news report on BBC One (09.02.1996). Entirely descriptive, the broadcast featured no on scene visuals, merely presenting a basic geographic indicator of the affected area. Information from a fire brigade commander is relayed, with the numbers of engines and firefighters on the scene emphasising the scale of the event. It is described as “a huge explosion in the Docklands area”, and with a statement of the IRA regarding

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<sup>62</sup> For analysis of the role of the media in the peace process, particularly the presentation and interpretation of political change, see Spencer (2008).

the status of the ceasefire detailed (quoting the Irish broadcaster RTE), there is a clear link created.

A short time later, the main evening news aired as scheduled, in an extended edition. It opens with the on screen caption “17 month ceasefire over”. The statement from the IRA, with an emphasis it has not been verified, is detailed and a short sequence featuring a John Major statement and a Tony Blair quote is played. The IRA statement is then repeated by Peter Sissons as visuals from the scene begin to be displayed. This leads in to a report by an on the scene journalist, with their language detailing casualty information, security measures being introduced across the country and providing oral descriptions of eye-witnesses.

The visuals featured are dominated, throughout the entire on scene report, by emergency service vehicles with flashing lights illuminating the night sky. Upon inspection, these are primarily fire engines and not ambulances. For the active viewer, particularly one cognisant of the blast timing (19.01) an understanding is then possible regarding the (literal) impact. As the damage is detailed, a sequence of shots show the affected buildings. Street lights provide ambient lighting meaning visuals are strangely subdued, with the full impact therefore unclear.

The extended nature of the broadcast allows a form of analysis. This occurs due to the twin events of the bombing and the ceasefire, allowing a narrative to be created. A second report, from reporter Denis Murray in Northern

Ireland, then features interviews with politicians, analysis of the language of the IRA statement and interviews with Belfast citizens. What is essentially a brief historical overview of the previous period utilises iconography of British troops to illustrate the passage of progress and time. Visual motifs of soldiers on patrol in streets, beginning with armoured vehicles and followed by a sequence of foot patrol is repeated in a familiar loop; central framed (in both senses here) is the soldiers uniform. Here, a movement from hard hats and body armour, to berets and fatigues is evident and connotations are clear.

The main evening news on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> of February (weekends featuring reduced and irregular bulletins) centres on updated coverage of the bombing. Opening with coverage of a John Major statement to the House of Commons, proclaiming there will be ‘no concessions to the bombers’, the report then focuses on daytime visuals of the bomb site. Beginning with a close up pan of one building facade, slowly progressing across a sea of smashed windows, narration explains windows were “shattered” over one hundred metres away. The next shot mimics the first, slowly panning across a road replete with glass fragments. One final shot again features the camera tracking back slowly, in a “reveal” of the full scene. This long/wide shot is sustained for several seconds allowing the audience to almost marvel at extent of the devastation. A crater is visible however the primary focus is the previously seen building dominating the frame, structural intact yet a ruined shell. It deliberately invokes illusions of the recent Oklahoma City bombing in the



United States, where a similar iconic image of a bombed building became a visual shorthand for the bombing itself.

Throughout these visuals, the reporter's narration deliberately deploys nouns and verbs that echo the act: "Gaunt and shattered buildings...testimony to the determination to wreck the ceasefire...Five buildings devastated' in an area packed with offices...A stark reminder that the ceasefire is over". Underscoring these words is the perpetual diegetic sound of a high pitched alarm ringing. It is described by the reporter as the only sound to be heard in the area, an aural motif of the panic this spectacle — this image event — caused.

A second report follows, highlighting the changing security situation. It signifies the reverse of that shown on the night of the bombing, with security returning to pre-ceasefire levels. Multiple shots of military checkpoints and police searching vehicles occur with the report concluding with a slow camera zoom on a policeman's firearm. This sequence has been carefully edited so there is a deliberate re-framing of the weapon; it moves (by way of the camera) from the periphery of the frame to a central focus. The connotations of this, the symbol the gun represents, and the perspective the image is being presented from, directly suggests further violence will occur. With the dominant mediated discourse critical of the act, emphasised as purely destructive, there is a further insinuation that the security forces are ready for such a development.

The early years of the decade were dominated by Republican issues, including prisoner release and demilitarisation. Coverage concentrated on violence, with visuals — particularly the bloodless devastation of the Docklands bombing — granted precedence. To offer a further clarification, reportage of such violence by the BBC concentrated on a Republican stance. There was a minimising of British army, RUC and Loyalist violence. Such paramilitaries, tending in the main to restrict their activities to Northern Ireland, received minimal coverage on BBC News bulletins (indeed across Schlesinger's four categories in general). 1993 can be recognised as a transitional year in the Troubles, with Hume/Adams talks and the signing of the Downing Street declaration paving 'the way for the 1994 ceasefires' (Parkinson, 1998, p. 73). Such progress hastened the demise of the Broadcasting Ban, a rhetorical tool of perception by/of the government.

