1

Temporalization

How News Became New

> *"What news on the Rialto?"*
> (*William Shakespeare*, The Merchant of Venice, *Act I, Scene III*)

What's the news? What's the latest news? Any news? No news? There is probably nothing as temporal as news. In most languages, the very word for news refers to its temporality: *news* in English, *nouvelles* in French, *novosti* in Russian, *uutinen* in Finnish, *nyhet* in Swedish all have "new" as their root word. The dictionary definition also includes temporality: "tidings; reports or accounts of *recent* (esp. important or interesting) *events* or occurrences, brought or coming to one as *new information*" (my emphasis). An early use of the word can be found in 1382 in the Bible (Wycliffite, E.V.): *Ecclus.* (Bodl. 959) xxiv. 35 "þe whiche fulfilleþ as phison wisdam & as tigris in þe daiys of newis."[1]

That "news is news is news" thus appears as to be as self-evident as that "a rose is a rose is a rose." As a result, unfortunately, the *temporality* of news has been neglected, or rather taken for granted, in academic research because it is considered too obvious. The salience of time in news has resulted in the "naturalization" of its temporal aspects. As a result, time is often understood in news only as mechanical time, rather than as socially constructed.

What is new in each historical period depends completely on how time is socially constructed in news. Journalism researchers have stated, for example, that there are three kinds of timeliness: first, there is recency (recent disclosure); second, there is immediacy (publication with minimal delay); and third, there is currency (relevance to present concerns) (Roschko 1976, 11). However, these categories are not fixed and change over time and space. Even if these categories clearly contribute to the breaking down of time, they still take time as "God-given," without problematization or understanding of the historical changes that have taken place in news.

In order to understand how the temporalization of news operates, we need to look at the definition of news. Just looking at the dictionary definition presented earlier, we see that news is supposed to consist of two elements: *recent events* and *new information*. This is a step in the right direction, identifying time as a component of news, but it remains unsatisfactory because it assumes a natural connection between events and time.

An alternative approach is to explore academic research that attempts to understand what news is. Gans (1979, 250) has divided into three different categories the theories about how certain stories are selected for the news: (1) journalist-centered; (2) the sheer habit of news organizations; and (3) event-centered. The third category approaches news as "a social construct, emphasizing the human agency involved in news, the informal rules which journalists adopt in order to process vast amounts of information and to select and repackage it in a form that audiences will accept as *The News*" (Gitlin 2003, 250). This approach also includes "the idea of news as a *narrative*, primarily a matter of fact, of data, of particulars which tell a *story*" (Shaaber 1929, 4).

According to Gitlin (2003, 250), the third category of theorization is event-centered because it argues that news "mirrors" or "reflects" the actual nature of the world. Again Gitlin's argument takes us in a direction different from mine. My primary interest is not in the mirroring or reflecting function of news, but in the ways it is constructed as a narrative that follows its own rules. Hence, for the purpose of this chapter, the "objectivity" of news is not the primary interest. Gans is helpful here, since he offers a synthesis of the three different approaches by defining news as "*information* which is transmitted from *sources* to audiences, with journalists [. . .] summarizing, refining and altering what comes to them from various sources in order to make the information suitable for the audience" (Gans 1979, 80, my emphasis).

However, the difference between news and information is not necessarily as unproblematic as this definition assumes. On the contrary, I would argue that it is the temporalization of news that has not been recognized as a key element in the distinction between "information" and "the news." For the purposes of this chapter, I define news as a specific type of writing that uses the *concept* of time and of an event in order to construct a new story. It is important to notice that every new story is not necessarily a news story and separating news from new stories by labeling it as "news" becomes of crucial importance.

Traditionally, in news studies, a distinction has been made between an event, a source and news (see for example, Galtung and Ruge, 1965). An event does take *place*, often far away from the news source and the people who are interested in it. The introduction of the concept of place into the understanding of the "newness" of news adds another dimension: the distance between the place of an event, of a source, and of the news. An event takes place, while travel takes *time*, and any change in distance, as well as the overcoming of distance, has an effect on the newness of news. The French word *jour*, the root word for journalist, journalism, and journal, is also a root word for journey. In its original meaning, a journey was a day's travel, which quickly became extended to also refer to something that could be measured by the specific number of days required (Harris, 1978, 120). The word journalist came into use in 1693 to describe those who wrote about *daily* doings for the public press (Harris, 1990, 172). Hence, the connection between news, event, travel, and time defined in terms of days was constructed at an early stage.

