

Critical News Analysis

1. The study of news

In this paper I attempt to integrate my recent work on the structures and functions of news discourse in the press with a renewed social and critical focus in the study of language and discourse in general, and of news discourse, in particular. It may be expected that a discourse analytical approach to news will provide a solid and more explicit basis for socio-political studies of the media. Conversely, a critical perspective is a necessary and timely extension of more traditional approaches in discourse analysis.

Space limitations do not permit a detailed summary of my own and others' work on the structures and processes of news discourse. However, a few key results should briefly be mentioned here in order to provide some theoretical background for the critical analysis of news discourse.

Firstly, the discourse analytical study of news provides a more explicit account of the structures of news as a specific text genre. It is no longer satisfied with a superficial content analysis of media "messages" (Krippendorff, 1980), but specifies for all the usual levels of text analysis the general and specific structural properties which define this genre. News discourse in the press, is then characterized by a fixed schema, featuring such conventional categories as Summary (Headline and Lead), Main Event, Background, Context, Verbal Reaction, and Comments. This schema, as well as its macrostructural (thematic) content, is realized discontinuously in the news text, that is, by "installments", ordered in such a way that the most important, interesting or relevant information of each category will come first; and other information later (or "lower") in the text. In other words, news discourse is strategically organized by a principle of relevance, which may supercede the underlying structures and ordering principles of the conventional schema. This schematic analysis of news discourse is obviously only one element in the rather complex framework of syntactic, semantic, stylistic, rhetorical and semiotic analyses of news reports (Hartley, 1982; Diger, 1983).

Secondly, the study of processes of news production by journalists may be approached from a discourse analytical point of view as well. Following important earlier work on the economic and macro- or micro-sociological properties of news organizations and the processes of newsmaking (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978), such a discourse approach emphasizes the fact that virtually all newsmaking is a form of text processing. News events are seldom witnessed and described directly; rather, they become available to journalists through a multitude of different "source

description of hysterical narrative from *Dora*, "an unnavigable river whose stream is at one moment choked by masses of rock and at another divided and lost among shallows and sandbanks," may apply quite closely to the geological thematic of much of Chatterton's writing and, perhaps more importantly, quite exactly to the structural strategy of De Quincey's remarkable digressions. See *Dora: Analysis of A Case of Hysteria*, 30. For a more general discussion of the topography of streams and blockage in Freud's work, see Henry Sussman, *The Hegelian Aftermath. Readings in Hegel, Kierkegaard, Freud, Proust, and James*, (Baltimore, 1982), 168-175 and Neil Hertz, "The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime," in *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1976-1977*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman, (Baltimore, 1978), 62-85.

53 Sigmund Freud, "An Analysis of Anxiety," 76.

54 Freud, "An Analysis of Anxiety," 88.

55 Yourcenar notes that the Mammertime was a completely different kind of prison, though--resembling a grave more than the terrifyingly infinite spaces of Piranesi's *carceri*. Yourcenar, 109.

56 Wilton-Ely, 89.

57 Yourcenar, 114.

58 This essay was aided by the kind assistance of the staffs of the Library Company of Philadelphia and The British Library, and by a grant from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation.

discourses", such as eyewitness reports, rumors, stories, interviews, press conferences, press releases, documents, reports, phone calls, agendas, and messages from other media and press agencies. These source discourses pre-define and pre-construct events as news events, and may already presuppose their newsworthiness. Reporters and editors, then, will essentially apply a number of operations, such as selection, summarization, combination, deletion, and stylistic reformulation on the basis of these earlier messages. These operations, as well as the cognitive and ideological processes of the journalists themselves, define the essentially constructed nature of news events. Many of the properties of this type of text-oriented news gathering also appear in the structures and strategies of news reports. Summarization especially appears in the Summary category of the news schema, interview fragments in Verbal Reactions, documentation in Background categories, and ideological positions in the overall relevance hierarchy, in lexical style and in the Comment categories of the news schema. In other words, news structures also contribute to the very reproduction of consensus and of professional and social ideologies underlying the process of newsmaking. This realization is essential in a sound critical theory of news.

Finally, a more explicit discourse approach to news will pay attention to the cognitive and social processes of reading, comprehension and uses of news and news information (1-16ijer & Findahl 1984; van Dijk, 1988a). Advances in the psychology of text processing allow a far more detailed account of the cognitive representations and strategies that define the processes of reading, comprehension, and memorization (van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). These processes in turn determine the widely studied but still elusive process of "influence", that is, the transformation of knowledge, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, ideologies, and other social cognitions of news users. Reading and comprehension are strategic processes in which readers make flexible, provisional but effective use of both external information from text and context, as well as resident knowledge and beliefs. The result of these "on line" processes is the construction of two types of representation, namely a representation of the text itself, and a so-called "situation model".

This situation model is the mental correlate of what a text is about, for instance, an event, action or state of affairs. Unlike "real" situations, models are partial and subjective. Models are organized by a fixed schema, consisting of such categories as Setting (Time and Location), Participants and Event, and their properties. In addition to information about the situation itself, they also contain opinions and therefore are the crucial cognitive result of the "application" of underlying attitudes and ideologies. Models are the representations of our personal experiences, whether our own activities or those events we read or hear about. Although we build a unique model for each discourse, new information will often also be used to update old models, for instance when we read about the situation in Lebanon in the press. Models may be generalized and may eventually be abstracted and decontextualized towards more general

knowledge scripts (e.g., about civil wars) or attitude schemata (about nuclear energy). Whereas textual representations are limited to the semantic (and fragments of the surface) structure of the text itself, therefore having limited accessibility, models also feature many other kinds of information drawn from general scripts and attitudes. In other words: models are the result of all information built or retrieved in the process of understanding a text or an event. In later reproduction of news, for instance in conversation, it is not the text representation but the model that will underlie subsequent uses of news information.