### The Broadcasting Ban

On October 19<sup>th</sup> 1988, in the aftermath of the Enniskillen and Ballygawley bombings, Douglas Hurd imposed a ban on broadcasting proscribed organisations on television. What was an unprecedented restriction on press freedom, the broadcasting ban sought to convert Thatcher's oxygen principle into codified law.<sup>63</sup> It discouraged analysis (where it existed) by further limiting the expression of oppositional opinion that contested the dominant discourse.

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<sup>63</sup> Similarities were frequently invoked to restrictions in apartheid South Africa

The ban, legal due to the 1922 Special Powers Act, comprised two central elements, with the first largely unnecessary; the media had applied a voluntary prohibition on interviews with members of paramilitary groups (particularly Republican) with the infrequent occurrences throughout the 1970s, including the INLA in 1979, detailed in previous chapters. The second element however extended censorship to a wider category, that of those allegedly supportive of terrorism. *Speak No Evil*, a 2005 BBC documentary subtitled *The Story of the Broadcast Ban*, explains “The ban affected 11 loyalist and republican organisations but Sinn Féin, the political wing of the IRA, was the main target”.

Groups that were both legal, and had elected representatives (as both MP and local councillors) were affected;

It meant that instead of hearing Gerry Adams, viewers and listeners would hear an actor's voice reading a transcript of the Sinn Féin leader's words (Welch, BBC News Online, 2005).

As Mark Devenport then notes, the ban led to ‘McCarthyite implications if we had to ask interviewees “Are you or have you ever been a member of Sinn Féin?”’ (Devenport, 2000, p.54). Whilst Douglas Hurd would declare it not to be a restriction on reporting, appearances of Sinn Féin, a legitimate democratic political party, were severely curtailed during the subsequent period. In the year prior to the ban, Sinn Féin representatives were interviewed seventeen times on the BBC; this dropped by almost two-thirds in the ensuing twelve months. The primary reason for the imposition of the

ban was the belief television granted terrorists a platform. Whilst Sinn Féin could therefore technically still be shown, in reality, the ban was used to limit their appearances, and limit their publicity.

Health warnings were the agreed method of drawing attention to the ban in news coverage however these were not always used. In the minutes of a confidential Editorial Policy Meeting at the BBC, it states subtitles were to be eliminated from BBC news programmes because they ‘could sound propagandistic’ (cited by Miller, 1995, p.51). The ban prohibited the broadcasting of any words spoken by a person who ‘represents or purports to represent’ or whose words ‘support or solicit or invite support’ for a listed organisation (ibid). Upon a clarification from the Home Office, it became clear that reported speech was outside the prohibition; it was thus acceptable to quote a listed organisation or a speaker supporting a listed organisation as long as the originator of the words was not heard speaking them. Furthermore, confusion would arise as to whether an individual could be held to ‘represent’ their organisation twenty-four hours a day; the Home Office would state this was too narrow an interpretation and that ‘a member of an organisation cannot be held to represent that organisation in all his daily activities’ (Henderson et al., p.2).

This definition would be deployed by the BBC in an interview with Gerry Adams regarding employment in Belfast (16.02.89). Thirty seconds of sound on film was broadcast (in Northern Ireland) with on-screen captions identifying Adams as speaking as MP for West Belfast rather than Sinn Féin

MP for West Belfast. In setting the ban as one which also limits those who “support[s] or solicit[s] or invite support[s]”, there would be a number of individuals who had their views cut, subtitled or eliminated entirely, despite not being a member of Féin. Seeking to underline the impact of the ban, the Channel 4 film *Trouble The Calm*, featured a caption explaining the strident editing:

Under government broadcasting restrictions, in force since October 1988, this woman cannot explain her husbands beliefs and motivations which led to his imprisonment (ibid).

With explanations of beliefs and motivations considered to invite support, it would become impossible for the media to report events in even a broadly descriptive sense. The ban then operated — through legislative action — as a weapon in the propaganda war, a rhetorical response to the visual spectacles committed by terrorists. The government sought to portray “enemies” as terrorists, lacking in political motivation; it was a tacit attempt to limit and eliminate any dialogue for this “opposition”.

When the ban was introduced, David Nicholas, editor of ITN, objected. He stated that ITN interviews with Sinn Féin were conducted

responsibly, because we all understand what these extremist organisations stand for is abhorrent to many people. British public opinion has never been more resolute than it is now, in my opinion, in defeating terrorism and that owes a lot to the full and frank reporting that we’ve been able to conduct on Northern Ireland for over nineteen years (Miller, 1994, p.63) .

Howeve, such a statement asserts that the news is about portraying the perceived feelings of the nation, rather than reporting on events. This is

particularly notable when Nicholas claims that broadcasters have helped foster such feelings with “full and frank” coverage.

Ten years after the Maze prison received worldwide attention due to the Hunger Strikes, Peter Taylor gained permission to film inside and interview prisoners. Some 450 inmates are interned in the infamous H-blocks; Catholic and Protestants only occasionally encounter each other on neutral territory. *Inside Story: The Maze – Enemies Within* (20/11/90) presented a number of extraordinary visual sights, including convicted terrorists and Republican prisoners taking part in a “hurling the welly” sports day, and an improvised Loyalist pipe band commemorating the Battle of the Boyne. The documentary, however, gained attention for ultimately highlighting the folly of the broadcasting ban.