Important as it is to note that new stories travel over distance, they also travel over time. New stories travel from generation to generation through memory. In so doing they are transformed from old stories into new stories, since a story is news for those who have not heard it before.

In this chapter I explore the temporal structures linking an event, an item of information, a source, and an audience of new/s stories. I argue that new technology has changed the relationship between all these. The newness of news no longer implies merely a closeness between the source and the audience, but that events, information, source, and audience have almost become one. This is the situation in which the temporalization of news has fundamentally changed the structure of news as we have learned to recognize it.

New Stories and Memory

Darnton (2000, 1) writes that the nature of "what constitutes news" varies considerably between different societies. He cites examples from studies of coffee houses in Stuart England, tea houses in early Republican China, market places in contemporary Morocco, street poetry in seventeenth-century Rome, slave rebellions in nineteenth-century Brazil, runner networks in the Mogul Raj of India, even the bread and circuses of the

Roman Empire. However, in *oral* news, people had physically to be in the same place at the same time in order to be able to exchange new stories. When people gathered together in the market place or in the church square it was easier to distribute new stories from one to many or from many to many.

In preliterate cultures, information that was important or sacred was often transmitted to new generations in the *form* of a story, for example a narrative poem. Pentikäinen (1989, 84) writes

> Under these circumstances, poetic form served as a technical aid to memory, whereby *particular details came to be repeated* more precisely than in prose narratives. Living poetry which exists as oral tradition is not, of course, preserved as such, but is disposed to change, facilitated by various cultural and individual factors. A rune may be handed down from one generation to the next, but each generation treats it in accordance with its own conceptual world. (My emphasis)

A story could be told and memorized, but this was not necessarily a news story, even if was a new story. It had elements of structure which are found in news stories ("once upon a *time*"), but time and place were not necessarily the most crucial aspects of the story's structure. These were in a way timeless and placeless stories, since what mattered was not the time of the event, or even the place of the story, but that the story had not been heard before. Their newness was not in the story itself but in their audience who have not heard it before and needed to remember it. These stories had two distinctive features: they were based on memory and on repetition. Clanchy (1994, 3) writes of the Middle Ages:

> Outside the king's court and great monastic houses, property rights and all other knowledge of the past had traditionally and customarily been held in the living memory. When historical information was needed, local communities resorted not to books and characters but to the oral wisdom of their leaders and remembrancers.

In this way, the distinction between what was news and non-news was not always clear even in the Middle Ages. As Shaaber (1929, 189–190) observes, there was an old habit of making up songs about passing events, battles, feuds, raids, murders, and domestic tragedies and remembering these, perhaps even all around the world, in the form of popular ballads. According to Shaaber (1929, 190):

these ballads, steeped in repetition, [were] almost borne down by its refrain, plunging abruptly into a situation, describing no characters and often not naming them, telling no long story and easy of pace, free of repetitions, bare of refrain, abounding in details and covering considerable stretches of time.

As a result, new stories, in forms such as poetry or ballads, had a much longer life than news. They were memorized, repeated, and partly changed from one generation to next. The elements of regularity and repetition were already present in the *form* of new stories. They were often old stories, but became new by traveling through time and space, by changing place but simultaneously becoming placeless, spaceless, and timeless. There are several examples of how one particular story travels in time and space, gets translated, and pops up somewhere else as a new story (Shaaber, 1929, 201). But oral new stories were about to change with the introduction of writing.

Written New Stories

Time was determined in agrarian communities by the rhythms of nature. Ong writes that before writing people did not feel themselves to be situated at every moment of their lives within any sort of abstract computed time. It appears unlikely that most people in medieval or even Renaissance Western Europe would ordinarily have been aware of the number of the current calendar year – whether this was dated from the birth of Christ or from any other point in the past (Ong 1982, 97–98). As Giddens (1990, 17–18) has pointed out, communities lived distinctively, following their own local times. "When" was almost universally connected with "where" or identified with other natural occurrences, and time was still connected with place. According to Gurevich (1972, 94), the peasant's calendar reflected the alternation of time, following the succession of the agricultural seasons. In many languages, the months still reflect the agricultural and other tasks of the respective months. For example, in Finnish, May is *toukokuu*, the month of sowing, June is *kesäkuu*, the month of summer, July is *heinakuu*, the month of haymaking, and August is *elokuu*, the month of harvesting.

