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THE MASS NEWS MEDIA IN SYSTEMIC, HISTORICAL, AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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In the search for greater precision in contemporary sociology, there is a tendency to neglect the general 'society', a point of reference whose empirical significance is often matched only by its theoretical obscurity. To speak of the whole invites generality and historical scope, qualities which undermine the assurance of exact verification, yet it is precisely generality and historical perspective which are necessary if the components and boundaries of society are to be understood. If to ignore the whole creates difficulty in every area of 'special' sociological focus, it is particularly dangerous in the attempt to understand those institutions whose function it is actually to address society as a general unit. The mass media is such an institution.

I am interested in making a theoretical statement about the mass news media that is both thoroughly general and abstract and at the same time directly specifiable in empirical terms. I will locate the media in terms of, first, a theory of the social system, and second, a theory of social differentiation which will provide both historical and comparative perspective. By linking analysis of news media to these broader theoretical traditions, I hope to enrich sociological thinking about the relation of the media to the operation of other social institutions and to issues of social change, subjects usually underplayed by more micro-studies. I hope also to throw a different light on broader implications of media practices that are either interpreted narrowly or simply taken for granted. Finally, in

the course of carrying out this analysis, I hope to illuminate certain problematic moral and political issues which have been the focus of ideological debate about the role of news media in social life.

THE MASS NEWS MEDIA
IN THE SOCIAL SYSTEM

The mass media produces symbolic patterns that create the invisible tissues of society on the cultural level just as the legal system creates the community on a more concrete and 'real' one. In a modernizing and differentiating society, the media is a functional substitute for concrete group contact, for the now impossible meeting-of-the-whole.[1] Although the mass media does have a certain atomizing effect on the perception of social life, this is not its social system function in an abstract and general sense: the mass media produces essential aspects of social integration, although integration only of certain distinctive types.

If cultural patterns can be differentiated into cognitive, expressive and evaluative strands (Parsons, 1951: 24-112; 1961), the media can be divided into cognitive and expressive components. In the category of expressive media, I include the narrative stories found most frequently on television. By the cognitive dimension of media, I refer to news stories that occur in newspapers as well as television news programmes. Because of these different focuses, entertainment and news mediums have sharply different social functions; they depend on very different kinds of social resources, and must be judged according to what are often contradictory criteria of success (Fass, 1976). I will limit myself in this effort to the news media and the cognitive dimension.

But a question immediately presents itself which touches on a critical problem in the sociological literature: is 'cognitive' in fact a sufficient designation for the orientation of news reporting? Cognitive patterns are typically understood to concern 'objective' definitions of social reality, definitions that are directed toward the object itself rather than towards the subject's feelings about that object (an orientation that defines expressive patterns), or toward the relation between subject and object (an orientation which defines moral or evaluative patterns). The perception of news as providing 'information' indicates this cognitive status in both lay and sociological parlance. However, as recent, post-positivist

discussion in the philosophy and history of science has emphasized, even the most radically cognitive statements are bound to have evaluative or moral dimensions which, although secondary, are nonetheless significant. The empirical perceptions of scientists are influenced through their group commitments as well as through their more general, moral, cultural, and metaphysical concerns (Polanyi, 1958; Kuhn, 1969; Holton, 1973). Professional disciplinary self-scrutiny cannot eliminate the non-empirical aspect of scientific observation, it can only change the nature of these non-cognitive constraints (Toulmin, 1972). It follows logically that news judgments, as less controlled exercises in empirical observation, are also bound to be partly evaluative. Consequently, to focus primarily on the impact of overt political bias on news reporting or on the problem of journalistic ethics, as a vast literature on the media has done (e.g., Noelle-Neumann, 1978), obscures the fact that a major function of the news media is actually to produce 'bias', to create through the framework of cognitive statements certain non-empirical evaluations. The problem of reportorial bias and professional ethics concern the cognitive dimensions of news, but if we accept the notion that the production of moral bias is also a 'good' and necessary social function, the empirical and theoretical focus of analysis shifts. The problem becomes to discover what particular kinds of evaluative judgments the news media produces, under what conditions it does so, and perhaps, to formulate the ideal and pathological conditions for the performance of this task.

There are two possible orientations of evaluative symbolic judgments, the level of values and the level of norms. Norms occupy a middle, intermediate position between general value patterns and the kind of 'raw data' or 'plain facts' that are continually being produced in the course of human activity. If we do not accept the view of human life as thoroughly atomistic and discrete, we must assume that 'just doing it' cannot be a major mode of self-explanation in any society (Bellah, 1970: 261). More general and significant justifications and legitimations are necessary. Yet at the same time it is true that social life is too variegated, too fluid, too profane to be organized in a manner that is strictly consistent with the broad sacred tenets that provide the kind of generalized integration that form 'value' patterns. A more flexible form of integration is provided by 'normative' patterns, which although sharing in the generality of the value dimension are nonetheless more specific and

contingent, and more open to continuous reformulation in relation to shifting social exigencies.

What is most conspicuous about the news media is its focus on this normative level. Just as individuals continually try to organize their experience in terms of formulating different normative explanations, newspapers do this for the society at large. News stories and news commentaries can be understood as a continuous processing of raw information that makes the experience of a society comprehensible in terms of more general categories.[2] These categories represent both previously articulated normative guidelines and more general value assumptions about what to expect from social life.[3]

The idiosyncratic aspects of news writing and its professional mores can be viewed as geared to this intermediate level of 'normative production'. For example, an examination of news 'leads' indicates that they are not only cognitively oriented to the 'five Ws' but that they invariably make a strong normative and moral point, and that this latter function is indeed the implicit criterion of good versus bad 'lead' writing. The lead is a device for summing up the 'significance' of the data-event by relating it, implicitly, to what people would have expected to happen in similar situations or to more general value judgments that would normally be applicable.[4] In fact, the entire professional concentration on what is 'newsworthy', 'fresh' as opposed to 'stale', as well as the stratification of rewards around the ability to make news 'discoveries' can be viewed as flowing from this normative function. For only by continually finding new, unfiltered, and unforeseen societal experience can the media perform its normative function effectively. This normative function also explains the occupational character and psychology of the news reporter role. The 'tough', 'cynical' quality of the role is usually taken as an indication that reporters have become jaded by the inundation of social experience and are concerned, as a result, only with recording the 'facts' on the most pragmatic and empirical level of analysis. I would suggest, to the contrary, that reporters remain committed to evaluative judgment and that their tough-minded cynicism is a professional role demand requiring the particular kinds of judgments they must produce — particularized and flexible normative evaluations rather than the more generalized, self-important, and 'religious' judgments that characterize spokesmen in institutions concerned with broader cultural patterns.[5]

Social institutions in every social sector can be associated with different kinds of social control, can be understood as providing the society with certain kinds of resources with which to respond to social strain and social conflict. The legal system is the institution commonly associated with social control in the normative sector. Laws present contingent formulations that are both consistent with more general values and at the same time allow society to change and evolve in response to developing strain and conflict. In distinguishing the news media from the law, the significant point is the media's flexibility. By daily exposing and reformulating itself vis-à-vis changing values, group formations, and objective economic and political conditions, the media allows 'public opinion' to be organized responsively on a mass basis. By performing this function of information-conduit and normative-organizer, the news media provides the normative dimension of society with the greatest flexibility in dealing with social strains. In exchange for this flexibility, the news media must, in effect, eschew certain attributes which allow social control to be exercised in other ways; it cannot, for example, attain the self-consciousness, legitimacy, and enforceability of the norms associated with the legal system. Between the news media, on one side, and the legal system on the other, there is a continuum of other institutions which make other kinds of normative contributions. The political party, for example, is more self-conscious than the news media and at the same time significantly less flexible in response to social events; and in relation to the legal system, the party produces norms that are more flexible and responsible while being less legitimate and enforceable.

