

When: Time in the News

*To everything – turn, turn, turn
There is a season – turn, turn, turn*

—Pete Seeger, from *The Bitter and the Sweet*
(Columbia Records, 1962)

AMERICA IS “RUNNING ITSELF RAGGED,” according to a cover story in *Time* magazine: “These are the days of the time famine” (April 24, 1989, pp. 58–67). Government officials struggle for “the opportunity to defend ourselves” in the accelerating news cycles (cited in Kurtz, 1998, p. 322). Citizens decry the lack of time to make sense of the news. A New Yorker whose kidnapping and release made headlines describes time pressures this way:

You read about it in the *Daily News* while crushed up against people on the subway to work. The story flies past you like a million others; there are far too many . . . to absorb. (Alpert, 2007, p. 301)

Journalists have a similar assessment in their own work. One cliché is “So many stories, so little time,” as *Washington Post* columnist Eugene Robinson put it (*washingtonpost.com*, March 6, 2007). The pace of reporting “inevitably puts more emphasis on efficiency than on depth,” says journalist Ben Cas-selman, because “reporters must also rush from story to story” (*Columbia Journalism Review*, May–June 2004, p. 65, 66).

With time at a premium, journalists say they focus on the *now* more than ever. Nancy Kruh of the *Dallas Morning News* says, “We’re good at covering snapshots—what people said today” (quoted in *National Civic Review* 85 (Winter-Spring 1996): 36). TV journalists “subscribe to this apparent truism: news is new,” says Deborah Potter, then–national correspondent for CNN (p. 36), who became executive director of NewsLab, an online center for broadcasters.

Journalists tend to blame technology for the current time pressures. *Editor & Publisher*, in a report to the journalism trade (May 2007, pp. 36–44), says,

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“The growing web culture and heavier work demands are visible” everywhere:

For reporters, it often means taking time . . . to crank out or update the latest web scoop. Newsrooms are facing larger workloads, increased stress, and more hours spent in the office for the same old pay. (p. 36)

Newspaper Guild president Linda Foley says, “You used to shoot for one deadline and you would work for that. Now it is constant updating” (p. 37). The same goes for editors. Gil Thelen, executive editor of the *Tampa Tribune* in Florida, called his Leadership column for *American Editor* magazine “Who has time to edit anymore?” (May–June 2003, p. 31).

Social scientists and other observers see a broader pattern. Early on Todd Gitlin decried “the pace of events, the rush of mass-mediated, distanced, and distorted experience” that disorients and deprives groups “of a sense of political context” (1980, pp. 235–36). Anthropologists have called the phenomenon a *time famine* peculiar to urban, industrial society (Parkes & Thrift, 1980). Sociologist Juliet B. Schor, who has taught at Harvard and elsewhere, says that “nearly all types of Americans” face “a profound structural crisis of time” (1991, p. 5). And the problem has not gone away. Instead, writes Alexander Stille in *The Future of the Past*, “the rate of change has increased markedly” (2002, p. xv).

Public observers, scholars, and journalists agree that American life has become busier, with little time to spare. For journalism, the time crunch seems to have forced newspaper reporters and editors to focus on the present instead of gathering background, spotting trends, or ferreting out future problems; it has accelerated especially on television, where competitive pressures to go live have left journalists without time to investigate or even edit their work; and it results from the internet and the shorter news cycles that emerge along with new technology.