There was no need for measured time. Until the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, instruments for measuring time were rare objects of

luxury. The most usual forms of clock in medieval Europe were the sundial, the sand-clock, or the clepsydra (water-clock) consisting of a candle or oil in a sanctuary-lamp (Gurevich 1972, 102, 105). If it was absolutely necessary to know the time at some point after sunset, this was measured by the burning down of a torch (Gurevich 1972, 105). According to Gurevich, the length of a journey was measured by the time spent at sea or on foot or horseback. It occurred to no one to imagine a journey between two points in terms of time measured in abstraction from the traveler making that journey. Time, in archaic society, was not something external to people, unrelated to their lives and doings (Gurevich 1972, 102–103). The same principle could be applied to new stories that included no mention of measured time.

Time, apart from agrarian time, was considered either not to matter or to be a matter for the Church. Le Goff (1980, 29–30) makes a distinction between the Church's time and a merchant's time in the Middle Ages. The church set up its own time which belonged to God alone and could not be an object of lucre. Monks reckoned by the number of pages of holy scripture they had read, or by the number of psalms they had sung between two observations of the sky. For the mass of the people, the main time signal was the sound of church bells, calling them regularly to morning prayers or other religious services. Thus when collective time became more important, the *recorded* passage of time would still be controlled by the clergy (Gurevich 1972, 105).

A significant change took place when writing was introduced. The memorization of stories lost its crucial importance, because these could now be stored by writing them down. Repetition within stories thus also became unnecessary, saving time and space. The shift from memory to written communication, which occurred in England in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, was not restricted to England, although it is more evident there (Clanchy 1994, 5). This resulted in an early temporalization of recorded events: *chronicles*, a continuous historical account of events arranged in time order without analysis or interpretation. Clanchy observes that the typical chronicle was a cumulative memorial, was monastic, and had its origins in the Benedictine preoccupation with the careful regulation of time. He writes

> The typical chronicle was thus a *dated series of events* recorded for the guidance of a monastic house. The chronicler computes years *Anno Domini* and months and calends and briefly describes the actions of kings and princes

which occurred at those times; he also commemorates events, portents and wonders. The chronicle was thus an unstylish production, concerned with the matter rather than the manner of presentation, and added to year by year and therefore by various people. (Clanchy 1994, 100, my emphasis)

Clanchy also writes that a distinction could be made between memorable events (*memorabilia*) and those worth remembering (*memoranda*); only the latter, which are really worthy of memory, should be recorded. Far from advocating the mass-production of literature or documents, the monastic writers aimed to record for posterity a deliberately created and rigorously *selected version of events* (Clanchy 1994, 147, my emphasis). This division, of course, will have important consequences for the future concept of news that records only newsworthy events.

If one wanted to reach out of one's own place, one had to send a message or a letter. An oral message could be repeated word for word by the messenger, but a letter had to be written. Because of the wide gap between ordinary uneducated people and the cultivated elite, intellectual culture became the monopoly of the church (Le Goff 1980, 155). Writing and reading were thus restricted to the church and to the upper classes who could also write letters. These were hand-written and contained information about a particular event or series of events that their writer considered important and wanted to be delivered over distance.

Letters were combined with oral communication. Darnton (2000, 1) writes that in seventeenth-century Paris there were newsmongers (*nouvellistes de bouche*) who gathered under the Tree of Cracow which stood at the heart of Paris in the gardens of the Palais-Royal and spread information about current events by word of mouth.

They claimed to know, from private sources (a letter, an indiscreet servant, a remark overheard). There were several other nerve centres for transmitting "public noises" (*bruits publics*), as the variety of news was known, especially benches in the Tuileries and Luxembourg Gardens, informal speakers. Corners on the Quai des Augustins and the Pont Neuf, cafés known for their loose talk, and boulevards where news bulletins were bawled by peddlers of *canards* [facetious broadsheets] or sung by hurdy-gurdy players. To tune into the news, you could simply stand in the street and cock your ear. (Darnton 2000, 1)

Letters started with a date and place, indicating the distanciation between the places they were sent from and those to which they were delivered. At

the same time, hand-written letters recorded information and did not rely on memory. The space for writing was restricted by the size of the paper (Gurevich 1972, 104). Letters were mainly for collective, not only individual, use. They carried information that was new if the recipient did not know it. The expression of time was still problematic, even in letters. Monastic correspondence used an expression related to papal years or *Anno Domini* (in the year of the Lord). Non-religious documents found it difficult to specify a numerical year. Clanchy (1994, 302) writes that everybody knew which year was meant – the present one – and that if there was any doubt, some *notable event* could be referred to. He gives an example:

