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***USA Today, The London Free Press and the Rationalization of
the North American Newspaper Industry***

Donald Shawn Berry

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Sociology and Anthropology

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

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ABSTRACT

USA Today, The London Free Press and the Rationalization of the North American Newspaper Industry

Donald Shawn Berry

In recent years, the North American newspaper industry has gone through a process of rationalization which has a number of implications vis-a-vis the journalist's role in ensuring the free exchange of information necessary in a democratic society. In the classical Weberian sense, newspapers have sought to rationalize their operations by increasingly turning to specialists: graduates of business administration programs, market researchers, newspaper design experts. With this shift there has occurred a shift in news philosophy; instrumental rationality has become increasingly salient at the expense of value-rationality.

In order to assess the impact of this process of rationalization, the following research question was selected: How has the rationalization of North American newspapers in recent years affected *news quality*? It was hypothesized that highly rationalized newspapers feature less interpretive reporting, less commentary, less analysis, less contextualization, and in general, more "information" than "meaning."

Using a variety of measures, partial support was found for the above hypothesis. In particular, it was found that news accounts in highly rationalized newspapers are less likely to feature historical context.

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SECTION ONE

I. Introduction

In modern democratic societies, journalists play an important role in the exchange of knowledge which contributes to the ongoing development of our shared cultural storehouse. As purveyors of knowledge, journalists have a privileged position in our society. Writing about the American news media, Carl Jensen (1986:38) notes that

because of the First Amendment, the news media have a special responsibility to inform the public, *which transcends other corporate responsibilities or excuses* [my emphasis]. Unlike all other businesses, the press has a preferred position in our constitution. Our founding fathers did not do this to protect the media's profits but to protect their rights to fully inform the public of what is happening in its society.

Journalists, then, are involved, to varying degrees, in the process of disseminating knowledge in the three spheres of modern culture: the cognitive dimension (science, technology); the normative dimension (morality, values); and the appreciative dimension (arts, aesthetics, linguistics). At various times, journalists act as intermediaries, translating the often abstruse and esoteric language of scientists, technicians, philosophers, politicians and artists into language and images the lay person can understand with relative ease. By so doing, journalists contribute to the interchange of ideas and information which is one of the pillars of democracy. This paper will argue, however, that recent developments in one of the most significant areas of media history -- the ongoing rationalization of the newspaper industry -- have

the potential to undermine the ability of journalists to contribute to the democratic process.

II. Max Weber and Rationalization

One of the most important contributions made by German sociologist Max Weber was his analysis of the multi-dimensional phenomenon of rationalization. A pervasive force in the spheres of economic life, law, administration, and religious ethics, rationalization has involved depersonalization of relationships; an increasing emphasis on specialized knowledge; improvements in the techniques of measurement and calculation; and a widening degree of control over natural and social phenomena (Brubaker, 1984).

Of particular importance are Weber's concepts of *value-rational* (*wertrational*) *action* and *instrumentally-rational* (*zweckrational*) *action*. Value-rational action derives from the actor's belief that acting in a certain way is inherently of value, regardless of its potential for success (Weber, 1968:24-25). Instrumentally-rational action (also referred to as means-ends rational action or rationally-purposeful action) derives from the actor's expectation that the end result of a certain action will be *the means to achieve another end* (Weber, 1968:24).

The subjective expectations of the actor (or actors) prior to the action are all-important in determining the type of rationality employed. Acting on the basis of the journalistic principle of "objectivity," for instance, may indeed be value-rational.

However, adhering to a professed news value such as "impartiality" may simply be a means to achieve another end: the promotion of larger circulation figures by ensuring that readers with diverse political opinions can all feel comfortable in buying a single, (apparently) neutral news product.¹ This example is only one of many possibilities, and as Brubaker (1984:38) notes, "purely instrumental action may be devoted just as well to self-enrichment at the expense of others as to the disinterested advancement of a valued cause."

III. Substantive and Formal Rationality

In his analysis of economic activity, Weber provides another important distinction when he differentiates between substantive and formal rationality. In the case of formal rationality, "action is based on 'goal-oriented' rational calculation with the technically most adequate available methods" (Weber, 1968:85). In the case of substantive rationality, however, the assessment of rationality is not restricted to these considerations. Rather, the results of action are measured with regard to "certain criteria of ultimate ends, whether they be ethical, political, utilitarian, hedonistic, feudal (*ständisch*), egalitarian, or whatever...." (Weber, 1968:85). In short, the substantive rationality of an outcome is assessed in reference to a particular value-orientation.

¹See Carey (1969:32-33) for a discussions of how the commitment to impartial journalism emerged because of the need on the part of newspapers to appeal to a mass audience comprised of politically heterogenous elements.

Applying this theoretical framework to journalism and newspaper management, we can see that purely formal rationality and substantive rationality exist together in a state of tension. One of the rallying cries of journalists in the past has been "the public's right to know." This represents a journalistic substantive-rationality commitment when the motivating factor is a belief that adopting this cause will promote democracy. However, such substantive-rationality orientations have traditionally been compromised to varying degrees by pecuniary and institutional considerations. Many news organizations have become large bureaucracies, which, like other private-sector bureaucracies, are primarily oriented towards continued growth and prosperity through the kind of formal rationality that promotes the greatest economic efficiency possible.² As a result, efforts at increasing the level of formal rationality, such as removing the arbitrariness of decision-making by establishing uniformly applied rules and regulations (Kalberg, 1980:1158), often take precedence over journalistic substantive-rationality concerns.

²Of course, it is important to remember that formal rationality is ultimately oriented to some kind of substantive rationality consideration(s). Indeed, Weber (1947:185) notes that

...it is not sufficient to consider only the purely formal fact that calculations are being made on grounds of expediency by the methods which are among those available technically the most nearly adequate. In addition it is necessary to take account of the fact that economic activity is oriented to ultimate ends (*Forderungen*) of some kind: whether they be ethical, political, utilitarian, hedonistic, the attainment of social distinction, of social equality, or of anything else.

IV. Early Newspapers and Rationalization

Early in their collective history, which covers a period of more than 300 years, newspapers were partisan and news articles openly expressed the political orientation of the newspapers' owners. These early newspapers, which were targeted at particular groups in society and which reflected the interests of those groups, were very successful (Knight, 1982:22). All of this began to change, however, at the end of the nineteenth century. As Graham Knight (1982:22) notes:

The "Great Depression" of the 1880's and early 1890's saw the large scale consolidation of capital -- centralization and concentration -- into a fewer number of larger hands. Markets became monopolized, and the form of economic organization began to shift from the small entrepreneurial firm to the large corporation. The press was not spared the economic or political consequences of this change.

As a result of these developments, newspapers became increasingly dependent on advertising revenue and had to create mass markets to ensure the kind of circulation figures that would appeal to advertisers. To create these mass markets, the news had to be increasingly sanitized of obvious bias so that it would appeal to potential subscribers from every political persuasion (Knight:22). Partisan journalism began to disappear and the beginnings of the modern ideology of "objectivity" became evident.³

³ James Carey (1969:32-33) also traces the emergence of "objective reporting" to the later part of the nineteenth century and the commercial need of newspapers to appeal to a mass audience comprised of politically heterogeneous elements. Referring to the development of objective journalism in the American media, he writes:

The practice apparently began with the wire services. They instructed their writers and reporters that any distributed copy had to be acceptable to both Democrat and Republican

In short, the commitment to "impartiality" was largely due to instrumental-rationality considerations rather than value-rationality ones. Indeed, journalists themselves fostered the ideology of objectivity as a rationally-purposeful means of resisting management infringements on their autonomy. Knight (1982:23-24) notes that

as [journalism] became a separate, full time occupation in the employ of large-scale capital, so the claim to professional status in general, and objective practice in particular, developed as a basis for autonomy and prestige.

subscribers and, as a result, writers became skilled at constructing non-partisan, i.e., 'objective' accounts of events.

This commercially grounded strategy of reporting was subsequently rationalised into a canon of professional competence and an ideology of professional responsibility.

It should be noted that some historians have suggested objective journalism began to emerge much earlier than the late nineteenth century. As Don Schiller (1981:7) explains in Objectivity and the News,

Journalism historians have tied the emergence of objectivity to the decline in party journalism, beginning in the 1830s, when the commercial penny papers combined advanced print technology with a street-sale distribution system as a way of expanding and cultivating a new public...

Schiller (1981:10) suggests that the emergence of objective journalism in the American penny press can be attributed to the political sentiments of its readership:

In particular, the belief of many republican tradesmen that knowledge, like property, should not be monopolized for exclusive use by private interest was expressed in the penny papers as positive commitment to cheap, value-free information -- to objective fact.

V. Rationalization of the Newspaper Industry in a Modern Context

The economic consolidation of the newspaper industry to which Knight makes reference has continued to the present, with markets becoming more and more monopolized. In the United States, 155 chains controlled two-thirds of the more than 1,700 dailies by 1982 (Hale, 1984:30). In Canada, as of March 1988, 94 of the country's 111 papers were owned by ten chains, giving those chains a market share of 81 per cent. More significantly, the country's two largest newspaper chains, Southam Inc. and Thomson Newspapers Ltd., had a combined market share of 47.5 percent (Marketing, November 14, 1988:45).

Even more disturbing in Canada was the suspicious shut-downs of three Canadian newspapers in 1979 and 1980, beginning with the closure of *The Montreal Star* on Sept. 24, 1979. Eleven months later, Southam closed the *Winnipeg Tribune* and Thomson shut down the *Ottawa Journal*. As well, Southam took control of the two daily newspapers in Vancouver, *The Province* and the *Sun*. As a result of these moves, Southam had an effective monopoly in Vancouver, Ottawa (*The Citizen*) and Montreal. Thomson, meanwhile, no longer had to worry about competition from the *Tribune* in Winnipeg. These disturbing developments in Canada's newspaper industry resulted in a Combines Investigation Branch probe and the 1981 Kent commission on the industry, which was very critical of the two chains and called for a federal newspapers act.

Increasing concentration of media ownership on the part of newspaper chains, and the attempt to establish monopolies through collusion, are both examples of instrumental rationality. When the goal is to maximize profits, increasing size to lower the unit costs of production and eradicating the higher capital and labour costs associated with competition are effective means to achieve that goal. However, such rationally-purposeful actions are not without implications for society at large; as newspaper readers and citizens, we need to ask about the impact on quality and diversity of news coverage when an independent newspaper is absorbed by a newspaper chain. Is the changeover a positive development, a negative development, or neither?

There is already some evidence that chain ownership is detrimental to news and editorial quality. For instance, in his article "An in-depth look at chain ownership," Dennis Hale (1984:117) cites a study of 24 papers that appeared between the years 1960 and 1975 on the American west coast. The study found no differences in editorials in 1960, when all of the papers in the study were still independent. However, by the end of the fifteen-year period, when two-thirds of the newspapers had become chain-owned papers, there was a discernible difference. In 1975, only 7.6 percent of the editorials in the chain-owned papers were in the category of argumentative, controversial and local. By contrast, more than twice as many editorials in the independent papers (17.6 percent) were in the same category.

One of the implications of this study is that the cultural product of editorial writers in chain-owned papers may be inferior to the cultural product found in non-

chain-owned papers. If editors at chain-owned papers are less likely to write argumentative, controversial and local editorials, the range of issues which are publicly debated in the forum provided by those newspapers is a narrower one. This in turn has a direct effect on readers' level of awareness about important social and political issues. (In Canada, national unity, treatment of indigenous peoples, and immigration policy are just a few of the topics of cultural importance which are regularly debated in the editorial pages of the Nation's newspapers.) One of the potential long-term effects is a less-informed electorate which is less capable of making important decisions about who should govern the country.

VI. Newspaper Redesign and Marketing Techniques in the 1980s and 1990s

In a speech given at the annual meeting of the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association in 1989, chairperson Sandy Baird (1989:36) summed up the changes that have occurred in the newspaper industry in recent years:

There was a time when the phrase "newspaper business" was mostly a contradiction in terms because newspapers often tended to operate more or less at the whim of a publisher. There was little emphasis on management skills. But that has changed.

The move to skilled management has accelerated in the past few years, and the emphasis is continuing...

Some of the results have been obvious. Our newspapers are better. They offer improved content, including more appealing graphics and better colour. Our newspapers are offering innovative products such as new Sunday editions, new special sections, improved TV magazines and the like.

The content improvements and the new products reflect imaginative approaches born of creative minds and reader research.

From Mr. Baird's observations, we can identify a few central themes: the new emphasis on management skills; significant improvements in content; the emergence of innovative new products; and the trend towards a greater degree of market research. These have been among the key changes that have occurred as North American newspapers have fought to regain ground lost to television. Emblematic of these changes is *USA Today*, a radically new type of newspaper which was launched in September, 1982, and which took television as its model. In an article for the *Columbia Journalism Review*, Tom McNichol and Margaret Carlson (1985:44) note that

From the start, the paper was conceived as being in a class of its own, a hybrid working outside the traditional standards of gumshoe journalism. The working model for the paper was, and still is, television -- a highly visual "quick read" sold in coin boxes designed to resemble a seventeen-inch television set.

With its effective use of bright colours, high-quality photo reproduction, innovative graphic design and brief stories (see appendices 1 and 2), *USA Today* has appealed to a new generation of readers. Weaned on television, this new generation is increasingly attuned to images rather than words and has less time to read because of a busier lifestyle than earlier generations of newspaper readers. *USA Today* has made huge gains by tailoring its product to this market. At the same time, it has influenced the form and content of a host of other North American newspapers, the most notable Canadian example being the London, Ontario *Free Press*, which underwent an extensive redesign in 1989.

Like *USA Today*, *The London Free Press* offers an illustration of modern-day rationalization of the newspaper industry at the organizational level (the bureaucratic structure), and at the news-product level (the content and format of the newspaper).⁴ Together, these developments may have far-reaching implications for the way newspapers are produced and read in the 1990s and beyond.

VII. Newspaper Rationalization at the Organizational Level

In a 1959 book entitled *Do You Belong In Journalism*, Wallace Lomoe (1959:52), managing editor of *The Milwaukee Journal*, lamented that newspapers were

...still bringing up reporters and copyreaders into management ranks without adequate management philosophies. Our news rooms are badly outdated in basic organization: do we still need old-time telegraph editors, city editors, etc., or do we need trained organizers who can take a fresh look and draw some new lines?

Three-and-a-half decades later, there is a different concern among many people in the newspaper industry. Today the worry is that too many modern newsroom managers are all too familiar with management philosophies but not attuned to journalistic values. One critique of the "MBA mentality" which has emerged in the newspaper industry was made by Doug Underwood (1988:23) after he left *The Seattle Times*, where he was a reporter:

⁴Shoemaker and Reese (1991:134) include a brief discussion of the connection between rationalization and modern newspaper practices in their book *Mediating the Message*.

Welcome to the world of the modern, corporate newspaper editor, a person who, as likely as not, is going to be found in an office away from the newsroom bustle, immersed in marketing surveys, organizational charts, budget plans, and memos on management training.[N]ewspaper executives have reshaped their newspapers in the name of better marketing, more efficient management, and improvement of the bottom line.

In explaining the reasons for this trend, Underwood pointed to the growing corporate control of U.S. newspapers and our age's enthrallment with "the arcana of scientific business management" (1988:23).

Particularly important has been the trend towards labour specialization. As part of a larger process of rationalization in modern economies, newspapers, like other business enterprises, have increasingly turned to specialists (including market researchers and newspaper design experts) in the belief that they can help them to become more effective and profitable in the marketplace. Viewed in this broader context, it is easier to understand why the characteristic traits of the modern newspaper manager include specialized training and knowledge in areas such as financing and management theory. At *The London Free Press*, for instance, former president and associate publisher Jim Armitage, who presided over the paper's redesign after being hired in 1985, had a Master's degree in Business Administration and had worked as a newspaper marketing consultant with Canada Consulting Group, Toronto.