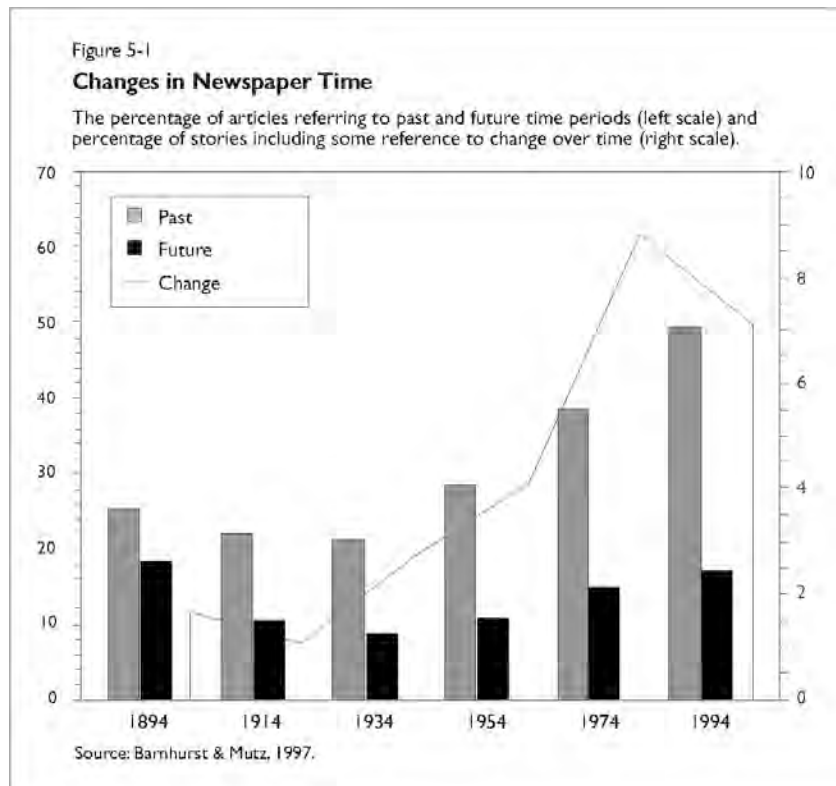
Less Time but Not Now

Did news stories become more centered in the present? To test this idea, our long-term study of newspapers looked at the number of references to different time points — past, present, and future — within each article (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997). Almost without exception, stories dealt with the present, and the number of references to the present remained fairly constant over the century of newspaper stories. Contrary to what journalists say, no fundamental change occurred in references to the now.

But other time references did change. After a small dip between 1894 and 1914, a slow but steady increase in references to other points in time continued through the century. Among the three topics we measured — accidents, crime, and employment — coverage of jobs, in general, contained far more points in time, and accident news contained far fewer. But the trend moved with almost identical timing for each topic as well as for each newspaper.

Rather than sharpening their focus on the now, journalists followed three other, distinct patterns (Figure 5-1). By far the most powerful trend was talk-

ing about the past. More than twice as many articles included past references in the 1990s than in the 1890s (see the bar graph). Those describing changes over time also increased (see the trend line). In 1894, less than 2 percent of articles talked about change, but by 1994 more than 7 percent did (down a bit from the peak in 1974). Finally, speculation about future events followed a curvilinear pattern, increasing shortly before the turn of each century in the study. These trends grew out of changes in the practice of newspaper journalism over the period.



U.S. news until the nineteenth century was haphazard about time. John L. Given, who wrote for the *New York Evening Sun*, remembers the day when a writer could stroll or stand “idle at a street corner waiting for something to happen” (quoted in Wilson, C., 1985, p. 28). There was “no rush or jostle about newspaper establishments,” said Colonel A. K. McClure, editor of the *Philadelphia Times* (p. 26). John Addison Porter of the *Hartford Post* recalled the “leisure in a newspaper office,” which valued “literary skill and book knowledge” (pp. 26–27). The prime example (or last hold-out) of deliberate news was Charles A. Dana, editor and publisher of the *New York Sun*, whose adage for success in newspapers was, “Never do anything in a hurry” (p. 26).

News organs of the era still retained some of what scholars call a *classic* sense of time: that events flow through a stable world (O’Malley, 1990, calls it the ideal river of Plato flowing with the endless change of Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher of the sixth century who introduced the idea of flux: that one can never step into the same river twice). In the classic sense of time, the rhythms of agriculture (Thompson, 1967) and the cycles of myth return endlessly, as do the speed of youth and the slowing of old age (May & Thrift, 2001). Philosophers such as Saint Augustine assigned special status to action in the present (Adam, 1990), but classic time also honors the invariant past. Newspaper operators of the nineteenth century focused on the present but lionized history. Myths of a glorious bygone America emerged in the *New York Times* and some magazines of the era (Winfield & Hume, 2007), as journalists increasingly made news stories commemorate national anniversaries from the past.