Models are crucial in the cognitive account of news understanding and influence. They are the first step in explaining how people acquire knowledge or opinions from the media. Of course, not only readers but also reporters and editors have (subjective) models of news events. Models result from the understanding of source texts, and underlie the production of the actual news text. The inferences readers or analysts draw from news reports about the "intentions" of the journalist, whether conscious or not, amount to a reconstruction of journalistic models of news events. Therefore, an ideological analysis of news needs a detailed theory of the structures, contents and transformations of such models.

It should be noted, in addition, that both journalists and readers not only build models of the events they write or read about, but also of the communicative situation itself, that is, of the event and context of writing, reading or watching news. Such a "context model" features information about the writer, reader or listener, the goals, relevant speech acts, and other social information of the communicative event and its participants. This context model influences the construction of the situation model: if we read a tabloid, our knowledge and opinions may assign a structure, content or opinion different from those suggested by the text, or intended by the author.

In other words, context models provide the bridge between the social context of news and the cognitive processes of news production, comprehension and use. Again, we see that models are crucial in critical, ideological analyses of news discourse. Although they are by definition unique and personal, models embody group-based representations of social events and structures and are able to explain how people process information. Models are the bridge that relates general social beliefs and ideologies to concrete, personal text production and hence with text structures. Similarly, models are essential in the definition of consensus: they explain how information and norms may become shared in groups, and how socio-political and cultural beliefs, interests and ideologies are acquired by the members of a group. Subjective, personal models explain how individuals may have different, variable interpretations of the same event or news discourse, while at the same time sharing general, consensual frameworks of interpretation, that is, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes or ideologies of the group.

2. Critical analysis

Against the background of this theoretical framework of news discourse, we may now make our next step, and introduce a critical dimension to our analysis. Such critical analysis is not new. It can be traced back to the work of the Frankfurt School, both in the humanities and the social sciences. This tradition is still influential in Europe (and Latin America), but less pervasive in the U.S.A. (Fitchen, 1981). One reason for this difference in influence is that this tradition is closely linked with a leftist point of view, and often (but not always) inspired by (neo-)marxist, political analysis of society, power, and ideology. Whereas it has had much influence in political science and sociology, the influence of this critical paradigm has at best been marginal in the dominant journals and books on linguistics, discourse analysis and mass communication. However, the past decade has seen some scattered attempts to change this critical underdevelopment of the language and communication sciences.'

British scholars and research centers have become leaders in the critical analysis of the mass media, and of media discourse in particular. Thus, the Center for Mass Communication Research in Leicester, the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham, and the Glasgow University Media Group, and associated researchers, all published critical studies of the British media. For the CCCS, interested more generally in a critical study of culture, this, for instance, has meant the introduction of a British (more explicit and less esoteric) version of some French social scientists and philosophers. Much of the CCCS research is being inspired by Gramsci's work on hegemony and ideology. Finally, at the universities of East Anglia (Norwich) and Lancaster, there have been developments towards a political and critical linguistics which are relevant for our critical position as well.'

I share many of the goals and theoretical frameworks of these British researchers. They are opposed to the kind of empirical research and superficial content analyses that have dominated much U.S. mass communication and news analysis. Despite the critical position taken against what they see as empirical positivism, much of their actual work shows a tendency towards systematic analysis and description, rather than a philosophical meta-analysis that is only accessible to the initiated. For example, the research done at the CCCS combines a serious political and ideological analysis with concrete studies of cultural phenomena in general, and the media in particular.

Having thus acknowledged my intellectual debts to some branches of the critical paradigm, and especially to its current versions in the U.K., I should also point out the need to look forward and develop new ideas, new theories and new methods of research. For instance, despite the critical attention paid to the media, and despite the highly interesting news analyses carried out by the centers and researchers just mentioned, their work is still rather fragmentary from a discourse analytical point of view. Influenced by some directions in French discourse analysis, this

British research tends to give more attention to the philosophical and political dimensions than to the concrete linguistic and other discursive properties of text and talk. Once prevalent, but now superseded, ideas of early structural linguistics, are still being used as if they were new and powerful analytical instruments. For instance, within the framework of a belated reception of 1960s semiotic analysis, elementary components of de Saussure's theory of signs, dating back to the beginning of this century, are still being referred to as if no new developments have taken place in more than half a century of linguistics and two decades of discourse analysis in many disciplines.

In other words, the current knowledge about phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic structures of sentences, text or talk, and about the socio- and psycholinguistic processes at work in the use of language in the social and communicative context, simply cannot be ignored, even in a political and ideological analysis. True, much of the work in linguistics and discourse analysis has displayed a converse limitation, that is, a neglect of the socio-political dimensions of language use and discourse. Notions such as power, ideology, dominance, exploitation, (re-) production, social formation, and related concepts are rare in the study of semantic representations, speech acts, sociolectal style variation, conversational turn-taking, textual coherence, narrative grammars, or modern rhetoric, to name only a handful of branches of modern discourse analysis. Hence, what we need in an up-to-date critical analysis of (news and other) discourse, is an integration of current socio-political theories of discourse and culture with these more explicit structural approaches to discourse.

At this point, a comment is in order. The program sketched above is not unrelated to the styles of writing and research, although these may seem only superficial expressions of theory formation. I have already suggested that, unfortunately, much work that makes use of the notion of discourse, especially studies (influenced) by French scholars such as Lacan and Derrida, and carrying such fashionable but confusing labels as "post-structuralism" or "deconstruction", have an esoteric and solipsistic tendency. Obviously, much of this is a matter of taste, and particularities of style may be related to different linguistic and philosophical backgrounds. Yet, solipsism and obscurantism are in my opinion inconsistent with critical analysis. In fact, they may be interpreted as manifestations of a conservative backlash in the humanities, especially influential in literary studies. It is true that theoretical analyses sometimes are difficult. One often has to acquire a number of technical terms or learn a complex theoretical framework. But once this terminology is acquired, theoretical discourses should in principle be transparent and accessible. Over-metaphorization often indicates vague rather than precise thinking, and more often than not invites imitation rather than understanding and a critical examination of theoretical positions. Theories and methods must be essentially communicable, learnable and applicable; otherwise, they have no scholarly, let alone critical, potential. Elegant style may be a

persuasive asset, but it turns into literary mystification if it enchants adepts rather than teaches important insights or skills. The different functions of scholarly and literary discourse should also be signaled by their different styles.