MBA-style newspaper managers can be contrasted with "old-style" newspaper managers like Sandy Baird, a former associate editor at the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* who retired as publisher in 1990:

Along with the likes of a Clarke Davey or Paddy O'Callaghan, Baird is one of that diminishing congregation of 'old-style' publishers who have not yet been ousted completely by bookkeepers or business-school specialists. He's part of that generation of newspapermen who really did start at the bottom and worked their way to the top. (*Marketing*, Sept. 17, 1990:35)

From a Weberian standpoint, the newspaper industry's increased reliance on marketing and management specialists is an expected development. In *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*, Alvin Gouldner (1976:239) notes that both the modern state apparatus and the industrial sector

are increasingly bureaucratic in character -- in Max Weber's classically delineated sense. That is, the organizational form values expertise, and roles and authority in bureaucracy are allocated on the basis of certified expertise. The bureaucratic form is thus not that of the popular stereotype of foolish inefficiency, but an historically superior form of efficiency and relative instrumental effectiveness.

News organizations have likewise placed increasing emphasis on certified expertise, which is one reason it has become so difficult for would-be reporters to enter the profession without a journalism degree. By the same token, it has become more difficult for reporters or copyreaders without any management training or experience to work their way up through the ranks into management positions, where they can then learn the necessary management skills on the job. In a book on newspaper management, Sohn et al. (1986:3) note that

Although talented copy editors and advertising sales people still get promoted to managerial positions, today top managers look for experience and training. Publishers may still prefer the experienced employee to the new holder of an M.B.A. when hiring managers; however, with increasing frequency, publishers want people who have a background in personnel relations, marketing, accounting, finance, and general management.

Newspapers, then, have increasingly rationalized their operations at the management level by turning to management and marketing specialists, or by encouraging their own employees to seek specialized training in these areas. This, however, is only one of the ways in which newspapers have become more bureaucratic. Another characteristic of modern bureaucracies is their emphasis on empirical evaluation. As Gouldner (1976:239-240) suggests:

Modern bureaucratic organizations in the state sector or in the production sector systematically evaluate the degree to which their policies are effective and make cost-benefit analyses of them; they appraise rationally the relative effectiveness of the various departments within the organization; they conduct public opinion and market researches that keep open contacts with their suppliers and outlets; they select new recruits and continually reevaluate all members with various kinds of psychological and performance tests; they defend policies with the use of research; they struggle and wage war against others with rationally documented argumentation and information -- "facts and figures" -- they prepare for unforeseeable contingencies by briefing their administrators with scientifically accumulated "background information" and with systems analyses allowing for different "scenarios" involving alternative assumptions about events.

In recent years, newspapers have also placed greater and greater emphasis on similar evaluative techniques, as the example of *The London Free Press* demonstrates. In an article decrying the changes at the *Free Press*, Don Gibb (1988:33), a former reporter and city editor at the paper, wrote that "A host of consultants were hired to survey readers, survey staff, survey advertisers, hire an editor, redesign the newspaper, prepare a strategic plan, help reporters and editors prepare for the 'new journalism' and help staff cope with stress."

As part of this process, over 1,000 people in the *Free Press* circulation area were interviewed by phone after the paper commissioned an in-depth readership study

by a Massachusetts-based newspaper-research firm (Sutter, 1988:24). Among other things, the 1986 survey found that readers were seldom able to go through the entire paper, and had trouble finding the stories and features they most wanted. (One of many subsequent changes in the newspaper's format was an elaborate, colour-coded, front-page key with short synopses of selected stories inside to help readers locate different sections and stories of interest.)

After the redesign, the same Massachusetts-based research firm conducted a follow-up study which surveyed 800 *Free Press* readers in southwestern Ontario. Sixty per cent said the paper had improved over the previous year (Sutter, 1989:35). In addition to such surveys, the *Free Press*, like many other newspapers, has also experimented with reader panels to determine what its readers want. At *USA Today*, where the paper's content and design were decided largely on the basis of market research (Seelye, 1983:27), there has been a similar emphasis on identifying reader likes and dislikes as precisely as possible.

Modern newspapers, in sum, have become increasingly bureaucratic in the way they make policy decisions and assess the marketplace. In particular, they have enhanced their ability to gather information about their audiences and measure product effectiveness in a systematic and efficient manner. The increased emphasis on empirical evaluation improves the calculability -- and hence the formal rationality -- of the production process, for it allows newspapers to more precisely gauge market demands and accurately predict the outcomes of product changes. Less and less is left to chance.

At the same time, newsrooms have become more editor-driven. After leaving the *Free Press*, where unhappy editorial workers went on a brief strike in the fall of 1990, Gibb (1988:33) wrote that

there is a feeling of despair in the newsroom. It has been sapped of enthusiasm, initiative and creativity because reporters feel they have little or no control over what they do. This has been reinforced by middle level editors who direct reporters on what THEY say the story is and go so far as to provide a list of questions to ask. Some reporters are resigned to the new regime and simply say: "Tell me what you want me to write."

At *The Seattle Times* there were similar developments. In an article after his departure, Underwood (1988:25) wrote that mid-level editors had proliferated in the newsroom, where reporters worked from computer lists of proposed stories approved by committees of editors. "Strict oversight of the entire newsroom operation is maintained through countless editorial meetings and memos and by using computers to check out each staff member's lists of projects, which must be constantly kept up to date" (Underwood, 1988:25).

Managing by committee and monitoring reporters by computer are two ways of trying to maximize "the values of calculability, efficiency and impersonality" (Brubaker, 1984:42) in the newsroom. That is, they are attempts at increasing the formal rationality of the newsroom. Similarly, when "middle level editors...direct reporters on what THEY say the story is and go so far as to provide a list of questions to ask" (Gibb, 1988:33), it would appear these editors are attempting to greatly streamline the news-gathering process. Such an approach has a high degree of formal rationality: it ensures a large amount of control over workers, a production

process in which the final product is attained more expediently, and a higher degree of predictability vis-a-vis the outcome of the work. With this kind of approach, however, there is also a greater danger reporters will distort the news by applying a pre-given but unwarranted paradigm while gathering information and formulating the news account. This concern, and others which will be raised later, bring into question the issue of rationalization and *news quality*. Before addressing that issue, however, the phenomenon of newspaper bureaucratization and changing labour relations will be explored in greater detail.

VIII. Rationalization of the Reporter's Role

As we can see from the above examples, one of the implications of the recent changes that have occurred in the newspaper industry is that story-content decisions in the newsrooms of the future will be increasingly removed from the hands of reporters. Moreover, reporters will have less and less say over *the appearance* of the final product. Underwood's comments (1988:25) suggest that *USA Today* has already gone in this direction to a considerable degree:

My former colleagues, many of whom worked at *USA Today* before fleeing back to the Gannett News Service or leaving for other jobs, report that news meetings at *USA Today* are only half-jokingly referred to as marketing meetings by some staffers. Reporters' copy, they say, is simply grist for editors, who hack it and reshape it into the brief, graphically oriented copy that gives the paper its television feel.

With these comments in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that *Free Press* editor Phil McLeod is reported as having "talked about the role of the reporter

becoming more and more that of a fact-gatherer" (Gibb, 1988:34). As editors take greater control over the news product, and the form of news representation shifts to "brief, graphically oriented copy" (Underwood, 1988:25), the reporter's role as a *writer* is diminished; instead, the reporter becomes (to a greater extent than has formerly been the case) *an instrument for the collection of information*, which can then be reshaped by others.

Just as newspapers have made efforts to promote specialization of tasks at the administrative and marketing levels, so too have they attempted to make the role of the reporter more specialized. Indeed, to an increasing extent the modern reporter is limited to the basic function of gathering "the facts." The more creative process of refining that raw material into a final product is increasingly given to editors. In this context, the classical Marxian analysis of worker *alienation* becomes pertinent. From a Marxian viewpoint, the reporters' lack of control over their own labour (which, according to Marxian theory, is an alienated product embodied in the objects it produces) can be considered to be further amplified by the process of alienation which occurs as they find themselves with less and less control over the object -- the news story -- which is the product of their labour. As Marx (1982:13) explained:

...the object produced by labour, its product, now stands opposed to it as an *alien being*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labour is labour which has been embodied in an object and turned into a physical thing: this product is an *objectification* of labour...The performance of work appears in the sphere of political economy as a *vitiation* of the worker, objectification as a *loss* and as *servitude to the object*, and appropriation as *alienation*.

In a journalistic context, this process of alienation has meant that the subjectivity of the reporter/writer role has been increasingly undermined. It has been replaced with the anonymity of the reporter/fact-gatherer role, as the following comments from a former *USA Today* bureau chief suggest:

USA Today "was managed to the point where what appeared under your name was irrelevant to what you wrote," says *San Francisco Examiner* reporter Eric Brazil, a former *USA Today* bureau chief in Los Angeles and a former Sacramento bureau chief for the Gannett News Service. "At a managed newspaper it beats you down. You either do it their way or you leave." (Cited in Underwood, 1988:25)

Perhaps we should not be surprised that the role of the reporter has been increasingly reduced to its most basic level as the bureaucratic structure of the daily newspaper becomes more advanced. One of the concomitant elements in the development of modern bureaucracies is a change in the way administrators view employees. As Gouldner (1976:254) notes

The old Saint-Simonian vision, in which the control over persons would give way to the *administration* of "things," appears on the horizon. The trouble, however, is that among the "things" now to be "administered" are *persons*. In short: persons are increasingly treated as "thingified" objects, no different from any other object.

In light of Gouldner's observations, it is not surprising that *Free Press* editor-in-chief Phil McLeod draws a distinction between "writers" and "reporters":

Reporters in the 1970s started thinking of themselves as writers....This kind of newspaper is not a writers' paper, it's a reporters' paper. The readers are essentially saying 'give us the information, don't go on and on about it.' (Cited in Sutter, 1988:24)

This comment is, in itself, part of a "thingifying" process, a way of replacing the reporter/author role with the more robotic reporter/fact-gatherer role. Indeed, it is an

ideological move, a step towards remaking the social construction of "reporter." That is, the signifier "reporter" is stripped of one of its constituent meanings⁵ and that meaning is instead presented as an opposite term. Inasmuch as they begin to think of themselves in the same sterile terms, reporters contribute to their own "thingification."

IX. Disciplinary Technology

From another perspective, the removal of story-content decisions from the reporter constitutes a kind of "disciplinary technology" -- a procedure combining knowledge and power -- in the sense delineated by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. In his introduction to *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow (1984:17) explains that

The aim of disciplinary technology, whatever its institutional form...is to forge a "docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved." This is done in several related ways: through drills and training of the body, through standardization of actions over time, and through the control of space. Discipline proceeds from an organization of individuals in space, and it requires a specific enclosure of space. Once established, this grid permits the sure distribution of the individuals who are to be disciplined and supervised. In a factory, the procedure facilitates productivity; in a school, it assures orderly

⁵*The Canadian Press Stylebook* (1989:2), which is the standard reference guide for reporters and editors across Canada, includes a number of references to the need for good writing in journalism, including the following observation which underscores the role of the journalist as both a collector of facts and a writer:

A vivid or appealing story results not from a wooden succession of statements, but from the proper choice of the facts to be presented *and deftness in the presentation*[My emphasis].

Stories can be bright, touching, inspiring or humorous without encroaching on the standards of impartiality, accuracy and good taste. The choice of the precise word or the vital phrase, as contrasted with a careless, dull recording, means the difference between the front page and the wastebasket.

behavior; in a town, it reduces the risk of dangerous crowds, wandering vagabonds, or epidemic diseases.

Assigned to single desks or cubicles, where they can be easily monitored by superiors while not on assignment, reporters are arguably subjected to the kind of "discipline of the body" that facilitates productivity through a *geographical* enclosure of space. However, at another level of analysis, the increasing removal of reporters from the news-production process represents a kind of *discipline of the mind*. That is, reporters are confined (to a greater and greater degree) to a specific enclosure of *cognitive space*, which in turn contributes to the creation of a "docile" mind that may be "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Cited in Rabinow, 1984:17) for whatever instrumental purposes are required of it. This discipline of the mind is accomplished, in part, by narrowing the possible parameters within which reporters can choose to research and construct their news stories; taken to an extreme, reporters are told what the story is and what questions to ask before they even begin working on their assignments.

Another way in which newspaper supervisors achieve discipline of the mind is to delimit the range of information that can be expressed linguistically. Reporters have always been subjected to a certain amount of linguistic delimitation -- accomplished, for example, by the requirement that reporters refrain from using language which is too difficult for the average reader (often considered to have no more than a high-school education) -- but papers such as *USA Today* have perhaps taken this disciplinary technology a step farther. Indeed, a *USA Today* staff guide called *Writing for USA Today* advised:

KEEP IT TIGHT. Propel the story with punctuation. Colons, semi-colons, bullets and dashes can replace some words.

Condense background information. Don't prattle on for several grafs explaining what happened at Love Canal, or spend an entire graf telling who Phyllis Schlafly is. Our readers are well-informed.... (Cited in Seeyle 1983:34)

USA Today has not gone to the Orwellian extreme of reducing unnecessary words by substituting more instrumentally-rational words such as *ungood* for "bad", but it has certainly frustrated critics with its streamlined prose. One example of its pared-down writing is taken from the paper's coverage of the 1988 election, in which it ran a feature story on Susan Estrich, Gov. Michael Dukakis' campaign manager:

Susan Estrich away from the campaign hot seat is:

☐ Reading novels by Alison Laurie, Ann Tyler.

☐ Dining out often; she's not a cook.

☐ Living in two-bedroom Boston apartment: "Futons and dhurrie rugs, things I bought and borrowed...."

(*USA Today*, Sept. 9, 1988)

It is examples such as these which prompted Ludlow (1986:419) to acerbically observe: "most of *USA Today*'s prose has been digested and squeezed so dry that the result is a mess of colorless little factoids in the punchbowl of journalism."

Alongside the push to eradicate unnecessary words by substituting different forms of punctuation, there has been an effort to increase pictorial content. The shift to a more iconographic presentation of the news (more high-quality photographs, sophisticated multi-colour charts, diagrams and logos) also narrows the reporter's grid of written signification and thereby further contributes to the discipline of the mind. The end result for readers is potentially a loss of *evaluative content*, since the manifest and latent ability of reporters to provide judgment by, for example, the

selection of connotative language, is diminished as the news is increasingly presented in an iconographic format.

X. Rationalization of the News Product

An important question which emerges from the preceding discussion is the following: *What effects has organizational rationalization had on news quality?* To answer this question, I began by looking at *USA Today*, the prototypical rationalized newspaper.

In a story which appeared in the *Columbia Journalism Review* shortly after the launching of *USA Today* in September 1982, Seelye (1983:27) wrote:

This experimental little newspaper. There had been nothing like it before, in content, in design, in sense of purpose, in production and delivery. It would be a "new medium," a satellite-beamed daily magazine, for only twenty-five cents. It would be in color. It would be easy and fun to read....

USA Today, which in less than a decade was able to boast a readership of 6.6 million readers a day, remains perhaps the best example in the newspaper business of the way in which value-rationality considerations have been increasingly eclipsed by instrumental-rationality considerations. Seelye (1983:28) notes that "While other newspapers might feel a constitutional responsibility to give readers what they 'should have,' even at the risk of boring them, *USA Today* would not take that risk."

Using extensive market research, *USA Today* was able to design a far more *rational* (i.e. efficacious) product, in terms of reader appeal and profitability, than had

typically been the case in the newspaper industry. *USA Today* made its product more appealing by better identifying and satisfying the desires of its target audience.

