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THE MASTERS OF TRUTH AND JUSTICE?

TVNZ NEWS-CULTURE

AND 'THE DISCIPLINE OF THE MARKET':

1989 - 1992

by

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In memory of a little bird who flew away

LOUISE WINTER

August 1988

ABSTRACT

During the 1980s, New Zealand was among the first countries to translate the reemergent neo-liberal ideology of economic rationalism into legislation and policy, thereby bringing about a radical shift in the ethos and organisation of many of New Zealand's public corporations. Among these changes, New Zealand's public television corporation became a 'market-led' state-owned commercial telecommunications enterprise.

This study is concerned with the news-culture at Television New Zealand Ltd subsequent to the company's restructuring into a cluster of profit-centres. It presents an ethnographic account of journalists' practice and editorial control immediately after the company's transition into a rationalised system oriented by quasi-privatised market transactions. It focuses on the ascendancy of a particular scale of values within TVNZ news-culture as a populist ethos became institutionalized within the State-Owned Enterprise.

TVNZ's news executives hold that market forces and populist production values enhance their representation of the broad public interest. This thesis assesses the claim in the context of ideological, material and regulatory structures.

I seek to demonstrate that the problem of conflicting goals, which beset TVNZ prior to its restructuring into a SOE, has not been resolved. The tensions and ambiguities engendered by conflicting commercial and social objectives remain. I argue that discrepancies between journalists' professional norms and routine practices in TVNZ news-culture are concealed through the co-option of journalists' professional ideologies into the wider market-oriented discourses of TVNZ corporate culture. Thus this thesis challenges the news executives' claim that they effectively balance organisational and journalists' professional goals. I contend, instead, that news executives compromise journalistic standards by defining them in relation to the *market* performance of the commodities they produce.

In a wider frame it is indicated that the public debate about standards of TVNZ journalism focuses too exclusively on the programmes and their producers without addressing standards in terms of the statutory framework which requires TVNZ management to operate the company as a cash-cow for the state. In conclusion, I contend that the state has a responsibility to ensure the television network, set up for and largely paid for by New Zealand taxpayers, provides a public space for citizenly discourse.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time there were the mass media, and they were wicked, of course, and there was a guilty party. Then there were the virtuous voices that accused the criminals...

Well, it's all over. We have to start again from the beginning, asking one another what's going on. (Eco:1987:150)

1.0: Introduction.

In the early days of the BBC news service, if the producers decided there was nothing important to report, "the announcer simply said 'there is no news tonight'." (Tiffin:1989:201).

The anecdote conjures up a production context which seems quaint and naive in contrast to the contemporary situation in which news is "a depletable consumer product that must be made fresh daily." (Tuchman:1978:31). The contrast is suggestive of the considerable social, cultural, economic, organisational and technological changes which have transformed broadcast news since its inception.

Television news is part of everyday life in New Zealand, yet the programmes tend to be regarded in isolation from the context and conditions of their production. This study seeks to remedy that tendency by making visible aspects of the world 'behind' a news bulletin which has been New Zealand's most popular television programme for over thirty years.

Television New Zealand's 6 pm news programme, currently called *One Network News at 6*, has been referred to as "probably the only experience of recent history most New Zealanders share." (Wichtel,1992:72). It is an enduring form of popular culture in New Zealand. As a cultural artefact, the programme has provided a critical site within the public

sphere¹ where different constituencies have unevenly struggled for legitimacy, influence, and a voice, during three decades of institutional and political upheaval.

1.1: Television as Popular Recreation in New Zealand.

Everyday life in New Zealand is permeated by the use of news-papers, magazines, books, film, radio and television. Here, as in other modern industrial societies, there is a strong attachment to the consumption of media products as a form of leisure. Watching television, in particular, is an integral part of domestic routines and leisure activity.

'The t.v.' is a home appliance used in the performance of the rituals of family and cultural membership. It is part of the symbolic processes of social construction "whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed." (Farnsworth,1989:61).

Hours upon hours of words and images flood from the TV screen into most people's homes every day. It has become part of our environment... It teaches us, tells stories, makes us laugh, makes us angry - it guides us into a whole series of different worlds and asks us to position ourselves in relation to them. (Lewis,1990:153)

The centrality of television as a primary symbolic medium in contemporary life makes it a transformative social force influencing the ways in which we understand our experience of the world and each other, our histories, identities and future possibilities.

The introduction of television sets and products has changed the physical environment of the home (Moran,1992:146-153) and the "domestic relations through which we construct our lives." (Morley,1986:13). At a macro-social level, television has "pervaded the national cultural space as has no other medium in the history of popular culture." (Gitlin,1983:30). Gitlin tends towards hyperbole in his statement that "[t]elevision pervades, usurps, lords it

¹ See Curran,1991:83.

over the national cultural space." (*ibid*). Nevertheless, his fundamental thesis remains valid: television has become a key cultural agent in industrialized societies, deeply embedded in the complex dynamics of the social production of meaning.

After transmission began in Auckland in June 1960, television viewing rapidly became part of everyday domestic routine. A 1988 survey of over 11,000 respondents showed television viewing to be the favourite popular recreation after reading (Hillary Commission:1990:19). The preference for reading as *the* favourite leisure activity of those surveyed by the Hillary Commission is significant. It reflects the high literacy and education levels among New Zealanders. Within the television industry, this characteristic of New Zealand society is cited to explain the unique degree of interest New Zealand audiences show in news, current affairs and documentary programmes². It may also explain why,

...by international standards, New Zealanders are not heavy viewers... Despite all the descriptions of New Zealand as a 'media-saturated society', with television as an all-powerful medium influencing television elections, consumption and the general cultural health of the country, only a minority of the total population watch television with any regularity. (Lealand,1991:71)

1.2: ONN@6 as Cultural Artefact and Agent.

The independent market research company AGB:McNair calculates, from a sample size of around 1100 people (440 households), on average 600-800,000 people or about a quarter of all New Zealanders, watch t.v. on any given night.³ The most popular regularly scheduled television programme (in contrast with 'one-off' screenings such as a rugby test) is Television New Zealand's early evening news bulletin *One Network News at 6* (ONN@6). In 1992, it rated an average of 26% of the total available viewing audience

² Australian audiences are regarded as being similarly inclined, suggesting that geographical isolation combined with a long-established policy of universal education and high literacy levels may be determining factors in this context.

³The audience figures vary over the year, with the total audience size increasing during the winter months.

(aged five and over) with a peak audience for one telecast of 39%, making it the highest rating programme of the year⁴. Since becoming a commercial entity, TVNZ has sought, with some success, to increase the numbers of younger viewers in the *ONN@6* audience. However, it remains most popular with viewers aged 35 and over, and in particular those viewers who are fifty or older.

The popularity of TVNZ's early evening news has been an enduring feature of the programme since its inception. Four months after the establishment of the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation in 1962, the first ratings survey showed that the nightly bulletin *NZBC Newsreel* was the most popular of its programmes in the North Island, and the second most popular in the South (Boyd-Bell, 1985:94). Twenty-two years later, the BCNZ Audience Research Unit reported that between February and November that year, *Network News* averaged audience sizes of 28.2% (Lealand & Battell, 1985:15). The programme's ratings for 1985 and 1992 are only two percentage points apart yet the 1992 audience, unlike that of 1985, had the option to tune in to TV3's early evening programme, *National News*, at the same time as TVNZ's *ONN@6* went to air.

The established loyalty of viewers to TVNZ's early evening news programme is evident in the fact that TV3's *National News* has only been able to rate 6-8% of the potential audience since it began over three years ago⁵. Neither the advent of competition nor shifts in the scheduled time the programme goes to air have, so far, markedly altered its ratings. While the ratings are statistical 'head-counts' and cannot be used to gauge audience appreciation of matters such as the journalistic standards of *ONN@6*, the figures nevertheless indicate that the early evening news programme broadcast by TVNZ on the

⁴ AGB:McNair quoted in TVNZ *Networks*, 11 February, 1993, p.1.

⁵This is if one takes the AGB:McNair ratings at face-value.

Television One channel, (currently *ONN@6*), has been an enduring form of popular culture in New Zealand.

Statistical indicators of audience behaviour belie the varied social uses viewers make of *ONN@6*. For example, turning on the television for the 6 o'clock news signals for many that the 'work' part of the day has ended and it is time to relax; they 'switch off' by 'switching on'. Watching 'the news' can be a habit or a domestic daily ritual, it can be used to provide companionship, audio-visual 'wallpaper' to the hurly-burly of family life or, possibly, an excuse to avoid the hurly-burly of family life. However, the common-sense rationale for watching the news is that the viewer seeks 'information' - about the weather, entertaining curiosities and significant public events, be it politics, sports, crime or disasters.

A significant feature of television news programmes is the privileged status given them in comparison to other programming genres. 'News' programmes are commonly assumed to disseminate the vital information a democracy needs to function. The assumption that the programme faithfully depicts a 'real' world, and provides information about important events, endows it with a social role which distinguishes it from other television programme genres. Historically, as with other forms of news media, it is commonly understood to carry out an informational role reporting information relevant to cultural and political life and affecting the public good.

1.3: The Parameters of the Broadcasting Debate.

Recent innovations in communications technologies such as satellite and cable, and the reemergence of the economic ideology of market liberalism, have transformed broadcasting into a "site for a collision of ideas over how Western society should be organised, not just

economically, but also culturally, creatively and morally." (Lealand,1991:68)

The classic public trustee model which provided the guiding ideal for New Zealand broadcasting until the 1980s, formulated broadcasting as a public utility to be developed "as a national service in the public interest." (Scannell,1990:11). One definition of the principle of 'serving the public interest' is:

The free flow of information is essential in a democratic society so that people can make important decisions about their way of life and make sense of the increasingly complex world in which they live. (Tully,1991:1)

The assumption that public broadcasting has an obligation to serve the broad public interest has been fundamental to the normative frameworks prescribed for New Zealand television by various commissions of inquiry. The perception of broadcasting as a public good has guided a succession of legislators and official commissioners (Adam,1973; Chapman,1985). Broadly speaking, the public good model is grounded in the emancipatory interest in using broadcasting to extend human liberty (Collins,1992). The practical means by which broadcasting might best be organised to serve this end has been debated since the beginnings of New Zealand broadcasting. This debate has been both internal to broadcast organisations⁶ and within the public domain. It has been further complicated by the ambiguities engendered by the unique configuration of the New Zealand system which distinguishes it from public broadcasting structures elsewhere.

From 1937 to 1988, broadcasting in New Zealand was state-owned but supported by a combination of license fees and advertising revenues. The conflict of competing interests this created for an organisation legally defined as a public broadcaster deepened after the mid-1970s⁷. Until December 1988, it was a publicly-owned corporation

⁶ See Gregory (1985).

⁷ See Farnsworth (1989) and Easton (1993) (1994) for a discussion of contributing factors underlying changes in social and economic conditions in New Zealand at this time.

characterized by mixed sources of income (advertising and license fee) and mixed goals determined by a coalition of governments, media professionals, interest groups and audiences." (Lealand,1991:68)

In the decade prior to deregulation, the organisation became more dependent on advertising as the static licence fee diminished as a percentage of operating revenue. By the early 1980s, other factors were contributing to what was becoming officially defined as 'the problem of broadcasting'. For example, the state's loss of monopoly control over the domestic television market due to satellite technologies was imminent. Another contributing factor was the extraordinarily lengthy hearings of the Broadcasting Tribunal for the third television channel which emphasized the inertia of the current regulatory framework.

As the discourses of competition and economic rationalism came to dominate the thinking of business, political and professional elites, the 'solution' to 'the problem of broadcasting' became shaped by the same conceptual framework. The Minister of Broadcasting and Treasury argued that it was no longer sensible to treat broadcasting as a public good and urged that the state trustee model of administration be abandoned in favour of a 'market' form of organisation which would be more appropriate given the emerging conditions of the new broadcasting environment⁸.

Rejecting the trustee model as elitist, the proponents of deregulation argued that 'market forces' are a more appropriate paradigm for regulating cultural production in a society where cultural products are largely consumed in private. Arguing that in a market system, broadcasting is dictated by the preferences and interests of viewers not broadcasting elites, the 'deregulators' held that a diversity of television services at an affordable level will give consumers greater freedom of choice (Cameron,1985; Kedgley,1988; Williamson,1991). Competition, it was claimed, would guarantee that consumers' interests are properly met.

⁸See Chapter Four for a detailed discussion of this period.

The restructuring of the public broadcasting corporation into state-owned enterprises in 1988 marks the full acceptance of commercial imperatives in TVNZ's corporate ethos and organisation. The social and cultural implications of the loss of a public television service in New Zealand have been, and continue to be, strenuously contested - particularly by non-TVNZ professionals also engaged in the "slippery interpretative processes of symbolic production." (Farnsworth,1989:19). The debate over regulation and the proper responsibilities of a state-owned broadcaster has become polarised between proponents of a market model and those who would have a public service ethos guiding TVNZ's operations.

'Debate' is perhaps not the most appropriate term as it appears the different perspectives and values of the contesting parties preclude dialogue. Collins has labelled the state of impasse characterizing broadcasting policy debates as a "dialogue of the deaf." (Collins,1992:10) Applied to the more specific context of the debate in New Zealand about standards of journalism at TVNZ, his phrase aptly describes its state of impasse, typified by the lost opportunity to debate the issues provided by the University of Auckland in 1993. The speakers, TVNZ's Network's Chairman and the Director of News and Current Affairs, and three of their most prominent critics, remained as entrenched in their respective ideological positions at the conclusion of the debate as they were when it commenced (Smith,1993[b]:61).

1.4: The Demonization of TVNZ News.

In the absence of dialogue and understanding, myths breed, and the workings of power remain opaque and unchallenged. The ambivalence and confusion which characterize the controversy over TVNZ news is perhaps best exemplified in the irony that the Ministerial architect of the current structure, Richard Prebble, now laments TVNZ's 'lack of

standards', and accuses 'it' of putting "profits, ratings and entertainment ahead of accuracy, fairness, soberness and impartiality". (Sunday Star 11/10/92)

TVNZ's Director of News and Current Affairs dismisses claims that his department's programmes are sensationalist misinformation or 'infotainment'. He argues that such comments come from " 'jaded television critics' and people who are ill-informed about the medium." (*New Zealand Herald* 7/10/92). He identifies himself and his colleagues as 'professionals' with high standards of practice and considerable expertise which they apply in the public interest. In a speech delivered to journalism students at Canterbury University, he asserted that

...we're driven not by ratings, but by a sense of mission... We aim to: inform accurately and fairly, provide a wide range of opinion; analyse and place developments in context; probe and scrutinize all areas of the public interest; and challenge, and hold to account, those who wield power. (Norris,1992:3)

His intention, he states, is to ensure that "the public is provided with quality information and analysis so that they can contribute to informed decision-making in an evolving democracy."

The Director's statement idealizes TVNZ's news service as a democratic instrument to be applied in the interests of extending political and social rights and fostering social equity. While arguing that editorial judgement is not 'ratings-driven', he suggests that the ratings nevertheless provide compelling evidence that viewers find the department's programmes credible and satisfies their "needs and concerns." (*New Zealand Herald* 7/10/92).

It is notable that public expressions of support for TVNZ news values and standards have been articulated only by individuals with an interest in defending the organisation's present position. 'Letters to the editor' and articles in newspapers and *The New Zealand Listener*,

unless written by TVNZ executives, reveal the concern held by some New Zealanders about the quality of the news service being provided by TVNZ since it became a state-owned enterprise.

However, in the absence of independent audience research, and without engaging in an extensive (and expensive) research project, it is difficult to gauge the representativeness of the complaints published in letters to the editor columns. While not addressing the issue of journalistic standards specifically, a 1992 poll, which randomly surveyed 750 people nationwide regarding their degree of satisfaction 'with the standard of television in New Zealand today', indicated an almost even split between those who were satisfied (47%) and those who were not (48%) (*National Business Review*, 27/11/92, pp.1-2). However, since the opinion poll neither distinguished between TVNZ and TV3, nor indicated the criteria by which judgements of satisfaction were made, it contributes little to understanding the respondents' evaluation of the services of individual carriers.

In a 1992 Heylen 'trust and confidence' poll, respondents rated journalists (along with politicians) as the least trustworthy of the listed occupations. However, one cannot take current antipathy towards TVNZ journalism as, *a priori*, the result of dissatisfaction with recent developments. A 1988 survey showed only 11% of 1000 adult New Zealanders "expressed 'full confidence and trust' in the media." (Lealand,1990:118). The social phenomenon of the sceptical mistrust of journalists as an occupational group has a long history. The roots of this mistrust are, I suggest, linked to the late nineteenth century transformation of journalism from an overtly political activity to a component of capitalist mass media structures and processes. The widely-held perception of journalists as scurrilous and unethical was commented on eighty-four years ago by the German social theorist Max Weber:

The journalist belongs to a sort of pariah caste, which is always estimated by society in terms of its ethically lowest representative. (Gerth & Mills,1958:96)

Paradoxically, the enduring success and popularity of the news media, and programmes like TVNZ's *ONN@6*, reflects the accepted legitimacy of these institutions and those working within them. While the ratings tell us only how many people within the sample group of 440 households had their sets tuned to a particular programme at a particular time, the statistical measure derived from ratings data suggests at least 600-800,000 New Zealanders derive sufficient pleasure from TVNZ's *ONN@6* to tune in to the programme on any given night.

Despite its enormous popularity for a television programme, and the wide-spread use of television as a domestic leisure activity, almost all public commentary about TVNZ since its commercialization has been negative. Organisers of the 'Great NZ Television Turn-off', a public campaign held in May 1992 which urged people not to watch television, suggested TVNZ was a threat to the integrity of New Zealand 'culture'⁹. Its staff were accused of endangering democracy and insulting the public intelligence (Dutton,1992; Cross,1992, Edwards,1992). Particularly subject to criticism have been TVNZ's journalists. Interestingly, some of the most vehement criticism of their productions have been voiced by former employees. One of N.Z.'s first television current affairs presenters, now a media consultant and educator, derides *ONN@6* as the 'cootchie-coo news' (Edwards,1992:15-25). Recently a senior TVNZ journalist, on resigning his position, pronounced TVNZ's news and current affairs programmes 'brain dead' (*New Zealand Herald*, 19/1/93). The phrase quickly became ammunition for the company's competitors and opponents. Even a former BCNZ chairman used it in a speech to deplore "the fragmentary and tabloid nature of

⁹ See Avril Bell's discussion of television's role in constructing a sense of national identity and national culture in *SITES*, Summer 1993, pp.30-44.

present-day reporting." (*The Dominion* 24/3/93)

Popular magazines such as *Metro*, *North and South* and the *N.Z. Listener* regularly carry articles which suggest TVNZ journalism is the work of Mammon and will bring civilization, such as we know it in New Zealand, to its knees. One television critic called the state-owned enterprise's version of *ONN@6* "a joke", claiming that "the package, beginning with the anchor, is all." (Reilly, *Dominion Sunday Times*, 3/12/89).

Political scientists Joe Atkinson and Alan Cocker have provided more scholarly and reasoned critiques. They argue that the commercial logic which currently dominates TVNZ executive culture has marginalized and suppressed the journalistic interest in public affairs reporting. One criticism by Cocker typifies their concerns:

News images often bewilder rather than inform the viewer. Directors and reporters use manipulative tricks and sensationalism to desperately try to hold the audience's attention. (Cocker, 1990)

Atkinson criticizes what he refers to as the 'depoliticization' of the bulletin through "the removal of serious discourse about public affairs stemming from the drive to maximize ratings points." (Atkinson, 1992:5) He decries the influence of American consultants in encouraging rapid editing in the construction of news items which fragments and distorts the event being reported into a series of images of a few seconds duration whereby the speech of interviewed subjects is reduced to 'sound-bites' which have little information value. He refers to this process as 'morselization'.

Atkinson argues, on the basis of a comparative study of *ONN@6* bulletins from 1985, 1990 and 1992, that the present programme emphasizes crime and conflict while trivializing and narrowing discourse on public affairs issues. In a vivid piece of polemic, he describes how he sees the consequences of commercial imperatives dominating the production values of

ONN@6:

TVNZ's news has become a series of advertisements, teasers and 'promo's', interspersed with terse messages from authority or brief vox populi interviews, and dramatically embroidered with cinematic fictions of sex, violence, grief and natural disaster. (*ibid*:4).

What TVNZ's critics do not address is that *ONN@6* is one of New Zealand's most popular cultural forms. Their neglect of the pleasures viewers derive from programmes like the news was remarked upon by print journalist Paul Smith. Regarding the proposed 'Great N.Z. T.V. Turn-off' in May 1992, he pointed out that the organisers were having to *persuade* New Zealanders not to watch television. The fact that New Zealanders were having to be 'shepherded into doing this' suggested to him that television's alleged inadequacies are not a major preoccupation for many viewers. The fact that the anti-tv lobby had to badger people to select other leisure activities, and were largely unsuccessful in eliciting a wide-spread response to their campaign, suggests that many New Zealanders accept the present television services available to them.

Few commentators on New Zealand television concede that some positive outcomes may have emerged as a consequence of restructuring, particularly in regard to TVNZ's news service. A singular voice was that of the *N.Z. Listener*'s Diana Wichtel who felt that:

Despite the morselisation, sensationalisation and all the other despised 'isations', our chances of hearing a minority opinion, a dissenting voice, a challenge to the official version are better than they have ever been. (Wichtel,1992:72)

Wichtel's comment suggests that the populist spirit now guiding news production at TVNZ has served the public interest through extending the discursive range of the state-owned news operation beyond the cautious and institutionally-focused bulletins of the pre-deregulation period.

Much current criticism of TVNZ reveals little awareness of the company's history, and scant appreciation of the statutory framework which currently governs the decisions of its managers and directors. Remarking on the structural myopia of many of TVNZ's critics, Smith wryly observed (in reference to the proposal for a 'T.V. Turn-off'):

There will be complaints about programmes and presentation; people will talk about the lack of alternatives and the abundance of commercials. What the arguments probably won't address is the history and structure which led to these processes or the total apathy accompanying the changes. (Smith,1992[a]:55)

Smith's comment emphasizes a crucial point which needs to be taken into account when critiquing TVNZ's news programmes, or any other news media for that matter - that journalistic practice and the degree of professional discretion they enjoy is ultimately determined by statutory structures and organisational imperatives. Shaped by this understanding, his evaluation of the possible benefits of the 'Great Television Turn-off' were somewhat different from those of the organisers:

The best result from the Turn-off could be a debate about the content and quality of television. But why stop there? Let's ask the same questions about our indifferent daily newspapers. Question why, when you phone a radio newsroom on weekends, you get an answerphone posing as a reporter? Why is there an abject acceptance of ideology in newsrooms whose tradition is to challenge?

But that's probably for the too-hard basket. Better to bludgeon a system designed by politicians to deliver not just programmes, but a hefty dividend at the end of the year. We do need the Turn-off. For one thing it may provoke some industry soul searching. It should also make us think why all this indignation took a long holiday four years ago when television became a commercially fattened, culturally rationed creature. (*ibid*)

1.5: The Problem of Understanding News Production at TVNZ.

TVNZ's *ONN@6* is a popular cultural artefact and constitutes part of the mundane and innocuous everyday world. It is also an instrument

... of power on the basis of [its] capacity to ... attract and direct attention, persuade in matters of opinion and belief, influence behaviour (e.g. voting, buying), confer status and legitimacy, [and] define and structure perceptions of reality. (McQuail,1987:82)

News organisations and their products attract criticism and inflame emotions because as a medium for public communication, they influence the processes whereby social meanings are constructed and legitimated. As Tuchman has pointed out:

"...news does not mirror society. It helps to constitute it as a shared social phenomenon, for in the process of describing an event, news shapes and defines that event." (Tuchman:1978:184).

TVNZ journalists' location within the contested processes of meaning construction in our society means that they are structurally imbedded in the political and economic struggles of a society "in which power is extensively deployed and unevenly distributed between individuals, groups and classes" (McQuail,*op.cit*:81).

Television, in particular, is perceived to have a special degree of influence in shaping public understandings and debate on important political and cultural questions. Hall has identified key processes whereby television news and current affairs programmes can be used by elites or their members to control public debate and preserve their cultural power. For example, being recognized as a legitimate authority or expert gives one the right to define which issues will be debated, the terms of the debate, and who will speak. (Hall,1973) Thus television news programmes like *ONN@6* constitute a site where various constituencies, with unequal access rights, struggle to define and influence public debates according to their own agendas.

Given broadcasting's special significance as a cultural industry, and its role in the democratisation of everyday life (Scannell:1992), the consequences of 'deregulation' and the restructuring of New Zealand's publicly-owned (and then, only) television organisation into a state-owned commercial telecommunications enterprise is understandably controversial and deserves close examination. If television news is a powerful definer and setter of public attitudes, if its discourses can enhance or jeopardize a citizen's capacity to

understand public affairs and make choices, then it is important that the conflicts of interests and competing and overlapping ideologies which characterize and shape the production context are made visible for analysis.

The public debate over TVNZ's programming and, in particular *ONN@6*, seems to revolve about the vexed question of whether or not the programme 'adequately informs' New Zealand publics now that financial performance and 'efficiency gains' rather than the public interest have become management priorities. If we, as a society, are to genuinely aspire to the ideals of equal representation and justice which legitimate our social institutions, then it is profoundly important that the issues of journalistic standards at TVNZ and the underpinning concerns regarding "the balance of social power and the nature and future of the polity" (Collins *et al*, 1986:1) are debated in an effective and inclusive manner so that policies which do serve the wider public interest may be formulated and enacted.

The defenders and critics of journalism at TVNZ invoke the ideals of social equity and human liberty as their motivating interests. However, they have reduced the debate over journalistic standards and the social responsibilities of TVNZ's news executives to little more than a battle of grand theologies. In Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945), Boxer's political maxim of 'four legs good, two legs bad' acquired its power by virtue of uncritical repetition. Similarly, critiques of TVNZ's news and current affairs programming have thus far amounted to little more than an endless reiteration of 'public broadcaster good, commercial broadcaster bad'. Not surprisingly, the debate has shed more heat than light.

For debate to be effective, it has to be grounded in the historically and socially determined realities of the production context. The complex matrix of competing ideologies and organisational, political, economic, technological and cultural pressures shaping and

operating on news production at TVNZ is beyond the scope of any one study. Much work has to be done to reveal these for analysis. What I seek to achieve here is to move the debate over journalist standards at TVNZ on from the current impasse by providing a fresh perspective on the issues.

It is TVNZ's news executives who are called to account by critics of its news and current affairs programmes. The implication of this focus is that TVNZ journalists are autonomous professionals who are failing to realize their professional obligations to New Zealand citizens. In this thesis, I argue that it is misguided to reduce the issue of standards of journalism at TVNZ to the professionalism, or otherwise, of individual journalists. Through showing the degree to which organisational imperatives and requirements shape TVNZ journalists' practice, I seek to redirect the debate to address current broadcasting policies and structures. In particular, I highlight the need to call to account the politicians who have determined that TVNZ function, not as a public good, but as a cash cow for the state.

1.6: The Orientation of this Thesis.

The 1980s in New Zealand were characterized by the rapid redefinition of the public sector through the application of the principles of economic liberalism to the management of many public corporations (Easton, 1994[b]). Broadcasting policy was radically reregulated, and the public television system commercialized, before citizens had a chance to consider and debate the social, cultural and political issues these changes presented.

This study attempts to contribute, rather belatedly, to fostering debate on issues of broadcast journalism and public knowledge. It does so through a close examination of the culture of news production at TVNZ in the period immediately subsequent to the company being restructured into a state-owned enterprise.

The executives appointed in 1987-88 to manage the Department of News and Current Affairs at TVNZ identified their brief as preparing the department for the "discipline of the market". (Director, News & Current Affairs). This study is an inquiry into what this means in its practical application within the daily routines of news production at TVNZ.

Drawing on three years of intermittent ethnographic research in the TVNZ newsroom, I look at occupational and organisational ideologies, journalist and managerial interests and practices, and the competing interests engendered by structural ambiguities inherent in the organisation.

My thesis challenges the news executives' claim to balance public service and TVNZ's commercial interests in the news programme *ONN@6*. I seek to argue that the demands of a broadcasting organisation dominated by commercial interests compromises, in significant ways, the professional interests and autonomy of TVNZ journalists, and the public interest.

Part One establishes the wider social and historical context which gives this analysis its meaning and relevance. Chapter One introduces the reader to news production at TVNZ from the perspective of the viewer who is more familiar with the television programme *ONN@6* than the conditions of its production. I establish its identity as a historically produced and contested form of popular culture in New Zealand, then acquaint the reader with the public debate about TVNZ news production. I conclude by setting out the broad parameters of this study. In Chapter Two, I review the classic texts on journalism as the organisation of social action in order to establish the theoretical points of departure and rationale underpinning my thesis. Chapter Three addresses research strategies. Here I formulate the issues of method and technique as I struggled with the research problem of understanding news production at TVNZ in the contemporary situation.

In Part Two, I establish the institutional context of news production at TVNZ. Chapter Four sets out the historical development of broadcast journalism in New Zealand. It highlights aspects of the political and organisational conditions and dynamics from within which the present formulation of 'professional television journalism' at TVNZ emerged. In particular, it examines the confluence and contesting of broadcasting interests during the 1980s when the New Zealand public sector became subjected to the ideologies of managerialism and economic rationalism. Chapter Five looks at the meaning and significance of news production for the state-owned enterprise TVNZ. Chapter Six describes the hierarchical arrangement of journalistic responsibility and expertise in the Department of News and Current Affairs.

In Part Three, the journalists tell their own story. This section gives an exposition of journalist rationales and definitions of the situation according to where they are placed in the hierarchy of accountability within the Department of News and Current Affairs. I set out the field-work evidence in such a way as to enable me to address the complex dynamics of the social relations and interests which shape journalistic practice in the TVNZ newsroom.

In Chapter Seven, I identify key constructs underpinning the newsroom norm of 'good television journalism', teasing out the criteria by which the journalists legitimate and explain their practice. This chapter highlights the shift in newsroom ethos to a populist orientation and the way in which professional commitments and organisational concerns dovetail in journalistic rhetoric.

Chapter Eight places the normative framework naturalised in journalists' rationales within the wider defining context of the hierarchical mediation of editorial authority. It sets out

the TVNZ senior news executives' interpretation of their responsibilities as managers of a TVNZ business unit or profit centre and how they ideologically reconcile the organisational demand that TVNZ's Department of News and Current Affairs be 'competitive' with their professional duty to 'inform'.

In Chapter Nine, the apparent consensus suggested by the normative accounts explored in Chapter Seven is shown to be deliberately constructed by the TVNZ news executives as they seek to mobilize journalism in the organisation's interests. This chapter details the structures and processes by which the tensions engendered by competing interests within TVNZ news-culture are effectively managed so that orderly and profitable production is maintained.

In Part Four, Chapter Ten, I use the fieldwork evidence set out in Part Three as the point of departure for an analysis of the news-executives' response to the requirements of the organisational structure and their perceived 'problem of control' over the social relations of news-production. I analyse key discursive constructs in TVNZ news-culture as defensive managerial strategies which foster and protect the commercial interests of the organisation. I then examine the implications of centralization and rationalization for journalistic standards and the realization of professional objectives. My thesis argues that competition has narrowed the range of discourses available to journalists, thereby compromising the capacity of journalists to adequately realize the professional norm of 'telling people what they need to know'.

In summary, news executives claim that market forces have improved the performance of the department's journalists, that they have become more 'professional' as a consequence of being exposed to competition and the 'discipline of the market'. I argue that the

'discipline of the market' does not enhance journalistic practice through an equitable balance of public service and commercial objectives. What it does do is facilitate management interests in achieving a strong central chain of command and a compliant workforce in order that financial commitments and targets are met.

The point I seek to make is that the public interest in TVNZ providing a television news service which represents the diverse communities of interest in New Zealand society will not be realized just by criticizing TVNZ news executives for a 'lack of standards'. The focus of the debate needs to be widened to include those parties who shape the statutory framework which defines the proper actions of news managers for it is they who are ultimately responsible for standards of journalism at TVNZ.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.

A genuinely explanatory approach to news content must give primary attention to understanding the processes by which it is constructed.
(Tiffin:1989:4)

2.0: Introduction:

In this chapter, I introduce what have been, for me, key texts in defining the parameters of the theoretical perspective I have adopted for my research into, and analysis of, the contemporary culture of news production at TVNZ. I begin by noting the classic texts which established the field of inquiry known as the sociology of news production. I then review some of the discussions which have been of value to me as I formulated my own inquiry.

2.1: The Sociology of News-Production.

Television news is the product of a complex industrial process characterized by competing requirements and pressures. The sociology of news is a theoretical field grounded in the analysis of media organisations and "the specific processes in those institutions responsible for creating the cultural product we call news." (Schudson,1991:156)

Walter Lippman's (1922) analysis of the 'standardized routines' of print journalism opened up the conceptual and discursive space which subsequently came to be known as the sociology of news. Lippman problematised the mirror analogy (journalists reflect 'real' events) commonly used to explain journalism by arguing that news-production was a rule-bound and routinized process. Focusing on the factors which intervene between an event and how it is reported, he proposed that 'news stories' did not reflect an intrinsically 'important' event within an empirically graspable external reality but are the outcome of organisationally determined interests and practices.

Robert Park's (1940) pioneering work in mass communications research, while an important contribution to the establishment of a sociology of news, focused on the intrinsic characteristics of 'news' as a form of knowledge rather than the organisational context of its production.

One of the first organisational studies of news production was by Warren Breed (1955) who analysed the modes of control applied in the news production setting to ensure reporters' conformity with editorial policies. While the analysis of the role of journalistic norms and editorial power in the shaping of the news product made a significant contribution to a sociology of news production, the value of Breed's study was limited by its functionalist methodology which identified norms as objective attributes of the social and organisational structure.

White (1950) applied the 'gate-keeper' model, developed within the discipline of social psychology, to the news selection process, concluding that 'the news' is a result of the application of the subjective preferences of individual editors. (Schudson, 1991:142). White's thesis was refuted by Griebner's 1956 study which argued that the selection process was too consistent and therefore was the outcome of the application of organisational and occupational norms rather than subjectively-based judgments. While the concept of the gate-keeper is a suggestive metaphor for the editorial process, the model leaves unchallenged the problematic notion of 'news' as *information* about discrete events of the day which can be gathered up and disseminated (Schudson: *ibid*). It also simplifies and glosses over the complex interests and processes which shape and constrain journalist practice. On this point, McQuail writes:

It is clear that the eventual news content... arrives by several different routes and in several different forms. It may have to be sought out, ordered in advance, or its discovery systematically planned. At times it also has to be internally manufactured or constructed. Such construction, like the selection

of news, is not random and subjective. It takes place largely according to schemes of interpretation and or relevance which are those of the bureaucratic institutions that are either the sources of news or which process events. (McQuail,1987:163)

The complex relations between journalists and their sources comprise a crucial area of inquiry within the theoretical field of the sociology of news. Given that media organisations in liberal democracies are "inextricably bound up with central social institutions that seek to manage the flow of information" (Schlesinger,1992:293), the question of "how sources organize *media strategies* and compete with one another" (*ibid*:294) is vital to our understanding of news products. Another area worthy of systematic inquiry are the relationships between news organisations, how they feed off one another in generating news and how these interdependencies shape and constrain the processes of public communication and information exchange.

The specific focus of this study, however, is intra-organisational. It is concerned with the culture of the TVNZ newsroom, and the management and control of journalists and their practice, immediately subsequent to the reorganisation of TVNZ as a state-owned enterprise.

2.2: News Work as Social Action.

Contemporary understandings of news as an organisational product have developed from a series of ethnographic studies, produced in the 1970s (Elliot,1972[a]; Epstein,1973; Burns,1977; Tuchman 1978; Schlesinger,1978; Gans,1979). The researchers wondered "how the world looks from the point of view of those being studied" (Schlesinger,1978:11) and went on to construct from the symbolic expression of meaning given by the journalists to their experience, a grounded, historical interpretation of the social organisation of news production.

These studies provided valuable new insights into the epistemology of journalism. In particular, they challenged the ideology that journalists are chroniclers of important objective truths by demonstrating that, while journalists work may "not necessarily [be] deliberately opinionated or biased", it is "heavily influenced by occupational and societal values." (Lambeth,1986:viii). Most analysts of journalism who adopt a social action perspective abandon any strong claim to an objective social reality independent of human experience and agency. They do not perceive 'news' as a report on a factual world. Rather, 'the facts' are analysed as organisationally defined. Distinguishing between the construction of facticity in science and journalism, for example, Tuchman writes:

By "facts" I mean pertinent information gathered by professionally validated methods specifying what is known and how it is known. Other sorts of inquiry, such as philosophy and science, are also concerned with the relationship between phenomena and knowing. But news procedures are neither contemplative nor geared towards determining essence. Nor are they able to predict and confirm axiomatic statements. Unlike more rigorous and reflective approaches to facticity, newswork is a practical activity geared to deadlines. Facts must be quickly identified. But for newsworkers (as for scientists), having witnessed an occurrence is not sufficient to define one's observations as factual. In science, the problem of facticity is embedded in processes of verification and replication. In news, verification of facts is both a political and a professional accomplishment. (Tuchman,1978:82-83)

Epstein's study (1973), based on his observations in the newsrooms of the three major American television networks NBC, CBS and ABC, supports the use of an interpretive/ social action framework to analyse television journalism. Using the theoretical source of the sociology of organisations, he concluded that journalists are collectively engaged in "the social manufacture of an organisational product." (Schudson, *op.cit*:149) Epstein observed that

...the level of journalism in network news is more or less fixed by the time, money and manpower that can be allocated to it, and that these resources are ultimately determined not by 'mean' or public-spirited broadcasters, but by the requisites which the news divisions must meet in order to maintain their operations. (Epstein,1973:268)

The conclusions he drew from his research identified the primary determinants of news to

be the requirements of the media organisation and practical constraints such as budgets, schedules, and availability of labour and equipment. In identifying the ways in which journalists' interpretations of 'professional' practice is determined by organisational requirements, Epstein noted the connection between organisational imperatives and wider regulatory and statutory structures:

Network news is thus shaped and constrained by certain structures imposed from without, such as government regulation of broadcasting and the economic realities of networks; certain uniform procedures for filtering and evaluating information and reaching decisions; and certain practices of recruiting [journalists] who hold, or accept, values that are consistent with organisational needs, and reject others - all of which are open to analysis. (Epstein,1973:42-43)

In his study of American newsrooms, Gans (1979) shifted the focus to highlight organisational and class determinants as a significant determinant of journalism. Gans advanced the view that journalism was a profession of the middle-classes and as such, reflected the basic middle-class values and ideology underpinning news production in America.

Where Gans focused on social norms to theorize a social class determinism, Tuchman (1972, 1974, 1976, 1978) adopted an interpretive framework to analyse news as a social construction produced through the activities of news workers and news organisations. According to Tuchman, news is a "depletable consumer product that must be made fresh daily and depends upon ongoing activities for its raw material." (Tuchman,1978:31) Drawing on the theoretical sources of symbolic interactionism (as exemplified in the work of Alfred Schutz and Irving Goffman), Tuchman analysed the everyday world of newsworkers as dynamic, negotiated, symbolic orders where newswriters, through simultaneously invoking and applying norms, constantly reformulated and redefined them from moment to moment.

She emphasized the routinization of news-work as the means by which the journalistic enterprise is made manageable. Tuchman argued that the constant and intense pressure created by a chronic lack of time is a significant factor in the daily manufacture of 'news' products. She noted that while journalists were responsible for ascertaining 'the facts', and avoiding libellous or misleading statements, they often had little prior knowledge of the matters they had to report on, and inadequate time to develop a considered analysis or to locate and interview those involved.

In sum, every story entails dangers for news personnel and for the news organization. Each story potentially affects the newsmen's ability to accomplish their daily tasks, affects their standing in the eyes of their superiors, and affects the ability of the news organization to make a profit. Inasmuch as the newspaper is made of many stories, these dangers are multiplied and omnipresent. (Tuchman,1972:662-3)

Because of the chronic conditions of uncertainty in which journalists work, Tuchman argued that certain forms of reporting which have traditionally withstood criticism are routinely adhered to as a form of defence. Tuchman identified the routine strategies or 'rituals' employed by news workers to allay or minimize the risks inherent in assessing 'the facts' and structuring a story. A key strategic defence for journalists, according to Tuchman, is the professional tenet of 'objectivity'. She analysed the concept as a referent for a set of behavioural criteria such as adopting certain procedures for verifying facts and 'knowing the truth', attributing contentious interpretations to others, and routinely identifying that which is easily observable. Tuchman concludes that journalists avoid the problems of the epistemological status of 'objectivity' by conforming to professional norms and expectations. Analysing the construct in the context of behavioural criteria of journalistic competence, she identified it as a 'strategic ritual' which "protects the professional from mistakes and his critics." (Tuchman,1972:678)

The 1970s marks a watershed in the sociology of news with the emergence of studies which analysed the stories journalists told about the nature of their work. These

'institutional mythologies' were seen to be a valuable analytic tool in revealing the underlying values inherent in journalist claims to professional expertise. They were shown to serve organisational and occupational interests in routinizing news production. (Sigelman,1973; Schudson,1978)

2.3: Journalist Ideologies.

Schlesinger (1978, 1987:162) demonstrated how the corporate ideology of the BBC newsroom served to provide solutions to the problems encountered in the daily production of news programmes. In particular, he analysed how the newsroom 'micro-myths' of impartiality and independence help to preserve the professional norm of autonomy while managerial control over journalist practice was substantial.

Burns (1977) and Schlesinger (1978) both note the frequency with which broadcasters at the BBC cited 'professionalism' as a rationale to 'explain' their work as the discerning work of news specialists. As well as basing their claims to professionalism on routine competencies, journalists also align themselves with those occupational groups which require extended and specialized training before membership is conferred. In doing so, journalists define themselves as an occupational group which can be judged only by those similarly qualified. In doing so, they are able to legitimize their claim to the right to control over their work.

It is this conception of 'professionalism' as conferring a mandate of autonomous judgement which has made the mantle of professionalism so attractive. (Burns,1977:137)

Identifying themselves as professionals, broadcasters construct their practice as based on a code of practice independent of organisational imperatives. In doing so, they legitimate their practice in terms of providing a public service.

Burns identifies the issue of autonomy as central to the claim to professionalism. He distinguishes two types of claim for autonomy by media professionals. Professional autonomy is used to defend the journalists' special privileges and rights subsumed under the rubric of 'freedom of speech' where these may be being challenged by extra-organisational institutions. Professional autonomy is also invoked by journalists who are subject to intra-organisational pressures. It is used by them to defend their professional entitlement to exercise discretionary judgement within the constraints imposed by the institutional framework established by management. (*ibid*).

Elliot (1977) problematizes the complex interrelations between media professionals and the bureaucratic framework within which they work. He highlights the dilemma raised by the conflicting and competing interests between the creative role of the 'communicators' and the dictates of organisational efficiency within the institutional setting. Elliot proposes that 'communicators' claims to professionalism should be understood as an 'occupational adaption' to the problem of conflicting roles; that "the elaboration of professional competence is a tactic by which operative staff within the organisation can pre-empt executive control." (*ibid*:152). He also suggests that it be seen as an 'organisational strategy' used by the organisation to pre-empt other types of external regulation".(*ibid*).

However,

...no matter how complex the adaptations which communicators make to the dilemma, the end result in terms of output will vary only if the adaption is supported by the organisational system in which the communicator is working. (*ibid*:150)

Production routines are maintained, despite the potential for conflict, due to the defining of professionalism "in terms of the skills necessary to meet the organisation's goals." (*ibid*:159)

The studies by Tuchman, Elliot, Burns, and Schlesinger all highlight the contradiction between journalist ideologies and the material conditions of their practise. They indicate that although media professionals claim autonomy, and organisational ideologies support this perception, in practice strategic, and substantive controls are "articulated throughout the production system." (Schlesinger,1978:162). Tuchman found from her observational studies that while a certain degree of conflict over the control of newswork was evident, in general, "news professionalism has developed in conjunction with modern news organizations, and professional practices serve organisational needs." (Tuchman,1978:5). She comments on the taken-for-grantedness, shared by both journalists and the consumers of their products, that the journalists' 'professionalism' ensures they are acting in the public interest. This belief renders invisible the origins of modern journalism in capitalist enterprises.

We take for granted the daily production of news as a consumer commodity without noting its historic association with the development of advertising by the penny press. We take for granted the embeddedness of the news net in legitimated institutions and the existence of centralized news gathering, as handed down to us from the nineteenth century. (Tuchman,1978:196)

In his study of news production at the BBC, Schlesinger argued that while the journalists believed they acted as independent professionals, BBC corporate and editorial ideologies routinely ensured broad conformity with the organisationally-desired approach to the news. Reporters accepted editorial authority and intervention because the demarcation of responsibilities gave editors legitimate control over story selection and treatment. The commitment of journalists to the BBC's corporate ideology of impartiality also ensured that journalist practice reflected the implicit value-orientation of the organisation.

One important contribution of Schlesinger's study is the solution he formulates to the 'problem of the audience' for mass media professionals who are unable to have first-hand knowledge of their audiences. (McQuail,1969; Elliot,1972). Schlesinger argues that journalists are not concerned about the 'structural lacunae' between them and their

audiences but with "the packaging of the broadcast, and comparative evaluation of others' goods." (Schlesinger,1978:107). Within newsroom cultures, there is not a 'problem of the audience'. This is due to the 'professional attitude' or 'self-sustaining' conventional wisdom of journalists - thus 'the audience', or rather, the construct of 'audience interest' " is part of a routinized way of life" (p.116) in which the journalist "is his own audience. When he talks of his professionalism he is saying that he knows how to tell his story." (p.134).

Some writers have problematised the journalistic claim to professionalism on the grounds that journalism as an occupation does not meet all the criteria traditionally used to demarcate professions from other types of work such as a unique set of qualifications based on the acquisition of a theoretical body of knowledge or a high degree of autonomy over one's work. (Henningham,1988:85-91). What is of significance, in the context of this study, is not whether the practice of journalism constitutes a profession, but which parties have the privilege of defining what constitutes 'professionalism' and who gains what from the claim to professional status. Regarding the validity of defining journalism as a profession, Soloski argues:

Much ink has been spilled over arguments about whether journalism is a bona-fide profession. Even more ink has been used by scholars who have attempted to identify the criteria that make an occupation a profession. But, as Hughes (1958:45) points out, it is not important to argue about which occupations qualify as professions; what is important is to ask what it means for an occupation to claim it is a profession. (Soloski,1989:207)

2.4: 'Professionalism' as a Historical Construct.

Professionalism has been analysed as a strategic defence for many occupations attempting to protect their members through enhanced status. Concern with the attribute of professionalism has been an enduring feature of journalism since 1884 when British journalists chose to attempt to "reconcile individual and corporate interests by organising themselves on the basis of professionalism rather than unionism." (Elliot,1978:175).

Numerous historical and sociological studies have examined "the workings of political, economic and ideological constraints and their constitutive role in the very definition of professionalism" and argued that, on these grounds, the "standard normative accounts of the free press" be dismissed. (Schlesinger,1986:284) Within the sociology of news, it has become widely accepted that the professional ideologies of journalists are historical constructions "structured by mass media production cycles" (Schlesinger:1978:83) and standardized as part of the historical development of journalism as an occupation (Brown *et al*,1978: Elliot,1978; Curran & Seaton,1981; Tunstall,1978).

Tunstall, for example, contextualizes the development of modern journalism as part of the production of a commercial 'package' - 'news-advertising-entertainment'.

News and advertising grew together - as two parts of a sandwich whose filling was entertainment. News, like American politics, borrowed heavily from entertainment - in order to get the people's attention politicians employed all the available entertainment razzle-dazzle and so did editors, and so did advertisers. (Tunstall:1977:23).

Analyses of the historical development of journalism (Schudson,1978; Tuchman,1978:Ch.8; Elliot,1978) demonstrate that the journalist rhetoric of 'duty', and the 'fourth estate' model of the news media implicit in it, originated in the late nineteenth century in the emerging industrial form of the "advertising-financed, commercial mass circulation press." (Garnham,1990:121).

The shift from partisan journalism to the emphasis on political independence and 'news' interpreted as fact rather than opinion in the new popular 'penny press' was the outcome of competition for advertisers and readers.

The newspapers accepted ideas offered by the new capitalist elite to justify its replacement of the older mercantile order. Among these ideas were that all private individuals had the right to purchase public knowledge and that all individuals act in their own self interest... Factual news attracted readers, and so affirmed the notion of popular democracy explicit in the capitalist

challenge to the colonial mercantile society. (Tuchman,1978:159)

Thus a key factor in the consolidation of the independent 'free press' was the construction of journalistic endeavour as fundamental to the public interest. At the turn of the century, the professional ideology of journalism as an instrument of democracy was well entrenched as a legitimating rationale of the industry (Boyce,1978:27; Day,1990:179).

By the late nineteenth century, mass circulation and advertising enabled the consolidation of a newspaper industry which, due to the stability of their markets among the political and social elites, accrued sufficient capital, credibility and prestige to participate in the political process as an independent 'estate'. (Elliot,1978:182).

The emergence of the capitalist press reveals a conjunction of private interests which successfully sought to monopolize the range of discourses entering and shaping public debate by destroying the independent working-class and radical press and placing the control of public communications in the hands of a few. (Curran,1977). In New Zealand, the Grey River Argus has been the only daily paper to represent the Labour movement¹⁰. From their beginnings in the nascent colonial state, the print media have been controlled by an entrepreneurial business class and the interests of capital (Day,1990; Butterworth,1989). Thus from the end of the nineteenth century, the professional development of journalism has been shaped by, and is functional to, the industrial production of news for mass markets.

The historical conjunction between capitalism and the commodification of public communication has made the occupation of journalism highly ambiguous.

¹⁰ See Scholefield, 1958:247-249; Day,1990:243.

The investment of capital necessary to serve mass markets has made it more and more necessary that journalism should be produced as a predictable, marketable commodity. Instead of a few men sharing all the work necessary to write and print a newspaper, relying on their readers to supply much of the editorial copy (which was the case at the beginning of the nineteenth century), the contemporary journalist is a member of a large staff, responsible for some specialized function within a large-scale organisation. This division of labour applies not only to single organisations, but to the whole international newsgathering and processing system. The elaboration of this system through agencies and syndication has also helped to make news a routine and predictable product. If the system is to articulate, then it is essential that all those working in it share common criteria for judging and processing the product. (Elliot, 1978:186)

The rapid but orderly nature of collective action in the newsroom, and the routine satisfaction of editorial and managerial requirements, has been explained by reference to "a corpus of occupational lore" used to evaluate and present news (Golding, 1981:74).