> The 1181st year AD, the 21st year of Pope Alexander III, the 27th regal year of King Henry II of the English, the 11th regal year of King Henry the son of the king, the 18th year that has passed since the translation of Bishop Gilbert Foliot from Hereford to London, when this inquest was made by Ralf de Diceto, Dean of London, in the first year of his Deanship. (Clanchy 1994, 303)

The Church established its own time marked by important events with the publication of calendars and almanacs. Later almanacs grew out of printed church calendars and always included a record of saints' days. To this were added astrological information and then the illustration of the labors of the months (Hönig 1998, 130). Pamphlets that concentrated on singular events were often called "relations," later "newsbooks" (Stephens 1988, 87).

As Stephens writes (1988, 54), news moves fast, but writing is slow. In the past, letters were delivered by messengers. They traveled exactly as fast as the messenger. Travel, especially on roads, was slow, tiresome, and even dangerous. In the early Middle Ages roads were no-man's-land, and travelers were exposed to robbers. Gurevich (1972, 165) writes that the most one could expect to cover on horseback in 24 hours was a few dozen kilometers, while pedestrians moved even more slowly on the wretched roads. For example, the journey from Bologna to Avignon took up to two weeks, from Nîmes to the Champagne trade-fairs took 22 days, and even to get from Florence to Naples took 11 or 12 days.

A letter from Pope Gregory VII, written in Rome on December 8, 1075, reached Goslar in the Harz on January 1, 1076. News of the death of Frederick Barbarossa in Asia Minor reached Germany four months later, and it took four weeks for the English to learn that King Richard the

Lionheart had been taken prisoner in Austria. The courier run from Rome to Canterbury normally took up to seven weeks, but especially urgent news could be delivered in four weeks (Gurevich 1972, 43–44). As a consequence, people went on living their lives without any knowledge of "notable events" that had happened much earlier.

Special couriers were used to carry tidings. Commercial correspondence developed between the major cities in the thirteenth century. There is evidence that from 1260 a regular and dependable courier service had come into existence between the commercial centers of Tuscany and the fairs of Champagne (Spufford 2002, 25). As Spufford writes, running a regular courier service was an expensive business:

> It involved not only the payment and maintenance of an adequately sized group of couriers for each route, but also access to an enormous number of horses, which had to be available for frequent changes of mount at suitable intervals all along the routes. (Spufford 2002, 25)

Holl writes that at the turn of the twelfth to thirteenth centuries "something began to stir in Europe. More than eight hundred years ago, people in some European cities began to feel a strange and previously unheard-of desire. They wanted to know the time" (Nowotny 1994, 16). God's time, as Le Goff put it, was giving way to the time of the traders and written news – in the form of newsletters – was beginning to manifest in Renaissance Europe as it had in Rome and in China (Stephens 1988, 73).

These newsletters also needed to be carried, though. By the early fifteenth century there were several important regular courier services. In the early 1420s the commercial couriers from Florence were expected to reach agents in Rome, nearly 300 km away, in five or six days; agents in Naples, nearly 500 km away, in 11 days; agents in Paris in 20 to 22 days; those in Bruges, nearly 1,400 km distant, in under 25 days, and those in Seville, nearly 2,000 km away, in under 32 days (Spufford, 2002, 27).

Walking "newsmen" appeared in public places in big cities where people expected to hear news in exchange for a coin, similar to the *gazetta* on the Rialto Bridge. In Paris during the sixteenth century there existed about 15,000 *nouvellistes* or walking newsmen, some of them in the Tuileries; in other cities they worked near markets or in the harbour area (Stangerup 1973/1974, 25–26). Gathering points for newsmongers in London were behind St Paul's; during the first half of the seventeenth-century news writers used to meet near Westminster (Höyer 2003, 452).

    Smith points out the improvement of the mail service in the seventeenth century. By the second half of the century, letters could be passed between Amsterdam and Paris in six days by the ordinary mail and in two days by a more expensive service. Most communication with London depended on twice-weekly packets but express communication was also available at a price (Smith 1984, 991). Postmasters were often correspondents in a network of news exchanges, comparable to more modern news bureaux. From about 1600, postmasters in European cities collected news from their own districts and mailed it to centers such as Hamburg, Paris, or London where it was edited and redistributed (Hart 1970, 13). Copenhagen was a news center for Scandinavia. Sensitive items which could not be published at home could sometimes be published abroad. Thus, demonstrations in Stockholm in January 1783 were reported in French, but not in Swedish newspapers, even though the reporter was Swedish (Höyer 2003, 452).