But these ideas existed alongside a *modern* sense of time: linear, measurable, and open to progress or reversals (Adam, 1999). In the last two decades of the century, references to the future increased (Winfield & Hume, 2007), as journalists began to anticipate national advances. To illustrate the change, Franc B. “Poliuto” Wilkie, first president of the Press Club of Chicago, begins by describing the timing of mid-nineteenth century news this way:

Things that happened in New York were known in their detail three days after they occurred. Events transpiring in London required fifteen days to reach Chicago. Occurrences happening in Central and Southern Europe required not less than three weeks to cross the continent to the metropolis of the West. Northern Africa furnished intelligence that was a full month on its passage. Russia, Siberia, India, Southern Africa only revealed their latest doings to us six months or a year after they happened. (1891, p. 323)

But, he writes, all of that changed by the end of the century: events “of importance” from any “point in civilization” became “known in Chicago the next morning at the very latest” (p. 323). As the new time regime took hold, news became more now-centered, and references to other time periods began declining. The older generation in newspaper offices felt nostalgia for their old work rhythm.

Newspapers under sensationalist editors like William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer became more aggressive in marking linear time: “evening dailies, multiple editions, and headline rushes . . . narrowed the distance between the news event and its deadline, intensified the pace of office work,” and turned news into a perishable product that lost value if “not harvested, processed, and delivered in a matter of hours” (Wilson, C., 1985, p. 26). As reporting became a job distinct from literary work, journalists competed for the stories and stunts that would sell copies on the streets. Under what critics then called the “tyranny of timeliness,” a reporter could get fired for being “a little slow getting to a telephone,” John Given recalls (quoted on pp. 38, 31). Besides the individual success and reversals registered in the newfangled scoops, exclusives, and deadlines, circulation became the measure of progress.

In a biography of the period, Julius Chambers, who became managing edi-

tor of the *New York Herald* and *New York World* in a long career in journalism, describes his early adventures as a modern reporter. After a messenger rushes in with a note, the night city editor sees “a great news story was in sight. He glanced at the clock—the hour was eleven” (Chambers, 1921, p. 81). He calls on “his star reporter, Daniel Kirwin,” saying, “take two men with you. Hire all the cabs you want. Get the story” (p. 81). The account of the murder investigation runs by the clock. Kirwin instructs his subaltern to “hurry to the office and write every line possible” (p. 83). Upon arriving at the scene of the crime, Kirwin uncovers several “mysteries in precisely eleven minutes. He was working against time . . . as a news-hunter” (p. 85). Reaching “the office at 1.30 (having written 1,500 words in the billiard-room of the dead man . . .), he had sufficient facts” to solve the crime, based on precise timings of the victim’s movements, such as, “How does [one witness] fix the time? Because his relief was due at nine, hadn’t arrived, and he was literally ‘watching the clock’” (p. 86–87). And in the end, time coordination blends with other stereotypes of the journalism occupation:

The full account of the sensational crime came together into a harmonious whole. At 2.30 a.m., the nine and a quarter column account of the murder of John Hawkins, written and compiled by seven different collaborators, went to press as smoothly as if it had been the work of one hand . . . Mr. Daniel J. Kirwin, star reporter, ran his critical eyes over the latest proof-sheets, caught a few typographical errors, handed the damp strips of paper to the night editor, . . . lit a cigar, . . . [and] said: “Let’s go down to Charley Perry’s and take something.” (pp. 89–90)

U.S. journalism manuals and textbooks by the mid-twentieth century treated the new time regime as ordinary, as in this *Introduction to Modern Journalism*:

Reporters’ work is almost all extemporaneous. Most of their writing is done under pressure. Generally speaking, news is good only when it is fresh, and reporters find it good routine to write their stories as soon as they return to their desks after gathering the facts for a story . . . (Robertson, 1930, p. 25; see also Campbell & Wolseley, 1949)

Readers & Machines

Journalists generally attribute the need for timeliness to two factors, audience demands and the tools at hand. A booklet for visitors of the *New York Times* printing plant in the 1930s describes how the telegraph and telephone sped newsgathering about a gas explosion that flattened a school building, killing hundreds of children in New London, Texas. The remote town, not on any maps in New York, was reachable by calling officials in Texas, and journalists then telegraphed “several columns of news, including interviews and eye-witness accounts” and transmitted wire photos by courier and phone lines. The *Times* editors called it “one of the most rapid and successful accomplishments in covering news at a distance in recent years” (“News,” 1937, p. 10).