3. Critical news analysis

Against this background and with these comments in mind, we may now proceed to a brief exposition of some directions of critical news analysis. Let me begin with a brief definition of what I understand by "critical" analysis. Critical analysis is partisan, positioned analysis, just like "uncritical analysis. However, unlike other types of analysis, it explicitly describes its position. That is, critical analysis formulates its socio-political goals, norms and points of view, and does not deny, ignore or dissimulate them. In addition, critical analysis is oriented towards societal issues or problems, and not primarily towards academic paradigms. It is not a branch of research or of a discipline, but a type of analysis and action, which may (or should) characterize any serious investigation. Thus, critical analysis makes academic research functional with the goals of a wider socio-political framework. Thirdly, critical analysis focusses on problems as experienced and defined by dominated groups, rather than on the problems of the powerful, the elite, or the ruling class. Critical analysis is functional through solidarity. Fourthly, critical analysis examines the socio-political, historical and cultural mechanisms that underlie the reproduction of power. Therefore, it pays particular attention to the analysis of the ideologies that sustain, reproduce or legitimate power. Fifth, critical analysis is both theoretical and interdisciplinary. It does not reduce social, political or cultural phenomena, let alone serious problems, to a single or simple theoretical model. Finally, good critical analysis is not only principled, but also practical and effective, and therefore flexible. It is not only directed at theoretical understanding, but also provides suggestions, solutions, and alternatives, and thus works towards formulating anti-ideologies and stimulating resistance. Indeed, it wants to change the world, and not only to describe it.

These major properties of critical analysis are especially relevant in the analysis of discourse and of other social practices that exhibit social contradictions, dominance, and resistance through social formations and institutions of different kinds. Major examples are well-known, and need not be detailed here. After earlier critical research on class, more recent work on gender and race focussed on the analysis of patterns of male and white dominance.

Power, ideology and the media

The media play a very specific role in these social frameworks. Both as private and as state institutions, the (dominant) media are first of all closely associated with dominant social formations and institutions. This

association may not be monolithic or without contradictions, but it is nevertheless coherent. Most journalists in our western societies are white, male and middle class. Their social group allegiances are represented in their socio-political ideologies and practices, and will therefore also be expressed in their newsmaking. The ideologies that sustain these practices have slowly been formed during their professional socialization, even when there is individual variation and incidental resistance against the dominant consensus. These ideologies will often dovetail with those professionals of the state, private corporations or other organizations who act as sources and communication partners, or who pay for their advertising. The same ideologies also underlie professional definitions of newsworthiness.

At the organizational level, the power position of the dominant media may sometimes be ambivalent, but it is generally coherent with that of the dominant formations and institutions of society. We use the term "coherent" here, borrowed from text grammar, to denote a social relationship between groups or institutions in which concrete or local inconsistencies or contradictions of action are not excluded, but of which the basic ideologies are not inconsistent, sharing similar basic principles. The term may also, or even more appropriately, be used to denote a similar relationship between the different ideologies themselves. Borrowing a term from logic, we may say that ideologies are "consistent" if they do not produce social contradictions. Ideologies are "inconsistent" when they systematically produce contradictions (conflict, struggle). An ideology that is inconsistent with a dominant ideology, will therefore be called a "counter-ideology".

Many newspapers or TV stations in the Western world are owned by multinationals, or survive only through financing or advertising by large corporations, or through subsidies from the State. Even when a prevailing ideology assumes that in "our democratic societies" editorial policy is independent from corporate and State control, and even when journalists have relative freedom (within variable margins of latitude), they obviously cannot enact an ideology that is incoherent with that of the corporate owners or managers, or with that of the State. Such control need not always be exercised by direct intervention or censorship. It may be more indirect and subtle, e.g., through shared values and norms, or a similar set of principles underlying the interpretation and evaluation of the social, political, economic or cultural world, that is through coherent ideologies. Individual journalists who practice an incoherent ideology will probably not be hired in the first place, or else they will be fired, unless they conform, at least overtly. In other words, the organizational and institutional position of the media demonstrates their participation in the complex framework of socio-political and economic dominance. Obviously, this holds for the dominant media and their journalists, but not for alternative or radical media (Downing, 1984).

This rather succinct socio-political analysis of the media, and of the structural basis of news production in terms of group and class relation-

ships and economic control, serves as a background for an examination of the crucial cultural dimension of the mass media (Hall, et al., 1980). That is, in industrialized societies, the media are the primary institution of ideological (re)production, possibly even more important than the system of formal education. True, we have seen that the mass media, and hence the journalists, do not accomplish this task alone. News reports, movies, advertising, TV-programs, and other discourse forms produced for public consumption are essentially co-produced with the producers of source texts, that is, with powerful elite groups or organizations, even when media-workers may provide the final form and formulation.

Yet, the dominant definitions of issues, problems, groups, conflicts and events of social life are constructed for or by journalists. In this way, the priorities, the prominence, the relevance and the presentation of mediaworkers and the political, business, social or cultural elites, are persuasively conveyed to the public. This does not mean that the media directly shape public opinion, let alone opinions of individuals. Societal macrostructures do not predict microstructures, they only specify their possible variations and boundaries (Curran, Smith & Wingate, 1987). They prepare the principles of public perception, define the frameworks of understanding, and hence the overall form of the consensual basis of dominant ideologies. After (but also through) socialization in the family and communication with friends, and together with the schools, the media are essentially the mediators of preferred meanings. Thereby they also sustain those groups, such as the intellectuals, who derive their power from their symbolic capital, from the resources that allow them to formulate and persuasively communicate such preferred meanings in the first place (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). In other words, the media play a crucial role in the reproduction of hegemony, of consensually based and ideologically framed "modern" control. This brief socio-cultural analysis of the media and of journalists in terms of their class or institutional positions, and their role in the reproduction of dominant ideologies, will serve as the backdrop for the critical discourse analysis of news reports in the press.