American news coverage of the Vietnam war strikingly illustrates the central characteristics I have attributed to the mass media: the non-cognitive dimension of news judgments, the particular character of normative versus value statements, and the flexibility this function provides in terms of the operation of social control. It can be argued that throughout the long American involvement in Asia, the 'facts' of the war remained relatively constant. With the passage of time, however, the war was reported very differently and came to seem like a different war. If the empirical event had not changed, what had altered were the non-empirical inputs to the American news media, particularly the normative definitions of those solidary groups that came to oppose the war and the more general value orientations supplied by the intellectual community. In a secondary but nonetheless significant manner, the news media

was also responding to the domestic economic and political strains created by the war which were filtered through the intellectual and solidary groups. It was because of these changing inputs that the 'new facts' about the Vietnam war — the headlines, leads, interviews, and direct observations — became more hostile and, in a symbiotic fashion, contributed in turn to the restructuring of public opinion concerning those facts.[6]

Another strikingly overt illustration of the theoretical position taken here is the American reporting of the Watergate scandal. Throughout the Watergate period, battle raged between different social groups over the proper normative 'framework' for interpreting the break-in and electoral violations, ranging from the Republican administration's characterization, a third-rate burglary, to the left's portrayal, a reactionary neo-fascist plot. Because of the balance of social groups and normative definitions prior to the 1972 presidential election, a situation I will discuss later in this essay in a different context, the 'facts' which appeared as Watergate news before the election supported the former, moderate 'observations'. Only afterward, when events had changed and more universalistic national definitions had begun to reassert themselves, could the 'real' nature of Watergate become reported as news. In restrospect, it is clear that the facts about Watergate are not facts at all without the framework provided by notions of 'constitutionalism', 'impersonal higher authority', and other similar kinds of generalized value commitments. Only the combination of these emergent definitions with the raw data of changing events allowed the more critical normative conclusions to be drawn in the form of fast-breaking news reports.

Although I have chosen two relatively gross examples to illustrate the systemic position of the mass media, and have discussed them only in the most schematic manner, I believe that the natural history of even the most minor news story can be shown to respond to the same kinds of internal and external pressures and that an analysis. of these pressures can be elaborated in rich empirical detail.

In concluding this section, I shall relate the theory presented here to an approach which appears to be its diametrical opposite, the understanding of news media presented by mass society and, more recently, 'critical' theory (Mills, 1956: 298-324; Benjamin, 1973: 112-113; Hall and Whannel, 1964: 364-386; Mueller, 1973: 86-126; Dahlgren, 1978; Golding, 1978). According to this perspective,

rather than performing an integrative function the news media produces atomism and inhibits rather than facilitates the exercise of independent, self-conscious social action. While the sense of atomization often produced by mass news coverage is an undeniable fact, two responses to this mass society critique can be made. First, the diverse pieces of news informations are not, in fact, as disorganized as they appear, for as normative evaluations they are always informed by more general patterns of value orientation. Second, the lack of overall coherence among these pieces faithfully represents the actual conditions of a differentiated society. From the perspective I have outlined, atomization should be seen as the result of the commitment of the news media to organize information at a normative level in as flexible a manner as possible. To maintain flexibility, the norms which are produced cannot be tied to any particular sacred value or to any particular organizational form, despite the fact that either of these connections would contribute to a greater sense of overall coherence. I am arguing, in other words, that the very real sense of disorder created by the front page of a newspaper or by the half hour of network news is actually composed of a series of normative statements each of which provides integration at a situationally-specific level. The sense of overall disorder is necessary if the mass news media is to perform effectively its function of 'covering' with a normative net the wide range of national societal experience. Moreover, we shall see that far from creating passivity and resignation, as the mass society critics assume, this mode of integration creates the possibility for effective, voluntary action and the assertion of individual rights.[7]

THE MASS NEWS MEDIA IN HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Although I have thus far described the mass news media in purely systemic terms, the exercise of this function is dependent on certain unique historical conditions, and the comparative variation in the performance of the news function can be explained in reference to the variation in these historical conditions. The very possibility of flexible normative production is dependent on the autonomy of news media from control by groups and institutions in other social

subsystems. If the news is controlled by political authorities it will be unable to evaluate or 'characterize' political events in relation to competing political and normative perspectives. The news media must also be independent, in a relative sense of course, of more general value-producing institutions, like the church, university and party. Finally, there must be differentiation from structures in the economic dimension, particularly from social classes.

This differentiation of the mass news media is a developmental process parallel to the 'classic' cases of differentiation which have traditionally been the focus of attention, the emergence of the autonomous economic market, independent state, and independent religious and cultural activities (cf. Parsons, 1969).[8] It should be viewed not as an event but as a process. Differentiation of the news media begins with the creation of the first news institution, or collectivity, where there had previously been only the circulation of rumours or improvised publication by broadside.[9] Despite this concrete structural differentiation, however, these first newspapers are usually tied rather directly, in fact have usually emerged in response to, the realization of certain specific group aims such as class demands, party commitments, or religious values. Only gradually is their movement toward more substantive autonomy as not only institutional structures but the goals themselves become differentiated. One step in this process may be a 'legal' free press, but further differentiation always involves freedom from more informal but equally powerful forces in the religious, solidary, economic and political subsystems.[10]

The emergence of a more independent news media can be interpreted as the creation of an 'autonomous regulatory mechanism' for the integrative dimension of society in the same manner that the emergence of representation, party formation, and constitutionalism indicates the development of regulatory mechanisms in the political sphere. And just as the resulting 'generalization' of political power is basic for the achievement of substantive freedom and reformist types of social control (Eisenstadt, 1969; Alexander, 1978), so can the differentiation of mass news media be regarded as the generalization of normative resources, a development that provides society with an enormously increased flexibility in responding to changing events and which contributes in a fundamental way to the attainment of increased freedom in the society at large. With political and cultural differentiation, the legitimation of political power moves from the unconditional forms of traditional

support to the conditional forms of 'rational-legal' legitimation. As the result of this development, the response of other social sectors to the activities of national government becomes increasingly significant for the maintenance of that power. It should be clear that the differentiation of mass news media is basic to such non-traditional legitimation, for it continuously 'regulates' government action according to more general value commitments produced by intellectual and cultural groups as well as in relation to the activities of political, economic and solidary groups which are outside of the government itself. It is no wonder that in a democratic society the media is in constant struggle with the state: it confronts the state as the populist counterpart to rational-legal control.[11]

The social forces that produce and inhibit differentiation of the news media are the same that create differentiation in other spheres. On the structural level, media differentiation is produced by the demands for more universalistic information that oppressed groups make in the course of their demands for societal inclusion and support — for example, in the demands for the end of 'anti-workingman' reporting in late nineteenth-century America or the demand by black groups for 'community' coverage in American society in the 1960s and 1970s.[12] Another such structural factor is the growth of stronger professional norms and self-regulation within the journalistic profession itself, developments that lead to demands for increased prestige and professional freedom.[13] On the cultural level, the crucial variable is the degree of universalism in national civic cultures, which depends on a range of factors from national religion to the structure of the educational system.[14] These differentiating processes manifest themselves in a number of different ways, for example in the changes in hiring policies of reporters, or in the editorial changes that often accompany generational shifts in newspaper ownership within the same family.[15]

At the risk of a certain simplification, this abstract general argument can be stated succinctly in the following way. The problem of the differentiation of the news media is the problem of the realization of a democratic social order, or to use a term I have developed in another context, substantive freedom. To the degree that the news media is tied to religious, ideological, political, or class groupings it is not free to form and reform public events in a flexible way. Without this flexibility, public opinion becomes 'artificial' and 'biased': it will be keyed to a part over the whole.