    As Höyer writes, in telling stories about unknown or only partly known events, the newspaper was preceded by flysheets, pamphlets, printed ballads, and songs, and by political prints, handbills, and other printed ephemera. Overlap in content between newspapers, periodicals, and other forms of printed propaganda were quite common. When the first printed news-sheets appeared they were almost exact copies of the hand-written news-letters: the same short information, the notices and two-liners, and the same random distribution of content (Höyer 2003, 452).

Printed News

In the seventeenth century ballads were replaced by news books or pamphlets (Davis 1983, 71). He (1983, 50) notes that *facts* and *newes* could be mutually exclusive categories. The word *newes* was applied freely to writings which described either true or fictional events, quotidian or supernatural occurrences, and affairs that may have been recent or several decades old.

    Davis (1980, 120) writes that the authors of English *novels* of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries always began their works with a preface asserting that they were presenting *not* a fiction but a *factual account of some real series of events* (my emphasis). Even in ballads, the words *novel*, *newes*, and *new* are used interchangeably. Ballads always claimed to be new and were sold for their newness (Davis 1983, 48–51). The word "newes" was also used to describe books written in prose which reported on foreign

news and noteworthy occurrences. Titles like *A Sack Full of News* (1557), *News from Antwerp* (1580), and *News from Hell* (1606) reveal differing degrees of factuality, ranging from jest-book to news ballad to religious-satirical commentary (Davis 1980, 126). Davis concludes (1980, 127) that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries novels and news reports were not seen as clearly fictional or as clearly factual; narrative during this time seemed to be categorized in ways that were not dependent on the distinction between fact and fiction. In other words, news could be novels, and novels could be news.

Davis (1983, 58) also observes that, with the advent of journalism, the temporal distance between reader and event is bridged by the technology of instantaneous dispersal of news – which makes possible a relatively small temporal gap between reader and event. As Harris writes, "by the 1690s, the culture, at least in big cities, became so obsessed with the potential significance to human consciousness of any single moment that an immediate written record needed to be created, and the preoccupations with news and novelty in fact coalesced" (Harris 1990, 172). Distances started to collapse: between the 1760s and the end of the century the journey from London to Glasgow was shortened from between 10 and 12 days to 62 hours. The system of mail-coaches or diligences instituted in the second half of the eighteenth century was even faster – the postal service from Paris to Strasbourg took 36 hours in 1833 (Hobsbawm 1975, 9). The invention of the printing press made newspapers more regular, but their delivery was still often dependent on transportation by foot, ship, or horse. News was not new in the modern understanding of the word, but it became regular and anticipated. News was in fact still old: days, weeks, or even months old, especially if arriving from a distance. But it was new in the sense that it was not previously known, no matter how far back in the past it originated, and at the same time new because it was labeled as news and published in a special section for news.

A Swedish-language newspaper, *Tidningar utgifne af et sällskap I Åbo*, published in Åbo in Finland in March 1773 a letter that had been sent from London in February of that year. These travelers' letters were an early form of foreign news. Increasingly, newspapers also published foreign news "borrowed" from other newspapers. Swedish newspapers arrived in Finland when they were at least a day or two, if not a week or two, old. The average age of foreign news in *Tidningar utgifne af et sällskap i Åbo* varied from six days (from St Petersburg) to four months (from Cape Town) (Rantanen 1987, 58).

The situation was not much different elsewhere in Europe. News of the outcome of the battle of Trafalgar, where the British fleet beat the French and Spanish fleets and Admiral Nelson died on October 12, 1805 reached London only on November 6. News of the defeat of Napoleon at Austerlitz on December 2, 1805 reached newspaper readers 17 days later. News of the death of Napoleon on St Helena on May 5, 1821 was published in *The Times* only two months later, on July 4 (Höhne 1977, 21).