News production

The critical analysis of news production processes is intimately related to the powers and ideologies that sustain the organization of newsmaking. On the one hand, we have the internal power structures within the news organization, and on the other hand the external power relations with other organizations, that is, with sources and news actors. Within the news organization, we find the hierarchical relationships between financial and economic management on the one hand, and the editorial staff on the other. For much of the Western press, this relationship is complex but relatively transparent. With most newspapers, editors are hired and fired by management, and the economic viability of a newspaper of course defines the framework for the relationship between directors and

(chief) editor(s) (Bagdikian, 1983). This means that indirectly, editorial policy must at least partly be constrained by the reader and advertiser market. In this way management may formulate directions for the general ideological orientation of the newspaper, although there may be a broad variation here, depending on the country and the newspaper. Within these boundaries, editorial policy may be relatively independent, which in turn means a partial allocation of freedom (and hence power) to editors at the expense of management.

Within the editorial structure, however, a similar dialectic of power and freedom may exist. The chief editor, as well as section editors, sometimes in more or less equal cooperation, decide daily about the general policies and the actual content of each day's paper. In principle, individual reporters depend on these decisions, and select and formulate their stories accordingly if they do not follow direct assignments. Through professional socialization and a complex process of informal communication, they know what kind of news stories are likely to be accepted, and what schemata, style and contents are coherent with general policies (Breed, 1955). Again, within these boundaries, they have relative freedom to perform the various steps of the newsgathering process, to contact sources, to do research and write their stories.

In these different frameworks of the media organization, power is enacted in many ways. Hiring, promotion and firing are of course the most tangible socio-economic expressions of these power structures, both within the editorial staff and between management and the newsroom. More indirect and subtle, however, is the everyday exercise of these power relations, which is embedded in professional routines, explicit or implicit rules and regulations, and in general by a complex professional and social ideology about newsmaking. Journalists learn which news events, topics, angles, and style are within the boundaries of the editorial framework. They know the norms and values of newsmaking, and have integrated a system of criteria that define the "interestingness" or "newsworthiness" of news events and their textual reconstructions in news stories (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978).

This editorial power is not simply limited to the internal relationships between the chief editor(s) and the reporters, but may also be more diffuse and more general: The definition of a "good news story" may be shared by journalists of several newspapers and in several countries. Especially in international news, and because of the dependency on international news agencies, there must be a fairly general consensus about everyday news reporting. In a study of international news, in which I analyzed a large number of newspapers reporting about the assassination in 1982 of Bechir Gemayel of Lebanon, I found that there may be an international "format" of typical news stories, despite socio-cultural and political variations between newspapers and countries (van Dijk, 1988b).

However, this professional consensus is not merely determined by the practical conditions of newsmaking, such as the nature of public

events, deadlines, the interests of the reading public, type of source stories, or relationships with powerful institutional sources. It also has an important ideological component, which defines the relevance of stories about state institutions, and about other elite groups, organizations, and countries, and of negative, spectacular, conflictual, or similarly interest arousing events and stories (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Golding & Elliott, 1979). In the fierce debate that followed the UNESCO sponsored discussion on a New International Information and Communication Order, Third World countries have repeatedly stated that this ideological aspect may be inconsistent with the interests of many developing countries (Unesco, 1980). Instead of spectacular news events (of the so-called "coups and earthquakes" type), they have pleaded for more journalistic attention for processes and structures, relating to development, dominance and exploitation, and coverage from the point of view of the dominated peoples, nations or regions of the world (Mankekar, 1985). This proposed alternative to Western dominated news values shows that indeed the professional routines of newsmaking in most Western countries do have an ideological basis, usually legitimated in terms of "freedom of the press". In actual practice, such freedom should be understood against the background of the freedom (and hence power) of the multinational media organizations, and in association with all those power structures that are the major news actors and clients of the Western press (Hamelink, 1983a).

This brings us to the second power framework of newsmaking, namely the relationship between the press and the various institutions or organizations with whom they are dealing. While the press is critical of such institutions, it does have considerable power to sustain, legitimate or attack these other power groupings. However, this critical stance may be marginal, limited to superficial aspects of activities of powerful institutions, and will seldom fundamentally challenge the legitimacy of the power structures. Thus, few Western newspapers will systematically attack the capitalistic or parliamentary system. Given the system of prevalent news values, the elites are also the major source and primary protagonist of news stories. This means that for their daily supply of information, journalists will seldom sever their pipelines with such institutions (Pettigrew, 1972). More practically, the routines of newsmaking presuppose a daily beat, good contacts, and a steady supply of ready-made information in the forms of press releases, interviews, documents, phone calls, and other indispensable source texts. A well-known source is the relationship with the police (Chibnal, 1977; Fishman, 1980). In other words, the media are partly dependent on other powerful organizations and institutions, yet have a relative freedom to criticize, that is, a certain power over other elite institutions (Brown et al., 1980). Of course, in less "democratic" contexts, the power of critique is more fundamentally curtailed (Hollingworth, 1987).