We are now in a position to return to the general perspective

stated at the outset of this essay and to place it in an historical perspective. Charges of 'news bias' must not be viewed as the failure of a reporter to report what is true, to indulge in the provision of moral judgment as opposed to cognitive information, but rather as the failure of an activity which has a normative and evaluative character to achieve sufficiently differentiated social status. Strains produced by such de-differentiation and the consequent perception of 'bias' are endemic, in various degrees, in all modern societies. If the mass media is 'superimposed' upon, rather than differentiated from, specific religious, class, political, economic, or regional groupings, it will continuously recreate these particularistic formations instead of 'society' itself.[16] The informational inputs to the media will be partial and shielded, and the normative outputs will be rooted in particularistic perspectives. Because flexibility in creating evaluative judgment is diminished, the social control function of the media is rigidified. Because opinion will be formed on the basis of partial information, efforts at reform will be less successful, strain will be increasingly unresolved, and social polarization will be exacerbated.

In such less differentiated situations, the normative definitions produced by the mass media — the news that it reports as fact — are no longer perceived as objective fact, as 'news', by the society as a whole. Only the members of those communities directly associated with the particular medium consider the reporting to be accurate; it is regarded as biased by all other groups, which in turn have their own version of the facts supplied by their own 'client' mediums.

We can view this problem in static terms, comparing different Western media and relating degrees of differentiation to degrees of national acceptance of news as fact or fiction. In the US, one newspaper, the *New York Times*, is accepted as factual arbiter by a wide spectrum of social opinion, with certain exceptions to be discussed below. In England, there is less unanimity, and the London *Times* reported facts that were often in direct contention with those reported by the more working-class or labour oriented *Guardian* and *Observer*. De-differentiation is carried to a further degree in France. Only after the First World War did the papers of France move from direct 'party' affiliations to the representation of 'tendencies' (Albert and Terrou, 1970: 94), and the particularistic association between medium and political orientation still remains strikingly apparent.[17] In Ireland, the situation is such that every

newspaper is directly tied to a group in another functional dimension: it is publicly understood that there are class, party, and religious newspapers.[18]

We can also view this problem of 'biased', client-like relationships between media and particular social groups and institutions in historical terms. The different paths toward development and the uneven, discontinuous advances toward differentiation taken by different Western mass mediums must be seen against the background of divergent national social structures and cultures.

From the early 1600s to the Revolution, the French *ancien régime* established strong censorship and a directly political tradition of news reporting. (In this discussion of the French case, I am drawing upon Manévy, 1966; Deniel, 1965; Boussel, 1960; Bellanger et al., 1969-1976; Bellet, 1967; Albert and Terrou, 1971.) Thus, in the first period of the formally free press, 1789-1792, the perspective of the revolutionaries was that newspapers were not to be unattached but were, rather, to instruct. As Brissot wrote of the press: 'It is the unique means of instruction for a large nation little accustomed to read and wanting to leave ignorance and bondage behind' (Albert and Terrou, 1971: 26-7). New journals formed around individual radical political leaders, expressing their personal points of view and closely connected to revolutionary clubs and societies. Counter-revolutionary news organs, equally personal, soon established themselves. After Napoleon's rigid governmental control the regulation became less intense, but Restoration papers continued to view themselves mainly as adjuncts to parties, classes, regions, and religious groups, and they reported news from a similarly personal editorial outlook. The Catholic right, for example, had its own weekly journals and daily papers that regulated and interpreted its relation to the government, to the Republicans, and to the Church itself vis-à-vis unfolding daily events. This interpretation occurred against the background of certain general value commitments, supplied particularly by Paulian texts as they were articulated by Bonald, Maistre, and Lamenais. Even the reporting by the Catholic press of such specific events as parliamentary debates reflected the general themes of hierarchical authority, the organic unity of the state, and the fundamental position of religion in public life.

The revolutionary period of 1848 simply repeated this pattern of personal political journalism, this time shifting towards the left: George Sand, Raspail, Lamartine, Hugo and Proudhon all had

their own news organs. And despite the broadening mass audience in the later nineteenth century, political and social conditions ensured the continuation of this sectarian style. In the Third Republic, serious senatorial candidates would often start their own newspaper as a means of bolstering their chances for election, and even in this democratic period government authority continued to interfere directly with the media's autonomy. The Republic's press law of 1881 continued to outlaw 'offenses against the President of the Republic, defamations against the army and its leaders, attacks against the regime, and calls to dissolve the laws' (Manévy, 1955: 69). In the 1890s, this law was used freely against socialist and anarchist papers. In the Dreyfus case, newspapers were highly politicized. Zola, after all, had initiated the affair with his famous 'J'accuse' in *L'Aurore* in 1898, for which he spent one month in prison. During each day of the trial, newspapers of different political persuasions devoted their pages to the task of exposing the errors and contradictions of the opposing side. At the time of the outbreak of the First World War, fully 40 of the 50 major French newspapers were frankly and openly propagandistic for different political factions. Although partisanship subsided to some degree between the wars, it was revived during the early post-war years primarily because of the effects of the Resistance, during which highly personalized and political journals flourished around individual leaders.

The American media experience differed drastically from the French for a number of reasons. (1) Although both colonial America and pre-Revolutionary France were enmeshed in patrimonial political systems with non-democratic states, the American experience in this regard was significantly more conducive to media autonomy. America's colonial separation made it much more difficult for England to enforce its royal restrictions than for the French king to enforce the writs of the *ancien régime*. Equally important, the English form of partrimonial rule was significantly more differentiated and controlled than the French; it left more room for decentralized, independent estates and for dissent. (2) The subsequent revolutionary experiences of the two nations were also far different. In France, the highly personalized attacks of the dissenting newspapers on traditional authority were strongly linked to particular ideological positions; this particularism set the stage for a vicious circle of personalized journalism to continue unabated into the post-Revolutionary phases. In

the defeat of McGovern and the ensuing de-polarization of American society did the national media once again begin to receive the more broadly based inputs of support which allowed it to produce news about Watergate that could be judged as fact rather than opinion.[19]

I would conclude by noting that while social scientists have studied 'cleavage' problems extensively in regard to the economic, political and cultural subsystems of society, they have rarely investigated the impact of cleavage on the integrative dimension and the production of norms. This lack of attention is largely the result of the fact that in contrast to these other sectors, processes in the normative dimension have rarely been theoretically articulated.[20] In this section, I have tried to indicate that sharp cleavage situations are explosive not only because they produce broadly defined economic, political and cultural conflicts, but also because, through their impact on the news media, they produce less cognitive agreement about the nature of the 'facts' themselves. The more that this kind of disagreement occurs, the more will social strains become exacerbated and prove immutable to social reform.

'STRUCTURED STRAIN' IN DIFFERENTIATED SOCIETIES

I have argued that the news media's success in performing its normative function is dependent on certain distinctive kinds of historical conditions. In the ideal-type situation of an undifferentiated mass news media, there exists either a single newspaper or news network which is the voice of official ideology and state, or a series of news institutions representing specific social perspectives. At the other end of the spectrum, in the ideal-type of a differentiated situation, the news media is structurally free of directly inhibiting economic, political, solidary, and cultural entanglements. In such a situation, the national public perceives the news media as providing 'facts,' and the media's normative function can be performed in a manner that maximizes its flexibility.