Sometimes transport by sea was not only faster, but easier and cheaper than by road. As Hobsbawm (1975, 9) observes, it took Goethe, during his Italian tour of 1786–1788, four days to sail from Naples to Sicily and three days to sail back. To be within reach of a port was to be within reach of the world: in a real sense London was closer to Plymouth than to villages in the Breckland of Norfolk (Hobsbawm 1975, 9). But transport by sea was not always smooth, and a place that was closer in distance was sometimes further in terms of time taken to receive news. This is evident from the first foreign news published in 1847 in *Suometar*, a Finnish-language newspaper in Helsinki, then in the Grand Duchy of Finland in Imperial Russia, but also a neighbor of Sweden separated from that country only by the Baltic Sea (Rantanen 1987, 51):

> In *Turkey* the Sultan, alias the Emperor, has been quite busy improving the government's faults and assisting enlightenment. – In *Persia* and further to the East the cholera has killed mercilessly. – On the northern side of *India* the English have been messing with the odd clans of Asia. – From *Sweden* there is no news because the sea is frozen and prevents the mail getting through.

Hobsbawm (1975, 10) writes that the chief drawback of water transport was its intermittent nature. Even in 1820, the London mail consignments for Hamburg and Holland were made up only twice a week, those for Sweden and Portugal once a week and those for North America once a month (Hobsbawm 1975, 10). Most information was hand-written and carried by mail.

There was also a mixture of many different kinds of communication. Oral communication was mixed with every new form of communication – script or printed. Darnton points out the mixture of different kinds of communication in pre-revolutionary Paris.

Darnton's model (Figure 1.1) shows how different forms of communications existed simultaneously and complemented each other. There were
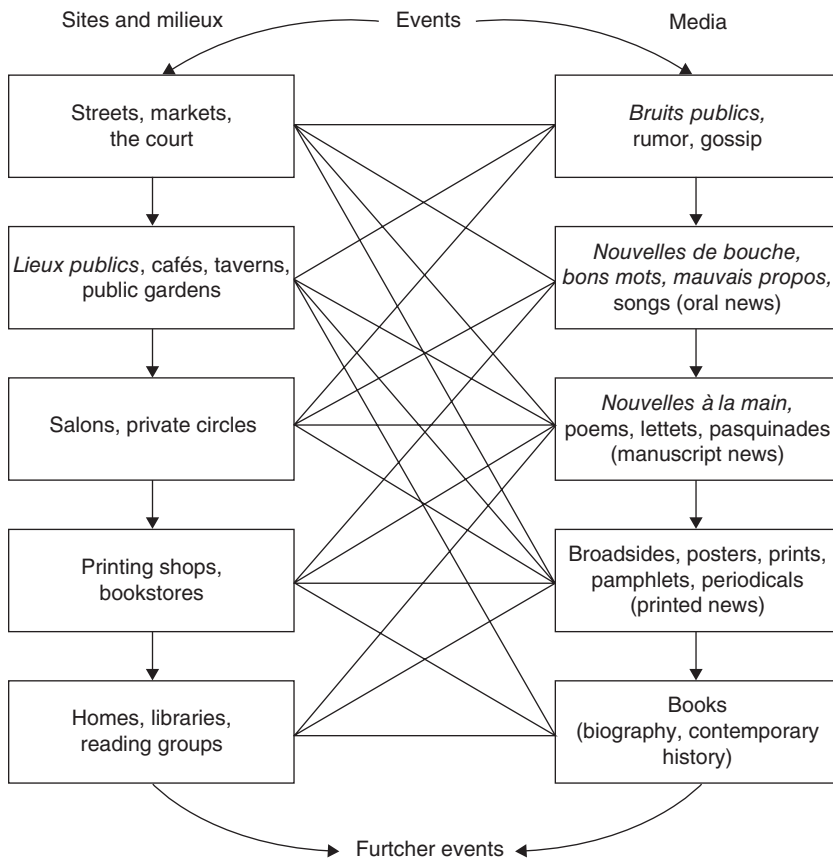
Figure 1.1 A schematic model of a communication circuit (Darnton, 1995, 189).

several circuits that partly overlapped but partly lived their separate lives. In their separateness they also started to form new and distinctive categories of stories.