Although journalists articulate a pro-social commitment,

...day to day production has no time to consider social values and relies on news values to guide selection and presentation. Presentation is the skill of turning taken-for-granted news values into rules of production. In assessing audience response journalists have to rely on accepted definitions of news, what makes a good or a not so good story. Journalistic notions of what is and what is not news have been forged in the workshops of a commercial press serving historically particular needs and interests. It is in this process that news values are created. (*ibid*).

2.5: The Normative Contours of Organisational Culture.

It has been written of the shared values of journalists which facilitate and order the routines of daily news production:

News values are one of the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society. All 'true journalists' are supposed to possess it: few can or are willing to identify and define it. Journalists speak of 'the news' as if events select themselves. Further, they speak as if which is the 'most significant' news story, and which 'news angles' are most salient are divinely inspired. Yet of the millions of events which occur every day in the world, only a tiny proportion ever become visible as 'potential news stories': and of this proportion, only a small fraction are actually produced as the day's news in the news media. We appear to be dealing, then, with a 'deep structure' whose function as a selective device is un-transparent even to those who professionally most know how to operate it. (Hall cited in Curran & Gurevitch:1991:153)

Tuchman uses the metaphor of "sacred knowledge" (1972:672) to describe the tacit nature

of news-values. This 'inherited' knowledge holds that certain matters are of interest, or relevant to, the viewer, and others are not. Tuchman (1978) found that the journalists she studied were unable to define or categorize what these criteria were other than to indicate they are something one acquires a 'nose' for after lengthy experience on the job.

Golding identified the general criteria used to evaluate and present news:

...drama (news stories are, after all, stories as well as news); visual attractiveness, [in the context of T.V. news]; importance (begging the large question of significance); size (of its kind); proximity (both cultural and geographical); brevity ...; negativity (news is about interruptions in the smooth flow of social process, a historically derived definition); and recency. News is about elites, and about personalities. (Golding, 1981:75).

However, news values are not universally agreed upon and applied. The norms which shape practice within a historically specific production context are determined by the economic and regulatory structures in which individual news organisations are embedded. That this body of 'occupational lore' is functional to the organisation was recognised by Tiffin in his study of Australian newsrooms:

...news values minimise the role of individual attitudes, so that news judgements transcend the preferences of the individuals producing it. (Tiffin, 1989:66-7)

The ability of individual journalists to effectively exercise the news values of the organisation provides the basis by which their competence is judged by colleagues and superiors. Ability is judged by the news executives according to their interests and objectives as managers of a complex organisation.

Given the opaque quality of news values, how might one go about researching them. One 'way in' is to conceive of the newsroom as a cultural milieu.

Just as individuals in a culture can have different personalities while sharing much in common, so too with groups and organisations...It is this phenomenon that is now recognised as 'corporate culture'. Organisations are mini-societies that have their own patterns of culture /sub-culture. This one organisation may see itself as a tight-knit team or family that believes in

working together. Another may be permeated by the idea that 'we're the best in the industry and we intend to stay that way'. Yet another might be highly fragmented, divided into groups that think about the world in very different ways or that have very different aspirations as to what their organisation should be. (Morgan,1986:121)

The construct of a 'news-culture' is a conceptual reference to accepted ways of seeing and acting which underpin journalistic activity within a specific setting.

While the conceptual difficulties and variety of uses associated with the term 'culture' (Williams,1976,87-93; Austin-Broos,1987) are notorious, the concept remains rich with possibilities. My use of news-culture draws on a Geertzian conceptualisation of culture as something public and observable which is constituted through the social processes which pattern and order human symbolic conduct (Geertz,1973). The understanding of culture as a dimension of social action refers to

...the organisation of experience shared by members of a community, a process which includes the standards and values for judging or perceiving, for predicting and acting. (Walton,1978:Foreword)

The construct of 'news-culture' enables a given context of news production to be analysed as a set of more or less coherent values, beliefs and practices by which news-work is patterned and made predictable.

Such patterns of belief or shared meaning, fragmented or integrated, and supported by various operating norms and rituals, can exert a decisive influence on the overall ability of the organisation to deal with the challenges that it faces." (Morgan,1986:121)

Where there is social action, there is also the exercise of power. The dynamic quality of culture derives from struggles between different parties within a social group to assert their values and meanings over those of others. A cultural analytic framework addresses "how meanings are constructed and imposed in order to mobilize group support" (Frost *et.al*,1991:91). Applied to the specific context of the newsroom, it is the responsibility of news executives to manage and guide the multiple subjectivities within the newsroom into

a shared outlook which enables production to become orderly and routine.

One of the more significant shifts in meaning in the production culture at TVNZ as a result of commercialization has been the replacement of a public service ethos with a populist market orientation. Ang's (1991) study of the British and Dutch public broadcasting organisations in response to changes in institutional arrangements being brought about by innovations in communications and information technologies enables us to extend our understanding of the way in which industry constructs of 'the audience' are being reformulated as a result.

Pointing to the relationship between policies of deregulation and privatisation in "Western Europe's television landscape" and the "crisis in the audience-as-public paradigm of public service broadcasting" (Ang,1991:30) she examines the complex processes underpinning the transformation of audience-as-public into an audience-as-market. Ang writes:

...this process of paradigmatic transformation should not be seen as a mechanical one; on the contrary... it is accompanied by many tensions and difficulties within the public service broadcasting organisations themselves, tensions and difficulties having to do with the need for these organisations to develop a new, acceptable way of thinking about the specificity of their relationship toward the audience. In short, what they need to do is to somehow reconcile the two contrasting paradigms of audience. (*ibid*)

2.6: The 'Problem' of Public Broadcasting in the New Broadcasting Environment of the 1980s.

"The transformation of media environments around the world ... has had profound consequences for public communication at all levels from local to international." (Ferguson,1990:ix) One significant consequence of the emergence of new communications technologies such as satellite, fibre optics, micro-electronics and digital compression is the vigorous global debate regarding the purpose and definition of public broadcasting.

Yet despite the intensity of the debate, the concept of 'public broadcasting', and particularly the meaning of "the word *public* in the context of broadcasting remains remarkably unexamined." (Scannell,1990:135). Perhaps the most considered exposition of the purposes and rationale guiding the British model of public broadcasting is found in the 1960 Pilkington Committee's Report on Broadcasting. Gregory recognises the difficulties of defending a system which draws so heavily on a concept as slippery as 'the public interest'. He nevertheless defends its value and relevance in broadcasting policy debates due to the democratic principle inherent in the concept:

While the oft-maligned, inexact, and frustratingly ambiguous notion of 'the public interest' cannot of itself determine broadcasting policy, it does stand as a symbolic representation of the *democratic* ideal which must continually inform that policy - the concept of a broadcasting system whose *raison d'être* is to serve society as a whole rather than any section of it. (Gregory,1985:10)

Initially, the concept of 'public broadcasting' was defined by the model established in Britain in the 1920s by John Reith. As Director-General of the BBC, Reith argued that "broadcasting had an immense potential for helping in the creation of an informed and enlightened democracy." (Scannell,1990:14).

The concept of public service, in Reith's mind, had, as a core element, an ideal of broadcasting's role in the formation of an informed and reasoned public opinion as an essential part of the political process in a mass democratic society. (*ibid*)

Public broadcasting was perceived by Reith to be the means by which political and social rights could be extended to include all citizens in a shared experience of national community. The Reithian model was characterized by an ethos of 'cultural uplift'. It sought to cultivate and 'lead' public taste rather than to 'pander' to it.

The Reithian model was adopted in New Zealand by James Shelley whose appointment by the First Labour Government as Director of Broadcasting in 1936 indicated official recognition of the potential for broadcasting to serve as a *cultural* instrument. That he

shared the lofty ideals of Reith is evident in the following statement by Shelley:

I regard radio as the great modern instrument for securing a real cohesion of the citizens of the community, based on a mutual understanding and sympathetic tolerance. The community spirit and the greatness of an ancient city such as Athens, depended on the close personal relation of the comparatively small number of citizens themselves... The radio, if properly used, should provide a means whereby the sympathetic influence of the actual human voice of ancient Athens can be added to the intellectual facilities of the widespread communication of the printing press. Thus it will form an instrument for real democracy, based on a sympathetic understanding of all points of view, considered in the quiet environment of the fireside. [*Radio Record*, 4 September 1936]. (Day, forthcoming: Ch8).

While Shelley has been fashioned as the 'father of public broadcasting' in New Zealand, his interpretation of what constituted an 'instrument of the people' was not accepted by all. One dissenting voice was that of Thomas Hunter (Principal of Victoria University College, who wrote in 1949:

'Surely he (Shelley) overlooked the fact that the Greek people met its speakers face to face and could express its approval and dissent...Broadcasting is not democratic in nature and ... until all shades of opinion may be heard on air the totalitarian character of our broadcasting system will remain." (*ibid*)

The Reithian formulation of public broadcasting has been likened to "a cultural dictatorship with the BBC as arbiter of tastes and definer of standards." (Scannell & Cardiff, quoted in Schlesinger, 1978:19). Scannell later argued, however, that the Reithian model of public broadcasting has been "much misunderstood." (*ibid*:26) He interprets the ideological and organisational revolutions which have been brought about by deregulation as a threat to a "hard-won public sphere created over the last thirty years in national television." (*ibid*). A key feature of this threat is market fragmentation of audiences and the loss of universality in the delivery of television services.

However, in the contemporary debate, the construct of 'public broadcasting' tends to be used in reference to the concept of broadcasting as a *public good* which is applied in the interests of the *national community*. The model of public broadcasting as a public good is

used to protect and promote the public interest through the establishment of broadcasting policies and structures which satisfy the requirements of representativeness and diversity, public accountability and access (Maharey,1990[a]:23). In the new broadcasting environment of the 1980s, characterized by the imminent fragmentation of broadcasting markets by communications technologies such as satellite and cable, and greater use of the electro-magnetic spectrum, the public trustee model of broadcasting became undermined. Proponents of a market approach to broadcasting challenged the relevance and validity of the concept of a 'public good'. Since 1945, cultural consumption and leisure have become increasingly privatised while 'national culture' has become increasingly pluralistic and fragmented. The concept of 'a national culture' has become problematic as cultural consumption becomes increasingly fragmented and private. (Farnsworth,1990[a]; Bell,1993)

The broad issues around which the debate revolves are those of political definitions of the obligations of the state with regard to policy governing publicly-owned broadcasting institutions, definitions of audiences, and the politics of cultural and national identity and "the significance of the way in which New Zealanders are constructed as particular kinds of cultural subjects." (Farnsworth,1990:134). The issues are complex and difficult to address given the struggles by different parties to define the terms of the debate according to their own agendas. (Easton,1991[b]:43; Farnsworth,1990[b]; Pickering,1990) However, I shall leave aside the cultural issues within the debate to focus on the implications of broadcasting organisation and policy for public communication, citizenly discourse and a broad and inclusive public sphere.

In an editorial to an issue of *Media, Culture and Society*, Colin Sparks defined his interpretation of the significance of the public broadcasting issues for citizens of liberal capitalist democracies.

The issues at stake in the debate around the future of broadcasting are very large, involving matters of cultural life as well as institutions and structures... The claim of the modern bourgeoisie democracies is that their citizens are the ultimate source of political power, and as such all enjoy equal political rights and entitlements. Part of those rights has been the set of concerns usually grouped under terms like freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of speech. They are important and necessary elements of any theory of democratic life, and as such have, historically, been the subject of some of the most intense struggles in the achievement of political democracy. They continue to be amongst the most sensitive questions in all societies. (Sparks,1989:131)

Pointing out that "the concept of public service broadcasting is, historically, more or less co-incident with the establishment of political democracy in Britain" (p.132) he emphasizes the significance and importance of those gains by highlighting the issue of social power which is at the heart of the debate.

The importance of these rights, both to those who wish to extend and deepen democracy and to those who find that they impose unacceptable restraints on their own exercise of power, or allow unacceptable freedoms to their subjects, lies partly in the fact that *without access to sources of information and opinion the formation of authentic political views is extremely difficult*. [my emphasis] In a bourgeoisie democracy in particular, in which the population at best only exercises occasional and retrospective sanctions over those who govern in its name, the right to information about the activities of the government is an important element in any notion of public life. (*ibid*)

Sparks takes a different position to Scannell, however, who attributes to public broadcasting structures the democratization of everyday life in modern liberal democracies. Scannell argues that

...the real effect of public service broadcasting has been to grant the citizen greater access to the mechanisms of public life than any other known broadcasting arrangement, and that it has likewise transformed the language and style of political life into a form more approximate to the norms of everyday activity. It has thus radically demystified politics and granted the possibility of political speech to the majority of the population. As such, it has been a profoundly democratic force. The replacement of the principle of public service by the principle of the market will, he claims, represent a major erosion of the public sphere in modern capitalism. (*ibid*:132-133)

Scannell does acknowledge the unequal distribution of communicative entitlements in mass representative democracies which constrain the potential of public broadcasting as an

instrument of democracy. Although broadcasting may have given voice to the voiceless, nevertheless, the power to comment on and influence the political process remains the privilege of those "speaking as authoritative representatives of powerful institutions". 'Ordinary people' can speak only for themselves. They are not entitled to opinions on public affairs but may speak *only of their experiences*. (Scannell,1990:162)

Sparks, on the other hand, is unequivocal in his challenge regarding the validity of the claim to independence and popular representation inherent in the Reithian model of public broadcasting. He argues that the values and interests shaping BBC programming were those of a privileged elite. As such, they could not be said to genuinely reflect the interests and concerns of their mass audiences. For Sparks, public broadcasting served in the hegemonic control of British publics:

...the function of public service broadcasting in the life of political democracy is one of the most powerful mechanisms by which the ruling class is able to manufacture a version of social life in which its own continued domination appears as natural and inevitable. (Sparks,1989:132)

The crisis being experienced by the public television institutions of Western Europe is one which, in New Zealand, has been 'solved' by the state abandoning its obligations to ensure the provision of a public television service. By restructuring TVNZ into a state-owned enterprise to be operated according to the 'market mechanism', those parties dominating the policy process have neatly avoided having to deal with complex ethical and philosophical dilemmas which need to be addressed if broadcasting is to serve the public good. These include the issues of how to finance and operate television services and ensure the free flow of information in the face of escalating delivery costs, a multi-channel environment, fragmenting audiences, and an increasingly pluralistic society in which the socio-cultural cleavages are widening. While the challenge is considerable, the growing degree to which these material factors define public communication increases the need for

democratic states to ensure that their publics have access to "an over-arching national service that openly aspires to cater objectively to the widest possible expression of interests, aspirations, tastes and opinions." (Gregory,1985:101)

The paradox facing public broadcasting in New Zealand is that just when the need for a strong and independent service is most pressing its future is most problematic. New Zealand society is clearly undergoing profound political, economic and social changes, which are rendering irrelevant the social consensus that has prevailed during the past 30 years. Political division is becoming more open, more multi-faceted and more passionately expressed, and basic political choices are having to be made about the directions, shape and character of an emerging, increasingly pluralistic, society. Such is the rapidity and extent of change that the capacity of political and administrative processes to cope is being called into serious question. Amidst all this, the role of institutional public broadcasting assumes considerable significance, because it is uniquely placed to serve all the people in the process of political disputation by which a nation's affairs are determined and resolved. (*ibid*)

While Gregory wrote this at a time when the Fourth Labour Government had only just taken power, and market forces had yet to be unleashed upon the public sector¹¹, he nevertheless saw 'the writing on the wall'. The global re-emergence of the neo-classical free-market ideology in the early 1980s provided a new frame for articulating a solution to the 'crisis of public broadcasting'.

The Reithian model of public broadcasting had the specific cultural task of 'integrating' the nation. It was perceived to be the means by which a *national* culture could be built, and 'good taste' cultivated amongst the population in general. The problem with the model was that it failed to appreciate the dilemma underpinning its unproblematic defining of good taste and the public interest. It did not acknowledge that elites definitions of 'good taste' and 'the public interest' were shaped by, and fostered, their own particular values and interests.

¹¹The restructuring and deregulation of broadcasting in New Zealand during the 1980s is detailed in Chapter Four.

The proponents of a market-based approach to broadcasting sought to discredit the 'public good' model on the basis of what they argue is its intrinsic elitism. A growing awareness of social cleavages, and the increasing pluralization of worldviews which characterize the societies of modern nation states, heightened the problematic status of questions such as 'whose values and interests will define the public good?' Increased awareness of cultural relativism has also weakened the concept of a universal 'public good'.

The implications of new communications and information technologies and contemporary social trends towards the pluralization of culture and the privatisation of leisure are pointed to as an indication that the concepts of mass culture/mass audience are no longer valid. Proponents of a 'free-market' model of broadcasting argue for the deregulation of broadcasting and letting people *buy what they want*. Consumer power is celebrated as people power. (Schlesinger,1992:4). In response to this notion - that the problem of elitism in public broadcasting can be removed through the mechanism of 'consumer sovereignty' and 'letting the market provide' - Gregory argues that broadcasting,

like other public enterprises... is an instrument designed to serve particular social ends. But unlike virtually all other such enterprises it is also a crucial means of determining those ends. For this reason politicians and others who would seek to measure its value as if it were simply one among many similar state enterprises, like an airline or a railway, can do so only in terms of a crude commercial calculus which provides more evidence of their shortcomings than those of the organisation they address. And for this reason the word 'public' will here elicit a reflexively negative response only among those who by force of prejudice or sheer ignorance see in the commercial marketplace the only valid measure of institutional worth. (*ibid*:102)

Gregory makes a strong case for "what Richard Hoggart calls 'democratic broadcasting' - a service which is neither state-controlled nor commercially impelled." (*ibid*) New Zealanders have never been properly served by their public broadcasting organisation, he argues, because it has never obtained the independence necessary "for the highest possible standards of journalistic competence and integrity" (p.107) to be achieved. If the ideal of

a public broadcasting organisation serving the broad public interest through giving voice to the diverse communities of interest which constitute 'the nation' is to be realized, according to Gregory, then the Chief Executive Officer of the organisation must make a commitment to represent the interest of the professional broadcaster in realizing the public service norms . "Professional broadcasting standards must not only be maintained at the highest levels, but if this is to be possible then they must constantly and vigorously be pleaded for in the power-sharing process that shapes organisational decisions." (p.108).

2.7: Theorizing the Social Organisation of Television Journalism in New Zealand.

The literature dealing specifically with these issues in the New Zealand context is scant. There is nothing available which focuses primarily on the organisational context of television news production in New Zealand. Hall (1980) gives a detailed historical account of the emergence of radio broadcasting in NZ from 1920-1954. Gregory's (1985) analysis of the development of broadcast journalism within a state broadcasting monopoly is an exemplary piece of scholarship. His interpretation of the administrative and political wrangles which beset the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation and the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand¹² offers the student of New Zealand broadcasting rich insights into the historical conditions and forces which have shaped the broadcasting structures and relations being contested today.

Drawing on the sociology of the professions and organisational theory, Farnsworth (1989) examines a significant historical shift in the balance of power between competing groups (administrators and producers) within NZ television when competition between two television channels (albeit both part of the BCNZ) was first introduced. Focusing on the

¹² The NZBC and the BCNZ were New Zealand's first two public broadcasting corporations. The shift in lettering is a consequence of restructuring in 1973. The organisations are discussed in some detail in Chapter Four.

institutional pressures arising from the tension between market forces and professional autonomy in public companies during a particular historical era in New Zealand broadcasting, Farnsworth analyses the way in which the considerable ambiguities engendered by the mixture of state and market were managed at that time.

In a brief chapter, Butterworth (1989) summarizes the historical emergence of broadcasting within a general discussion of the mass media in New Zealand from a political economy perspective. She emphasizes the role of capital in shaping the relation between the owners of mass media organisations and the new colonial state.

Wood's (1984) analysis of the determinants of the institutional forms of New Zealand broadcasting provides a study of greater depth. His inquiry examines the historical emergence of New Zealand broadcasting structures in relationship to the historical development of the capitalist economy. It also analyses the institutionalization of meaning production in television current affairs programmes in the early 1980s. Wood argues that these programmes served a hegemonic function in the interests of the state through legitimating economic and political discourses and structures that protected and fostered the interests of capital. His study provides for the student of television journalism in New Zealand, a shrewd and provocative interpretation of the wider historical conditions within which the occupational group has emerged.

In the New Zealand literature, where media theorists have discussed television news programmes, it has been in the context of the political effects of news and current affairs discourse rather than the organisational conditions which have shaped programme production. As does Wood, Loader & Bosshard (1987) adopt a neo-Marxian structuralist conceptual framework to demonstrate how capitalism, and the world-view of social elites,

are legitimated and reproduced through TVNZ news and current affairs programmes. Leitch (1989), (1990), also analyses New Zealand news media discourse as hegemonic, presenting social, economic and political issues within a context of individual experience, leaving the underlying structures and processes of capitalism invisible and unchallenged. The polemical approach adopted by Loader and Bosshard and Leitch in their critical discourse analysis of case-studies of specific programmes is valuable as an invitation to debate. However, analysing TVNZ news and current affairs programmes as 'instruments of domination' fails to take account of viewers actively interpreting news discourse according to their own interests and ideological positions. They are also silent regarding the intra- and extra-organisational structures, processes and relations shaping signification practices in television news and current affairs production.

If the purpose of critique is to bring about change, then we need to be clear about where the responsibilities for change lie. Analysing news discourse may be a necessary element of critically theorizing the news media but it is not sufficient because the human agents responsible for the editorial shaping of meaning, and the institutional structures which in turn, govern their practice, remain unexamined.

As Australian media theorist Rodney Tiffin has pointed out:

Only by understanding the organisational context does it become possible to specify precisely how and when news may be manipulated, either internally via managerial intervention or journalistic prejudice, or externally by news sources. Understanding the institutional processes of news production is a prerequisite for understanding what the news means. (Tiffin, 1989:4)

The relation holding between TVNZ news programmes, the production of social knowledge and the exercise of power in New Zealand society is complex and difficult to apprehend. Fruitful analysis of the political and social significance and implications of TVNZ news

discourse requires an understanding of the institutional pressures and social processes which journalists are subject to, and how they understand what they do. This study seeks to initiate and develop a body of knowledge about journalist practice within New Zealand's state-owned television organisation and in doing so, provide for more informed and rational debate about standards of journalism at TVNZ and how New Zealand broadcasting should be organised.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH PRAXIS.

We need to anthropologize the West: show how exotic its constitution of reality has been; emphasize those domains most taken for granted as universal...; make them seem as historically peculiar as possible; show how their claims to truth are linked to social practices and have hence become effective forces in the social world. (Rabinow, 1986:241)

To arrive at a sociological analysis... one must go beyond immersion. One must become disengaged and reconstruct the data gathered in terms of a number of themes deriving from a sociological perspective. (Schlesinger, 1978:11)

3.0: Articulating the Research Grounds.

The sociology of knowledge is the field of inquiry to which I have been drawn as a scholar. My interest in the news media derives from a concern with the symbolic and material dimensions of cultural production in relation to the exercise of social power in capitalist liberal democracies. I am interested in conceptualizations of 'media power' in terms of interpretive variation and its social determinants.

The topic of this thesis developed from my interest in the TVNZ's top-rating flag-ship news programme, *ONN@6*. In the period following the public broadcaster's reorganisation into a state-owned enterprise, the programme became the subject of considerable public controversy. This reflected the competing and contradictory pressures and interests caused by the requirement that what had been a public service oriented organisation was now to "act successfully as a business" (State-Owned Enterprise Act 1986, Section 4).

Defining the programme in the context of its significance as a key cultural artefact in New Zealand is complex and difficult because of paradoxical aspects of its identity. Everyone 'knows' *ONN@6* even if they do not watch it - it has been a part of daily life in New Zealand for over thirty years. On the other hand, theorizing its meaning and authority as a contemporary cultural form seems fraught with complications and uncertainties.

While I am certain of my own proclivities as a social theorist -interpretive and critical - at the beginning of the research, I was unsure where and how to begin. The field of inquiry is all-embracing and complex, given the relations and processes of production and reception, cultural politics and social power within which ONN@6 is enmeshed¹³. The first step, and fundamental challenge, for the social theorist/researcher is the question - 'where to begin?' How might one most effectively approach the slippery multi-nuanced complexities of an all-encompassing social phenomenon. I will start by setting out the grounds of my practice.

The interpretive position is reflexive (Blum & McHugh,1974) in the sense that the researcher is conscious of, and takes into account, the conditions of the study's own possibility. In other words, my construction of the research problem, and the analysis of the social world I formulate, will be shaped by, and display, the values and interests I bring to the inquiry.

As an interpretive theorist (Weber,1947; Schutz,1962,1967; Rabinow,1979), my practice is grounded in the understanding that the way in which I formulate the research problem, the conceptual framework I work within, will determine the form of knowledge the analysis will produce - what will be questioned and what will be taken-for-granted and left unexamined. The interpretive theorist rejects the positivist claim to objectivity, on the grounds that the latter fails to recognise the intrinsic embeddedness of the social theorist in the world being studied. As a member of the social world, as an active participant in its social construction, my appraisal of any phenomenon is situated in my own history and experience of the world, and therefore inevitably positioned and partial.

¹³The parameters of the debate were discussed in the Introduction, Chapter One.

Doing interpretive research is grounded in the understanding that 'reality' is not independent of human agency but a product of it. (James,1952; Schutz,1962,1967). From an interpretive perspective, there can be no claims to an absolute validity, truth or 'real' meaning 'outside' the intersubjectively created world produced by human actors acting intentionally as members of a group. Social reality is produced and reproduced by them as they collectively experience and structure their everyday affairs and interactions.

The production of meaning is a cognitive process in which the 'actuality' of experience is defined according to the socially and culturally defined frames of reference influencing individual perception. Interpretive inquiry is not *describing* 'the way things are', but *interpreting* how people 'see'. Thus, in seeking to address the *meaning* of things, the researcher must address their indexicality, those conditions within which individual perception and experience are socially and contextually defined.

The interpretive theorist approaches social phenomena as the product of situated practices, shaped and constrained by the meaning structures of the everyday world of social actors. Given that 'reality' and 'meaning' are socially constructed, then it is fruitless for the researcher to conceptualize social phenomena *as if* they are objects with essential characteristics which can be 'uncovered' by some mechanical sequence of research behaviours and generalized within a claim of representativeness.

The world of the researcher is as value-laden as that of those s/he seeks to understand. The discipline of the interpretive theorist requires abandoning the search for certainty, and the belief in privileged techniques which 'guarantee' 'the facts'. This means that there can be no privileged position from which 'the truth of the matter' can be 'unearthed' and 'gathered up'. One can only study the conditions under which social agents of different kinds

consider any information as representing a 'fact'. Within interpretive social research, questions regarding the objective validity of representations as 'facts' are bracketed - the researcher is concerned with extracting the values and implicit knowledge ordering collective affairs. The discipline of the interpretive method then, is not to satisfy the requirements of 'objectivity'. Rather, it is to attend carefully to the subjective point of view of those being studied in order that analysis is informed by their version of the world rather than by fictive second order constructs of the researcher.

My practice as an interpretive theorist/researcher is guided by Weber's concept of *verstehen* (Gerth & Mills, 1958) or a spirit of critical sympathy. The ethos of an empathic engagement directs my attention to the consciousness of actors about themselves and interprets social action within the terms of their contexts of meaning.

Making sense is structured according to our interests and the relevance we attribute to our experiences. (Weber, 1947; Schutz, 1967). As in the common-sense world of everyday life, the researcher organises her framing of a research problem according to her subjective domains of relevance. The determination of relevance is shaped in accordance with a set of related problems which are constituted of typifications. For Schutz, typification is the central mode of organising our experience into 'knowing'. The world of experience is interpreted in terms of *types*.

The sum-total of these various typifications constitutes a frame of reference in terms of which not only the sociocultural, but also the physical world has to be interpreted, a frame of reference that, in spite of its inconsistencies and its inherent opaqueness, is nonetheless sufficiently integrated and transparent to be used for solving most of the practical problems at hand...

Thus, typifications on the commonsense level - in contradistinction to the typifications made by the scientist, and especially the social scientist - emerge in the everyday experience of the world as taken for granted without any formulation of judgements or of neat propositions with logical subjects and predicates. They belong, to use a phenomenological term, to the prepredicative thinking. *The vocabulary and the syntax of everyday language*

represent the epitome of the typifications socially approved by the linguistic group. (ibid:120) [my emphasis]

In the language of social actors, we find the typificatory medium *par excellence*. Schutz directs the social researcher to examine the linguistic typifications or first order constructs of the subjects they would understand - it is here that the meanings with which those subjects construct their 'world' can be apprehended in their concrete specificity.

3.1: Framing The Research Problem.

Having broadly sketched the general parameters of my methodology, I turn now to discuss the concerns which shaped my determination of a particular research problem from my general interest in the *ONN@6* production/reception nexus.

I had not been satisfied by structuralist theories of television news which totalized and over-determined news discourse as something which 'does things to people', which mystifies them regarding the 'real' nature of their lives. An active audience perspective, which examines "how specific audiences make meanings and pleasures in their engagement with television programmes in the context of everyday life" (Seiter, *et al*,1989:3, Corner,1991), seemed a more appropriate place to begin an inquiry into news discourse and its cultural significance. A social action analysis of *ONN@6* dereifies the programme, locating it as "an integral element of daily life, a family resource" (Jensen,1990:220) and viewers as actively engaged in producing their own readings of news discourse. The human actor, located within the nexus of everyday domestic relations and active in the construction of meaning and reality, is central to such an inquiry.

However, at the same time, one also needs to take into account social, political and economic structures which shape and constrain the processes of reception. Thus news discourse analysis needs to address the "...possibilities and limits of the 'free-play' of sense-

making in relation to the systemic character of social structure and ideology (Dahlgren & Sparks,1991:19).

The complexities of the communicative relation between television news producers and audiences present the researcher/ theorist with an enormous challenge. Richard Hoggart refers to the twin processes of meaning production and reception as

...a kind of transmutation... people will take things offered to them and transmute them into the terms of their own culture. But the media aren't in business for nothing and there is a sense in which they do have an 'effect' and an impact. (Corner,1991,147)

Here we have come full circle back to the question 'what kind of 'effect', or 'impact' are we talking about?' While the critics of TVNZ and *ONN@6* confidently assert its pivotal role in the formation of public and political knowledge and cultural power in New Zealand, there is good reason to be cautious. Numerous theories of the news media/society relation reflecting a range of political orientations (McQuail,1987; Windschuttle,1988) are available to the researcher. The diversity of theoretical models is matched by the diverse voices publicly contesting specific representations of the programme.

At this point, I began to appreciate that to analyse this special modern form of knowledge, television news, one first requires some understanding of the social history, organisational processes and political and economic interests shaping its production. My focus, as I sought to define the research topic, shifted away from news discourse and towards the human actors and "the specific processes in those institutions responsible for creating the cultural product we call news." (Schudson,1991:156).

The disruptions and upheaval within the TVNZ news department as a consequence of preparations for competing within an open television market promised rich research

possibilities. The transitional period following 1987 as the news operation was reorganised in preparation for the loss of monopoly control - over the market and over the television share of the broadcasting fee - offered a rare opportunity to examine organisational and cultural processes which are normally so taken for granted as to be invisible.

Two factors played a significant part in confirming my decision to begin my inquiry into *ONN@6* by studying the organisational setting and production context. I did not have the resources to conduct an audience research project into the social uses and meanings of *ONN@6* discourse. What I did have, however, was an opportunity to gain access to TVNZ's Auckland newsroom.

3.2: Beginning Research.

Renewed contact with an old school friend then employed as a TVNZ news bulletin director brought an invitation to visit the Auckland newsroom. During my visit, I spoke with journalists about the changes they had experienced and were continuing to experience. They were interested and supportive when I outlined to them my provisional research plans. My supervisor then formally approached TVNZ's Department of News and Current Affairs to request permission for me to observe in the newsroom. This was granted as an open-ended invitation, on the condition of confidentiality. The arrangement was informal - I was given the freedom to come into the newsroom, and to move about as I chose, as long as I was sensitive to the journalists and did not disrupt them when they were busy.

I began my fieldwork at TVNZ on 21 October, 1989, a few weeks before 'the competition', TV3, came on air. I was invited to sit at the Home Desk beside the Assistant Home Editor. For two weeks, I would come into the newsroom just after 7 a.m. and stay until after the news went to air, observing in the studio for the duration of the broadcast.

One of the joys of research, and something beyond the scope of methodology, are those fortuitous events which open up for the researcher, glimpses of 'the way things are done' in the community being researched. My fieldwork at TVNZ began with one such event.

At 1.30pm on my first day in the newsroom, I was sitting at the Home Desk with the assistant Home Editor when news of an earthquake in San Francisco came through. The Foreign Editor, also working at the desk, had rung a colleague at Channel 9 in Sydney who broke the news. I proceeded to watch with great interest as he tried to arrange a link-up with Channel 9 to get access to their satellite feed from San Francisco.

He had a problem. At that moment, TVNZ was transmitting live coverage of a Rugby game being played in England. The satellite circuit was booked by the Sports Department and would be for another hour. The Foreign Editor was getting rather frustrated. Within the organisation, Sports as well as News have their interests to be attended to. Three-quarters of an hour later, at the conclusion of the game, ABC's footage of the earthquake started feeding into the newsroom, via Channel Nine's satellite link-up.

I sat all afternoon watching the action from the newsroom hub of the Home Desk. By the time the satellite feed came in, the logistical arrangements, budget and production decisions for the 'Quake' item were already well underway. Journalists were being briefed, contacts made, phone-calls fielded... The Department's Director came down from 'upstairs'. I recorded the asides journalists made to their colleagues as they listened in on the exchange between the Foreign Editor and the Director:

Director: "...not so good, not so good."

Unidentified Journalist: "How big's big?"

Another U/J: "Stevie Wonder felt the earth move."

Home Editor: "To think there are people watching satellites in their hotels..."

U/J: (laughing) "Some-one book us in."

Assistant Home Editor to researcher: "We've all been assigned to it (quake story). The

whole thing is one of arrangements... dealing with the mechanics of it... the journalistic thing has nothing to do with it. The bosses upstairs will already be talking about how much it will cost. Editorially, there is no discussion. What we have to do now is to get in touch with contacts.

I noted the veiled sarcasm and jokes in quietly spoken asides when the Director responded to the Foreign Editor's recounting the story he had heard from his mate in Sydney, the humour and frustration expressed by the journalists who at this stage had no means of access to the satellite footage that other people were able to watch, the rising volume as excitement spread amongst them and they gathered in clusters near a v.d.u. But what really made a big impact on me, and my mind kept repeating all afternoon as I watched the journalists work, was Assistant Home Editor's comment: "the whole thing is about arrangements... the journalistic thing has nothing to do with it." What could he mean? Isn't what I am observing 'journalism'? Do they do something else, something other than 'journalism' too?

While the 'quake' story had initially been deemed something of a fizzer, it became what the Foreign Editor referred to as 'a big picture story', and the lead in that night's bulletin. 6-8 minutes were allocated for the item which is significant given that an average item is around 90 seconds duration. The 'quake' story pushed aside what had been the provisional lead which dealt with a speech made by the M.P. Winston Peters to the Wellington Chamber of Commerce which suggested he had publicly compromised Jim Bolger, the Prime-Minister (one of the first in what was to become, in the New Zealand news media, a very long-running story). Items 17 to 21 on the run-down¹⁴ were dropped to make room for the extra-long item.

The newsroom was buzzing. Journalists were clustered around video terminals or ringing

¹⁴The run-down is the provisional plan for the evening bulletin which each journalist has access to on their video display unit.

around trying to establish contacts. They were trying to find some New Zealanders in San Francisco who could give a New Zealand angle to the story (they eventually found three New Zealand meteorologists attending a conference there), and attempting to arrange a live-to-camera interview with an American journalist at the scene for *Holmes*¹⁵. The Bulletin Producer harrassed an exasperated Foreign Editor to make arrangements for a link up with a San Francisco television studio, which was seemingly impossible because the earthquake had broken the telephone lines. A heated exchange momentarily flared. There were tensions rising elsewhere. A reporter responded testily to the Assistant Home Editor's query about progress on an assignment, telling him it was not done yet because he was waiting for technical crew to become available. (My guide explained that the numbers of technical crew - camera and sound technicians had been reduced.)

Nearby, a news presenter sought advice from the Bulletin Producer as to whether he should wear a jacket or not for the special 'news-flash' broadcast that was about to be made about the earthquake. Later in the afternoon, an *Auckland Star* photographer came in to take photographs of the earthquake off one of Home Desk's video terminals for a Special Edition being prepared. Meanwhile, one of the senior reporters was having a last minute briefing with the Home Editor before he flew out to San Francisco.

While the arrangements and activity relating to the 'quake' story were considerable, it was still just one item, and there were three programmes that had to be completed for that evening - *ONN@6*, *Holmes* and *News at Ten*. In a chat with the deputy Director, he remarked to me that "organisational change was accomplished through moving people's ideas and attitudes". Another journalist explained that "'the truth' was safeguarded by a

¹⁵ *Holmes* is the daily half-hour populist current affairs programme which follows *ONN@6*. It is named after its presenter Paul Holmes.

pluralistic approach to news-making" - that a journalist wrote what his or her professional judgement dictated should be written.

I watched and audio-taped as directions were given and arrangements made. I listened to the journalists chat, gossip, complain, joke and argue. The Assistant Home Editor, who was quite busy by now, nevertheless generously provided a running commentary when not occupied elsewhere, which I taped. I also made copious notes.

Observing in the studio when the bulletin went to air at 6 pm, I noticed that the 'quake' item concentrated on the fires and collapsed buildings in the Marina district, and the two-story motorway where one section collapsed onto the level underneath. Having watched the satellite feeds coming through in the afternoon, I knew that most of San Francisco had remained relatively unscathed by the 'quake. But that was another story. The one that was told was about the dramatic events at the collapsed motorway and the fires in the Marina district. The item suggested wide-spread devastation through the use of footage showing rescue teams, firemen and confused groups of locals wandering around with blazing buildings in the background and emergency services personnel trying to make a difference. Earlier I had seen, on the satellite footage from San Francisco, pans over the city taken by aerial cameras which had been set up for the World Series match being played there that day. From these, one could see that the earthquake damage was extremely localized, and that much of the city remained intact. None of this footage was included in the item.

The Assistant Home Editor was generous with his time and thoughts. He explained to me what he and others were doing and reflected at length on his experience which went back to the early 1960s when television journalism, NZ-style, was in the process of being 'invented'. As one of 'the old guard', his definition of the situation and interpretation of

the recent changes contrasted with those of some of the younger journalists I spoke to. They had not been so inculcated with the public service ethos which had oriented journalist practice before the 'discipline of the market' had been brought to bear in TVNZ's newsrooms. I went home that evening wondering how on earth I could organise such a rich variety of experiences and insight, and in what frame of reference could they all be meaningfully placed.

After two weeks observing in the newsroom, I returned home to begin the process of transcribing tapes and organising my field notes. Once again, the question was 'how'? Given the nature of my questions, and the practical constraints on what I could undertake¹⁶, I had to consider which approach would be the most fruitful in making sense of my experiences within the TVNZ newsroom.

Reviewing my journal and notes, transcribing the tapes, I began to get a sense of news-making as routinized, even standardized, industrial production. What I had seen and learnt began to organise itself within the frame of reference of a complex industrial process characterized by competing requirements and pressures. There was an interesting distinction that was becoming apparent between the discourses of the news managers, those journalists involved in the selection and production processes, and those involved in reporting. These discourses also overlapped, most noticeably where the speaker was explaining why things were done the way they were. It was very confusing - at one moment a journalist would be telling you how much conditions of practice had changed, yet at others, they suggested that their practice had, essentially, remained unchanged.

¹⁶ The way in which I framed the research problem was influenced by several types of considerations. Domestic responsibilities and financial constraints, as well as the logistical difficulties of access to a research site which was in another city, all played a part in shaping my thoughts about how to approach this complex social phenomenon.

The Department's Deputy Director told me his brief, on being appointed to the office, was to apply "the discipline of the market" to news production at TVNZ. What, I wondered, did that mean in its practical application, i.e. as social action. The commercial imperatives of maximizing audiences, options and financial returns seemed to me to conflict with the public service values the journalists invoked in explaining their intentions. But observation showed a calm and orderly newsroom in which journalists seemed at home with the routines of daily production. I was curious as to how the conflicting and competing pressures and interests engendered by the restructuring of a public sector organisation into a quasi-privatised commercial entity were experienced by the journalists.

It seemed the journalists did not consider the question and they looked blank or uncomfortable when I raised it. I was told by one journalist that "nobody here will talk about their motivation - they don't think on that plane." (Assistant Home Editor)

My perspective of the newsroom was of a community of news-workers engaged in the daily rituals and routines of news production, and I sought to understand journalists' interactions in the context of their own meaning structures. But it soon became apparent that I was going to have to answer some of the questions I was posing for myself. It is at this juncture that the critical perspective comes into play, for the journalists' accounts were unable to explain the paradoxes and contradictions and contested representations which constitute the intersubjective world of the newsroom.

I chose to frame the research context as a news-culture. The decision to use the construct of a 'culture' to structure my analysis of the news production context at TVNZ was made after carefully considering "the implications of different metaphors for thinking about the nature of organisation" and how the use of a particular metaphor "frames our understanding

... in a distinctive yet partial way." (Morgan:1986:12). Though the notion of a newsroom 'culture' is a theoretical construct, it refers to that common-sense 'world' which is objectively encountered as a given by journalists and others who work with or visit them¹⁷.

It was a term the journalists sometimes used themselves:

There's not a lot of talk within TVNZ about the nature of news. People just come in and inherit the culture that exists. (Bulletin Director)

Soon after becoming a state-owned enterprise, TVNZ was divided into profit-centres called Strategic Business Units which required a considerable change in culture for TVNZ. (General Manager, News & Current Affairs)

3.3: Strategies for Engaging the Common-Sense World.

Ethnography is actively situated *between* powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the boundaries of civilizations, cultures, classes, races, and genders. Ethnography codes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion. It describes processes of innovation and structuration, and is itself part of these processes. (Clifford & Marcus, 1986:2-3)

The open invitation extended to me by the Assistant to the Director of the Department of News and Current Affairs, to conduct my research in the newsroom as I saw fit, was generous and tempting. I wanted to immerse myself in the journalists world for an extended period of time in order to conduct a full ethnographic engagement with my subjects. However teaching, domestic and parental responsibilities meant that I could only carry out fieldwork at intervals. As the research site was in another city two hours drive away, I had to conduct field visits during teaching recesses. I also had to deal with the exigencies of being a mother to a small child. Initially, I could visit the newsroom for a whole day (7 am - 7 pm), but could be away from home only four days at a time (the period my partner had off between his shifts at work.)

¹⁷My use of the construct 'culture' was also discussed in Chapter Two, Section 2:5.

A year later when I gave birth to another daughter, I had to shorten my visits to the newsroom to four hour intervals because I was breastfeeding her. Fortunately my mother had just moved to Auckland and generously consented to be left 'holding the baby'. Being constrained to doing fieldwork between feeds meant that my periods of observation became concentrated in the late morning and early afternoon. The field data I collected was from transcripts of the many interviews I was given and informal conversations, and detailed notes I made from observing the journalists and listening in on their conversations. Being situated at one of the hubs of the newsroom, the Home Desk, (the other was the Production Desk), I had ample opportunities to observe and listen in on conversations between the Home Editor, the Foreign editor, the Assistant Home Editor and the journalists as they got on with the job. The initial two weeks in the newsroom served me well by enabling me to establish contacts and get a feel for the intersubjective context which made journalist's accounts and rationales more sensible so that later, when I could observe only sections of their day, I nevertheless understood where that fragment fitted in to the larger picture. The initial intensive period of fieldwork where I could observe for 12 hours at a time meant that I had some experience of the context to the situations occurring at those times which were being referred to and described in discussions and interviews with journalists.

Thus my research activity has drawn on the spirit of an ethnographic approach rather than been an exemplar of it. It has fallen short on some of the essential defining criteria, for example - an extended period of immersion in the culture. While my period of observation in the newsroom has been long-term, (extending from October 1989 to May 1993), it has been intermittent, being confined to a two-week period during teaching recesses (every three months on average). Another feature of my field-work which departs from the ethnographic is that my focus has been partial. I have mostly drawn on the editorial team for their definitions of the situation, and the news managers in particular. Thus my analysis

does not claim or attempt to generate a 'thick description' of the minutiae of the structures and processes constituting TVNZ news-culture. It deals with only one aspect of it - the dialectic of journalist autonomy and organisational imperatives.

To understand the way in which the world of news production was constructed by the journalists, and in order to 'safeguard the subjective point of view', I chose a critical ethnographic approach (Sarantakos,1993:265-268). Given that the interests guiding me were critical and interpretive, I felt it was the most appropriate style of inquiry into the structures and processes constituting TVNZ news-culture.

I do not like using terms like method and technique in discussing my approach to developing an analysis from the fieldwork. I have not sought to be methodical in the sense that a mechanical, well-controlled experimental design and test of statistical significance is methodical. Nor did I interpret the purpose of the research in terms of displaying a mastery of technique. Rather, I was interested in evoking what Marcus refers to as "a whole world". (Marcus,1989:7-30) By immersing myself in the common-sense world of the journalists and being guided by their definitions of the situation, I was able to discern the rules and codes ordering collective activity in the newsroom, and the diversity and multiplicity of journalistic experience.

My approach has been guided by

...two related methodological imperatives... One imperative is to give a correct representation of the organisation under study; the other is to show how the phenomenon is constituted or built up. (Clegg and Dunkerley,1980:276-277)

Given my earlier remarks about social facts as socially constructed and contested realities, I will clarify my interpretation of Clegg and Dunkerley's statement that the researcher should 'give a correct representation' of the organisation. I will do this through discussing

it in the context of the more general research problem of validation which I touched on in the opening section of this chapter.

My search for understanding journalistic practice was not concerned with the cognitive 'fit' of the news message with an 'objective' social reality. My focus has been to understand the discursive practices structuring the interplay of voices in the newsroom. It has also entailed a reflexive engagement with the process of constructing a sociological analysis from spoken narratives. To understand the common-sense world of the journalists, I turned to their language, for as Schutz reminds us, in the language of a culture are the pre-conditions for knowing.

In working with transcripts of discussions, I am textualizing the organisational life-world of the TVNZ news practitioner, assuming its multiple, complex reality to be readable (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). The transcripts provided access to the categories of meaning, the assumptions, values, ideologies and interests which constitute the natural attitude of the journalists.

The ethnographic techniques of observation and extended, unstructured interviews were used in order to access the webs of significance constructed by the journalists as they explained and accounted for their collective affairs. In order to understand how the TVNZ journalists defined their activities, responsibilities and objectives in the new situation, I immersed myself in their spontaneous discourse with all its symbolic referencing and rhetoric.

The notion of rhetoric is used here in Kenneth Burke's sense of talk about strategies for the 'encompassing of situations'; that is, meaningful, knowing action. The rhetoric of

TVNZ news practitioners is 'positioned' language, situated in the routines of the newsroom and within the institutions of the organisation. It not only maps out the collective values, the social codes and conventions which define the taken-for granted processes of television news-making, it also references the subjective unfolding of professional and organisational rationales according to the position occupied by the speaker within the hierarchical distribution of responsibility and authority in the organisation. Thus the rhetoric or explanatory speech of the journalists is structured by the discourses available to the journalists as members of the newsroom. I have chosen the construct of 'discourse' to describe the empirical phenomenon of linguistic frameworks which are situated in, and shape and constrain, journalist practices and relations.

The construct of 'discourse' is used widely in this study to emphasize the situated nature of journalists' speech, their production of meaning and the interests shaping their language.

Hartley writes that

...in order to understand a discourse we need to look more closely at the social, political and historical conditions of its production". (Hartley, 1982:6)

The construct of 'discourse' is valuable for it helps explain the organisational structuring of journalist practice without over-determining the nature of the mediation of editorial and executive control. Using the term 'discourse' reflects the bounded character of journalistic interpretations as produced by individuals who are employees of a large organisation. As

Hartley puts it:

In discourses, language-systems and social conditions meet... Whether we identify with [a discourse]... or resist it,... [w]hat we cannot do is avoid it. Our everyday interactions are structured by our social/economic/political relations; these relations are experienced through various discourses, and discourses are structured by the generative system of language. Hence in order to live in the everyday situations that feel so natural, so familiar, we must make sense of them through the meanings which discourses have established as the taken-for-granted routine of 'reality'. (ibid:6-7).

Using a discursive approach, that is, by focusing on what the journalists say they do, one

is able to identify the discourses available to the journalists with which they make sense of the situations they encounter. Through examining the interrelationship of these and other accounts of situations and events, the status of individual accounts as evidence can be assessed and conclusions drawn.

The terms 'discourse' and 'discursive' are problematic as conceptualized by Foucault in that

...he seems to relate discursive practices to social practices without ever providing an explicit answer to the question, where does discourse end and social life as such begin, if at all? (Lemert & Gillan, 1982:130)

Without denying the significance of this epistemological dilemma, I feel that the notion of 'discourse' as 'positioned' language is sufficiently clear to justify its application in the context of this research.

In designing the thesis, I have made use of extensive quotes from the journalists. I have chosen to do so because the purpose of my study has been to understand the grounds which enable the journalists to act meaningfully in their collaborative engagement in news production. The segments I have chosen from the journalists' accounts of their practice have been selected for their rich evocation of the contextuality of meaning given to their actions by the journalists. However, in the interests of coherence, I have concentrated on a strand or aspect exemplified in the quote, and passed over others in silence.

In the introduction to this thesis, I stated that the purpose of this study was to fill in 'a gap' in the available empirical data which may be drawn on by those who, either as academics or viewer-citizens or media professionals, wish to reflect upon and debate the cultural form *ONN@6*. What does it mean to talk about a 'gap' in a body of knowledge or theoretical field?