Taylor remarked it

will allow viewers a unique chance to see those on both sides who are doing the killing. I think what will surprise most viewers is that underneath the hoods, they are very ordinary people...it is a very different place from what it was ten years ago. I think they hope that by letting us show that, they will undermine the myth that has build up around it (no date, Frayn).

The programme, and particularly the visuals deployed, humanised individuals but there was a continued and repeated insistence on their true status; Taylor’s cold open voiceover explains

The Maze Prison is unique. Behind its walls are almost 400 prisoners, most dangerous terrorists...they planted the bombs, pulled the triggers and stained Northern Ireland with blood.

This is later stressed by an interview with the prison warden:

Taylor: Are they ordinary prisoners you guard?

Warden: No, they are out and out terrorists.

There is also a strong emphasis placed on the number of prisoner officers – “1200 prison officers guard the prisoners. A ratio of 3 to 1” – with an implicit suggestion this is due to the clear and present danger posed by inmates.

The programme featured Taylor interviewing prisoners in their personal capacity and as such, there was no requirement to re-voice their contributions. It was only when the IRA’s “spokesman for food” is filmed complaining, in his official capacity, that his words must be dubbed in a surreal exposure of restrictions:

The thing with the sausage rolls...they’re getting a bit small.  
In terms of size and all that you know. The quality is still there.  
They’re getting a bit small you know.

Just as Gerry Adams could therefore be interviewed on BBC radio, with his own voice heard as he detailed an attack on his house, an actor was required when there was this movement into an official stance. Sinn Féin received significant media attention following their response to the Downing Street Declaration, and the Irish government rescinded its ban the following month (January 1994). The disparity between governmental positions in London and Dublin was then combined with the media persistently highlighting and subverting the ban. Its status received further attention during the visit of Gerry Adams to the United States in 1994, where interviews aired across

Europe, America, Africa and the Republic of Ireland. Only within Britain was a voice-over utilised.

Comparable to the manner post-Carrickmore restrictions were superseded by the events of the Hunger Strike, the Broadcasting Ban was rendered obsolete, by political events, with the Government's stance untenable at the close of 1993 (Butler, 1995, p.80) It would ultimately be lifted in September 1994, two weeks after an IRA ceasefire declaration. With the ban, there was a suggestion that rhetoric had now overtaken the visual. By 1988, a visual thesaurus of Troubles codes had been established that was dominant, sustained, and ultimately expected by the audience as a framing device. The Governmental response was an attempt to control one method of information output, relying on the partisanship of the media to "control" the other.

### Influence

Ken Bloomfield, National Governor of the BBC in Northern Ireland points to four influencing factors which impacted the position of Governor.

First, what I might call the 'statutory framework'...a royal charter.  
Second there is what I might call the 'case law' of the BBC; the steady accretion of custom and practice... building up over time to rather well-established conventions. Third, there is the influence of the working environment current at a particular time...  
And finally there is the influence of powerful personalities  
(1996, pp.148-149).

I would suggest these four can in turn be loosely applied to indicate the primary influencing factors on BBC output, stretching from the broadcasting



ban, to unofficial governmental pressure. Criticism of the media, particularly by Liz Curtis, Alan F. Parkinson, David Miller and David Butler, concur that improving coverage was not a simple solution. Rather there was a belief that allowing greater knowledge of the situation, including greater awareness of the background and beliefs of all parties, would allow an audience to consider and discuss the problem from an informed perspective. Instead, a vocal minority dictated the dominant discourse, Bloomfield's "powerful personalities" directing the means of rhetoric and representation established over twenty years:

I have often remarked that reporting in Northern Ireland is like reporting a general election every day of the week. During elections, the parties and their supporters, wherever they are, either here or elsewhere in the UK, are hyper-sensitive, seeing bias at every turn, ringing up to criticise a phrase here, a headline there. As far as I am concerned, it is like that all the time. Why did you interview so-and-so and not so-and-so, why was my statement not used, why did you go to that event but not this event, why did you say that person was a Catholic but you did not say another one was a protestant? It is a sensitive audience out there  
(Baker, 1996, pp.123-124).

As Elliott concluded from his analysis of reporting in the early 70s, 'the tendency of the British media was to report violent events as simply irrational and horrid ... Such events were irrational *because* they were horrid' (cited by Spencer, 2000, p.21, original emphasis). The Omagh bombing of 1998 can be seen as the pinnacle of this horrid, irrational violent events, the last major spectacle of the Troubles, and a significant moment in moving beyond a contested media atmosphere.

## Omagh

Al-Qaeda attained American public awareness for the first time in 1998, following the dual bombing of US embassies in the Southeast African cities of Dar es Salaam and Nairobi. The two attacks were symbolic strikes, on the eighth anniversary of American forces arriving in Saudi Arabia, likely at the direction of Osama bin Laden (Gunaratna, 2002. p.46).

These attacks, and the subsequent public and political response, can be recognised as influencing American reaction to the Omagh bombing eight days later: 'especially swift and strong, emotions and sentiment being heightened' (Dingley, 2000, p461). Existing as the highest death toll from a single incident during the Troubles, the Omagh car bombing killed 29 people, including nine children, and injured/maimed 220 others. It was committed by the RIRA, a splinter group from the Provisional organisation, who viewed Sinn Féin acceptance of the Mitchell Principles, which involved commitment to non-violence, as a betrayal of Republican ideals and the struggle for a united Ireland.