Yet even though such a differentiated situation is in a certain sense 'ideal,' it produces nonetheless certain distinctive kinds of social conflict and is open to certain types of ideological criticism. I will describe these as 'structured strains' or 'contradictions' inherent in the relation between a differentiated mass news media and

its social system environment. Although my treatment of such strains cannot be exhaustive, I will elaborate the kinds of problematic relationship I have in mind.

On the micro-level of role conflict, the existence of differentiation must by its very nature continually raise the problem of collusion between a news reporter and his sources. In order to function as a normative-organizer, the news reporter must stretch his reach into the 'socially unknown', which means establishing intimate and trustworthy contacts through which to gain information which otherwise would remain private and 'unregulated.' Yet if to discover is to engage, to evaluate is to withdraw, and only if the latter occurs can the information garnered by the reporter be processed and judged according to independent norms. This problem must be regarded as a dilemma inherent in the very structure of the differentiated system. 'Selling out' is a possibility only because differentiation has first established the partners for the transaction. On the other side of this conflict, the differentiated and legally protected status of the journalist's role raises the possibility that the narrow interest in finding 'what's news' enters into conflict with important public interests, as when journalists protect the identity of illegal sources. This kind of strain has manifest itself in the increasingly acrimonious conflict between courts and media that is occuring in most Western nations.

Another more general structural problem for even the most ideally differentiated media is the antagonism between government and news agencies that generates efforts at news distortion and manipulation by the government and, in turn, episodes of irresponsible criticism of the government by the media. If, as Neustadt, for example, has maintained (1960: 42-63), the American president is himself a 'normative' figure engaged in persuasion as well as in command, the government's political goals become directly competitive with the goals of the mass media, namely, to place public events within a more general evaluative framework. The president and the media are in continual battle over the normative definitions of events. The norms the president seeks to impose, however, are those of a particular segment of the national community. In other words, precisely because the power of the state is thoroughly differentiated from the news media the latter become vulnerable to an enormously potent political force whose aim, paradoxically, is to completely de-differentiate, or fuse, the relationship. Although the prize in this battle is influence rather than power, the struggle is in

deadly earnest, and it can result, as recent American and Indian experience has demonstrated, in greater danger to political as well as normative freedom.[21]

The third and most general kind of contradiction I will mention concerns the manner in which the differentiated position of the media makes it vulnerable to pressures for the 'inflation' (Parsons, 1967) of its social system role. I will describe this kind of strain in relation to several of its specific manifestations.

Theorists from Aristotle to Marx and Weber have emphasized that the achievement of intellectual insight proceeds most effectively along a dialectical path, through the head-on dialogue of opposing perspectives. Yet, by a logic that would be contradictory to the entire implication of the preceding argument, it appears that the conditions for such dialogue occur only in those societies in which the news media is less rather than more differentiated, for only in relatively undifferentiated situations do the mediums produce sharply divergent perspectives of public events. This logic is apparently fortified by the charges made by intellectuals critical of the American press, who describe it as bland and simplistic, who assert that by not 'facing the issues' the press has contributed to the political and moral stagnation of American society. Of course, to continue the science analogy used earlier, the knowledge created by such polarized media would be subject to a high degree of paradigm conflict. Still, media differentiation appears, paradoxically, inversely related to the sharpness of public thought and the quality of intellectual insight available to the society at large.

But this connection between the impoverishment of public dialogue and media is, indeed, only an apparent one. Social scientists drawing such a connection misunderstand the media's social function, and when the same error is committed by the public at large the media becomes vulnerable to serious damage. The news media's peculiar social position means that it 'reflects' the conditions of the society around it, and in this respect it is, as conventional wisdom would have it, a 'slave to the facts,' if that phrase is taken in non-cognitive sense. Because of its very flexibility and integrative power, the news media cannot be a self-conscious 'organizer' of norms in the way that institutions in other dimensions are: it does not formulate basic goals, which is a political responsibility, or basic values, which is a cultural one. For example, the lack of sharp political focus and perspective in American political news is not a dire commentary on the impact of differen-

tiation on the news media but rather a reflection of the inadequate autonomy achieved by the American political system, as manifest by such structural weaknesses as the atomization of executive and legislative functions and the inability of political parties to articulate and maintain distinctive political positions (cf. Huntington, 1968: 93-139; and Hardin, 1974).

This specific problem provides an opportunity for formulating the contradiction we are concerned with in more general terms. To the degree the mass media sustains a differentiated position, it will absorb the weaknesses and reflect the distortions created by inadequate structural development in other social sectors. Social differentiation is always an 'uneven and combined' process of development, and in one society certain sectors 'lead' where in other societies these same sectors 'lag' (Smelser, 1971:7). The peculiarly American combination of a highly differentiated news media and less thoroughly differentiated political and intellectual institutions produces certain distinctive problems. In this situation, precisely because the media has been such an effective normative organizer, it will be 'blamed' for the weaknesses of these other sectors.

Such a double-bind situation creates strong centrifugal pressure for the inflation of the media's social function which can lead, ultimately, to an equally radical deflation. The media will be asked to perform, and may well accept, a political or cultural role, and because it does not actually possess the functional resources for performing such tasks, it is bound to fail.

Illustrations of this inflationary-deflationary spiral abound in the recent history of the news media in America. In social crises, for example the 1960s, when the weaknesses of the American political system are exacerbated, pressure mounts for the media to expand its functions, to engage in critical or radical political judgment, to investigate, and 'clean up' the government and the society as a whole. But because the government has itself been unable to accomplish this task, in responding to these demands the media opens itself up to devastating political criticism about its lack of objectivity.

'Media politics' presents another example of the manner in which effective media performance can be undercut by weaknesses in the political sector. By media politics, we refer to a range of politically degenerate phenomena: the generation of political support on the basis of presentation of self rather than through the ar-

ticulation of public issues; presidential use of television to create the charismatic, Caesarist domination of political opposition; the volatility of public opinion that encourages the mercurial ascension of untried, inexperienced and often woefully incompetent political 'leadership.' Yet, once again, these problems relate to the deficiencies of the American political system interacting with the peculiar functional position of the media, not to the problems of differentiation in the media itself. Although the differentiation of news media does introduce a high degree of fluidity into political communication, it need not necessarily dominate other forms of political influence, as it tends to in the US. The real problem in the US case is not the differentiation of the integrative dimension but the lack of differentiation of the political system. It is because the institutions that should produce self-conscious political norms cannot do so — cannot, in terms of systemic logic, provide certain kinds of competing inputs to the media — that political candidates gain popularity without articulating explicit positions. In the same manner, although 'presidential politics' is facilitated by a differentiated media, it is the failure of organizational opposition that prevents the creation of alternative, competing political symbolization. And, once again, the pervasive public criticism of what are mistakenly regarded as instances of an inflation of the media's political role can result in the deflation of what is, in itself, a relatively 'healthy' social institution.

This inflationary-deflationary dilemma can occur in regard to the cultural as well as the political dimension. In certain situations of extreme social strain, the news media's normative orientation becomes legitimately transformed into a 'value' function, although even this more generalized role is performed in a highly flexible, reponsive manner. Such a generalization of function characterized television news at crucial points in the Watergate period, particularly during the congressional hearing when television served a key function in the ritualistic invocation of the civic culture that was one of the fundamental responses to the strain of that time. After such episodes (cf. Lang and Lang, 1968), however, the danger is that the news media will be expected to assume the permanent role, and will accept the responsibility of value arbiter rather than norm-organizer. But this inflation can occur only to the degree that deficiencies exist in the cultural dimension itself, if moral leadership cannot generate sufficient clarity and relevance to provide the news media with the kinds of value inputs it would nor-

mally 'register' in a normative manner. The performance of this inflated function makes the news media particularly vulnerable and opens the door for the destructive deflation of its normative scope, for example in the public support for presidential legislation restricting the media's flexibility.