When is a gap in knowledge perceived, and by whom? Where do 'problems' come from? It is obviously more than a simple matter of noticing an error, bias, or omission. [The examples...] underline the role of political and historical factors in the discovery of discursive partiality. The epistemology this implies cannot be reconciled with a notion of cumulative scientific progress, and the partiality at stake is stronger than the normal scientific dictates that we study problems piecemeal, that we must not over-generalize, that the best picture is built up by an accretion of rigorous evidence. Cultures are not scientific 'objects' (assuming such things exist, even in the natural sciences). Culture, and our views of 'it', are produced historically, and are actively contested. There is no whole picture that can be 'filled in', since the perception and filling of a gap leads to the awareness of other gaps... If culture is not an object to be described, neither is it a unified corpus of symbols and meanings that can be definitively interpreted. Culture is contested, temporal and emergent. Representation and explanation - both by insiders and outsiders - is implicated in this emergence." (Clifford & Marcus, 1986:18-19)

I am not interested in seeking to establish the validity of my analysis by faithfully replicating a well-trodden experimental pathway which has been legitimated within the discourses of positivist social science as 'a road to truth'. I prefer the idea of 'fruitfulness' to that of 'validity'. Social research, I feel, should be judged according to whether the interpretation made - the story told - elicits a response by others to tell their own. In other words, its validity adheres in its effectiveness as an invitation to dialogue, and as a means to extending the possibilities of informed debate and social action.

I do not see my work in terms of 'capturing' or representing the whole complex phenomenon of news production at TVNZ during the transitional period. My research can yield only a 'partial truth', in that the life-world cannot be represented as a total social fact. The researcher is constrained by the issues of selection and interpretation - what to take up and what to leave out. These must be struggled with afresh, each time a new piece of research is embarked upon.

James Clifford, discussing the limits of the ethnographers 'art', reminds us of Raymond Williams' evocation of the older sense of the term 'art', that is:

...the skillful fashioning of useful artifacts. The making of ethnography is artisanal, tied to the worldly world of writing. (Clifford and Marcus:1986:6)

My earliest field enquiries showed me that the daily concern of news practitioners is with 'getting on with the job' - not with analysing the grounds of that possibility. Faced with several daily deadlines and chronic overload, discussion focuses on 'how' not 'why'. The everyday formulation of television news practice is ordered and guided by shared but unspoken attitudes and assumptions about "the nature of society, of journalists, of freedom (media, market, religion, self, as well as gender and ethnicity), of truth and the nature of transnationalism." (Davies:1989:55). Such forms of knowledge, implicit in news-making routines, are taken for granted as natural, 'gut-feelings', matters of fact rather than for reflection. The immediate preoccupations of the journalist are with story selection and treatment, meeting deadlines, and coping with technical and logistical requirements.

Perceiving themselves to be pragmatists, and academics as 'ivory-tower theorists', news professionals reject the validity of critical analyses of their products and activities as having little relevance to their reality of 'sifting facts', deadlines, and competition. Media theorists have to take some responsibility for this rejection. In analysing news practitioners' intentions and constructions in terms of their mystifying consequences, many academics have assumed the actuality of fictions of **their** own making and imputation. An unfortunate result, as Australian Rod Tiffin notes, is that

...many media practitioners have become adept at unthinkingly deflecting all criticism as ill-informed, ill-motivated or impractical. (Tiffin:1989:2)

Despite their being engaged in activities concerned with the communication of social knowledge, many journalists and academics perceive the world-view of the other to be incommensurate with their own, impeding communication and the potential benefits of dialogue between two occupational groups with much in common, being, as they are, both engaged in the slippery processes of cultural production (Farnsworth,1989).

One continuing obstacle to dialogue between New Zealand academics and journalists is that academic interests have focused on the content of television news within a political context. These analyses have shown little understanding of the institutional processes and imperatives which shape the journalists' experience and their interpretation of their experience in practice. If journalists are to acknowledge academic analyses as meaningful, let alone persuasive, then these must show cognisance of the practices and relations of those involved, as they themselves understand them to be.

3.4: Interpreting Interpretations: Theoretical and Methodological Framing of the Research Experience.

I have therefore used an interpretive approach based on a symbolic construction of culture (Weber 1947, Schutz 1967, Geertz 1973) because I seek to produce a study which begins with the world of news production as the journalists themselves understand it to be, thereby creating a common point of reference for them to consider some important factors in the determination of their practice, and its consequences.

I begin with the construct of culture because this is how the journalists speak of the news production setting - as a social milieu which is distinct to other social settings within and outside the organisation. The routinized and orderly nature of their everyday interactions in the newsroom attests to the widely shared values and standards which guide their judgements and actions, and the extent to which the journalists share in a common sense of what they do and why.

An interpretive or phenomenological approach requires understanding journalistic discourses in relation to their social determinants, the context of their production. The new managers of the TVNZ newsroom prioritized changing the culture of the newsroom as they found it when appointed in 1987. They sought to do this by carefully cultivating particular discourses within the newsroom. To use the construct of 'culture' is not to assert that the term denotes a unified corpus of symbolic meanings and patterned social action that can be definitively interpreted. It is, however, integrated, in the sense that while it is contested, temporal and emergent, it remains meaningful and compelling to its members.

The focus of my inquiry into TVNZ news-culture is the dialectic of journalist and

organisation during the transitional period immediately subsequent to the public service news organisation being restructured as a business unit and news production subjected to a commercial logic. Thus my understanding of the journalists was shaped by my perceiving them as employees of a complex organisation. I therefore interpreted their definitions of the situation in the context of their production within a stratified, hierarchical corporate world, characterized by competing yet overlapping requirements and pressures.

Therefore, my interpretation moves from journalists' typifications to uncover the conceptual structures which make their world meaningful to them, and to uncover the intentions and interests shaping meaning production in TVNZ news-culture. In doing so, I construct an interpretation which goes beyond the journalistic frame of reference to consider the constitution of social interests in speech, and the way in which symbolic forms - language - intersect with relations of power. Thus the way I approach, analytically, the dialectic of journalist and organisation, is in the context of looking at how meaning is mobilized within a social setting in order to support individuals and groups who occupy positions of power.

The power of news executives to impose their version of 'good television journalism' on the journalists is legitimated by the conferring of authority through executive status, and by the journalistic norm of 'the editor has the final say'. Therefore my analysis takes a Weberian view of social relations in the newsroom, explaining the legitimation of relations of domination through appealing to the legality of enacted rules - in this instance - editorial authority.

To move from an ethnographic focus to consider how social power is exercised in a particular context is consistent with the interpretive principle that where an interpretation comes from does not determine where it can be compelled to go. Geertz held that social

facts speak to issues, because they are made to.(Geertz,1973:23) That he himself did not chose to adopt a critical perspective and concern himself with the way in which symbolic forms intersected with relations of power, does not preclude an interpretive theorist from doing so. The interpretive principle that one considers the production of meaning in light of its significance within the wider cultural context, supports the conceptual integrity of a study which builds a critical inflection into its analysis. One of the strengths of the phenomenological approach is that it is open-ended. While one may begin with the descriptions of their experience given by research subjects, these may be further elaborated by others whose experience of a series of descriptions enables them to move beyond the perspectives defined by the research subjects themselves. The critical perspective enters naturally as part of my interpretation, my own hermeneutic engagement with the phenomenon being studied and, in doing so, strengthens the overall analytic framework.

News production is a complex industrial process which is affected by numerous intra- and inter-organisational influences and pressures, as I recognised in my concluding remarks in Chapter two. My inquiry is concerned with a significant intra-organisational determinant of journalism at TVNZ - the managerial shaping of journalistic discourse to ensure broad conformity with organisational interests during a period of cultural transformation. Through the organisation of my thesis, I have sought to place this aspect of TVNZ news-culture within a historical and organisational context. Thus while my methodology is mainly ethnographic, Part Two of the thesis sets out the historical context which has produced and shaped the contemporary culture of news production at TVNZ to account for a production culture which is both historically constituted and organisationally defined.

Chapter Four establishes the historical context shaping the emergence of television journalism within publicly/state-owned broadcasting in New Zealand. This chapter shows

that a defining feature of New Zealand broadcasting is the long history of official resistance to broadcast journalism being practiced independently of the state's interests. It places in context, the present situation in which the hegemony of the state has been replaced by the hegemony of the market.

Chapter Five establishes the significance of the programme/product *ONN@6*, within the contemporary organisational context of TVNZ as a SOE. It is within these historical and institutional contexts that the ethnographic interpretation of the editorial determination of meaning within TVNZ news-culture is placed.

PART TWO:

THE HISTORICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

OF

NEWS PRODUCTION AT TELEVISION NEW ZEALAND LTD.

On the next two pages, in Figure 1: The Political and Organisational Structure of NZ Broadcasting, I set out a table summarizing key features of the historical emergence of a national broadcasting structure in New Zealand. The time-line from 1920-1980 is taken from Stewart and Moss (Edgar and Rahim, 1983). I have adapted and extended it to deal specifically with N.Z. *television* policy and structures from 1980 - 1993.)

Year	Governments	Acts	Broadcasting Organizations	Major Reports and Events
1980	National	Broadcasting Act	Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand	June 1975, Second Television Channel July 1973, "Broadcasting Future for N.Z." July 1971, Broadcasting Authority Report on Second Television Channel 1968, Broadcasting Authority Established
			Broadcasting Council of New Zealand	
1975	Labour		New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation	
1970	National			
1965				
1960	Labour	Broadcasting Corporation Act	New Zealand Broadcasting Service	June 1960, Television Commences
1955	National			
1950	Labour	Broadcasting Act	National and Commercial Broadcasting Services	April 1943, Name changed to N.Z. Broadcasting Service 1937, Commercial Service July 1936, National Broadcasting Service March 1936, First Broadcast of Parliament
1945				
1940				
1935	Reform/United Coalition	Broadcasting Board January 1932	Radio Broadcasting Company April 1925	January 1923, First Broadcasting Regulations February 1922, First Regular Station November 1921, First Radio Broadcast
1930	United			
1925	Reform			
1920				

Figure 1.
The Political and Organizational Structure of Broadcasting

1993	National		TVNZ LTD & RNZ	Dec: Privy Council rejects Maori Council's appeal over transfer of broadcasting assets. Maori Broadcasting Agency <i>Te Reo Whakapuaki Iirangi</i> established by the Crown to administer Maori broadcasting funding allocation.
1992				Dec: Geary replaces Corban as Chairman of TVNZ Board
1991	National	B/C Act 1989 Amendment allowing 100% foreign ownership of NZ broadcasting companies.		
1990				Oct: TVNZ Ltd May: SKY begins transmission division of Networks formed to take over resp. for television broadcasting within TVNZ Ltd.
1989		BROADCASTING ACT	BCNZ	TV3 begins: Nov 26 July: B/C Act comes into force, B/C Tribunal dissolved
1988		BROADCASTING AMENDMENT ACT (No.2) (set down legislative basis and provided for the transitional arrangements for the restructuring of the BCNZ into two state-owned enterprises.) RADIO & RELATED TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT		Dec 1: BCNZ replaced by S.O.E's TVNZ Ltd & RNZ Ltd. Maori Council injunction placed against asset transfers to B/C. SOEs. July: Steering Committee on Restructuring BCNZ on S.O.E. Principles 'Rennie Report' August: Officials Coordinating Committee report 'Implementation of b/c policy reform
1987	Labour	Telecommunications Act, 1987		Oct: Sharemarket Crash and World Recession Prebble replaces Hunt as Minister of Broadcasting B/C Tribunal 'Third Channel' Warrant Decision
1986		S.O.E. ACT 1986		April: Waitangi Tribunal's Te Reo Maori Report Royal Commission 'Chapman Report'
1985				Royal Commission on Broadcasting begins
1984	Labour			July, Treasury Report 'Economic Management' June: Labour becomes govt. B/C Tribunal 'Third Channel' process begins
1980	National			TVNZ established
DATE	GOVERNMENT	LEGISLATION		SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

CHAPTER FOUR: THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BROADCASTING AND BROADCAST JOURNALISM (TELEVISION) IN NEW ZEALAND.

We need to understand media texts in the context of the institutions that circulate them, including in that context the prevailing and changing histories of these institutions. (Moran,1992:Foreword)

The publics of New Zealand have been as deeply engaged with the broadcasting services as have those services in turn with the state. (Butterworth, 1989:149)

4.0: Introduction:

To prepare the grounds from which an interpretation of contemporary TVNZ journalism might be theorized, we need first of all to understand the historically unique pressures, interests and ideologies which have shaped the conditions of its possibility. In this chapter, beginning with the national radio service, I set out the shifting structural frameworks and historical forces which characterize and have shaped the emergence and development of television journalism within New Zealand's public broadcasting organisations.

4.1: The Emergence of New Zealand Broadcasting: 1903-1935.

The official response to the emergent medium of wireless was one of extreme caution. Seddon's Liberal Government was not interested in the state being involved in developing the technology or researching its application. Nevertheless, it desired to establish a state monopoly over the incipient technology just as it had previously with the telegraph and sea cable (Hall,1980:2).

The Liberal Government of New Zealand was the first to regulate the use of the new communications medium. In 1903, it passed the Wireless Telegraphy Act, securing state control over the direction and ownership of the nascent technology of radio and ensuring further developments remained within its jurisdiction.

Some officials believed it was going to be a passing fad (*ibid*:5) Rather than fade, however, the use of radio as an entertaining leisure activity increased in popularity. Initially a hobby of 'backyard' amateur enthusiasts, by the 1920s 'the wireless' had been incorporated into domestic life. The marvellous capacity of radio to extend the boundaries of personal experience through radio was captivating and public enthusiasm for the technology was widespread.

In Britain, public expectations of access via radio, to events of national importance, developed quickly. The BBC's first Director-General, John Reith, commented on this phenomenon in his 1924 treatise *Broadcast Over Britain*.

There is a grumble and a cause of complaining if the crofter in the North of Scotland or the agricultural labourer in the West of England has been unable to hear the King speak on some great national occasion, the Prime Minister at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, or the president of the British Association tell of the latest explorations in the borderlands of scientific knowledge. The music and the news and the other happenings of the great cities must be brought to them as a matter of course. (Reith:1924:15)

In Britain, the potential of broadcasting to serve the public interest as a democratic instrument was quickly perceived and a state monopoly formed to administer broadcasting as a public trust. In order that this public service be protected from political interference, the BBC was granted autonomy by Royal Charter in 1925. The guiding ethos Reith defined for the state broadcasting organisation was emancipatory. The purpose of broadcasting was to enlighten and 'uplift' the common folk through educational talks and cultivating their aesthetic sensibilities to the standards valued by his own class. The

concept of public service, in Reith's mind, had, as a core element, an ideal of broadcasting's role in the formation of an informed and reasoned public opinion as an essential part of the political process in a mass democratic society. (Scannell,1990:16)

While Reith's liberatory vision of broadcasting as a public good was weakened in its application through underlying cultural, gender and class biases, the model he developed for the organisation of broadcasting provided an ideal that has had international appeal.

The principles underpinning a public service broadcasting structure have been summarized by Madge:

- *Broadcasting should be universally available;
- *It should in its output, cater to a catholicity of tastes;
- *There should be universality of payment;
- *Broadcasting should be distanced from governments;
- *Broadcasting should be distanced from commerce. (Madge,1989:207)

McQuail writes: "While the concept of the public interest has been slippery and controversial (see Held, 1970), a simple definition, drawn from the field of public planning says that something 'is in the public interest if it serves the ends of the whole society rather than those of some sectors of the society' (Blanfield,1955)." (McQuail,1987:70-71).

In New Zealand, the architects of the initial national broadcasting structure looked to the BBC and Reithian principles of public service broadcasting (summarized above) as a guide. However, the political will to grant the nascent broadcasting service independence from political interference via a formal covenant was lacking. As a consequence, the development and consolidation of New Zealand public broadcasting structures have continually been hampered by political interference and opportunism.

Nevertheless, radio brought a pleasurable new dimension to the lives of New Zealanders. For the first time, they were party to events which, hitherto, had been the privilege of only a few to experience. Special broadcasts of ceremonies and events, and the reporting of tragedies and heroic achievements of national significance served to involve New Zealanders in events which, in turn, developed their interest in matters beyond those of their immediate experience (Hall,*op.cit*:22-31). In contrast to the print media, which tended to foster the provincial interests and regional identity of its readership, the immediacy and

intimacy of radio made broadcasting "a cohesive social force that contributed substantially to the growth of a national consciousness" (*ibid*:28). Radio also delivered a companionship newspapers could not match. Its convivial intimacy won a place for 'radio' in the hearts of many New Zealanders. In providing a source of pleasure and recreation, it acquired great popularity and quickly became entrenched in family routines.

The era of organised broadcasting was ushered in with the gazetting of the Radio Telegraph Regulations for Amateur Experimental and Broadcasting Stations on 18 January 1923 (*ibid*:13). In 1921 Prime Minister Coates had advised Parliament that 'the Government would not go in for broadcasting' (Day,forthcoming:13) but would license private enterprise to operate radio services (Hall,*op.cit.*:11).

The regulations defined broadcasting as a 'serious' enterprise, suitable for the dissemination of 'information'¹⁸ and 'fireside entertainments', but inappropriate to be used as a commercial instrument. The broadcasting of advertising, and "any communication of a seditious, profane, obscene, libellous or offensive nature", or "of propaganda of a controversial nature", was made illegal (*ibid*:13). The regulations required all potential listeners and broadcasters to be licenced (5 shillings for listeners, 2 pounds for broadcasters), for which they had to present a character reference and statutory declaration.

Between December 1922 and the end of March 1924, there was a fivefold increase in the number of licensed listeners. The quality of the services offered by the trade stations, however, did not live up to the lofty vision implicit in the 1923 regulations. Unable to draw revenue from advertising or the licence fee (which went to the Post & Telegraph

¹⁸ Defining what constituted 'information' as opposed to 'propaganda' was the privilege of the Post and Telegraph Radio Inspectors.

Department), the radio stations were limited in what they could provide in the way of entertainment and educational talks.

Public pressure on the government for a *national* service increased after a licence fee increase of 500% in March 1925. The government responded by amending the 1903 Wireless Telegraphy Act to allow private investors to establish and extend a national broadcasting system and improve the quality of transmission and programmes. There was no interest shown initially, due to the prohibitive conditions imposed by the state (*ibid*:15). However, by August, the government had entered a contract with two entrepreneurs to set up the Radio Broadcasting Company of New Zealand. The company was contracted to establish services in the four major cities, Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin.

When setting up the Wellington station 2YA, the Company directors created a position of 'editor', as distinct from that of 'announcer' with the brief to arrange and edit a 7 pm 'news' hour. J. Ball, the appointee, is credited with being New Zealand's first broadcast journalist. However, while appreciative of the 'power of the spoken word', the directors failed to see radio's capacity for immediacy or the value of employing journalists to produce an independent news service¹⁹.

At this time, broadcast 'news' services were conceived of in the same terms as the programming staple, 'radio talks' - a utilitarian vehicle for the dissemination of practical information. The intention was to provide a "service for country listeners, a means of conveying to farmers functional information... more rapidly than newspaper delivery would allow." (Gregory,1985:20).

¹⁹New Zealand's newspaper cartel, economically and politically powerful by the 1880s, may also have been persuasive in this regard. They managed to maintain an intractable monopoly over news services in New Zealand until 1962.

Much to his chagrin, the news service's editor, Ball, had to put the evening bulletin together from items 'lifted' from cable news, BBC broadcasts and local newspapers (not necessarily the same day's) (Hall,*op.cit.*:24). The hour-long programme was filled mainly with educational material such as the farming report (which included stock market prices and matters of agricultural interest), book reviews and 'lecturettes' by "civil servants, academics and specialists" (Sullivan, 1987:15; Hall,*op.cit.*:24).

Some aspects of the service were extended and improved under the Broadcasting Company. Broadcasts to schools for an hour each week-day afternoon were begun in April 1931, although the service was suspended several times in the following two years as funding pressures increased with the deepening economic crisis of the Depression. (Carter,1993:207) Overall, the Company did not satisfy public and government expectations of a quality national service. On the expiry of the Company's licence in November 1931, its stations were nationalised as a state enterprise to be administered by a government-appointed Broadcasting Board (Hall,*op.cit.*:48).

The 19 privately-owned stations, called B stations, continued to operate privately, but were refused official permission to advertise. This was an enduring point of contention for they had no access to the revenue from the licence fees which had gone to the Broadcasting Company, nor were they allowed to operate their trade stations on a commercial basis. As Day puts it, "the B stations could exist, but could not earn a living." (Day,1991:10). Despite vigorous lobbying by their supporters, the B Stations continued to struggle to survive under ambiguous guidelines which allowed them to arrange programme sponsorship, but prevented them from advertising "in any shape or form." (Hall,*op.cit.*:53).

Some progress was made in the area of information programming. In March 1935, the last

full year of its existence, the Broadcasting Board lifted the prohibition on broadcasting 'controversial' material. A 'Talks Department' was created and the journalist, poet and novelist A.E. Mulgan appointed as Supervisor of Talks. Under his leadership, the range of topics covered by the stations was extended, including some restrained discussions of international crises such as the Spanish Civil War, and Europe. It was, however, another 20 years before contentious domestic affairs were seen to be fit material for discussion over the airwaves.

Historically, it may be argued, New Zealand society has been characterized by a prevailing political belief in 'majority rule' which denied the legitimacy of conflict and dissent. In the early 1930s, when class relations were being placed under extreme pressure by the economic crisis of the Great Depression, the prevailing political ideology was that

... politics should be confined within the four walls of Parliament lest it threaten the delicate fabric of social consensus. 'Politics' could be given reign only periodically, at election times, and then only with vigilant handling. Governments were elected to govern and should be allowed to do so unhindered by public debate and disputation. (Gregory,*op.cit.*:19-20)

The official exclusion of political debate from the permitted subjects for broadcasting precluded the development of a form of broadcast journalism which was guided by the occupational ideology of informing citizens so they can participate in the democratic process. Rather, the parameters of the Broadcasting Board's news service were defined by the prevailing norm that 'politics belonged in Parliament'.

In present-day terms, the timidity of the service was remarkable. In 1932, 2YA (the Wellington station) had "withheld the news of riots by groups of unemployed workers." (Edgar & Rahim,1983:274). In 1934, the world-renowned religious philosopher, Krishnamurti, was banned outright from broadcasting in N.Z. That same year, a B (private) station was prevented from broadcasting the epilogue of a play by George Bernard Shaw,

which was to be read in honour of the playwright during his visit to New Zealand. In July, two academics had papers rejected by the Post and Telegraph Department on the grounds that the content of the talks would be offensive to public standards of decency and good taste.

The following year, in which there was to be a General Election, "an outside broadcast from a public function attended by the Governor General was cut off when one guest rose to speak; he had been nominated for a seat in the coming election and regulations prohibited any parliamentary candidate from broadcasting." (Carter, 1993:203) On the eve of the election, the Post and Telegraph Department authorized the jamming of the populist broadcaster 'Uncle Scrim's'²⁰ 'Friendly Road' programme because officials feared that he would endorse the Labour Party (Hall,*op.cit.*:78). As it turned out, the Labour Party won the election, becoming the first Labour Government in New Zealand's political history.

4.2: Broadcasting and the State: 1935-1962.

After becoming the Government in 1935, Labour established a state broadcasting monopoly under the control of two new state departments. A new portfolio, Minister in Charge of Broadcasting, was created and taken up by the Prime Minister, Michael Joseph Savage, who was acutely aware of radio's potential for a Labour Government, given the anti-Labour bias of the country's newspapers. (Gregory,*op.cit.*:17). Parliamentary broadcasts began in 1936 in order, the Prime Minister argued, that citizens could hear political debate for themselves and form their own opinions rather than being dependent upon the selective and prejudiced interpretations of the conservative press.

New Zealand, at this time, "had the world's fourth highest density of radio licenses, some

²⁰ For an account of the colourful and controversial 'Uncle Scrim', see Day, 1991:9-17.

200,000" (Maharey,1987:6) which presented the Government with commercial as well as political opportunities to seize upon. Labour purchased the privately-owned trade or B stations, and lifted the long-standing ban on radio advertising in order to create a National Commercial Broadcasting Service. The opening up of a new advertising market made the NCBS highly profitable. These revenues were used to subsidize the National Broadcasting Service, which continued to receive the radio licence fee, and to expand the radio service into a national network. A period of cultural expansion also began, under the stewardship of Professor James Shelley who was appointed as Director of the National Broadcasting Service in 1936.

Shelley's vision as Director drew on the Reithian ethos of using radio to 'culturally enlighten' the people through 'unifying' them in a common appreciation of 'finer things' and heightening awareness of their common interests. Shelley sought to provide 'quality' cultural experiences for New Zealanders through raising professional standards within New Zealand broadcasting and through broadcasting 'the best of what was available'. While open to criticisms of elitism, Shelley's interests and talents were considerable and through initiatives, such as setting up what was to become the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, his contribution to the cultural life of the nation was remarkable (Carter, 1993).

Despite the progress made in the areas of capital and cultural expansion, the state broadcasting monopoly remained mired in political conservatism. Labour reimposed the ban on controversy which had been lifted only a year before and although, Shelley saw in radio the means to create "the machinery of a true democracy" (*ibid*:206), the government's appropriation of the NBS for its own purposes was a significant obstacle to the realization of this ideal.

In September 1937 an Official News Service, produced in the Prime Minister's Department, began to be broadcast on the NBS and the NCBS. Its purpose, the Government explained, was to provide citizens with an alternative interpretation of its policies than those given them by the newspapers. Ostensibly to inform citizens, the 'good news' policy implicit in the bulletin's construction ensured that they were "to be a people informed, rather than an informed people." (Gregory,*op.cit.*:20).

Until the end of Labour's term in 1949, the Official News Service functioned principally as a government vehicle for press releases from its various departments. The bulletin's journalistic torpor is highlighted by the complaints raised in Parliament in 1947 after a NZBS news bulletin broadcast failed to report a major rail accident in Auckland that had happened four hours earlier. (NZPD, Vol.278:pp.366-372)

Listeners and the Opposition frequently criticised the partisan nature of the NBS and NCBS's news service. However, when National became the government in 1949, they were reluctant to abandon what served as an effective official publicity channel. In the end, the only change they chose to make was to shift responsibility for the news service from the Prime Minister's Department to the Department of Tourism and Publicity.

In broadcasting generally, however, services were becoming more professional. Transmission ranges progressively extended and by 1949, there were some provincial stations servicing local areas. The credibility of broadcast news services, however, remained low. They were widely perceived to be little more than a government handout service, padded with material which had already been read in the newspapers.

The close links between the Government and radio news production was made particularly

evident in the NZBS's coverage of the industrial crisis of 1951 which

... almost exclusively vilified the watersiders and those striking in support of them, while praising the government's handling of the conflict. (Gregory,*op.cit.*:21)

The failure of successive governments to relinquish political control over the news service remained an enduring source of frustration for broadcasters who felt that "the lack of an adequate domestic news service was 'by far the greatest weakness of the NZBS'." (J.H. Hall quoted in Gregory,*op.cit.*:33).

As an assistant Director of Broadcasting, Hall argued that the government must allow broadcast journalists to serve the "political functions of public service broadcasting." (*ibid*) In support of the broadcast journalists' struggle to professionalize²¹ the news service, Hall conducted a content survey. He showed that in the period between late 1955 and early 1956, 81% of the bulletin's items had been supplied by the publicity division of the Department of Tourism and Publicity. The results of this survey were used by Hall to lobby the Minister of Broadcasting in the interests of establishing an independent broadcast news operation, on the grounds that:

...the broadcasting of news is a public duty that a publicly-owned Broadcasting Service ought to take seriously... [People] should at least be given the opportunity to be informed of the day-to-day activities of their own nation. (*ibid*)

The Minister's response was to consult with the Director of Information Services of the Tourist and Publicity Department. He reassured the Minister that government control "ensured that a balanced view is maintained on matters with which the government is concerned, e.g. industrial troubles, political controversy, etc." (*ibid*:32) The Minister of Broadcasting agreed with this analysis and the status-quo remained undisturbed.

²¹ By this I refer to the employment of an experienced staff deliberately required to prepare copy independent of political, religious and other pressure group considerations.

The lack of political will to set up an independent news service within the New Zealand Broadcasting Service was not the only obstacle to the emergence of professional broadcast journalism in New Zealand. During the 1950s, the NZBS attempted four times to secure a contract with the New Zealand Press Association which would give the NZBS access to the NZPA's wire service. The NZPA viewed the NZBS as a potentially powerful competitor and refused its repeated requests.

The NZBS, having failed to tap into the news net of the press, began tentatively to expand its own news operation. Regionally-based correspondents were commissioned and some of the NZBS staff around the country were assigned to 'quasi-journalist' roles. In 1957, a proposal by the NZBS for a "daily news bulletin, with separate bulletins for the national and commercial divisions" (Gregory,*op.cit.*:32) was submitted to the Minister in Charge of Broadcasting. A general election slowed the decision-making process and it was not until September 1960 that approval came through to appoint an Editor "who would be responsible to the Director for the organisation, development and supervision of the news service." (*ibid*:33)

Another general election then intervened. The new Minister of Broadcasting supported the appointment but

...the inflationary economic situation at the time left Treasury unimpressed with the plan. It recommended 'no economic or financial priority at the present time'. In its view, the proposed enterprise would largely duplicate the services already provided by the press; it would be hard to obtain the 20 journalists required, and the attempt to do so would create undesirable competition with the newspapers and the Tourist and Publicity Department. (*ibid*:33-34)

While the proposal was under review, the introduction of television became a public issue in New Zealand. The government seemed reluctant to rush into anything - the question of whether television should be introduced into New Zealand had begun to be considered by

a committee of inquiry set up in the 1940s. It did not report until 1957. The official inertia was subject to intensifying pressure from public and private investors. In 1959, the NZBS began experimental television transmissions from their Auckland studios²² and on 1 June 1960, regional transmissions began in the four national centres.

After some vacillation, the incoming National Government decided to set up a public broadcasting corporation to administer both radio and television services. Seeing the prospect of quasi-independence as a public corporation, the broadcasters took the initiative and circumvented Treasury's resistance by appointing an Editor who in turn

...recruited an initial staff of six journalists. In December, 1961, an early evening news bulletin was introduced on the commercial stations. (*ibid*:34)

4.3: The Invention of Television News: The 1960s.

Television news production began initially in the New Zealand Broadcasting Service's Auckland studios and was produced in the format Briggs refers to as 'radiovision'²³, i.e. a radio service plus *some* images, mainly of the newsreader.

The production team consisted of a scriptwriter and news-compiler who assembled the newsreel from week-old BBC bulletins. In 1961, the NZBS joined the British Commonwealth International News Agency (BCINA) and short newsreels from around the world became available.

These took only one or two days to reach Auckland, where the individual items were viewed, cut, scripted and compiled into newsreels. (Boyd-Bell,1985:93).

²²"The 'first official transmission' one night in May 1959 included a film on hydatids, a Health Department instructional film of eating houses, a Transport Department film on road accidents, and a court case." The New Zealand Television Society, a public lobby group formed to press for the establishment of television services bemoaned "the 'dismal spectacle' of no entertainment whatsoever!" (Boyd-Bell,1985:71)

²³ See Asa Briggs *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol.4: Sound and Vision*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

The studio was able to run a newsreel three times a week with, occasionally, a locally produced item also being shown.

During 1961 the Christchurch and Wellington television stations opened and the NZBS moved to establish a national radio and television news service centred in Wellington... The newsreel was screened at 'about' 7 o'clock along with the weather forecast, and each of the three channels in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch were including items commissioned from local cameramen. (*ibid*:94)

The evening news bulletin's first ratings survey, taken four months after it first went to air, showed the intense audience interest in 'news'. The by-now nightly newsreel was

...the top programme in Auckland and Wellington, although in Christchurch it came second to *You Asked For It*. At the same time, the news headlines rated fourth in all centres. (*ibid*:94)

The immediate popularity of the television news bulletin has been attributed to its novelty (Day, Personal Communication). The combination of pictures and 'news', which could be watched and shared at home, was a compelling and successful combination. New Zealanders had never experienced the kind of news service which became available to them through the newly-independent NZBC. However, the television journalists were working within a conservative and bureaucratic structure which applied significant constraints to their professional autonomy. The novelty of television made the news bulletin appealing but many viewers were dissatisfied by the narrowness of its editorial range which reduced the programme to little more than "...an offshoot of a government department, another publicity department in fact." (NZBC Journalist, Personal Communication:1992)

The preconditions for professional broadcast journalism were created when the state established the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation to administer a radio and television monopoly in April 1962. The NZBC was a public utility which generated income through a mixed system of licence fees and advertising revenues. As one commentator wryly observed thirty years later, public television in New Zealand was "born commercial and the

wails over this creation have never subsided." (Smith,1992[b]:55)

At its first meeting, the NZBC's three-man board decided to establish a news department to serve both its radio and television divisions (which it continued to do, except for a brief period in the mid 1970s, until 1988). It had taken the broadcasters ten years to obtain an official commitment to establish what they hoped would be "a news service which operated according to genuine journalistic norms." (Gregory,*op.cit.*:94)

However, although the organisation of New Zealand broadcasting as a public corporation implied operating independence from the state, the professional autonomy sought by the NZBC journalists remained elusive. Reflecting the conditions obtaining at that time in New Zealand's public corporations generally, the

NZBC developed as a strictly hierarchical and bureaucratic organisation, with its upper echelons staffed and controlled by administrators, many of whom were drawn from radio. There was a high degree of codification present, for example, with two books of regulations to cover all aspects of procedures and operations, and a strongly centralized command structure based on common notions of seniority and deference. (Farnsworth,1992:194)

Within this institutional setting, New Zealand's first television journalists set about their business.

The appointment of R.E. Coury as the NZBC's first Editor²⁴ in 1961 marks the beginning of the News Department as an entity. Before coming to the NZBC, Coury had been the Prime Minister's press secretary during Labour's 1957-60 second term of government. But for most of the 1950s, he had been Bulletin Editor of the NZBS's nightly 9 pm news. The production style Coury had acquired while working in the Tourism and Publicity Department altered little when he took up editorial responsibilities at the NZBC, according

²⁴ Coury held this position for the next decade.

to one journalist who worked with him. (Personal Communication).

News production began on a regional basis, with each of the regional stations producing a bulletin according to their own schedules.

In March 1962, a policy pronouncement attempted to coordinate the output, announcing that in future there would be a short five minute spoken news bulletin and weather summary on all stations at 7.p.m. and at closedown. The NZBC newsreel would screen at 8 o'clock every night, including national and international material as well as a selection of local items exchanged between the individual stations. With minor variations the system survived over the next ten years until the arrival of the national network in late 1969. (Boyd-Bell,*op.cit.*:93)

The production in 1963 of a 7.30pm bulletin integrating spoken news and film inserts, *NZBC Reports*, marked the transition from a predominantly newsreel service to "the country's first television news bulletin as such." (*ibid*:84)

The following year James Kemp, the BBC's Scottish news editor, was seconded to review the NZBC's news service. In his report, he questioned the standards of journalism at the NZBC and recommended that a Controller of News and Current Affairs be appointed to upgrade the professionalism of the service. This was viewed favourably by the National Government who, it has been suggested, were nervous about Coury's past association with Labour. The position of Controller removed Coury's direct link with the NZBC's Director-General thereby weakening his authority within the organisation. (*ibid*:69)

The NZBC's first Controller of News and Current Affairs was Waldo Macguire, the head of BBC television news. Seconded to the NZBC for a year, Macguire sought to establish a pool of senior, experienced broadcast journalists and, in general, raise the profile of its news department within the NZBC (Boyd-Bell,*op.cit.*:95). The budget of what became the Department of News and Current Affairs was doubled and regional editors were appointed in Auckland and Christchurch. It was Macguire's influence which introduced into the

NZBC the first moves towards allowing its broadcast journalists to touch on political debate.

Macguire instituted broadcast coverage of the major political party conferences. He also proposed a current affairs programme which could serve as an "outlet for political controversy". The result was *Compass*, a weekly half-hour current affairs programme, which began in 1964 and soon became "a foremost vehicle for vigorous political exchange" in New Zealand. (*ibid*:52).

While the establishment and consolidation of a public information service was a primary commitment of the BCNZ's Board and Director-General, politicians were "highly sensitive to the possible effects of broadcasting news upon their own interests." (*ibid*:73). Coming into production at a time when the domestic political consensus was disintegrating under the pressure of growing differences between constituencies within New Zealand society, the NZBC's news and current affairs programmes generated considerable political sensitivity, both outside and within the organisation.

4.4: The Struggle to Define the 'Independence' of the NZBC.

From its inception, the administration of the NZBC was fraught with conflict. Tensions were initially generated by the Government's concern over the cost of expanding television transmission and facilities into a national television service. The NZBC's administrators resented what they perceived to be the Government's procrastination over their proposals, particularly the recommendation of a second television channel. Intra-organisational tensions were also mounting as the Minister for Broadcasting, the NZBC Board, the NZBC's Director-General, and the journalists sought to implement their different agendas in defining the nature and extent of the independence of the public corporation.

For a short time after the NZBC had been established, the Director-General, Gilbert Stringer, held responsibility. By 1964, the Government felt that he had too much control. The resignation of the Chairman of the NZBC board in March 1965 marked the point at which the politically-appointed board, in particular its new chairman, began to assume a much greater role in the NZBC's affairs. (*ibid*:45-47)

Stringer was in a difficult position. He was wary of the NZBC board members whom he felt were business-men with no knowledge or understanding of the special nature of broadcasting. He insisted to the NZBC Board and the Minister for Broadcasting that, as Director-General, he was also Editor-in-Chief and, in that capacity, was obliged to protect the integrity and independence of the Corporation's journalism.

The NZBC journalists, however, regarded Stringer with suspicion, particularly after he had publicly stated that the press was "a better vehicle for expressing the clash of public issues." (*ibid*:77). Stringer's career in public administration and his distaste for controversy were perceived by the journalists as evidence that he had no genuine commitment to supporting their efforts to cover public issues as their professional judgement dictated. Events such as 'the Bick Affair'²⁵, when Stringer appeared to the journalists to be caving in to political pressure by cancelling a *Compass* programme, confirmed their suspicions.

Gregory suggests that Stringer was in the invidious position of being faced with the "virtually impossible demand" of satisfying two very different sets of interests within the NZBC. As Director-General, he became "something of a martyr" in the struggle between conservative administrators, whose style had been shaped by long service in the NZBS, and

²⁵ The banning of a *Compass* programme on decimal currency led to the resignation of its producer, Gordon Bick, in September 1966. See Gregory, 1985:74-76.

journalistic staff eager to grasp the opportunities they saw to "impel New Zealand's politicians - some sullenly resentful - into a new democratic era." (*ibid*:76-78)

Thus from the beginning of the Corporation, there existed a mutually suspicious relationship between the NZBC's administrative hierarchy and the journalists. According to Gregory, the latter were watchful

...for any sign that the executives were willing to compromise the ideal of journalistic independence, and the need for continuing negotiation with the NZBC's political autonomy together comprised the two jaws of an administrative vice that closed relentlessly upon the corporations' top management. (*ibid*:75)

However, he does acknowledge that:

To speak of a mutually suspicious relationship between the journalists and the administrative hierarchy is to over-generalize. It over-looks the fact that certain officers, such as the editors of the news service and of current affairs, and the controller of news and public (later current) affairs, trod a middle ground between the administrative and professional domains. Nevertheless relations between the two groups were generally characterized by a tension between the bureaucratic preoccupation with hierarchical control and the propensity of a professional group to resist that control whenever it is seen to threaten its own norms and values. (*ibid*)

The NZBC's news bulletins continued to be, on the whole, deferential to the country's political masters until 1969 when a current affairs programme, *Gallery*, redefined the possibilities of what a NZBC current affairs programme might attempt to accomplish.

Gallery was

...a new phenomenon in the context of New Zealand radio and television: virtually for the first time in its history public broadcasting was seen clearly to be a vehicle for open political disputation rather than a purveyor of officially-prescribed information. (*ibid*:52)

Gregory attributes the unprecedented autonomy of the programme's producer to blurred lines of responsibility due to an internal reorganisation of the NZBC during 1968-1969 and

the preoccupation of the corporation's management with Broadcasting Authority hearings.²⁶

The exceptional television coverage of the Vietnam war plus the anti-war demonstrations in New Zealand's larger cities meant that the NZBC journalists were cutting their teeth "on the most dramatic and emotionally-charged issue of the times." Their coverage of socially divisive controversies led to the NZBC journalists being accused of bias with "too much air time being given to minority groups, to deviant forms of social behaviour, and in particular to youthful protesters." (*ibid*:54)

Conservatives within the community were incensed at what they felt to be the NZBC journalists' lack of balance in reporting these contentious issues. The view was upheld by the NZBC Board who complained that "news and current affairs concentrated too much on 'negative' and 'destructive' aspects of social behaviour at the expense of the 'positive' and 'constructive'." (*ibid*:53)

By the late 1960s, the NZBC's Department of News and Current Affairs had become the subject, as well as the conduit, of considerable controversy. Current affairs and news bulletins were criticized for undermining public order by devoting "too much time to New Zealand's strikes, protests and grizzles". (*ibid*:81) Politicians, conservatives in general, and the NZBC Board in particular, were critical of what they saw as the lack of balance in some of the department's programmes²⁷. Relations between NZBC journalists and administration grew increasingly strained. In 1969, the National government established the

²⁶The programmes producer became answerable to three different people - the manager of the Wellington station, the chief producer at head office, and the Editor, Current Affairs.

²⁷ See Gregory, 1985:74-75 and Boyd-Bell, 1985:99-102 for accounts of controversial NZBC Current Affairs programmes. Boyd-Bell also discusses the significance of the NZBC's coverage of the *Wahine* disaster as a benchmark in the consolidation of professional television journalism in New Zealand (p.95).

New Zealand Broadcasting Authority and through the mechanism of government appointees, enabled them to increase their influence on the NZBC.

After the establishment of the Broadcasting Authority, a Commission of Inquiry was set up to assess tenders for a second television channel. The NZBC had been pressing for a second channel since the early 1960s but the National government resisted the suggestion. As a result of the Commission of Inquiry, however, a second channel was proposed. The successful bidders for the warrant were a large private conglomerate. Their success was short-lived for Labour won the 1972 elections and, deciding to keep broadcasting in public hands, withdrew the warrant.

4.5: The Experiment with 'Guided Enterprise': 1973-1976.

Labour's Minister of Broadcasting, Roger Douglas, saw the NZBC as inefficient bureaucracy dominated by public service administrators. He argued that "the key to good broadcasting is good programming and the key to that is to concentrate on good programme planners and producers." (*ibid*:29) With a second television channel imminent, he began planning a structural reorganisation of broadcasting.

A committee, chaired by a former Director of BBC Television, Professor Kenneth Adam, was set up to advise the government "on how best to implement its new broadcasting policy." (*ibid*:58) The Committee's report, *The Broadcasting Future for New Zealand*²⁸, articulated the 'guiding principles' for a new public broadcasting structure: "decentralization, independence, and the introduction of competitive enterprise within publicly owned broadcasting services." (Adam,1973:15).

²⁸ Known as the Adam Report.

The Adam Report recommended that the NZBC and the New Zealand Broadcasting Authority be dismantled and broadcasting restructured into three independent corporations, Radio New Zealand, Television One and Television Two (later South Pacific Television) under a Broadcasting Council. The Committee sought to create the conditions for achieving a 'middle course' between an organisation dominated by commercial imperatives wherein audience size became a preoccupation of management, and the restrictive bureaucratic inertia of the previous system. Their solution was a system they referred to as 'guided enterprise'.

Within the restructured system, the radio network and the two television channels would compete with one another for advertising revenues and audiences. The television channels would also be expected to operate complementary programming schedules so that their programmes were not in direct competition with one another.

The Adam Report formally articulated, for the first time in the history of New Zealand broadcasting, the social value of "reporting to New Zealand society what is being said and done within that society and outside" in order that a collective sense of national identity and nationhood be fostered. It emphasized that the objective of 'nation-building' "is so manifestly of the highest importance in any scale of broadcasting values." (*ibid*:9). To create the conditions the Adam Committee perceived necessary to realizing this goal, their Report recommended that programme producers become "the key figure in broadcasting" (*ibid*:14), replacing the administrators and engineers who had, for ten years, dominated executive posts within the NZBC.

The new structure, set out in the Broadcasting Act 1973, and the Broadcasting Act Commencement Order 1973, came into operation in December that year. Two senior

executives from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Alan Morris and Allan Martin, were appointed as Directors-General to Television One and Two respectively. The second channel Television Two did not, however, begin operating until 1975.

The NZBC's journalists welcomed the reorganisation. Being in competition with another television news operation would give them something they could measure themselves against, and enable them to "lift their game". (Personal Communication: Former NZBC Journalist) The autonomy of producers and journalists were enhanced by the 1973 Broadcasting Act, which removed the section of the 1961 Act requiring the NZBC, "in the exercise of its functions and powers", to "comply with the general policy of the Government"²⁹. The Act also abolished the portfolio of Minister of Broadcasting.

A "brief period of intense competition" ensued which

...produced great changes in content and presentation as the channels actively sought to appeal to audiences. Viewing rose sharply. New Zealand programmes designed to give the audiences what they wanted produced the first significant overseas sales. (Rennie, 1992:61)

But where the Adam Report had expected the intensity of commercial imperatives to be balanced by public service objectives, this did not occur. The system was riven with contradictions and, in practice, the public service objectives became dominated by competitive pressures.

TV-1 became aggressively competitive, abandoning the principles of common programme junctions and complementary programming, and employing commercial television strategies such as emphasising presentation and its 'family' of personalities (Boyd-Bell, *op.cit.*:147).

²⁹The Broadcasting Act, 1961, Section 11 stated: "In the exercise of its functions and powers under this Act the Corporation shall comply with the general policy of the Government of New Zealand with respect to broadcasting and shall comply with any general or special directions given in writing by the Minister pursuant to the policy of the Government in relation thereto." (*New Zealand Statutes*, 1961, No.117, p.1757)

The second channel, TV-2 (South Pacific Television), began broadcasting mid-1975. It produced two evening news bulletins, *Two at Seven* and *News at Ten*, and gave regional news a special emphasis. The organisation broke new ground by appointing a woman as presenter in the nationally networked news programme.

TV-2 struggled to challenge the established lead of Television One. It did not have the same transmission range as TV-1, which made it less attractive to advertisers, and it faced the considerable obstacle of overcoming the entrenched viewing habits of New Zealand audiences. TV-2's response to the pressures of competition was to place an increased emphasis on entertainment-values in programming and production, including its news programmes. This exposed the channel to accusations of 'sensationalizing' news and current affairs and lowering broadcasting standards.

The contradictory and conflicting objectives of the system of 'guided enterprise' undermined the experiment and doomed it to failure. The scheme's weakness was the naive expectation that it was possible to

'produce a cross between the fighting cocks of commercial competition and the love-birds of complementary programming'; the quest for the advertising dollar had led both channels into a ratings game which had not only precluded complementary placements between programmes of differing audience appeal, but in so doing had also tended to vitiate public television's ability to cater for the widest possible range of viewing preferences. (Gregory,*op.cit.*:99)

Even if the experiment had continued for longer, the competing value-systems at its core would have prevented the balance interests of market and social objectives, envisaged by the Adam Committee and the Labour Government, from being achieved.

As it happened, Labour's radically restructured television broadcasting environment, in terms of both the shift in organisation and control within broadcasting, and the introduction

of a second channel was short-lived. Labour lost the 1975 elections to National whose broadcasting agenda was shaped by a different set of concerns. National's leader, Robert Muldoon, had a history of altercations with broadcasting authorities and journalists since the establishment of the NZBC in 1962 (*ibid*:93-95). When in Opposition, National had been strongly critical of the three corporation structure which, they argued, was an expensive duplication of services. National politicians and newspaper editorial commentary had also been critical of the NZBC broadcasters who were criticized for being irresponsible, uncontrollable spendthrifts and "deviants, opponents of the established moral order." (*ibid*:109). When it won the 1975 elections, National moved to replace Labour's experiment with a more centralized and reintegrated structure which would facilitate greater administrative control over production and expenditure and what they saw as the "loosely defined moral standards" (*ibid*:111) and liberal attitudes of the NZBC's broadcasters and journalists.

4.6: The BCNZ and the Cross Restructuring: 1976-1984.

When National came to power in 1975, the NZBC owed Treasury \$38,900,000. This debt was

...a consequence of its borrowing for the vast schedule of capital expansion required of it, notably the conversion to colour of the two television channels and their expansion throughout the country, and the continuing development of radio facilities. (Gregory,*op.cit.*:92)

The NZBC's debt burden had been exacerbated by the cost of setting up the second television station (\$39 million) and increases in administrative costs created by the 1973 restructuring. Ironically, while the intention of the 1973 Broadcasting Act had been to increase the independence and efficiency of New Zealand broadcasting, the creation of three independent broadcasting structures (Television One, Two, and Radio New Zealand) plus an administrative umbrella organisation, quadrupled staff and labour costs. The impact

on the New Zealand economy of the emergence of OPEC and the 1973 'oil shocks', and the resulting high inflation of the mid-1970s, served to intensify the financial concerns of the NZBC's administrators (Farnsworth,1989:124). "These financial straits were a far cry from the days of self-sufficiency and capital surplus enjoyed by the NZBC during the previous decade, and were to add a new dimension to the question of the corporation's independence." (Gregory,*op.cit.*:92)

When Labour was in power, broadcasting policy had increased the professional autonomy of broadcasters. The National Government set about replacing the expansive energies released by Labour's handling of broadcasting with a programme designed to bring the broadcasters to heel.

National's proposed reorganisation of the public broadcasting system via the instrument of the 1976 Broadcasting Act was marked by considerable public debate (Edgar & Rahim,1983:283-4) and industrial conflict (Farnsworth,1989:94-119). "Its preparation and passage caused, without any doubt, the greatest period of turbulence and conflict in the history of New Zealand television." (*ibid*:84)

The introduction of the Broadcasting Bill into Parliament in October 1976 led to industrial action as NZBC broadcasters attempted to resist the amalgamation of the two channels' news operations and the placing of the production process back in the hands of bureaucratic administrators. The Government was unsympathetic, rejecting the broadcasters' action as an undignified and unjustifiable attempt to make "'political capital' out of their circumstances" (NZPD 1976:4396, cited in Farnsworth,*op.cit.*:108). While some academics and broadcasters had argued that the new Act would reintroduce ministerial control over broadcasting, it appeared few others lamented the passing of the NZBC. (Gregory,*op.cit.*:92)

Rivalries and internal friction between the radio and television broadcasters, and between the two channels, meant that the broadcasters were unable to achieve a unified position from which to defend their professional interests. The chronically poor morale among the NZBC staff was exacerbated by persistent controversies over NZBC programme standards and the close connection between the broadcaster and the state. These factors all served to undermine the broadcasters' attempt to win public support and strengthened National's position³⁰.