Omagh, county town for County Tyrone, is home to local studios of a BBC regional branch, guaranteeing immediate media attention for the act. 'Propaganda by deed as well as by media was thus ensured' (ibid, p.459). An amateur video of the blast and the aftermath, the scale of the bombing, coupled with its unexpected nature (due to the Good Friday agreement) combined to raise the resultant (graphic) visual impact.

The main BBC news report on the day of the attack occurred at 10.20pm (15.08.98, a Saturday weekend broadcast). It opens with a close up camera shot of rubble and a pair of fireman using spades to clear debris. Their actions are repetitive and in sync, with the high pitched scrape of metal on the road surface a juxtaposition to the general quiet. As the camera zooms out, a voice-over narrative details the descriptive facts of the incident. The wide shot, and the nature of the attack on a main shopping street, is centrally framed, with a row of shops extending on either side to the distance. The facades and rooftops of many are damaged, with the street covered in debris. Multiple firefighters are now visible with two fire engines at the far end of the street providing a stark contrast to two khaki green armoured military vehicles in the foreground. Soldiers can be seen patrolling the edge of the frame. A series of static visuals provide a directed focus, with a clear intention being the creation of a specific iconic shot akin to Father Daly and his handkerchief. There is an extended pause spent on one shot showing the mangled metal of a vehicle, a single bright red fire extinguisher, standing upright in the centre of the frame, and an empty wheelchair on the left. The only other instance of colour is a provided by a yellow banner, torn and scattered across the frame. At the appropriate instant, the voice-over explains: “with people simply enjoying the final day of Omagh’s annual carnival week”. Whilst the connotations of the empty wheelchair and red extinguisher are particularly obvious, their power as an image cannot be denied.

Confusion over the bomb warning is detailed and there is a stylistic and emotional edit as it is revealed police “shepherded hundreds of people to the far end of the street [beat] and that is where the bomb went off”. At this beat, the sharp edit occurs, jumping from steady news footage of the aftermath to amateur video, low quality, grainy and unsteady footage of the actual explosion. Smoke can be seen rising in the distance, with general confusion and mayhem clear. The audio of the video is muted with flames beginning to form in the centre of the frame.

An on the scene reporter, intriguingly framed on either side by an RUC officer and appended by a soldier in the rear of the frame, is then followed by a second short sequence showing a nearby hospital and the injured. General confusion is again apparent. The camera follows a trolley being wheeled inside by a number of paramedics and there is a focus on the foot of the victim, the only visible aspect. It is covered in blood and the narrator explains ‘many of the victims are horribly mutilated’. The report then concludes with a return to a static central shot of the street. The repetition of this visual would ensure it became a key short hand image for the attack. It is an immediate signifier of the violence, damage and destruction caused, is framed neatly by two rows of shops and extends to an official civil building dominating the distance.

The repeated use of this shot over subsequent news broadcasts can be identified as serving two functions. That of signifier, as detailed above, a scene setting motif, but also as a contrast to the amateur recording, which

revealed the graphic aftermath. This too was played frequently, in an edited form on shorter news bulletins and on current affairs show including *Breakfast with Frost*, which was hosted by reporter Huw Edwards, and in detail on an extended edition main evening news the same day (16.08.98). The video opens with the blast and the operator initially zooms in to the scene. People are visible both running to, and away from, the blast site. A dust cloud envelops the area and footage zooms out as a woman moves towards and past the camera. She is guiding her son, bleeding from the ear, with blood flowing down his face. The deep red colour of the blood, and the vivid blue of his sweatshirt, are magnified against the washed out grey of the surrounding frame. The audio of the video footage has been playing throughout.

As the camera progresses up the street, a number of injured people can be seen lying on the ground, with others crouching over providing assistance. A woman can be heard off screen: “hold pressure on it, hold pressure”. Another woman is shown being carried out of the frame and then, in the immediate environs of the blast radius, several bodies can be seen, covered with tarpaulins and blankets. This makeshift attempt captures the operators attention and they linger for several seconds as they pass over each. The narrator speaks up, explaining these images were “captured on video and seared on the minds of the survivors”. BBC News is then presenting these to a new re-mediatised audience.

Footage returns to the motif shot established in coverage the previous day, showing the street, centrally framed, and with some rubble cleared. It remains cordoned off, with blue police tape; a crime scene. Soldiers however patrol, with weapons raised and wearing battle helmets, visors and body armour. As before, there is a juxtaposition established, however here it is between the rule of law, of criminality, and the armed services, of terrorism. Report rhetoric then focuses on the human interest angle, using the death of three generations of one family as their lead avenue for coverage.

Throughout regular news broadcasts, there is a focus on the event, with visuals utilised to provide “information”. *Spotlight* (08.09.98), fulfilled a form of investigative journalism as it sought to explore the schism in the Republican movement, with the three weeks since the explosion, allowing a window of reflection and period of analysis. It utilised what can be identified here as the second *iconic* image the BBC/media sought to create and disseminate and promote.