Readers were given what they told market researchers they wanted:

They wanted short stories. They wanted sports. They would not follow a jump. They liked charts and graphs -- information presented in ways that could be absorbed quickly or, as one Gannett executive put it, "in ways that are not words, ways that are not spelled out, and not interpreted." So exhaustive was the research that only one major reader-requested feature was added after the paper made its debut: a crossword puzzle. (Seelye, 1983:26)

Though popular with readers, *USA Today* has been heavily criticized by newspaper commentators. Soon after the first issues of *USA Today* hit the streets, Ben H. Bagdikian (1983:32) wrote an article for the *Columbia Journalism Review* in which he wrote that

the country's first truly national daily newspaper of general circulation is a mediocre piece of journalism. It has no serious sense of priorities: stories are played up or down not because of their inherent importance but on the basis of their potential for jazzy graphics or offbeat features.

Bagdikian, a journalism educator and a former assistant managing editor for national news at *The Washington Post*, went on to observe that in the first week of January, 1983, *USA Today* missed a number of important stories, including "Soviet denials that its nuclear satellite was falling to earth...discovery of an apparent second black hole in the universe" and "...a new organization of prominent corporate executives to oppose [then United States president Ronald] Reagan's economic policies" (1983:32). During the same week the paper provided only briefs or "upbeat little features" for a number of other important stories, including "State election defeats for [then] Indian Prime Minister [Indira] Ghandi; and court confirmation that

Chicago schools can use voluntary school integration without busing" (Bagdikian, 1983:32).

Veteran reporter and journalism lecturer Lynn Ludlow (1986:419-420) also criticized the paper, arguing that

Except for the opinion page in which a predictable editorial is countered by opposing viewpoints almost as unsurprising, *USA Today* excludes all commentary, personal columns, interpretive writing and investigative reporting. Not a single story, column or paragraph on the other pages takes a critical perspective toward anything.

In a world where readers are increasingly faced with a bewildering quantity and variety of information, more interpretation, more critical evaluation, more contextualization -- more *depth* -- rather than less, would seem to be needed. *USA Today*, however, has taken the opposite approach, cramming an extraordinarily high number of often-trivial information bits into its paper. After analyzing a typical edition of the paper, Ludlow (1986:419) noted that

Altogether, with each list or summary counted as one unit, the reader is supplied with 771 separated items of information. This compares to about 200 separate items in a more conventional metropolitan newspaper with twice the "news hole," or the amount of non-advertising space.

Unfortunately for readers of *USA Today*, more *information* does not necessarily lead to more *meaning*. On the contrary, the post-modernist Jean Baudrillard (1983:95) hypothesizes that

information is directly destructive of meaning and signification, or neutralizes it. The loss of meaning is directly linked to the dissolving and dissuasive action of information, the media, and the mass media.

Baudrillard (1983:98) argues that in the process of attempting to *simulate* communication and meaning, information actually "devours its own contents" in the process:

It is a gigantic process of simulation with which we are all familiar. The non-directed interview, speech, listeners who telephone in, participation at all levels, blackmail through speech -- all say: "It's your concern, you are the event, etc." More and more information is invaded by this sort of phantom content, this awakened dream of communication. It is a circular set-up in which the desire is put on stage, an anti-theatre of communication, which, as we know, is never anything but the recycling "in the negative" of traditional institutions, the integrated circuit of the negative.

In the pages of *USA Today*, this "circular set-up" takes on interesting new forms. To further assure readers that "it's your concern, you are the event," *USA Today* frequently commissions or jointly commissions polls on various topics to find out what everyday Americans (the people who buy *USA Today*) are thinking and doing. Last fall, for instance, *USA Today* reported on poll respondents' attitudes towards Cincinnati Reds owner Marge Schott after she was accused of making racial slurs -- "Poll: Reds Owner should be punished" (Dec. 8, 1992).

A more interesting example of polling and relevance was provided by the following 1985 notice for a series of articles in *USA Today*. The notice appeared on the front page of the March 8 issue with the headline, "Next week: Poll about you":

USA Today introduces next week a quarterly one-of-a-kind barometer of the quality of our lives, how we feel, what we say, what the statistics are about us.

The Life Quality index will draw together trends in education, income, safety, health -- for example, we're becoming more satisfied with our lives as we grow older -- and will help us track the variety of factors that make our lives better or worse.

And an exclusive opinion poll will balance those USA Trends with our own views on how our lives are going.

Compare your own LQ -- Life Quality -- beginning Monday in *USA Today*.

The Life Quality index stories -- and others like them -- arguably offer further evidence of the media *simulation* Baudrillard (1983) writes about. In the case of the "Life Quality" index, *USA Today* readers are likewise offered the opportunity for "participation at all levels" (Baudrillard, 1983:98); indeed, they are given the chance to *become the news* -- i.e. "Next week: Poll about you." However, as they become part of the "circular set-up in which the desire [for communication] is put on stage" (Baudrillard, 1983:98), readers also become part of the public domain, where they are to a certain extent *desubjectivized*, converted into grist for a series of "quick-read" articles which sell papers by appealing to our collective narcissism, rather than by dealing with more substantive issues such as government or corporate wrongdoing. Baudrillard, argues, in fact, that "the people have become *public*," that in our postmodern age, "the social" no longer possesses an "authentic essence," with "its own needs, its own will, its own values, its finalities" (Baudrillard, 1985; cited in Ashley, 1990:99). As Baudrillard observes, "(the people) even allow themselves the luxury of enjoying day to day, as in a home cinema, the fluctuations of their own opinion in the daily reading of the opinion polls" (Baudrillard, 1985; cited in Ashley, 1990:99).

Baudrillard's reference to "home cinema" is an interesting one, for in *USA Today* there are, to a larger extent than more traditional newspapers, a great many faces: faces of politicians, faces of sports heroes, faces of movie stars, and faces of

everyday people, many of them beaming back at us, assuring us that we are with friends, that the world is a happy place. In addition to simulating the comforting images on our television screens, where we witness a continual stream of faces, the photos of everyday people like ourselves offer an underlying message to readers: "It's your concern, you are the event..." (Baudrillard, 1983:98).

XI. "Amusing Ourselves to Death"?

One of the dangers with emphasizing *information* at the expense of *meaning*, as Neil Postman (1985) argues in *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, is that it leads to an increasingly passive audience. That is, it becomes increasingly difficult to sort out the irrelevant from the significant because there is a benumbing amount of irrelevant information.

For readers of *USA Today*, this is particularly true. Indeed, one of the daily trademark features of the paper is something called "USA Snapshots...A look at statistics that shape the nation." On the front page there is a box in the left-hand corner which feature various snippets of statistical information about the United States. On the front page of the December 16, 1991 edition, for instance, there were two pie graphs indicating the "percentage of time one party controlled both White House and Congress vs. time control was divided." (In the Washington through Truman period, 73% of the time one party controlled both the White House and Congress; in the Eisenhower through Bush period, 31% of the time one party

controlled both the White House and Congress.) Other than these percentages, no other information (such as the political or historical significance of these figures, or what they suggest about democracy in the United States, or what they imply for the future) is included. These figures may in fact say something important about the nature of American politics, but we are not given the necessary information to put them into a meaningful context. Just how they "shape the nation" is not clear.

What is clear, however, is that these "snapshots," and other informational tidbits like them, do indeed *shape* something. They shape the way newspapers are read. Indeed, readers are increasingly encouraged to read the news as a series of discreet pieces of information, whose most important value is their ability to amuse us (Postman, 1985). (This is even more so of the *USA Today* "snapshot" in the Life section of the December 16, 1991, issue cited above. This "snapshot" tells us that Potato chips were the "Supreme snack" in the USA in 1990, with Americans consuming 6.1 pounds per person, compared to only 3.9 pounds of tortilla chips per person and only 1.6 pounds of snack chips.") In short, the trivial is raised to new importance in *USA Today*, an observation underscored by another story on the front page of the same Dec. 16, 1991 issue cited above: "Hormone may be the key to cuddling."

Postman (1985), echoing Aldous Huxley's use of the term in his dystopic novel *Brave New World*, calls TV the *soma* of our modern existence; but *USA Today*, with its "USA Snapshots," can certainly be included in the same category. In fact Postman uses *USA Today*, which is sold in newspaper boxes designed to look like

television sets, as a prime example of how television, with its emphasis on brief, disconnected information bytes, has become the dominant paradigm for the form in which news is presented. Keeping this in mind, we can see how the metaphor of the snapshot -- a casual photograph which provides a brief, transitory view of a certain phenomenon -- is an appropriate one for *USA Today*, for it underscores the increasingly fleeting nature of contemporary news representations, and announces the new emphasis on television-like iconography (graphic images of little potato chips, for instance) at the expense of discourse and narrative.

XII. USA Today's Impact on other Newspapers

USA Today has clearly influenced *other* American newspapers. In a follow-up article on *USA Today* for the *Columbia Journalism Review*, McNichol and Carlson (1985:44) note that "splashes of colour, graphs, charts, and a move toward short, easily digestible news nuggets are some of the ideas which a growing number of local papers are borrowing from 'The Nation's Newspaper'." *USA Today* even had an effect on the highly-respected Wall Street Journal, another American newspaper which serves a national audience. McNichol and Carlson (1985:48) note that

The [Wall Street] Journal's managing editor, Norman Pearlstine, told a meeting of editors and bureau managers last fall that the paper, whose circulation had dropped 3 percent in the preceding twelve months, was facing growing competition from, among other publications, *USA Today*. He called for shorter stories and fewer jumps [from one page to another], as well as "faster, better, deeper" coverage.

Part of the reason for *USA Today's* influence on other newspapers has been its relatively quick success. In the three-and-a-half years after its first appearance in 1982, it climbed in circulation from nowhere to second place (Ludlow, 1986:418). In 1986, it had a total circulation of 1.4 million (including bulk sales), compared to two million for *The Wall Street Journal*. By early 1992, *USA Today*, which proudly proclaims on its front-page banner that it is "No. 1 in the USA," was able to claim a readership of 6.6 million readers a day.

XIII. The "New-Look" Free Press

Although *The London Free Press* is in a different category of newspapers than *USA Today*, it too has attempted to make its pages more "reader-friendly." The end result of the changes at the *Free Press* was a radically different-looking paper phased in over a period of months beginning in the fall of 1988. The redesigned *Free Press* features a greater emphasis on informational graphics; fact boxes containing basic facts and statistics in an easy-to-digest, bulleted format; decks preceding the articles which provide a brief precis of the story; and, in general, shorter stories (see appendices 3 and 4).

Before the changes at the *Free Press* were implemented, then-associate publisher Jim Armitage claimed the paper was not going to be another *USA Today*, despite the fact it was going to incorporate some of the same innovations. Armitage

told a writer at *Marketing*, a Canadian periodical which publishes an annual supplement on the Canadian newspaper industry, that

...where we will be different is that our stories will not be the kind of McNuggets of information that *USA Today* relies on. We will still provide the depth on stories that give us our strength in this market. If there's one thing that newspapers do well that other media cannot, [it] is to provide that depth on stories. (Sutter, 1988:25)

Despite the professed commitment to depth of coverage, the *Free Press* did institute stricter guidelines on story length which could conceivably compromise news quality and the journalist's role as a disseminator of matters of cultural importance. Typically, a news story that might, in the past, have been told in 16 inches or 14 inches of copy would now have to be told in 12 inches or less, the rationale being that modern readers lead busier lives and want to be able to get through the paper in a shorter period of time. However, even though tighter writing can provide as much pertinent information as one would find in a less concise story, there are occasions when all of the necessary information can not be crammed into a smaller news space. It is not hard to conceive, moreover, of nervous reporters chopping important background details because they are worried about potential criticisms of requests for more space.

In addition, stricter rules on length can alter the way a reporter approaches a news story and the way an assignment editor chooses stories to assign. By covering stories of a less complex nature or oversimplifying stories on more complex topics, the reporter can more easily write stories to fit a smaller space. In other words, form

takes even greater precedence over content than is normally the case at a daily newspaper.

In part, shorter stories, like other design and content changes in the *Free Press*, are intended to accommodate the reader who wants to be able to skim the paper. However, the question raised by the characteristic features of the redesigned *Free Press* is this: In satisfying the desires of readers who want only a "fast read," does the redesigned *Free Press* also *encourage* its readers to read the news in a more cursory manner? And if so, should a newspaper, which has a certain social responsibility to inform its readers so they can be more effective citizens, be presenting news in such a way as to encourage a more superficial reading? From a value-rational perspective which emphasizes the press's "social responsibility," the answer to the last question would probably be no; but from an instrumental-rationality perspective which is oriented towards corporate prosperity, the important consideration would be whether the changes help provide the means to achieve the desired end -- in this case, increased market penetration and greater profits by appealing to more readers and, by extension, more advertisers.⁶

⁶Last fall, *Free Press* associate editor Mary Nesbitt told Peter Gzowski, the host of the CBC radio program *Morningside*, that *Free Press* circulation

"continues to decline. We're not having a blood letting but it's more like a thousand cuts...We're sort of placing ourselves in the middle of the pack...Our circulation has dropped by just under three per cent in the last year. At some newspapers it has dropped more."

XIV. Rationalization and Narrative Structure

One of the implications of the changing nature of news in modern newspapers is that the reader is increasingly responsible for bringing a sense of coherence to the news. In highly rationalized newspapers such as *USA Today* and the *Free Press*, readers have a greater say in arriving at their own interpretations of the world from the various pieces of information provided, rather than being limited to the reporter-driven narratives (with their *preferred readings*) that typify conventional newspaper reporting.

Even when written in inverted-pyramid style, traditional newspaper articles clearly favour a modified narrative structure in that they generally flow logically from one item to the next, sometimes building to a conclusion, and frequently ending with some kind of device -- a quotation or a reference to expected developments in the future, for example -- which provides a sense of closure. However, in highly rationalized newspapers, the more traditional, narrative structure of news, as found in the self-enclosed news article, is undermined as the news is fragmented into a variety of alternate forms, including diagrams, graphs, lists and fact boxes. With this new form of representation, which offers the reader a greater number of entry and exit points, the burden of creating an overall sense of meaning from the details of a particular news item, or series of items, shifts from the reporter's shoulders to the reader's. Indeed, the reporter becomes less and less of a writer and more and more of a "fact-gatherer."

One of the problems with undermining the traditional narrative structure of the news, however, is that it can also undermine the reporter's ability to respond critically to the people or events being covered. Consider, for example, the following extract from a 1987 *Free Press* election story about then-provincial-Tory-leader Larry Grossman.

"Instead of dealing with the issues -- education, environment, free trade -- he [then-premier David Peterson] wants to count on Ontario voters being fooled.

"I think the whole issue of Liberal complacency in a number of areas is something we will be discussing.

"When I look at the first few days of the campaign, I think they are planning to run a 'land is strong campaign,' avoid the issues, run a glossy, 'hi, how are you?' campaign.

Grossman's own campaign was restricted Monday to a speaking engagement in Whitby and a handshake tour of a Toronto mall -- itself featuring a great many "hi, how are you?" greetings. (*The London Free Press*, Aug. 4, 1987).

This is an example where the whole is clearly greater than the sum of its parts. Grossman has accused premier Peterson of complacency and a desire to see voters fooled by a "glossy, 'hi, how are you?'" campaign which avoids the issues. However, the reporter implies there is a certain degree of hypocrisy in Grossman's criticisms, for he himself adopts the same "hi, how are you" superficiality in his own campaign. Of course, it may be the journalist did not intend such a reading, but it seems more likely he is attempting to communicate a subtler message to the reader than "the facts" alone would indicate, namely, *Be sceptical of what this guy is saying*.

Reporters often make subtle communications to their readers, and there are undoubtedly many examples similar to the one above which could be found in the redesigned *Free Press*, for the primary mode of communication in the new *Free Press*

is still a narrative one. However, the opportunities for subtextual criticism by, for example, the intentional juxtaposition of certain story elements are perhaps diminished as the emphasis shifts towards a more non-narrative news format which leaves less room for traditional news structure. Indeed, the subtextual effectiveness of the above example derives in part from the lengthy build-up to the last paragraph; Grossman's long-winded attack on the premier's anticipated hypocrisy makes his own apparent hypocrisy all the more ironic. It is difficult to conceive of similar effects being achieved in a less-narrative form, such as a quick-read box which briefly lists candidate activities and selected statements in a bulleted format. When the news is presented in such a fashion, readers are conditioned to see each element as a discrete unit of information -- not as part of a larger whole which may need to be considered in terms of its total effect.