Electronic News

Time-place compression began radically to change with the introduction from the mid-nineteenth century of the telegraph and of submarine cables. Electronic news began to travel by itself and at the speed of electricity – no

longer with a messenger along winding roads or across stormy seas, but along direct lines and almost instantaneously. Of course, telegraph lines and submarine cables could be cut, preventing the *transmission* of messages, and these messages did not reach every corner of the globe, but the change was by any standards drastic. As Smith observes, the telegraph made possible the idea that a newspaper's coverage should encompass the events of a *day*. He writes

> Such boundaries hardly correspond with the conceptual and cognitive categories accepted elsewhere, but henceforth daily journalism operated in a new tense, as it were, of the *instantaneous* present. (Smith, 1978, 167, my emphasis)

The telegraph also made it possible to send the same message to several locations simultaneously and thus to multiply it endlessly. The global mass-production of news began with the telegraph and the foundation of the first news (telegraph) agencies. Paradoxically, this made the delivery of electronic news more complicated, because a more distinct separation now emerged between the gatherers, producers, and users of news. A news-gatherer was like a coalminer, gathering the raw material (information) from which news was manufactured and then sold to clients. In fact, this was the beginning of the industrialization of news.

In most countries, the telegraph lines were built along railway lines. Hence, speedier transportation was closely combined with speedier transmission, although these were now separate. The introduction of railways, and thus of the telegraph, resulted in the increasing standardization of time, thus adding to the value of news, whose newness could now be measured not only in days, as in the pre-telegraph era, but in hours and minutes.

Before the railways were introduced each location or region operated on its own time, taken from solar readings. The promotion of uniform time made possible the introduction of railway timetables. Before this there were about 60 different railway times in the United States alone (Kern 1983, 12). Greenwich time was universally adopted in 1887. Universal time contributed mainly in two ways to perceived value of time in news: (1) by giving a timetable of news and (2) by creating additional value for news in different time zones.

Every single news story could now be datelined not only with the day but also with the hour. By 1860 the telegraph could handle 10 words per minute, by 1900 about 150 words per minute and by 1920 about 400. By 1900, orders from London to buy or sell could reach the New York Stock

Exchange in three minutes (McNeill and McNeill 2003, 218). Competition for the latest news became more intensive, as who received it first and was able to deliver it faster to the customer became a question only of hours, then of minutes and seconds. The news agencies were compared to each other in terms of their capacity to transmit the latest news and to provide a constant flow of news almost without interruption. Day or night, working day or holiday, news had to flow constantly and steadily. "Today we have no news" became unthinkable.

The adoption of time zones meant that the same news could be re-labeled as the latest news in different time zones. When electronic news overcame distance and was able to be transmitted instantaneously around the world, it gained an additional value, since news could be sold several times over in different time zones, with what was already old news in London, for example, being still new in New York. This was also true, of curse, with any new stories, but the introduction of time zones could be further used to make news new by creating the sense of universally mea-sured time that connected people together in different locations around the world.

In the early days of the telegraph, transportation by sea and transmission by telegraph were combined. President Lincoln was assassinated on April 14, 1865 in New York. It took 12 days to transport the news by the steam-ship *Nova Scotia* to the telegraph station at Greencastle, near Londonderry, in the north of Ireland. By 11.30 a.m. on April 26 a message from Reuters – datelined New York, April 15, 9 a.m. – reached the offices of the London newspapers which published it on April 27: "President Lincoln was shot by an assassin last night, and died this morning. An attempt was likewise made to assassinate Mr Seward, and he is not expected to live" (Read 1999, 43). The sense of newness was skilfully constructed in this datelined story. The fact that President Lincoln had died 13 days earlier did not matter, since the news item spoke of "last night" and "this morning." It was still news in London, although the actual event had taken place much earlier, but by giving its readers the datelines the new story was made the latest news.

The increasingly widespread transmission of news by cable, replacing transportation by steamship, resulted in an immediate change in the speed of its delivery. On August 1, 1866 the first hard same-day news was tele-graphed to London – the resignation of the US Secretary of the Interior. The 12 days taken in 1865 for news of Lincoln's assassination to reach London became unacceptable, and the first news in 1881 of the shooting of President Garfield appeared in the London papers within 24 hours of the event. In

consequence much more extensive mourning was observed in Britain for Garfield than had been the case for Lincoln (Read 1999, 96–97).

However, distance and the overcoming of distance by time affect news in several ways. First, the event which the news is about is new because it took place recently and was reported soon after. Second, the news itself may be new even if the event is old, because the audience did not previously know about it. It follows that a new event may become old news if it has already been reported, and old news may become new if it has not yet reached an audience. The third aspect of temporality in news lies in the impossibility of *no news*, of "no novelty, nothing new",[2] which implies the wider influence of news in society, emphasizing the importance of news in establishing social time.