The Broadcasting Act 1976 came into effect in February 1977, replacing the decentralized three-corporation system with the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand, a complex new administrative structure similar to that established by the 1960-63 National Government. Clause 20 of the Act which required the BCNZ to have regard to government policy was particularly reminiscent of the 1961 Broadcasting Act. The portfolio of Minister of Broadcasting was also reintroduced. The Minister, Hugh Templeton, defined the aim of the new broadcasting structure as providing for "effective operational autonomy for the broadcasters, linked with effective accountability to Parliament and through Parliament, to the public." (Gregory, 1985:93)

Within the reintegrated broadcasting structure, what had been three separate corporations were now reduced to service arms of the BCNZ. The governing body was a single board chaired by a full-time, executive Chairman - this was a new development in the history of New Zealand broadcasting. The Government's interest in building up the financial reserves

³⁰ Farnsworth (1989:Ch.6-7) examines in detail the factors contributing to the inability of the broadcasters to marshal wide-spread support for their opposition to the 1976 restructuring of broadcasting.

of the corporation was reflected in the appointment of a Wellington stockbroker, Ron Jarden, to the post. "Jarden's primary task was to oversee improvements in the organisation's financial management, and in this he was aided by the government's agreement to write off" the corporation's public debt (*ibid*:92).

Although the \$1.4 million loss of 1978 was followed by a \$3.8 million surplus the following year, the BCNZ's operating costs continued to rise while the licence fee remained static. "Extra income could only come, therefore, from advertising or marketing revenue. This, in turn, increased the pressure to expand commercial programme scheduling strategies, which emphasized audience size over minority programming." (Farnsworth,1985:124) Planning was made difficult by the government's refusal to give block grants to the BCNZ for two years, preferring to drip-feed funding instead. The financial 'squeeze' on the broadcasters tightened as the NZBC senior administrators built up cash reserves at the expense of resource development and staff training.

The emphasis on accountability brought about the greater bureaucratization and centralization of broadcasting operations. (Farnworth,*op.cit*:122) Managerial procedures expanded as the corporation's administrators moved to establish more effective formal controls over the practice of BCNZ producers and journalists. Tensions within the BCNZ increased as administrators and programme-makers struggled for authority in determining how budgets were to be balanced, which areas were to bear the costs, what programmes would be shown, and at what times. The power struggle was resolved in favour of the administrators by the 1979 restructuring, instituted by the Chairman of the BCNZ Board, Ian Cross.

Cross had been appointed following the sudden death of Ron Jarden. Cross's appointment

"as the first full-time chairman since corporation control was introduced in 1962" was significant in shifting the balance of power within New Zealand Broadcasting back into the administrators and government's hands. (Gregory,*op.cit.*:105)

Its significance lay not only in the full-time nature of the appointment *per se*, but in the fact that unlike his predecessors the new chairman would also be the highest salaried officer in the BCNZ (receiving the same salary as a grade 1 permanent head). This greatly enhanced the likelihood that in appointing a chairman on these terms the government had also effectively superimposed a *de facto* chief executive above the formal directors-general responsible for the radio and television services. (*ibid*)

Cross justified his restructuring of the television service on the grounds that competition for advertising revenues was not in the public interest because it diminished "public television's ability to cater for the widest possible range of viewing preferences." (*ibid*:99) According to the 'Cross Plan', the reorganisation would allow for an increased diversity of programmes and allow the two-channel system to function more co-operatively.

Cross's 'rationalization' of television brought together South Pacific Television and Television One into a single entity, Television New Zealand. (Boyd-Bell,*op.cit.*:48). Cross saw the amalgamation of the two channels as consolidating the organisational structure and reducing the likelihood of the state selling one channel to private interests.

A system of 'complementarity' programming was introduced whereby programmes on each channel were scheduled according to common time junctions. Under this system, the two channels became identified as the vehicles of distinct programming styles. Television ONE became the channel for 'information' programming, while TV-2 became the 'entertainment' channel.³¹ The financial situation of the BCNZ was not only improved by removing the

³¹Channel Two moved towards becoming a full-service channel again in March 1994 with the introduction of magazine-style news and current affairs programmes. The shift away from complementary scheduling between TVNZ's two channels is a consequence of a new marketing strategy at TVNZ. The traditional identification of Television One as the information channel and Channel Two as the entertainment channel has been replaced by a plan to target specific markets more effectively. Television One's schedule is targeted at the 45 and older age group while Channel Two is targeted at the 18-44 age group.

expense of duplicated production costs. It also served to maximize advertising revenues. Through setting up the system of complementary channels providing either 'entertainment' or 'information' programming, advertisers were effectively compelled to buy advertising time on both channels in order to reach the whole audience. The amount of television advertising allowed was also increased.

The setting up of Television New Zealand had significant consequences for the BCNZ's television journalists. An important aspect of the reorganisation was the combining of each channel's news, current affairs and sports programme production services under one administration. A Controller of News was appointed, who was responsible to the Director-General of the Production Service. The production centre was moved from the recently built site at Avalon in Lower Hutt, near Wellington, to Auckland.

Inter-organisational and interchannel rivalries continued within the new structure. The creation of the position of Controller severed the direct link programme producers had had with the Director-General and eroded their professional autonomy further.

[P]roduction and technical resources were [now] controlled by the regional managers, who also enjoyed direct access to the Director-General. Consequently, programme-makers faced a number of checks to their discretion over programme production, requiring vetting, organisation and scheduling by other agents before production could be approved. (Farnsworth, *op.cit.*:147)

A former TV2 journalist Bruce Crossan was appointed as the new Controller of News and the news production style returned to a format which was suggestive of the 1960s 'official bulletin' approach³². At the same time, the journalists were attacked by Muldoon, who sought to publicly undermine their credibility.

³²This viewpoint was expressed by several journalists to me during my field research.

Tensions between Ian Cross, the BCNZ Chairman, and its journalists grew increasingly strained. Many journalists felt the loss of competition keenly and were incensed by Cross's assertion that "the values of professional competence and integrity were not... guaranteed by journalistic competition alone." (Gregory,*op.cit.*:99) In April 1984, Cross

...publicly criticized the content and objectivity of television and radio news in a speech that questioned journalistic standards generally. Broadcasting, he said, was 'exposed to the allegation of bias' by its selection of news commentators some of whom 'have exhibited a partisanship that has become entirely predictable, even before they open their mouths'. (Gregory,1985:108)

Only days before, the PM, under increasing political pressure (and about to call for a badly mis-judged snap election in which his party lost power), had been "strongly critical of journalistic standards and practice, particularly television's." (*ibid*) Morale within the news department, already lowered by the loss of independence and Muldoon's attacks, was further undermined. (Farnsworth,*op.cit.*:148-10). The BCNZ Chief Executive Officer's failure to support the journalists deepened what was becoming a considerable rift between the organisation's leadership and the Department of News and Current Affairs.

According to Cocker (1992),

The paradox of the Cross reamalgamation of TV-1 and TV-2 was his belief that it furthered the cause of public service broadcasting whilst in fact it subjected it to even closer control by the politicians, especially Muldoon. The Cross reforms were missing this vital ingredient of public service broadcasting - political independence. Because Cross was perceived by television journalists to be carrying out the requirements demanded by Muldoon that they should be 'reined in', journalists at TV-1 and TV-2 were extremely suspicious of the motives of reamalgamation. They saw it as a cynical attempt to bring them in to line. This was particularly true of those journalists based at Avalon with TV-1.

The outcome of 'the Cross Plan' was to remove the power of what had historically been the New Zealand television 'establishment' at Avalon through the appointment of mainly TV-2 executives to the key managerial positions within the new organisation, TVNZ. In

appointing executives with a demonstrated ability for a populist and 'entrepreneurial' approach (Cross,1988:56), Cross placed the "conflict between public service and commercial objectives within a new framework." (Farnsworth,*op.cit*:149).

4.7: The Climax of the Regulatory Phase: 1984-1988.

In 1984, certain events presaged radical changes within the structures and ethos of broadcasting, and the conditions under which broadcasters and television journalists practiced their craft. A new broadcasting environment was being created through innovations in digital and tele-communications technologies. Satellite, cable and digital compression technologies radically expanded the potential number of channels that would be competing for audiences. The pressures created by the increased competition for advertising would have, at some point, to be addressed. The state's handling of the distribution spectrum as a scarce resource, and broadcasting as a public trust, became open to challenges.

Audience demands for greater choice in television programming and services were increasing and private interests sought an end to the state's television monopoly. In response, the National government had directed the Broadcasting Tribunal to begin hearings to grant warrants for four regional television stations.

Ideologically, the period was characterized by the re-emergence of a neo-conservative market liberalism and the ascendancy of the doctrine of managerialism with its emphasis on executive accountability³³. The rise to prominence of these ideologies brought about a fundamental split in views regarding the best way to reorganise broadcasting. Positions

³³ See Boston, 1991:pp.8-10 for a summary of the tenets of managerialism or 'new public management' (NPM).

on the issue became divided between those who favoured a minimal role for the state and those who argued for continued state involvement in ensuring the public interest in a non-commercial public service was provided for.

On becoming the Government in July 1984, Labour commissioned a Treasury review of the state of the economy, as part of its election pledge to 'open the books'. The Report, titled *Economic Management*, and in particular Part Two: Chapter 13, *State-Owned Trading Enterprises and Management of the Public Service*, proposed reforms which advocated the application of the principles of managerialism in the administration of public corporations. The objective of this new strategy was to achieve "greater efficiency in the use of resources." (p.292). Competition was recommended as the mechanism that would encourage the achieving of 'efficiencies' within the public sector corporations which were to be reorganised as state-owned enterprises. With regard to telecommunications, Treasury argued that a state monopoly "would seem likely to slow down the uptake of new technology" jeopardizing "objectives of efficiency and international competitiveness." (p.282). In summary, the Report offered a blue-print for deregulation, commercialization and the privatisation of public corporations.

Ian Cross was not sympathetic to the application of the principles of economic liberalism and commercial business management to broadcasting. He believed "that television should not exist mainly as a marketing instrument of the mass distribution of consumer goods" (Cross,1988:38). On the expiry of his contract Labour declined to reappoint Cross, preferring someone more in step with the thinking of Cabinet.

Hugh Rennie, the new Chairman of the BCNZ Board, initiated a comprehensive overhaul of the BCNZ's structure, accounting and management systems with the purpose of

improving productivity. To assist in the removal of "government department models and attitudes" and reform TVNZ as a "commercial business able to survive the coming competition" (Rennie,1992:63), the Board appointed a British journalist and senior broadcasting executive, Julian Mounter, as TVNZ's Director-General.

By this time, the State-Owned Enterprise Act 1986 had been passed, creating a legislative framework which would enable the programme set out for public corporations in the 1984 Treasury Report *Economic Management*, to be accomplished. While the Act did not immediately affect broadcasting, it spurred the BCNZ Board on to prepare for the seemingly-inevitable day when TVNZ would lose its monopoly and have to compete for revenue.

When Mounter took up his position, he found TVNZ "an inefficient and complacent state broadcaster" with a corporate structure and culture which was "the product of being kicked around for 25 years" (Mounter,1991:2)³⁴ Describing what he saw as a "moribund system" (p.4), Mounter lists as its key weaknesses, the absence of:

- * performance criteria for establishing managerial and producer accountability.
- * effective financial management systems which enabled the accounting system to be used for strategic analysis and forward planning.
- * capital expenditure and re-investment.

He also found a public service culture characterized by "a civil service bureaucracy, a lack of entrepreneurship, a devaluation of creativity, complacency." (p.3)

In view of the imminent arrival of "a radically deregulated broadcasting environment"

³⁴ Mounter is referring to the seven restructurings of New Zealand television by successive governments since its inception.

(*ibid*:1), Mounter felt that

...we had too many staff in too many buildings. Over 2,200 in a total of something like 22 countrywide. If we were to face competition we had to lose fat and complacency. (p.5)

His proposed 'reduction' programme involved introducing "modern financial systems and controls", reducing staffing levels and changing company culture. The latter, Mounter found "the most daunting." (p.7). Early in his paper, Mounter states that he felt that these weaknesses were "counterbalanced" by TVNZ's skilled, creative and committed staff (p.5), but he later reveals that he felt it necessary to "attack" their attitudes towards their work:

...probably the key decision was to attack the prevailing psychology of staff...few of our people knew what competition was. They didn't understand the dangers. That meant many of them didn't understand or support the need for change. Some weren't much interested in finding out, either. It was an attitude that threatened our very survival. (p.7)

One of Mounter's priorities became setting up a strong leadership by management to encourage staff to "adopt the values of rigorous competition."(p.8)

Mounter replaced the post of Controller of News and its incumbent in 1987 with a Director of News and Current Affairs. The appointee, an expatriate New Zealander who was working for BBC2 at the time, was given "the brief to prepare the Department of News and Current Affairs for the discipline of the market". (Director, News and Current Affairs, Personal Communication, 1990)

While the BCNZ board were restructuring in order to enter the broadcasting market from a position of strength ³⁵, the litigious hearings for the third channel dragged on. The number of contenders and diverse proposals were unexpected by the Tribunal which had anticipated perhaps "one or at most two applicants whose applications would match the

³⁵See Rennie in Comrie & McGregor, 1992:63-66.

Tribunal's own plans for television." (*ibid*)

Among the major contenders was the Aotearoa Broadcasting System, which wished to set up a television station reflecting the interests and concerns of Maori. The ABS was an initiative sponsored by the New Zealand Maori Council which had, in March 1985, "decided to do something about its longstanding dissatisfaction with the extent of Maori programming on the BCNZ's networks." (Fox, 1988:489) For despite various ministers and administrators paying lip service to the concept of greater representation of Maori interests and language on television, 30 years after its inception, programmes serving this objective constituted less than 1% of total programming.³⁶

At the same time as ABS was preparing an application for the third channel, the Wellington Maori Language Board sought a ruling from the Waitangi Tribunal regarding the Crown's neglect of Maori in broadcasting and education. In its 1986 report, the Waitangi Tribunal urged the Minister of Broadcasting to recognise the Crown's obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi "to recognise and protect the Maori Language, and that the Broadcasting Act 1976 (Sec.20) enables this to be done so far as broadcasting is concerned (para 7.1.9) " (quoted in Fox, *op.cit.*)³⁷

³⁶ The Aotearoa Broadcasting Trust, which it set up to represent Maori interests, argued that it was the only applicant that offered a real alternative to the other contenders and was capable of delivering a long-awaited 'fair deal' for *tangata whenua* [the Maori term of reference for Maori - 'the people of the land']. It also presented itself as posing the least threat to the two existing state tv channels. Through the withdrawal of the BCNZ (which had initially agreed to support the ABS's application) and a lack of unity within Maoridom, the ABS had to withdraw its application. See Derek Fox's two chapters in Spoonley & Hirsh (1990), pp.103-107 and pp.128-133; and Fox's *The Mass Media : A Maori Perspective*, in the Royal Commission on Social Policy's 'April Report', (1988), pp.416-503 for a fuller discussion of the issue of Maori and New Zealand broadcasting.

³⁷While the Chairman of the BCNZ and the Director-General of TVNZ, at the time, made a display of sympathy towards the concerns of Maori for a voice within broadcasting, substantive progress has been slow. There is one 10 minute Maori Language news programme broadcast around 5.15pm, Monday to Friday.

4.8: The Royal Commission on Broadcasting: 1985-86.

Besides the Broadcasting Tribunal's third channel hearings, another major initiative, the Royal Commission on Broadcasting and Related Telecommunications, was set up by the Labour Government in 1985.

The litigious system of the Tribunal hearings was time-consuming, taking until 1987 before the Tribunal made a decision. It was costly for the bidders because of the delay. Estimates of the total cost range from \$20-23 million. (Cocker, Personal Communication, 1992; Williamson, Personal Communication, 1993) What might have been start-up capital went into lawyers' fees. Rennie describes the procedure as 'a farce' brought about by the bureaucratic resistance to change displayed by the Tribunal members and attributes this as a key factor in shaping the attitudes of broadcasting's political 'deregulators'³⁸ (Rennie,*op.cit.*:6).

The Royal Commission on Broadcasting and Telecommunications, headed by Robert Chapman, a Professor of Political Studies, took almost as long as the Tribunal to report. The fate of the subsequent Report highlights and exemplifies the ambiguities, competing interests, and contradictions which have beset state-owned television in New Zealand since its inception as a mixed-system broadcaster in the early 1960s.

The brief of the Royal Commission was to examine the policy issues facing broadcasting at the time, and to "determine the future shape of the public interest in an implicitly non-monopoly context" (Farnsworth,*op.cit.*:188). When it reported, in September 1986, the Royal Commission's recommendations supported the retaining of the BCNZ structures and, by implication, the public-utility model of broadcasting but suggested the establishment of

³⁸See Rennie in Comrie & McGregor, 1992:63.

a Ministry of Communications which would be responsible for telecommunications as well as broadcasting.

The Chapman Report recommended that the state not only continue to regulate broadcasting, but also extend regulation to cover the new communications technologies of cable and satellite services. It also suggested the Broadcasting Tribunal's functions be strengthened and expanded and commercial interests, in particular television advertising, be reduced. The enforcing of quota systems for local content on television and radio was also proposed.

The Report was met by opposition at a number of levels, beginning with a struggle within the Commission as to the proper direction the recommendations should take. It included an addendum (which had been strongly resisted by Chapman) by a dissenting Commission member, Laurie Cameron. Cameron argued that implicit within the Commission's terms of reference was the assumption that the BCNZ structure would not change and that this 'circumscribed' its findings and recommendations. (Cameron in Hawke,1990:38) He claimed that the frequency spectrum "should be regarded as a scarce national resource" and proposed a competitive tendering system for a more 'effective' distribution. (Cameron,1986:452)

Cameron was critical of the BCNZ, in particular the failure of its administration to separate out its commercial and non-commercial activities, and its inability to detail exactly how the broadcasting licence fee was spent. He argued that public broadcasting objectives prevented the BCNZ from providing an efficient commercial broadcasting service, while its reliance on commercial activity undermined the attempts of the BCNZ to realize its role 'as a trustee of public broadcasting'. Cameron's solution to this fundamental conflict of interests

was to separate the BCNZ's dual functions by selling Radio New Zealand and TVNZ to private interests and setting up a public service broadcasting foundation from the funds provided by the sale.

Opposition to the Chapman Report was also mounted by the BCNZ executive. Given the static licence fee, which by 1985 had fallen to 16% of the Corporation's net revenue, plus increased operating costs, the BCNZ was increasingly dependent on advertising for income to support its programming. Thus those responsible for its administration resisted any suggestions to reduce the hourly allocation for television advertising to nine minutes (Smith,1992[b]:55).

The Chapman Report's interpretation of the 'problem' of the BCNZ and public service broadcasting clashed too with the views of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and others in Cabinet (but not the Minister of Broadcasting ³⁹). They were privately critical of the BCNZ and felt, like Cameron, that the way to approach the new broadcasting environment was to treat it like any other business enterprise. As a consequence, Cabinet, already committed to deregulating telecommunications⁴⁰, ignored all but the Commission's recommendation to set up a Ministry of Communications. It also decided to change the system of spectrum management and 'deregulate' broadcasting as well.

The Commission's recommendations received "widespread criticism [for] having failed, after months of expensive and exhausting deliberation, to come to grips with some of the fundamental problems facing broadcasting." (Kedgley,1988:31) The Report was largely

³⁹Jonathon Hunt was committed to the concept of broadcasting as a public trust. He felt during his term as minister that the BCNZ needed to be left alone to consolidate under the new leadership of Rennie (Chairman) and Nigel Dick (C.E.O.), with Beverley Waken as D-G of RNZ and Julian Mounter as D-G of TVNZ. Hunt was replaced by Richard Prebble as Minister of Broadcasting in April 1988.

⁴⁰See Rennie in Comrie & McGregor,1990:62-64 for an account of the Government's motivation.

ignored by Cabinet. Rennie lists as contributing to the eclipse of the Commission's report, the Tribunal hearings, imminent new telecommunications technologies, major changes in the BCNZ and private sector, and new economic policies. (Rennie,*op.cit.*:5) Easton suggests that the "Royal Commission reflected a view of economic, social and cultural management of the 1970s, while the Treasury one was of the liberalised economic regime of the 1980s." (Easton,1993:12) He points to the exceptional length of the terms of reference for the Commission and its failure to elaborate or codify the philosophy underpinning their recommendations.

The reader must wonder whether the elaborate detail of the terms of reference overwhelmed the commission. Behind this is the question [as to] what analytic framework the commission might have used. There was no government agency (other than the Treasury and the Broadcasting Corporation) dealing with the practicalities of policy, and by doing so, developing a comprehensive view. There was a statute, the Broadcasting Act 1976, but it was largely one of mechanics rather than the policy issue which the commission was addressing: of accountability and independence, of culture and social development. To this day there is no government policy agency concerned about broadcasting as a cultural and social phenomenon.

It could be argued that there were other reasons why the Royal Commission was not a success: with hindsight the terms of reference were not appropriate; the inquiry occurred just as a new economic management hostile to the commissioners was instituted. But the lack of a viable analytic framework, illustrated by the need for a detailed terms of reference, may well have been fatal. (*ibid*)

The mid-1980s saw economic conditions for broadcasters becoming increasingly more difficult. In 1987, the licence fee was meeting only 12-14% of the corporation's costs and advertising revenues were falling. After the global economy was destabilized by the October 1987 sharemarket crash and the world recession deepened, economic conditions in New Zealand provided fertile ground for those who would commercialize the public television system on the grounds that it was an inefficient, bureaucratic state monopoly. Deregulation and competition were proposed by many to be the only viable response to the imminent transformation of the broadcasting environment through the new telecommunications and digital technologies. Contrary to Cameron's scenario, radio and

television frequencies were potentially an abundant resource, making the traditional perception of broadcasting as a community trust of a scarce resource obsolete. This was the core of Treasury's argument - the concept of commodifying the electro-magnetic spectrum through a tendering process. They argued that the public interest in having a greater choice of services and programmes would be better served by market forces⁴¹.

A key concept underpinning arguments for a market solution to 'the problem of broadcasting' is 'consumer sovereignty'. Its advocates hold that open access to a competitive broadcasting market cause a rapid increase in the number of channels available to consumers thereby meeting audiences' demands for more choice. From a market perspective, a public service approach to broadcasting is elitist in that administrators decide what is in 'the public interest' and what services and programmes audiences will receive. A competitive television market is perceived by them to be more democratic in that broadcasters seek to expand audience numbers by being sensitive to audience requirements.

Interestingly, when Treasury advocated a market approach to broadcasting in its submission to the Royal Commission in 1986, "they were almost laughed out of court." (Kedgley,*op.cit.*:30) Easton notes that, at this time, Treasury's solution to 'the problem of broadcasting' "contradicted government policy." (Easton,1990[a]:6). Yet two years later when the legislation was enacted, "what the Treasury officials told the Royal Commission on Broadcasting and Telecommunications should be the model, was the model."

⁴¹ See Easton B., 'Broadcasting 1985-1990: Commercialism vs Culture', 1990, in which he gives a detailed account of the Treasury submission to the Royal Commission.

(Wakem,1992:44)⁴²

At this time the government, while advocating a greater liberalization and increased competition within broadcasting, still expressed a commitment to "ensuring social objectives in broadcasting continued to be met" (Wilson,1992:7). A market approach was sought by the Minister of Finance, Roger Douglas⁴³, and the Minister of Broadcasting, Richard Prebble. They legitimated it in a 'public interest' rhetoric

which spoke of the need to open up broadcasting because of the growing frustrations due to outmoded regulation and restriction. Prebble spoke of a number of pressures in the broadcasting industry which required early attention. So the changes were not marketed so much in terms of a 'free market' as in terms of giving the broadcasting and telecommunications industries more freedom of action, removing unnecessary restriction etc. whilst still maintaining a number of social objectives. (Cocker,Personal Communication,1992)

In April 1988, an Officials Coordinating Committee, chaired by Jim Stevenson of the Department of Trade and Industry, was established to report on how these objectives might be achieved. One area of particular concern was TVNZ's dominance of the production sector. Another concern of both Cabinet and the Officials Committee was the BCNZ's inability to account precisely for expenditure within the organisation's operation. What was sought was a mechanism which separated the control and distribution of public monies, and a greater accountability by the broadcasting organisation. Reflecting the market-orientation of its members, the Committee's report released four months later advocated that broadcasting and telecommunications should have the same regulatory structure. While broadcasters and the Broadcasting Tribunal argued strongly against such a proposal, the

⁴² Beverley Wakem resigned as CEO of RNZ in February 1991 in response to indications that public radio was to be privatised by the government. In the public statement she made to the media at the time, she said that during the period she had been with Radio New Zealand (from the early 1960s) there had been five major restructurings of broadcasting and 17 legislative changes and she did not feel up to going through any more. (*NZ Herald*, 8 February 1991).

⁴³The same Roger Douglas who was Minister of Broadcasting in the 1973-1975 Labour Government when it introduced competition for the first time.

Committee's report provided the framework for the reorganisation of New Zealand's broadcasting structures.

At the same time a Steering Committee on the Restructuring of the BCNZ on State-Owned Enterprise Principles, chaired by Hugh Rennie, was also set up. The Rennie Report, tabled in July 1988, identified a need for the BCNZ administration to assess the costs of specific programmes and increase managerial accountability. It also drew attention to the cross-subsidization of commercial and non-commercial services. (Farnsworth,1992:193) The Report recommended that the BCNZ be replaced by two State-Owned Enterprises: Television New Zealand and Radio New Zealand, a recommendation supported by the Officials Committee.(Wilson,*op.cit.*:5)

However, two years later, Rennie publicly criticized Treasury for subverting the programme of reform he had proposed for the BCNZ. Where he had envisaged the serving of public service obligations within a commercial context, the final shape of the legislation made profit-making the primary objective of the new broadcasting SOE's. He felt that the "[d]ual roles of advice to the Government and control (through dividend requirement) had given Treasury excessive power at TVNZ and enabled it to implement a purist philosophy of profit-seeking." (*New Zealand Herald*, 15 November 1990)⁴⁴

The Director-General of Radio New Zealand also expressed misgivings about the failure of government to listen to experienced broadcasters in designing the 1989 Act.

...there are ideologues in both Commerce and Treasury, who want to go down particular pathways and will not be diverted from them. It's like trying to stand up in the face of a juggernaut. No amount of practical, professional argument from real experience in the industry makes any difference. (Wakem,1992:44)

⁴⁴Easton develops an analysis of Treasury's 'preoccupations' with regard to the BCNZ (Easton,1991).

The profound influence of the New Zealand Treasury in shaping the new broadcasting policy has been commented on by others.⁴⁵ However, to what extent Treasury influenced the current statutory framework of New Zealand broadcasting is beyond the limited scope of this chapter to address. But when, in 1988, the Broadcasting Amendment Act (No.2) set down the legislative basis and provided for the transitional arrangements for the restructuring of the BCNZ's restructuring into SOEs⁴⁶, the preferred model was based on the principle of commercialization⁴⁷.

The legislation redefined the social obligations of TVNZ. When it was governed by a public service ethos, as an arm of the BCNZ, these were defined in the following terms:

To provide the people of New Zealand with responsive, responsible and respected television broadcasting service which plays a dominant role in the nation's communications, has an identifiable New Zealand character, fosters political and social awareness and enriches its cultural life through the scope and quality of its programmes and other presentations. (Steering Committee Report, 1988: Appendix 1)

After TVNZ became a SOE on 1 December 1988, the company was required to "operate as a successful business and, to this end, to be as profitable and efficient as comparable businesses that are not owned by the Crown." (New Zealand Statutes, 1986, No.124, p.1309)

The Broadcasting Act 1989 came into force on 1 July 1989. In the new structures set up under the Act, social objectives, policy advice and regulatory functions were separated from commercial activities. Broadcasting policy now came under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Communications and the Communications Division of the Ministry of Commerce.

⁴⁵See Boston, J., 'The Treasury and the Organisation of Economic Advice: Some International Comparisons', in Brian Easton's *The Makings of Rogernomics*, 1989.

⁴⁶Radio New Zealand Ltd and Television New Zealand Ltd.

⁴⁷See Easton, 1989: pp114-131 for a summary of the principle of commercialisation, and a description of its development within the Treasury.

The Act replaced the time-consuming and expensive system of allocating warrants via the Broadcasting Tribunal with a procedure whereby existing users acquired a 20 year frequency right. Newcomers bid for frequencies in a market-based tendering process. Under the Radiocommunications Act, 1989, some spectrum frequencies were set aside for non-commercial purposes and others allocated for future use under the discretion of Cabinet (namely for Maori broadcasting and other specialist uses.⁴⁸)

Two organisations were created by the 1989 Broadcasting Act to ensure the provision, within broadcasting, of social and cultural objectives. The Broadcasting Standards Authority was set up to 'maintain broadcasting standards', i.e. to deal with complaints regarding transgressions of the code of acceptable practice set out in the 1989 legislation, apply sanctions, advise and conduct research.⁴⁹

The Broadcasting Commission was established to receive and administer the disbursement of the broadcasting fee according to the criteria set out in Section 36 of the Act. The Broadcasting Commission (which was soon renamed NZ on Air) is required to distribute the license fee money according to the directive that it reflect and develop New Zealand identity and culture by promoting programmes about New Zealand and New Zealand interests, Maori language and culture, and ensures that the interests of women, children, the disabled and other minorities are provided for within broadcasting.

Funding is allocated on a project-by-project basis, thus removing the mechanism of cross-subsidization which had supported the provision of commercially unprofitable programming for minority audiences within the BCNZ broadcasting structure. (However, since the

⁴⁸See Wilson, 1992:36-37.

⁴⁹See Helen Wilson's report 'Broadcasting Policy and Planning in New Zealand (1992) and Hugh Rennie's chapter in Comrie & McGregor (1992) for details of the restructuring.

Commission has made the funding of projects dependent upon the prior purchase of the proposed programme by a commercial broadcaster, its function of providing for the interests of minority audiences, not served by TVNZ and TV3, is severely constrained.⁵⁰⁾

4.9: The Maori Council Challenge: 1988-1993.

In 1988, the Maori Council and the Wellington Maori Language Board had an injunction placed against the transfer of ownership of \$277.5 million of broadcasting assets from the Crown to Television New Zealand Ltd and Radio New Zealand Ltd. The injunction was placed on the SOEs the moment they came into existence at midnight on 1 December 1988.

The case rested on the Crown showing that the transfer of ownership of the Crown assets was not contrary to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.⁵¹ Late in July 1991, the High Court approved the transfer of Crown assets to the SOEs. This decision was made after the Crown had presented a package of proposals including an allocation of \$11 million for funding the establishment of a Maori broadcasting structure and a further \$13 million for the promotion of the Maori language and culture through iwi⁵² broadcasting.

In October 1991, the NZ Maori Council lodged an appeal against the High Court decision in the Court of Appeal. It argued that the Crown's proposals failed to provide a system of safeguards consistent with the Treaty. In particular, the Council was concerned that, though reservation of access to transmission and production facilities was proposed by the Crown, there was no access reserved to the mainstream broadcasting services to facilitate the extension of Maori language programming.

⁵⁰See Maharey in Spoonley *et al* (1990), p.203.

⁵¹For more detail regarding the principles underlying the position of the Maori Council, see Gee, 1990 and Easton, 1990a and 1990b.

⁵² The Maori Broadcasting structures have been set up on a tribal basis.

The Court of Appeal rejected the Maori Council's appeal on the grounds that the Crown's funding proposal for Maori Broadcasting did indeed constitute adequate provision for Maori language and culture in broadcasting. The Maori Council then took its case to the Privy Council, after some hesitation and debate within Maoridom over the expense of such an undertaking, given the limited financial resources available to meet the cost of the action. As it happened, in December 1993, the Privy Council did reject the Maori Council's appeal. The decision was based on the Privy Council's acceptance of the Crown's argument that it was fulfilling its Treaty obligations to foster Te Reo Maori⁵³ through the autonomous statutory agency 'Te Reo Whakapuaki Irirangi' it had set up in July under the Broadcasting Amendment Act.

The function of the agency, the name of which was changed to 'Te Mangai Paho' once it was established, is to distribute the Crown grants made as a result of the High Court hearings of the Broadcasting New Zealand assets case. The Crown has pledged an additional \$13 million to be paid to the agency over the period 1994 to 1996. It will also receive a share of revenue from the public broadcasting fee as of mid-July 1995. (*New Zealand Herald*, 1 March 1993; *Onfilm*, March 1994).

4.10: TVNZ and Deregulation: 1988-1993.

Overall, the deregulation of broadcasting in New Zealand was accomplished with such rapidity that there was only one substantial challenge. The initiatives taken by the N.Z. Maori Council to challenge the State in changing the character of New Zealand's *public* broadcasting system to a *state*-owned system have been "the only effective opposition to the new regime" (Wilson, 1992:16). Attempts by those within the industry to contribute their insights based on experience have been ignored. (Wakem, 1992:51) While legitimated in

⁵³ The Maori language.

the name of the national/public interest, Treasury's solution to 'the problem' of public broadcasting, and in particular the public television system, and the assumptions which underpinned it, has not been subjected to close and critical examination.

Significantly, there was no public involvement as there was with the 1986 Royal Commission hearings. As has historically been the case in New Zealand broadcasting, there was no public involvement in the decision-making processes which radically reorganised New Zealand broadcasting structures during the 1980s. One possible reason is that the degree of restructuring of the public sector and change brought about by the Labour Governments of 1984 and 1987 was so overwhelming, it was difficult for the public to keep abreast. Another reason, as Cocker argues, was that "there was no widespread public sentiment for the BCNZ like that accorded the BBC in Britain. Only elements of the system, most typically long-established radio services, have a degree of public attachment. We have changed our broadcasting structures too often to become wedded to them." (*New Zealand Listener*, 15 April 1989)

Cameron suggests that public sympathies for the BCNZ were low because the mixed-funding method had failed to provide New Zealanders with either a broadcasting system wholly guided by public service values such as the BBC, or a commercially successful system which paid its own way.

The New Zealand broadcasting structures failed in that commercial imperatives prevented a fully public broadcasting service from being developed, and the requirement that a commercial system service public broadcasting requirements through cross-subsidization hampered profit-generation. (Cameron, 1986:453-463)

The ambiguities and competing interests which have historically hampered New Zealand broadcasting from effectively realizing either commercial or public service objectives appear to have been resolved to a certain extent by the radical liberalization of the

regulatory framework governing state-owned television. "TVNZ has grown at a compounding rate of 13% over the past five years, better than most New Zealand companies." (Drinnian,1993:4). Five years after becoming a state-owned enterprise on 1 December 1988, TVNZ Ltd.'s shareholders funds had increased from \$140 million to \$197 million. TVNZ's 1993 Half-year Report showed that the company's 1993 revenues had increased 4.8% to \$164.96 million and after-tax profit was up 54.8%. Its shareholder, the Government, took a \$6.8 million dividend (\$4.6 million the previous 6 months), and an increased tax payment of \$7.18 million (\$4.7 million the previous 6 months). Operating expenditure and interest before tax took \$143.49 million against \$143.53 million a year ago.

The chairman [of the Board], Mr Geary, said the result was achieved as a result of a stronger economy and improved market performance by business units increasing revenue while holding cost increases...

Mr Geary said TVNZ's directors were confident the company would meet or exceed all its financial targets in the remainder of the financial year. (New Zealand Herald, 8 September 1993)

The greatly improved financial performance of the company suggests deregulation has indeed been an effective solution to the financial problems of state television in New Zealand.

The term 'deregulation' needs to be qualified however, as the state continues to play a key role in setting the conditions which govern entry to the marketplace. Broadcasting in New Zealand is not a classic free-market unfettered by state regulation. Ironically Treasury, the architects of the 'deregulated' New Zealand broadcasting environment, accept that a certain degree of government intervention is necessary. In their 1987 post-election briefing to the incoming government, *Government Management*, Treasury acknowledged that the effective workings of a market necessarily requires the state to provide the legal framework within which voluntary market transactions occur. Easton (1990:9), Farnsworth (Deeks &

Perry,1992:191-192) and Wilson (1992:16) state that the broadcasting reforms of the late 1980s were not so much a 'deregulation' as a radical re-regulation of broadcasting in different interests.

Ironically, where the 'more market approach' demands a minimal role by the state, government organisations involved in the regulation of broadcasting have proliferated since 'deregulation'. Where broadcasters had to deal with six in the 'bureaucratic' era of the Broadcasting Tribunal, broadcasters now may have to deal with up to seventeen (Wilson,*op.cit.*:16). Previously broadcasting came under the jurisdiction of one government portfolio. In the present context, broadcasting comes within the brief of five Ministers - the two share-holding Ministers (the Minister of Finance and the Minister responsible for TVNZ), the Minister of Communications, the Minister of Commerce and the Minister of State-owned Enterprises.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF NEWS PRODUCTION AT TVNZ Ltd.

5.0: TVNZ as a State-Owned Enterprise.

On 1 December 1988, Television New Zealand Ltd became a limited liability company incorporated in New Zealand under the Companies Act 1955. A State-Owned Enterprise, it is owned by its shareholders. These are the Minister responsible for TVNZ and the Minister of Finance. The share-holding Ministers are responsible to the House of Representatives for the performance of the functions given to them by the State-Owned Enterprises Act 1986 or by the rules of the State Enterprise.

Television New Zealand was paid for by the New Zealand tax-payer and, until 1 December 1988, administered as a public corporation. The company remains, in a sense, publicly-owned, because the company's shareholders are Ministers of the Crown who theoretically represent the New Zealand public. Accountability provisions require state-owned enterprises to report to Parliament via the shareholding Ministers. (Parliament has established a special select committee to monitor the performance of the SOEs and of the shareholding Ministers.)

The State-Owned Enterprises Act 1986 is the key document guiding TVNZ Ltd. *Inter alia*, it contains:

4. Principal objective to be a successful business - (1) The principal objective of every State enterprise shall be to operate as a successful business, and, to this end, to be -

- (a) As profitable and efficient as comparable businesses that are not owned by the Crown; and
- (b) A good employer; and
- (c) An organisation that exhibits a sense of social responsibility by having regard

to the interests of the community in which it operates and by endeavouring to accommodate or encourage these when able to do so. (New Zealand Statutes, 1986, No.124,p.1309)

The SOE Act 1986 requires a formal statement of corporate intent to be made. TVNZ's corporate mission statement has been refined over the last four years. In 1991, it read:

The Directors of the Company aim to operate a commercially successful electronic communications business, acting with social responsibility in the provision of quality services, and through the achievement of commercial success, to fulfil a subsidiary objective of serving the people of New Zealand by the presentation of television programmes which reflect and foster New Zealand's identity and culture. (TVNZ Annual Report,1991:1)

However, TVNZ's Interim Report 1993 had reduced the statement to:

Television New Zealand Limited aims to operate a commercially successful electronic communications business, acting with social responsibility in the provision of quality services including the provision of television programmes which reflect and foster New Zealand's identity and culture. (TVNZ Interim Report 1993:8)

Whether or not TVNZ's formal mission statement explicitly defines the significance given financial and cultural considerations, the company's requirements under the SOE Act ensures that commercial interests are a priority in strategic planning and operating decisions.

Strategies for achieving corporate objectives were set out in a 1991 TVNZ in-house training seminar video *Strategy For Growth*:

- 1) To increase the value of Television New Zealand for shareholders and increase the company's long-term viability.
- 2) To maintain TVNZ's size and diversity. This is essential if New Zealand television broadcasters are to compete offshore.
- 3) To pre-empt international competitors by launching new products into the local market.
- 4) To enter new growth areas in broadcasting and telecommunications.
- 5) To increase export earnings by co-productions with off-shore partners.

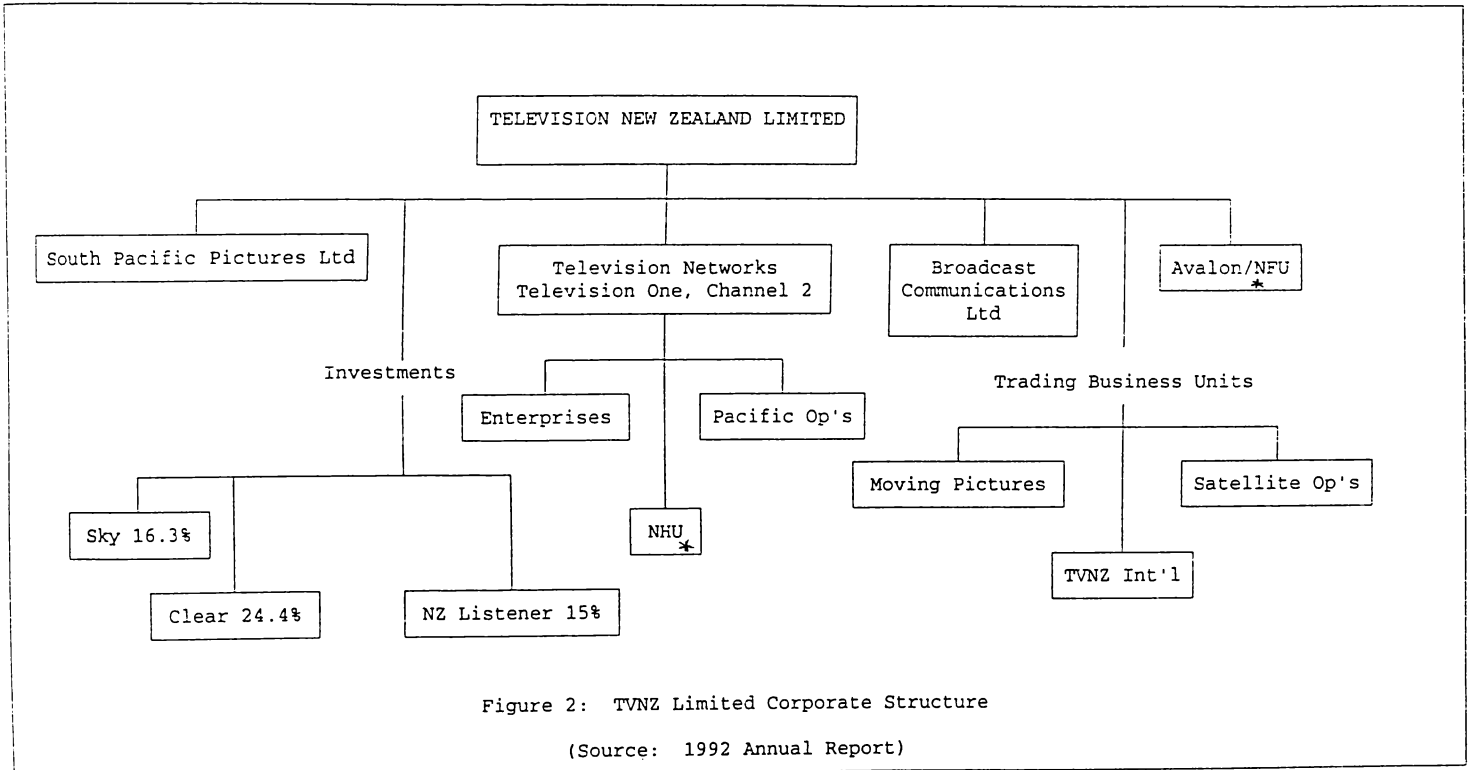
6) To use a proportion of the profits generated by new growth to expand the output of drama, documentary, children's and wild-life programmes.

After becoming a SOE, TVNZ was restructured into 27 profit-centres in order that revenue be obtained from previously unused sources within the organisation. Two wholly-owned subsidiaries were created - Broadcast Communications Limited and South Pacific Pictures Ltd. BCL was fashioned from the departments responsible for transmission and distribution sites and facilities. It generates revenues from leasing use of its facilities under contract to its privately-owned competitors, the terrestrial carrier TV3⁵⁴ and Sky Television⁵⁵. BCL also has major contracts with the Royal New Zealand Air Force and the Ministry of Transport. The other subsidiary company is South Pacific Pictures Ltd, TVNZ's in-house programme production centre. The Natural History Unit (NHU) has been fashioned from TVNZ's Dunedin production facility to produce wild-life programmes for the national and international market.⁵⁶ The television programme production facility and National Film Unit at Avalon near Wellington has also become a subsidiary which services the private sector as well as TVNZ. Trading Business Units were established to market TVNZ products and services nationally and overseas. However, most of TVNZ's profit-centres are within the core division Television Networks. (See Figure 2 for TVNZ organisational structure.)

⁵⁴TV3 was set up by a private consortium. It began transmission on 26 November 1989 and entered receivership on 2 May 1990. Factors contributing to the failure of the station included beginning transmission just before the Commonwealth Games were held in Auckland to which TVNZ had full coverage rights, coming into the advertising market at the beginning of summer when audiences diminish, trying to meet TVNZ head-on in a programming war, and the inertia of New Zealand audiences who tended to stay with the channel they were used to. In 1991, the National Government passed an amendment to the Broadcasting Act 1989 which allowed 100% foreign ownership of New Zealand media organisations (repealing the 49% limit placed on foreign interests holding shares in New Zealand media companies by the Broadcasting Act 1973). On 18 December 1991, the Canadian-based company CanWest Global Communications bought controlling shares in TV3. It has a 20% shareholding. The other major shareholder is the Australian bank Westpac, which acted as the company's receiver.

⁵⁵ Sky Television is a New Zealand owned pay television company which provides a satellite-based service of three channels (sports, news and movies).

⁵⁶ After becoming a SOE, TVNZ radically reduced its programme production operation. Many of those involved in making programmes for TVNZ were made redundant and subsequently went to set up or work for independent production houses.



ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF TELEVISION NEW ZEALAND LTD

* NHU: Natural History Unit

* NFU: National Film Unit

5.1: Television Networks.

Networks, as it is called, is TVNZ's core division and runs the company's television broadcasting operation.⁵⁷ It is administered by a Directorate consisting of the heads of the various departments, the Chief Executive Officer and the Deputy Chief Executive Officer. The Director of Programming, in 1993, became responsible for what he calls the "packaging" of news and sports productions. (McCready, 1992:9)

A formal expression of the ethos guiding everyday practice in Television Networks is contained in its mission statement:

To maintain first and second place in the ratings by broadcasting complementary programmes which satisfy viewers' needs, thereby achieving appropriate profits in relation to assets employed. (1991 Annual Report, p.9)

In 1993, TVNZ's Television One had 48% market share, Channel Two 35% market share. Its main competitor, TV3, had 16% market share. Sky (N.Z.) Television⁵⁸, accounts for the other 2% (TVNZ Interim Report 1993; AGB:McNair, January 1993). Five years after deregulation and loss of its monopoly, TVNZ's 83% market share shows the company continues to dominate the New Zealand television market. The steady improvement in TVNZ's financial performance over that period reflects its dominant position. For example:

	1990	1991	1992
<u>Income:</u>		\$314.14m	\$343.46m
<u>Profit Before Taxation:</u>	\$25.4m	\$29.7m	\$35.2m
<u>After-tax Profit:</u>	\$13.0m	\$20.6m	\$23.4m

The primary indicator of the company's ability to generate income from its assets, its earnings before interest and tax, show a 33% increase for the first 6 months of 1993 on its

⁵⁷From now on, all references to TVNZ refer to the division of Television Networks except in the few occasions where the context shows I mean the larger State-owned Enterprise as a commercial entity.

⁵⁸ New Zealand's private satellite television company SKY (N.Z.) Television is in no way connected with Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB which operates out of England.

earnings for the same period the previous year. (TVNZ Interim Report 1993, p.1)

Under the S.O.E. Act (part III, accountability), TVNZ is required to pay an annual dividend to the Crown.

<u>Annual Dividend:</u>	1990	1991	1992
	\$8.5m	\$11.25m	\$10.0m

(Source: TVNZ Annual Reports 1990-1992)

The annual turn-over of New Zealand's television advertising market is estimated to be around \$300 million. TVNZ's main source of income is advertising revenue. In 1991, this totalled \$238 million. In 1992, it was \$245.8 million. (Ministry of Commerce, 1993:18) In its first year of competition, 1990, TVNZ lost \$40 million in advertising revenue to its only competitor at the time, TV3. However, TVNZ's annual turn-over in its first year as a SOE dropped by only 3%. One of the biggest factors contributing to the impressive financial performance of TVNZ in its first year of competition was the massive reduction in labour costs through cutting staffing levels by 50% (from 2200 in 1988 to 1100 in 1991). Trading profits were being generated by the company's newly-created subsidiaries and profit centres (known as Strategic Business Units).

As a State-owned Enterprise, TVNZ does not have access to guaranteed funding as it did prior to 1 December 1988. Revenues are generated from commercial activity and funding from the licence fee distributing agency NZ on Air, which TVNZ competes for against TV3 and independent production houses. TVNZ's Maori department is funded by NZ on Air because the programme promotes Maori language and culture. Overall, NZ on Air funding constitutes a very small proportion of TVNZ's \$300 million income⁵⁹.

⁵⁹ It is difficult to give accurate figures. For example, Mounter (1991) states that the licence fee contributed only 4% of its total annual revenue. The Company's 1991 Annual Report puts it at 19%.

5.2: Redefining the Department of News and Current Affairs as a Profit-Centre.

After becoming a SOE, TVNZ's Department of News and Current Affairs was redefined as a profit centre called a Strategic Business Unit. Its managers saw the department's "burdened cost-structure" as "threatening its survival" (General Manager, News and Current Affairs). They centralized production in the Auckland newsroom and halved the size of the operation. Whereas the Department had 300 journalists and a national network of regional news-rooms and stringers in 1988, by 1993, it employed 160 journalists full-time. Staff reductions were effected mainly through the department's withdrawal from regional news production and the closure, or radical reduction in the size, of regional news operations.

As a SBU, the department operates as "a mini-company" (General Manager, News and Current Affairs) within the larger organisation of Television Networks. It is self-funding, generating from its advertising revenues greater profits than its expenditure.

A system of internal charging now operates between departments for goods and services provided and used. For example, before restructuring, studio time was allocated to those productions requiring studio space according to the length of time the producers said they required, "with no real examination or testing of what they needed" (General Manager, News and Current Affairs). The SBU *News and Current Affairs* is now charged by the SBU *Auckland Resources* for using the transmission studio when a programme is broadcast. The General Manager of the News SBU explained: "Having to pay for each resource meant efficiencies were put in place. Hence all costs of each production are now evident."