An editor of the *Times* defines news as “current events of interest or importance to the readers” and puts readers first: “its readers determine what is news” because a newspaper “cannot survive one day without readers,” who “will switch to another” if the paper fails to publish what they want (MacNeil, 1945, pp. 126–27). Consequently, “speed enters into the gathering, the writing, the editing, and the display of many news stories” (p. 129). The reader-consumer has leverage as long as newspapers face competition to get the most-timely news.

The *modern* sense of time had begun emerging centuries earlier along with printing, which scholars during the Renaissance employed to compare the present to the past and test earlier writers’ beliefs about nature against their own observations. Modern science and history depended on communication, then as now. Like classic time, the modern sense of time is “a flow of events,” but modern time emphasizes “having a direction” that runs from past (behind) through present to future (in front) (Giddens, 1987, p. 142; Lawrence, 1971). Time also turns into a tool and commodity (Bauman, 2000): “Remember that time is money,” Benjamin Franklin wrote as “Advice to a Young Tradesman” in the 1748 edition of *Poor Richard’s Almanack* (1950, p. 132). Modern time entered journalism as newspapers became more industrial, shrinking time just as railroads had earlier shrunk space (Schivelbusch, 1986). The factory compresses time, making it seem scarce (May & Thrift, 2001). “The rhythms of the machine tend to replace human ones. Deadlines reproduce themselves. . . . A generalized hurry makes its entrance,” producing social anxiety (Ferrarotti, 1990, p. 92).

Other scholars have documented a transformation in time sensibilities by the beginning of the twentieth century (Kern, 1983). The data from our newspaper study show references to different time periods reaching a low point about then. First, talk about change bottomed out by 1914, and then references to past and future reached their nadir over the next two decades. U.S. newspapers covered fewer events overall (see Chapter 3) but more foreign events (see Chapter 4) during the same period. It was a phase in history with plenty to cover in the now: world war followed by a market crash and economic depression. At the same time, journalists were consolidating their newly asserted professional standing by founding state and national associations and creating codes of ethics. In their reporting, they turned to more institutions and groups, along with a few more officials, to generate stories (see Chapter 2).

Publishers of the period also rebuilt newspaper form, creating the modernist style that presented the newspaper itself as a social map (Nerone & Barnhurst, 1995), re-drawn on a daily basis to emphasize its spatial reach rather than a temporal durability (Innis, 1951). The older news forms had a temporal bias, meaning a focus on preserving events through time, and the new spatial bias paid more attention to circulation and broad dissemination through space in the present. These trends early in the century anticipated the forms of radio and television news that would emerge decades later. Historian Harold Innis suggests that the changing biases of communication media have social and cultural consequences and mark shifts in centers of control. In this case, pub-

lishers moved from personalistic to corporate patterns of control over communication, and journalists in counterpoint began to push for higher status.

By the 1930s, newspapers began their steep increase in references to other time periods, especially the past. One element behind these shifts was that photojournalism established a secure place in news practices. Pictures can be more direct in describing physical appearance and conveying current emotion, tasks that operate in the present tense. News pictures freed reporters to do other things, such as pointing to earlier events and to the patterns of change from then until now or the future. Our study examining newspaper coverage of the deaths of sitting U.S. presidents over a century illustrates these changes (Barnhurst & Nerone, 1999). Pictures of the chief executive grew larger and moved from static, timeless portraits to active and candid shots. As the photographs and their captions took on the immediacy of presenting the latest news, the surrounding text could turn to other tasks, including quoting experts and officials, describing the responses of groups, examining the changes through time, and referring to past events.

Journalists at mid-century, however, began to question the slavish emphasis on linear timeliness. One critic, a small-town newsman and journalism professor, argued that “newsdom must confess that it has gone too far” in its zeal “to be up to the moment”: some editors have “ruled out a ‘yesterday’ story” and others proclaim “an event happening at 1 p.m.” more newsworthy, “because it is more recent, than one taking place at noon” (Neal, 1947, p. 55). But the overemphasis on timeliness was fading because of three factors: first, “there are more one-newspaper cities today, and hence news competition has changed”; second, accounts of out-of-date events that got lots of attention in newspapers made “editors wonder whether they had thought out their news policies carefully enough”; and third, foreign news, especially battle accounts from distant places, seemed important to editors “geared for years to regard this second [world] war as big news.” As a result, “‘timely’ is being interpreted now much more sensibly than it was a few years ago” (pp. 55–56).