The new form of industrially produced timely news was not universally accepted. Nerone and Barnhurst (2001, 435) write that it was Horace Greeley, editor of a leading newspaper, the *New York Tribune*, who, in 1845, predicted that the telegraph would take over newsgathering, outsourcing it from the newspaper and allowing the newspaper to devote its energies instead to the philosophical work of making sense of the news. Within a short time, however, according to Greeley, the consensus became the opposite. The telegraph, and allied developments in local reporting, had turned the newspaper into an ever more ephemeral miscellany of bizarre events. Another contemporary of Greeley, Charles Dudley Warner, argued in 1881 that both telegraph operators and reporters had a bias toward volume – being paid by the piece, they wanted to produce as much as possible – and toward the sensational. "Our newspapers every day are loaded with accidents, casualties, and crime concerning people of whom we never heard before and never shall hear again, the reading of which is of no earthly use to any human being." Nerone and Barnhurst conclude that the *industrial* newspaper, focused as it was on the ever more routinized production of news, did not take on the task of interpreting it, and the editors who managed reporters discouraged them from doing so (Nerone and Barnhurst, 2001, 435).

When News Became New

The elements of which news is made up are events, sources, and information. When news is manufactured as a good it is temporalized and localized

in the narrative form of a story that is socially recognizable as news. The narrative form of news at a given time varies considerably both historically and geographically.

Information becomes a news story only when it is narrativized and exchanged. Information can be stored and kept for further purposes, but is not news unless its novelty is recognized. In oral communication, information is stored inside one's head and memorized. Until it is shared with somebody, it remains just information. When it is exchanged with somebody who did not know about it and who acknowledges its novelty, it becomes a new story. Anybody might store information about a range of things, from concrete to abstract, but an organized exchange of new stories as an everyday experience changed information into new stories. Anybody might also be a source, because, in oral communication, people simply talk to each other and mostly exchange new stories freely. The exchange of new stories often concentrates on an event, but also on a comment or a re-comment about an event.

When new stories were "old," as they were in ballads or songs, they were still "new" because they consisted of new information, of something that was not previously known. The source had to know how to deliver new stories in such a way that they were recognizable as new. With the advent of the printing press, there was at first no differentiation between what was a news story and what was a "novel," but this distinction gradually began to appear when books and papers became separate. Simultaneously, news became more "factual," while the novel became more "fictional." When newspapers published news, it was not necessarily "new," but the timing, regularity, and increasing frequency of their appearance made news "newer." Still, the event could sometimes be "old"; there could be a spatial and temporal distance between the event and the information, but the publication and the narrative made it "new," i.e., news.

The telegraph profoundly changed the concept of time, not only nationally but also globally. Most scholars acknowledge the role of *communications* technology, such as the telegraph, but pay less attention to the role of *media*. Simultaneously, news became ephemeral, a perishable commodity that was no longer memorized, as new stories had been, but easily forgotten. News has to be repeated more frequently, because it loses its value with time. When the number of news increased, they had to be printed and stored because it became impossible to memorize news. Newspapers turned new stories into news by developing a new genre of writing that was labeled as news because of its temporality.

The new product, electronic news, the combination of the "lightness" of the telegraph and the "heaviness" of the information content, resulted in new features of immediacy and temporality. Because news had to be new and thus immediate, it gained a value of temporality which was something of a two-edged sword, becoming eminently saleable but also easily perishable. Electronic news had a very short life: it was like a mayfly, living for several months underwater as a larva before emerging for a brief life as a winged adult.[5] The mass-production of news meant that the production process became longer than it had been, although transmission became shorter, and that the finished product had a very short life.

Source, place, and time became important identifications of what makes news new. Together they framed the event the news was about. Equally, news started to mark time: there were certain times when the audience expected to receive news, whether by reading a newspaper in the morning or later listening to radio news or watching television. An individual had to wait for news that was chosen for him/her by a medium. News reminded its audience that it was time for news.

The temporal aspects in news have changed drastically since news was "invented." We see a gradual change, an evolution from oral news into electronic news. Every form of new technology has changed the form of news but at the same time used some aspects if its earlier forms. The change has never been a complete departure from the old: the old forms have existed with the latest ones. Together they have contributed to the increasing temporalization of news that exceeds its influence over news to contemporary societies. However, as will be further discussed in Chapter Seven, our understanding of news is primarily based on the nineteenth-century concept of electronic news.

Notes

1   http://dictionary.oed.com/, last visited October 27, 2008.
2   http://dictionary.oed.com/, last visited October 27, 2008.