The annual budgeting procedures require the news managers to assess which programmes will be made the following year and get quotes from the other SBU's about the cost of providing internal services such as studios, bearers, satellite service costs, vehicles,

provision of payroll and personnel services, mail handling and office accommodation, cleaning, fire protection, cafeteria, etc. To these, each SBU adds anticipated labour costs and those of external goods and services e.g. domestic air travel, international air-travel, helicopters, accommodation, rental cars, freight, contracts with suppliers of news etc. Thus the formula for working out the total cost of a programme is:

SBU charges + labour + outside goods and services = total cost

Each programme (e.g. *ONN@6*, *Holmes*, *Primetime*) draws up its own budget to this formula. Producers of each programme make a first draft of the budget, which is checked and rechecked by Finance staff and by the editorial executives. The final meeting, where the budget for each programme is agreed, is attended by the Producer.

He or she haggles a little, but at the end the producer has to be happy to 'own' the budget, to be content that it will finance the product, because the Producer will be held accountable. (General Manager, News & Current Affairs)

Management considers individual programme producers being accountable for specific project budgets to be an extremely valuable part of the new system. After intense scrutiny, Department budgets are agreed with the programmers and Finance, and approved. The sum total of all Departmental budgets becomes Networks Division's working budget. News then draws on the agreed sum throughout the year to pay for S.B.U.'s services, labour and 'outside' services. If during the year schedulers or programmers want to change the product, for example, add a 'special', extra funds are negotiated and supplied to provide for the additional work. However, while there is provision for some transferring of money within each programme's budget at the behest of the Producer, "the bottom line must remain unaltered." (*ibid*).

A Producer is now able to tell what each day's activities have cost by totalling "the commitments" for that day (General Manager). The commitment logs are a new

management instrument which give a fairly accurate indication of expenses before the invoices arrive. Day-to-day expenditure is logged in the newsroom computer. As each new story is created, a template is also automatically produced which lists the codes for all the types of expenditure likely for an item. Beside each code an estimate of the cost is inserted, known as commitments. As invoices arrive from other S.B.U.'s and outside suppliers, actual costs are put alongside the commitments. Total actual costs are then reported weekly, or monthly, to the Producer, enabling reconciliation against the 'Year To Date' budget. The value of the new accounting system to the General Manager and senior executives is that they are able to regularly monitor and identify expenditure trends within the News unit. The system allows them to identify, code by code, the expected costs of each aspect of the programme-making. For the first time, management can ascertain specific types of expenditure such as how much *ONN@6* budgeted for helicopter travel, or how much they have spent 'year to date'.

S.B.U. News has several minor direct income flows so the end of the year balance has these ingredients:

<u>From Networks:</u>	<u>To SBU's:</u>
total cost of agreed programmes	cost of providing internal services
<u>From Income</u>	<u>To Labour</u>
sales of news material abroad	costs of salaries, ACC levy ⁶⁰ , etc
<u>From New Zealand on Air</u>	To outside suppliers
total cost of Te Karere ⁶¹	
-----	-----
\$ X	\$ X
-----	-----

The unit also derives incomes from sales of news material to the domestic market, from Sales and Marketing for advertising income generated by news programmes (which goes to Networks to pay for the programmes), and from sponsorships. The organisational requirement for profits and managerial accountability has made maintaining/increasing 'market share' a primary focus of concern for the unit's executives.

5.3: News-Production as a Core Activity of TVNZ.

"The provision of news is one of the essential roles of a television service" (Aisbett & Wright:1989:13) and news production is a core activity for TVNZ. After the new legislative framework redefining the company's structure and purpose was enacted, the Department of News and Current Affairs was reorganised.

Soon after becoming a SOE, TVNZ was divided into Strategic Business Units (SBU's). Each department became a SBU with further downstream divisions of each SBU; unique and as appropriate to the SBU's activities.

⁶⁰All employers and wage earners have to pay a levy to the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC), a government department which pays medical costs etc for accident victims.

⁶¹*Te Karere* is the 10 minute Maori Language daily news bulletin which goes to air three quarters of an hour before *ONN@6*. It is not produced by News and Current Affairs but by the Maori Department and funded from the Licence Fee through New Zealand on Air (the Broadcasting Commission set up by the Broadcasting Act 1989).

This required a considerable change in culture for TVNZ. Seminars were held with most staff members asked to consider 'what if I owned the business?' From these came some good ideas for efficiencies - a bonus. The discussions were really aimed at impressing a change of mind-set towards a stand-alone company in which all decision-makers and managers (of all levels) would have to take their share of accountability to get the bottom line right. (General Manager, News & Current Affairs)

The Strategic Business Units enabled the SOE Act 1986 to be applied in TVNZ's day to day operations. 'Changing the institutional culture' to one concerned with 'getting the bottom line right' has been a priority of management charged with the responsibility of 'maintaining the ratings' and 'achieving appropriate profits in relation to assets employed'.

5.4: The Ratings.

Television audience ratings are a statistical estimate of the number of homes tuned to a particular television programme. The system of ratings measurement has been developed to service the advertising and commercial media industries. It was devised for advertisers who required a source of information about audiences independent of the broadcasters themselves. (Meehan,1990:117-137). The ratings are used as a measure of the proportion of the potential audience watching a certain channel at a specific time. In particular, they are used to assess the "relativities" of audience size between programmes on different channels which are scheduled at the same time. (Nick Jones, AGB:McNair: Personal Communication, 1993) Academics have subjected the ratings system to extensive critique (Meehan,1990;Ang,1991;Cunningham and Turner,1993; Altheide and Johnson,1980). Burns likened the dominance of ratings discourse within media organisations to "watching the whole practice of medicine being reduced to the use of a thermometer." (Burns,1970:156). Nevertheless, within the commercial media and advertising industries, they are taken-for-granted as a crucial form of knowledge because on the basis of the ratings, a price-tag can be attached to a commercial slot. It has been estimated that a single ratings point is worth \$3 million a year to TVNZ. (Atkinson,1992:5).

Television administrators have measured audience size since the NZBC began. The organisation has always been a mixed system, relying to varying degrees on the revenues generated from advertising sales. Now that the statutory framework governing the company has changed the operating ethos from that of a public service to a wholly commercial orientation, ratings have acquired increased strategic importance within the organisation. They now dominate the discourse and interests of TVNZ executives.

The value of ratings to a commercial television organisation, as perceived from an *institutional* point of view has been articulated by Beville as follows:

They *determine* the price that will be paid for programmes and the pay that performers will receive. They govern the rates that advertisers will pay for a 60-second or 30-second or smaller units in and around a programme. Ratings determine stations' audience and rank order in their market, and to a large degree they dictate the profitability of broadcasting stations and their value when put up for sale. The salary and bonus compensation of key network and station officials are also governed by ratings success. Ratings results ultimately determine whether top management and programme and news management... will retain their jobs, be promoted, or demoted. (Quoted in Ang, 1991:47)

The ratings, which construct the audience in terms of demographic categories described in the language of "frequencies, percentages and averages" (ibid:50) are held by television executives to be objective, factual measures of audience size. They use the ratings data as a statistically accurate and therefore credible indicator of the tastes and preferences of audiences. This assumption underpins the world-view and actions of executives within the media and advertising industries. As a taken-for-granted discourse, 'the ratings' is central in the conceptual framework which shapes their business practice.

Explaining the significance of the ratings to executives in a commercial television company, a programmer remarked:

People hate us mentioning ratings. The fact is ratings are a measurement of audience preference. They are not some ludicrous thing that we slavishly

pander to. They indicate what people like, what they don't, what they chase, what they are soft on. It is important, and it's necessary that we watch the audience to see if their tastes are changing. Tastes do change and they are constantly monitored.

I once said at a conference that ratings are a fiction we all agree to believe in. To some extent that is true because we will never really know exactly how many people watched any particular programme. But we are in a situation where people are making choices about options. Ratings give us an indication of what they seek from the medium. They are not absolutely quantifiable and absolutely anything, but they certainly do give us an indication of audience movement and change and that's what they should be doing, because that effects our decision making every day. (Programmer)

Given the dependence of a commercial television organisation on advertising revenues, the programmes which attract the largest ratings become valuable to the company as the 'bait' which attracts the higher advertising fees.

The commercial significance of the ratings in the contemporary situation at TVNZ is evident in the way in which its executives construct them as "the engine which drives broadcasting" (TVNZ Programmer). Ang quotes a researcher working in American commercial television who uses a bio-mechanical metaphor to explain their significance within the industry:

[They are a] regulating device that is crucial for success. Programmes are the heart of broadcasting, while sales provide the muscle. Ratings with their feedback element are the nerve system which largely controls what is broadcast. (*ibid*:48)

TVNZ engages the independent research firm AGB:McNair to measure its audiences. Programme audiences are measured in terms of their size and composition. Size refers to the number of people tuned in to a certain programme or channel at a certain hour on a certain evening; composition refers to the sorts of people who are watching, defined in terms of demographic variables such as age, location, income, and sex. Measurements are taken in relation both to the total potential audience and to the actual audience at the time of measurement.

5.5: 'The News' as Commodity.

ONN@6 is not just a news programme, it's a prime time show. There's a maximum amount of viewers out there and we just happen to be a news programme that's sitting in that slot. So apart from informing, we've also got to entertain, we've got to be slick, polished and better. (Bulletin Producer)

This perspective on *ONN@6* has been generalised by Powers:

Television's first mission is not to inform. It is not even to entertain. It is to move goods, to round up viewers for the main event - the commercial. (Powers, 1977:19)

The significance of the news programme which leads in to prime-time derives from the function it serves in what programming vernacular calls the audience 'inheritance factor' or 'flow-on effect'. *ONN@6* is vital to the organisation because it

...brings in the audience at six o'clock and you feed them through. They just flow on and feed right to the 7.30 junction which is the most competitive junction - that is when the audience is most active and they are switching. But if you have got them there, then you have a very strong chance of keeping your audience. The key anchor programme on Television One is the News without doubt. The channel's whole profile revolves around that authority, credibility - it affects them right through. (Programmer)

Since commercialization, *ONN@6* has become organisationally defined as a critical instrument in TVNZ's competitive strategies. It consistently "wins the ratings war" (*ibid*), by attracting, on a daily basis, the largest television audiences available to advertisers - on average 26% of an estimated potential audience of 2.9 million viewers. In 1992, the 6 p.m. news bulletin "was watched on average by 26% of the total available viewing audience (aged five and over). It reached a peak of 39% on one telecast, making it the top individual programme for 1992." (*Networks*, 11 February 1993, p.1-2).

Advertising rates for slots within the highest rating programmes are the greatest revenue earners. A 30 second advertising slot during the newshour, on a Monday night⁶² in

⁶² Monday nights have the highest rate of charge of the week.

October 1992 cost \$11,000 ⁶³and there are four advertising breaks within the newshour with an average of six advertisements per break. However, the worth of *ONN@6* to TVNZ extends beyond the value of the advertising revenues it attracts.

The newsreaders play a significant part in the strategies with which TVNZ's marketing executives secure audience trust and loyalty. They are carefully selected and groomed to embody authority and trustworthiness. The presenters are used to *represent* what one TVNZ executive referred to as "the human face" of the network. The celebrity status they acquire through daily exposure in living-rooms and through the widespread distribution of their images in other advertising media (newspapers and magazines, on hoardings and the sides of buses) is

...a strength for the network. If you have a person who has the authority that becomes a symbol of the station, that gives the whole station a bit of a lift. I think it helps to have the news delivered with authority. But it really is a **symbol** of authority and it reflects on the whole credibility of the station and through it the credibility of all the journalists that are working for it. (Chief Assistant, Director, News & Current Affairs)

The 6 pm news presenters are the "absolute keystone" of the company in that they represent the means by which prestige, goodwill, credibility and authority are 'won' for the network (Programmer) ⁶⁴.

Thus *ONN@6*, as well as attracting valuable advertising revenue, also serves as the 'flagship' of the company. The credibility and authority of the programme establishes

⁶³ There is a monthly variation, the charges being less for the months at the beginning of the year than those at its end, e.g. a Monday night in January was \$6,000, in April, \$8,000, in September \$10,000.

⁶⁴ See Allan (1990). It is the task of TVNZ's marketing department to construct a credible and appealing 'human face' for the organisation. Their central strategy for achieving this is through turning news presenters into 'personalities' with celebrity status, through broad and constant 'exposure' in other media. Copies of *The New Zealand Woman's Weekly* frequently carry an item on one of TVNZ's stars, who is usually one of their news readers. *The New Zealand Listener* also gives them exposure, though not to the same cloying degree as the *NZWW*. See 'The Judy Factor: TVNZ's Trump Card', in INL's now defunct magazine *Sunday*, 4 February 1990, pp.10-16 and 'The Fame Game', *More*, May 1990, pp 27-35.

TVNZ's status as a reputable broadcasting organisation. It is this reputation which the company trades on, and the 'credibility' of the news is sold along with the faces of the presenters and the programmes they represent.

CHAPTER SIX: THE ORGANISATION OF JOURNALISTIC RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPERTISE.

The old concept of the crusading journalist going it alone is a myth and a legend. In the communications industry the required skills are so widely spread that no one person can make a television programme. It's got to be an amalgam of a lot of highly specialized people. (Bulletin Director)

6.0: Introduction.

The daily production of a television news programme is a complex and unique form of journalism requiring the co-ordination of a range of specialist skills. This chapter broadly outlines the discrete but overlapping spheres of expertise, and the demarcation of responsibility and authority in TVNZ's Department of News and Current Affairs.

The social organisation of news production at TVNZ is not a static arrangement but is subject to continual alteration by the senior news executives. For example, since the beginning of my study, the titles of the two executives immediately beneath the department Director have changed several times and the position of Executive Producer for ONN@6 has been expunged. However, these are but minor shifts in a set of arrangements which have not fundamentally altered. Early in 1994, the Deputy Director swapped overseeing daily news programme production with the present Executive Producer of Current Affairs. While the Deputy Director will continue to retain overall responsibility for all news and current affairs programmes, he is now more closely concerned with overseeing weekly productions.

The following representation of the organisation of news production at TVNZ reflects the hierarchical arrangement of journalistic responsibilities as they were in 1993⁶⁵. However,

⁶⁵ The designation of spheres of expertise and responsibility within the hierarchical authority is not explicit in the newsroom. 'Rank' is not a term the journalists would use themselves, and when asked, none could provide a term for referring to the differing status of journalists according to their location within the organisational structure.

I have included a description of the duties of *ONN@6*'s Executive Producer even though the position no longer exists. As quotes from interviews with her are used in this study, a description of the position is given so that the reader has some idea of what the post entailed.

The use of personal pronouns for the Home Editor and Chief Assistant to the Director of News and Current Affairs needs to be clarified. The position of Home Editor was filled by a woman during the first two years of this study. When the Chief Assistant to the Director moved to take up the position of TVNZ's Standards Manager, the Home Editor replaced him. A male journalist was then appointed as Home Editor. In this section, I refer to the Home Editor as 'he' and the Chief Assistant as 'she'. However, in subsequent chapters, I use 'she' as the personal pronoun for the Home Editor, and 'he' for the Chief Assistant as referring to quotations from interviews with the journalists who held the posts in 1990-1992.

6.1: The Management Team.

The Group Chief Executive of TVNZ is Editor-in-Chief. He carries responsibility for the production of news and current affairs programmes by the organisation.⁶⁶ Although a trained journalist, his authority as Editor-in-Chief is called on only in exceptional circumstances such as when the organisation is sued for libel as a result of a news or current affairs programme, or an extraordinary situation arises that is without precedent.

The Director of News and Current Affairs is the most senior executive responsible for the management of the department. He represents the department in the wider management of

⁶⁶ He is responsible to the Television New Zealand Ltd Board of Directors and the Shareholding Ministers of the Crown who are the Minister of Finance and the Minister Responsible for TVNZ.

Television Networks, the television programme production and transmission arm of the organisation. He is part of the TVNZ Directorate which consists of the Chief Executive, Ass. CEO/Director of Operations and the Directors of the other departments within Television Networks - Special Events and Sport, Programmes, Sales and Marketing, Planning and Public Affairs, Finance, TVNZ International, Business Development and Resources.

The Director is responsible for the delegation of specific production and editorial functions within the department (assisted by the Deputy Director and the Executive Producer - Current Affairs). He establishes and directs editorial policy and oversees the activities of the editorial team and the department's financial managers. It is his responsibility to ensure that the imperatives of the wider organisation are met by the department.

There are two other journalists working in the Director's suite of offices. This is the administrative part of the Department of News and Current Affairs and is a floor up from the newsroom. The Chief Assistant to the Director of News and Current Affairs is concerned with the legal affairs of the department, standards of journalist practice and matters of taste. She responds to contacts from members of the public regarding TVNZ news and current affairs. Where a complaint is made, she establishes its validity and decides on the appropriate course of action to be taken. When a complaint is formally lodged with the Broadcasting Standards Authority, it is the Chief Assistant who is responsible for briefing TVNZ's legal representatives.

The other executive, the General Manager of the News SBU, has editorial responsibility for *Te Karere* only. He looks after the business affairs of the department, i.e. contracts, budgets, costings, new business, and wages of all salaried and casual staff.

The most senior hands-on journalist in the newsroom is the Deputy Director of News and Current Affairs. He oversees the production of all news and current affairs programmes. It is his responsibility, under guidance from the department's Director, to ensure that the programmes meet their budgets and briefs as set out in the TVNZ Journalists' Manual.

The Deputy Director is concerned with ensuring that the two components of the production process, news selection and news construction, reflect the editorial standards and policies established by the Director in consultation with the Deputy Director and the Executive Producer of Current Affairs.

The Executive Producer of Current Affairs is responsible for the production of the daily current affairs programme *Holmes* and the weekly current affairs shows.

6.2: The Editorial Team.

Next in the hierarchy of accountability is the editorial team. This consists of the Deputy Director, the Executive Producer of Current Affairs, the Assignments or Home Editor, the Foreign Editor, the Executive Producers and Producers of the various news and daily current affairs programmes, the Sports and Political Editors and the Editors-in-Chief of the regional newsrooms.

One of the editorial team's key responsibilities is keeping informed of breaking news stories and important political initiatives and developments so that potential stories can be identified and the journalists under their particular jurisdictions can research the essential details. It is the Deputy Director and the editorial team who select what will become the 'stories of the day', which news or current affairs programmes will cover them, and the 'angles' or treatment for individual items.

6.3: The Production Team.

Before the Executive Producer of ONN@6 left in 1992 and the position was dissolved⁶⁷, she was in charge of overseeing the production of the programme. She and the Bulletin Producer were responsible for weighing up story suggestions against the wider objectives of the Department⁶⁸. She also served as a 'sounding board' for the other editorial staff involved in the bulletin's production and was the intermediary between them and the Director and Deputy Director.

The Bulletin Producer is responsible for pulling the individual items being produced in a newscast into a complete programme to be aired as the evening news bulletin. In consultation with the Deputy Director, he decides which stories will be covered and the angle or treatment. The Bulletin Producer establishes the various elements required of a particular story. i.e. the visual and archival elements, the angle and preferred treatment. He described the criteria which guide his decisions:

'Who is going to be interested? Is it going to make a good television story? Will it stop people in their tracks when they're walking past the room and come in and sit down and watch our news? Will they remember it tomorrow? Will it be talked about on the bus? And how many people does it impact upon?" (Bulletin Producer)

6.4: The Assignments Team.

While the Bulletin Producer is concerned with what he referred to as 'output', or 'product', the Home Editor and the Foreign Editor manage the 'input' side of the production process. With their assistants, they constitute the 'assignment' or 'desk'. They assign stories and attend to the logistical details of getting stories covered and ready to go to air. They are the primary point of contact between the editorial team (of which they are members) and

⁶⁷After the Executive Producer for ONN@6 left, the responsibilities of the position were spread between the senior executives. The Deputy Director explained that it was more cost-effective that way and made possible because of more efficient mobilization of existing resources within the SBU.

⁶⁸ which is to produce a popular programme which appeals to as wide an audience as possible.

the 'working' journalists, the reporters and story producers who are assigned by them to work on specific stories.

The central responsibility of the Home Editor is the assignment and processing of domestic news stories after the editorial team has made its initial selection at the morning meeting. He draws on the information given to him by the reporters and from his diary of newsworthy events coming up. He also meets with the journalists before the morning editorial meeting, scans the newspapers, Radio New Zealand's and other wire services to see what stories are 'breaking'. The Home Editor decides which reporters will cover what stories and, in negotiation with the programme producers, which programme gets the stories. (e.g. *ONN@6* or *Holmes*). He checks that the reporters and story producers are developing the angles the editorial staff want and ensures the stories are completed on time. It is the Home Editor's responsibility to manage the logistics of story coverage. He directs the movements of journalists around the country so that, as the former Home Editor put it: "the right people are in the right places to get the right story". It is also his responsibility to ensure that the reporters are aware of, and satisfy, editorial expectations and the requirements of the production desk.

The Auckland-based Home Editor co-ordinates the activities of TVNZ reporters in the various operations, at both the head office in Auckland and the major regional centres of Wellington and Christchurch.

He also liaises with the bulletin producer and the other news programme producers (in Auckland and other centres) to see what their needs are. Regular contact between the Home Editor and the regional Bureau Chiefs is maintained to keep the information channels flowing and to ensure there is no duplication of effort by the different newsrooms.

The regional editors-in-chief, who are considered about equivalent in rank to the Home Editor, are responsible to him. The Wellington Bureau Chief, who co-ordinates the Wellington newsroom and Parliamentary reporters, and the Christchurch Bureau Chief who manages both Christchurch and Dunedin news operations, are responsible to the Auckland-based Home Editor. They are part of the editorial team, participating in team meetings via the tele-conference facility. It is their responsibility to co-ordinate the activities of staff in the regional offices with those in the Auckland newsroom.

Two other major areas for which the Home Editor is responsible are 'planning', which involves knowing what is going on in the community and government so that potential stories can be identified, and ensuring reporters are aware of the essential details. The Home Editor also plays a central editorial role in the "enormous culling process" (Home Editor). A large number of potential stories are rejected between the start of the newsday and late morning.

Before the morning meeting of the editorial team, he rings the TVNZ chief reporters in Wellington and Christchurch. Each keeps a diary of possible stories that are developing. Typical sources of story ideas are their own diaries, newspaper or radio reports, the computerized news agency feeds, personal contacts, faxes, the phone log and letters. There is an abundance of available material but very little of it is deemed suitable by the editorial team:

"From over a thousand **potential** stories, ⁶⁹ only around a dozen of them will make it to the evening bulletin." (Home Editor)

The Home Editor is responsible for ensuring that they have not missed "anything that's

⁶⁹ This refers to the total available stories from the wire-services (RNZ's in particular but there are four main services available on the Electronic News Gathering System). Story ideas are also taken from the Home Editor's and other diaries, as well as big stories which might have been broken by the daily newspapers or radio.

major [and] TV3 gets it first. That's important - we don't like to see stories missed by us and that's particularly important now that we're in competition." (ibid)

The Foreign Editor is responsible for the selection of news stories from the satellite feeds that TVNZ has contracted to receive from six international broadcasters and agencies. He arranges TVNZ's requirements for satellite services with Telecom and deals with overseas companies whose satellite feed material has been used. He is also responsible for the permanent TVNZ reporters in London and Sydney, and for organising contacts, crews and stringers for overseas stories.

6.5: News Presenters.

The news presenters are journalists with a special status since they provide and represent the 'human face' of the organisation. They are 'the face of the news' due to their high degree of public exposure and their familiarity to viewers. They play a key role in the marketing strategy of 'channel branding'⁷⁰. They are not involved in either editorial decision-making or putting items together. Their duties could be said to be more public relations work than journalistic. They write or rewrite the 'intro' for items and make other script adjustments and additions such as 'ad libs'⁷¹ and taggings⁷² which are used in the presentation of the bulletin to tie the items together.

⁷⁰ TVNZ's Manager of Channel Marketing explains the concept in the in-house journal *Televiews* Special 1992, p.7.

⁷¹ 'Ad.libs.' are not, as the phrase suggests, spontaneous additions but carefully crafted comments used to lighten up the mood of the delivery and to create a sense of everyday, ordinary conversation.

⁷² 'Tagging' is the industry name for the small phrases used by the news presenters at the point where another presenter is responsible for reading the script.

6.6: Technical Staff.

The Bulletin Director is the 'link' between the news studio crews and the journalists. He directs the studio technicians and 'orchestrates' the technical transmission of the bulletin. He has editorial input to the extent that he can create graphics or select a picture to put in a story and he works in tandem with the Bulletin Producer, but has no editorial control and does not attend the editorial team meetings.

6.7: Foreign Correspondents.

Television New Zealand has two reporters placed overseas. The European reporter is based in London, England and the Australian reporter based at Channel Nine in Sydney.

6.8: Story Producers and Reporters.

At the bottom of the organisational hierarchy of accountability are the story producers and the reporters. The story producer acts as the hands-on editor of an item. S/he is responsible to the Home Editor for ensuring an item is produced for screening and that it has been covered 'thoroughly' and that 'the shape is right', according to the established editorial and production framework.

Story producers are journalists who have been identified by management as possessing 'good visualizing skills', which means they can be relied on to shape the 'look' and 'feel' of an item so that it is consistent with the overall style determined by editorial policy. They guide and advise the reporter regarding storyline, structure, approach, and selection of the appropriate footage. As well as giving editorial assistance to the reporter they will also help with logistical problems such as making contact with the 'talent', i.e. those individuals perceived necessary to the story. If for example, the item is an Auckland story but they want to add a piece out of Christchurch just to give a different angle, they are responsible

for getting that. They maintain constant contact with the Home Editor so that, as the story develops, they know what is happening and where it will fit in the bulletin. The story producer provides on-going editorial assistance for the reporter, especially in cases where a story is particularly complex or difficult.

Reporters are expected to be actively seeking stories which have not been carried in the other media. Their responsibility is to maintain sources and to know what is going on in their 'round' or 'beat'⁷³ as well as to follow up the stories breaking that day. They keep the Home Editor informed of potential stories they have found through their sources, contacts and individual initiatives. A system of 'reporter enterprise' is encouraged. This refers to reporters actively seeking stories which have not come from a diary entry, public relations release, newspaper follow-up or radio report. In practice it is a difficult policy for the reporters to implement as they spend most of their time on stories they have been assigned. The reporter is also often working on something carried over from the day before, or on material for another news programme⁷⁴.

A certain degree of flexibility of movement between different programmes has recently been introduced for the reporters. As one explained:

I work specifically for *ONN@6* but I also can do stories for the *Tonight* programme which means I can do longer, more in-depth pieces for them if I want to. I usually just make a suggestion to the programme editor of *Tonight* if I've got something I think they would be interested in and if they say yes, then I go to the home desk and if I need extra time to do that, then I say: look I've got to be working on this story today so can you clear me from 6 o'clock duties. If they can they will. If they can't, I will have to do it another day. It's pretty much the way all the reporters are working at the moment because we've got enough staff to do that. A while ago we just had

⁷³These terms denote the domain of activity and contacts e.g. 'police', 'environment', 'business' that a particular reporter is responsible for. However, within the television newsroom, these are more loosely defined than is the case on newspapers.

⁷⁴ In 1992, the more experienced reporters were given the opportunity to produce longer and more in-depth items for the mid-evening news as well as *ONN@6*.

enough people to cover *ONN@6* only. That came about in the past 12 months that there's been an increase in the staff⁷⁵ of Network -not everyone is doing that because a lot of the staff here are fairly new anyway so it's enough for them to be doing a 6 o'clock item but then there's a group of us who are getting a bit bored with doing a minute 10 everyday and you know we can stretch ourselves a bit on *Tonight*. (Senior Reporter)

Until recently the reporters had to file a story every day but since the deputy director has modified the story producer system, there are more reporters available, easing the pressure on reporters and allowing them a degree of flexibility.

When a story has been assigned them, reporters make the necessary contacts with the individuals central to the story, and go into the field to investigate, interview, and film. However, while the reporter has some interpretive latitude in constructing the item, the elements of the story/item (visual, spoken, archival) will already have been established by the Home Editor, the Deputy Director and Bulletin Producer.

Television news production is governed by the imperative of 'filling the newshole' (Reporter) by the scheduled time. The economic penalties the organisation will incur for failing to do so are considerable. The news executives are responsible for ensuring the institutional commitment to "the regular production of an irregular and unpredictable commodity" (Tiffin,1990:15) is met. The attribute characteristic of all news-organisations "producing news for a market based on the concept of the newsworld." (Schlesinger,1978:104) is the requirement for journalists to practice according to the "operating rules" (Epstein,1973:42) established or sanctioned by the news executives.

Shared knowledge of the operating rules is an essential criterion for newsroom membership

⁷⁵While the reporter perceived that there had been an increase in staff, the Deputy Director corrected this. The increase in availability of reporters was due to a rearrangement of the role of story- producers so that, if required, they could serve as reporters.

for it enables the effective co-ordination of the journalists' activities through minimizing the role of individual attitudes and preferences (Tiffin,*op.cit.*).

Assignment editors, who select the events to be covered, must have a clear set of criteria and advance preferences, to reduce the virtually limitless barrage of information to manageable proportions and at the same time choose the *type* of stories which producers require for their particular programmes. [Reporters] require some formula for putting together their story... so that their reports can be smoothly meshed into the programme. Similarly, editors, cameramen and sound technicians must have clear precepts about the requisite format of news pieces. Producers, finally, must impose guidelines on all those involved in the production of news stories so that they can meet budgets, schedules, and other standards that they are responsible for maintaining. (Epstein, 1973:42).

In the next chapter, the journalists' identify key operating rules and defining characteristics of TVNZ news-culture and the normative frame guiding their collective enterprise.

PART THREE:

DISCURSIVE AND INTERACTIVE STRUCTURES

OF TVNZ NEWS-CULTURE.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DEFINING THE 'PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE'.

Lots has been written about our professional rules but no-one outside ever really understands. In the end, it's all interpretation. Like a judgement in a court-case, in the end it is what someone decides. They may not decide very differently from any other one hundred people. There is a consensus, it's fairly obvious. I mean, it just ploughs on. (Home Desk Assistant)

7.0: Introduction:

This chapter identifies key beliefs and themes in TVNZ journalists' accounts of what they do, why and how. It sets out the defining parameters of TVNZ news-culture, *as the journalists themselves understand these to be.*

The journalists' understandings of their practice, and the news operation, constitute what Schlesinger terms the 'professional attitude', i.e. the self-sustaining conventional wisdom shared by the journalists as part of a routinized way of life. (Schlesinger,1978:107) It underpins the collaborative attribute of the journalists' enterprise and enables the routine co-ordination of newswork in the TVNZ newsroom.

'The professional attitude' is more than a body of normative knowledge, although this constitutes a large part of it. The journalists draw on a wide range of explanations to describe their practice. While professional norms and ideologies tend to be cited initially, journalists also emphasize the "mechanics" (Assistant Home Editor) of news-work i.e. managing the practical details of the journalistic enterprise as a key determinant of their practice. These the journalists also refer to as the 'logistical burden'. The pragmatic character of the 'professional attitude' is exemplified in the Home Desk Assistant's comment: "The whole thing is one of arrangements, dealing with the mechanics of it."

Because of recent changes in the technical aspects of television journalism, and also in organisational structure, historical comparisons are an integral feature of TVNZ's

journalists' accounts of 'the professional attitude'. Frequently journalists explained aspects of the general nature of current journalism by using examples of the way in which journalism used to be practiced at TVNZ. Another feature is reference to the daily current affairs show, *Holmes*, which makes up the 6 pm newshour along with the news bulletin *ONN@6*. I therefore conclude this chapter with a section dealing with journalists' perception of the programme as a defining influence on contemporary journalism at TVNZ.

7.1: Attributes of 'Professionalism'.

The journalists understand themselves to be engaged in the production of factual, impartial depictions of an external reality for the medium of television. As one put it:

I am a processor and conveyor of information. I'm here to take the facts, the events, the sequences surrounding a story and to re-work it for television or work it for the first time for television and present it through the medium in a way that everyone can understand and relate to. (Reporter)

The basis of social action in the newsroom is framed within a democratic rhetoric of empowerment and social responsibility. Journalists have "a duty to tell [the people] what they need to know" (Exec.Producer *ONN@6*); they are working in the interests of people who "are too busy, looking after the kids or at work, to find out things for themselves". (Home Desk Assistant Editor)

Their occupational ideology posits a fiduciary relationship between the journalist and the citizen. The professional responsibility of the journalist is constructed in terms of a public trustee "gathering the facts as they happened" (Reporter) for the benefit of the citizen. The citizen is characterized by the attributes of dependency and trust.

The journalistic spirit of public service is articulated in the departmental mission statement made by TVNZ's Director of News and Current Affairs:

We aim to: inform accurately and fairly, provide a wide range of opinion; analyse and place developments in context; probe and scrutinize all areas of the public interest; and challenge and hold to account those who wield power... to provide the public with quality information so that they can contribute to informed decision-making in an evolving democracy. (Norris,1992:3)

The journalists see themselves as representing the public interest through "gathering and disseminating information about significant public affairs and events" (Assistant Home Editor); they are 'watchdogs' positioned between the state, its institutions, and citizens.

We are trying to tell people who probably don't know, about decisions that will affect them. For instance, [if] a government is talking about major changes to the education system, then I think we have a duty to either explain, or make them aware of what is happening, and the dangers or advantages or whatever that may incur. I think we have the role of showing them what their elected officials are doing, right or wrong. (Home Editor)

The journalists' professional responsibilities are constructed in terms of contributing to a citizen being 'informed' so s/he can develop an opinion about particular issues and participate in the democratic process. Implicit in some journalists' formulation of 'professional duty' is the notion of advocacy journalism, the journalist as an agent of justice. Describing the aspect of her work she found most satisfying, one journalist explained it as:

Being able to achieve things in peoples' lives that they wouldn't have been able to otherwise. Where people are helpless, we can be a tool to allow them to achieve justice. Television can just be incredibly valuable to the helpless of this world. That can cover things like the *Fair Go*⁷⁶-type stories or the starving millions in Africa who actually manage to get some help because of pictures being seen in the Western world. (Home Editor)

Evoking a sense of journalism as a calling, this journalist seeks to act as an advocate for the less powerful and disadvantaged in the world. She sees the visual aspect of television as a valuable instrument for serving the public interest and, thereby, for realizing her vocation.

⁷⁶A popular TVNZ consumer affairs programme.

The discourse of professional duty contains a tension between differing interpretations of the appropriate methods and contexts in which this calling should be exercised. As one news executive put it:

Regarding the supply of information to the public - there's a constant clash in weight between the traditional role of news organisations, which is to provide information about what's going on, and that watchdog role which leads to investigative journalism. There's a tension between the two about which is, or which should be, our primary function - information or watchdog. I think that's something that's going on within the industry. It's not something we have fights about or anything, but it's a constant *balancing* of provision of information and the advocate role. (Assistant to Director, News & C/A)

The distinction between advocacy *for* a particular group in society - 'ordinary people' - and taking "a strongly independent and sceptical line with groups who are forever pushing barrows" (Deputy Director, News & C/A), and which is the appropriate path for a journalist, is a delicate and complex matter which is resolved through a claim to professional autonomy and expertise. Being able to define that line and "reflect fairly, all sides of an issue" (Executive Producer, ONN@6) is the mark of journalistic competence. Through the construct of 'professional independence', the requirement of 'balance' is routinely met. It is the professional discipline of 'being fair', or 'objective', which resolves for the journalist the tension between the implicitly value-oriented position of 'public advocacy' and the occupational ideal of 'neutrality'.

TVNZ journalists used 'objectivity' synonymously with 'neutrality' or being 'impartial' or 'unbiased'. Their unproblematic use of the term indicates they are unaware of, or unconcerned about, the epistemological debates in the social and natural sciences over 'objectivity'⁷⁷, and the claim to being 'value-free' as an observer.

⁷⁷ These debates are not central to this thesis and are not discussed here. See, for example, Anthony Smith's 'The long road to objectivity and back again: the kinds of truth we get in journalism' in Boyce, Curran & Wingate (1978); Manoff & Schudson's 'The Grisly Truth about Bare Facts' in *Reading the News* (1986), and Patrick Day's 'Journalistic objectivity: a myth debunked' in *NZ Journalism Review*, 1990, Vol 3, pp.11-12.

The doctrine of 'objectivity' allows the journalists to construe themselves, in their professional capacity, as neutral and politically disinterested. The journalists believe they are able to "put personal bias aside" (Producer) through certain behavioural techniques acquired through their training as journalists. Competence in these techniques is a key criterion in judgement of a journalist's professionalism.

7.2: Guarantees of Impartiality.

Objectivity... it's innate, isn't it? It's one of those principles like balance and accuracy and things. It's in-built. (Bulletin Producer)

A key journalistic assumption is that the journalist is an autonomous practitioner guided by internationally recognised 'professional' standards which are separate from, and not contingent upon, organisational interests and managerial policy.

Journalistic wisdom holds that the well-trained and responsible reporter automatically achieves "professional distance" (Reporter) between their own personal views and the matter they are reporting on. This is seen partially, as the outcome of the application of professional norms and, partially, as a function of technical craft-work. Knowledge of these is acquired through training in basic craft skills:

We make a deliberate effort to train people so they do put aside any personal bias and do the task that they've been given. (Home Desk Assistant)

The canons of 'professional' journalism - advocacy, impartiality, objectivity, balance and accuracy ⁷⁸ - are accomplished through knowledge, and the routine practice, of behavioural conventions such as 'checking the facts', using a range of sources, and ensuring a range of views are presented.⁷⁹ The requirements of 'fairness' and 'balance',

⁷⁸ See Curran in Curran & Gurevitch, 1991: pp. 98-100.

⁷⁹ Television New Zealand Journalists' Manual, pp. 19-22.

within the exigencies of everyday affairs, are achieved through several strategies.

Often we have stories that have conflict in them and we say 'somebody says this' and somebody else says 'that's not so', and we try to figure out what's happening. With a story like that where there is some sort of conflict in it, we always like to have at least approached both sides and try to find out what's going on. Often you find in a story like that, that one side will not talk, which is fine - I don't see a problem with running a story with only one side in it as long as we tried to talk to the other and can say either they wouldn't talk or whatever. (Exec. Producer, Bulletin)

The collegial attribute of news-work is understood by the journalists to contribute to the accomplishment of the professional requirement of objectivity. Collaborative decision-making is valued by them as 'safeguarding' or 'guaranteeing' the impartiality and representativeness of their reports.

It is safer for the public in the sense that the story is the product of three or four professional people conferring and deciding rather than just one individual. (Home Desk Editorial Assistant)

'Putting a few heads together' is taken to also improve the commercial attribute of the bulletin.

The more people that have input in deciding what stories should make it in the bulletin, the better bulletin we'll have. Everyone, like it or not, has their own prejudices, their own interests, their own particular stories they feel ought to be in the bulletin. Having five or six people involved in that decision-making means it's more likely to be a representative and fair and interesting and entertaining bulletin. (Bulletin Editor)

The journalists cite the 'team approach', i.e. peer collaboration over editorial decisions, as evidence that the impartiality of 'the news' is not compromised by the subjectivity of any one individual. The processes of peer review and on-going collegial negotiation over specific instances of individual judgement are construed to guarantee that neither personal bias nor organisational interests "contaminate" their reporting of 'the facts' (Bulletin Producer).

The more people that have input in deciding what stories should make it in the bulletin, the better bulletin we'll have because everyone, like it or not, has their own prejudices, their own interests, their own particular stories

they feel ought to be in the bulletin. Having five or six people involved in that decision-making means it's more likely to be a representative, fair, interesting and entertaining bulletin than if just one person made that decision. (Home Editor)

It's a collation of several attitudes to what's important, and how it should be treated, so it's a fairly well-rounded, broad product of a whole lot of people's input rather than just one person's. (Producer, *ONN@6*)

The internal pluralism of the newsroom, i.e. the diversity of journalists' personal interests and perspectives, is believed to enhance the realization of professional canons. The journalists also emphasize their preoccupation with "the logistical burden" (Home Editor) as another guarantee of objectivity. This term is used to refer to the pressures of organising the human and material required for a particular item. [The "logistical burden" is discussed in greater detail in 7:6]. One journalist asserted that

There is a relative innocence in journalists. Even if it's going into an area where you have a particularly strong view, inevitably, in doing the item, you get involved in the mechanics. You've got a camera crew, you've got to do interviews, you're thinking about the intro, you're thinking 'what's the story about, what do I need to know'. Otherwise my editor is going to say 'you've left this out, you've left that out.' (Home Desk Assistant)

Their "innocence", as the journalist put it, is guaranteed by the time constraints they operate within - they have no time to "push a barrow" even if they want to. (*ibid*)

The professional attitude (Schlesinger, 1978:107) of journalists is not wholly constituted by enduring professional ideologies. Journalistic competence or professionalism also includes knowledge of organizationally defined norms, such as news-production style, which reflect the shifting interests and orientation of the company. For example, production styles acceptable a decade ago are no longer perceived by the journalists to constitute 'proper television journalism'.

It's changed a lot. Ten years ago, we were putting out half an hour of news but it wasn't television, it was just a newspaper with pictures. I mean we'd see reporters sitting up there delivering a two and a half minute story whether the people out there are interested or not. (Bulletin Producer)

7.3: The Populist Ethos.

TVNZ journalists use the epithets 'institutional' and 'worthy-but-dull' to refer to the former production style of the pre-competition culture,⁸⁰ now perceived to be "a turn-off to ordinary people" (Reporter). Many journalists compared the current orientation to the pre-deregulation ethos when

...it didn't really matter whether the public liked it or not, we were going to tell them what was important. (Chief Assistant to Director)

The normative prescription guiding journalists in the contemporary situation was expressed by one journalist in the following terms:

TV news needs to get away from institutional angles to 'people' angles because the audience is emotionally tied in to the individual affected. When it's all about Ministers and meetings, people switch off. (Home Desk Assistant).

The change in emphasis and orientation in news production style at TVNZ is now

...populist, more in line with what people are thinking. We're not talking over their heads... we hope to really talk to them. (Producer)

While the term 'populist' is not common in journalist discourse, a populist rhetoric is used to describe the prevailing newsroom ethos: for example, "...stories must not be about parliament and statistics and unemployment and health boards etc. Stories are now about 'people'..." (Reporter) and "every story should have personal contact" (Homedesk Assistant).

Explaining how a populist ethos shapes the treatment of a news item, the Home Editor remarked:

⁸⁰ They are referring here to the paternalism which characterized the relationship historically holding between broadcasting official and citizen in New Zealand (see Ch.4). The orientation of these 'bulletins of record' were personified in the mature white male presenter who spoke impassively with a precise diction few New Zealanders shared. That his embodiment of authority became perceived as a liability when executive producers felt the sting of commercial pressures, both at TVNZ and subsequently TV3, underscores the shift in institutional ethos which accompanied the restructuring of the BCNZ into the two State-owned Enterprises, Radio New Zealand and Television New Zealand.

We are more likely to try and find an issue or find an underlying thread and cover that rather than just covering a conference. We are more likely to say 'what is going to be coming out of the Ambulance Officers Conference, what is the issue that they are looking at?' and do a story about that issue and not necessarily even tie it to the conference. Before we were continually going to conferences and just saying here is a conference, here is what they are worried about, here is a shot of the people, here is an interview with a man who is upset, we wouldn't do that sort of story so much today. We would be more inclined to show ambulances at night, interview with somebody who maybe hadn't been able to get an ambulance at night and say this typifies the problem that has been seen in these four centres because of a cost funding problem. And look behind the issues but still do it in one minute. I think in that sense we are covering issues and covering material a lot better. And we are not as vulnerable as we were three or four years ago, to being manipulated at conferences, meetings by pressure groups, etc. (Home Editor)

Another explained:

Nowadays, when parliament changes a law, we go out and find Joe Bloggs in the street and find out how he's been affected by the change. We don't go to parliamentarians and say: 'Why did you do it and how do you feel about it?' (Executive Producer, News Hour)

The journalists reject criticism levelled at them that a populist ethos privileges entertainment values and thereby compromises their professional obligation to report widely and in depth on public affairs and issues.

The Employment Contracts Bill when it got reported back into the House, we gave it about 4 minutes. Lot's of graphics and stuff because it's not a very visual story. But it was very important and we had to do it... well, we felt we had to do it. TV3 did it in a spoken because they see us as the 'state broadcaster' though we're not really anymore. But we do see that responsibility to do something like that. (Exec. Producer, Bulletin)

Alongside the strong contemporary rejection of 'institutional' news is a lingering sense of their historical responsibilities. What makes the commercial national carrier TVNZ different from the commercial national carrier TV3 is the legacy of public ownership and service. In TVNZ's news-culture, a sense of duty prevails regarding certain stories which are overwhelmingly of the 'worthy-but-dull' category.

We have a responsibility on the information side to put visually dull stories anyway. We think that the sale of Telecom is visually dull - what do you show? A bunch of people sitting around in the press conference showing a few figures? We think that 'interest rates' are visually dull - what do you see? Wide shots of banks, you picture that in your mind's eye. But the

important part of that is the information aspect coming through. We're compromising the visual element of the show to meet the desire of people to know whether they're going to pay more for their mortgage next week, or whether their telephone rentals are going to go up. So we are continually having the contradiction between the two. (Deputy Director, News & Current Affairs)

The claim to compromise the visual element in the public interest, however, is not sustained by the fieldwork evidence. In fact the predominant theme in journalistic definitions of the contemporary situation was the production imperative of 'viewer appeal'. While the duty to inform constitutes a key element in journalists' accounts of their professional attitude, attracting as large an audience as possible is the consideration guiding their practice.

The rule about an item affecting people or being of interest to people is important, but the other thing is, it has to be interesting so that people keep watching. There is no point in doing a bulletin that everyone is going to switch off after story number three. So while there are lots of stories that might be very significant and worthy, if it's not going to be interesting enough for people to watch, then you've lost the reason for doing it. (Home Editor)

The rule guiding populist news production is that if a programme is to appeal to a broad heterogeneous audience, then the ideas and language must be simple and stick to basics.

I don't think you need to sacrifice... you do trim off some of the worthier and duller material, the material that made people work really hard to stay with you. But you don't have to lose a lot of it. Quite often you don't eliminate that subject or that content from your programme, you just dress it differently and I don't have any difficulty with that. (Deputy Director)

Currently, in the newsroom, "there's quite a lot of thinking that if you put too much into something, then it loses the audience." (Exec. Producer, Network News Bulletin)

The trade-off in favour of the commercial imperative is justified on the grounds that if 'worthy but dull' items dominated the bulletin, many viewers would be bored and switch off. Any contradiction, within the culture of the newsroom, is resolved by rationalizing the commercial imperative of audience maximization within the context of popular

representation:

The bogey of 'entertainment kills the real news' is a fallacy because you don't lose the truth by making it entertaining. It has actually brought the truth of the story, the impact of the story, home to them. (Home Editor)

If we turned the 6 o'clock news into a programme that deals with everything in great depth, its ratings would fall and then who have we served? We've suddenly removed from our area of influence an enormous number of people who might otherwise be watching. (Deputy Director, News & C/A)

The equating of a large number of viewers being tuned to the programme with success in meeting the journalists' duty to inform 'the people' presupposes the viewer is interested not so much in being intellectually as emotionally engaged. Populist television journalism constructs the citizen's need for information about public affairs in terms of being disposed to see for themselves.

We do have a responsibility to inform people. But the visual message is such a powerful one. You have to be continually mindful of the need for the visual element. Part of retaining the audience is their need to see.

Television can give them a lot more appealing viewing or it can satisfy their mind's eye, what they can imagine, it actually satisfies that. That's the whole thing about television. For the first time it enables people's fantasies or imaginations to be satisfied. Reading something, you can only imagine what it was like. For example, Nelson Mandela to be seen down on a ticker tape parade in Manhattan. You could imagine it, but you know that the only way to ever satisfy your imagination on Nelson Mandela is to watch the news tonight and to see the huge turnout of people.

So it's not us manufacturing that, it is the way in which we package that so that we satisfy the quest, or people's desire to fulfil what they can't from other sources of the media." (Executive Producer, *Holmes*.)

While the visual element became emphasized as a key component of 'proper' journalist practice only after TVNZ became a commercial enterprise, the journalists do not see the increased tendency to equate compelling images with newsworthiness in terms of 'capturing' viewers: that is rather the programmers' perspective⁸¹. The journalists interpret the visual emphasis as one of a cluster of editorial strategies which have been introduced

⁸¹ See Ch5:4.

with the purpose of enhancing their ability to communicate with, and reflect, the interests of 'ordinary people'. The most crucial element in the cluster of journalistic norms defining 'proper practice' in the contemporary situation is the rule of 'relevance'.

7.4: The Rule of Relevance:

TVNZ journalists locate the ethos guiding their practice within a populist discourse of relevance which celebrates the common-sense thinking of 'ordinary New Zealanders'. It is an article of faith in contemporary TVNZ news-culture that the prevailing style of news production is more democratic than when the company was a public corporation because competition makes the viewers' interests a central concern of production.

The 'rule of relevance' is construed as giving the journalists greater precision in meeting the viewers' needs and interest. The reasoning behind this assumption is that relevance makes *ONN@6* inform more effectively than the repudiated institutional style because the programme is shaped by, and reflects, the common-sense thinking and interests of 'ordinary people'.

The 'rule of relevance' was introduced into TVNZ news-culture in 1987 by the newly-appointed Director of News and Current Affairs. "The problem" he explained, "was institutional news - of which there was a great deal when I arrived here." Institutional news was unacceptable to him because "it failed to address 'relevance'. We just got some politician telling us what he's doing. How it was likely to impact on significant groups of people was not clear." (Director, News & Current Affairs)

There are various tests the journalists use to determine what is of interest or relevant to 'ordinary people'. Most are simple *a priori* tests, e.g.

The extra ACC levy is relevant because every wage earner will pay it... that's very direct relevance. The rise in the price of payments to dairy farmers is indirectly relevant to almost everybody in the country because it is extra income for the country which should affect the process of consumer demand which should make us all feel slightly more affluent - more money going around the system - you have to establish relevance by whatever devious or direct connections you can find. (Director, News & C/A)

In determining the significance of a potential story, or judging that a particular piece is relevant to 'ordinary folk', the journalists draw on newsroom lore regarding the interests and concerns of 'ordinary people'. These conventional understandings and assumptions about 'what the audience wants' are taken for granted in everyday practice. As one journalist explained:

I don't actually think about the audience, but I know I'm thinking about them if you know what I mean. You know you're providing news to the public but you don't actually think, 'how are the public going to view this'? It's already up there. When you're judging a news story you're already thinking that; it's an integral part of the judgement system. You know a good news story when you see one. (Home Desk Assistant)

The journalists' judgements as to relevance draw on tacit assumptions about viewers' interests and attitudes. These typifications of the audience are part of the stock of occupational recipe knowledge journalists acquire during their socialization into a newsroom culture.