XV. Reader-Selected News

By de-emphasizing the narrative structure of the news, modern newspapers do, to an increasing extent, what John Fiske (1989:196) calls on "the news" to do in his book *Reading the Popular*:

[news] must not preach or teach; rather, it must invite participatory readings and lay itself open to viewer-selected, viewer-produced, viewer-circulated meanings of its content -- for only this viewer productivity can make those events part of the micro-level culture of the everyday...

It is more important in a democracy to stimulate people into making national and international events matter in their daily lives than it is to teach them about the "truth" of those events. Popular culture

must escape the control of those who wish to promote a certain set of meanings of the world.

While highly rationalized newspapers appear to allow for a greater degree of *reader* productivity (and thus *more democratic* productivity, for the production of meaning is more widely dispersed) they should perhaps be seen in another context. From a Gramscian perspective, news is one of the cultural forms comprising the realm of *popular culture*, a key site on which the social construction of *the people* and *the popular* is contested by dominant and subordinate cultural groups. As Robert Hackett (1988:83) notes in "Remembering the Audience: Notes on Control, Ideology and Oppositional Strategies in the News Media,"

Recent cultural studies researchers have stressed that cultural practices and meanings can be implicated in modifying, reproducing, resisting and/or transforming social relations of power, domination and inequality. Notably, the sphere of popular culture has come to be seen as a key site for such struggles -- the ground upon which the terms of capitalist hegemony are affirmed, contested and negotiated. In this regard, studies of popular culture have demonstrated how the hegemonic process -- the winning of mass consent to an established social order with its attendant definitions and understandings of the world -- is never static, seamless, monolithic or non-contradictory. Rather, it is an ongoing struggle to modify and reproduce, through ideological institutions and practices, the meanings associated with dominant social relations.

Hackett's observations are particularly relevant to *USA Today*, which has secured a firm place for itself in modern American popular culture. One of the results of the emphasis on a more reader-centred news product is that underlying structural inequalities and injustices in society are increasingly obscured by a news product which concentrates almost exclusively on giving readers "what they want" rather than "what they need." One consequence is that readers participate in their

own co-optation as they are (a) less challenged to question the "established social order" (Hackett, 1988:83)⁷; and (b) more likely to accept that, despite significant social, political and economic differences among them, they can all be served by the same news product, for that product has been largely sanitized of perceptible bias in the form of overt and less overt critical evaluation, making it more palatable to a wider spectrum of readers with diverse political opinions.

By the same token, it is significant that one of the formulaic devices which came to characterize *USA Today* after its appearance in 1982 was the peppy headline or lead which begins with "We" -- i.e. "We eat out more; spend less on food" (Feb. 4, 1985) and "We're driving more, and it costs us more" (Feb. 18, 1985). In both of these examples, individual differences are glossed over as readers are constituted as part of a larger, mythical "We" (which includes *USA Today* itself). This stylistic technique, which helps create the impression that a heterogeneous group of readers can be served by the same editorial product, also fosters an uncritical acceptance of prevailing ideological assumptions. In the "We eat out more..." and "We're driving more" examples cited above, readers are cast (at least in the headline or lead, the most likely parts of the story to be read) as a monolithic block of consumers acting together. The resultant impression of universally shared values and behaviour reinforces the perceived legitimacy of a major part of the "established social order" (Hackett, 1988:83), namely, a capitalist system fuelled by *consumerism*. Adherence

⁷There are some exceptions, of course. For instance, on Dec. 16, 1991, the front-page, *USA Today* cover story tackled the issue of racial stereotypes in sports ("Stereotypes pit ability vs. intellect").

to majority-held values is strengthened, in short, by the very way readers are constituted as subjects.

In effect, *USA Today* has managed the contradictory feat of accommodating a greater plurality of "readings," while at the same time working to constitute its readers as a collectivity unified by certain key values such as consumerism. To put it another way, *USA Today* has found an effective strategy in its efforts to be *relevant* to as many people at the same time as possible. As Fiske (1989:6) explains,

Relevance is the intersection between the textual and the social. It is therefore a site of struggle, for relevances are dispersed, and as divergent as the social situations of the people: the popular text, therefore, has to work against its differences to find a commonality between divergent social groups in order to maximize its consumption and profitability.

XVI. The "Journalism of Hope"

Another way to maximize "consumption and profitability" is to make the news more attractive by giving it a more *optimistic* slant. At *USA Today*, the ideological groundwork for such an approach was laid by Allan H. Neuharth, the paper's founder and former chairperson of the giant chain Gannett Co., which publishes it. Neuharth cited the "journalism of hope" as a corrective for the journalism of despair which presumably characterized other newspapers (McNichol and Carlson, 1985:44).

In its very first edition, *USA Today* opted for the "glass half full" approach, providing the following description of an airline crash: "MIRACLE: 327 survive, 55 die" (Sept. 15, 1982). As McNichol and Carlson (1985:44) note, "For headline writers, the

formulaic optimism has sometimes meant sticking yellow, smiley faces on events that most papers would portray as tragic."

Providing a positive take on events is a more instrumentally-rational approach to news coverage insofar as it provides *USA Today* marketers with a useful tool to sell advertising (i.e. "*USA Today's* Positive Journalism Creates a Positive Environment for Your Advertising"⁸). However, many editors would probably balk, due to value-rational notions of *news integrity*, at the idea of putting an artificially "happy face" on a tragic situation, or any other type of news, for that matter. Indeed some might even hear Orwellian overtones in such a "feel-good" philosophy, perhaps worrying that the days when journalists become propagandists working in the service of giant news corporations, compelled by instrumental rationality to write that War is Peace or that Slavery is Freedom, are not far off. In any event, when clearly tragic events (which elicit real responses of grief and sorrow) are given a positive spin, their ability to provoke genuine human emotions is potentially undermined. From a journalistic substantive-rationality perspective this is unacceptable: if media depictions lose even part of their ability to effect empathetic responses, there is a danger readers will become increasingly indifferent to the suffering of others, losing part of their own humanity in the process.

⁸Cited in McNichol and Carlson, 1985:44.

XVII. Rationalization and "Objectivity"

While *USA Today* has made efforts to temper its "good-news excesses" (McNichol and Carlson, 1985:44), and the "We" headline/lead is no longer in vogue, something which continues to feature prominently in the paper is the "USA Snapshots" segment discussed earlier. As mentioned before, the various "USA Snapshots" offer colourful graphics with snippets of statistical information, a title, and a sentence or two of introduction (at most). However, no explanation of the political, historical or social significance of the figures is provided. They are potentially important, but we are seldom given a sufficient amount of context to make them meaningful. In terms of contributing to reader understanding, they are not very rational.

From another point of view, however, "USA Snapshots" are exceedingly rational. With their benign graphics and value-neutral statistics, they are unlikely to alienate anyone by appearing to favour a particular viewpoint. They are, in short, an extreme example of the kind of news coverage which characterizes much of the paper. *USA Today* should, however, be headed in the opposite direction (as should its competitors).

For various reasons, mainstream newspapers have long endorsed the outdated goal of "objectivity," an impossible ideal which has the negative side-effect of fostering reader complacency. Newspaper readers have a responsibility to search out left- and right-wing news sources so they can make up their own minds, but when

they are presented with (ostensibly) value-neutral news there is no impetus to find alternative accounts. Nor is there the kind of strongly-opinionated news story which provokes readers to reflect on their own opinions about the subject. Instead, newspaper readers are like somnambulists, only half-aware of the world around them. Either the news is seen as being a more-or-less accurate account of things as they were; or there is a cynical, misguided notion that "the media always gets it wrong anyway so why pay any attention"; or the news is seen as being important for its entertainment value alone. In none of these case are readers challenged to take a more constructive approach which would see them going to other sources to do more of the work of apprehending reality, in all of its multi-dimensional complexity, themselves.

An effort to provide fair, balanced news coverage is a good thing because it increases a newspaper's credibility. Equally important, though, is a newspaper's opinion writing. However, with the exception of the editorial and op-ed pages, a few columns and the occasional "analysis" piece, there is far too little commentary in most mainstream newspapers (which is perhaps one reason the alternative press is gaining in popularity). The problem is compounded by newspapers such as *USA Today* and *The London Free Press* which have further undermined the ability of reporters to respond critically to the day's events. The result is a more reader-centred news product which paradoxically fosters greater reader passivity. Though appealing to many readers, a highly rationalized format is very *irrational* in terms of promoting a more motivated and responsible citizenry. As a result, readers may eventually

decide the slicker, more reader-centred newspapers which have followed in the footsteps of *USA Today* are doing them a disservice. That is, they may come to agree with Postman (1985) that modern media are narcotizing us with their amusing irrelevances, and dulling our critical perspective in the process.

SECTION TWO

Section one of this essay elaborated on the phenomenon of newspaper rationalization. As part of that elaboration, the implications for *news quality* were discussed using examples to illustrate a number of different criticisms. The second part of this essay is an attempt to explore, in a more systematic and empirical fashion, some of the those criticisms.

I. The Problem

As we have seen, the North American newspaper industry has gone through a process of rationalization which has been effected in a number of ways. In particular, North American newspapers have sought to rationalize their operations by increasingly turning to specialists: graduates of business administration programs, market researchers, newspaper design experts. At the same time, there has been a shift in news philosophy: instrumental rationality has become increasingly salient at the expense of news value considerations (value-rationality).

At the news-product level, highly-rationalized papers attempt to appeal to a larger audience by casting a very wide net. Often this is accomplished by running more stories (but in shorter form), on a wider variety of topics, than a regular newspaper. The main target group is readers in the 18 to 49 year old bracket; these baby boomers have the buying power which attracts advertisers. Readers in this age-

group are often assumed to have smaller attention spans than earlier generations of newspaper readers because they have grown accustomed to the kind of brief television news stories which do not require much concentration. As a result, offering more stories allows these modern readers to read their newspaper in the same way that they watch television. That is, it gives them a greater degree of choice (the kind of choice they get when jumping from channel to channel with the remote control).

Moreover, highly rationalized newspapers assume that readers in their main target group have less time for reading because they have more leisure opportunities and busier work schedules than newspaper readers in previous ages. In response, highly rationalized newspapers manage to present information more quickly for the modern, busy reader by increasing the iconographic element of newspapers. Thus, highly rationalized newspapers are more likely than less rationalized newspapers to feature pie graphs, charts, diagrams, quick-identification logos and a much larger number of photographs than more traditional newspapers such as *The Globe and Mail* or *The Wall Street Journal*.

In short, highly rationalized papers such as *USA Today*, *The London Free Press* and *The Seattle Times* have attempted to make their products more reader-centred by: (a) decreasing the level of *authorship* by (further) minimizing the role of the reporter in news production; (b) making newspapers more user-friendly by presenting information in a more varied format; (c) emphasizing the reader's role in constituting the subject matter of news by including more surveys on reader opinions; (d) increasing the amount of clearly "popular" news coverage (entertainment, sports,

soft-news features) at the expense of more traditional "hard news"; and, as mentioned above, (e) including shorter stories on a greater number of topics.

One of the dangers of the present-day rationalization of the news "product," however, is that limiting the ability of the journalist/"author" to impart meaning will in turn narrow the range of social criticisms (of both the left and the right) that are indirectly possible through the manipulation of the news text. Although they must give the appearance of adhering to the ideology of objectivity,⁹ journalists are nevertheless able to convey their intended meanings through a variety of means, such as providing historical, political or economic context which alters or qualifies the meaning of the day's news. (In a story about a male politician's stated support of women's rights, for instance, the reporter might note that the politician was once charged with wife assault).

As newspapers become more rationally purposeful, however, the ability of journalists to exercise this creative discretion is increasingly diminished for two reasons: (1) there is less room in shorter stories to provide background information and context; and (2) the reporter (or editor) has less ability to manipulate the many elements that come together in the creation of a news story. Indeed, when news stories are presented in the form of perfunctory "fact boxes," this creative discretion

⁹One somewhat compelling argument for maintaining at least a certain degree of "objectivity" in news coverage is that it provides journalists with the aura of neutrality which allows them access to some places which would otherwise be off-limits. In this respect, adopting an "objective" stance is a rationally- purposeful way of providing readers with a view of people and events which would otherwise go unobserved. However, I still feel newspapers could serve their readers better by putting less emphasis on impartiality and more emphasis on interpretation. Indeed, it is interesting to note how quickly government leaders chastise reporters for lacking objectivity. Often it is these same politicians who benefit greatly from the kind of surface coverage which merely recounts their official pronouncements -- in an entirely neutral fashion -- without challenging them.

is greatly diminished, for journalists are less and less capable of establishing a "preferred reading." Moreover, "fact boxes," by definition, allow less room for evaluative content; by-and-large they consist of the kind of simple statements of fact (dates, places, statistics, etc.) which tend to have a higher degree of neutrality.

In short, the arena of knowledge-dissemination provided by the news -- one of the important terrains "upon which the terms of capitalist hegemony are affirmed, contested and negotiated" (Hackett, 1988:83) -- becomes more tightly circumscribed as reporters lose narrative control over newspaper copy. The end result is a greater danger that newspapers will help perpetuate existing relations of domination along lines of class, gender and race, for their ability to overtly and covertly challenge the status quo is increasingly undermined. This in turn threatens the ability of journalists to foster the kind of critical awareness and insight needed by a nation's citizens as they attempt to ensure the best social, economic and political milieu possible.

II. Research Question and Literature Review

The following research question was selected:

How has the rationalization of the news product at certain newspapers in recent years affected news quality at those newspapers?

My hypothesis is that highly-rationalized newspapers such as *USA Today* and the redesigned *Free Press* feature less analysis, less commentary, less context, less evaluative content, and in general, more "information" than "meaning." This hypothesis is derived, in part, from some of the critical commentary which followed the appearance of these newspapers.

As indicated earlier, journalism commentators have been fairly critical of this new breed of newspapers. For instance, Bagdikian (1983) contended *USA Today* had no sense of priorities and backed up his claim by demonstrating how it had missed a number of important stories during a week-long period in January 1983. In a content analysis of a single issue, Ludlow (1986:419) showed that by a margin of about three to one, *USA Today* ran far more stories in its daily news space than traditional metropolitan newspapers. Moreover, she bemoaned the lack of "commentary, personal columns, interpretive writing and investigative reporting."

In a more exhaustive study, King (1990:83-87) found that in its coverage of the 1988 presidential primaries, *USA Today* devoted less attention to campaign issues, personal qualities of the candidates and policy issues than did the *New York Times*, a more traditional newspaper which also serves a national audience. In a content analysis of front-page stories from January 8 through June 8, 1988, King found that

USA Today was more likely to concentrate on the contestual element -- "winning and losing, strategy and logistics, appearances and hoopla" (Patterson, cited in King, 1990:83). Eighty-eight per cent of the sentences in *USA Today*'s front-page, presidential-primary stories focused on the contestual, or "strategic game," aspect of the campaign, compared to only 73.7 per cent of *the Times*' front-page sentences. The results of the study, which involved 1729 sentences from both newspapers, were found to be statistically significant. Despite the percentage differences, however, King's (1987) overall conclusion was that the two papers demonstrate the same *pattern* of coverage; that is, they are both likely to focus on the strategic game, or "horse-race," aspect of the presidential primaries rather than campaign issues, personal qualities of candidates or public policy issues.

The London Free Press has not been studied in as much detail, although a 1988 article by Don Gibb (1988), a former reporter and editor at the paper, argued that "profit motive" was "driving the paper into journalistic bankruptcy." Gibb provided anecdotal information which suggested the paper had lost some of its "commitment to hard-hitting, credible, responsible journalism." In another article, Smith (1988:16) quoted a former assignment editor who complained that the *Free Press*, which had formerly encouraged detail and substance, had gone in the opposite direction because of the more profit-oriented philosophy ushered in during the late 1980s: "They [editors] cut stories to size so much that you can't put any substance in them."