Finally, if our system reference shifts from the national to the international level we can see, quite clearly, that even the most differentiated national medium will usually be closely linked to particularistic, national loyalties in terms of its relationship to extra-national events. One way of comparing the international and national communities is in the degree to which their normative structures are, first, widely shared, and second, universalistic. On the international level there is radically less commonality and radically more particularism. Consequently, whereas the direct link between newspapers and a particular social group remains a distinct possibility on the national level, the de-differentiated identification of newspapers with the interests of a particular national community is standard practice on the level of international social relations. Although many a national newspaper may succeed in differentiating itself from a particular government's 'line' on the interpretation of an international event, it will rarely succeed in differentiating itself from the norms and values of the nation as a normative community. Events in the international arena are, as a result, almost always interpreted from the particularistic perspective of the nation within which the news medium operates.[22] Consequently, little 'regulation' exists and international news appears to outside observers to be biased in the extreme. Whether or not this bias is the result of such overt factors as reportorial ethics or over-reliance on government sources it constitutes a major independent factor in the creation and exacerbation of international conflict. Although this problem of national media particularism is not created by media differentiation — whereas the other strains we have mentioned are — it is certainly a structured strain that this differentiation does nothing to resolve.

In this essay I have presented the outlines of a general theory of the mass news media in society. The media produces certain kinds of normative definitions, and the success of this production depends on the degree to which it has achieved autonomy from other social institutions and groups. A dependent media — the product of an

unevenly differentiated, relatively fused society — can itself become a significant source of social polarization and of rigidification of the mechanisms of social control. Moreover, the flexibility of the news media is such that even in a highly differentiated condition it can become a focal point of great social strain: its very transparency makes it a highly visible conduit for the weaknesses of its external social environment. Although this argument has been abstract and condensed, it provides, I hope, a relatively specific model for future empirical elaboration and debate.

NOTES

1. This sense of the media as powerfully integrative is widely accessible to the common sense of the members and observers of American society in particular. As one visitor to the US wrote in the early nineteenth century: 'The influence and circulation of newspapers is great beyond anything ever known in Europe. In truth, nine tenths of the population read nothing else. . . Every village, nay, almost every hamlet, has its press. . .Newspapers penetrate to every crevice of the nation.' (Thomas Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, Philadelphia, 1833, vol. II, pp. 72-73; quoted in Mott, 1941, p. 168). Tocqueville was also struck by the American press as the independent vehicle of a certain kind of integration. He described it as 'the power which impels the circulation of political life through all the districts of that vast territory. . .The power of the periodical press is second only to that of the people' (*Democracy in America*, 1835, part I, ch. XI). In light of the structural considerations we shall discuss below, it is not surprising that Tocqueville should link the importance of the American press to the individualism and voluntarism which he also emphasized as unique features of the early American scene.

2. In other words, there is a relationship between the fact that individuals need to interpret their experience through general categories and the need for some kind of 'normative production' to exist on the social level. In the early nineteenth century, a writer for the Boston *Daily Advertiser* made this link between the need for individual integration and interpretation and the functional necessity for institutional interpretation very clear. 'The insatiable appetite for *news*,' he wrote, 'has given rise to a general form of salutation on the meeting of friends and strangers: *What's the news?*' (7 April 1814, quoted in Mott, 1941, p. 202, original italics).

I have used the term 'categories' here for a particular reason: it should be emphasized that in addition to being concerned with very situationally-specific and flexible kinds of non-empirical evaluations (see the comparison with legal institutions, below), there is another dimension that distinguishes the news media's evaluations from others. In addition to being normative and specific, 'news' is oriented directly toward cognitive judgments. It provides the social component of rational judgments about the *nature* of everyday life, and it does so in a uniquely standardizing way. Law, by contrast, provides the social and standardizing framework for judgments about the *morality* of everyday life. 'News' directs normative-consensual judgments toward cognitive concerns, law directs them toward moral ones. The normative element of news judgments, then, is not nearly as visible as the normative component of law, since it is expressed in what are apparently purely cognitive terms. This, of course, is the same problem with scientific statements, and one of the primary reasons for the strength of positivist thinking. In terms of the theoretical traditions which emphasize such social structuring of cognitive perception, Parsons (1961) provides a very precise conceptual discussion of the ways in which the *normative* sphere of culture (which he also identifies as the integrative and moral sphere) provides regulation for cognitive, expressive, and moral judgments. The most creative exploration of this social structuring of cognitive perception is undoubtedly to be found in Garfinkel's work (1967, passim). If, in Garfinkel's terms, individuals tend to view external events as simply 'documenting' and elaborating their a priori perceptions, the news media must be understood as a vital link between this individual documentation and social events which an individual will never directly encounter. Reporters employ the 'documentary method' in their own perceptions of events, and the products of their investigations document the events for their readers.

3. The fact of the interpretive character of news stories and their relationship to broader cultural patterns can be seen in any reporting which is subject to conflicting interpretations and is, therefore, an object of political struggle. For example, in early March 1978, 21 of the 37 members of the House International Relations Committee of the United States Congress urged the president of the US in a letter to reconsider his controversial arms package deal to Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. In an article reporting this event, *The Washington Post* linked it to the actions of a number of pro-Israeli groups, describing it as part of a 'determined campaign to block the package deal'. (*Near East Report*, 1978, p. 46). The congressional representatives are characterized here in terms of an ascriptive political bias rather than as responding to their constitutional duties or acting in a conscientious way as individuals. There is no doubt that five years earlier — when more general American sympathies for Israel were more firmly rooted — this 'fact' would have emerged in an entirely different light, if indeed it would have been viewed as sufficiently interesting to be reported as news at all.

Another, equally revealing example can be seen in a recent Canadian incident. In mid-February 1979, the prime minister of Quebec and ardent French nationalist René Levesque was the official host for a visit by the French Prime Minister Raymond Barré. Canada's English-language papers described Levesque's behaviour throughout the trip as an embarrassment, reporting that he had frequently drunk too much and had engaged in 'erratic behaviour.' The French-language press viewed the visit far differently. The incidents, when mentioned at all, were usually treated as good fun, evidence of Levesque's informality and high spirits. While the *Globe and*

Mail, a leading English-language paper, accused the French-language press of a cover-up, Michel Roy, editor of Montreal's *Le Devoir*, argued that the reporting of the specific incident revealed contrasting general orientations: 'The secrets and travels of Margaret Trudeau have never had the place of honor in the French-language press that they have had in the newspapers of our colleagues...What comes out of the anecdote, out of private behavior, out of the digressions of conduct of a public figure — without being submitted to censorship for an instant — interests the French press much less [than the English]. (Los Angeles *Times*, 1979). To the French journalists and editors, Roy is arguing, the 'incidents' had simply not been news: they had not violated their general expectations of personal behavior for public figures.