7.5: Journalistic Conventions Regarding the News Audience.

Audience typifications underpinning determinations of relevance are described in terms of iconic stereotypes such as:

Mother of 3 of Naenae - she is interested in what affects her - law and order, politics but not institutional stories...should always keep it simple. (Wellington Newsroom Editor)

or

A fictional lady in Balclutha... someone who's not quite yuppie Auckland, someone who's not quite even in the middle towns, but still sort of urban.. but in a kind of bucolic, rural sort of way. (Executive Producer, Newshour)

Journalists also cite the comments and viewing habits of families, friends, and those of strangers gleaned from chance conversations at social gatherings as sources of knowledge

about the audience. In particular, reference was made to adolescent children or younger siblings. This is curious given that the ratings indicate that the news is most popular with those over 35 years and especially those 55 and older. The journalists' vagueness about their audience reflects the professional aloofness journalists cultivate regarding 'the audience'. As far as the journalists are concerned, the news viewers do not need to be consciously considered. They are an unproblematic given in the journalists' experience and understanding. *ONN@6*'s consistently high ratings are offered by them as evidence that journalistic judgements accurately reflect the interests and concerns of the public.

It is difficult to satisfy the public, but generally I think the public are fairly satisfied. They express that by watching us as opposed to TV3. (Executive Producer)

The journalists' reliance on occupational conventions also serves as a defence against what they see as the dangerous vagaries of 'public opinion'.

The hypocrisy of the public knows no bounds. They will forever complain about the sensationalism that they are receiving, but that is what they want to watch. You've got to be very careful about believing everything the public say. (Director)

We still get people saying, 'Oh what's all this sports rubbish?' and we get people saying 'What's all this political rubbish, give us more sport'. We do have the responsibility to find that happy medium. (Deputy Director)

You'd be mad to take too much notice of the phone logs. If you get a thousand calls telling you they think you've behaved rudely that night, you are obviously going to listen. But if you get four calls, two of them saying they don't like Penelope Barr's⁸² dress, you know it means nothing. (Director)

The TVNZ journalists tend to dismiss criticism by 'outsiders' as either an expression of the 'shooting the messenger syndrome', or the grumbling of malcontents, boffins, disgruntled lobbyists or enthusiasts. They regard much of the criticism they attract as a consequence, not of what they do, but of the ignorance of others regarding the unique features of their craft.

⁸²ONE's weather presenter.

Television journalism is a very specific grammar and a specific craft which all too few people outside understand at all. (Bulletin Director)

The following example, recounted by the Deputy Director, is offered to exemplify the kind of peculiar behaviour they routinely deal with from viewers.

There were some phone calls the other day when we didn't run the Farmer's Santa Parade⁸³ until the end of the bulletin. We made a decision: this is a nice item to go out on, it's a weekend bulletin so let's give people something bright to end the bulletin with. The kids will all be watching for it. So we committed a minute or so and we just did a non-standard closing to the programme. We said 'here it is, here's what happened today in Auckland, here's the Santa Parade, enjoy. Run the closing theme and off we go.

There was obviously hordes of people who'd been at the Santa Parade waiting to see its coverage on the t.v. Well the phone started ringing half-way through the programme with callers demanding 'where's the Santa Parade?', 'how dare you do this'. You can see in the phone logs how the tone of the calls gets harder and harder as the bulletin wears on. The receptionist had to take really rude and arrogant stuff - 'why the hell haven't you done this, we can't trust you guys...' Then, of course, at the end of the programme, the item comes on and the phone calls disappear. Well, what do you do about that? You just sort of ignore it. I take more notice of the Letters to the Editor because I quite enjoy debate. A couple of letters come in one day and then you get a counter view the next week, so you can see the range of views being sketched out. (Deputy Director)

The particular legacy they have inherited as employees of what was, until recently, a public television network, makes their work even more difficult.

It's unusual the degree to which people here believe they have a stake in our news service. It is a feature of New Zealand. You don't see it overseas. Alright, there is a historical reason for that. You certainly don't challenge their right to express their view. I think it's all really good healthy stuff. I read the *Listener* and the phone logs and Barry Shaw⁸⁴ and all those sorts of things. Who doesn't? But, statistically, they are irrelevant because they represent a tiny fraction of opinion. Obviously they tend to be a similar group of people who are the type of person who will ring up or will write a letter. (Director, News and Current Affairs)

These comments illustrate the journalists' understanding that what they do is the discerning work of news specialists. While the basis of social action in the newsroom is explicated in

⁸³ This event has become a part of the traditional Christmas festivities for Aucklanders.

⁸⁴ Long-serving *New Zealand Herald* television critic who retired in 1993.

a democratic rhetoric, the journalists desire exclusive authority over their work. Criticism might be interesting, but it is not taken seriously since it is not articulated by individuals with comparable expertise. This is held to be the case, not only with regard to 'ordinary people', but also in the instance of academics who challenge the contemporary interpretation of 'proper journalism' at TVNZ.

The criticism levelled by academics - just the mere fact it comes from academics - I mean, if they expect to get from the news the same depth of analysis and information which they are used to handling in their work, then they are going to be disappointed. They might be perfectly capable of handling it but the vast majority of our audience is not tuned to that sort of information reception and analysis and doesn't really get very interested in it either. (Deputy Director, News & Current Affairs)

Claiming a professional monopoly of judgement, the journalists insist on their right alone to determine what constitutes 'proper' television journalism. That this should be the case is taken for granted. What concerns them are not 'first principles' but rather the practical challenges of getting a daily programme to air. The most frequently cited 'problem' encountered in their work was the 'logistical burden'. This term refers to the difficulties encountered in organising the human and technical resources required to get a particular story to air.

7.6: The 'Logistical Burden'.

The production of a television news bulletin requires many different professional skills and a range of technical equipment. However, these are fixed aspects of an established production environment, as are operating procedures and the editorial frame. The most problematic aspect of meeting daily production commitments is that the raw material of production is unexpected events. News organisations partially solved this problem by establishing the 'rounds system'. This enables journalists to keep close contact with those agencies and communities, such as the courts or parliament, where news stories are expected to be found on a regular basis. All the different news agencies are active in these

areas, which diminishes the chance of a 'scoop' or being first to break a particular news story. The most newsworthy events are unexpected and unforeseen but the organisation can make little preparation for these.

A case-study is more illustrative in this context than speaking in generalities. The following section describes the decisions and arrangements made at Home Desk to get the 'raw material' for what became *ONN@6*'s lead item for 21 October 1989. While a particularly difficult assignment, it exemplifies the 'logistical burden' that the journalists so often referred to as a significant feature of their professional experience.

The Home Editor heard a news item being broken on Radio New Zealand news at 5.30 am. The story concerned a police tip-off about the location of a body. The tip-off had been made after the TVNZ police liaison programme, *Crimewatch*, had run a segment the previous evening on an unsolved murder. On getting to work at 7.00am, the Home Editor assigned the story to the reporter who had covered it originally, two years previously. The reporter had to contact the family involved, get library footage of the initial item and get a copy of the *Crimewatch* item. The Home Editor then rang the Chief Reporter at the Wellington newsroom in order to let him know that they would be looking into the story and also to make an inquiry about another item they were preparing on the murder of a taxi driver in New Plymouth. She then went to a meeting and her assistant took over responsibility for the item.

Home Desk was unable to contact the family. TVNZ already had a crew and reporter in New Plymouth covering the taxi driver story. But another of TVNZ's reporters was ill and unable to work. Home Desk found out that the police were investigating a location in the Lindis Pass area in Otago's Mackenzie Country. The police officer responsible for

investigating the tip-off was in Palmerston North. The Home Editor's assistant arranged for the camera crew in New Plymouth filming the story on the murdered taxi-driver to fly to Palmerston North to film an interview with the policeman supervising the recovery of the body in the Lindis Pass. Footage was flown to Wellington, then line-fed to Auckland. Due to staff shortages in the Christchurch newsroom, the Dunedin newsroom had to charter a plane and fly to the Lindis Pass to film the police operation there. The exercise was hampered by bad weather and further complicated by the difficult technical requirements of line-feeding pictures and sound from the regional newsrooms to Auckland.

So that was a very complicated logistics exercise. If the bits of the stories are in the main centres, it's easy. It gets more complicated when you have one bit at Lindis Pass, and another bit at the West Coast, and another bit at Napier - we're forced to use more and more aeroplanes. It can get very expensive. We soon hope to be able to use fibre optics cables to feed items around the country. It will save us an enormous amount of money, but also speed up the process immensely. (Home Editor)

The above example of the 21 October lead was used by the Home Editor to make the point that, to understand contemporary television journalism, one must take into account the complex practical and technical factors that journalists must address. The journalists' perception of their practice is shaped by the material and temporal difficulties that have to be resolved in covering assignments and getting a daily news programme to air. Therefore, when the journalists explain how they themselves understand what they do, their explanations emphasize the pragmatic aspects of journalism; setting up and accomplishing the necessary material interventions within the limited time available.

The material factors shaping contemporary journalism include, as part of the "logistical burden", constraints imposed by the technical nature of the medium itself. Thus the Home Editor's comment also draws our attention to the changing technical aspects of television news production as a significant determinant of journalism.

7.7: Technology as a Journalistic Determinant.

The professional attitude of TVNZ journalists is shaped to a significant extent by their experience of working with a medium which is constantly being redefined by technological innovations.

At the beginning of television news production in the NZBC, the news was put together by journalists whose background and training had been in print. The technology was rudimentary and the journalists were inexperienced in television techniques. Initially they produced bulletins which were 'radio with one picture', i.e., an announcer reading a bulletin to the camera, and after 1963, radio with some pictures.

Developments in telecommunications and digital technology in the past decade have enabled the rapid editing of video tape, the electronic 'feeding' of video footage from one newsroom to another, satellite communications, computer-generated images such as graphics, wraps and dissolves. The technical facility of computer graphics has a marked impact on the structuring of a news item and its transmission as a programme. Until recently, complex and detailed information had to be delivered by a 'talking head' i.e. either a government official or a news reader would be shown in an extended shot listing the details of the proposed changes or whatever the story was about. Such information can now be rapidly summarized in a more visually appealing manner using computer-generated images. The 'immediacy' of news has also been enhanced by a centralized electronic news-gathering system and the international telecommunications networks.

Television journalists believe that, for a news story to be told on television, it has to use the narrative devices of fiction. The production of meaning is visual and dramatic - the story must have drama to 'drive the plot', have a beginning, a climax and resolution. A

story is told through live and file video footage, computer graphics and a spoken script. Information must be communicated through a conjunction of 'captivating' techniques which exploit the visual and dramatic elements. Besides narrative devices, commercial scheduling practices also structure the story. The rigid format of the programme imposes its own discipline. Television news bulletins cannot be shortened or lengthened to accommodate all the potential stories TVNZ journalists identify. While newspapers are able to vary the numbers of pages per edition, the 30 minute television news format (24 mins excluding advertisements) allows for around a dozen items of, on average, a minute and a half duration. The leading item usually is a little longer.

Referring to his experience of making television news in the 1960s, one journalist described the reporter as a "one-man band, working in liaison with an editor" (Home Desk Assistant). They worked within a decentralized system in regional newsrooms, producing news for a regionally-defined audience.

In the current centralized system, shaped by a managerial ethos of a regime of 'efficiency', the editorial team has to make decisions which reflect the commercial interests of the organisation. Stories have to be judged sufficiently newsworthy according to commercial criteria to make the bulletin. If one is marginal, it may not be worth the expense of putting together an item since it might get "pushed off the back of the bulletin" (Executive Producer) by a more compelling story which breaks during the day.

TVNZ journalists share the opinion that the nature of the television medium and organisational ethos dictates largely what they can say and do. They are making news within a commercial organisation which requires news be shaped by the construct of 'broad appeal'. This means that rather than informing 'in-depth', a 'once-over-lightly' approach

is taken. Selection is determined by established editorial conventions regarding what 'most people' want to see. As one journalist explained:

While they have an appetite for news, [viewers] don't want to be bored by it. They don't want to watch something and say: 'We've already heard that on the radio and seen it in the papers. They want to be surprised and say, 'bloody hell's teeth, did you know that was going on?' (Home Desk Assistant)

The imperative guiding their professional judgement is

...to find a product which is palatable to our viewers, accessible to them, which they can recognise and understand as their news. It has to be about them, for them, and for the most part understood by them. In the audience are various levels of ignorance and informedness, comprehension and intelligence. There will be some people that we will never reach, and there will be others for whom it is far too trivial and there's not enough meat in it. So it's not an easy game. (*ibid*)

The journalists define the factors which limit their capacity to inform as temporal, structural, logistical and financial. The complex issues of meaning construction and reception are dismissed by reference to the 'notorious' problem of the cognitive incapacity of viewers to 'absorb' information from the television medium. As one journalist remarked:

Studies suggest that half an hour after a television news bulletin, very few people remember what was in it. (Director, News and Current Affairs)

The compressed nature of the news bulletin has been referred to by some journalists as a 'straight jacket'. There is the perception that within the format and time available to them, they can really only "attract people's attentions to an issue but not give them incredibly deep coverage of it." (Deputy Director.)

We do know that most people now get their news off the tv which is stupid - I would never do that myself because of what we can't show, how limited we are. (Exec. Producer)

The limitations of the *ONN@6* format are held to be 'balanced out' by the other programmes that are part of the department's output and which go under the ONE Network

News 'brand'. In particular, the daily national current affairs programme *Holmes*⁸⁵, which, since 1989, has followed the national news bulletin, is seen to remedy the problem of the 6 pm bulletin format and the constraints it places on the capacity of its journalists to 'inform the public'. *Holmes* is described as having a

critical function within the early evening news package because it balances the straight reporting of the news with some in-depth investigative material on the big story or issue of the day. (Deputy Director)

7.8: Holmes: 'The Back of the News'.

Holmes and *ONN@6* take complementary roles within the newshour 'package' by providing a programme its makers describe as 'straight reporting' followed by one which is 'issue-based', i.e. allowing an extended coverage of topical issues. It provides the news department with "a vehicle" (*ibid*) to give a 5-6 minute treatment to either particular stories of wide appeal where there is some history or a complicated set of events which the time constraints of a network item cannot accommodate. The complementary relationship between the two programmes is described by *Holmes*' Executive Producer:

We feed off Network News more than they feed off us, though on occasions there may be a turnaround. We do a major investigation and you can see something quoted on the Network News following an interview on *Holmes* last night or something like that. But mostly we feed off news, we feed off the events of the day. (Executive Producer)

The format and presentation in *Holmes* is unlike that associated with traditional TVNZ current affairs programming. The programme's populist style reflects the change of emphasis that occurred within TVNZ news-culture when the organisation became a State-Owned Enterprise. One journalist defined it thus:

It is populist current affairs as opposed to worthier intellectual current affairs. Current affairs, traditionally, meant long studio interviews with politicians, in-depth investigations into political scandals or other things. (Home Editor)

⁸⁵ Named, in the current personalising fashion, after its presenter Paul Holmes.

Holmes is current affairs. But rather than institutional things, we deal with issues in a people-based way. On *Eye Witness* etc. you dealt with institutional things in an institutional way. We went to the banker, we went to the secretary of the company. This time we're more likely to go to someone who is a victim on the factory floor or whatever. (Executive producer, *Holmes*)

Conventional newsroom wisdom holds that "people find it very difficult to sit through an hour of very heavy information." (Home Desk Assistant) The programme has been designed to hold on to the *ONN@6* audience for a further half-hour. Its populist version of 'current affairs' is legitimated in terms of 'knowing' what people want from an early evening daily current affairs programme and being responsive to that:

Say Jenny Shipley embarked on some new policy of squeezing more dollars out of the beneficiaries at the bottom of the heap. The audience would want her on the *Holmes* programme being interrogated. They want to see their questions being put to the people in power if it is an emotive issue like that. They don't necessarily want long *tours d'horizon* of the political leaders but they want specific questions addressed. (Director, News and Current Affairs)

The programme's success⁸⁶ is attributed to the way it manages to "carry an audience which historically has avoided information programmes" (Deputy Director) through a populist approach of blending entertainment with "heavyweight" (*ibid*), issue-based stories. The mix of approaches is presented in a light and irreverent style appealing to a broad section of the audience.

Many TVNZ journalists cite *Holmes* as a programme which exemplifies a balancing of the professional requirement to inform and the commercial imperative to attract a large audience.

He [attracts] the biggest audience we have ever got for a current affairs show, night after night after night. A lot of that audience would not otherwise have been tapped, probably never been attracted to watch a current affairs show in any great numbers and in any great consistency. *Holmes* is the big achievement. That's the achievement - the most exciting blending of a commercial imperative while still meeting journalistic targets

⁸⁶*Holmes* rates a slightly smaller audience size than *ONN@6* but nevertheless, is consistently one of the highest rating programmes on New Zealand television.

as well. (Deputy Director)

The Deputy Director's judgement that a 'balance' has been achieved between commercial and journalistic objectives is based on the criterion of the ratings. High ratings indicate a large audience and are perceived by the news managers as illustrating that the journalistic objective of informing citizens is accomplished. This view is exemplified in the following comment by the presenter of *Holmes*:

Ratings are the only democracy...

(Paul Holmes, quoted by Wichtel, *New Zealand Listener*, Nov 28, 1992:72)

This perception reflects a fundamental belief within TVNZ news-culture that 'watching' can be unproblematically equated with 'being informed'. The journalists take for granted that they have adequately discharged their professional responsibilities in telling a story as well as they can. Whether or not a programme 'informs' is seen by them to depend on how many people watch it.

With regard to criticisms made by callers during and after the programme, complaining that the programme does not "produce enough information - there's too much drama, hysterics, performance, and not enough information" (Director, News & Current Affairs), the Director remarked:

There's a sense in which that is possibly true. There is a down-side to having such a powerful performance. But the up-side is that there are a hell of a lot of people watching and getting the information. (*ibid*)

His comment suggests that rather than a 'balance' being achieved, in the sense of professional and commercial objectives being met equitably, the resolution of the two sets of requirements constitutes more of a compromise. This compromise is accepted in the sense that a populist approach to current affairs entails a trade-off between serious analysis and depth of information, and the number of viewers attracted to a lighter, more entertaining approach. The compromise in favour of commercial imperatives is rationalized

through reference to audience size. *Holmes* attracts a big audience for stories and subjects

...that a few years ago, would have been the switch-off of all time. Stories like child-abuse. People would have gone and done the dishes. But Holmes manages to get people to watch that because of the way it is packaged. (Home Editor)

The most significant thing that I notice is the apparently undisciplined approach. In fact he is very disciplined but the apparent undisciplined approach of his presentation - appearing almost as if he's lost his place or he's not quite aware of where it was going to - but I don't know if anybody else could do it. He is showing us a technique that only he can use. [Traditionally], we judged a broadcaster on the cleanness of their performance. They don't stumble, they are authoritative, straight. He's taken all that and said 'well look, hang on, those aren't important. What is important is whether or not I engage the audience and whether they are with me and following what I am talking about. He gets a response by being much more human and having much more of a conversation to the extents of slips-ups and bumbles and repetitions and acknowledging his mistakes. I think it's great... His ratings are around 26%! News at 10 attracts 9%. (Deputy Director)

Holmes capacity to draw in and hold on to viewers who historically avoided information programmes is valued most by news management. The delivery of the presenter, Paul Holmes, would once have been considered unacceptable at TVNZ. However those features of his performance which, in the public service news-culture, would have been condemned as 'bad' broadcasting, are now celebrated by the news executives as the apotheosis of populist daily current affairs programming.

The fact that many viewers see him more as an entertainer than a journalist is attributed, by the Deputy Director, to being a 'quirk' on the part of the New Zealand public.

There are so few stars in this country... hell, where are the entertainers? The award [Entertainer of the Year] is rather more of an indictment of the paucity of entertainers than it is of Paul. (*ibid*)

You don't quite understand just how powerful television is until you actually step outside it. I mean, sitting in this great technical tower that we've got here, it's pretty easy just to walk in, watch the sausages go down the production line and out the other end, and at night you go home. But just recently, I had a rude awakening when I went to Dunedin to produce the *Holmes* programme - we did a special out of Dunedin. The impact that that guy had in a conservative little southern New Zealand town is just mind-boggling. I was totally overawed at just how this town's prepared to bend,

to cope, and to entertain this little guy from Auckland. It's staggering how the people responded to him, they treated him like Royalty. I'd never experienced anything like that. He's just a news show host. He's in their living rooms every night but I just didn't realise what sort of impact a television news programme can have. (Bulletin Director)

Journalists commented on the way in which *Holmes* had 'redefined' the boundaries of 'proper' journalism and prevailing definitions of 'news' in TVNZ news-culture. One journalist who spent some months working on *Holmes* before moving to the Homedesk felt that *Holmes* journalists had introduced 'fun' and 'initiative' into news gathering techniques and set new standards of practice for network journalists working on item construction.

What we've done is push the boundaries a bit harder, we became more aggressive and decided that if there was a tragedy, a tragic story, then we wanted to be in it. So, maybe for the first time, we became a bit more determined to get in there with the cameras where it's so much easier for newspaper journalists to do it. They can simply just get on with the telephone call. With us, we've got to go in for the whole palaver, like the interview with the brother of the killed policeman down in Southland, interviews with parents of victims of drink-driving accidents. Those sorts of things have previously been the sort of ground for documentary areas.

As a result of us doing that, and doing it over a period of time, it becomes acceptable and opens the doors for *ONN@6* to do the same, in a much more limited role. At the very beginning, we used to get heaps of telephone calls saying 'how dare you intrude da da da', but now we don't get any, very rarely, simply because people have come to accept that as a standard mode.

We've also introduced a bit of fun, have a bit of a laugh at ourselves. We've introduced a lot of emotion into television, sadness and happiness and linking up people from one side of the world to another. So I think it's been quite beneficial to television news. (Home Desk Editorial Assistant.)

One way in which *Holmes* has redefined established journalism at TVNZ is that working on *Holmes* stories has required journalists to become more aggressive in the way in which they 'pursue' a story. Whereas once, they

...would get to a certain part of the story then back off, I think now we've crossed over that boundary. I think we're tougher on the news stories, which we need to be. Not aggressive for its own sake but to pursue stories, you have to be aggressive. So we're pursuing stories with more vigour these days. That's not meant to cast any aspersions on journalists who've been here before, in times gone by. The time then was different. Different time and different approaches, different standards of, or perceived standards, of professionalism and ethics and morality, I suppose. (*ibid*)

While the speaker is suggesting that the redefining of ethical boundaries and the meaning of 'acceptable' behaviour in news production is something of a *fait accompli*, this is not so. The case of *Holmes* highlights the tensions which underpin contemporary news-culture. At one level, it is a function of differences in the orientation of differing programmes. But more significantly, the tension reflects an on-going debate within the news department regarding the 'proper' way to go about delivering a television news service. While this is normal in any newsroom, the recent organisational transition from public to commercial broadcaster has emphasised and underscored the ambiguities and differences in journalists' interpretations of what is appropriate professional practice. This is particularly apparent when one looks at the relationship between *ONN@6* and *Holmes*.

Although the commercial success of *Holmes* is self-evident, some journalists were ambivalent about the way in which the programme has altered the boundaries of acceptable practice by placing a greater emphasis on the emotive and sensational. The Home Editor offers an example:

I think some of the things that have gone on *Holmes* have been total sensationalist. One example that comes to mind is a story they did quite early on about three women living in the jungles of Northern Queensland. For ten or fifteen seconds of the item, there were shots of naked women running around the jungle. They had bikini marks, they obviously didn't normally go naked around the jungle at all. You could have got the impression with the wide shot, but instead you had closeups. It was not essential to the story at all, in fact it was probably untruthful. (Home Editor)

However, while she does not always agree with the way they do things or even in their choice of subjects some days, "I still think they have achieved a great deal in attracting a bigger audience to a more in-depth form of information than would have been possible otherwise." (*ibid*)

The programme *Holmes* is a benchmark in TVNZ journalism. Personality driven, cheeky

and at times subversive of accepted values and standards, appearing to shun many of the conventions of traditional broadcasting both in terms of content and delivery, it is a programme unlike any other that has been produced by New Zealand public television. *Holmes'* producers judge their experiment to be unconditionally successful as a daily current affairs programme. Other TVNZ journalists remain ambivalent about commercial success at times overriding professional ethical considerations. They smooth doubts away with the rationale that the programme's populist ethos - to act as an advocate for "the victim on the factory floor" (Exec. Producer, *Holmes*), and its success in attracting viewers who previously never watched current affairs, satisfies the journalists' professional duty to represent 'the people'. Populism, in their reckoning, equates with popular representation.

In conclusion, TVNZ journalists' explanations of their professional norms and practices suggest TVNZ news-culture is based on a consensus among them regarding the nature of 'proper' television journalism. However, some aspects of the journalists' account are ambiguous. The distinction between 'institutional' and 'populist' news production styles suggests that they perceive a significant shift in the normative framework that guides their practice. Yet the journalists also feel that the fundamental nature of their practice has not changed, despite the reorientation of TVNZ news-culture to accommodate the commercial ethos of the company. The production style may have shifted with the organisational ethos, but they hold that their capacity to realize their professional duty as journalists has not been affected.

The normative framework guiding contemporary journalistic practice at TVNZ is taken-for-granted by the journalists as an unproblematic set of givens. Yet this framework reveals the ascendancy of a particular scale of values - commercial values - which have come to the fore in TVNZ news-culture only recently as a consequence of the company's restructuring

as a SOE. Contemporary TVNZ news-culture is a deliberate construction of the senior news executives whose responsibilities, as managers, include creating a unity of purpose and orderly relations in the newsroom. In the next chapter, I look at the 'professional attitude' of senior TVNZ news executives in order to prepare the way for an examination of the hierarchical mediation of editorial authority.

CHAPTER EIGHT: 'MANAGING FOR QUALITY': NEWS EXECUTIVE DEFINITIONS OF THE SITUATION.

8.0: Introduction.

The journalists' account of the culture of news production at TVNZ suggests a consensual approach to the business of producing a daily television news programme. Its routine accomplishment is predicated on a shared understanding as to the principles of 'proper' journalism.

For the purposes of analysis, the journalists' account of their practice needs to be examined in relation to the organisational setting and context within which it is embedded. But first, I focus on the accounts given by the senior news executives concerning the nature and purpose of their work, as journalists with managerial responsibilities. This chapter looks at the special problems they have had to address as a management team brought in by Julian Mounter to bring the discipline of the market to news production at TVNZ. It outlines the solutions they have fashioned to the problems and dilemmas they faced on their arrival in 1987, and some of the practical constraints which they experience as journalists and managers of a television station undergoing a radical structural realignment from a public to commercial orientation.

8.1: The Impetus for Change.

I'd characterize it as being a revolution in '88, '89, and an evolution since then. (Deputy Director)

The initial impetus to change the culture of the newsroom at TVNZ came in 1986 after the BCNZ Board appointed Julian Mounter, an English journalist from the BBC, as the company's Director. They were responding to the monetarist reforms proposed and initiated

by the 1984 Labour government.⁸⁷ Broadcasting was not immediately targeted for corporatization as a State-Owned Enterprise. But the new Chairman of the BCNZ appointed by the incoming Labour government shared the finance minister's enthusiasm for corporatization, greater managerial accountability, and the principles of a 'free-market', as the solutions to the problems facing the BCNZ.

On his arrival, Mounter targeted the Department of News and Current Affairs as a priority (Personal Communication, Director - News & Current Affairs). He believed that commercial success depended upon a new ethos being introduced into the hitherto public service culture of the journalists (Mounter, 1991). To do this, he appointed as TVNZ's Director of News and Current Affairs a New Zealand-born journalist working at the BBC, Paul Norris, who in turn, appointed an Editor of Daily News Programmes (later renamed Deputy Director) to oversee the day-to-day running of the newsroom.

According to the Deputy Director, the department had

...been neglected really, since 1980. It was 5 or 6 years behind the times. The Department in Auckland was inappropriately housed in a shabby old building next door - a rabbit warren - the equipment was outdated - people were driving across town to studios. It was inefficiently run, badly resourced, had been allowed to decay, really.

[The senior directors] seemed to have operated on the principle that it was better to build up cash reserves than actually plough the money back into a steady improvement in resource and training and development, basically, of TVNZ. (Deputy Director, News & Current Affairs)⁸⁸

News production under the BCNZ operated at both network and regional levels. The

⁸⁷ See C. Wilkes, 1990, p.136.

⁸⁸ What is neglected in this reference to the condition of the BCNZ's news operation in Auckland is the controversial re-siting of the head office of BCNZ News and Current Affairs from Wellington to Auckland by Julian Mounter soon after his appointment. In early December, 1989, when I visited the Wellington newsroom, references to the Auckland operation displayed a barely suppressed ironic bitterness.

BCNZ's Head Office of News and Current Affairs was in Wellington. There was a complex 7-tiered management structure and a total of around 300 staff. The news operation at TVNZ has its origins in the regionally-based system established in the early 1960s before a national network was feasible. It remained regionally oriented, with the regional bureaux experiencing a high level of operating independence and autonomy.

When the new Director of the BCNZ's News and Current Affairs Department was appointed in 1987, there was no day-to-day editorial control operating at a national level and little sense of a common orientation between the network and regional offices. The regional offices had been established on a twin brief - to make news for their regional audiences as well as for the network. The bureau chiefs, having a greater sense of their regional than their national audience, tended to support the interests of their regional programmes before those of the network.

8.2: Taking Charge.

The new Director, appointed with a brief to prepare the Department for "the discipline of the market" (Director), felt the "burdened cost structure of the regional system threatened the company's survival". He saw the lack of centralized control over co-ordination, formatting and presentation to be a liability threatening "competitiveness".

Research shows that if you are going to have a top-rating news programme - even more than a consistency of product and quality - it has to have a consistency of look and feel to it. (*ibid*)

The desired uniformity required management to have greater control over production. A central authority had to be established. At the same time, the Director wished to avoid "bureaucratic" management structures which he saw as costly and inefficient.

I don't want this to be seen as a bureaucracy. I wouldn't use the word bureaucracy to describe what this is - it is not meant to be a bureaucracy at all. A bureaucracy is a place like Inland Revenue. Government departments are bureaucracies. The BBC wasn't a bureaucracy but it was possibly closer

to one than what this is. It was never a government department, well, it was less close to being a government department than the old BCNZ was, but it certainly had adopted some bureaucratic methods. It had a high proportion of people who were involved in personnel and administration - it carried an enormous layer of non-productive (non-programme-making) people. In fact, we used to put some of these people into the category of the programme prevention department. In a way, it was very refreshing to come out here to this department, which did have some elements of that sort of bureaucracy attached to it when I came in 1987, but it was plain that they were targets for the chop quite quickly. (Director, News & C/A)

For the Director, there is no contradiction between establishing a recognized chain of command in order to centralize and increase executive control of the department's operation, and the principle of a non-interventionist managerial style. As he explained:

Any news organisation to be effective has to have a system whereby the people at the bottom, the reporters, have to have a fair degree of autonomy. You can't give them a rule book covering every known situation - they've got to be creative. That's what this business is all about - they've got to make judgements a good deal of the day without assistance - they can't look up the bloody manual - it doesn't cover all the sorts of decision that I need them to make. So more important than the dynamic of a bureaucracy which is top down and with rules to cover every eventuality, I am interested in creating an ethos where people are empowered to take most of the creative decisions themselves - certainly there has to be a framework within which these people can flourish and develop and do the tasks required of them and yes, it is my task to ensure that that framework is the right one, and that it is communicated clearly. But that's about as far as I want to go. I don't want to be taking all the daily editorial decisions for these people - nothing will work if we do that. (*ibid*)

A bureaucratic system of regulation operates through "formal control and coercive sanctions to secure routine compliance with its dictates" (Reed:1985:129). The Director rejects the term 'bureaucracy' to describe the present social organisation of news-production, claiming it was part of the 'old' culture that disappeared along with his predecessor. In contrast to the bureaucratic form of management which he felt was unproductive, Norris refers to the style of management he has introduced as "hands-off"⁸⁹. This is known as the "referral upwards policy" and the principle is identified in the TVNZ Journalists' Manual as "vital to the successful operation of news and current affairs programmes. The basic rule is 'if

⁸⁹ Here Norris reflects his past experience as a news executive in the BBC. Schlesinger (1978) identifies this policy as a key strand in the editorial mediation of control in the BBC's news operation.

in doubt, refer upwards'." (p.63) The rule means that journalists act on their own initiative except in certain exceptional cases where the organisation will be exposed to some legal risk as a consequence, in which case, they 'refer up' for advice and consultation. "Upwards referral protects both the company and the individual staff. It ensures that decisions are ultimately made at the level appropriate to the circumstances and nature of the judgement required." (*ibid*)

Recognising the limitations of the formal systems contained in the policy and procedures manual, the Director emphasizes flexibility and 'creative' discretionary action by the journalists as the most effective way in which they can respond to the constantly changing and unpredictable news environment. Articulating the nature of his management style within a rhetoric of worker empowerment, the Director identifies the current relations of news-production as the collegial exercise of professional autonomy. He emphasizes the collective attribute of television news production, implying that the editorial function is democratically exercised.

The Director of News and Current Affairs sought to establish a centralized editorial "chain of command". This was what he identified as "the first element of effective leadership". To achieve this, he sought to appoint able deputies, i.e. "reliable quality journalists with proven judgement to key positions in the structure" (*ibid*) and who subscribed to the same general range of professional and managerial values and orientation as himself.

Each of the editorial team had the responsibility of building a team from the disparate elements of the national news network. This was particularly important for *ONN@6* because of the large number of people involved compared to the smaller teams producing

other news and current affairs programmes⁹⁰.

The director identified "team-building" as a central principle of good leadership. He felt that fostering a "climate of trust to enable full and open communication between key individuals" (*ibid*) was crucial to the effective operation of the newsroom.

In contrast to the nature of executive control in a bureaucratic structure which is maintained by a formal authority, as Max Weber described it⁹¹, journalism in the contemporary situation in the TVNZ newsroom is guided by a normative framework set up by the director to establish the boundaries of 'sound' editorial judgment. These boundaries provide the framework for action and "are broad enough to permit journalists some creativity in the reporting, editing and presentation of news stories. On the other hand, the boundaries are narrow enough so that the journalists can be trusted to act in the interest of the organisation." (Soloski,1989:226) Some attributes of this management will now be discussed.

Nevertheless, while expressing a commitment to increasing the extent to which TVNZ journalists may exercise their professional discretion, his desire to establish what he calls a "strong chain of command" (Director) is unavoidably contradictory. It is quite possible that meeting the requirements he has identified as essential components of news production will demand a yet greater imposition of editorial control over journalists at TVNZ.

⁹⁰This continues to be a problem for management. In late 1992, the Deputy Director spoke of the "trouble in getting a team established" on *ONN@6*.

⁹¹ See Talcott Parsons (ed.), The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation, 1947.

8.3: Creating a Recognised Chain of Command.

In 1988, Norris appointed Shaun Brown to direct and co-ordinate the daily operation of TVNZ's news and current affairs production.

Brown, born in Britain, has had most of his professional experience in New Zealand, and considers himself a "kiwi journalist". After beginning his training with a British newspaper, and spending a year at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in a combined radio TV newsroom, he joined the NZBC not long after his arrival in New Zealand in 1972.

In 1975 he produced New Zealand's first nightly current affairs programme *Tonight at Nine* and then went back on the road as a reporter, on *Dateline Monday*, after which he went to work with the BBC for a couple of years. It was here that he met Paul Norris. He returned to New Zealand and the BCNZ where he produced *Fair Go* for a year in Wellington and then moved to Auckland to start *Eyewitness News* when "the management at the time decided they wanted to have another go at nightly current affairs" (Deputy Director). After two years, Brown went freelancing and was part of a group involved in the bid for a third television channel.

His appointment as Editor of Daily Programmes, (later changed to Deputy Director), he understood as "being recruited to help ready the place for competition, basically". He shared the Director's formulation of the elements of good management of the newsroom - team-building, the fostering of a climate of trust between reporters and editors and the encouragement of decision-making at lower organisational levels. He too rejected "...the word bureaucracy because it is so pejorative" at the same time recognising that to be commercially successful, a centralized chain of command had to be established over the production process. He asserted: "I think we are more in control than the previous system."

(Deputy Director)

In the following statement, Brown rationalises the tension between establishing a style of management which is non-bureaucratic and non-interventionist while establishing a centralized chain of command:

It's too simple to say that I impose my views on the whole organisation because there are some very talented people of similar experience who sit just below me in the next level and it would be foolish not to listen to what they have to say. There are a whole raft of people who've been around a long time. We carefully selected for these jobs and we listen very carefully to what they have to say. I don't see myself as just 'listening' to them and then setting my own agenda. I tend more to guide them, if I think they need guidance into a particular area, by saying 'look, are we doing enough on this angle or enough on that story. Have we finished with Terry Waite? Has enough been said about that? Is it time we moved onto something else? It's more a guiding role. (Deputy Director, News & C/A)

At the executive level, leadership is exercised informally on a daily basis. The Director and his Deputy get together after the morning's editorial meeting, where

... any difficult editorial issues are talked through - 'are we going to run the police investigation into the child molester at the Christchurch civic creche - the police have asked us to hold off.' The ethical issues, and the issues involving editorial management, are discussed and we reach a decision through that discussion... acting responsibly both in regard to a police request not to run a story because, for example, they may be setting a trap for a suspect - and the news department's goal to be the news group that breaks a story, plus the public's right to know. So we aim to strike a balance between the various issues involved. (Deputy Director, News & Current Affairs)

There is also a meeting after lunch when progress on the bulletin items is reviewed and any further editorial issues are resolved. A post-mortem is conducted after the evening bulletin has gone to air. At any time during the day, there may be calls regarding any major development which the Deputy feels may need the Director's input.

8.4: The 'Problem' of Control.

A central strand in the Deputy Director's strategy to knit the disparate parts together into a cohesive and effective news operation was to convince the journalists that *ONV@6* was

...our core product and our efforts and our focus have to be prioritised so that that was always advantaged. It was never second choice - it never was to be compromised by regional or other considerations. It had to have the best journalists available from regional and network news. (Deputy Director, News & C/A)

He emphasizes this point because on his arrival, "a serious obstacle" to establishing a "centralized chain of command" (*ibid*) was the attitude of regional editors who, under the previous arrangement, had enjoyed considerable autonomy over their regional news operation.

It was very hard for the network editor to say 'I want that story' or 'hey why wasn't I told about that story - I hear you had a story on regional news last night that should have been exposed to the nation'. The regional boss would say, 'oh no, I don't think that was the case, I don't agree with you' and you'd have to resolve that. We were going to lose revenue, we certainly can't afford to squander stories that the nation should know about just for a regional audience because it suited a regional producer to do that.

When I came here (before I actually took over the reins), I used to sit in the morning meetings and didn't say much - I just listened. I was astounded to discover that the editor of those bulletins - the person who was appointed for judgement, understanding, expertise in story treatment - was often unable to get to air the stories he or she thought should be told because reporters seemed to have a disproportionate amount of power.

I can remember a situation at the 9.30am meeting - they had had a chat about ideas earlier and a reporter was very keen on a story in Wellington. At 9.30 they sat down and it wasn't on the list. I asked the editor 'what happened to that story, why aren't you doing it?' He said 'Oh, Wellington don't want to.' Everybody was doing what they liked and he didn't have the authority or the power...

The first resolve I had was that the production desk had to make the decisions about what went into the programme, it couldn't simply depend on the mood of the reporters around the country. (*ibid*)

An effective chain of command that could administer the departmental director's policy was achieved when the regional news programmes were dropped and decision-making became centralized in the Auckland newsroom under the Director of News and Current Affairs.

While the bureau chiefs in the regional offices in Wellington and Christchurch continued to be responsible for the output of their offices, they became answerable to the Auckland-based Home Editor and the editorial team with whom they communicated at the teleconferenced editorial meetings held twice daily.

The three executives guiding the news operation at TVNZ are the Director of News & Current Affairs, the Deputy Director, and the Executive Producer for Current Affairs. Despite recognising the editorial team as the group who run the newsroom, it is the executives, the news managers, who determine the appropriate solution when there is 'a problem' or an appointment, such as the producer for a new show, to be made:

It's us three who sit down and take the first steps. I think the three of us have a common view - all three of us have been around a long time - worked in newspapers and television - all three of us have worked in the BBC - and therefore all three of us have an international view and experience which is important coming back here because NZ has always suffered from having a relentless need to train from scratch, its broadcast journalists. (Deputy Director)

A further issue to be dealt with was lifting the standards and 'quality' of the reporters' performance. Describing 'the problem', the Deputy remarked:

It was erratic, that was the problem when I arrived. Some people were doing really well and some were doing very poorly and some were doing a bit of both. There was an absence of control, of quality control. I mean 'quality' in terms of both story selection and information selection and treatment - there was an absence of control over that. (*ibid*)

They felt they had inherited a situation that might have been acceptable in a non-competitive environment, but was now untenable. The lack of communication and co-ordination among working journalists/ reporters and editorial staff meant that

You got what you were given. The producers didn't see the scripts fully, they didn't really understand what they were going to get - it was all a bit of a surprise and sometimes it was pathetic! (*ibid*)

According to the Deputy Director, "getting the edge on the competition" depended on the

production of commercially successful television programmes which, in turn, required a strong managerial command over production.

Historically, television journalism as practiced at TVNZ was the product of journalists trained in the newspaper industry and who brought many of the techniques and conventions of print journalism with them to the medium of television. There was also the legacy of almost a decade in which training and upgrading of equipment and resources had been neglected in favour of building up a cash reserve for the organisation.

For the new Director of News and Current Affairs, and his Deputy, if the organisation was to 'be competitive', 'professionalizing' the journalists was a priority. The issue of journalists' training was, and continues to be, something of a thorn in their side:

...the absence of tiers in the market place means that our top show - *ONN@6* - is still a training ground. You won't find that anywhere else in the world really. If you go to America, the networks there recruit from the big local stations who recruit from the smaller local stations. People simply learn and get their experience at a low level and climb the ladder. It's the same in Australia - there's regional television there...but here in NZ, unless you go overseas, the only place you got trained was in the NZBC, BCNZ, TVNZ. That's always been a difficulty which has been accentuated by the demise of regional news because that was a useful training ground. You could put journalists in there and they could make mistakes and there would be a different environment with less pressure and lower expectations for a clean professional product all the time. So we missed out on that when that disappeared.

That's why we've always placed a premium on people who come in from outside. Not just because they're ready trained but because they come with some different viewpoints, some different perceptions on what can be achieved and what should be achieved unlike just constantly training people in our own image which is a cloning system, like there's only one game in town. (Deputy Director, News & Current Affairs)

8.5: Articulating 'Gut Feelings'.

The Deputy identified the contesting of journalistic pre-conceptions regarding what makes a 'good' news story as a key strategy in 'professionalizing' journalism in the contemporary newsroom. He felt that this was particularly important because, compared to their British

counterparts, the journalists at TVNZ were less able to articulate the reasoning behind their judgments. This he attributed to the different educational backgrounds of British and New Zealand journalists, the former tending to have had tertiary qualifications and experience whereas, until recently, most New Zealand journalists were trained 'on the job'. For example, when a journalist says, 'that's a good story', 'that's a cracker', the deputy director is

...always a little resistant. I think there is a danger that journalists can get into a sort of set attitude like 'this will shock, gosh that's staggering, wow that will surprise people'... While there's lots of room for that sort of coverage [of surprising events] what I think we've done in the last three years is broaden from that. For a start, it's got to have a considerable degree of relevance. (*ibid*)

The Deputy describes himself as 'badgering' journalists to articulate the grounds on which they base their news judgement. He feels that in "any worthwhile newsroom" there should be "constant debate about why it's running this story, why it's treating it this way." He explains that he always encourages a debate

...because it interests me why we've come to believe that certain stories are what we should run. For example, being in journalism for 25 years, I have grown up in my career with a certain set of what is an appropriate story and what isn't. That's why you have to keep challenging because it's very easy to get stuck. Whereas, if you worked in Fleet Street on the British tabloids, they never challenge or question anything. They hire people who are just aggressive muckrakers. That's fine. That's their part of the market and good riddance. But most of us have to analyse and keep challenging while we are doing the story and there has to be a constant debate about it. (*ibid*)

The purpose of establishing a centralized chain of command was to increase the authority of the editorial frame which had been established with the express purpose of enhancing executive control over the production process. Thus, while the Deputy Director cites 'challenging the process' as a strategy for enhancing professionalism and improving the quality of journalism at TVNZ, the parameters of debate are nevertheless fixed within the boundaries of the editorial frame. The services of several American broadcasting consultants were contracted to assist the news executives in determining what that frame

should be and in training TVNZ journalists to implement it.

8.6: The Consultants.

In 1988, the services of several American television consultants were contracted. Each was a specialist in an aspect of commercial television news production; on-camera aural and visual presentation, audience research, strategy and promotion, and production techniques.⁹² Prof. Fred Shook, who teaches Broadcast Journalism at Colorado State University, and specialises in populist, visual story-telling, was responsible for taking workshops on reporter techniques. He has worked with TVNZ journalists since 1988 on aspects of reporter practice such as script writing, bulletin construction, and story production.

In his texts and teaching, Shook conceptualizes the television reporter as a "visual essayist". In using this term, Shook emphasizes the unique approach required in television journalism which stresses the visual element in telling a story. He also draws on the literary tradition of the Eighteenth Century essayist:

Today reporters and photojournalists who have reassessed the nature of television have begun to identify reporting concepts that are demonstrably more effective for television than are the techniques of print reporting in which stories are primarily built around words. Among their peers these journalists have come to be called visual essayists, a term that describes journalists who link words, pictures, and sounds to create news reports that communicate a sense of experience to their audiences.

These individuals have demonstrated that visual essayists are to television news what narrative essayists are to print journalism. They are journalists with a message for a larger fraternity of television journalists whose calling is to help define who we are as a society, where we have been, and where we are headed, and who seek to accomplish this mission in ways that will attract and hold news audiences. (Shook,1989:xx)

Shook's use of the notion of a 'calling' to describe the exemplary form of television

⁹² Joe Atkinson (1993,1994) reviews the history of the consultants brought in by the Director of News and Current Affairs and analyses the nature and consequences of their advice.

journalism he celebrates, is echoed in the TVNZ journalists' idealized accounts of the nature and purpose of their practice. He constructs television journalism as an interpretive cultural vocation which blends the historical precedent of the pamphleteer with the modern commercial imperative of audience retention.

Management has construed improving the quality of journalism at TVNZ as a matter of refining the technical competencies of the journalists so that they become more adept at crafting a television news programme which attracts the largest possible audience.

The focus of Shook's training has been to equip TVNZ journalists with the full range of film/video techniques in order to emotionally involve and engage viewers so they continue to watch the programme. Shook recommends television journalists use a naturalistic, upbeat style of writing, accompanied by compelling visuals and an emphasis on people in order to involve viewers in the story being told. The tenor of the programme must be positive, or at least neutral so as not to depress or turn the viewer off. (Shook, 1989: *passim*)

The news executives have sought to ensure the techniques taught by Shook are applied in everyday practice by appointing story producers to oversee and guide reporters as they carry out their assignments.

8.7: Story Producers.

I'm talking about the two essential ingredients... one is the content - the basic information, the selection of that information - and the other is the treatment that allows that information to be effectively communicated. And you really have got to have both. It's no good having a really good researching, investigative reporter who is unable to tell a story any more than it is having a sharp, treatment oriented reporter who knows how to make all the whizz-bangs work and graphics and really get all the dramatic devices into a story but usually gets the facts wrong. That is the essential difference between television journalists and their colleagues elsewhere... we [in television] need the people who have not only all the attributes and

skills of print and radio journalists in terms of information-gathering, story generation, but also, they have got to have the skills to communicate that, using television techniques, to the audience. (Deputy Director, News & Current Affairs)

News or story producers were first introduced in the initial period of competition which occurred in the 1970s. However, since deregulation, they have been reintroduced and have become a key element in the establishment and on-going exercise of the centralized chain of command. They play an important part in the institutionalization of editorial expectations and the lessons of the consultants.

In the initial stages of the story producer system, the Home Editor allocated a story producer to work in tandem with all reporters in their covering of a story. On assignment, s/he would help the reporter plan the coverage of the event to ensure the reporter understood the angle and treatment required by the production desk. When the reporter returned from an interview and filming, the story producer would look over the video footage with the reporter to identify the desired shots, work up the script and guide the tape editor when s/he put sound and image together. [The procedure is shown in Appendix B: the video 'A Nice Clean Product'.]

The news producers came in to guarantee quality, to provide support. Some reporters saw it as a constraint or restriction of their freedom, a threat to their independence. But it was substantially more a support for them because there was no way we wanted them getting their product on air if it wasn't up to scratch and then having to go around afterwards in a post-mortem situation. Putting in the news producers gave a clear indication of our expectations - saying this is what we want. (Deputy Director, News & Current Affairs)

Initially this created some friction with reporters who were used to exerting more autonomy over their practice - as one put it, they were used to being a 'one man band'. The executives argue that resistance to the story producers was misguided because they were introduced to help journalists re-adjust to the new ethos. The Deputy explained that they worked in the reporters' interests because their guidance prevented reporters from 'making

mistakes' and being censured as a result.

The mechanism of the story producer has been effective in ensuring the executives' editorial policy is observed and applied. With the story producers acquiring confidence and ability, and the reporters becoming more adept at satisfying the requirements of the executive, there has been a shift in the way in which the story producer system operates. The Deputy Director found that, once the reporters were trained up, "only two or three news producers are needed to run a show once they're all up to speed." (*ibid*)

This has enabled journalists whose only duties were in the role of story reporters to act either as reporters or story producers, depending on staffing requirements. The organisational priorities of reducing labour costs and ensuring product consistency are well served by this flexibility on the journalists' part as management now "don't have to carry too many reserves in the producing team because they are there in the reporters." (Deputy Director)

By late 1992, the Deputy Director felt that, overall, the management team's strategies for 'professionalizing' news production at TVNZ had been successful:

We still have problems of erratic performance though they are less than they used to be. We constantly badger away and try to lift it. But I'd have to say our journalists work harder now, they are more tightly focused on their work, they are more professionally competent in obtaining the product and turning it round and getting it to air. There have been some good individual production efficiencies achieved. (Deputy Director, News & C/A)

The achieving of 'efficiencies' within production is closely tied to the news executives' interpretations of 'professionalizing' journalism at TVNZ. The 'reporter enterprise' scheme, as it is called, reflects this blending of economic and professional interests.