Changes in time sensibilities for news did adjust to economic realities for the press. In long-term measurements (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997), the *when* of news tracks inversely with Census Bureau data (1970, p. 810, Series 246) on how many daily newspapers existed in the United States. The number of newspapers published grew from the 1890s (with 1610 dailies in operation) to reach a peak in the early decades of the twentieth century (at 2600 newspapers, a 61 percent increase), then began a long, slow decline in 1914, dropping toward the original numbers by the 1960s (1766 dailies in 1963, a 68 percent decrease). Although many other factors intervened, news writing focused more on the now as daily newspapering as a line of business activity grew, and then declined as competition waned and reporters could turn their attention to past events and to analyses of changing trends.

So the story journalists continue to tell about the when of news is old, one originating a century ago when journalism first emerged as a separate occupation and asserted a respectable pedigree, abandoning earlier relaxed and literary practices. As journalism became professional and institutional, practitioners did

at first focus more on the present under the modern, high-speed, intensive work regime regulated by deadline pressures. But the newfound professional status came at a cost. Over time, in concert with changes in news form and the rise of photojournalism as an arm of expert newswork, professional news also brought the opportunity for journalists to turn more toward the long journalism that cites previous events and points to trends and changes over time. The transformation in news time accompanied a decline in the number of newspaper businesses, but the story journalists tell has still not absorbed the transformed environment.

How When Works in Print

Barbara Serrano grew up in Silicon Valley, the daughter of a truck driver father and a (mostly) stay-at-home mother, on the Mexican side of Gilroy, California. But she always wanted to leave town and do interesting things, travel and take part in bigger events. In her early teens, she got hooked on the Watergate television hearings. When her mother asked, “What are you doing watching that?” she said, “It’s big. The president’s resigning.” Her parents seemed outside of time and events, and she wanted something else. In high school, when a local radio station picked up a story on a lunchroom boycott she had written for the student paper, “that was it,” she said: “I’m becoming a journalist.” She got into Berkeley and then landed internships and reporting jobs, first for a Gannett newspaper and then for the *Orange County Register*, until moving to Seattle in 1990. The *Seattle Times* started her as a general assignment reporter, but about a year later sent her to cover state politics in Olympia, typically an assignment for a white male, not a Latina.

Three years later, she returned to the newsroom as a political reporter, and the *Times* promoted her to political editor in 1999. She remembers two big stories from that era. One was a proposal to build a Central Park for Seattle, called the Commons. She wrote seven articles once the City Council put the project on the ballot for September 1995. The early stories included that initial short account of the council’s action and budget projections (July 8, p. A-8, 477 words), then two articles in a Sunday paper (August 20, p. B-1): a reaction story about the mayor (714 words) and piece about a Seattle Mariners stadium project competing on the ballot (833 words). The stories grew longer as she focused on the potential impact of the proposal.

Based on a tip, she began to look at the numbers in the proposal and compared its budget to projections that forecast money problems for the city. She talked to the city financial director, as well as to the residents and businesses facing possible displacement. Three weeks before the municipal election, the *Times* published a long story (3228 words) detailing the project (“61 Acres and Counting — All our Thoughts about Living and Working and Playing in the City Face the Test,” August 27, 1995, p. 12).

After reviewing the four years of events leading up to the vote (as well as earlier projects, such as the Space Needle and related work of 1968, which failed twice before voters approved them), the story describes “the dream,” which included business development, affordable housing, and traffic solutions:

“How else to explain company CEOs sitting next to labor leaders and environmentalists at the Commons table?” The story describes similar ventures in other cities and raises questions about time: When in U.S. history has a city carved out so many acres for a park? (Answer: never.)