What is clear from earlier studies of *The London Free Press* and *USA Today* is that additional analysis is required to assess the impact of modern rationalization practices on the journalistic qualities of these newspapers. In the remaining sections of this essay, I attempt to make some preliminary efforts in that direction.

III. Definition of Main Concepts

Rationality: the drive for ever-increasing predictability, control, and stability in human relationships, governance, and the physical world (King, 1987:125).

Information: Value-free (neutral) knowledge which is transmitted between parties. In journalistic parlance, this means providing "the facts" and letting the readers derive their own opinions on the basis of these facts.¹⁰ An example of "information" would be something like, "The Prime Minister was taken to the airport by car." This is a statement of fact, and no judgement is stated or implied.

Meaning: That quality which is conveyed by making or implying connections between different pieces of information. Meaning always carries with it a certain amount of intentionality; the purveyor of meaning wants to indicate the existence of certain relationships to the reader. In short, something is made "meaningful" when it

¹⁰ A fairly convincing argument can be made that "facts" are never neutral, for their selection is based on the reporter's or editor's interpretative framework, which derives from his or her own biases and the conventions of the news business. In short, "values" are always involved in news production, but there are variations in the *degree* to which different values are given prominence in a reporter's work. In an (ostensibly) "neutral" piece, these values are not overt; in a "non-neutral" piece, they are more clearly evident (that is, it is more easy to see where the reporter or editor stands on the subject).

allows the reader to interpret "the facts" as part of a coherent pattern of signification rather than simply absorbing them as isolated bits of information.

IV. Research Design

The research design for this study involved a content analysis of different issues of *USA Today* and the *Free Press* (in its redesigned and pre-redesign formats). The *Free Press* was an ideal choice because it is possible to compare it in its less-rationalized and more-rationalized forms by evaluating articles on comparable subjects from different time periods. *USA Today* was also a logical choice because it is the prototypical rationalized newspaper (and to a certain extent provided the model for the redesigned *Free Press*).

In order to analyze the *Free Press*, I selected a single topic on which to focus: coverage of the Ontario provincial elections in 1987 and 1990. This approach allowed me to compare *The London Free Press's* election coverage before and after the newspaper took on a much more rationalized format in 1989. Election coverage was a particularly pertinent topic on which to focus given that one of my central concerns has been the responsibility of newspapers to contribute to as enlightened an electorate as possible. Election campaigns offer the most obvious opportunity for newspapers to inform their readers about current and potential leaders, and the issues they will have to address as elected representatives of their constituents.

As an initial step I arbitrarily selected a week-long period from the early parts of the 1987 and 1990 provincial elections. In both cases, the week-long periods were in the month of August.¹¹ From those week-long periods I then selected the Monday, Wednesday and Friday editions in order to ensure a balanced representation of the entire week's coverage.¹²

In both 1987 and 1990, the *Free Press* included special election-page coverage in the front section of the newspaper. I selected the first election-coverage page from the three editions chosen for each time period, giving me a total of six pages. Sentences found in both wire-service and staff-written news accounts were included in the overall analysis.

In some cases, I also calculated the overall percentages for *staff-written* news accounts because I felt there might be significant difference between these accounts and the ones provided by wire services such as Canada Press. In effect, I felt it necessary to control for the institutional origin of the news account. The highly rationalized organizational structure of the *Free Press*, and the heightened emphasis on profitability in recent years, mean that *Free Press* reporters are working in a newsroom with a somewhat different philosophy than more traditional newsrooms. This philosophy could affect the way news articles are written. For instance, the shift to shorter stories could, as it was suggested earlier, influence the approach to news

¹¹The early August issues were chosen on the basis of practicality rather than any theoretical rationale. Because they were from the beginning of the month, it was easier to locate them on microform.

¹²The specific dates were Aug. 3, 5 and 7, 1988, and Aug. 1, 3 and 6, 1990.

gathering: reporters might, in some instances, look for stories which require less background explanation in order to meet new rules on story length.

The unit of analysis for this study was individual sentences. This was the most appropriate unit of analysis given the nature of the material under study. Using individual stories as the unit of analysis was not possible because of the variability of story length and the fact that many of the news accounts in highly rationalized papers are presented in a non-story format. Often, this non-narrative format does not even consist of paragraphs, another possible unit of analysis. In order to have a basis for comparison, it was therefore necessary to use a smaller unit of analysis: the individual sentence.¹³

The selected portions of *The London Free Press* were analyzed using four measures. In choosing them, I attempted to select indicators which would tap into the following elements of discourse: contextualization, evaluation/judgement, and persuasion/incitement. These elements of discourse indicate that a *higher level of meaning*, over-and-above a simple expository level of meaning, which limits itself to a neutral description of the subject matter, is present. It is this higher level of meaning which sits at the meaning end of the meaning/information continuum.

Directly assessing the amount of meaning in a unit of news was impossible because of the highly abstract nature of the concept "meaning." However, I was able

¹³For the purposes of my study, I considered only sentences which could be identified as such by virtue of a capitalized first letter at the beginning of the first word and a period at the end of the sentence. As well, I did not include photo captions or decks, which provide a one-sentence precis of the story to give readers an additional indication of the story contents over-and-above the headline. In addition, text accompanying graphics was not included.

to measure the degree of *expressiveness* present in a unit of news. In effect, I used degree of expressiveness as one indicator of the degree of meaning, since expressiveness is one way to convey additional shades of meaning beyond the direct, specific information conveyed by purely factual information.

To assess the amount of expressiveness (which is still a relatively abstract concept), I calculated the number of adjectives which described personal characteristics of the politicians running for office -- i.e. fiery, short, soft-spoken.¹⁴ Such descriptive adjectives, it should be noted, carry an *evaluative* component. Identifying such adjectives was relatively straight-forward, but in cases where any doubt remained, I relied on Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, which indicates parts of speech with its definitions. Since the unit of analysis was the individual sentence, a sentence with two or more adjectives only received a score of one.

Another way of conveying meaning is to provide context so the reader can assess a certain event or detail in relation to other events or details outside the immediate realm of the current news story. Providing more context often allows for greater understanding. To determine the amount of context, I determined the total number of sentences with some form of *historical* or *geographical* context, and then divided that total by the total number of sentences analyzed.

Historical context was defined as any background information which made reference to an occurrence which predated the current day's news by at least a week.

¹⁴Text found in news articles and fact boxes was included in the study.

For example, in a story about the number of female candidates in an upcoming election, a reference to the number of female candidates in an election four years ago would be classified as historical context.

Geographical context was defined as any information about a geographical locale *outside of* the immediate geographical locale focused on in the news account. For example, in a story about high pollution levels in Toronto, a reference to similarly high levels in Buffalo, N.Y. would be classified as geographical context.

In a another attempt to assess the amount of "meaning" in the old and new versions of the *Free Press*, I used a form of analysis known as evaluative-assertion analysis. Pioneered by Osgood, Saporta and Nunnally, this technique uses the *evaluative assertion* as the unit of analysis. The following examples, taken from *Teaching Prejudice* by Garnet McDiarmid and David Pratt (1971:36), illustrate the difference between an evaluative assertion and a statement of fact:

1. Indians killed some people who encroached on their territory.
2. Indians murdered some people who encroached on their territory.

Assuming that the basic facts of the case are true, the word "killed" is neither euphemistic nor judgmental. It is a simple statement of fact. The word "murdered," however, is an evaluation that requires adjudication.

As Pratt and McDiarmid (1971:36) note, there are times when the researcher must make arbitrary decisions when deciding whether something is an evaluative assertion. However, despite this limitation, Pratt and McDiarmid were able to build a convincing case that social-studies texts used in Ontario high schools in 1968

contained a number of biased assertions about minority groups such as Jews, immigrants, African Americans and American Indians.

My rationale for using evaluative analysis was that meaning, as I define it above, "...always carries with it a certain amount of intentionality; the purveyor of meaning wants to indicate (either overtly or more subtly) the existence of certain relationships to the reader [or listener]...." Of course, one could argue that even statements of fact make certain relationships clear to the reader -- the relationship between the various words in the sentence, for instance. However, what distinguishes the evaluative assertion is that it makes a relationship explicit and it makes a *judgment* on that relationship. By making a judgment, the evaluative assertion provides another level of meaning beyond simply pointing out the existence of a relationship; it offers an opinion (albeit in a sometimes subtle fashion) on that relationship which encourages us to reflect on our own opinion about the matter.

Unlike Pratt and McDiarmid, I used individual sentences as my unit of analysis (in order to speed up the process of analysis). Thus, a sentence could contain more than one evaluative assertion but would only receive a score of one. As in the case of the analysis of context-bearing sentences, only sentences found in news stories or fact boxes were analyzed.

My use of evaluative assertion analysis was similar to that of Pratt and McDiarmid in that I too limited my study to certain groups. Whereas they limited their analysis to evaluative assertions about minority groups (and Christians, who provided the control group for the study), I only considered evaluative assertions

about the three main political parties in the Ontario election, the politicians involved and the policies they endorsed. An example of one such evaluative sentence, in which a former campaign manager for the Conservatives endorses the Liberal party, is the following: "The Liberals, over the last five years, have done more for Northern Ontario than the Conservatives did in the previous 20" (*The London Free Press*, Aug. 2, 1990). Evaluative assertions made by a member of the public, another politician, or a reporter were included in the study. This meant that material in quotation marks was also analyzed.¹⁵ In addition, I was not concerned with the *degree* of positive or negative bias, just as long as there was *some* degree of judgment which could be identified.

One final way to assess the amount of meaning is to determine the number of articles which are clearly commentary or analysis pieces. In such articles, the writer is allowed to make assertions and connections which extend beyond the limited scope of a specific news event in order to provide a greater amount of understanding of a political, economic, historical, social or moral nature. Moreover, the opinion-piece writer has more opportunities than the reporter to *persuade*, or *incite*, readers or

¹⁵The rationale for including quoted material was that reporters can use comments from sources as a means of expressing their own opinions. Indeed, reporters who wish to express their own views can strategically place certain quotations in order to highlight a particular viewpoint that they share. The reporter has a wide degree of latitude in choosing which quotations to use and where to place them. It is therefore important to consider quoted material in order to fully assess the reporter's ability to convey meaning (not only through his or her own words, but through the words of others as well).

Furthermore, one of the goals of this essay is to assess any differences in the *overall* amount of election-related evaluative content in highly rationalized newspapers and less rationalized ones. As a result, it is important to consider any evaluative assertions found in quoted material, regardless of whether the reporter shares or opposes the opinions expressed therein, because such material has as much capacity to promote reader reflection, and thus contribute to more *meaning*, as any other evaluative-assertion-containing material.

public figures to adopt a certain type of action. In the following *USA Today* editorial, for instance, the editorialist makes an attempt at persuading then-president George Bush to adopt a certain course of action:

[Bush] made a good start last week by collecting his economic proposals into a package and explaining them to voters.

He should do the same with a plan for reducing the deficit and a way to pay for his health-care proposals. (Sept. 14, 1992)

In order to assess the number of commentary and analysis pieces on the 1987 and 1990 Ontario provincial elections, I used only those articles in the original six pages which were labelled "analysis" or "commentary," and only those articles, including editorials, which appeared in the commentary/opinion pages of the *Free Press*. (It was only in the case of this indicator that I went beyond the original six pages selected for analysis.)

As a parallel part of the study, I selected two week-long periods from the federal-election coverage of *USA Today* (from the years 1988 and 1992). I then submitted them to the same content analyses described above. Since the format of *USA Today* has not changed substantially during its 11-year history, it was assumed there would be no significant difference vis-a-vis the above indicators for the two time periods. Conversely, it was assumed there *would be* significant differences for the two periods chosen from the *Free Press*. In short, *USA Today* served as something of a control.¹⁶

¹⁶The ideal approach would have been to contrast *Free Press* federal-election coverage with *USA Today* federal-election coverage, but unfortunately, there has not been a Canadian federal election in the post-changeover period of the *Free Press*'s history. As a result, contrasting provincial-election coverage with U.S. federal-election coverage was the next best alternative.

V. Results

The results of my study were surprising in many ways. First of all, I found very few adjectives describing personal qualities of politicians in either the pre-redesign or post-redesign versions of the *Free Press* (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

Adjective Content of Sentences by Date			
<i>The London Free Press</i>			
Count Col. Pct.	1987	1990	All
Adjective- Containing	1 (.004%)	2 (.01%)	3 (.014%)
Non-adjective- Containing	263 (99.9%)	204 (99.9%)	467 (99.8%)
Total	264 (100%)	206 (100%)	N=470 (100%)

There was a similar paucity of adjectives describing the personal characteristics of politicians in *USA Today*. In all, there were only five such adjectives: three in the 1988 version of *USA Today* and two in the 1992 version. In both cases, these sentences accounted for less than one percent of the total number of sentences (N=442).

In order to test the validity of this indicator, I calculated the number of personal-characteristic adjectives (PCAs) in the commentary/analysis/editorial pieces, where one would expect to find a much greater degree of room for expressiveness (see Table 2.) As expected, there were considerably more PCAs on average in the opinion pieces than there were in the news stories and fact boxes. In both the 1987 and 1990 versions of the *Free Press*, about five per cent of the sentences in the opinion pieces contained at least one PCA, compared to less than one per cent of the sentences in the regular news items. There was also a large number of PCAs in *USA Today's* opinion pieces, although there was a large difference between the 1988 and 1992 versions. In 1988, two per cent of the sentences in the opinion pieces contained PCAs (N=107); in 1992, nine per cent contained PCAs (N=66).

TABLE 2

Adjective Content of Sentences by Date in <i>Free Press</i> Opinion Pieces			
Count Col. Pct.	1987	1990	All
Adjective- Containing	6 (5%)	5 (6%)	11 (6%)
Non-Adjective- Containing	109 (95%)	74 (94%)	183 (94%)
Total	115 (100%)	79 (100%)	N = 194 (100%)

In sum, the PCA indicator seems to measure what I intended it to measure, for it is found in a significantly higher proportion in the kind of writing which naturally lends itself to PCA-usage, namely, commentary and analysis. The low number of PCAs in the election-news sections of both the *Free Press* and *USA Today* is significant insofar as it suggests that, in comparison to opinion-piece writers, reporters have very few opportunities to make overt judgments via personal-characteristic adjectives. Moreover, this finding appears to obtain regardless of the degree of rationalization.

Another indicator I employed was the number of evaluative-assertion-bearing sentences (EABSs) (see Table 3). In this case, the pre-redesign version of the *Free Press*, in which 17 per cent of the sentences had EABSs, fared slightly better than the

redesigned version, in which 14 per cent of the sentences had EABSs. However, this difference was not found to be significant ($X^2 = 1.02$, $p < .50$).

In order to compensate for the possible distortions involved in using a measure of central tendency such as the mean, I opted to also consider another measure of central tendency which is not affected by extremely large or small scores: the median. In order to use this method, I changed my unit of analysis to individual news stories. Once again, the scores for the two versions of the *Free Press* were almost identical: the median score for the 1987 version was 2.5 EABSs per news account, and the median score for the 1990 version was 2 EABSs per news account.

TABLE 3

Evaluation-assertion-bearing Sentences by Date			
<i>The London Free Press</i>			
Count Col. Pct.	1987	1990	All
Evaluation- assertion-bearing	46 (17%)	29 (14%)	75 (16%)
Non-Evaluation- assertion-bearing	218 (83%)	177 (86%)	395 (84%)
Total	264 (100%)	206 (100%)	N=470 (100%)

Both the old *Free Press* and the new *Free Press* did slightly less well when sentences in wire-service stories were excluded from analysis. Thirteen per cent of the staff-written sentences (out of a total of 233 sentences) in the earlier version of the *Free Press* contained EABSs, compared to only 10 per cent (out of a total of 155 sentences) in the new *Free Press* ($X^2 = 1.4$, $p < .30$).