8.8: Reporter Enterprise.

'Reporter enterprise' refers to the reporters not relying on diary entries, public relations handouts, newspaper follow-ups or what they heard on Radio New Zealand's *Morning Report* or any other programme. The executive introduced the strategy in an attempt to make the news programme more attractive to viewers as a source of 'breaking stories'. Management felt that previously, the news operation was mainly reactive and dependent on newspapers and radio as sources for stories. Through the strategy of reporter enterprise, the journalists are encouraged to work their contacts and sources and investigate possible leads in an effort to come up with an "important and relevant" (Deputy Director) story which TVNZ can 'break'. The following comment by a reporter reflects this new imperative.

I'm not interested in packaging - the editing and sub editing areas, I'm not interested in that. I'm just interested in finding bloody good news stories and the more that we can find off the diary which no one else knows about that we know about, then the better I like it. Okay, we have to be a bit of daily record of what's taking place but we're not a historical log. (Reporter)

Being the news organisation to 'break', or be first with, a new story is perceived in terms of 'adding value' to their operation and products.

We want news in the sense that it is news that nobody knows about. It is our story which is always worth something around here. I like the ones we instigate. It is our story - 'here's something that you need to know that you haven't already heard from somebody else'. It gives the bulletin an added value. (Executive Producer, *ONN@6*)

However, the scheme has not been as successful for the *ONN@6* team as it has for other programmes such as *Holmes*. While the news programme reporters are expected to generate stories from their own investigations, most of their time is taken up with covering those stories assigned them by the Home Editor. The decrease in the number of journalists is a significant factor here:

Because we don't have a lot of people working here anymore - we don't have 12 reporters sitting around with four of them filing stories - we miss out on a lot of stories. Because of that, we don't have the contacts, we don't have the time and we tend to follow stories rather than instigate them.

(Home Desk Assistant.)

The strategy of reporter enterprise exhibits idealized managerial expectations. The reality the working journalists experience is something quite different. They now have to compete with other journalists for a limited number of camera crews, and the resourcing of research and investigation is limited to what is, largely, commercially viable.

8.9: Financial Considerations and Constraints.

The first priority of the executive officers of TVNZ's Department of News and Current Affairs is to manage the production of news and current affairs programmes in a "cost effective manner" (Deputy Director). Financial considerations have become a key factor in determining the standards of contemporary journalist practice at TVNZ.

It can always be better - throw more money at anything, you can always probably improve it. If I am to do a better and more comprehensive service with a greater variety of programmes, then give me more money. (Director, Department of News & Current Affairs)

Costs are a reality. If you can't afford to do a story, you can't do it. You may be able to compromise and do it to a certain degree. But in a lot of ways, it's better you don't do a story than do half a story. (Home Editor)

The stated departmental objective of "providing a quality information service to the people of New Zealand" (Director, News & Current Affairs) needs to be qualified by the phrase, "as far as we are able, given the conditions within which we operate." (TVNZ Mission Statement, Annual Report, 1992)

As a consequence of TVNZ's restructuring as a State-Owned Enterprise, the number of journalists working for the Department of News and Current Affairs has shrunk by 50%. Reorganised as a profit-centre, the department has met its own operating costs and generated revenue while operating on reduced budgets.

The SOE Act requires production to be disciplined by the imperative of cost-effectiveness.

The Act makes no provision for the central journalistic value of providing news as a public service.

We can't meet these wider needs [for a public television service] because we are commercial. That's the dilemma at the moment. If government wants to make one of the channels non-commercial and deliver at that pitch, fine. At the moment they haven't done that. The government has said: 'We will have a state-owned television existing in a commercial market'. Therefore we're being told that we've got to return to the government a percentage of the profits each year - \$26 million last year. So much has got to go back to the government because we're a SOE. That is the condition of the warrant which Television New Zealand operates under. So therefore, in a competitive environment, we've got to compete just like TV3 would for that dollar. Now if they want to change the rules that's fine. If they want to change the rules and make us a non-commercial channel, we will deliver to minority interests. At the moment we're a broadcast commercial medium and we have to pitch at that level otherwise we're out in the cold. (Executive Producer)

Because *ONN@6* and *Holmes* were the 'flag-ship' programmes for the organisation, conferring credibility and prestige on the company, and attracting a large audience at the beginning of the evenings schedule, they were valuable commodities for the company and were, initially, somewhat exempt from the production imperative of "keeping an eye on the bottom line" (General Manager). At the beginning of my fieldwork, late in 1989, the Home Editor commented:

There are very few stories where cost would be a deciding factor. Cost might be a deciding factor in a story as to whether we did it for midday or six o'clock. For instance, if a story was up north and we knew we could get it back in time for midday, but that was going to cost us two thousand and a helicopter fee and we really didn't need it back until the end of the day, then that would be a cost decision. Basically, it's because our news is a high rating competitive winner, so it's not a big factor. It most certainly is in *Top Half*⁹³ and *Te Karere* because they have a limited budget and they are not priorities, so they would often make efforts not to do a story that involved hiring a freelance crew, they would wait until they could get a camera and staff, a camera crew to do it. (Home Editor)

Two years later, daily budget meetings had been instituted and all programmes are now subject to close attention by management as they seek to identify elements within the

⁹³ The regional programme which followed, prior to 1990, the early evening news bulletin in the northern regions of New Zealand.

production process which constitute "a drain on resources in a competitive environment" (Director).

One significant example of the way in which the emphasis on cost has redefined the perception of what is newsworthy can be seen in the transformation of the meaning of the term 'broadcasting' in TVNZ news-culture:

We have chosen to inform by broadcasting rather than narrowcasting. We decided that it is much more cost effective to do broadcasting. Basically, we decided that TVNZ can't afford to inform on a local level. Minority interests, be they spastics or the four-wheel drive club or ethnic groups, they end up out in the cold. They are the victims of commercial television.

We have a national responsibility. For financial reasons, we have chosen not to do regional television. If we had the funds, it probably would be something which we would do. (*ibid*)

This justification of present editorial policy as entirely proper, through claiming a 'national responsibility', fails to appreciate the contradiction inherent in the rationale. As the executive uses it, 'national' is not an inclusive term referring to the diverse constituencies and communities of interest that make up 'the nation'. Rather, the term is applied in an exclusive fashion to distinguish between a national market and those communities which are too localized in their tastes and interests to be targeted by television advertisers. What it now takes for an event in the regions to be considered worth the expense of covering is that it have universal appeal. In practice, most are tragedies. The Deputy Director explained that the shift in "our targeting" occurred "for competitive reasons" although "our journalists don't really want to hear too much of this. But I have to understand it." (Deputy Director)

At the same time, the news executives point out that financial considerations must prevail over journalistic interests because they have to. The department's Director spells out "the price of not being competitive":

If we falter competitively and lose significant amounts of revenue, not just

within our hour, but the sort of revenue stream that we can create by capturing the audiences early in the evening, if we fall down on that, then the revenue dries up. There is no government money involved, so they give us less, we lay off more journalists, we cut our crews, we start dropping programmes which aren't quite broad appeal, we get tighter and tighter. We have done a bit of that already. We don't want to do it anymore. (Director, Department of News and Current Affairs)

The news executives are clear about their responsibilities - they are managing a profit-centre for a commercial organisation and their primary consideration is to ensure that the journalists produce programmes which are commercially successful. While, as journalists, they recognise public service values, the realization of professional norms is subject to the imperative of broad appeal. TVNZ corporate culture is oriented to the overall commercial success of the company, and it is to organisational objectives that the news executives must attend.

8.10: The Business of Ratings and Standards of Journalism.

Within a commercial media organisation, the emphasis on broad appeal means that journalists' professional standards are organisationally defined. Thus at TVNZ, journalism is evaluated in terms of programme effectiveness as measured by the statistical indicator of market research ratings.

The tension generated by competing organisational and professional interests is resolved by the ideology that 'popularity' equates with 'popular representation'.

Ratings are important to the organisation and therefore important to me in terms of commercial revenue and no one is going to ignore or avoid that. But it is also a professional measure as well. You are doing your job better if you are reaching more people. (Deputy Director).

The perception that ratings-driven news programming is democratic derives from confidence in the perceived representativeness of the market survey method which produces ratings. Based on data from 440 households, the sample is calculated to be a reliable indicator of viewer satisfaction and representative of the demographic profile of the

potential audience, i.e. New Zealanders aged 5 years and older.

The ratings are perceived to be a more reliable reflection of audience preferences than the views of individuals who contact TVNZ, either by letter or phone, or who write to the papers, expressing their criticisms of TVNZ's 6 o'clock news.⁹⁴ Unless a significant number of phone logs give the same evaluation of a particular item, individual evaluations are seen to be idiosyncratic and not representative of widely-shared tastes and opinions.

The ratings tell management how many people are watching and enable them to monitor trends to see if the programme's appeal is improving or declining or static. *ONN@6* and *Holmes*' high ratings are seen by the news executives to indicate a wide-spread acceptance by the programmes' audiences of TVNZ's journalistic style and standards. Thus they serve as a means by which the quality of journalism may be judged, as well as their own effectiveness as managers.

The news executives do not see the centrality of ratings in contemporary TVNZ culture necessarily entailing that their practice is wholly "ratings-driven" (Director). They hold that journalistic standards and their professional integrity has been upheld. As evidence, management contrast their own production standards with those news organisations who have chosen to fight the ratings war with tabloid excess. As one of the editorial team put it:

If you watch local news in New York, you would throw up at how bad it is. It is appalling - gunshots, sex, violence, drugs. If it bleeds it leads - that's the philosophy - and pretty people up front. Its all just packaging and window dressing. I don't think that we are going to go that far because we have different traditions and values here. In fact ... I hope to God we never do because we should run a responsible news programme. (Foreign Editor)

⁹⁴ The problematic character of television ratings is discussed briefly in Ch5.4, and references for critiques of the ratings system are provided.

The news executives believe ethical standards must be maintained, not only because

...we believe them to be right but because they conform to general value standards out there in the community. If we transgress those areas, we will be offending the general viewpoint - norms that are held, for the most part, out there in the audience. (Director, News & Current Affairs)

The populist ethos guiding production determines that programming must reflect the tastes and needs of the targeted audience. Given that TVNZ news management see "a strong streak of puritanism" (Director) in their targeted ONN@6 audience, they have a pragmatic interest in maintaining ethical standards at a level they perceive acceptable to their viewers. At the same time, the populist ethos has redefined TVNZ news values. Rather than intellectually engage the viewer, the journalists seek to engage them emotionally with an exciting visual experience.

Judging where to draw the boundaries of acceptable limits in producing a populist news programme is a complex business for the executives. The boundaries are neither static nor certain.

The managers of a news operation, subject to increasing market pressures, feel that the boundaries defining ethical practice for journalists are fluid and opaque. The TVNZ Journalists' Manual provides a formal expression of the organisation's policy on ethical matters but in practice these guidelines are subject to being redefined by specific instances that arise. Competition sometimes forces a shift in the attribution of newsworthiness and the definition of ethical boundaries. For example, if

...TV3 puts up some interview which I regard as highly suspect in some regard or another (I might regard it as contempt of court) what do we do? If we've got a similar interview, but we've held back on using it because we're saying we'd be wrong, legally or ethically wrong to do this, what should we do? Should we follow, or should we remain true to our first instincts? Difficult. And there's no one rule you can give. You just have to take each case on its merits...

At one point in the Gulf War, the Iraqis captured, tortured and paraded American and British pilots. One of the American networks went on air saying they were not going to use any of the sound from the footage of the

captured pilots because it believed that what they were saying was extracted under duress. There you can see that they were conforming to an in-house guide-line. They subsequently amended their guideline, or amended their interpretation of it anyway, and did run some of the material. Probably not all of it but some of it. So you can see that two ways. You can say they clearly did try to impose their code of ethics on the use of this material. The competitive environment may have caused them to adjust their original standpoint because it might have been because everybody else was running it, they felt obliged to as well... they didn't want to be seen lagging behind the competition. (Director, News & Current Affairs)

Competition places considerable pressure on news executives who, at times, have to decide between maintaining ethical standards recognised by the journalists within that particular organisation, and keeping up with competitors who broadcast material which is compelling viewing because of its shock value or doubtful taste.

While competition keeps extending the boundaries of 'acceptable' television journalism, the news executives are satisfied with their competence in making decisions which achieve a balance between commercial interests, professional ethics and public moral codes.

There is a fair amount of balancing involved. But it isn't necessary to compromise basic journalistic ethics. I don't feel I ever do. I just don't have the luxury anymore of being completely singleminded about it. (Deputy Director, News & Current Affairs)

They reject the notion of being compromised as journalists by commercial imperatives. To the contrary, they construe their expertise as being able to

...do something that serves a public interest, is editorially sound, meets the ethical requirements of our profession, yet still is competitive and commercially successful as well. (*ibid*)

They are confident in their ability to equitably balance such a complex set of conflicting interests and goals. In fact, it is the daily juggling with these components which, the Deputy Director states, makes the work so "exciting" and "satisfying". The executives judge themselves to continue to provide New Zealanders with a "quality television news service" (Director, News & Current Affairs):

I think we reflect bloody well, actually, what happens around New Zealand, despite what people say. Despite the cost, we go to places like the East

Coast whenever there is a major story. We won't ignore a huge flood in inland Taranaki because it's a bit of a problem to go to. Both us and [TV]3 make that effort. The policeman shot in Ranfurly, well, we'll be there. (Executive Producer, Newshour)

In terms of the product on the screen, the people in this country have never had it so good. They get a diverse range of product that is virtually found nowhere else in the English-speaking world. (Director, Department of News & Current Affairs)

In conclusion, the news executives at TVNZ are satisfied that they have met their brief to apply 'the discipline of the market' to the public service culture they inherited in 1987. A centralized chain of command has been established over a national operation whose 'competitiveness' was being endangered by the near-anarchy of regional newsrooms used to a high degree of independence. Ensuring journalistic compliance with the requirements established for product consistency is an on-going task for management.

In the next chapter, I examine in detail how the news executives co-ordinate and control the diverse influences within TVNZ news-culture and maintain an orderly production process.

CHAPTER NINE: 'FORGING THE CONSENSUS': THE MEDIATION OF EDITORIAL CONTROL IN THE NEWSROOM.

9.0: Introduction.

The culture of news production at TVNZ is produced by competing yet overlapping interests and discourses, and the ambiguities and tensions these engender. It is apprehendable in the dialectic of belief and practice - what the journalists, in their various capacities, **say** they do, and what they **must** do.

In TVNZ news-culture, the clash of ideas in debate is celebrated as an indice of healthy professional practice. At the same time it is the task of management to ensure that the diversity of meanings and interests journalists bring to production are disciplined to ensure that organisational priorities are met.

This chapter is concerned with the ways in which TVNZ news executives guide and control the complex and multi-vocal culture of the TVNZ newsroom. In focusing on the mediation of editorial control, it also raises the issue of professional autonomy in contemporary news-production at TVNZ.

9.1: Formal Controls.

The Television New Zealand Journalists' Manual provides a formal statement of departmental intent, individual programme briefs, the regulatory framework and statutory requirements as well as guidelines for journalists. The section on policies and procedures covers everyday ethical questions that have to be resolved, essential principles of media law, and the legal difficulties that can arise for journalists in the course of their work. It

also sets out the style conventions for using the Aston system⁹⁵.

Though my field work suggests that the TVNZ Journalists' Manual is hardly a significant determinant of everyday practice in TVNZ newsrooms, it is nevertheless the formal statement of the brief guiding TVNZ journalism. The manual was made available to TVNZ journalists in August 1991. Before the 1988 restructuring, there had been two documents which formally established general policies governing journalism within the BCNZ. However these became obsolete after the organisation was changed from a public corporation to a state-owned enterprise. In 1987, the newly appointed Director of News and Current Affairs asked his Chief Assistant to prepare a new set of standing instructions. Its author describes its history.

Paul Norris initially asked me to look into the question of ethics and look at what had been published for Television New Zealand journalists so far to see how appropriate it was for the present situation. About eight months later, I told him it was ready. However, he just decided not to proceed at that point with anything further. We didn't release it until this *Frontline* thing came up.⁹⁶ Then the Chief Executive ruled there had to be a review of standards, and a Standards Review Committee was set up. (Chief Asst. Director, News & Current Affairs)

⁹⁵ Aston Style refers to the conventions governing the use of the computerized studio method of placing graphics and identifying names and titles on screen as the programme is broadcast.

⁹⁶ The Chief Assistant is referring to a legal furore which broke after the broadcasting of a current affairs programme called 'For the Public Good' in the *Frontline* programme. The programme suggested improper and illegal dealings between Cabinet members of the Fourth Labour Government and members of New Zealand's business elite. Defamation writs were brought against the company, (some of which are still legally pending, others subsequently withdrawn), and complaints were laid with the Broadcasting Standards Authority. In one of the few instances where TVNZ has been severely censured by the BSA, the Authority upheld the complaints on the grounds that allegations were made which could not be supported by evidence, and that unethical methods had been employed to acquire footage. TVNZ was required to "broadcast apologies to the Business Roundtable and the Treasury, summarizing the Authority's decision, and refrain from broadcasting advertising material between 6 pm and closedown on Sunday, 3 February, 1991 (which, the company estimated, cost it \$100,000 in lost revenue)." (Communications Division, Ministry of Commerce Report on Broadcasting Policy, October, 1993, p.66.)

The scandal had considerable consequences for the Department of News and Current Affairs. The Executive Producer of 'For the Public Good', a senior journalist and long-standing TVNZ employee, was sacked. The department was split between those who felt that management had been justified in the way they responded, and those who felt the programme's Executive producer had been made a scape-goat for senior management who had failed in their editorial responsibilities. There was a considerable loss of face and negotiating power for the department within the company as a result of the debacle.

The document prepared by the Chief Assistant formed the basis of the journalists' manual that was subsequently produced.

The Chief Assistant explained that the department Director had not shown a great deal of interest in releasing it prior to "this *Frontline* thing" because he wished

...to let things try to settle down without a set of rules, to allow the people to develop their own feeling about the directions the programmes are going, directions the profession is going, rather than have them composed as a set of guidelines. (*ibid*)

As discussed in Ch.8:2, the Director sought to replace the BCNZ's stolid bureaucratic system with a 'non-interventionist' managerial style. However, events showed the need for a formal statement of standing instructions. The managerial strategy of achieving product consistency also involved delineating the expectations that management had towards each programme. Such expectations included *ONN@6* and by implication clarified for journalists the kinds of stories they should be making⁹⁷.

Thus the Journalists' Manual is the official document regarding journalists' actions but from observation it has little bearing on the day-to-day direction and nature of journalism at TVNZ. Rather, editorial discipline within daily production routines is achieved through informal means, and in particular, the expectations that management are known to have. News production is co-ordinated and managed by means of the implicit discipline of an *ethos* through which a behavioural consensus has been achieved. A key element in the executive maintenance of this ethos are the editorial meetings between the Deputy Director and the Editorial Team.

9.2: Editorial Meetings.

The morning editorial meeting enables the executives, the editorial team and the producers of the daily news programmes to co-ordinate their work for the day. The meeting deals

⁹⁷ See Appendix A for the Programme Briefs for *ONN@6* and *Holmes*.

with the logistics of which stories are to be covered, which programme will be the lead story of the day, where 'the talent' is, how much it will cost, and so on.

The meeting also performs an important co-ordinating function between editorial staff in Auckland and the regional newsrooms. It allows the Wellington and Christchurch Bureau chiefs to know what each programme Producer is planning to do;

So we don't trip over each other, we don't find we've all gone out to interview the same person. We're not wasting resources. We try and make sure *Holmes* ties in with Six O'clock [ONN@6] and that we follow and back up each other's stories. (Home Editor)

It is also the site of the intensive 'culling' process that takes place every morning. From over a thousand stories which have been noted, only 50 or 60 story ideas might be possibilities actually raised for consideration at the morning meeting. Of these, only ten or so will make it into the bulletin.

The editorial meeting is the launching pad for the story - it gets the story going. But the progress of the story is monitored during the day. If a reporter was to go off at a complete tangent, one would not expect to find that on the screen at night because it will have been monitored and adjusted. There is constant dialogue between the Producer of the 6 o'clock, the Executive Producer, and the Deputy Director, if need be. (Bulletin Producer)

Along with news selection and staff coordination the editorial meetings are also instrumental in the reproduction and maintenance of executive discipline over everyday practice in the newsroom. The strongest control originates through the discipline imposed by the Deputy Director. It is at this venue that the Deputy "forges" the editorial consensus, and repairs and maintains it.

It is at the morning meeting that "a lot of the *mores* about exactly what should be in the bulletin under this particular style at the moment, and what shouldn't, are established." (Home Editor). The Deputy Director tends to communicate his priorities and preferences to the Editorial team members in an indirect and oblique manner. Describing how his style

of leadership works, the Home Editor explained:

I go in with a list of maybe ten or twelve story ideas and on a given day, maybe three of them might be knocked back. I might not agree with the reasons why they've been knocked back but I understand their thinking. I'll file away that information, say 'right, they don't want that story, a preview of a woman's netball thing, what they would rather have is this or this'. I file that away and next time I have similar options and stories, I just don't include that, because I know that is not the sort of thing they want for the programme. (Home Editor)

Through the tacit communication and interpretation of managerial expectations, the editorial team acquires an understanding of the news values management want observed. The team members learn editorial policy through being sensitive to cues they pick up from the Deputy Director's responses to their story suggestions and discussions. They shape their 'news sense' according to whether the particular story ideas they present elicits enthusiasm from him. If they are ignored or dismissed, then they learn not to bring that idea up again, regardless of their own evaluation of its potential as news.

The editorial team members take what they have learned from their meeting with the Deputy Director and apply it in their dealings with those journalists for whom they are responsible. In this way, the tacit knowledge of editorial priorities structures the journalists's practice and interaction. Thus, through the mechanism of the editorial meeting, collegial interaction is regulated and ordered by a carefully managed consensus which secures the journalists' compliance with the expectations of the news executives. As a consequence, the journalists come to share in a collective recognition of the 'house style' which they are required to reproduce in their work.

This shared understanding of the non-negotiable elements of editorial policy is a crucial element in the news executives' quality control strategies. Through the daily reproduction and repair of the operating consensus, the Deputy Director ensures a uniformity of outlook regarding the purpose of specific programmes and consistency in the required appearance

and 'feel' of the news product.

9.3: The Assignments Meeting and Home Desk.

Just as the news sense of the editorial team is reinforced daily through the indirect communications of the editorial meeting process, so to the news sense of the reporters is renewed and redefined on a daily basis through picking up on the cues given by the Home Editor.

The Assignments or Home Desk, under the direction of the Home Editor, is a critical link in the editorial chain of command. It is the principal conduit whereby editorial priorities are transferred from the level of the management and editorial team to the reporters and story producers. It is also the junction tying in the regional newsroom operations to the centralized news operation based in Auckland.

The Home Editor is responsible for reporter management, i.e. the assigning and guiding of reporters, and co-ordinating and resourcing their activities. Her biggest responsibility is as mediator between the editorial team, the production desk and the working journalists. At the Editorial Meeting (editorial team) and the Assignments Meeting (Home Editor and reporters), she manages the flow of information, assessing the intelligence reporters bring back from their work in the field and implementing the editorial priorities established by the Deputy Director. Thus the Assignments Desk under the guidance of the Home Editor constitutes a crucial site where TVNZ news-culture is negotiated and reproduced in daily production.

Since 1992, the morning Editorial Meeting has been preceded by an Assignments Meeting, held at around 8.45am. This is a gathering of the reporters and the Home Editor and the

Bulletin Producer of the day. The Deputy Director may make a brief and informal contribution to the assignments meeting - "he will put his head in and make a couple of suggestions and then go off again" (Reporter). Wellington and Christchurch bureau chiefs and some reporters participate via a conference call. The purpose of this meeting is to give reporters an opportunity to contribute to the process of story selection and treatment.

The management team instituted the new procedure of the Assignments Meeting in response to a perceived need to give reporters greater opportunities to participate in the early morning selection process. Previously,

At 9 o'clock the assignments desk [Home Editor] would say 'here are the things happening today - take your pick'. And I would apportion stories. It was clumsy, it was really too much to expect of one person consistently to be able to get that right. But more than anything else, it deprived too many people of input and consideration. It also made the 9 am meeting too long and unwieldy and frustrating. So we came up with a new idea whereby the programmes would have their own meetings. The other programmes and newsrooms have always done that. Over the years, we've talked about inviting reporters into the morning meeting for '6' but we felt it was too unwieldy. Now they all go in there and it gives them a chance to put some ideas in at the beginning of the day.

It wasn't like a burst of inspiration because the producer was charged with the responsibility of building a team. We've always recognised that *ONN@6* has trouble in getting a team established. (Deputy Director)

The assignment meeting exposes reporters to the thinking and concerns of the news executives, giving them greater insight into the factors which must be taken into account by management. There is also the perceived benefits of a wider range of expertise being brought to bear in the editorial process. Staff morale has also improved through reporters having the opportunity to participate in an important part of the journalistic enterprise from which previously they were excluded. Evidence of this was given by one senior journalist who explained that, formerly, it had been her experience that questioning or debating editorial decisions reflected back negatively on the reporter. There had been a tendency for editorial staff to see the reporter who challenged their interpretation of the proper way to

respond to a specific situation or problem as 'difficult' or uncooperative,

...because you had been given a story and now you were arguing about it. [Now] with the assignments meeting, you are being treated as some-one with something of value to contribute. Also, by being in there, you have the opportunity to listen to them discuss why it is a good idea between themselves, so you are a party to their way of thinking, so you can be convinced easier in that sense. (Senior Reporter)

The reporter felt another beneficial consequence of the new system was a greater editorial flexibility. In the earlier part of my fieldwork reporters spoke with some misgivings about the inflexibility of some editors over changing decisions regarding the angle of a particular story they had made at the morning meeting.

I mean, you only have a rough idea of what the story might be in the morning. The editor and the chief reporter might have an idea that that is the angle but actually when you get into the story, that is not the angle or it's not as strong as they thought. (Reporter)

Since reporters had become involved in the selection process, the editorial team seemed to be more receptive to a reporter changing the proposed angle on a story.

For example, the other day I went out to do a story about this plutonium ship that's been going all over the world and there's been concern that it might come past NZ and they said 'we don't want to take Greenpeace's word for it - we want to find someone independent'. So I got a guy from the Navy who's their navigation expert. I spoke to him on the phone and he said it was most likely it will come by NZ so I said to [the producer]; 'this guy says it's going to come by NZ, this is the angle - let's get a map up showing the routes and I'll go out there and do the interview and get some shots.'

Then I went out about midday and he'd had two more hours to study his charts and he said he'd changed his mind - that it was quite unlikely it would come by NZ now - it will probably go another way. We did the interviews and we did the shots and then I rang up the producer and said: 'look, he's changed his mind'. I expected him to think this was not a story now because it's not going to come by NZ. But he said 'great, fine, good, okay - it's changed around a bit - it's kind of a good news thing isn't it - still second lead sort of thing'. So it seems to be quite a different change in that sense - more flexibility. (Reporter)

While the introduction of the Assignments Meeting may be regarded positively by reporters who feel they have some involvement in the editorial process, the initiative does not significantly increase the extent of their participation in shaping production. Reporters may

now be part of the discussions which constitute the selection process but they remain excluded from the privilege of formulating the editorial policy and 'house style'. These are defined principally by the executives' concerns with product consistency.

The news executives' attempt to 'forge a consensus' and build 'team spirit' among ONN@6 reporters through the Assignments Meeting is undermined by differences between the news executives' and the other journalists', interpretation of 'proper television journalism'. This difference has been generated by the restructuring of what had been a department oriented by a public service ethos into a strategic business unit or profit-centre within a commercial enterprise.

Conflict often arises when a reporter's idea for a story which s/he feels is important is rejected by editorial staff required to produce a programme which has "a sense of pace and appeal" for an executive who wants "to keep it competitive, because I know that has an impact on the commercial revenue." (Deputy Director, News & Current Affairs) For example, a reporter wanted the bulletin to carry an item on the closure of a maternity hospital in Central Auckland. His bidding for inclusion of his item was based on the judgment that the item satisfied the requirement of the rule of relevance: "thousands of people are interested in whether or not the maternity services in Auckland are going to be able to cope with the restructuring [of maternity services] and whether or not they've been upgraded to cope with an increased demand for their services". But the story was rejected by the Bulletin Producer.

My story was about what sort of facilities were going to be provided to replace St. Helens and how the facilities at National Womens and other hospitals were going to cope with that change-over.

But there seemed to have been an expectation [by the producer] that there was going to be chaos. The story was dropped despite the fact that I thought I'd made it clear in the morning that there wasn't going to be chaos because I'd researched the story the day before. (Senior Reporter)

He felt the reason for the production desk rejecting it was because there "wasn't a shambles in the transfer process... because there wasn't a big problem in the transferral in the immediate sense." His interpretation was that this situation

...exemplifies, to some degree, the conflict between stories which are going to be possibly dramatic and stories which are in a sense useful or interesting public information and which affect a lot of people. Quite often stories that don't necessarily affect a lot of people but are dramatic or sensational or whatever get precedence because of their dramatic quality. Despite the fact that they don't really affect anybody. (*ibid*)

If the consensus carefully 'forged' by management is not artificial, it is still only a partial consensus. TVNZ journalists' behaviour may reflect the priorities and expectations of management. Their collective action, however, belies reservations privately harboured regarding the impact of commercial imperatives on their capacity to fulfil their public obligations. The above quote illustrates the ambivalence some journalists feel about the propriety of news-values which privilege the compelling quality of the dramatic over public service objectives. Another source of concern is TVNZ's withdrawal from providing a regional news service.

I think there are a lot of regional stories that we don't do because they don't fit into our short half-hour format where we have to cover the most important stories of the day for the nation as a whole. I think that's quite sad. People like regional television - they like to see themselves reflected on television. Nowadays I only go to the regions when there's a murder, a disaster like terrible snow in the South Island, dying sheep or a gang murder down in Taneatua - it gives people almost a wrong emphasis on what's happening. (Reporter)

Cleavages in TVNZ news-culture can be detected from the ambivalence with which journalists sometimes spoke about their work. Differences of perspective are generated by the conflicting priorities of those journalists responsible for increased productivity and efficiency within the SBU, and those who interpret their professional aspirations within a public service context.

This situation is not unique to TVNZ. Wherever journalism is subject to and organised to

serve the interests of capital, journalists' public service aspirations are compromised, to a greater or lesser extent, by organisational interests. What is special about TVNZ news-culture is the conjunction of publicly and commercially-oriented forms of television journalism within the one production setting.

It was the potential problems such a confluence of competing interests might engender which motivated the Director and the Deputy Director to establish, on their arrival, a "strong, centralized chain of command." To effectively manage the conflicts generated within TVNZ news-culture by the historical legacy of a public service ethos subsequently marginalized by market imperatives, the news executives rely on a time-honoured occupational norm which has, historically, served to minimize disruption to production within capitalist news bureaucracies.

Being socialized to accept certain occupational precepts and beliefs is a fundamental aspect of a cadet's induction into the craftwork of journalism, and his or her acceptance as a member of a newsroom. One of these deeply held beliefs is that the journalists within a newsroom hold a plurality of values and attitudes and, therefore, are representative of the diverse values and views in the wider society. The internal pluralism they perceive in newsroom culture is held by them to guarantee the objectivity and impartiality of the work they produce as a collective.⁹⁸

Another important mark of experience or 'professionalism' is a journalist's acceptance of the rules governing newsroom arguments and debate:

There are clashes from time to time. A reporter may think that the editor has pumped a story up more than it should be in the intro. Those things can happen and they sometimes do. But the end of the line is that if the editor

⁹⁸ As discussed in Ch7:2.

says 'this is how I see the story', then that's how it's going to be. There's always got to be an arbitrator and he has to call the final shots.

The editor has to win because he is putting a bulletin to air that has a very large number of elements. The editor knows in his head what shape the bulletin is going to be, where the stories are going, how they make up a whole bulletin. So he's looking at the story that the reporter is looking at, but against other times that he's given for other stories, and other placements that he's given. He's juggling a number of elements, so he must be the final decider. (Home Desk Assistant)

In the end, the editor has to win because he is juggling a number of elements which the reporter has no knowledge of, or responsibility for. The reporter has a very narrow perspective. I look at a story in the wider perspective of the entire bulletin. (Bulletin Producer)

The norm of 'in the end, the editor has to win' draws its efficacy as a control mechanism from its close connection with the indisputable realities of a daily production cycle and the considerable constraints placed on journalists by the pressure of time within the production run.

A formal mechanism exists for resolving disputes between members of the editorial team and reporters. If a reporter feels severely concerned about a story being rejected, s/he can go with his or her grievance to the Department Director. However, this option is rarely exercised. As the Director remarked: "I would look at that... but it doesn't happen very often that people raise individual stories that have been rejected."

While journalists frequently claim that "the newsroom is all about debate and that's very healthy" (Reporter), my fieldwork evidence shows the conditions governing newsroom debate are such that few journalists utilize the formal complaint method. This is because the journalists know they have no future in the organisation if they do not defer to editorial authority "in the end".

The Director of News & Current Affairs, commenting on the nature of executive control

in the newsroom, used Geoff Black's definition of 'news' - "it is what the news editor says is news"⁹⁹ to acknowledge the nature and extent of managerial control over the production of news. However, the Director rejects the notion that he is, in any way, "setting an agenda" (Director, News & Current Affairs) for TVNZ journalists. He holds that his authority is recognised by them because they are in agreement with his interpretation of 'proper' television journalism. The fieldwork evidence shows otherwise. It reveals that the so-called 'challenging debate' between journalists is not a debate in the sense of an open-ended dialogue. Rather, debate is ritualized in that its final outcome is pre-determined at its beginning by the tenet that "the editor wins in the end".

For newsroom debate to be of this narrowly circumscribed and ritualistic character, journalists must be predisposed to defer to editorial authority, despite their own private judgements regarding the matter at hand. Conforming to editorial expectations is tacitly accepted among the journalists as a crucial aspect of being 'professional'. Within this context, it is not 'debate' but the celebration of the myth of 'healthy debate' which constitutes a defining element of everyday life in the TVNZ newsroom.

9.4: The Limits of Debate: The Production Desk.

Now that the "discipline of the market" (Director, News and Current Affairs) has been applied to news-production at TVNZ, management must balance the competing pressures of commercial imperatives and the professional obligation to provide a public information service. As managers of a SOE, the news managers are obliged to ensure continued production of a consistently marketable commodity.

The editorial meetings, the assignments desk and the production desk are crucial sites

⁹⁹ Cited in Tucker, 1992:26.

where managerial discipline is exercised. Speaking in the context of how the new scale of values set out in executive prescriptions have affected her practice, the Home Editor gives some insight into how the implicit mediation of executive control operates:

Things have most certainly changed in the culture of the organisation, and in terms of my role as Home Editor. There are stories I would have chosen to put on air two years ago, I don't put on air. It's not so much the result of individual choice - the sports example I gave you is a good example. Two or three years ago we would have done the little girl learning to be a trampoliner thing because it was nice pictures and people would have gone 'ah' over it, now we don't, we do the second sports story on the rugby instead. We know that more people in the market are interested in rugby.

But that's not a conscious decision I've made. It's a decision that has been made by the people who know what the market should be. I know that I can suggest trampolining stories all I like, and they will never get to air because of that executive committee decision. The major sports are the ones we cover. I am not singling out sports, it's just a clear example of things that happen in other areas as well. (Home Editor)

The artificial nature of the operating consensus is illustrated by the fact that even members of the editorial team speak with some ambivalence about having to allow their judgments based on their experience as journalists to be overridden by those "made by the people who know what the market should be."

Differences between journalists' values and editorial priorities are resolved by authority of the production desk. The degree of executive control that is currently exercised over the editorial process is legitimated on the grounds that a centralized control is essential if there is to be "a very clearly perceived sense of what we are all about." (Director, News & Current Affairs) The Director and his Deputy

...made it absolutely clear that it was the production desk that determined the content of the programme. The Production Desk could instruct, command. It could, if it wanted to. Usually what it does is on a different footing because the team usually reaches an agreement on what is required. But it can, and I do as well, say 'no, I'm sorry, that's not the story that we want. We don't want it done from that point of view but this point of view - we think this is a more relevant point of view for our audience'. (Deputy Director)

The evidence suggests that the consensus which orders collective action in the newsroom, and facilitates the routinization of news production, is a behavioural rather than a journalistic consensus. It is not one formed through common agreement on fundamental principles of practice. The journalists are a diverse group of people with their individual personal and professional histories, interests and concerns. However, the news values they apply are those cultivated by the senior executives in order to achieve the firm command of production necessary to ensure their managerial responsibilities are met.

The fieldwork evidence demonstrates that the concept of news production being a case of "news by committee" (Assistant Home Editor), and underpinned by consensus, only makes sense if it is seen to be an attribute of the myths of authority the Director holds to. The journalistic discourse of 'consensus' is an organisational myth, a strategic managerial conceit which keeps the production setting and the character of the journalism practiced at TVNZ under the strong executive control required for efficient commodity production.

The Deputy Director puts his case:

Everybody who gets to the sort of level that I am at finds himself having to balance for the first time. When you are a journalist on the road, there are people doing the balancing for you. There are people telling you that you can't afford to hire the helicopter, the story is not worth it, but you will always argue that it is, because it is your story. You will say that the item deserves two minutes, because it's your story and something you have to believe in for that day. And I am not being unkind to journalists, we have all been through that... Those sorts of arguments that come up from the bottom - that's part of the process. I accept that and encourage it. But at my level there's the balancing act, like saying 'well, if we spend that money there, we won't be able to keep Cameron Bennett¹⁰⁰ in London next year, so we aren't going to do that. I am trying to explain it that way.

Similarly, you may feel that story is important to you, that I can see all the stories that we need to consider today and that story doesn't get in tonight's bulletin because in our view those stories are more important. I know you want to give that story three minutes because you think it is really

¹⁰⁰ TVNZ's London-based European Correspondent.

important, but I want to keep the bulletin with a sense of pace and appeal and I want to keep it competitive, because I know that has an impact on the commercial revenue. I have to consider that, they don't. (Deputy Director)

9.5: The Issue of Professional Autonomy.

In response to the loss of the company's monopoly over the television market in New Zealand, and its guaranteed income from the licence fee, TVNZ's senior executives sought to increase profits and reduce operating costs. The morale of the journalists dropped as the news operation was centralized and its staffing levels reduced by half. Once the transition was accomplished, editorial authority was even less likely to be challenged than within the previous system, given that retrenchment is an effective method of selective recruitment, and those journalists remaining at TVNZ were on individual contracts and anxious about career prospects and future income.¹⁰¹

The rhetoric of the news executives invokes the ideologies of leadership, worker empowerment, collegiality, and enterprise. In practice, the strategic management of news production at TVNZ is shaped through an interest in increasing executive control with the object of imposing and sustaining a carefully defined set of practices. This intention is evident in the Director's interest in what he called 'consensus'- "if you examine the notion of consensus and how you would create it, you can only do it by persuading people who wish to be persuaded" (Director) - and in his efforts to achieve it in the newsroom. He remarked:

If there was somebody who was way outside the consensus, who wanted to pursue a different agenda, a different style of journalism, we would have a bit of a problem because somebody would have to be in continual dialogue with that person to bring them into our way of thinking. Or in the end, we'd have to say, 'look, you're a great fellow but your aims and our aims are not as one'. In any news organisation, you have a problem with people who want to pursue goals and objectives that are not those of the department. (*ibid*)

¹⁰¹ Another study in its own right would be the industrial politics of the TVNZ newsroom, from the period of the appointment of Julian Mounter in 1986 through to the transitional period being dealt with in this thesis.

Differences in interpretation about the constituents of proper journalism are managed and controlled through their permitted expression in the ritual of debate. It is ritualistic in the sense that 'everyone knows' the rule governing the interaction: in the end the editor wins. Order is achieved through a complex process that results in common consent to this rule.

The replacement of the public television bureaucracy with a 'leaner' commercial organisation has scarcely fostered the professional autonomy of TVNZ's journalists. In the former 'bureaucratic' system, the reporter operated as a "one-man-band, who 'liaised' with the editor" (Home Desk Assistant). S/he enjoyed considerably more autonomy when the organisation was regionally structured, authority dispersed, and the ethos guiding practice was to provide a public service.

The power-sharing consensual myths of modern management and the ritualized nature of newsroom debate conceal the contradictions inherent in contemporary TVNZ news-culture. Together, they enable management to apply technologies of control within the production context without disturbing journalists' key occupational values of independence and objectivity.

There is no consensus among TVNZ journalists as to what constitutes 'sound journalistic judgment'. The possibility of forging a consensus resides in the journalistic tendency to anticipate and meet editorial expectations.

Occupational norms stress that once a journalist works for a particular news organisation he should regard most of its requirements as legitimate.
(Tunstall, 1971: 117)

Journalists learn this rule as part of their training. They learn that the more responsive they are to their editors' requirements, the more quickly they become accepted, and 'professional' status is conferred on them.

The substantive skills of journalism are not mastered through acquiring a body of theoretical knowledge as with doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. As one TVNZ journalist put it, "you come in and inherit the culture that exists." (Foreign Editor). One becomes a journalist through the process of being socialized into a newsroom culture where the attitudes and values of that particular group are acquired.

Baker's research enabled him to theorize that "training by socialization" was the appropriate phrase to describe the process whereby executive discourses are adopted by news workers. Describing the features of the pattern he observed while researching Australian news cultures, he remarks:

Many of the journalists interviewed recalled their trainee days as having occurred within a framework of pressured bewilderment. They regularly used expressions such as 'sink or swim', 'thrown in at the deep end', to describe their feelings. (*Baker, 1985:156*)

The two newsroom trainees who were the first to come into the TVNZ newsroom as part of its internship programme expressed similar feelings of "pressured bewilderment". One was stationed at the assignments desk, the other did research for the *Holmes* programme. They described their experience of struggling to meet the expectations of their editors and producers as "culture shock". Their difficulties, one explained, arose from the fact that little of what they had been taught while studying in a tertiary institution prepared them for the values and attitudes shaping the culture of news production at TVNZ's Auckland newsroom.

For the seasoned journalists, it was business as usual. One of them even went so far as to compare their experience of producing a daily news programme as "working in a sausage factory." (Bulletin Director) The Deputy Director acknowledged the metaphor evoked something of the routine nature of journalism. That was "inevitable" since "we have to

make the programme every night."

No-one gives us a choice here and says sorry, the news is only 10 minutes long tonight because we don't really think there is very much to tell you... we churn it out pretty steadily. So I don't think we should shy away from the concept of us being a production line operation.

But where it offends is the thought that it is so mechanical, and the input so predetermined, that one person pulls the skin on and the other puts the meat in. It's far more complex than that. The shows have to have a quality, a consistency. (Deputy Director)

Curran points to the paradox implicit in Tunstall's comment (above) which implies that "journalists feel autonomous because they broadly internalize what is demanded of them". (Ferguson:1990:118) This phrase is apt for it illuminates the situation in the TVNZ newsroom where, as a matter of daily routine, the journalists negotiate the contradictions and paradoxes of their culture.

TVNZ news-culture is a product of the antinomies and ambiguities engendered by the competing interests of profession and organisation. These, however, are not a source of disruption. The functional qualities of ambiguity in a newsroom culture have been remarked on by Tiffin:

The ambiguity and imprecision inherent in the nature of news values is not organisationally disabling. Rather it may be functional for an enterprise that has to face audiences with a range of beliefs, and deal with sources of conflicting hues while maintaining its own cohesiveness to meet production schedules...

Similarly there is a useful mixture of, on the one hand, principles and pretension ('freedom of the press', 'a calling' etc.) and on the other, the rhetoric of a commercial enterprise which cannot be expected to be altruistic or go beyond what its customers want. The first can be used against threats of external interference,... while the second, anti-messianic emphasis deflates criticisms of lack of performance.

The imprecision not only decreases external accountability but increases internal cohesiveness. (Tiffin:1989:68-69)

The careful nurturing of the behavioural consensus by TVNZ news management effectively masks the discrepancies between journalistic belief and practice in the contemporary

situation. The contradiction underpinning the rhetoric of 'forging a consensus' is that the news values inherent in this normative frame are not collectively arrived at but are imposed.

The outcome does not enhance the journalists' professional autonomy. Journalists' aspirations to professionalize are restricted by this consensus which is informed by the interest in controlling commodity production. The 'discipline of the market' has redefined professional standards in terms of how successfully journalism serves organisational imperatives such as increasing the value of their products through product consistency and audience maximization, and reducing the costs of production.

In conclusion, the fieldwork evidence, as set out in Part Three, shows the culture of news-production at Television New Zealand is characterized by two competing normative discourses - a managerial discourse based in commercial television industry conventions, and the journalistic discourse of professionalism. In the final chapter, I examine the dialectic of these ideologies through the management of news production at TVNZ Ltd. and the wider implications for the professional development of TVNZ journalists and for the interests of New Zealand citizens.

PART FOUR:
THE MASTERS OF TRUTH AND JUSTICE?

CHAPTER TEN: CONTRADICTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY TVNZ NEWS-CULTURE.

The history of news since the nineteenth century has been the history of a translation from popular defined as 'for the people', to popular as 'for the market'. (Hartley:1982:130)

10.0: Introduction.

In the introduction to this thesis I identified *ONN@6* as a contested cultural artefact and profiled the debate about the quality of its journalism that has ensued following TVNZ's transition from a public to a commercial broadcaster. I noted that an element missing from the debate about *ONN@6*, but critical to it, is an acknowledgement of the legal, material and ideological conditions shaping its production.

This study has sought to clarify the organisational determinants of journalism at TVNZ in order to provide a context within which a debate over the journalistic standards and editorial policies of the SOE may be fruitfully developed. The underlying intention of my research and analysis has been to contribute to broadcasting policy debates and administrative decisions which foster social equity and human liberty through informed citizenly discussion within a broad and inclusive public sphere¹⁰².

Boyce has argued that the "paradox of the Fourth Estate, with its head in politics and its feet in commerce, can only be understood if it is appreciated that the whole idea of the Fourth Estate was a myth." (Boyce,1978:27)¹⁰³ The newsroom situation, revealed in the

¹⁰² While I am aware of the current discourse on the public sphere which has developed in response to Burger's translation of Habermas's The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, (1989), I do not deal with it here. The conceptual and political problems of the Habermasian construct of the public sphere are considerable (Garnham,1986; Landes,1992) and would unnecessarily complicate and divert my argument away from the direction I wish to take.

¹⁰³ For an account of the historical emergence of the concept of journalism as an arm of government - the 'Fourth Estate' - and a critical reappraisal of the term, see Boyce in Boyce, Curran & Wingate (1978), pp.19-40.

substantive chapters in Part Three, obliges me to situate the normative discourses of TVNZ news executives and journalists within a production context shaped by a commercial logic and the structures of mass media production cycles.

The literature identifies that the appropriate perspective for developing conclusions from my fieldwork material is one which recognises that news organisations are complex bureaucracies whose operations include strategies and procedures for controlling employee performance and reducing conflict (Elliot,1977; Baker,1986).

In this chapter, I analyse contradictions in TVNZ news-culture arising from discrepancies between the professional rhetoric of the journalists and their institutionally-defined actions. Key discourses are examined in the context of how their use conceals competing journalistic and organisational interests in the culture of news production at TVNZ and, as a consequence, minimizes conflict and disruption to the production process. I argue that these discursive strategies have been valuable to the executives responsible for mobilizing journalism in the organisation's interests during the transitional period of restructuring and rationalization.

The debate over the standards of journalism at TVNZ reflects concerns raised in the wider international debate over the best institutional and organisational means by which contemporary broadcasting policy and structures might serve emancipatory interests. My thesis concludes, therefore, by addressing the implications for the broad public interest of the reorganisation of TVNZ as a SOE.

10.1: The Origins of the 'Rule of Relevance'¹⁰⁴.

The rule of relevance is a key prescriptive and evaluative construct in TVNZ news-culture. The journalists cite its centrality as an organising principle underpinning their practice as evidence of their commitment to act in the public interest, and to reflect the interests and concerns of 'ordinary people'. This belief, however, misconstrues the commercial interests underpinning the emergence of relevance within journalistic discourse at TVNZ.

The emergence of 'relevance' and a populist ethos within television organisations have been linked to the pressures experienced by staff of those organisations competing in a market context (Ang:1991; Schlesinger:1978). The BBC, for example, responded to losing its monopoly of British television in the 1950s by reformulating the institutional relationship to the audience (Ang:1991; Burns:1977). In 1975 New Zealand's television system underwent a similar realignment. As directed by the 1973 Broadcasting Act, the BCNZ established a second channel operating under the principle of 'controlled competition'¹⁰⁵. During this period news values within the organisation became shaped by an interest to appeal to viewer tastes and reflect popular perspectives.

In 1978 Labour was succeeded by a National government led by Robert Muldoon. The ritual restructuring of broadcasting, a seemingly inevitable adjunct to the election of a new government in New Zealand, replaced the competitive framework with a system of complementary programming¹⁰⁶. The two channels' news operations were integrated and

¹⁰⁴ The 'rule of relevance' is defined in Chapter 7:4.

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter 4:5.

¹⁰⁶ The system of complementary programming between TVNZ's two channels (Television One's identity was constructed as the 'information' channel and Channel Two carried 'entertainment' programming) continues to the present day. However, changes in their schedules during 1993 and 1994 suggests the relationship between the two channels is being redefined by management in order to target specific audiences more effectively. (McCready,1992) The introduction of news and current affairs programming on Channel Two (March 1994) is for the purpose of attracting the elusive under-35 year old viewers, known in the industry as the 'coke bracket'.

the ethos guiding news production within the new entity reflected a different set of interests. TVNZ journalists now deride this period for the 'institutional' or official orientation of its news values.