Although the study conducted by Paletz et al. (1971) of city council news coverage in Durham, North Carolina, emphasizes the specifically political bias of news reporting, it can just as accurately be viewed as documenting the more general function of news as normative-organizer and interpreter. The study concludes that news reports on the council's activities invested the events with a 'rationality, causality, and temporal coherence' not inherent in the events themselves: '[C]onventional journalism includ[es] condensing and summarizing: investing events with rationality and coherence (even though the events may be confusing to the participants, and the reporter himself may not fully comprehend both what has occurred and its meaning); emphasizing the council's decisions at the expense of other activities...and treating the council and its members with respect.' (1971: 81)

4. The interpretive and 'clarifying' (i.e. normative) function of news is revealed, implicitly, by journalists' self-imposed strictures about the style of news writing. The style books utilized by major news organizations universally stress simplicity of language in the service of communicability. To achieve such simplicity, of course, important details must be selected from a wide range of facts. As Harold Evans, editor of *The Sunday Times*, writes in *Newsman's English*: 'Sentences should assert. The newspaper reader above all does not want to be told what is not. *He should be told what is*. (1972: 25. Italics added.) As Evans makes clear in the rules he lays down for copy editors, to be simple and pricese is at the same time to identify facts that are significant to an individual's social life. '[The copy editor] must insist on language which is specific, emphatic, and concise. Every word must be understood by the ordinary man, every sentence must be clear at one glance, and every story must say something about people. *There must never be a doubt about its relevance to our daily life*.' (1972: 17. Italics added.) The close relation between the interpretive function of news and its peculiar linguistic style is also revealed in the following admonition by Curtis McDougall, professor emeritus of journalism at Northwestern University. 'Vagueness and indefiniteness are avoided, and clarity obtained, *by placing important ideas at the beginnings of sentences. Also by playing up the action, significance, result or feature of the paragraph or story*, by avoiding vague and indefinite words and eliminating superfluous details, words, phrases, and clauses.' (1968: 104. Italics added.) Of course, these latent functions of news style are contrary to the self-conscious professional rationale, which views stylistic simplicity simply as a means to more powerfully communicate neutral and objective truth. Sometimes this contradiction is revealed quite plainly, as when Hohenberg, author of *The Professional Journalist*, argues, on the one hand, that instead of using platitudes and jargon the writer should just provide 'a clear, simple story of what happened' (1978: 100) and, on the other, that the journalist must be an interpreter

who 'applies the rule of reason to the news' (ibid., p. 440). For an extremely perceptive analysis of some of the broader implications of news prose, see Harris, 1978.

5. Indeed, this continued occupational commitment to normative evaluation is reflected in what is in fact an inherent gullability of the reportorial role, which is reflected, for example, in the way that newspapers are always open to accepting 'the hoax' (Shaw, 1975). It is also reflected in the continual strain toward journalistic 'advocacy' and activism, even under the conditions of media differentiation.

6. Perhaps the most spectacular illustration of this shifting process of interpretation can be seen in the American news media's coverage of the 1968 Tet offensive in Vietnam. American war reporters' perceptions of the massive strength of the North Vietnamese Army have to be understood as occurring against the background of their growing distrust for official US military sources in Saigon, their increasing alienation from US governmental authority in general, and their ever more firmly rooted pessimism about a successful outcome for the US war in Asia. It was for these reasons that the reporters' descriptions of the Tet offensive emphasized the 'psychological defeat' suffered by the US and South Vietnamese rather than the more purely military side of the US response, which could have been interpreted as a stand-off, or even, quite legitimately, seen as a limited US victory given the military objectives of the North Vietnamese. (Baestrup: 1978, passim.)

The domestic impact of this negative reporting of Tet was, of course, tremendous. It was undoubtedly partly responsible for the decision of Lyndon Johnson not to seek a second term in office and indirectly contributed, therefore, to the election of Richard Nixon. This incident demonstrates, then, the real autonomy of the news interpretation vis-à-vis other institutions and other normative pressures. Still, these war correspondents' judgments were themselves highly responsive to the changing positions of other institutions and authoritative interpretors of public events. There is a symbiotic relationship between the reporting of news, the discovery of new facts, the opinions of intellectuals (both elite and dissident) as expressed in intellectual journals, the contents of 'little magazines', and the stories in mass news magazines. In one sense, the intellectual journals and little magazines may be seen as the 'creators' of new orientations and the mass weeklies and daily news mediums as 'distributors' (cf. Hirsch, 1978). On the other hand, these sources of opinion must be seen as truly interdependent and, further, as closely linked (through personal networks as well as through channels of information) to institutions in other sectors of the social system (cf. Kadushin, 1975).

7. This recent emphasis by mass society and critical theory on the enormous power of the media to suppress reflexivity and to enforce passivity rests upon a theoretical logic that must be strongly rejected: the proposition that individuals can create their own interpretations of the external world without reference to socially established norms. Thus, the very fact that normative interpretation is linked to supra-individual 'social facts' (in Durkheim's sense) is prima facie evidence, according to critical theory, of the anti-voluntaristic character of mass-media effects. We contend, to the contrary, that since all individual decisions occur in a normatively-defined environment, the decisive issue is not *whether* but *how* and *what*: what is the nature of this normative institution and how does it affect action? This introduces an historical and comparative perspective on the question of reflexivity and autonomy which is lacking from most of the recent media literature informed by critical theory.

While this most recent 'strong media' approach over-emphasizes the power of media vis-à-vis individuals — and, correspondingly, virtually eliminates the reality of secondary institutional life — the earlier classical media studies (like the two-step flow model of communication: Katz and Lazarsfled, 1955) created a 'weak media' model that was unrealistic in the other extreme. These studies focussed on whether or not the media could influence short-run political events — and on whether media effects can be isolated from social context — rather than on its specific cultural impact on normative perception. Certainly the media is impotent if it departs too radically from the socialized values of its audience and their primary groups (cf. Shils and Janowitz, 1948 [1975]): Its critical sociological contribution is, precisely, to relate these background values to the vast array of particular incidents that unfold in the daily life of a modern society. The relevant theoretical question at this stage of media research is not that of primary groups versus mass media but rather the specific function performed by mass media vis-à-vis primary groups, secondary institutions, and ongoing social events.

The third theoretical tradition of mass-media research which we polemically address in this essay is the more orthodox Marxist, or ruling class model whereby the media is viewed as an instrument for the dominant economic elite to control information for their own instrumental interest (for a recent attempt to document this position for the Canadian case, see Clement, 1975: 270ff). The fundamental theoretical weakness of this perspective is that it overlooks the pivotal role of voluntary action in the media process, the fact that the judgments expressed in news stories are much more the result of the socialized value orientations of reporters than the instrumental control of media owners. In historical terms, the general movement of Western media has been gradually to separate itself from direct client relationships with social groups, as we will argue in detail below. (Elizabeth Baldwin's (1977) argument, I believe, successfully challenges the proposed overlap of Canadian media and corporate elites in her re-analysis of the data used by Clement). The ruling class model argues, to the contrary, that not only has the media retained its tight linkage to social interests, but that any historical analysis of media position should focus principally on social classes (cf. Golding, 1974: 23-29). We shall insist, by contrast, on a multidimensional analysis of the independent variation of the media's relations to every major institutional subsystem.

8. I have tried to synthesize the literature on cultural, structural, and psychological differentiation from the point of view of its analytic theory and its ideological perspective in Alexander, 1978. For a general exposition of the theoretical perspective that has informed the present discussion, see Alexander, 1981.

9. *La Chanson de Roland* — the epic poem of medieval France — may be considered for example, as an illustration of organized opinion about a political event (Charlemagne's campaigns in 778-779 AD) which had not yet taken a differentiated institutional form as 'news'.

In the differentiation process, the relationship of rumour and broadsides to the media is the same as the relation of court cliques to political parties in political life, trading fairs to markets in the economic sphere, and early monotheistic religions to transcendental religion in the cultural world.