Not surprisingly, *Free Press* fact boxes provided even less EABSs content than staff-written news stories. Only six (or 9%) of the 1990 *Free Press*'s 69 fact-box sentences contained EABSs. By comparison, 18 per cent of its non-fact box, news-coverage sentences contained EABSs ($N=137$). Although this figure drops to 13 per cent when only staff-written, non-fact-box sentences are considered ($N=88$), it still seems clear that news presented in a traditional format is more likely to contain EABSs. Indeed it is interesting that the 1990 *Free Press*'s non-fact-box EABSs totals were almost identical to the 1987 *Free Press* EABSs totals.

Unexpected results emerged when I compared *USA Today*'s 1988 and 1992 federal-election news coverage, which consisted entirely of staff-written copy (see Table 4).

TABLE 4

Evaluation-assertion-bearing Sentences by Date			
<i>USA Today</i>			
Count Col. Pct.	1988	1992	All
Evaluation- assertion-bearing	12 (6%)	38 (16%)	50 (6%)
Non-Evaluation- assertion-bearing	199 (94%)	199 (84%)	398 (89%)
Total	211 (100%)	237 (100%)	N=448 (100%)

USA Today's 1992 federal-election news coverage contained 10 per cent more sentences with EABSs ($X^2 = 5.3$, $p < .05$). The same relationship is evident when median scores are compared: the median score for the 1987 *USA Today*, which contained a large number of very short news accounts, was 0 EABSs per story, whereas the score for the 1992 *USA Today* was 2 EABSs per story.

Although it is impossible to say for sure without additional research, one possible explanation for the discrepancy between the 1988 and 1992 versions is that *USA Today* may have responded to criticisms such as those made by Ludlow (1986) by increasing the amount of commentary, which naturally lends itself to EABS

content,¹⁷ in its news-coverage after 1988. Although they are not identified as such, there are two articles in the 1992 material -- "Politics vs. 'principles'" (Sept. 9, 1992) and "'Serious business' for Bush" (Sept. 11, 1992) -- which are clearly analysis pieces. There were no such articles in the 1988 news accounts.

In any event, there was a range of EABS scores for the two versions of *USA Today* and the two versions of the *Free Press*. The scores ranged from a low of six per cent in the 1988 *USA Today* to a high of 17 per cent in the 1987 version of the *Free Press*. The average score for the three highly rationalized papers (the 1988 and 1992 versions of *USA Today* and the 1990 *Free Press*) was 11 per cent, five per cent lower than the score for the 1987 *Free Press*. However, the range of scores for the four papers, and the relatively small percentage differences between the top three, leads me to question the value of the EABS indicator as a means of differentiating highly rationalized papers from other papers. Indeed, one highly rationalized newspaper (the 1992 *USA Today*) was able to deliver practically the same amount of evaluative commentary in its news accounts as the 1987 *Free Press*. In this respect,

¹⁷In general, the *Free Press* and *USA Today* opinion pieces had a much higher percentage of EABSs, as one would expect, than the non-opinion items. The EABS content for the opinion pieces in all four newspapers averaged out to 27%, compared to an average of 13% for regular news items. However, there was a wide range of EABS scores in the opinion pages of the four different papers. In the 1987 *Free Press*, 16 per cent of the 115 sentences contained EABSs, compared to 24 per cent (N=79) in the 1990 *Free Press*. In the two versions of *USA Today*, there was a much larger discrepancy. Only eight of the 107 sentences (7%), in the 1988 *USA Today* contained EABSs, compared to 62% of the 1992 *USA Today* sentences (N=66). However, a large part of the variation is attributable to the way in which the EABS scores were calculated. Only EABSs which made a judgment on parties, politicians or their policies were included in the analysis. The 1988 *USA Today* election-coverage opinion pieces did indeed contain a large number of EABSs, but most of them were on other aspects of the election, such as the need for debates and election-day registration. Few of the 1988 *USA Today* EABSs made reference to the parties, politicians or their policies.

the 1992 *USA Today* appears to offer just as much meaning as the pre-redesign *Free Press*.

Another indicator of meaning that I used was the number of election-related opinion pieces identified as such or found in the two-page commentary sections of the respective newspapers. In the editions selected for analysis, each ran a total of four opinion pieces as part of their election coverage (see Table 5).

TABLE 5
Type of Opinion Piece by Date of Paper
The London Free Press

	1987	1990	All
Editorial	1	2	3
Analysis	2	0	2
Column	1	2	3
Total	4	4	8

In terms of the total number of sentences of explicitly-identified commentary, there were 118 in the 1987 *Free Press* and 79 in the 1990 *Free Press*. Another significant difference between the two versions was the degree to which commentary and news were separated. In the 1987 *Free Press*, two of the opinion pieces were located among news stories -- and both were written by *Free Press* reporters. In the 1990 *Free Press*, the opinion pieces were confined to the editorial pages and none

were written by reporters. (Two were written by editorial writers and two were written by non-staff columnists).

The 1988 and 1992 versions of *USA Today* were also somewhat dissimilar vis-a-vis the number of clearly-identified opinion pieces (see Table 6):

TABLE 6
Type of Opinion Piece by Date of Paper
USA Today

	1988	1992	All
Editorial	1	1	2
Analysis	0	0	0
Column	4	0	4
Assorted ¹	0	12	12
Total	5	13	18

While the 1992 *USA Today* appears, from the above table, to have offered a much larger amount of commentary than the 1988 *USA Today*, a different picture emerges when we look at the total number of sentences in each version. The 1988 opinion pieces contained 107 sentences of commentary, compared to only 66 sentences in the 1992 version. The majority of those sentences in both years were written by non-*USA Today* writers, and none of the explicitly-identified commentary in either version was written by reporters.

An additional part of the study measured historical and geographical context (see Table 7). An example of a context-bearing-sentence (CBS) was the following:

It has been exactly 50 years since the Ontario Liberal party last entered a provincial election campaign as confident of winning big as the hordes unleashed by Premier David Peterson when he called the [1987] election. (Aug. 1, 1987)

A 1990 story about high taxes for Canadian farmers contained the following example of geographical context: "Farmers in the United States can bring produce to market at lower prices because they pay less in taxes, she [a Toronto fruit vendor] says" (Aug. 6, 1990).

TABLE 7

Context-bearing Sentences by Date			
<i>The London Free Press</i>			
Count col. pct.	1987	1990	All
Context- bearing	45 (19%)	20 (10%)	66 (15%)
Non-context bearing	188 (81%)	185 (90%)	567 (85%)
Total	233 (100%)	206 (100%)	N=439 (100%)

The old *Free Press*, in which 19 per cent of the sentences contained either historical or geographical context, scored considerably better than its 1990 counterpart, in which only 10 per cent of the sentences were CBSs ($X^2 = 12.27$, $p <$

.001). When only staff-written sentences were considered, the differential was even greater, with a 20 per cent CBS ratio for the old *Free Press* and only an eight per cent ratio for the redesigned version. A similarly large disparity was evident when median scores were compared: the median score for the 1987 *Free Press* was 4.5 CBSs per story, while the score for the 1990 *Free Press* was one CBS per story.

The impact of design and content rationalization becomes even more significant if we look specifically at the "fact-box" news accounts in the redesigned *Free Press*. Only three (or 4%) of the 69 fact-box sentences contained CBSs. By contrast, 11 per cent of the non-fact-box, news-coverage sentences contained CBSs (N=137). (That figure dropped to eight per cent when only staff-written, non-fact-box sentences were considered (N=88)). By comparison, 20 per cent of 1987 sentences, which were all in the form of news stories, contained CBSs.

Surprisingly, there was also a large CBS difference between the 1988 *USA Today* and the 1992 version (see table 8.)

TABLE 8

Context-bearing Sentences by Date			
<i>USA Today</i>			
Count Col. Pct.	1988	1992	All
Context-bearing	5 (2%)	35 (15%)	40 (9%)
Non-context bearing	206 (98%)	202 (85%)	408 (91%)
Total	211 (100%)	237 (100%)	N=448 (100%)

In the 1992 *USA Today*, there were 13 per cent more CBSs than there were in the 1988 version ($X^2 = 19.7$, $p < .001$). What makes this result even more surprising is that it can not be explained by simply pointing to a few 1992 news accounts with an unusually high number of CBSs. Instead, there are a number of news accounts with a substantial number of CBSs (most of them of the historical variety). Indeed, the median scores bear this out: the median score for the 1988 *USA Today* was zero CBSs per story, compared to three CBSs per story in the 1992 *USA Today*. Again, one possible explanation (although more research would be required to confirm it) is that *USA Today* editors decided to respond to criticisms of their news-coverage style by including a larger degree of context in their 1992 election coverage.

Despite the high score for its 1992 news accounts, however, *USA Today* was still outperformed by the 1987 version of the *Free Press* (see table 9). Indeed, if we compare the 1987 *Free Press*'s staff-written sentences with the 1992 *USA Today*'s staff-written sentences, we see that there were four per cent more CBSs in the 1987 *Free Press* ($X^2 = 1.24$, $p < .30$). The chi square score indicates there is a 30 per cent chance that this differential is the product of chance; however, if we take the average percentage of CBSs for the three rationalized newspapers (9%) and compare it with the score for the 1987 version of the *Free Press* (19%), the differential becomes considerably larger.

TABLE 9

Context-bearing Sentences by Date			
<i>The London Free Press and USA Today</i>			
Count Col. Pct.	1987 <i>Free Press</i>	1992 <i>USA Today</i>	All
Context-bearing	45 (19%)	36 (15%)	81 (9%)
Non-context bearing	188 (81%)	202 (85%)	390 (83%)
Total	233 (100%)	237 (100%)	N=471 (100%)

In the election coverage analyzed in the 1992 *USA Today*, there was only one fact box which included information presented in sentence form (N=19). It contained

no CBSs or EABSs. The election coverage analyzed in the 1988 *USA Today* also contained just one fact-box (N=4). There were no CBSs or EABSs in it.

Something which made up a much larger part of *USA Today*'s 1988 news coverage was a regular segment called "Electionline," which consisted of a series of news briefs. (These news briefs were, on average, five lines in length and provided a cursory look at election issues, events and candidates). Like the *Free Press* fact boxes, "Electionline" contained very few CBSs or EABSs. Of the 115 news-brief sentences, four per cent contained EABSs and three percent contained CBSs. These scores were comparable to the EABS and CBS scores for the non-"Electionline" news stories, which, at an average length of 14 lines, were longer than the news briefs but were themselves fairly short.

In the election coverage analyzed in the 1992 *USA Today*, the equivalent of "Electionline" was "Election'92" ("A Look at the Candidates and the Issues"). However, it comprised a much smaller portion of the news coverage selected for analysis than was the case with the 1988 material. Furthermore, the average length of these briefs, eight lines, was larger than the 1988 average. In the 40 lines of "Election'92" news coverage, 10 (or 25%) were EABSs and 3 (or 7%) were CBSs.

VI. Additional Indicators

One thing which struck me as I was doing the previous analyses were the differences in the ratio of staff-written to wire-service copy in the two versions of the *Free Press*. In the old *Free Press*, 233 of the 264 sentences (or 88%) were written by *Free Press* reporters. In the new *Free Press*, only 155 of the 206 sentences (or 75%) were written by *Free Press* staff. In the case of *USA Today*, which has considerably more financial resources than the *Free Press*, all of the news accounts were written by the paper's own reporters.

A more important indicator was the ratio of information-related to issue-related news accounts. Information-related news accounts were defined as those which focused primarily on providing basic election-related information such as enumeration procedures. Issue-related news accounts were defined as those which dealt with campaign issues such as taxation policies, environmental protection and public car insurance. Rather than analyzing each individual sentence, every news account was identified as being predominantly issue- or information-related, and all of the sentences were designated accordingly. An admittedly rough (and very subjective) measure, it did provide a useful indication of the nature of the news coverage in the different versions of the *Free Press* and *USA Today* (see tables 10 and 11).

TABLE 10

Type of Sentence by Date			
<i>The London Free Press</i>			
Count Col. Pct.	1987	1990	All
Issue-related	237 (90%)	147 (71%)	384 (82%)
Information-related	22 (10%)	59 (29%)	81 (18%)
Total	264 (100%)	206 (100%)	N=470 (100%)

TABLE 11

Type of Sentence by Date			
<i>USA Today</i>			
Count Col. Pct.	1988	1992	All
Issue	97 (46%)	176 (74%)	273 (61%)
Information	114 (54%)	61 (26%)	175 (39%)
Total	211 (100%)	237 (100%)	N=448 (100%)

In terms of information- versus issue-related content, the pre-redesign *Free Press* outperformed the redesigned *Free Press* and both versions of *USA Today*. Ninety per cent of the sentences in the old *Free Press* were issue-related, compared to about 70 per cent for the new *Free Press*, about 75 per cent for the 1992 *USA Today*, and 46 per cent for the 1988 *USA Today*. Furthermore, the difference between the old *Free Press* and the new *Free Press* was statistically significant ($X^2 = 32.06$, $p < .001$), as was the difference between the old *Free Press* and the 1992 version of *USA Today* ($X^2 = 26.5$, $p < .001$).

VII. Intercoder Reliability Scores

Intercoder reliability scores were calculated on three of the six indicators. They were not calculated for the opinion-piece segment of the study because there was no question as to whether the selected items were commentary pieces. By the same token, there was no question about the wire-service articles. In the case of the personal-characteristic adjectives (PCAs), no intercoder reliability scores were calculated because so few PCAs were found in the respective versions of the *Free Press* and *USA Today*. (This in itself is reason enough to conclude that the PCA indicator is not a useful tool for distinguishing between highly rationalized newspapers and less rationalized newspapers; there are simply too few examples to make any meaningful comparisons.)

Intercoder reliability scores for the remaining indicators were calculated using a sample of news accounts randomly selected from the different versions of the *Free Press* and *USA Today*. (Six news accounts were selected.) At least one news account was chosen from each version of each newspaper. The two other judges were then given copies of those articles to code. Each judge coded a total of 85 sentences. It was decided beforehand that a coefficient of reliability (C.R.) of .80 would be required in order to conclude that an acceptably high level of agreement between the three judges had been reached.¹⁸

Coefficients of reliability were calculated using a basic formula, "the ratio of coding agreements to the total number of coding decisions" (Holsti, 1969:140):

$$C.R. = \frac{3M}{N_1 + N_2 + N_3}$$

M is the number of coding decisions on which the judges agree, and N₁, N₂ and N₃ refer to the number of coding choices made by judges 1, 2 and 3.

The coefficient of reliability scores were as follows: .73 for the EABSs indicator; .87 for the CBS indicator; and .43 for the information-versus-issue indicator. The CBS indicator was the only one which provided an acceptably high level of intercoder reliability. However, the score for the EABSs indicator could likely be raised to a more satisfactory level in future studies by providing better training of coders. (In the present study, coders were only given a few examples of

¹⁸This is a somewhat arbitrary decision. However, it is based in part on Berelson's (1971:172) review of 30 studies and experiments which was intended to assess reported levels of reliability. He found that correlation co-efficients ranged from .78 to .99. Based on that review, he noted that "the reports on reliability which do appear [in the literature] are uniformly high."

EABSs and non-EABSs during a very brief training period.) The score for the final indicator is more problematic; it suggests that there is too much overlap between *information* and *issue* content. Given the low coefficient of reliability score, this latter measure would likely have to be dropped in future studies, or replaced with one which provided a more clear-cut distinction between categories.

VIII. Discussion

My original hypothesis was that highly-rationalized newspapers such as *USA Today* and *The London Free Press* feature less analysis, less commentary, less context, less evaluative content, and in general, more "information" than "meaning." This hypothesis was only partially supported.