In 1986, another structural reorganisation of TVNZ was begun in order to create a vehicle that could successfully compete with private companies when TVNZ lost its monopoly over the New Zealand television market, which was imminent. Relevance re-emerged in the culture of news-production as part of the preparation of the Department of News and Current Affairs to help TVNZ 'win' the competition for audiences and advertising revenue.

TVNZ's journalists, however, do not perceive a causal link between the organisational shift to a populist ethos and the emphasis on relevance in news-production, and the managerial prioritizing of commercial imperatives. They construe 'the rule of relevance' as reflecting a greater editorial commitment to the professional obligation to inform citizens about 'the things they need to know'. While the introduction of a populist ethos has required some changes in the way the journalists go about their work, conventional newsroom wisdom holds that the reorienting of journalism to accommodate a populist ethos involves only superficial or cosmetic changes to their practice.

But the editorial emphasis on a populist interpretation of relevance has greater consequences than merely "trimming off some of the worthier and duller material", "dressing topics differently" or angling a story to reflect a 'popular' rather than 'official' point of view. For the range and breadth of *ONN@6*'s coverage of events and issues has narrowed significantly since a populist ethos and the concern for relevance to 'ordinary people' has guided journalism at TVNZ. (Atkinson, 1992)

The common newsroom epithet 'worthy but dull', used by TVNZ journalists to refer to material considered to be of public significance but with little entertainment value, signals a radical shift in the conceptual basis on which newsworthiness and relevance are currently decided.

In a news-culture shaped by a public service ethos, judgments as to the relevance of news stories are made according to a *social* interpretation of the audience as citizens and members of politically and culturally defined constituencies within the nation state. The populist determination of 'relevance' redefines the way in which news viewers are institutionally constructed by stripping away the identity of citizen. The news viewer becomes perceived as an isolated consumer with a preference for items which provide a vicarious emotional experience from entertaining curiosities or other people's tragedies.

10.2: 'Relevance' as Managerial Strategy.

The news executives assert that their judgements of 'relevance' are grounded in knowledge of the realities of the viewing context and the viewers' lives produced from extensive audience surveys and focus- or cluster-group research. It is on the basis of this research that they maintain they give the audience the kind of news service they actually want.

TVNZ's news audience research, however, is market research, shaped by the discourse of ratings and the marketing system of Target Audience Groups (TAGS). The research methodology ignores the viewer's embeddedness in the social world for it is fashioned only to provide information about consumers' tastes and preferences in order to target them more effectively for marketing purposes. The form of knowledge produced about news viewers reduces them to ciphers - no longer citizens with cultural and political concerns and interests, they are reduced to standardized "consumption units in a corporate world."

(Elliot:1982:243)

The utility of the 'rule of relevance' lies in the way it conflates the broadly inclusive social category of citizen, imagined in journalistic norms, with the TAGS of market discourse. In doing so, it successfully co-opts journalists' discourse into the market-oriented discourse of the organisation. As a consequence, the fact that the realization of journalists' professional norms is not a priority in a corporate culture oriented to seeking opportunities to exploit in the market-place is effectively concealed.¹⁰⁷ By disguising the way in which commercial imperatives underpin the editorial determination of 'good' journalism, the equanimity of reporters who distance themselves from the commercial aspects of news-making is maintained, and the potential for disruption and conflict minimized.

10.3: The Redefining of 'Professionalism' as Technical Competence.

Another key construct which conceals the competing interests of commercial and public service goals in TVNZ news-culture is the term 'professional'. When journalists speak about their professionalism, they mean "knowing how to tell their story". (Schlesinger,1978:134)

TVNZ journalists speak of their 'professionalism' to indicate their proficiency in behavioural techniques which, they claim, enable them to "put personal bias aside" (Bulletin Producer). These occupationally-defined procedures include verifying facts, drawing on different sources and presenting rival interpretations.

The TVNZ journalists perceive these practices as the means by which they are able to

¹⁰⁷ TVNZ's Planning Department Report '*New Zealand and the International Television Industry*' (1990), pp.23-28 exemplifies the focus on commercial success which characterizes the corporate culture and the interests shaping TVNZ executives' interpretation of their responsibilities.

distance themselves from the 'commercial' side of news production and maintain their professional integrity or "commitment to higher goals - of neutrality, detachment, a commitment to truth." (Curran,1991:98). The concept of 'professional integrity' is based on the assumption that the journalist is an autonomous practitioner guided by internationally recognised 'professional' standards which are separate from, and not contingent upon, organisational interests and managerial policy.

Those TVNZ journalists who do not have managerial responsibilities take pride in asserting that they do not take ratings and commercial imperatives into account in their work. What they fail to recognise, however, is that while they may faithfully follow procedures for 'putting personal bias aside', these practices do not prevent the organisation's financial commitments to advertisers and the state from affecting their construction of events in the items they make. In telling their stories, they are obliged to practice according to the news-values and editorial policies set by executives who believe that "ratings cannot be sustained for an hour of intelligent probing of complex issues". (Director, News and Current Affairs)

TVNZ's news executives, while also using 'professional' to refer to occupational behavioural norms, more frequently use the term in a context which reflects their concern with meeting financial commitments and targets.

In response to TVNZ's exposure to market conditions, the Director of News and Current Affairs sought to co-ordinate the department's human and technical resources more efficiently, and to produce high rating programmes. To achieve the latter, he identified a need to achieve product consistency, i.e. compositional coherence in the programme's narrative flow and its 'packaging' and consistency in on-air presentation from night to night.

A major obstacle the senior news executives had to overcome was what they identified as 'the problem of control'. By this, they meant the independent attitude of TVNZ's journalists, particularly those in senior positions in the regional newsrooms. In order to ensure increased operational efficiency and product consistency, the news executives required the journalists to be responsive to a centralized editorial authority. Using the rhetoric of 'total quality control'¹⁰⁸ to legitimate their increased editorial control, and the consequent erosion of the journalists' professional autonomy, the news executives centralized and rationalized the news production operation and shifted the emphasis from reporting to production.

This shift in the guiding priorities and focus of TVNZ journalism is exemplified in the Deputy Director's emphasis on making it "absolutely clear" to the journalists "that it was the production desk that determined the content of the programme." The new configuration of authority and responsibility in the social relations of news production at TVNZ has changed the meaning underpinning the news executives' concept of journalistic 'professionalism'. In the contemporary situation, this is now defined in terms of how competent the journalists are in applying the news values and compositional techniques required by the news executives.

As a consequence, the extent to which the journalist can exercise her or his professional discretion in story selection and treatment has diminished. The recently introduced policy of inter-programme flow, which allows journalists to contribute items to the department's three daily news or current affairs programmes, has given them the opportunity to enjoy some variety in the formats available to them to tell their stories. However, the discipline

¹⁰⁸ This term alludes to the contemporary management ideology and techniques of 'quality assurance', known as Total Quality Management or TQM. See Campbell, C., Bollard, A., & Savage, J., Productivity and Quality in New Zealand Firms: Effects of Deregulation, Wellington. New Zealand Institute of Economic Research, 1989.

imposed by the production desk has reduced the journalists' role to little more than "the technical administrative task of constructing a story to general specifications drawn elsewhere." (Baker, 1986:178). Within such a production context, each journalist's autonomy "may realistically consist of little more than his [or her] freedom to manoeuvre within the constraining bounds of his [or her] assignment." (*ibid*:179).

These constraints apply not only to TVNZ's working journalists but also to members of the editorial team. The last Executive Producer of *ONN@6*¹⁰⁹ described her experience as "no freedom, all responsibility" and spoke of her frustration at being able to apply her own interpretation of good television journalism only when it coincided with the orthodoxy established by the Director and Deputy Director.

Her frankness was exceptional, possibly because she knew she would soon be leaving TVNZ. Her colleagues were more circumspect, preferring to allude to their experience of organisational constraints on their interpretation of 'professional journalism'. One journalist's ironic reference to the 'chain of command' as 'the food chain' typifies the guarded ambivalence they feel about the current state of affairs. On the one hand they resent the erosion of their autonomy but feel vulnerable about expressing it, given that the Director had recently "trimmed the fat" (Deputy Director) by halving the number of journalists employed. On the other, they acquiesce to increased organisational constraints on their practice because of their occupational socialization to defer to editorial authority.

The newsroom axiom that it is the editor who has 'the final say' ensures the journalist's compliance because her/his "task, as [s]he sees it, consists of writing the best story [s]he can within a given framework." (Baker, *op.cit.* 179) The mediation of editorial control is a

¹⁰⁹ When the Executive Producer of *ONN@6* left TVNZ to work overseas, the position was dissolved.

feature of all newsrooms, and journalistic experience in general. What has been of interest in this analysis are the journalistic discourses and practices encouraged or discouraged at TVNZ and the specific nature of the pressures and conditions which discipline journalism, now that TVNZ's news operation has been reorganised as a profit-centre within a SOE.

10.4 : 'Rationalization' and Professional Standards.

The Director of TVNZ's Department of News and Current Affairs declares that, as far as their news service is concerned, "the NZ public have never had it so good!" He and his colleagues celebrate the principles of economic rationalism and managerialism as instruments of reform which, they claim, have liberated the news operation from the arrogance and inertia of a public service bureaucracy tied closely to the state. Not only has the financial performance of the department been improved by their application of 'the discipline of the market'; they assert it also means "we are doing our job as journalists better." (Deputy Director, News & Current Affairs). It is their belief that the competing interests of the organisation (to make profits) and the profession (to provide a public service) are effectively 'balanced'. But are these claims justified?

The 'institutional' era of public service broadcasting is presently derided by the news executives for the way in which journalism was straight-jacketed by the conservatism, timidity and deference to ministerial authority of BCNZ administrators. As the evidence set out in Chapter Four revealed, the historically close connections of New Zealand broadcasting with the state presented significant obstacles to journalists who wished to practice journalism as a public service. However, structural change has not in itself removed these obstacles either.

TVNZ news managers now utilize a detailed, computerized cost-accounting system which

enables them to keep a close eye on the financial aspects of the news operation. The implications of organisational restructuring for journalism are less transparent, yet rationalization and centralization have significant consequences for journalists and professional standards and objectives.

For example, centralizing and rationalizing TVNZ's news operation has reduced the departmental 'news net'¹¹⁰ and the amount of local knowledge and information coming into the production process. A centralized electronic news-gathering system may produce a steady flow of 'news' more cheaply than having journalists spread around the country, but the lack of reporters who live outside Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch is reflected in the absence of stories in TVNZ news programmes which reflect the interests and concerns of many New Zealand communities. The news executives may argue that "...we reflect bloody well what happens around New Zealand despite what people say..." (Executive Producer) but, typically, it is only scandals, tragedies, and visiting VIPs who currently induce TVNZ to commit resources for regional coverage.

The managerial emphasis on 'efficiency gains' intentionally pressures journalists to produce "more stories, more quickly" (Deputy Director). As a consequence they have less time to do research, investigate leads and develop contacts and sources. The likelihood of mistakes being made is increased, especially when a quick turnaround on stories is demanded of staff whose numbers have been reduced to an operating minimum.

The news selection process is also affected by the managerial concern for reducing costs in relation to revenue generated. Cheaper options which do not affect many people but provide compelling material, e.g. a bus crash, become more attractive to producers than

¹¹⁰ Tuchman, 1978: Ch.2 and *passim*.

regional or issue-based stories that are more expensive to produce because they require more research or resources. Potential items which are in the public interest but lack visual or emotional appeal will tend to be ignored on the grounds that they are 'worthy but dull'.

Stock images offer a cheap alternative to committing resources necessary to get footage for the item. (An ex-TVNZ editor referred to this practice as "visual wall-paper".) An increase in the appearance of 'set piece' treatments and visual and verbal cliches in *ONN@6* has been noted by one commentator who described some of the most frequently used of these visual stereotypes:

South Africa is a dusty Soweto street filled with dancing and/or rioting blacks; Ethiopia is flies crawling over the eyes of wasted children; fiscal excess is young stockmarket traders yelling into three telephones at once; discord in Wellington is politicians ambling along the corridors of Parliament Buildings. (Allan,1989:57)

The commercial imperatives of maximizing audiences and financial returns encourages the practice of forcing verbal information to compete with vivid, dramatic pictures which have only a loose connection to the *point* of the story. A reduction in resources also increases the susceptibility of the news production process to sophisticated manipulation by public relations consultants. All these factors are determining influences on standards of practice in a rationalised news operation.

TVNZ's senior executives respond to the issue of journalistic standards by bemoaning the small number of experienced professionals available to them. They point to New Zealand's low population and explain that the labour pool of experienced, professional television journalists on which they can draw is very small (Harman,1991). While population and finances cannot be disregarded they do not, in themselves, constitute an adequate

explanation for lowered professional standards among TVNZ journalists¹¹¹.

Factors such as the loss of senior journalistic expertise, experience and 'inside' knowledge of political and administrative processes in New Zealand through the 50% reduction in staff numbers and the shift in emphasis from reporting to producing an entertaining and seamless product also need to be taken into account. Another important consideration affecting standards of journalism is the technological determinism that characterizes the culture of TVNZ's senior executives and is evident in their strategic planning.

10.5: Journalistic Standards and Technological Determinism in TVNZ Corporate Culture.

Developing the technological infrastructure of the company and marketing its products are two areas which have been identified by management as worthy of significant investment strategies. Given a lesser priority are the organisation's investment in providing the conditions which enable journalists to deliver their best work and keeping, producing and attracting highly qualified journalists.

Ferguson has defined the concept of technological determinism as "the extent to which policy choices are technologically driven rather than socially derived" (Ferguson, 1986:53). The policy decisions of TVNZ management reflect a technological determinism in this sense. This is manifest as a shared belief among the executives that the solution to the

¹¹¹ Taking as his point of departure the premise that the media are obliged "to challenge and independently examine issues and events in the public interest" (Smith, 1993:60), Paul Smith's *N.Z. Listener* column *Media Watch*, regularly critiques specific instances of lax journalistic standards in TVNZ Ltd news and current affairs programmes.

challenges of competition lies in 'seizing' the commercial opportunities presented by technology.

This article of faith is exemplified in the rhetoric of TVNZ's 1991 Planning Department Report. It is also evident in the in-house *Vision 2020* seminars. In the video produced as part of that training programme, Judy Bailey¹¹² tells the viewer it is 'the exciting world of new technology' which provides opportunities for TVNZ to exploit in their drive for 'growth'

...when Television New Zealand became a SOE, it had a choice. Did we adopt a fortress New Zealand mentality and look inwards? Or did we take advantage of our strengths and skills for the future? Television New Zealand is convinced it has made the right choice - we're going for growth!

One of TVNZ's 'strategies for growth' has been to invest in a state-of-the-art electronic news processing system, along with new production and transmission facilities. Within the organisation, technology is celebrated for enabling greater immediacy of news and reducing time-consuming aspects of production. For example, stories or footage from the regional operations can be rapidly transmitted to the Auckland production centre. Computer generated graphics can condense the presentation of information into a frame, and provide images when video footage is unavailable or inadequate. These are valuable resources to the industry and demonstrate the ways in which technology can assist news production. However, its application can also be detrimental to journalistic objectives.

While technological developments have eased the pressures of getting a daily national news programme to air and made possible the production of a 'tighter, slicker package', they do not necessarily entail an improvement in the quality of communication. On-screen computer graphics may aid the organisation of information into visually appealing summaries which

¹¹² One of the main *ONN@6* news-presenters and TVNZ's chief marketing strategy - Bailey is used to represent the company's 'human face'.

can be presented simultaneously. Elaborate electronic links between newsrooms around the globe can bring pictures and news from just about anywhere. However, in a world characterized by rapid and complex social change, it is not technology *per se*, but journalists' expertise which viewers depend on to make sense of the social, cultural, political and economic issues of the day. Journalists need to be skilled in the use of the new communications technologies, but the free flow of information depends ultimately on well-researched items covering a wide range of public events and issues which provide New Zealand citizens with a deeper insight into their meaning.

Recent innovations in satellite and digital technologies have dramatically increased the speed and ease with which stories may circulate among newsrooms and the immediacy with which events may be reported to the viewer. However, assessing complex situations that are still in the process of unfolding, explaining their meaning and relevance to a large and diverse audience, remains a complex and difficult task. The technical capacity to broadcast images of events around the world as they happen presents journalists with an enormous challenge to place them in their wider context and provide a considered and informed interpretation of what those events might mean to the viewer.

In an increasingly competitive global broadcasting environment, the emphasis on speed to meet growing demands for immediacy in news programming mitigates against journalists properly researching their stories. Under circumstances where time and resources for research and reflection are considered by managers to be expensive luxuries, the potential for journalistic inaccuracies, errors and biases is greatly increased.

At TVNZ, the news executives cite their arrangement with the consultant, Professor Shook, as evidence of their commitment to fostering high standards of journalism and the

professional development of their journalists in order that the pressures and challenges presented by the new broadcasting environment are effectively handled.

Shook maintains that a television journalist should not only inform viewers about events but also give them some insight into the meaning of those events. He articulates the ideal of the television journalist as a 'visual essayist' whose work embodies a "sense of community" which viewers recognise as their own. (Shook,1989:215) The journalists are taught to accomplish this through using visual narrative techniques to connect *emotionally* with the viewer.

Shook's interpretation of 'good' television journalism emphasizes television's capacity to communicate the experiential qualities of an event and directs the journalist to exploit that aspect of the medium in their practice, to keep the viewer 'hooked'. I contend that the metaphor of the television journalist as a visual essayist is socially and politically naive. It neglects a fundamental difference between the nature of literary social commentary, which interprets human experience as socially and politically defined, and commercial television journalism which is predicated on the myth of objectivity and a decontextualized construction of the viewer as consumer.

In order for journalists to provide insight into the social meanings of events as 'visual essayists', they need first to acknowledge the situated character of the versions of the world they construct, and the political and cultural implications of their practice. This would require their being familiar with the complexities of such issues as the problems of representation and cultural politics, audience reception and meaning construction¹¹³, and

¹¹³ For a range of theoretical perspectives on audience reception of mass media messages, see Hall,1973,1977; Altheide,1974; Jensen,1986,1990; Gamson *et al*, 1992; Atkinson:1992.

the epistemological debates surrounding the concept of 'objectivity'.

But despite the significant investment made by TVNZ in journalism training since 1989, its journalists remain untutored in the conceptual and analytic skills necessary to address the critical issues of public communication which have significant implications for their practice. TVNZ journalists may be more adept than their predecessors at using visual narrative techniques and the new technologies to tell their stories. But while they have become expert in these aspects of their craft, they remain ill-equipped to "incorporate a thoroughgoing recognition of the immense moral and cultural implications" their practice entails. (Millet,1989:66).

Commenting on issues in Australian journalism, Kramer writes:

Getting it right is a matter of knowledge, skill and professional integrity. It is therefore proper to raise the question as to whether Australian journalists are adequately educated and trained. Do they need to know more about the world in which they operate? Do they need more highly developed skills in writing and speaking. Do they need more understanding of history, and a firmer grasp on handling ideas? I suspect they do, and that we need to give much more thought to their education and professional development. Attitudes are as important as knowledge and it would be reassuring if journalists thought of their audience as alert individuals with diverse interests, capable of qualitative judgements. (Kramer,1990:21)

But at TVNZ, as in other commercial television newsrooms, the journalists are not required to think about the immense moral and cultural implications of their practice. They do not have to reflect viewers' lives in all their cultural and political dimensions. Their task is to use their journalistic skills to secure the organisational imperative of maximising audiences, options and financial returns.

I do not wish to over-determine the process. TVNZ's information programmes are not wholly subsumed by the tabloid interest in shocking and amazing their viewers in the hope of keeping them tuned in. The programmes produced by TVNZ's Department of News and

Current Affairs exhibit differences in the balance of journalistic and entertainment values according to the guiding objectives defined for each programme in its programme brief. These are largely determined by the target audience. This is particularly evident in the notable difference in production values between Television One and recent Channel Two news and current affairs programmes. For example, the tabloid ethos of 'if it bleeds, it leads' has not completely negated a commitment to public affairs journalism in weekly current affairs programmes such as *Counterpoint*, *Frontline* and *Fraser*, and daily news programmes such as *Prime-time* and *ONN@6*. However, the production values of Channel Two's daily news programme *2 Newsnight* and the quasi-current affairs crime show *Under Investigation*, targeted at the 15-36 demographic, appear to be designed to entertain rather than enlighten.

The balance of journalistic and entertainment values in *ONN@6* is characterized by the 'once over lightly' approach in an attempt to achieve a popular blend of 'serious' and 'tabloid' journalism. The potential of the programme to serve emancipatory objectives is subjugated by the commercial interest in capturing an audience by playing to perceived preferences for the light and sensational over the 'worthy but dull'. While the balance of journalistic and entertainment interests is different in each of TVNZ's news and current affairs programmes, all of them reflect, to a greater or lesser extent, the subjugation of journalistic objectives to the ahistorical, depoliticized perspectives of commercial programming and marketing lore within the wider corporate culture.

10.6: The Dominance of Programming Interests.

The organisational determinants of journalism at TVNZ do not originate with TVNZ's news executives since they themselves are subject to the authority of more senior members of Television Network's directorate. Since TVNZ became a SOE, the organisation's executive

culture is underpinned by a concern with operating a successful business, and as a consequence of this concern, management decisions are dominated by programming rather than journalistic interests.

This dominance is confirmed by events in mid-1993, when the Director of Programming, after resigning, was reappointed to a position of more authority within Television Networks' Directorate. He now has overall control of news and current affairs, sports, programming and production. Editorial decisions remain the preserve of the Director of the Department of News and Current Affairs.

The Director of Programming explained the motivation behind his promotion.

The idea is to get greater co-ordination between all the production units. Under the old structure it was quite difficult to get decisions through. We're a big company and we need to have quicker and more-effective decision-making.

Competition's going to get much tougher out there - we're going to have to move a lot faster. This will enable us to be more competitive. (McCready quoted by Lawrence, 1993)

The emphasis within the company on 'beating the competition' increases with the greater fragmentation of the television advertising market. As competitive pressure on the organisation increases, so does the marginalization of public service goals within the managerial agenda.

A British Broadcasting Research Unit study of the effects of commercialization in New Zealand broadcasting after its initial introduction in the 1970s identified the consequences for other values in programme production:

Through a subtle, and almost insidious process, creativity, innovation, and experimentation have been squeezed out by the increasingly voracious appetites of advertising agencies and the Corporation's own marketing people. There is a sad but open recognition that the essentially conservative requirements of the advertising agencies, who demand the safety of last

year's successes to satisfy their clients, condition and ultimately stultify the programme-makers. (cited in Farnsworth, 1989:463)

With regard to news production, the organisational interest in targeting and 'capturing' demographic groups sought by advertisers conflicts with the journalistic obligation to represent the public interest. *ONN@6*'s Executive Producer testified to the tension between commercial and public service goals inherent in TVNZ executive culture, engendered by the conflict of interests between programmers' and journalists' objectives.

It's not that the journalists aren't committed to providing quality news programming, it's the programmers who aren't interested. I mean we had *Eyewitness*, a very good programme (though it had its faults) but the programmers decided they didn't want it. It wasn't performing in the ratings so they canned it which was a very stupid thing to do. They had the 10 o'clock news rolling all over airtime - ranging from 10.00pm to 10.45pm - which is ridiculous. The programme lost its committed audience because they didn't know when it was on. Some of the audience turned to TV3 because they knew *Nightline* was on at 10.30. When the ratings dropped, we hear from the programmers that 'the ratings have dropped, can it and put something else on'. There was no commitment from the programmers to get a news programme to air on time. They just don't care, they don't give a shit then they throw the ratings back at us. (Executive Producer, *ONN@6*)

An irony of the ratings system is that while production decisions are made according to the ratings points and audience share a programme attracts, these are largely a function of where it is placed in the schedule. The time a programme goes to air is critical to its success. One news executive referred to the "big battle" that sometimes took place between the Directors of News and Current Affairs, and Programming, over the scheduling of news and current affairs programmes at times when they had access to a wide audience.

An editorial in TVNZ's in-house journal *Televiews* (April, 1992), written by the Director of News and Current Affairs in response to a previous editorial by the Director of Sales and Marketing, rebuts the latter's claim that "it is advertising which makes journalism possible".

Of course there's a sense in which that's true - commercial revenue pays for

the news department - but the reverse is also true, namely that it's the journalism which makes the advertising possible...

Advertisers clearly appreciate the opportunities offered by the newshour's consistently high ratings... Promotion and presentation play an important part in maintaining our ratings... But in the end, presentation and promotion must rely on content. You can hype a mediocre product but to stay steadily at the top for long periods requires the public to value the product... Strong content must be the test of whether... our programmes succeed or fail. (Norris, 1992:2)

The *Televiews* editorial debate indicates the tenuous legitimacy of journalistic interests which are continually at risk from programming and production decisions made by executives for whom the construct of 'the public interest' has little valency or relevance. The fact that those responsible for marketing and news production within TVNZ used the forum of *Televiews* editorial column to debate the relative importance of advertising and journalism points to ideological divisions within Television Networks' directorate.

The position of the news executives regarding their professional responsibilities as journalists working for a state-owned news organisation is ambiguous. The situation suggests that the commercial imperatives that determine programming interests are, to a certain extent, imposed on the Department of News and Current Affairs. Yet the news managers themselves reproduce the ideologies which sustain programming dominance in the present corporate culture. For example, they claim that they cannot afford to 'narrow-cast', i.e. provide programmes which are of interest to minority or regional audiences and therefore do not satisfy the imperative of audience maximization through the criterion of broad appeal.

The senior news executives explain they have to take the ratings into account, they have to be 'competitive' if the company is not to be 'left out in the cold'. The prevailing organisational norm of 'broad appeal' mitigates against producing items which may be of

interest only to a minority of viewers. Every moment of the bulletin is controlled by the imperative of keeping a heterogeneous news audience from switching channels for, if the ratings fall, so do the advertising rates for the newshour slot. This policy is justified on the grounds that the majority of the public are satisfied with the present service because the newshour programmes consistently draw the highest ratings. However, present ratings cannot necessarily be taken as evidence of viewer approval, or of preference for the populist formats and presentation of the present programme.

Consistently high ratings do indicate sustained viewer loyalty. However, the enduring quality of the programme's popularity may well reflect its status as an established domestic ritual in New Zealand. TVNZ's early evening news bulletin on ONE has been a top-rating programme ever since it began in 1960. Whether its style was 'institutional' or 'populist', it has attracted around 26-28% of the potential viewing audience. On this evidence, it can be argued that TVNZ's 6 pm news-hour commands higher ratings than TV3, but not because the standards of journalism in *ONN@6* are, overall, of a better standard than TV3's. Rather, the differences in ratings may reflect the habits of *ONN@6*'s core audience which consists of predominantly middle-aged and older New Zealanders who have been watching that particular news bulletin for up to 30 years. Thus it is possible that viewer loyalty to *ONN@6* is a consequence of the monopoly TVNZ, and its predecessors, enjoyed until 1989. In other words, its popularity is a function of viewer habit rather than viewer preference.

TVNZ's news executives reject this argument. They assert that it is

...profoundly insulting to the intelligence of the audience to assume that they gravitate to their sets merely out of habit or some other frivolous reason. These days viewers are sophisticated and mobile, they have remote controls and they like to graze between channels. They won't stay watching night after night unless you are providing coverage they find relevant to them and their needs and concerns. (Norris quoted by Graham, *New Zealand Herald*,

7/10/92)

Implicit in this statement is the assumption that if people tune to and stay with a programme, then they are satisfied by that programme. Satisfaction is taken to mean that the audience feels their information needs are met. What this assumption does not address is the possibility that audience size is a reflection of the absence of better viewing alternatives at the time when most New Zealanders are sitting down for tea - and when around half of them are doing so in front of their television sets.

While some differences in on-air presentation exist, TVNZ's and TV3's 6pm programmes are consistently similar in the stories told, the way they tell them, the aspects of social reality and experience on which they comment, and those about which they remain silent. This similarity in production values reflects the organisations' common grounds in their dependence on advertising revenue and their need to build audiences sufficiently large to attract advertisers.

The dominance of programming interests in the corporate cultures of New Zealand's three commercial television companies, and the dissatisfaction of audiences, has also been noted by the Executive Director of NZ on Air, the disburser of the broadcasting fee. In the context of discussing what she referred to as the 'staleing of the audience', Dr Harley remarked:

We re-evaluate our strategy all the time in the light of what we perceive to be mounting criticism of what free-to-air television is offering. It is certainly getting progressively harder to get certain types of programming accepted by the networks. As the contest between the networks continues to heat up, we are concerned that this trend will intensify. From where we sit, the Fee-payer is the loser. We believe there is likely to be an increase in the levels of disquiet. There seems to be some evidence that as all three channels seek to squash into a relatively narrow band of the commercial spectrum, they are dealing to a notional mass market which in fact fails to satisfy increasing numbers of people who are supposed to make up that mass. For example, over the past four years, the volume of news and current affairs programming has about doubled. The audience for this product has only

increased 3 percent. In the same period we have seen the introduction of a second early evening news bulletin. Despite this, news viewing in total has declined. Furthermore, despite the introduction of a third network, viewership levels overall are also down.

What is the audience, the Fee-payer trying to tell us? They are telling us by their mass behaviour exactly the same as they are telling us as individuals in letters to the editor, letters to ministers of the Crown, letters to the Broadcasting Fee centre - and that is the services that we - and I mean here the three networks as well as NZOA - are not meeting their needs sufficiently. If the news and current affairs statistics are anything to go by, then viewers and Fee-payers do not mean "give us more of the same". Perhaps they want diversity? Diversity of programme type, diversity of style, diversity of voice and opinion, diversity within genre. Choice. Not news vs news vs news at 10.30. What they seem to be getting is more and more of the same and at exactly the same time. If one of the intentions of the broadcasting regime begun in 1989 was to provide choice, then I think that a case can be made to say that the audience does not believe that the reforms have been totally successful. (Harley, 1994:8-9)

Public concern over the commercialization of what had been New Zealand's public television corporation, and the effect this has had on the quality and breadth of its news service, indicates the concern felt by many New Zealanders about the loss of an institutional site for the provision of a vital public good. The underlying concern has been succinctly formulated by Gregory:

New Zealand society is clearly undergoing profound political, economic and social changes, which are rendering irrelevant the social consensus that has prevailed during the past 30 years. Political division is becoming more open, more multi-faceted and more passionately expressed, and basic political choices are having to be made about the directions, shape and character of an emerging, increasingly pluralistic, society.

Such is the rapidity and extent of change that the capacity of political and administrative processes to cope is being called into serious question. Amidst all this, the role of institutional public broadcasting assumes considerable significance, because it is uniquely placed to serve all the people in the process of political disputation by which a nation's affairs are determined and resolved. (Gregory, 1985:101)

Given the rapidity of social change, and the growing pluralism and fragmentation of New Zealand society, its citizens need a healthily operating public sphere which provides them with accurate, balanced and relevant information regarding the rapidly changing conditions

of their lives, and a forum to debate and shape public policy.

10.7: TVNZ and the Public Interest.

The swiftly changing media environment is a key element in the profound transformations which characterize contemporary life. The metaphor of an explosion is frequently evoked to describe the massive increases in the rate of information production and exchange as a result of recent innovations in communications and information technologies. (Altheide and Johnson, 1980:1)

The ways in which people think about their experience of the world, about each other, understand social issues and perceive future possibilities are shaped by the information they receive. Given that news-media products enjoy a privileged status as fact, and the reliance of many people on television news for their information about the world beyond their experience, prime-time television news programmes like TVNZ's *ONN@6* influence the way in which viewers perceive 'reality' and frame their political and cultural agendas.

TVNZ's Director of News and Current Affairs states that his objective as Director is to provide a television news service which "aims to inform accurately and fairly, provide a wide range of opinion; analyse and place developments in context; probe and scrutinize all areas of the public interest; and challenge, and hold to account, those who wield power." (Norris, 1992:3) He states his intention is to provide the public "with quality information and analysis so that they can contribute to informed decision-making in an evolving democracy." The Director's statement implies that he idealizes TVNZ's news service as a democratic instrument to be applied in the interests of extending political and social rights and fostering social equity.

In Chapter Four, I recounted the struggle of early New Zealand broadcast journalists to create the conditions which would enable them to provide a news service which served as an instrument of democracy. TVNZ's news executives believe that, at present, they are closer to realizing this ideal than any of their predecessors. This belief is illustrated by the Director's claim that New Zealanders 'have never had it so good' as with the news service which the department currently provides.

He and his colleagues maintain that competition and a populist ethos have dispelled what they perceive to have been a cultural dictatorship of public service broadcasting whereby broadcasting elites made programming decisions on the basis of what they thought was 'good' for the audience. By contrast, TVNZ news executives characterize the current market system as governed by the concept of consumer sovereignty, and therefore more democratic because it seeks to meet the viewers' needs, and give 'ordinary people' a voice, unlike, it is proposed, a public broadcasting form of organisation.

Given the conservatism endemic to the administration of state-owned broadcasting in New Zealand, it is possible to argue that a populist commercialism has allowed a greater range of views to be expressed within the news bulletin these days compared to when TVNZ news served largely as a mouthpiece for 'officials'.

In contemporary TVNZ news and current affairs programmes, a greater range of voices may be heard and social cleavages may indeed be more visible than when the organisation was a public broadcaster. However, the news executives' democratic rhetoric of popular representation is specious. The privileged status of programming lore in TVNZ executive culture presents significant impediments to be overcome before TVNZ's news executives can claim to promote informed public debate among New Zealanders about the complex

range of issues facing them as citizens.

Take, for example, the populist myth of 'ordinary people'. In the world, there are no 'ordinary people' to be represented, only the shifting communities of interest which form around particular issues. Individuals from lower socio-economic groups may appear in news items more than they did during the 'institutional era', but they are seen, not heard. They are presented as individuals in isolation from the economic, cultural and political conditions which structure their lives and which connect them with others. The voice they are given is the voice of the underdog. Their views of the world are not represented as authoritative and their stories are not theirs, but journalists' stories *about* their (often tragic) experience. They are framed in terms defined by journalistic and industry conventions, editorial preoccupations, and the organisational imperative of 'capturing' audiences in order to sell them to advertisers.

Another structural impediment to TVNZ serving as a forum for public debate are that TVNZ's executives no longer responsible for ensuring that the interests and concerns of all significant sections of the community are given representative coverage. As managers of a SOE, they are accountable only to the share-holding Ministers and their accountability is defined principally in financial terms.

The reality behind the TVNZ executives' rhetoric of reform is that the reorganisation of New Zealand's public television corporation into a commercial enterprise constitutes a significant erosion of the public sphere.

While the institution of public broadcasting in New Zealand may not have achieved its full democratic potential, the statutory obligation of a public corporation to represent the

significant communities of interest constituting New Zealand society ensured that citizens' communicative rights and entitlements, and principles of social equity and equality, remained a guiding principle for its administrators.

When New Zealand's public television system was commercialized, and its journalists became subject to the discipline of the market, the transformation of public into privatised space diminished the potential of its journalists to realize their professional obligations to inform and foster public debate and citizenly discourse.

In 1988, when the current statutory framework of New Zealand broadcasting structures was being put into its final form, Farnsworth warned that the free market model being enacted in the legislation would not achieve the emancipatory objectives claimed for it by its proponents. "A commercial broadcasting market will neither produce socially equitable ends, nor the broadest set of conditions for the public interest." (Farnsworth,1988:463) A market form of organisation, he argued, did not "set the conditions for an open marketplace of ideas" because

...there is a major obstacle which prevents most areas of the media from behaving as a free market. It arises from the fact that the commercial media are primarily financed by advertising revenue. Not only does this prevent classic free market organisation, it also sharply limits, in predictable ways, diversity and choice. (Farnsworth,1988:462)

To support his argument, Farnsworth cites Jonscher's analysis of the failure of the market model in broadcasting.

Unlike in conventional markets, the revenue collected is proportional only to the number of viewers watching the programme, not to their level of appreciation of it... unlike the market for cars, food or furniture, in which consumers can vote (with their pound notes) for quality, diversity or originality as well as quantity, in the market for advertising-supported television, consumers can only vote for quantity. (Farnsworth,1988:462-463)

Subjecting the New Zealand public broadcasting system to market pressures, Farnsworth

maintained, was inimical to the public interest, particularly given the uniqueness of the New Zealand situation.

In 1988, ministerial and business elites promoting the deregulation of broadcasting and the reorganisation of the public broadcasting corporation into SOEs, supported their position by drawing on consultants' projections that claimed entrepreneurs with private capital would quickly move into the space vacated through the withdrawal of the state.¹¹⁴ They asserted that deregulation of the broadcasting market would create a proliferation of services. Through this mechanism, the public interest in diversity and choice would, in theory, be met.

Five years after deregulation, TVNZ dominates the market with an 80% share, and only one private national terrestrial station (TV3) has set up in competition with it. TVNZ's hold over the market resulted in TV3 going into receivership within six months of starting up. The company has become financially viable only after the National government allowed 100% foreign ownership of New Zealand-based media organisations and the Canadian-based media multinational, Canwest, became its principle shareholder. A pay satellite service, three regional UHF stations and two very small cable service experiments have also entered the market but have managed to corner only 2% of it.

The struggle of TV3, and those parties attempting to establish regional or community television services, attests to the difficulties of raising sufficient capital for a private television station in a country with a small population, little venture capital and an increasingly fragmented, increasingly competitive market.

¹¹⁴ The London-based firm Hamilton Booz Allen has been the most influential in this context.

10.8: *Plus la change, plus la même chose.*

Until 1989, successive New Zealand governments had sought to satisfy both public service and commercial objectives through one vehicle, the publicly-owned television corporation. It was on the evidence of the failure of this form of organisation to fulfil either set of interests effectively that deregulation and quasi-privatisation of New Zealand's public broadcasting corporation were justified.

The proponents of the radical reshaping of New Zealand's broadcasting structures by the principles of managerialism and market liberalism claimed this would ensure the New Zealand public television finally would achieve operating independence, cease to be indebted to the state and the New Zealand tax-payer, and give audiences diversity and choice in programming. The deregulation of broadcasting in New Zealand may have solved the financial crisis experienced by the BCNZ but it has not enhanced the essential requirements of democratic media - summarized by Maharey as the principles of diversity in the representation of views, public accountability and universal access. (Maharey,1990:23) The failure of the market model to deliver these benefits to New Zealanders confirms the warnings made in the mid-1980s by writers such as Farnsworth and Gregory regarding the social consequences of a market solution to the problem of New Zealand broadcasting. Tiffin, in his analysis of market imperatives in Australian commercial television, warned that, where ratings dominate industry forms of knowledge,

... the language of democratic rhetoric and mass appeal can easily slide into a celebration of conformity, where popularity becomes the measure of truth.
(Tiffin:1989:57)

To let market forces, articulated as the ratings, determine programming and production decisions allows the provision of a public good to be determined by a narrow and flawed instrument.

Since TVNZ became a SOE, the strategic lore and ethos of commercial warfare has become increasingly privileged within the SOE's executive culture over other value systems such as that of professional journalism. As the number of international, national and regional television channels broadcasting to New Zealand audiences multiply, the competitive pressures TVNZ's managers are already exposed to will intensify. Their struggle to maintain market share will result in increased pressures on those working for TVNZ to meet financial targets and commercial imperatives. As the market fragments further, TVNZ's news executives are going to find it even more difficult to achieve the democratic ideal described by the Director in his statement of departmental goals.

10.9: Conclusion:

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, the debate over journalism standards at TVNZ is part of a wider debate in contemporary liberal democracies about the institutional and organisational means by which the broadcasting environment and structures might be most effectively organised in the public interest. This debate has been described by Collins as

a dialogue of the deaf between the two sides to the debate, each invoking the superordinate value, freedom, and arguing that the policies of the other side is mendacious. (Collins,1992:10)

His comment indicates that the dualistic market vs. public form characterizing the New Zealand debate over the organisation of broadcasting in general, and TVNZ's standards of journalism in particular, is a feature of the debate as it has been constructed elsewhere.

This situation is a consequence of the fact that the proponents of both public and market models of broadcasting service delivery justify their position using a liberal rhetoric of fostering the constitutional and communicative rights of citizens. Collins points out that one danger of this dichotomizing of the broadcasting policy debate, as being either for or against the market, is that critical questions are overlooked.

Not least of these questions is how viewers and listeners are to ensure that it is their preferences which determine the policy and practice of broadcasting institutions. (Collins,1992:13)

Collins does not elaborate the important point that viewers' preferences are varied, reflecting their various institutional positions constructed around their identity as citizens *and* consumers. It is because of their multiplicity of preferences, for information and entertainment, that a mixed system is necessary to guarantee a choice of services depending on how the viewer identifies his or her information needs.

The most effective guarantee that broadcasting policies provide the best institutional means of securing liberty and equality, Collins argues, is through a mixed system of public and private structures. With regard to the provision of a television news service, a mixed system would allow viewers to choose between news programmes shaped by public service goals as well as those oriented by market imperatives. It is the state's responsibility to restore the publicly-owned television organisation to the people because the possibility of a private group setting up a public television service in New Zealand is minimal, given the special conditions that distinguish the New Zealand situation.

TVNZ was turned into a SOE because the competing interests inherent in its organisation as both commercial and public broadcaster prevented it from succeeding at either. The idea behind exposing the company to market pressures was to allow its managers to achieve one set of objectives. However, those responsible for the corporatization of TVNZ failed to appreciate that they were depriving New Zealand citizens of a communicative entitlement. Turning TVNZ into a SOE has failed to overcome the ambiguities and conflicts engendered by its historical identity as a public broadcaster attempting to fund its public service objectives with commercially-generated revenue. While the SOE has succeeded at operating as a commercial enterprise, it continues to fail the New Zealand public by depriving them

of the right to have access to the diversity of a mixed television system. The only way in which the state may effectively remedy this shortcoming is to ensure public access to a mixed system, in which some part of TVNZ at least, provides a public television service.¹¹⁵

In New Zealand, defining an effective institutional and organisational broadcasting structure that fulfils social equity obligations has been an enduring struggle and one which still has some way to go. As Atkinson has noted:

We have not even begun to explore the real potential of television, in conjunction with more recent technologies, to sustain rather than enfeeble our public discourse... Unfortunately, such an exploration is unlikely to occur without some lessening of commercial pressures on television, either through state subsidy, or through an increase in licence fees and the re-uniting of public broadcasting revenue with public ownership. (Atkinson, 1992:14)

In this thesis I have argued that TVNZ's present configuration as a SOE prevents the Department of News and Current Affairs from realizing the objectives its news executives formally defined as their mission. Before TVNZ journalists can realize public service objectives in news production, certain changes in the culture of the organisation will have to occur.

At present Television Networks Executive Officers allow programming and commercial interests to dominate policy and operational decision-making. The substantial influence the Director of Programming presently holds over the company's operation attests to this. This characteristic of TVNZ executive culture would have to change before a quality¹¹⁶ news

¹¹⁵ It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss how such a public broadcasting entity would be funded. Easton's (1994) discussion of this economic problem establishes a conceptual framework of underlying principles and policy issues from which an effective broadcasting mechanism could be developed.

¹¹⁶ By quality, I use the same defining criteria as the Director of News and Current Affairs in his statement of the departmental mission: "to provide a service which informs, analyses, probes and scrutinizes all areas of the public interest in order that the public is provided with quality information and analysis so

service becomes a priority.

TVNZ's Board and executive officers will have to appreciate more than they presently do, the company's responsibility to provide New Zealanders with quality public service news programming (defining quality by journalistic rather than market criteria of success). For this to be possible, they will need to place more value on journalistic goals, particularly in decisions regarding scheduling, resourcing and production of news and current affairs programmes.

One obstacle to this occurring in the present situation is the belief dominating TVNZ executive culture that the commercial success of *ONN@6* and *Holmes* is due to the programmes' current formats and presenters, and the contributions made by American consultants expert in local commercial news marketing in the United States. As I pointed out earlier, this belief is misguided as TVNZ's early evening news hour has always been one of the company's most popular regularly scheduled programmes. If they acknowledged that watching the news on TVNZ at tea-time is an enduring social ritual in New Zealand, then perhaps they might feel more comfortable about ceasing to follow so slavishly, the formula for success prescribed by commercial television lore.

Another requirement would be a greater awareness by TVNZ executives, including the news executives, of the ways in which the ideologies of managerialism and economic rationalism shape the practice of journalism and prevent journalists' professional goals from being realized. The earlier sections of this chapter have set out some of the more significant features of the processes whereby organisational interests compromise and subordinate journalistic values.

that they can contribute to informed decision-making in an evolving democracy."

I believe that these changes in the TVNZ executive culture are unlikely to come about while the requirements of the SOE Act determine the executives' interpretation of their responsibilities and obligations. Therefore, people who are concerned about the standards of journalism at TVNZ should redirect their attention to those who have the power to define the statutory framework which determines the pressures and priorities shaping managerial and editorial policy at TVNZ.

One important subject for public debate is the state's strategy for absolving itself of its responsibilities to New Zealand publics by giving the Ministry of Commerce jurisdiction over generating communications and broadcasting policy rather than some more appropriate entity like the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, or even a Ministry of Broadcasting. This peculiar state of affairs is indicative of the Government's attitude that broadcasting is just another business and should be managed as such. The inability of recent Governments to think in any terms other than that of economic rationalism was made apparent when the Labour Government deregulated broadcasting and abandoned its responsibility to ensure that all significant constituencies are represented in the media.

New Zealand is notable in comparison with other OECD countries for deregulating broadcasting and transforming public into commercial entities without any attempt at public consultation, and for the rapidity of these changes. In particular, it is notable for the absence of any state provision for researching the equity issues that need to be addressed as New Zealand enters into the uncharted grounds of a new communications epoch dominated by the twin processes of globalisation, and cultural and political fragmentation. In doing so, the New Zealand government has absolved itself from the difficult but necessary task of addressing the many cultural and political issues raised by the new broadcasting environment of the 1990s, nationally and internationally.

Curran writes, with regard to journalism and democracy, that "professional commitments need structures to support them." (Curran,1991:100). In converting TVNZ's news operation into a profit-centre subject to the pressures of the television marketplace, the state has failed to meet its obligation to ensure New Zealand citizens have access to a diversity of television services and the means to freely form an informed opinion on public affairs, by failing to support TVNZ journalists in realizing their professional obligations to citizens.

Deregulation has not provided a broadcasting system which promotes social equity in which divergent social groups have the opportunity to define their interests in their own terms and promote them in the public domain. Nor has it delivered the promised liberation of New Zealand broadcasting from political opportunism and self-interest. The struggle of journalists within New Zealand's state-owned broadcasting corporations to achieve both professional independence, and the support and resources necessary to realize their professional norms, endures.

APPENDIX A

PROGRAMME BRIEFS

FOR

ONN@6 & HOLMES

PROGRAMME BRIEFONE NETWORK NEWS AT SIX

One Network News at Six is dedicated to providing for the people of New Zealand the country's leading bulletin of national and international news.

It aims to:

- * provide a full and comprehensive news service covering the stories of major significance or interest, national or international, including sports news and weather information; the programme presented and packaged so that news is made relevant and accessible to viewers.
- * provide the first, fullest and most accurate coverage on all breaking news stories, updating such stories as events unfold.
- * provide impartial, authoritative and credible reporting in all areas, with appropriate context and analysis to enable viewers clearly to understand the impact of the stories we report.
- * reflect the interest of New Zealanders in both triumphs and tragedies; in progress and achievements as well as problems and conflicts.
- * dominate the news ratings, by virtue of strong content clearly presented; to be seen as winning with quality.

PROGRAMME BRIEF"HOLMES"

"Holmes" is dedicated to providing the people of New Zealand with a daily current affairs programme designed to appeal to the broadest possible audience.

It aims to:

- * provide a compelling mix of topics, from an emphasis on a central issue of the day to lighter features of the 'human interest' type.
- * use as its central dynamic the appeal and broadcasting skills of Paul Holmes; the programme seen to be presenter-driven, and the presenter demonstrating full ownership of all programme content.
- * take even the most apparently difficult subject and find a treatment comprehensible to and attractive to a majority of viewers.
- * on occasion to articulate for the inarticulate, and to represent the perspective of ordinary people in battles with bureaucrats, politicians or sundry authorities.
- * be recognized as informative, challenging, pacy and provocative; to be seen as essential viewing by all who care about what's going on in New Zealand and who may wish to contribute to public debate on such matters.
- * to continue as the longest-running and highest rating daily current affairs programme New Zealand has ever seen.

Source: TUNZ JOURNALISTS' MANUAL

APPENDIX B

VIDEO: 'A NICE CLEAN PRODUCT'

APPENDIX B:

'A NICE CLEAN PRODUCT'

This video was produced by myself and five others as part of a 1990 Summer School Video Production Course conducted on by Continuing Education at the University of Auckland.

The group had been given the brief to produce a 15 minute video on a non-fiction topic. In the absence of anyone else having an idea they wanted to pursue, I told them of my research at TVNZ and how I had come to the course in order to acquire skills which would enable me to make, as a teaching resource, a short video showing the TVNZ journalists at work.

I suggested that we visit the newsroom at TVNZ with the intention of putting together a video which showed the various stages of producing an item, from the initial selection process to the broadcasting of that item as part of that evening's 6 pm news programme. The group was enthusiastic and so was the Home Editor when I contacted her to arrange access.

The group worked as a collective. They kindly allowed themselves to be directed by me as it was my story that we were going to tell, I was familiar with the setting and journalists, and already had a firm idea as to the arrangements that needed to be made. We took turns at interviewing and using the cameras, and conferred with one another over the shots we needed and the best way to proceed to achieve these.

The Course Tutor supervised the editing of the video but it was a collaborative effort, under my direction because the group understood that I wanted to tell a particular story which could be used within the Television News section in a university course I taught, *Sociology of the Media*. We discussed how to go about making the programme as I had outlined, and each of the group had a turn at editing as part of our training. The imperfect technical quality of the video reflects our inexperience. Everyone was very pleased with the result as a first attempt, and we had a lot of fun. However, we ran out of time, and did not worry about putting credits on the video.

At that stage, I had not intended to include the video as part of my doctoral thesis. In 1993, I decided to include it as part of my thesis for I felt it was valuable in helping me achieve my objective of contextualizing the programme, *ONV@6*, by enabling readers of my thesis to see the newsroom setting and see and hear the journalists account for themselves and their work.

Unfortunately, I have been unable to find out the names of the other members of the group who helped produce the video at the Summer School in 1990. I acknowledge their contribution and thank them for enabling me to make it, and especially for the spirit of collegiality and fun which they brought to its production.

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