Note also that the dependence of the press on reliable and permanent news sources may itself contribute to the reproduction and legitimation of

power relationships in society. Those who are best organized, who have press agents, press bureaus, or other forms of professionalized contacts with the media, also have the highest chances of access, coverage, quotation, and positive or neutral description, and this means the highest chance of being heard about, which again may confirm or legitimate power. Only state institutions, rich private organizations and corporations, and large social groups or institutions have such facilities. In other words, the media not only mediate but also magnify power, simply by their daily descriptions of the powerful as primary actors in society. The less powerful--"ordinary citizens", women, minorities, the elderly, children, Third World peoples, and all those who do not have regular, organized access to the media--will usually play a more dependent, passive role, for instance as victims, unnamed masses, deviants, criminals, or people who "have problems" or "cause trouble". Many studies in the last decade have repeatedly demonstrated this point. ¹⁰

This is the general framework that organizes the daily activities of journalists in their newsmaking practices. Because of the dominant social and professional ideologies of newsmaking, their routines will necessarily focus on powerful institutions. The legitimation of such practices may be attractively simple and persuasive: the powerful make most of the decisions that affect people, and it is the task of the press to report these for those affected and interested. This means, for instance, that police versions of a disruptive event such as a demonstration, a crime or a strike, may be paid more attention than the version of the event given by the demonstrator, or the opinions of the suspect or striker. Similarly, presidents, ministers, leaders, or directors of powerful countries, organizations or institutions will be accessed more by (and have more access to) journalists than lower level members.

It is important for a critical discourse analysis of news that these constraints in the process of production also have textual correlates: the powerful more often are news actors, they are more often quoted, they appear more often in prominent headlines, and their stories are usually found and presented as more credible. For the less powerful, exactly the opposite is the case. Their experiences, their versions of a story, their opposing ideologies, and their credibility tend to be less prominent, marginalized or simply ignored. Textual particles of doubt and distance often accompany their versions of the events, if such versions are quoted at all. This process holds both nationally, and internationally, that is, both for groups or institutions and countries. Events in other countries (communist or Third World) are often described and evaluated by "reliable sources", which often are western diplomats or western observers (Rosenblum, 1981). Their necessarily biased stories are not considered to be biased, because the underlying values, interests and ideologies agree with those of most newsmakers. The same is true of the description of ethnic minority groups: news reports or television programs have recourse to a (white) "minority expert" rather than to the opinions of minority group members themselves (Downing, 1980; van Dijk, 1983, 1988b). In brief,

the critical analysis of news production must be closely connected with a critical analysis of news discourse itself. The conditions of news production appear to define the constraints of the very structures and contents of the news text itself.

We may continue the critical analysis of power and ideology in news production at even more detailed, micro levels. It would be possible, for instance, to examine how news interviews are being conducted, and whether there are different strategies of talk when dealing with powerful politicians, directors, leaders or celebrities, on the one hand, and women, minority group members, Third World people (also their leaders), strikers, demonstrators, the unemployed, and the opposition, on the other hand. Unfortunately, we have few detailed empirical data on such news gathering strategies.¹ We may infer from interviewing in similar situations of power, however, that politeness, deference, respect, fewer critical remarks and less expressed doubt will tend to be given to the powerful, whereas the converse will be true for the less powerful."

This does not mean that for some newspapers, in some countries, some journalists will not be able to interview critically some people in power positions. This surely happens, but it is incidental, not structural. Newspapers or journalists consistently addressing the powerful in this way would soon lose access to them, and hence lose important source texts. In addition, they may be threatened with expensive libel or slander cases if they cannot prove their critical accusations. In other words, there are socio-economic, political, and cultural constraints that also translate at the concrete level of everyday interactions between journalists and their news sources. For the most powerful, daily exchanges with journalists are not even necessary. They may have recourse to the monologue of official statements and press releases, which are to be taken at face value by journalists. Research on news production shows that the pressure of deadlines, the power structure of the organization of news making and the dependence on sources, will simply favor a more or less literal (though partial) reproduction of such monologues (van Dijk, 1988a). Conversely, the declarations, press releases or other self-initiated contacts of opposing, minority or dominated news actors have a higher chance of being ignored (van Dijk, 1983).

It is clear that the practices, organization, and ideologies of news-making systematically favor the power elites, and thus play a role in the reproduction of such power. Indeed, the dominant media participate in this power, and despite possible conflicts and opposition, they organize the public voice, image, and formulations of the (other) elites. On the other hand, the media do have some contact with the public, through subscription, for example, and--more directly, but also marginally--through letters to the editor. This may sometimes favor a more critical stance towards the authorities or others in power. It is however a well-known ideological self-image that represents the press as the defender of the interests of the public, of the "common people", or of the "weak". If critical at all, the media will at most be sympathetic to the position of

another, large, and relatively powerful opposition group--unions, opposition parties, or large organizations, such as major ecological and anti-nuclear groups (Chilton, 1985; Wodak, et al. 1985). While critical organizational, interactional and content analyses have repeatedly detailed and confirmed such conclusions, we need more insight into the micro-strategies of the ways such power relations are represented ideologically, and how they are enacted in the everyday practices of journalists.

Critical news text analysis

Much of what has been argued above also suggests how a critical analysis of news texts themselves could be carried out. Obvious research questions would be the following (see also Cohen & Young, 1981): Who are the (main, secondary) actors of the news story? Who are the active actors (agents), and who the are passive participants (patients)? Which actions are described, emphasized or ignored? How are these actors described, from which point of view? Who appears as a source, and how are such sources legitimated? Who is quoted (or not quoted), and with what stylistic formulation?

These analytical questions relate directly to the conditions of the newsmaking process. They are not "inherent" to the news story, they are not universals of narrative or discourse. Each of these questions presupposes variation, choice, and decision, at many levels of textual analysis, and each choice presupposes beliefs, opinions, attitudes and ideologies. Practically no structural property of text is ideologically neutral (Kress, 1985). Let us discuss a few examples of these structural properties of news discourse.