For an interesting discussion of the origins of mass news mediums in fifteenth and sixteenth century France, especially the early 'canards,' see Seguin, 1961 and 1964. These early canards present a theoretically fascinating case because they combine a

religious-magical world view with the newly emerging standards of 'objective' reports that typify a differentiated media. Canards regularly reported fantastic events like miracles, visions, and various manifestations of the divine will on earth while, at the same time, trying to 'verify' them in good reportorial style by providing impressive lists of eye witnesses (from whom age and profession would be presented) and by providing legitimating texts from religious and secular authorities (Seguin, 1964: 21-24).

10. Because of the differences in specific historical development, the mass mediums of different Western nations were attached to, and promoted by, different kinds of groups and institutions. Differentiation has proceeded, therefore, at enormously different rates and with widely varying results. In France, the first real newspapers were organs of the absolutist state, to which the Church soon responded with papers of its own (Albert and Terrou, 1970). In the US, on the contrary, the differentiated state as such never had its own media, and the most important early papers were promoted by independent bourgeois like the Franklin brothers and later by political parties (Mott, 1941). The relationship between institutional independence and legal freedom is similarly uneven. Whereas in the US legal freedom of the press preceded any real institutional independence the institutional autonomy of certain newspapers in nineteenth century France — at least the ability of papers to disagree with one another and the government, to present divergent interpretations of unfolding events — preceded the legal freedom which arrived only with the Third Republic. For a more detailed discussion of the comparative historical development of the media, see below. For the conceptualization of the institutional versus goal aspect of differentiation, see Eisenstadt, 1969: 13-32.

11. In rational-legal societies, this struggle between state and media will be a fight for position and relative strength with each side retaining its relative freedom of movement. In societies where regimes are neither fully traditional nor fully rational-legal, on the other hand, the state will become interventionist and impinge on the internal functioning of the press itself. The governments in such societies will confront the media in different ways depending on the nature of the particular resources they possess. In various forms of political dictatorship, the governments of nineteenth century France relied on direct political force of one kind or another. Napoleon established the first left-wing control of media with his 'Décret du 27 Nivôse' on 17 January 1808, which tried to institutionalize general ideological values from which newspapers could not deviate. It forbade journals to publish articles 'contrary to the social compact, to the sovereignty of the people and the glory of the armies' (Albert and Terrou, 1970: 30). The purpose of this tactic was to control the effects of social differentiation by preventing any independent interpretive intercession between the government and newly emerging social groups. This rationale was articulated very precisely by Napoleon in his memoirs at Sainte-Hélène. As he wrote about his government-controlled newspaper, *le Moniteur*: 'J'ai fait du Moniteur l'âme et la force de mon government ansi que mon intermédiare avec l'opinion public du dedans comme du dehors. . . .C'était le mot d'ordre pour les partisans du government'. ['I made the *Moniteur* the soul and the power of my governments as well as my intermediary with public opinion inside and outside the country. . . . It laid down the "word of order" for the supporters of the government' (quoted in Albert and Terrou, 1970: 31)].

Later, when the French government of the Second Empire couldn't control the increase in newspapers in the face of rapid and widespread social differentiation and

its own weakened control, the regulation it did achieve was still established through political means: first, by establishing 'authorization' and demanding the rights to pre-publication readings (*prealables*) and also by sponsoring its own official media (Havin's *Le Siecle*, the 'monitor of the opposition'). Despite these precautions, the existence of the 'authorized' opposition papers contributed massively to the fall of the regime in the late 1860s and early 1870s.

By contrast, in a liberal if not fully democratic regime, like that in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England, the government seeks to control opposition media in more voluntary ways. Thus, between 1815 and 1855 Britain's government imposed high taxes that made British papers the most expensive in Europe (three times as expensive as the French). The effect of this indirect economic control was, nonetheless, much the same as with direct political control: it cut off the ability of competing leadership from reaching the masses and, thereby, enforced a more strongly stratified political community (Albert and Terrou, 1970: 50). We will elaborate more on this comparative and historical discussion below.

12. As long as state control does not become absolute — as in the ideal-typical fascist or communist state — social differentiation will produce (and be created by) new social groups whose position vis-à-vis other groups and unfolding events must be articulated and whose demands must be internally integrated and standardized. These tasks can be achieved only if the group has its own news medium. It is for this reason that in the nineteenth century France, despite the unfree status of the press, the numbers and varieties of newspapers increased dramatically, as did the total circulation (from 150,000 to 1 million between 1852 and 1870 — all during the period of government control). Every new rupture in French society during the 1860s, even between the government and its natural supporters like the Catholics, created new papers. By 1870, even the *normaliens* had their own organ, *Le Courier du Dimanche* (Bellet, 1967).

13. The existence of the 'journalistic profession' is an example of the kind of role differentiation that must accompany institutional differentiation. In eighteenth century America, the first newspapers were established and written by printers, who performed a number of different tasks in their local communities. '[The typical editor] had other affairs besides his newspaper on his hands. He was a job-printer and usually a publisher of books and pamphlets...often the local postmaster, sometimes a magistrate, in many cases public printer...frequently kept a bookstore...occasionally branched out into general merchandise lines' (Mott, 1941: 47). There seem to have been three phases of role differentation in the history of America media. In the first, printers themselves performed all the principal tasks involved. In the second phase, which extends from the first days of the nation into the late nineteenth century, the printers were, on the one hand, differentiated from general editors who directed all editorial policy and were usually also the owners of the paper, and from writers on the other. Writers in this period were usually highly educated 'intellectuals'. In the third phase, owners and editors were differentiated from each other and, correspondingly, the journalist's role became more specialized and professional, and relatively more insulated from the personal intervention of the owner.

One can also argue that the contents of newspapers themselves became increasingly differentiated as they sought to integrate and interpret the events and institutions of an increasingly differentiated society. From the late nineteenth century onward, the sections of the Western papers have become increasingly specialized into sports

sections, home sections, religion and book review supplements, editorial and national, local, and foreign news, business and leisure, travel, and so forth.

14. Walzer (1965: 255) has demonstrated, for example, the tremendous spur given by the universalistic religious categories of Puritanism to the development of early English news pamphlets. The transcendent and impersonal orientation of the Puritans made them distrust traditional, personal sources of information, particularly as they related to outside events like foreign wars and the progress of the international Protestant movement. To remedy this situation, the Puritans issued their own, more objective news pamphlets. This early development in the mass news media also served to define the self-consciousness of a newly emerging social group, the English gentry.

15. This kind of multidimensional analysis of sources of differentiation makes it possible to understand a fact that is commonly misinterpreted in the literature on media, namely the impact of decreasing economic competition among newspapers and television stations. The fact that this historical development has been accompanied by a perception of increased news objectivity indicates that although economic competition is certainly a facilitating factor, it is only one economic factor among several others in contributing to media independence. Indeed, economic competition is not nearly as important an economic factor as the differentiation of media institutions from other strategic elites and from institutions in other societal sectors. Directed by a strategic elite oriented toward a unique function, the news media needs enormous financial resources to support its independence from other sectors in the society, even from the industrial-corporate one. Thus, the somewhat paradoxical fact exists that in the period of monopoly capitalism the media must become corporations in order to save themselves from being dominated by, among other things, financial pressure from the economy and its dominant class.

The French case is interesting in this regard, for it can be argued that one of the primary reasons for the lack of independence of the French press from various social groups and classes was its inability to procure advertising. British and US papers relied heavily on advertising to expand circulation and news coverage and to generate capital internally; in this way, they could become more independent of personal wealth and direct control. In France, however, the enormous cultural bias against 'bourgeois commercialization' for a long time made it impossible for newspapers to both publish advertisements and be accepted as objective mediums (Albert and Terrou, 1970). (The contrasting effects of advertising can be seen in the fact that while in 1914 the average French newspaper was 8-10 pages, the average British and American paper was 20 pages or more).