In terms of personal-characteristic adjectives (PCAS), there appears to be almost no difference between the pre-redesign *Free Press* and the redesigned *Free Press*. There were few PCAs in the news accounts of either version of the paper, a pattern which was also evident in the news accounts of the 1988 and 1992 versions of *USA Today*. In other words, reporters at both papers were quite limited in their ability to make evaluative comments through PCAs, which allow for a greater degree of expressiveness. The reason for the absence of PCAs is likely the commitment to "objective" journalism; both *USA Today* and the *Free Press* want to maintain a certain semblance of impartiality. However, in their opinion pieces, where news bias is more overt, both *USA Today* and the *Free Press* featured a higher percentage of PCAs.

This was true for the different versions of each paper, although there was some variation between the different versions of *USA Today*. The opinion pieces in the 1988 *USA Today* contained a much smaller percentage of PCAs, but this can be at least partially attributed to the fact, mentioned earlier, that few of the 1988 opinion pieces focused on the politicians or their policies.

In terms of the average number of evaluative assertions, there was little difference between the earlier and redesigned versions of the *Free Press*. The election-page copy in the new *Free Press* seems to provide just as much of a forum for the dissemination of differing opinions via the statements and paraphrased statements of politicians, their supporters and their detractors. Furthermore, the version of *USA Today* with the greatest percentage of EABSs had about the same amount as the 1987 and 1990 versions of the *Free Press*, again suggesting that degree of rationalization does not have a significant effect on EABS content. It should be noted, however, that the intercoder-reliability score for this indicator was lower than the minimum level desired, so the actual difference between the election-coverage content selected from the different versions of the two papers may be greater than this study indicated.

Degree of rationalization also appears to have little or no effect in terms of the *amount of* election commentary provided, even though the old *Free Press* offered about 33 per cent more clearly-identified election-commentary items than the new *Free Press*. There was also a similar differential between the 1988 *USA Today* and the 1992 *USA Today*. (This was the only area in which the 1988 *USA Today*

outperformed its 1992 counterpart.) However, I do not consider the differences between the different versions of the *Free Press* and *USA Today* to be substantial. A difference of 30 or 40 lines -- the equivalent of one or two opinion pieces -- could easily be due to happenstance or external differences, such as variations in the amount, or importance, of election news (the usual source of election commentary) from day to day.

More significant, perhaps, was the fact that there were no clearly-identified, reporter-written "analysis" articles in any of the highly rationalized papers, whereas there were two in the 1987 *Free Press*. The absence of such articles is consistent with *Free Press* editor Phil McLeod's prediction that the reporter was becoming "more and more of a fact-gatherer" (Cited in Gibb, 1988:34). In a more specialized newsroom, there is less-and-less overlap between different roles: reporters collect the facts; editorialists and columnists interpret their meaning. The reporter's opinion on those facts becomes less and less important.

This kind of clear-cut division of labour does not necessarily have to obtain in a highly rationalized newsroom, however; the 1992 *USA Today* contained at least two election-related articles written by reporters which could easily have been classified as "analysis." Indeed, both contained a high number of EABSSs. The 1990 *Free Press* also ran a few articles which contained an analytical component.

Distinctions between "analysis," which carries an evaluative component, and straight reportage are often blurry, which makes an analysis of opinion pieces difficult. Nevertheless, the absence of clearly-identified, reporter-written analysis

pieces in the 1990 *Free Press* is potentially significant; it could be that the *Free Press*'s entire 1990 provincial-election coverage lacked such articles. If this were the case, it would be a disservice to readers: if anything, reporters should be writing *more* of the commentary, not less. Having worked on the initial story, the reporter has a better understanding of the issues and the background information which provides important context. (Generally, reporters only have room in their articles for a small portion of the information they collect.) In this respect, they have a clear advantage over editorialists and columnists because they are more likely to be aware of the subtleties behind the news account which affect its overall significance. In short, they are best equipped to explain the underlying importance of the day's news.

Another potentially significant difference between the 1987 and 1990 versions of the *Free Press* was the number of context-bearing sentences. The old *Free Press* contained about twice as many CBSs, and also outperformed the 1992 *USA Today*, which had considerably more CBSs than the 1988 version. Most of the CBSs in all four papers were of the historical variety.

About one in five of the old *Free Press*'s sentences contained historical or geographical context, which is quite a large percentage. Part of the reason for the difference between the two versions of the *Free Press* was almost certainly the departure of veteran *Free Press* reporter Nick Martin, who wrote the two articles with the highest CBS-content among the ten 1987 news articles analyzed. Martin was deeply disturbed by the changes at the *Free Press* and left the paper in order to work at *The Winnipeg Free Press*, where I met him as an intern reporter in January 1989.

He felt that the modernized *London Free Press* did not provide him with an environment in which to write the kinds of stories which interested him.

In its rush to produce a more rationalized product, *The London Free Press* appears to have sacrificed some of the historical context which helps readers understand current events from a larger perspective. Indeed, it appears, on the basis of this study, to have changed into a paper which is grounded much more in the "here-and-now." Ultimately, however, such an approach is not in the best interest of *Free Press* readers because history, in particular, is an extremely important part of our culture; it helps individuals to learn from, and avoid, the errors committed by others.

The new *Free Press* seems to have undermined its ability to provide CBS content, because apart from losing at least one reporter who appeared to have a knack for incorporating such information into his articles, the *Free Press* has also adopted a redesigned format which is inherently less amenable to historical context. As suggested earlier, shorter stories allow less room for background information, which may be of tangential importance only. As a result, references to previous events are often the first to go if something has to be cut.

Along with less historical context, the redesigned *Free Press* also appears to offer less staff-written content, perhaps because it is less costly to buy wire-service material than it is to have staff reporters write it. The 1990 *Free Press* ran about 15 per cent fewer staff-written stories than did the 1987 *Free Press*. While a much

larger study would be required to determine if this were a consistent pattern, it would certainly be a valuable one to undertake.

In the context of this essay, staff-written articles are arguably more *meaningful* than wire-service stories because they provide a local perspective which is especially important to people as they attempt to understand how local, regional and national events impact on their own lives. Without that sense of relevance, provincial or federal election issues may seem somewhat meaningless to prospective voters.

Similarly, articles which focus on issues rather than information are also arguably more *meaningful* to the electorate. As they learn about the various election issues, readers can begin to see the larger patterns which provide them with an overall sense of how to vote. As with the study of history and many other subjects, it is more important to understand general trends than it is to know specific details. The history professor who teaches his or her students to focus on the significance of historical events rather than memorizing dates and places does a far better job of enlightening them. By the same token, the reporter who writes about key issues rather than mundane details, such as enumeration procedures (*Free Press*, Aug. 3, 1990), does a better job of preparing readers to vote. Of course, information on enumeration procedures is important because it helps to ensure that prospective voters will show up to cast their ballots, but such information is given a disproportionate amount of space in the redesigned *Free Press*.

Consistently identifying information and issue-related news accounts is not easy, however, as the low coefficient of reliability score for this indicator

demonstrated. Moreover, to a certain extent this indicator covers some of the same ground covered by the EABS indicator: information-related content is also "neutral" content for the most part, and issue-related content often includes an evaluative component. As a result, it would perhaps makes more sense to drop the information-versus-issue indicator in future studies in order to concentrate more on improving the coefficient-of-reliability score for the EABS indicator.

In sum, the present study produced some support for the hypothesis that the news quality of highly rationalized newspapers is lower than the news quality of other newspapers. However, as the example of the 1992 *USA Today* demonstrated, this does not necessarily have to be the case. Indeed, there can be room in highly rationalized newspapers for a substantial number of CBSs, EABSs, opinion-piece articles and issue-oriented stories. This kind of content can be increased by including more stories of an analytical or historical nature, as was the case in the 1992 *USA Today*.

Having said that, however, it is also important to note that, in terms of rationalization of the news product, *form* does appear to have a substantial impact on *content*. In the election news analyzed in the 1988 *USA Today*, the average story-length was only seven lines. By comparison, the average story-length in the 1992 coverage was 18 lines. This large difference almost certainly offers part of the explanation for the 2 per cent CBS score for the 1988 *USA Today* compared to the 15 per cent CBS score for the 1992 *USA Today*; as suggested earlier, shorter stories allow less room for context.

Form also appears to determine content when election material is presented in the form of fact boxes. The EABSs and CBS totals in the 1990 *Free Press* dropped by four or more percentage points when only fact box sentences were considered. When fact-box content, which made up about one-third of the 1990 election news coverage selected for consideration, was excluded from the analysis, the EABS totals for the old and new *Free Press*'s were almost identical.

The same was not true for the CBS content, however. Only 11 per cent of the 1990 *Free Press*'s non-fact-box, news sentences contained CBSs, compared to 20 per cent of the 1987 news sentences. To explain *this* differential, we have to look at the possible contributing factors mentioned earlier: shorter average story lengths in the 1990 *Free Press* and the departure of *Free Press* reporter Nick Martin and other staff members¹⁹.

IX. Limitations of this Study

Although it produced a number of potentially significant results, it is also important to be aware of the limitations of this study. The first was that it is very difficult to find indicators which do an adequate job of corresponding to the concept of "meaning." I tried to overcome this problem by using several indicators in an

¹⁹I wanted to determine how many of the reporters who wrote articles selected for analysis from the 1987 *Free Press* also wrote articles selected for analysis from the 1990 *Free Press*. This was not possible, however, because three of the six staff-written articles in the 1990 *Free Press* did not have bylines indicating the identity of the writer. Of the other three stories, one was written by a reporter who also wrote one of the stories in the 1987 *Free Press*.

In the case of *USA Today*, three of the reporters who wrote stories in the 1988 *USA Today* articles selected for analysis also wrote stories for the 1992 *USA Today*.

effort to more adequately tap into a concept which is more multi-dimensional than most. This strategy was only somewhat successful.

Part of the problem is, of course, the abstract and multi-dimensional meaning of the word "meaning." In this essay, I essentially treat "meaning" and "information" as two poles, but in fact, they are not. Indeed, all "information" is to a certain extent meaningful, for communication of any type is intended to convey something which is deemed by one person to be worthy of communicating to another. That is, "information" is deemed by one person to have some sort of *meaning* to someone else. Moreover, because of our different life experiences and interpretive frameworks, something may be very meaningful to one person and have little meaning to another.

"Meaning," in short, is a very slippery term, as Ogden and Richards (1946:248) demonstrated in their book, "The Meaning of Meaning":

When...the problem is scientifically approached, we find that no less than sixteen groups of definitions may be profitably distinguished in a field where the most rigid accuracy is desirable.

In other cases ambiguity may be fatal to the particular topic in which it occurs, but here such ambiguity even renders it doubtful what discussion itself is...

One interesting effect of [our] exposition is that it forces us for the time being to abandon the term 'meaning' itself, and to substitute either other terms, such as 'intention,' 'value,' 'referent,' 'emotion' for which it is being used as a synonym, or the expanded symbol which, contrary to expectation, emerges after a little trouble.

Ogden and Richards' latter comment is particularly instructive. I suspect that if I were to deconstruct my own use of the term "meaning," I would find that I am using it to signify something like "the product of reflection" or "the product of

interpretation." These definitions are not much better, however, because they do not distinguish higher-level meaning from lower-level meaning. Indeed, when we see a stop sign, we *interpret* it and act accordingly. However, the stop sign does not promote a *higher* level of meaning because it does not compel us to make many connections or engage in any degree of reflection about our own beliefs. The same is not true when we encounter the following three elements of discourse:

contextualization, evaluation and persuasion. Insofar as they promote a greater degree of cognitive activity, these elements of discourse, like a complex literary symbol, create the *potential* for greater meaning. However, as suggested before, the meaning of something depends as much on the interpretative framework of the percipient as it does on the thing perceived. Indeed, for some people a stop sign may prompt far more reflection than any historical reference.

In short, the *Free Press* may or may not be more *meaningful*, depending on whose perspective we take and the evidence we adduce in support of our position. Likewise, the issue of *news quality* ultimately hinges on the question of who is making the evaluation. For the reasons indicated above, I think the redesigned *Free Press* offers less meaning and therefore less news quality. However, readers of this essay may disagree because of the biases inherent in their own interpretative frameworks. Indeed, there can never be unanimity of opinion when something as complex as the question of meaning is at issue.

On a less philosophical note, there is another important issue which would have to be addressed in any future studies: comprehensiveness of analysis. I opted to

analyze only a portion of the election-news coverage in the newspaper issues selected for this study. However, it would probably be preferable in future studies to analyze all of the election coverage found in any part of the newspaper (including the front page). This would allow the addition of another unit of analysis: individual issues of the newspaper. Such a move would enable researchers to better assess how well readers were served each day by the *overall*-election coverage in the *Free Press* and *USA Today*. Indeed, it may be that there are significant differences between the two versions of the *Free Press* (and possibly *USA Today*) in terms of the *total amount* of election coverage provided daily. The present study was limited to pages specifically earmarked for election coverage or commentary/analysis. The readers, however, are not limited by these considerations, and if they feel they are not getting what they need from the election-coverage pages, they can look elsewhere in the paper for more "meaning."

Another limitation of this study was that the analysis was conducted on a relatively small number of issues. As a result, it would be premature to come to any firm conclusions based on the data presented earlier. Indeed, a much larger (and random) sample of the *Free Press's* total provincial-election coverage in 1987 and 1990 would be required to ensure a greater degree of certainty vis-a-vis the interpretation of the results. The same would be true for additional studies of *USA Today*.

The present study was not intended to be exhaustive, however. Rather, it was intended to be an exploratory effort which would provide future researchers with

some tools to analyze the effects of newspaper rationalization. Moreover, it was meant to suggest the most promising directions to pursue. In this respect, the results vis-a-vis historical context, analytical writing and staff-written-versus-wire-service content were the most important, for all of them suggest areas in which future research could produce significant results.

SECTION THREE

Conclusion

USA Today and *The London Free Press* offer two examples of what has happened in recent years as North American newspapers have increasingly rationalized their content and design formats.²⁰ Although the circumstances and degree of change varied from paper to paper, many other newspapers (including *The Seattle Times*; *The News* in Boca Raton, Fla.; the *Quad-City Times* in Davenport, Iowa; *The Atlantic Journal and Constitution*; and the *Detroit Free Press*, to name just

²⁰Among the more recent changes at the *Free Press* which merit future consideration is the decision to reorganize the newsroom staff into "clusters" (work teams) which are responsible for different subject areas. Gordon Sanderson, reader's advocate for the *Free Press*, explained in a January 30, 1993 column that

As production is streamlined [through pagination], so is the approach to news coverage undergoing changes, with greater emphasis on social issues and people, less on events. This allows preparation of stories, pictures, graphics, backgrounders and advancers two or more days ahead of publication. (*The London Free Press*, Jan. 30, 1993)

In addition, Associate Editor Mary Nesbitt told *Morningside* radio host Peter Gzowski last fall that the *Free Press* is "moving on to content issues, and people issues and community matters as well." In an hour-long broadcast about the newspaper industry, Nesbitt told Gzowski that the *Free Press* hopes the "cluster system"

"will enable us to get a little bit closer to our community and to readers...What we've done is to take everything back to content, and to organize around areas of content work teams, work teams of about eight to 10 members. And they comprise reporters, editors, photographers, a leader and so on. But our topics are organized along very broad coverage lines. For instance, one topic is called family, another is called work and wealth, another one is called applause and so on."

In the same *Morningside* interview, Nesbitt noted that

"What we're trying to do now is to get a better fix on what our readers say they need from a newspaper...[The readers] have taught us many things...anything from we don't want negative news all the time; we would like to see some positive stories, but positive stories with a point. They're not looking for good news for the sake of good news, but they would like to know what's going right in their community and in the world."

a few) also made content and design changes in efforts to make their papers more "reader-friendly." In Canada, a number of newspapers have also redesigned their formats in recent years,²¹ including *The Edmonton Journal* and the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, which, like *The Toronto Star*, did its redesign "in-house" rather than taking the consultant approach (Sutter, 1991:7).