Presentation. The "surface" level of lay-out and presentation does not simply reflect the strategic pre-organization of the reading process, such as attention; macrostructure (topic) formation, and model building. It also signals prominence, relevance and importance of news events, issues and actors. Front page, size, headlining, use of large or bold type, photos, and several other properties of news presentation express underlying meanings and semantic hierarchies, which in turn are instrumental in model formation by the readers. As a general strategy, then, more newsworthy actors and their activities are presented more prominently, that is on the front page, on top of the page, in the headline and leads, in the Main Events category and as speakers in the Verbal Reactions category of the news schema (van Dijk, 1988b). Since most newsworthy actors are more powerful, we obtain an interesting relation between social prominence and textual prominence. Obviously, the form of this reproduction is also communicated to the readers, who will tend to pick up these signals of prominence in their reading process, and therefore in the construction of models (van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). Dominant news actors thus tend to become structurally dominant in models also, and this again favors recall, and later uses of information in conversation or other forms of social

information processing based on the news. In the discursive strategies of the reproduction and indirect legitimation of power in the news text, we see the first stages of "influence", that is of the socio-cognitive basis of the process of ideological reproduction by the (reading) public.

Style. Somewhat less directly, these structures and strategies may also be witnessed at the level of sentence syntax, another feature of the surface expression of underlying meanings. Some of these structures, to be sure, are not subject to variation, and hence cannot be monitored by the construction of power by the journalist. Yet, in many subtle ways, there is a link between power, ideology and form (Kress & Hodge, 1979; Mey, 1985). First, complex syntax may both express and signal the symbolic power of higher education (Bourdieu, 1984). Indeed, much of the news is only fully understandable by the better educated, so that they can take more advantage of public information through the news media. The same is true for lexical style, especially the use of abstract nominalizations and technical jargon.

The ordering of syntactic categories, or the placement of clauses, may also express prominence of news actors, whether as agents or as patients. In the previously mentioned, classic study by Fowler et al. (1979) about language and control, it was shown for instance that powerful actors, such as the authorities, tend to appear in first subject (and semantic agent) position especially when they perform neutral or positive actions. As agents of negative actions, they tend to be downgraded by a passive construction, or to remain implicit altogether. The reverse is true for non-dominant news actors. I have found the same strategy at work in news about ethnic minorities, who tend to be prominent in E paper, on the page, in the headlines or the Main Event category especially when they are the agents of negative acts. "

Semantics. Presentation, syntactic and lexical style are manifestations of underlying meaning and reference. They serve the interpretive strategies of the reader in the construction of semantic representations and models in memory. At the global level of semantic analysis, headlines and leads were seen to express underlying macrostructure, the topical organization of the news discourse. It is not surprising to find that newsworthy, powerful actors tend to be prominent also through their occurrence in macro-propositions. The same is true for their actions.

At the local level of semantic organization, for instance in the coherence links between propositions, we find another set of rules and strategies that subtly convey dominant or preferred interpretations and signals by the journalist. Much of the textual strategy of ideological production does not operate by what is actually said, but rather by what is not said, by what is ignored, left out, but nevertheless implied--that which is present and absent at the same time. In this way, presuppositions play a prominent role in discourse. They are crucial in the interpretation and the establishment of coherence, but are only signalled indirectly in the text.

These presuppositions are based on the knowledge and beliefs represented in the: models, scripts and attitudes of the readers. In this way, the journalists may indirectly state the relevance, if not the truth, of such presupposed propositions. The reader is invited to make the relevant inferences, but is not explicitly confronted with them. Clearly, this is a very subtle and therefore powerful strategy of meaning production. This is also the case for other forms of implication and indirectness, such as allusions, associations, and suggestions. To avoid libel or slander, and in order to respect the ideological goal of not giving explicit opinions in news reports, the journalist is thus able to make statements that avoid the responsibility of the explicit.

Reported speech. A similar analysis may be made, at the semantic-pragmatic level, of the organization of reported speech in direct and indirect quotations. The strategies followed here are so complex that they have until now defied complete linguistic, literary and discursive analysis. Both in the semantic and stylistic presentation of speech of news actors, journalists have a complex set of signals that may suggest distance, criticism, or other opinions about the speaker or the reported speech. This is even more intricate in indirect discourse, which irretrievably mingles journalistic interpretation and opinion with those of the news actors. It has been suggested earlier that there may be systematic differences between the ways in which the powerful are quoted. Sometimes, the same structural form may have contradictory functions. For instance, literal quotation may express deference, respect and truthfulness with regard to powerful actors and speakers, but it may also signal distance and doubt when "controversial" actors or speakers are mentioned.

Rhetoric. Finally, along the rhetorical dimension of news discourse, which cuts across all other textual levels (from presentation to underlying semantics) we also find complex and subtle means for the signalling, expression, description, and hence the reproduction of power. The primary function of news discourse is to inform, not to persuade. Therefore, news reports have different rhetorical structures from editorial articles, background or opinion articles or advertising. Yet, it is precisely the ideological truth claim of news reports that needs to be backed up. There are several strategies to do this.

First of all, journalists prefer to mention "reliable" sources, and we have seen that these are mostly white, male, Western, and powerful. The same is true for eyewitnesses. Next, truth may be signalled by exactness tactics, such as the use of numbers. Whether correct or not, whether relevant or not, news discourse is replete with numbers. Since they are seldom corrected later by the newspaper, their major function is not exactness per se, but a rhetorical ploy to connote precision, and hence truthfulness. Numbers, however, are mostly derived from official documents, declarations, and other source texts from the more powerful, such as the police, the government, scholars or social organizations. This is

typically the case after serious events such as disasters, accidents, demonstrations, or in more structural processes, such as unemployment or the economy. The numbers game of the press, in other words, signals the assumed expertise of the more powerful institutions.

I have found evidence for this claim in my own studies of the representation of ethnic minorities, refugees and squatters in the press. The numbers game that supports the public panic of news reports on immigration, for instance, is fully orchestrated by the political and judiciary elites (van Dijk, 1988b). However, the media themselves also have a role by simply echoing such numbers (and neglecting the numbers given by less powerful organizations), and even by rhetorically enhancing their effect by the well-known strategic moves of exaggeration.' On the whole then, the major rhetorical means of news reports are geared towards the construction of apparent truth, serving the ideological goals of credibility and reliability of the press.