One week after the attack, thousands of mourners gathered in the centre of Omagh for an act of prayerful reflection. This received significant media attention, with elevated camera shots framing the street identical to that of the attack aftermath. What dominates now however, is the sea of people, an amorphous mass of faces. In a series of extended shots, the passage of time is marked only by the continual, gradual illumination of traffic lights, flickering through its sequence as a satisfying symbol of change, progress and normality. This spectacle — deliberately constructed and promoted as such

by the media — can be seen as a book end to the Troubles on British television. What started in 1968 with unexcited violent protests, and a media unsure of a means of representation, had now become a calm period where a quiet majority stood up and asked for peace. The BBC had now established a visual rhetoric, a language of motifs, symbols, shots and shorthand, that had combined to present “terrorism”, and its evolution, to a national audience.

With the passing of the millennium, the Troubles would fall into abeyance, regional in character and no longer a significant threat to the British state. It could no longer be considered in the same category as the terrorism ‘that seems to be the prominent feature of the movement in the early twenty-first century (Laquer, 2003, page 208).

# Conclusion



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History only happens in the present...  
the media...exists...as flashes and images.  
History is therefore being reduced to images

Paul Virilio  
(1999, p. 57).

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Michael Griffin, in *Camera as Witness, Image as Sign: The Study of Visual Communication in Communication Research*, posits two trajectories for contemporary lens-based media, photography, film and television: realist and formative (2001). Positioning visual communications in relation to Benjamin's mechanical reproduction of imagery that characterises the modern mass media, Griffin stresses that visual studies should concentrate on how media producers and viewing audiences use and interpret images.

This thesis offers archival research and qualitative textual analysis in order to probe and interpret how the BBC as a media producer used images of domestic terrorism during a three decade period. The BBC receives such sustained attention because it occupies a central position in the media ecology of the United Kingdom, and holds a number of 'structural and thematic interrelations with other phenomena and contexts' (Jensen, 2002, 239). Indeed, the BBC can be positioned as a 'a microcosm of some larger system or a whole society' (Gomm et al., 2000, p.99); examination of their output is therefore important and necessary.

A contemporary news report is corrupted by the online sphere of social media and "citizen journalists" (see Allan, 2013; Allan and Thorson 2014; Wall, 2012). Previously, and for a large portion of this study, it was professional, preconceived shots, carefully considered and composed, that were utilised to construct a news story. To quote Griffin in detail, this standardised footage is gathered by:

an experienced videographer [who] knows the kinds of shots that will be needed in the editing process. In addition to framing the familiar “stand ups” of reporters “on the scene” and the “talking heads” of interview subjects, the camera person looks for establishing shots of the relevant scene or location, cut-ins that can serve to illustrate details, and cut-aways that will provide a variety of camera angles, editing transitions, and cover shots necessary...These visual practices accomplish four goals: they furnish the newscast with widely recognised symbols of pertinent people, places and institutions, thus creating an impression of *significance* and *access*; they provide *signs of “information”* — location footage, interview testimony, and images of physical evidence that serve to corroborate the *validity* of the news report; they provide visual segues for *transitions* and cover shots for *continuity*; and they provide a good supply of loosely associated imagery, cut-aways and visual details that both facilitate the construction of a narrative structure and contribute to an overall appearance of *authenticity* (1992, p.134, italics in original).

Identifying these visual practices in the archival footage of the corpus allows clear patterns to be identified, leading towards an answer of the central research question.

Arising in the post-WWII period, due to the technological development of light-weight, hand-held cameras allowing sound and pictures to be recorded on location (on the scene) with sound-sync, *vérité* style coincided with the birth of television news.<sup>64</sup> Film (in the abstract sense) could be captured directly. With truth key — akin to photography’s notion of evidence — such cameras granted intimacy and immediacy. This direct access translated to an aesthetic style where a representation of reality (and revelation) was possible. Whilst, as detailed, every camera shot and set up involves consideration and consciousness, the composition of the *vérité* style — natural lighting, blurred

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<sup>64</sup> Within cinema, a distinction exists between *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema. Eric Barnouw would classify direct as a more observational form (fly on the wall) and *vérité* as documentarian evidence of a provoked situation (1974). The use of *vérité* here refers to its stylistic and aesthetic tendencies.

and uncertain focus, accidental framing, harsh movement — carried a visual coding connoting authenticity. Just as (apocryphal) accounts of the Lumière brothers *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* herald astonished audiences unaccustomed to the moving image fainting, early video footage of the Troubles, including the October 5<sup>th</sup> march in Derry, revealed to the broadcast news audience real brutality and violence; a camera almost overwhelmed by visuals and uncertain where to look.