Of course, the changing face of the newspaper industry is partially a function of the changing technical capacities of newspapers; indeed, technical improvements in printing and production capacities created a certain self-generated logic and momentum for the rational refinement of newspaper design. In addition, there are undeniably potential benefits for readers when this process of refinement is done with restraint. For example, the moderate use of computer-generated graphics with news articles can help readers assimilate and retain a greater amount of information, especially when the subject naturally lends itself to graphic representation, as in the case of stories which have a geographical element.

There is already some evidence that graphic representation of information can have such benefits. For instance, preliminary results of a study by a University of Florida professor suggested that readers recalled stories more accurately when they were accompanied by a graphic and a photo (Neustaedter, 1990:12).

While there are certain benefits, however, there are also a number of potentially negative elements which have often accompanied newspaper remakes,

²¹Sutter (1991:6) notes that *The Globe and Mail* adopted a more conservative new face to go after a small, affluent, population segment that still continues to value the printed word.

including a tendency towards greater superficiality (pointless graphics, surveys on trivial topics and light features at the expense of comprehensive local-news coverage). More importantly, the content analysis in the previous section of this paper suggested that highly rationalized newspapers such as the redesigned *Free Press* and *USA Today* may not provide their readers with the same degree of historical context and staff-written content as less rationalized newspapers. To a certain extent, the results of that analysis contradict former associate publisher Jim Armitage's 1988 assertion that, despite the redesign, the *Free Press* would "still provide the depth on stories that give us our strength in this market" (Cited in Sutter, 1988:25).

Because the media serve such an important role in maintaining our democratic system of government, the possibility that highly rationalized newspapers provide their readers with an inferior news product should be of concern to everyone. Indeed, additional studies are required to assess, in a more exhaustive fashion, the overall impact of the trend towards more rationalized forms of news representation.

Also of concern is newspaper rationalization at the organizational level. In the newspaper business, there has traditionally been a "church-state separation" between the business-side and the news-side, with circulation and marketing seen as a "business-side" issue (Cited in Cox, 1989:6). In terms of corporate efficiency, however, such a separation is *irrational* because it lacks the harmonization of operations which produces greater instrumental effectiveness. When different parts of an organization have not synchronized their goals, the actions of one department may run counter to the goals of another. An expensive investigative piece done in the

name of responsible journalism, for example, may undermine the profitability of the paper if it does not also increase circulation figures. The trend towards "MBAs in the newsroom" -- and the "bottom-line" philosophy they bring with them -- was thus inevitable, because it has helped remove the barriers between the *business-side* and the *journalism-side* at a number of newspapers. Declining market-penetration levels due to competition from other media and changing demographics only accelerated the shift in this direction.

As part of the process of rationalizing newspaper operations, marketing and management specialists have reorganized newsrooms to be more effective. Moreover, they have reshaped the news product after surveying and resurveying readers to find out what they want in their newspapers. From a marketing perspective this makes sense, but from a journalistic perspective it is unsettling to see newspaper design and content formats which represent, in the words of Ben H. Bagdikian (1983:33), "the primacy of packagers and market analysts in a realm where the news judgement of reporters and editors has traditionally prevailed." A more difficult entity to quantify and evaluate than reader likes and dislikes, *news judgement* is based on experience and intuition, and (although it is sometimes limited by its own biases and typifications) it reflects a broad-based understanding of news which is often more forward-looking than that of readers. Indeed, it is interesting to note the comments of William Thorsell, editor-in-chief of *The Globe and Mail*, who said on a *Morningside* radio broadcast last fall that

of the things that we have done in editorial content in the last few years that are quite popular with readers, I don't think one of them was

suggested by readers... You can't ask or depend upon readers to tell you what's not in the paper that they would like to see....[I]f you're going to create a new relationship with reader that the reader's going to say, "Wow, I really like this," it's generally going to come out of this word creativity, or intuition, or your own sense of living in the world and your own bright ideas....

On a similar note, most traditional newspaper men and women would probably be disturbed to see a newspaper industry in which the reporter becomes more and more of a "fact-gatherer." As this transformation occurs, the news business becomes less of a "haven for the independent, irreverent, creative spirits who have traditionally given newspapers their personalities" (Underwood, 1988:24). As newspaper readers, we should be concerned about the changes in this direction that have already occurred, for such changes have disturbing implications vis-a-vis the journalist's ability to disseminate, interpret and indeed *create* the body of shared knowledge which constitutes our cultural storehouse.

Reporters have always had to adapt to the ever-changing newspaper business, and they have found ways to work within the system and still produce at least some stories which live up to their journalistic ideals. However, in an age when market forces seem to be increasingly dominant, there will almost certainly be a growing tension between the journalist's substantive-rationality commitment to "informing the public" -- in a truly meaningful way which promotes not only general awareness but critical thinking as well -- and the formal rationality necessary for the maximization of corporate efficiency and profitability.

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Appendix 1

ELECTIONLINE Resistance to Games runs deep

1 TIME • WATCH ON THE CAMPAIGN

Debate directives: 90 minutes, no notes

New South campaign debate directives included a 90-minute time limit, no notes, and a ban on the use of the word "debate." The directives were issued by the Federal Election Commission (FEC) on Sept. 12. The FEC said the directives were issued to ensure that the debate was a fair and balanced presentation of the candidates' views. The directives also required that the candidates appear in person and that the debate be broadcast on television.



USA TODAY's election report
The FEC's new directives for the debate between George Bush and Michael Dukakis are a reflection of the commission's desire to ensure a fair and balanced presentation of the candidates' views. The directives also require that the candidates appear in person and that the debate be broadcast on television.

MAJORITY REPORTS After reports that the debate would be a "debate" rather than a "discussion," the FEC issued directives to ensure that the debate was a fair and balanced presentation of the candidates' views. The directives also require that the candidates appear in person and that the debate be broadcast on television.

MAJORITY DOESN'T The FEC's new directives for the debate between George Bush and Michael Dukakis are a reflection of the commission's desire to ensure a fair and balanced presentation of the candidates' views. The directives also require that the candidates appear in person and that the debate be broadcast on television.

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CAMPAIGN CLOSE-UP: SUSAN ESTIMICH

She's Dukakis' fighting spirit



A good book beats cooking
Susan Estimich is a writer and editor who has worked for several years on the campaign of Michael Dukakis. She is known for her sharp wit and her ability to write about the campaign in a way that is both informative and entertaining.

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S. Korean groups call them divisive

SEOUL, South Korea — The United Nations Commission on Human Rights has received a report from a group of South Korean human rights activists that the government is using the United Nations to divide the country. The group said that the government is using the United Nations to divide the country into two parts, one for the North and one for the South.

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Bangladesh flood waters down Dutch mail still in river

Appendix 2

Comparing the candidates' plans

Comparing President Bush's economic plan with proposals by Democratic Mitt Clinton

TAXES

U.S.: Across-the-board personal income tax rate cut of perhaps 1%, financed by \$17 billion in unexcused "tax spending cuts" (Estimates are that would mean \$26 a year to a four-member family earning \$43,000). Corporate tax rate cut — from 15% to 10% — for small businesses. Again calls for capital gains tax rate cut on investments, including new

0 00000 0

STUDY AND REPLY TO LETTERS

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

BUSINESS: Citi Group House operating budget by 21%, if Congress cuts its operating budget (that amount). Current budget was \$2.3 billion for Congress, \$183 million for the White House. Pay cut of 5% for 2-4, 100 federal employees earning more than \$7,000 a year. (Bush's \$200,000 salary set by Congress would not be affected).

the Value House spending 25% of

SMALL BUSINESS

THE INFORMATION BY THE COUNCIL, AND

FREE TRADE

NOTE: Some Free-Trade areas with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Pacific nations. Also in Free-Trade with U.S. American Free Trade Agreement.

CLIMATE: Open to free-trade ports. Not worth help for U.S. workers and environment.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

NOTE: Double initial 1.5 economic output in 140 trillion by early next century. When Korea says the U.S. can be reached if economy expands by 3.3 percent in 4 years, a year after inflation (GDP) are in line with 2% a year.

CLIMATE: Over 3 million jobs over last year's by spending 120 billion on infrastructure and technology. 100 billion on water and sewage treatment.

'Serious business' for Bush

Asserts his plan is solid

**By Judy Keen
Lisa May**

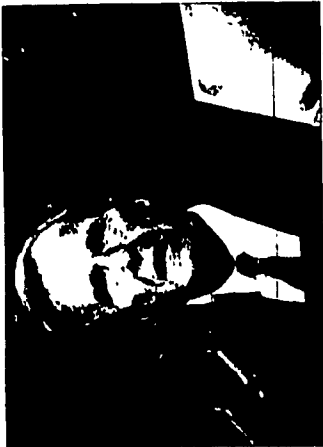
The projected economic agenda laid out by President Bush on Thursday is designed to prove he is absorbed by his own ideas of increasing political liberalism — without giving his first ten months credit as a doer.

AND there is no doubt it is the issue that will decide the election. In an Aug. 31-Sept. 2 USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup poll, 69% rated the economy a very

"I know that Americans have many questions about our country," he said in his address.

[illegible]

Chavez said the difference is "only between them," the fact is "the majority," and he said middle-class and the poor.



Mr. J. David King, Agent, 6, rue de la Paix, Paris, France.

KEY POINTS

Comparing Worst statistics ever from when President Bush took office	
Unemployment	
Jan. 2001	5.4%
Aug. 2002	7.5%
Inflation	
1998	-0.4%
1991	-4.1%
Budget deficit	
Fiscal 1999	\$152.0 billion
Fiscal 1991	\$299.5 billion

...leader for each
city try to be
...you have such a
...difference is the
...and
...manager Fred
...But is a
...every day? Our
...approach is
...after that.
...be short a
...to create a
...the
...these
...and a
...income.
...the
...and

A no-tax promise — sort of

President Bush — who's been trying to live down his broken 1992 promise not to raise taxes, has called "surfer night" back into the limelight.

Well, Bush said in Munich last week, "I found out the hard way I was doing with the economy. I've got to make some corrections. I've got to make some changes, and I'm not going to do it again. Ever. Ever."

But when Washington's omniscient news of a president and his pearly white House spokesman declare President Bush's Thursday to be "surfer night," it means that the president's words aren't going to be taken seriously.

"Our position is that the Civil War army has played a 'game name' - Eisenhower said - 'We don't think we need to make a jungle. Clinton has said to the 12th Army, we're going to over-kill'."

CBS' *Thursdays* (1997) is a comedy about a group of friends who are trying to make a living in the entertainment industry. The show is a comedy about a group of friends who are trying to make a living in the entertainment industry.

might have otherwise been found its close to circumstantial and surprising that the previous activity means what he said.

— Lady Gaga

- Lady Love

Appendix 3

Riding boundary changes shocker for some

By Nick Martin
London Free Press

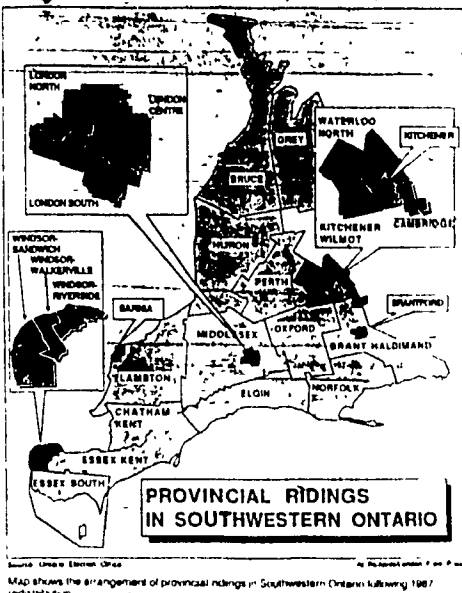
It was the sort of ride the Tories in Maple Leaf were been making for 20 years but, like disgraced Liberal leader, Dick Thompson, it was a shocker. It was the sort of ride the Tories in Maple Leaf were been making for 20 years but, like disgraced Liberal leader, Dick Thompson, it was a shocker.

64 Once you start moving one thing (riding border), there's a ripple effect. 55

— Paul Thompson, member of Ontario Conservative caucus

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Rae continues public car insurance drumbeat



BOB RAE, leader of the New Democratic Party, continues his drumbeat for public car insurance.

Bob Rae, leader of the New Democratic Party, continues his drumbeat for public car insurance. He has been making the case for a public car insurance system for some time.

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Grossman fears full bilingualism 'risk'

By Dave DeGuzman
London Free Press

Grossman fears full bilingualism 'risk'. He has been making the case for a public car insurance system for some time.

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Liberals too fast or too slow with labor reforms?

By Jim Coyne
Canadian Press

66 The world, not just Canada, the world, we're teaching a lesson to the world. 55

66 The Liberals have been reluctant to go the full way (on meeting promises). 55

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Appendix 4

ELECTION NOTEBOOK

FOLLOWING THE LEADERS

TODAY

Liberal Premier David Peterson goes north to meet with the Ontario Liberal Party in Toronto. Peterson will be in Ontario for the next two days, visiting the province's Liberal Party headquarters in Toronto and then heading to Ottawa for a meeting with the federal cabinet. Peterson will also be in Ontario for the next two days, visiting the province's Liberal Party headquarters in Toronto and then heading to Ottawa for a meeting with the federal cabinet.



N.D.P. leader B.C. Rae campaigning for the Sept. 8 provincial election, greets workers at the site of the de Havilland aircraft plant in suburban Toronto on Tuesday.

TUESDAY

Peterborough, Ont. — The Ontario Liberal Party will hold a meeting in Peterborough on Tuesday to discuss the party's strategy for the upcoming provincial election. The meeting will be held at the Peterborough Convention Centre and will be attended by party members and officials.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The party is not a political party, it is a social party." — David Peterson, Liberal Premier.

WHERE JOB-TRAINING MONEY WILL GO

Here's what Premier David Peterson promised Tuesday: Job-training programs will receive \$40 million in new funding over the next three years. The money will be used to create new job-training programs and to expand existing ones. The money will also be used to create new job-training programs and to expand existing ones.

ELECTION PROMISES

New programs expected as premier woos voters

The NDP's treasury critic says all those campaign vows are just campaign promises and a sad commentary on our system of government.



Premier David Peterson talks with the president of Automation Training Systems Inc., Robert Wosmer, right, while touring the Richview plant Tuesday.

Goodies expected. The NDP's treasury critic, Robert Wosmer, says that all the promises made by the Liberal government are just campaign promises and a sad commentary on our system of government.

Wosmer says that the Liberal government's promises are just campaign promises and a sad commentary on our system of government. He says that the Liberal government's promises are just campaign promises and a sad commentary on our system of government.

ONTARIO ELECTION

Financing The Vote Ontario's election will cost millions

The \$10 million quoted by the Tories is only a portion of what will be needed for David Peterson's early vote.

The Tories have quoted a figure of \$10 million for the cost of the election, but this is only a portion of what will be needed for David Peterson's early vote. The Tories have quoted a figure of \$10 million for the cost of the election, but this is only a portion of what will be needed for David Peterson's early vote.

MIKE HARRIS

Tory leader vows to freeze taxes

He promises a common-sense approach to government.

Mike Harris, the Tory leader, has vowed to freeze taxes. He promises a common-sense approach to government. Harris says that he will freeze taxes and that he will take a common-sense approach to government.

Town council rejects Ottawa bid to buy Oka land

It says it was the will of the people expressed at a stormy town meeting Tuesday night.

By Peter Lowrey and Heather Whyte, Canadian Press.

Oka, Que. — Town council decided Tuesday night to reject a federal government offer to buy land at the centre of an armed standoff between Indians and police. The council's decision was a rejection of the federal government's offer to buy the land.

The town council's decision was a rejection of the federal government's offer to buy the land. The council's decision was a rejection of the federal government's offer to buy the land.

IN OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Leaders of the Assembly of First Nations, the country's largest native organization, will meet today with the federal government to discuss the Oka crisis. The meeting will be held in Ottawa and will be attended by the leaders of the Assembly of First Nations and the federal government.