In sum, at all levels and along all the dimensions of news texts, we find traces of their communicative context, that is, textual expressions, manifestations or signals of the conditions of its production, as well as strategic preparation of the reading process. Critical analysis, therefore, should not be limited to an explicit and systematic discourse analysis, but must establish links with these properties of the context. Power and ideologies are not "in" the text, but expressed, signalled, constructed or legitimated by the text. Hence, it is important to analyze the relationships between textual and contextual structures, between actors and represented actors, between textual prominence and socio-political prominence, between quotation and actual speakers, between style and writers/journalists, and between topics and who is assumed to define the social, cultural, or economic situation.

Reception. Finally, we should critically examine the process of reading, understanding, representation, recall, and usage of information communicated to the reading public. Who is reading anyway? And how? Who has access to the media, this time seen from the other side of the communication process? These questions involve cognitive, social, cultural and economic dimensions. Another question pertains to the power of the public. A critical analysis is not primarily directed against those who are dependent, those who have little freedom, those who have less power. Research shows that comparatively few people have full control of the reading and understanding process. General memory limitations, lack of knowledge and expertise, and lack of attention, together with socio-economic conditions that constrain access to the printed, quality press, converge to predict that little of the mass of news information will be processed, and even less represented and integrated into memory. Surely, readers can hardly be blamed for these conditions, and critical attention therefore should be directed towards the analysis of the conditions of symbolic or material access to the media, and to the socio-cultural basis (such as lack of education) of these limitations (Cirino, 1971).

On the other hand, readers in a competitive media market have at least some power, for example, in terms of their relative freedom to select newspapers. Their interests therefore do have some influence on editorial policy. Although it is a well-known ideological assumption of many editors that "they publish what the public wants", research shows that editors know little about the actual interests of the public, usually have low expectations about their readers, and hardly pay attention to research that documents readers' interest and reading behavior (Atwood, 1970). Instead, journalists get most of their feedback from colleagues and probably from friends, family members and acquaintances, that is, from people of the same socio-cultural formation. Also, the interest of the public is not the result of an autonomous process, but an ideologically based construction, in which the media themselves play an important role. Once the public of the tabloids is used to a diet of sex, violence and human affairs, an interest in the details of the political, social and cultural life of the country can hardly be expected, and certainly not in interest in foreign, Third World situations.

Other examples may be drawn from my study of the reproduction of racism in everyday conversations (van Dijk, 1987a), which shows that readers often use the media to support their own prejudices. In an analysis of the political and press panic that followed the immigration of Tamil refugees to the Netherlands (van Dijk, 1988b), I have found that the press may use those prejudices to sustain government policies against further immigration, with the argument "that there is no public support" for such a policy. I must note that their own negative reporting about Tamils had influenced popular resentment against these refugees in the first place.

Admittedly, there are some general areas of interest, mostly determined by personal and group relevance, and varying according to education and other socio-cultural conditions. However, the press has the symbolic power to "build" interest for practically any subject, depending on the style, rhetoric and presentation of reporting. In this way, nearly any story can be communicated effectively. After all, the many human interest stories in the popular press also have little personal relevance beyond the satisfaction of curiosity about the lives of important people.

In other words, the critical analysis of the reading process does presuppose cognitive and social inquiry into the ways readers memorize and represent news stories, but such an investigation should be embedded within the wider setting of the communication context, featuring the contents and style of the press, the broader socio-cultural conditions of reading behavior, such as formal education, other media messages, and other forms of social information processing about relevant topics of the public agenda of attention (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Obviously, the media themselves are the primary agents that shape much of the socio-cognitive framework of their own reception. Instead of "blaming the victim", a critical analysis of media use comes down to an analysis of its crucial conditions.

4. Conclusions

This paper has argued for a critical analysis of news. Combining recent developments in the critical analysis of language, discourse and communication with increasing interest in the study of news, I propose that critical news analysis deserves special attention as an important field of academic research and action.

Quite simply, critical news analysis presupposes a systematic analysis of news. I have shown that such an analysis should not be limited to the usual interplay of macro-sociological, economic or historical analyses of the mass media, research into media effects or uses, possibly combined with sophisticated, but necessarily superficial content analysis. Rather, we need a full-fledged theory of media news. From our perspective, such a theory is necessarily interdisciplinary, and thereby includes both a macro and a micro component. At the micro level, we should make explicit the precise structures and strategies of news production in news organization and social contexts, as well as the processes of news text production and comprehension, and relate both these theories with a theory of news discourse structures. Such an interdisciplinary framework will then allow us to integrate the analyses with a critical dimension, or, conversely, to have our analyses monitored by critical questions about news communication in our society.

The analysis of production processes shows that a discourse approach is relevant here too. A large part of the production process is a form of text processing. Journalists are routinely engaged in reading other media messages or agency wires, reading press releases, going to press conferences, conducting interviews, making phone calls, and consulting documents. That is, the production of news texts is essentially a process of reconstruction, in which selection, deletion and summarization play an important role. At the same time these processes are, of course, monitored by the knowledge, beliefs or other social cognitions of the journalists, featuring their political attitudes but also professional rules and strategies and general news values.

Much of the critical impact of news analysis focuses on the conditions of this production process. It is here that power and ideology play their most tangible role. Thus, we have seen that news production is formed by both internal and external relations of power. It is shaped internally by the hierarchical structure of most editorial teams, and externally by the dialectics of power among less powerful or more powerful institutions, organizations, or groups, both as clients (for instance in advertising), and as sources and news actors. Through socialization and education, and through their professional experience on the job, journalists acquire the dominant ideologies that monitor their everyday interactions with these different social groups. This control may be demonstrated for the smallest details of news text processing: who is contacted during a daily beat, who is talked with, who gets access, whose declaration or actions are taken seriously, and who is considered a reliable

source or witness? These questions have answers at the textual level of topic choice and hierarchy, in terms of prominence of presentation (place, size, headlining, etc.), stylistic description of actors and actions, patterns of quotation, syntactic sentence style, and the rhetoric of persuasion.