The differences between this French situation and the American one could not be more striking. In America, the early papers were often started precisely for the purpose of advertising, the 'news' representing a later editorial addition. The antinomy between advertising and objectivity was virtually non-existent in America: a vast number of newspapers in the early nineteenth century were in fact called 'advertisers' even when they were principally devoted to news reporting and to political affairs (e.g. the Boston *Daily Advertiser*).

By contrast to the aristocratic distrust of commercialization ingrained in French culture, it is individualism that informs the positive American attitude toward media advertising. As the Boston *Daily Times* replied to its critics in 1837: 'Some of our readers complain of the great number of patent medicines advertised in this paper. . . . [W]hether the articles advertised are what they purport to be. . . is an in-

quiry for the reader who feels interested in the matter, and not for us, to make. It is sufficient for our purpose that the advertisements are paid for. . . . One man has as good a right as another to have his wares, his goods, his panaceas, his profession published to the world in a newspaper, provided he pays for it' (quoted in Mott, 1941: 301).

16. For the use of the concept 'superimposition' and the reasons why superimposition exacerbates social conflict, see Dahrendorf, 1959: 206-240.

17. In the typical coverage of a single event in the Parisian press there is very little overlap in 'facts' among the several papers which span the political spectrum from right to left. For example, on Sunday, 30 July 1978, most papers reported that the French government planned to support Spain's entry into the European Common Market. The conservative *Le Figaro* ran the news as a major front page story, but it focussed entirely on what it described as the dishonest, unscrupulous manner in which Socialist leaders had opposed the government's decision under the banner of support for southern French agricultural workers. The communist paper, *L'Humanité*, played the story in an equally big way, but described the news as the 'intolerable' and irresponsible government decision, purportedly taken without 'rational' consultation with the agricultural groups affected. An equally important part of its front page story coverage concerned the announcement of the elaborate demonštrations to be held by the agricultural workers in southern France. *Le Matin*, the moderate socialist daily, referred to the government's decision hardly at all, focussing almost completely in its front page story on the new political conflict between the Socialists and Communists the decision had triggered. *Le Monde* placed the story on page 20, representing without elaboration the press releases of the government, Socialists, and Communists. As this brief recounting begins to indicate, in a very real sense French newspapers are more interpretive than descriptive; indeed, it is often hard ;o get a sense of the nature of the actual event without reading the report in every paper. In the weekend edition of *Le Figaro*, 29-30 July, five out of six front page stories were basically editorial commentaries. With the exception of the Common Market story, the first news reports appeared on page 3.

18. Left-wing totalitarian governments, of course, present a systematically different and much more primitive kind of media 'fusion'. There, the lack of differentiation between state and society has pushed the media into the role not really of party newspaper but of party-state ideological organ. There is a direct link between such a media position, however, and the dominance of party papers in the pre-revolutionary periods. Bolshevik papers began, for example, as the instruments of a struggling party, organs which, correctly, viewed bourgeois papers as similarly particularistic and ideological in orientation. The Russian Revolution, then, simply substituted one dominant class bias for another. As Lenin wrote in 1921: 'Capitalism has transformed journals into capitalist enterprises, into instruments of gain for informing and amusing the rich, and as a means of duping and undermining the mass of workers. . . . *We* have begun to make the journals an instrument for instructing the masses, to teach them to live and to build their economy without the financial interests and the capitalists.' (Lenin, *Oeuvres*, volume 32, pp. 132, quoted in Conte, 1973. Italics added.) This perspective is firmly in place today. As a leading journalist, V. Kudrajavcev, wrote in *Izvestija* on 25 August 1968: 'Even the very term "truth" has a class content' (quoted in Conte, 1973). In 1969, 77 percent of the more than 11,000 students entering Soviet journalism schools were party members. As I have tried to indicate by calling them ideological organs rather than newspapers

the Soviet press actually performs more of a generalized, value function than a specific, normative one. They are more interested in the underlying 'meaning' of events — in putting the events directly into the general ideological context of Soviet Marxism-Leninism and Russian national culture — than in the nature of the unfolding events themselves and in their immediate relation to other events in the society. It seems possible that the more detailed and concrete function of day-to-day integration and interpretation is performed by other Soviet institutions, for example by the elaborate and profuse 'letters-to-the-editor' sections contained in many newspapers.

19. Although the parallel is not exact, a similar relationship can be seen between a recent period of intense polarization and the emergence of more particularistic mediums in France. In September 1977, when it appeared that the French left coalition would come to power in the March 1979 national elections, a potentially powerful new paper, *J'informe*, appeared on the national scene. Published by a former cabinet minister close to Giscard D'Estaing and financed by a number of large industrial interests, the paper immediately assumed the role of spokesman and interpreter for the government's center-right coalition (with an initial circulation of 150,000). Although the *J'informe*'s short-run purpose was to contribute to the government's re-election, its long-range goal was to provide a forum for Giscard's party and, presumably, for the social interests attached to it, after the left took control. Once the left coalition split apart in late 1977, and the prospect of a left-wing government receded, the need for the new and self-consciously propagandistic paper was gone. On 18 December 1977 *J'informe* ceased publication; its financial backers had withdrawn the necessary support (*New York Times*, 18 December 1977, p. 8).

20. For a parallel discussion of another segment of the integrative dimension of society and the cleavages to which it is subject, see Alexander, 1980.

21. In the American case, the conflict between government and news medium can be traced back to the very first year of the American federal government. In 1789 the US Congress sharply restricted journalists' access to the US Senate because of what they regarded as the latter's 'misrepresentations' of recent Senatorial debates (*Abridgement of the Debates of Congress*, Vol. I, pp. 952-955, 26 September 1789, as quoted in Mott, 1941, p. 143).

The controversial case of Philippe Simmonet and *Le Monde* offers an example of this conflict in a different national media environment. On the grounds that Simmonet, a veteran economic reporter for *Le Monde*, had discovered and intended to print some information that was embarrassing to the government's relation to the international oil companies, the French government brought suit to prevent publication. The strength of the government in this situation is revealed by the fact that *Le Monde*'s editors surrendered tamely to its pressure, in fact joining the government in pressing Simmonet to reveal his sources and — when he would not — firing him without due process. Needless to say, the firing immediately became politicized, and Socialist and Communist trade union representatives joined Simmonet's suit to regain his position. It is extremely revealing that the message Simmonet takes away from his experience is that the idea of a 'liberal', independent journal is hypocritical, and that newspapers should seek to develop consistent, all-encompassing political perspectives on everyday events (see Simmonet, 1977, passim).

22. This is revealed in a particularly acute way by the lies that are so often told, wittingly and unwittingly, by war correspondents. On this topic, see Knightley, 1978. For an extremely interesting analysis of the differences in newspaper coverage

of the first American manned moon landing by French, Italian, and Russian papers, see Tudesq, 1973. On the topic of international 'news' in general, it is not inaccurate to say that the Western powers moved to establish wire services in the mid-nineteenth century — the Wolffe Agency in Germany, Reuters in England, L'Agence Havas in France, Associated Press in the US — precisely in order to gain some control over and develop some national policy in regard to the rapidly developing international economic and political relations of the day. (On the French case, see Frédérix, 1959.) It should also be mentioned, however, that one nation's newspapers can often serve as an important source of critical leverage for the dissidents of another, as British BBC broadcasts have served for dissidents in Uganda and Pakistan today.

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