Prominent across BBC reporting, the raw and unrestrained footage symbolises the commencement of the Troubles. Yet, caught unaware at the outbreak of violence and quite unsure how to contextualise events, the BBC were unable to provide the necessary framing or background to events. The Civil Rights march in Derry on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1968, Burntollet Bridge on 4 January 1969, the Battle of the Bogside during 12–14 August 1969, and Bloody Sunday on 30 January 1972, therefore exist as incidents where graphic footage revealed the true nature of violence and the ultimate human cost. Footage exists as distinct from the aforementioned idea of carefully considered and composed professional shots, framed (in both senses) to capture events according to the journalist and institutions values. Instead, they were horrifically violent. Unpackaged by an institution unsure of precisely how to report on terrorism, conflict, and violence on home soil, the images held unmatched force; yet, to transpose the words of David Campbell regarding al-Jazeera's images of the Iraq War in 2003, they were 'no more

than what appeared, in actuality, before [the] camera lenses' (Campbell, 2003, p.107).

These initial events are central to an understanding of the representation of the Troubles and the patterns established. They remain visceral and shocking today – even in the context of contemporary images of violence – and show events as they truly took place. However, in the aftermath, and as the BBC was subjected to greater public and political pressure (whilst simultaneously reflecting internally on its own role and responsibilities within conflict reportage) there was an institutional form of self censorship initiated. Reporting was routed through the Northern Ireland controller and here can be identified the moment meaningless images became the dominant visual thesaurus of the Troubles.

Bonfires and burning vehicles – the perverse fascination of the flame – became familiar. These symbols became signifiers across BBC news for the larger instances of terrorism and the Troubles, allowing a version of “reality” to be framed and represented, with a related removal and retreat from the presence of the body. The violence caught the BBC (and the population) by surprise; with time, with politics, and with ideology, they settled into a system of sanitisation, the obfuscation of violence, and signs and signifiers of terror-less terror.

It is possible, and fruitful here, to identify parallels between the reporting of the 2011 London riots, and initial events in the Troubles. With both

originating as a form of protest — civil rights regarding housing, employment and politics in the latter; a response to the death of Mark Duggan, shot by officers of the Metropolitan Police in the former — Douglas Kellner situates events in London (and subsequently spreading across Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester) within the sphere of a spectacle of terror, arguing it is one of the branches of domestic terrorism and societal violence (2012). As he states,

On Monday afternoon, rioters and looters fanned throughout the capital, robbing, trashing, and, in some cases, setting stores on fire, randomly attacking cars and buildings, and producing a perhaps unparalleled night of violence and terror in London... The event was truly a global spectacle; Al-Jazeera broadcast the London riots live and non-stop, and the BBC could barely keep up with the cascading reports of lootings, vandalism, fires, and terror spreading throughout London (ibid, p.19).

The nature of events was unexpected and the BBC, unsure of how to report and frame coverage — whether it be anti-police uprising, social and economic protest, consumerist desire, Žižek's 'outburst with no pretence to vision' (2008, p.63) — retreated to the same dominant signs of violence established throughout the Troubles. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 2011 the BBC opened the nightly news with a four frame split screen, each showing an aerial shot of a burning building, vivid plumes of red and orange flames streaming upwards against a black night sky. An arresting visual, and for those of a certain age, it conjured associated iconic images represented during the Troubles.

The reportage of the Troubles would seldom reach beyond the signs and symbols initiated in the years after 1968. A shorthand for terrorism and



violence was established, and a shorthand for individual events was created through iconic images. The shot of Father Daly and his handkerchief is now representative of Bloody Sunday; footage of funerals and “soldiers” in fatigues and balaclavas stand for Catholic memory and Bobby Sands; footage organised around imagery of the armed forces stood for authority and the British state. Campbell’s notion of the media being ‘weaponized’ (2003, p. 108) applies, with both sides seeking to target the medium and warp McLuhan’s central idea. Massive bombings throughout the early 90s were immortalised through the lexicon of destroyed buildings, rubble and economic ruin. There was a preponderance of imagery of damage and destruction but still a removal of the body from incidents of death and murder persisted.

Indeed when there was such acts, the narrative tended towards the descriptive and factual, seeking to universalise suffering. Long shots, from behind police tapes and revealing anonymous locations from afar, revealed what Chouliaraki calls ‘the management of visibility...“dots-on-the-map” news’ (2006, p.101). Without spectacular imagery, and without the visual thesaurus to represent the dead body, there was a profound absence. This framed terrorism through description but not explanation, corresponding to ‘choices (not intentional but institutional and routine)’ (Chouliaraki, no date, p.6). Use of simple maps, for instance in the Bandstand attack of July 1982, represented suffering through ‘geographical terms, casting them [the human] in the abstract and decontextualised mode of cartography’ (ibid).

Such a fact placed a significant burden on traditional media to desperately devise standards for dealing with, and responding to, terrorism visually. If the media did ignore, or avoided reporting fully, an act of terror, Molotch and Lester's concept of disruptive access would apply, with agents forced to "make news" by somehow crashing through the ongoing arrangements of news-making, generating surprise, shock, or some more violent form of "trouble" (1974, p.108). The IRA sought to deploy their own form of disruptive access through the Enniskillen bomb of 1988.