In other words, a critical analysis of production in turn implies a systematic analysis of the results of these ideologically monitored practices of newsmaking. Whereas some properties of news discourse may be explained in terms of strategies for effective communication, and the relationships to readers, most of its specifics require explanation in terms of the conditions of newsmaking in particular, and of socio-cultural reproduction in general. We have seen that a systematic discourse analysis allows us to describe explicitly subtle details of textual organization, and to relate these to certain properties of the production process. Structural variation of text may express, signal, denote, connote, describe or legitimate properties of the production context, including relations of power and dominance.

The ideological dimension of the critical analysis of news production and news structures is not simply limited to the study of legitimation of power by the mass-mediated representation of the different power groups in society or in the world. The role of the media in general, and of daily news in particular reaches down to more fundamental conditions for the reproduction of such power relationships which may be summarized as follows:

1. Public news discourse provides the major conditions for the reproduction and construction of knowledge in most industrialized cultures and societies.
2. This knowledge is not "objective"; it is "biased" in the sense of being bound to the interest of power groups that have the resources to preformulate a dominant definition of the social situation.
3. Media organizations participate in this power structure. Within flexible boundaries of possible dissent or opposition, the media generally reproduce this knowledge bias. In this respect, the media (together with, e.g., public education) may be seen as the symbolic division, or "voice" of the power structure.
4. This reproduction process, however, is not always straightforward. It may be subjected to the relatively autonomous processes of mass-mediated discourse production, and thus result in various types of transformation, such as rhetorical exaggeration or mitigation, and especially the distribution of prominence.
5. Instead of directly "transmitting" dominant beliefs, the media construct an interpretive framework. Given a rather general definition of the situation, they do not simply convey or prescribe "what" people should think, but rather "how" they should think. In other words, the media provide both the boundaries and the building blocks of a public consensus. Thus, they provide the conditions of the establishment and maintenance of an ideological hegemony.

6. However, the process of ideological production is not unilateral. It is not only directed from the powerful, through the media, to the public at large. The manufacture of consent also may imply an orchestration of dissent that reflects the power structure. Socio-economic conditions contribute to the contents and forms of "public opinion" as well, and within flexible but controlled boundaries of protest and resistance, the media may thus provide feedback to the power structure.
7. With regard to the other powerful groups and institutions, the media may present themselves as the vox populi, and thus set limits to the power of the other dominating institutions of society. This does not mean, however, that the media act as third, independent or neutral force, as a referee between the state (or other powerful institutions) and the people. They remain part of the dominant power structure, but serve so to speak as its (sometimes critical) PR branch, which not only (re)presents the elites to the public, but which also provides feedback to the elites on behalf of their less powerful clients. At the same time, the media may act as the communication broker among different, and sometimes opposed, power groups.

These few points briefly indicate the complexity of the ideological framework, and the many (sometimes real, sometimes apparent) conflicts of interests that shape the specific socio-cultural role of the media, and of news production in particular. Despite their possible variations, the latitude of dissent and opposition, and despite its sometimes autonomous actions, most news media operate as the symbolic and ideological "mediators" (agents, brokers, representatives) of the power structure. The processes of newsmaking and the structures of news discourse show how this task is most effectively carried out.

The main argument of this paper is that the various power relations are systematically exhibited in news discourse. Critical news analysis, based on subtle and systematic theories and methods of discourse analysis, allows a reconstruction of these power relations as well as insight into the symbolic strategies by which these power structures are reproduced and legitimated.

Notes

- 1 A longer first version of the paper was presented at the Instituto de Semiótica y ComunicaciOn, Granada, Spain, September 7-12, 1987.
- 2 For details, see van Dijk (1985b, 1988a, 1988b).
- 3 See, e.g., Ksamarae, Schultz, & O'Barr, 1984; Mey, 1985; van Dijk, 1985a, Vol. 4, 1988d)
- 4 For an early reader of critical media research in Great Britain, see Cohen & Young, 1972/1981). One of the most prominent publications of the Center in Leicester is their analysis of the media coverage of a Vietnam demonstration in London (Halloran, Elliott & Murdock, 1970). For examples of work by

- CCCS members, see, e.g., Hall, et al. (1978, 1980). For the discussion of ideology in British media analysis and cultural studies, see Barrett, et al. (1979), Bennett, et al. (1981). Critical linguistics approaches can be found in Fowler, Kress, Hodge & Trew (1979), Fairclough (1988).
- 5 For a more general analysis of these properties of power, see Lukes (1974, 1986).
- 6 See Altheide (1985), Atwood & Grotta (1973), Paletz (1987), Paletz & Entman (1981), and Turov (1983).
- 7 See Bagdikian (1983), Fowler (1987), Golding & Murdock (1979), Gormley, (1975), Hall, et al. (1978).
- 8 For the relations between ideologies, and the notion of "dominant ideology", see also the critical discussion in Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, (1980).
- 9 The political economy of the mass media and international communication are discussed by Bagdikian (1983), Becker, Hedebro & Paldin (1986), Hamelink (1983b) and Schiller (1973).
- 10 See Cohen & Young (1981), Chibnall (1977), Downing (1980), Hartmann & Husband (1974), Tuchman, Kaplan & Bent (1978), van Dijk (1988b).
- 11 See Chibnall (1977), Glasgow University Media Group (1976, 1980), Halloran, et al. (1960).
- 12 Heritage (1985) is one of the few studies that examine news interviews in detail, but does so rather from a conversational than a broader communicational or societal point of view.
- 13 See Erickson, et al. (1978), Bradac & Mulac (1984) and van Dijk, (1988d) for review and further references.
- 14 See Bruhn Jensen, (1986), Robinson & Levy (1986) and van Dijk (1988a).
- 15 See van Dijk (1988b, 1988e), Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk (1988).
- 16 See for instance the study of the media accounts of the Mods and the Rockers in the UK during the 1960s by Cohen (1980).

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