So clearly media conscious, particularly evident during the Hunger Strike, the IRA conceived an attack on what was a literal and symbolic location and event. They believed that media organisations would be forced to visualise the reality of the event, moving away from tropes that say little, and towards powerful images of the dead. The end goal was one of British disengagement through attrition and propaganda. However, it was the availability of amateur footage — removed from the carefully planned images of a professional cameraperson — that acted as a mediating code, allowing the audience at home to mimic the role of the witness. Enniskillen was therefore another turning point in the Troubles, both for factions and organisations. It backfired on the IRA, with no representative even attempting justification in the aftermath. It moved away from the arbitrary codes of violence without violence and death without death, for the briefest of moments, holding extraordinary framing power for media and governmental ideology. It allowed the government to engender support for sustained military

involvement in Ireland, and it allowed (or rather forced) the media to visualise the true nature of terror framed through a neutral eyewitness.

Occurring between the graphic nature of 1968-1972 and the fragment of 1988 exist ten men. With death, destruction, ruin, and terror dominating the preceding ten years, yet a repetition of familiar coded images failed to accurately represent events, the Hunger Strike returned the Troubles to a headline story, encompassing a wealth of news values. Indeed, with the election of Bobby Sands to parliament on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 1981, five weeks after first refusing food, he entered the elite person sphere. The stark visualisations created by the IRA, and deployed by a willing media, became coded as ideology and performance. Adopting and subverting the popular military codes of order, honour, and ritual — including adorning the casket with a flag akin to the ceremonial rite of military honours, coded and directed towards an international (i.e. American) audience — the funerals became symbolically romantic and myth forming. The emotional charged images then, very briefly, mark a moment when the BBC attempted to represent the Troubles in an alternative manner, away from the empty imagery and myths they formed and disseminated. However, in again failing to provide the necessary contextualisation to the hunger strike, these images became powerful codes for the framing of Irish Nationalism and freedom fighting. Fierce criticism, similar to that faced in the early years of coverage, and the ultimate self-consuming nature of visuals, led to the BBC returning to their existing thesaurus for another seven years, until the events of poppy day. It would

then be another ten years before the image of death reappeared. Again though, this was not through a deliberate act of the BBC. Rather, the availability of powerful amateur footage *forced* them to engage with these visuals and move away from the economic imagery of Bishopsgate (1993), London Docklands (1996) and Manchester (1996). The dead could not be denied.

With the satellite news gathering of the 80s leading to ‘the decade of the dish’ (Bell, 1995, p.137) conflicts around the globe became visible. ‘The media seldom cover more than one or two conflicts or catastrophes at any given time’ (Allern, 2002, p.141) and with modern warfare heading towards Der Derian’s notion of the MIME-NET — the military-industrial-media-entertainment network, merging ‘the production, representation and execution’ of conflict (2009, p.xxvii) — images of burning cars, burning barrels and the throwing of stones, lacked power, intrigue, or sheer ferocity. The Troubles would only reappear during these large scale bombings when mass destruction was evident. Indeed, the IRA were acutely aware of their fading import in the globalised visual landscape, desperately seeking physical and abstract power. Hoskins and O’Loughlin’s statement is apt in respect to the Docklands bombing at 19.01 GMT, just in time to maximise coverage on the evening news; ‘In this way, the medium, in terms of its cycle of distribution or broadcast of news, will be more receptive to events occurring or reported at certain times of the day than others’ (2007, p.43).

As with this conclusion's earlier analogy to the London riots of 2011, a second is appropriate: the "falling man", itself existing as a singular symbol, and representative (including through literature, documentary film and art) of the larger event. The first ten years of BBC coverage of terrorism in Northern Ireland can be compressed down to the single twenty-four hour window of September 11<sup>th</sup>. In electing to jump to his death from the burning towers, the falling man was visible on live rolling news coverage and replayed frequently during the morning hours. So unprecedented was this, the act of (forced) suicide/homicide, that there was confusion about its representation amongst the media. Trapped in an 'iconic impermissibility', it gradually disappeared from coverage, whilst other alternative visuals flourished (Hamdy, 1999, p. 253). These alternatives removed the 3,000. Similarly then, beginning with vivid footage, amidst the riots on the Bogside and the shootings on "Bloody Sunday," the BBC had no existing referents, nor no alternative means of representation. Consequently, initial coverage trended towards the graphic, shot on location vérité style, at the heart of the action. Gradually however, there was an overt movement away from this form; by 1974 and the UWC strike, reportage had settled into a model typified by superficial visuals, generic media templates and descriptive rhetoric.

This form of reportage would dominate until the Hunger Strikes grabbed attention across the world, deliberately executed so there was a procession of dead and dying with the body physically present. With the exception of Enniskillen and Omagh, where amateur footage provided a method of

perception that occupied a disjuncture to established means, coverage of Northern Ireland by the BBC was dominated by the empty symbolism of the absent image, by the rhetoric of euphemism, and a concerted lack of context and analysis.

The BBC would — and what can be argued, continue to — routinely draw upon past ‘images, video, phrases, people, places and events, as well as other media, to locate and to shape’ (Hoskins, 2006, p.455). Yet, when these images fundamentally (mis)represent the reality of three decades of violence, the present and the act of locating and shaping is dangerously affected.

The attack on 9/11 can be recognised as discrediting the use of terror, making

a return to violence in Northern Ireland seemed unlikely. The London bombings of July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005 further undermined the legitimacy of using terror, particularly in an environment where community support was vital. Within a month of the attacks, Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams announced the decommissioning of weapons (Mockaitis, 2008, p.10).

As violence in Ireland waned, homegrown terrorism of extreme Islam became *the* dominant threat, emerging in the aftermath of what can be demarcated as the post-Cold War, post-9/11 world; a world of new wars, diffused wars, virtuous wars. A world of mediatised conflict. Simultaneously, global economic recession and a series of circumstances culminated in an out-burst of violence across England, facilitated and documented across social media.

*The Transnational Terrorism, Security, and the Rule of Law Project* has explored terrorism developments across Europe, including charting frequent words in media articles regarding the subject. At the turn of the millennium,

despite the Good Friday agreement, British, Northern Ireland, IRA, police and Adair all occur and clearly indicate importance and concern. Terrorism itself as a term is absent from the top ten. In the aftermath of September 11, all references to Ireland disappear, supplanted by a new lexicon: Afghanistan, terrorism, September, Bin Laden and the basket of Muslim, Islam, Islamist and Islamism. Just as imagery of Troubles faded throughout the 90s, the codes and symbols no longer powerful to engage, so too did its significance as a national and international event. For the next four years, such lexical terms were prevalent (including the addition of Iraq and Bush), indicative of a movement from domestic terrorism to global conflict and the War on Terror. 7/7 reversed this trend, returning to internal terror and domestic homeland: police, security, Britain, British, London, Blair dominate, and Muslim, Islam, Islamist, and Islamism rise to the top of the discourse (anon, 2008, p.95).

David Miller details the work of Ed Cairns, who examined the perceptions of children in Northern Ireland and Scotland. Shown simple line drawings of a train crash or house on fire, children from Northern Ireland

were much more likely to mention bombs or explosions in stories than children in Scotland who “virtually never” mentioned such things. However Cairns and his colleagues found some groups of children in the West of Scotland who, at the time (1976-7), could only receive television from Northern Ireland. These children mentioned violence more often than the other Scottish groups. Cairns concludes from this that: “The evidence presented here thus appears to confirm the conclusions reached by other investigators — that television news can distort perceptions of reality — and to extend this finding to children as young as 5 years”  
(Cairns et al., cited by Miller, 1994, p.263).

Furthermore, Hoskins and O'Loughlin detail research (conducted since 9/11) which indicated that the 'mainstream media, particularly the BBC, remain the primary source of news across all demographic groups in times of crisis' (2010a, p.908). As such, precisely how the BBC continue to represent terrorism remains a central concern for students of the media. This research explored the images of the Troubles over three decades, identifying what images dominated, along with pinpointing precisely where, when, and why specific changes in reportage occurred. Analysing the organisation in this way is important; it is a search for the 'descriptions and typologies which have implications for other, or larger, social systems' (Jensen, 2002, p.239).

Whilst focusing directly on the BBC as a key part of our media ecology is of importance, further insight into the nature of its coverage would be possible, and enhanced, through a comparative study with its commercial broadcasting rival ITV. Such a study would lead to generalisations, but the 'analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases, as with two experiments, will be more powerful than those coming from a single case (or single experiment) alone' (Yan, 2003, p.53). This process would have led away from the central research question and, in prioritising the BBC, subsequent scholarship has a substantial volume to initiate proceedings from. However, the possibility of ITV imagery further illuminating the BBC's historical and evolving patterns of coverage, and the signs and symbols both organisations utilised, is ripe with potential and offers considerable excitement.



The connection between the media and terrorism has been well documented by academics. Precisely how entwined they are is evident throughout the examples detailed; terrorists seek maximum publicity for their conduct, moving towards the symbolic to attain maximum impact. The media – the BBC – utilise(d) a combination of code, symbols, signs and rhetoric to present these acts of terror within a particular discourse and framework. Yet each remained isolated in a series of decontextualised atrocities.

As Schlesinger et al., note, ‘public knowledge of terrorism is founded upon the images, definitions and explanations provided by the media’ (1983, p.1). Amidst an increasingly complex media discourse, there is now a surfeit of information, downloaded directly to our pockets. These images, definitions and explanations, are directed by a number of parties at a number of audiences. The British media played a key role in building a consensus around the representation of Ireland and domestic terrorism during the Troubles. That consensus was closely aligned to the state’s explanation of the conflict. As society moves into what can be termed the age of (hyper)terror, the BBC continue to play a centrally mediating role. Precisely how their journalism seeks to engage, frame, represent, and symbolise the world – as the world responds to it – initiates a fascinating new era of reporting, social commentary and media studies.

In exploring the past, it is possible to gain a better understanding of the present and imagine the future.

As John Corner succinctly states ‘an enriched sense of “then” produces, in its differences and commonalities combined, a stronger, imaginative and analytically energised sense of “now”’ (2003, p.275).

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All television content is indicated within the text using a six digit date format. Programming was sourced from a number of archives, primarily the Northern Ireland Political Collection (NIPC) contained within Linen Hall Library Belfast, and The University of Ulster's Centre for Media Research at the Coleraine campus. Further material was obtained from several private collections.

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