Serrano’s article balances that possible future with the voices of opponents, who call it “chasing an elusive yuppie rainbow.” They say they consider the Commons an “ideological mantra” and a “utopian concept.” An activist “talks history,” citing events in his past going back forty-six years in the district: attending Little League games, working at neighborhood jobs, and driving “city mayors in the annual parade” as far back as the administration of U.S. President Lyndon Johnson. Against the solid ground of history, he points to the uncertainty of specifics in the proposal: park safety, traffic rerouting, tunnels, and parking, as well as the fate of area businesses.

Details follow about the history of what Serrano’s story calls “one of the biggest urban renewal projects on the planet.” The “expensive” proposal was competing with many other capital projects, including city schools. The story concludes that “the Commons might not be the blueprint voters are willing to pay for,” by recounting “reasons why the plan might not work” and the issues “not addressed” in the proposal. Its timing and future are uncertain.

Leading up to the vote, Serrano then published two front-page stories. One covers a “Front Porch Forum” (September 5), sponsored by the *Seattle Times* and local NPR affiliates, and the other is a brief summary titled, “The Seattle Commons — Voting on a Vision — Will a Central Park in Seattle Bring People Back or Uproot Those Who Are Already Here?” (September 11).

The following week, Page A-1 announced, “Voters Say No to Commons” (September 20). The proposition, Serrano reported, had failed by a slim margin. Commons supporters “saw me as the enemy,” she said in our interview, but the newsroom feedback called her coverage the “best reporting in years” for the city. Even so, her predictions did not fare as well; the city’s future unfolded as an economic rebound, with surpluses instead of the projected budget trouble.

Another big story Serrano remembers involved a 1997 handgun proposition. Lawmakers had introduced gun control bills to the Washington legislature four times beginning in 1993 and then again in 1997 (March 29, p. A-1, 830 words). After the bill died a fifth time, backers started a ballot initiative “to promote trigger locks and safety classes for handgun owners” (September 26, p. B-2, 1036 words). Serrano followed up with a report on debates and rallies, one including then-newly elected NRA Vice-president Charlton Heston (October 17, p. A-1, 1251 words). These three stories responded to occurrences and grew longer as they referred more to the past. But they were merely a prelude.

Serrano had begun investigating what would happen if the proposal became law, actually reading the entire text of the initiative (something she told me was novel for a reporter) and talking to the drafters of the legislation, the police who would enforce it, the hospitals caring for handgun injuries, and the Washington State department that would issue licenses and certify the required train-

ing, as well as proponents and opponents. A journalist’s role is “getting information and understanding the process,” she said in our interview, “and I think we can see it in a way that the public can’t or doesn’t know how to.”

On October 26, the *Seattle Times* published a front-page story on the proposal, “Gun Measure Isn’t as Simple as Seems” (3756 words). In the long article, Serrano begins from the “broader, philosophical questions” voters faced about gun control, before presenting eight aspects of the proposal’s future: the expense and complications for gun owners, government paperwork and records containing registered owners’ personal information, uncertainty for spouses and children in licensed households, the impact of regulation on firearm safety instructors, budgetary doubts over whether registration would cover costs (as state law requires), confidentiality waivers for health-care providers to keep handguns from the mentally unstable, unpredictable enforcement of the new fines and jail sentences, and the time it would take for stalking victims to get trained or tested and then wait five days to get a handgun when pursued “by ex-boyfriends or estranged husbands.”

Her editor David Boardman liked the handgun story, she told me. It was a kind of reporting begun at the *Seattle Times* because of time pressure. As an afternoon paper until 2000, it could not compete on breaking news with the morning *Post-Intelligencer*. Editors also knew “what the TV guys had,” she said. “As an editor now, I really insist” on the same kind of reporting “for any major initiative.” The goal is “to help readers understand . . . what is really likely to happen.”

Two follow-up stories on the proposition included the mixed response among police — fewer of their organizations and more of their chiefs opposed it (October 27, p. A-1, 1681 words) — and the behind-the-scenes plans opponents made for a competing measure (October 29, p. B-1, 839 words). After the election, she published “Handgun Proposal Is Trounced” (November 5, p. B-1, 898 words), a postmortem explaining why voters rejected the proposition 2 to 1: “Opponents always seemed to have the upper hand as proponents saw their eight-page proposal come under the microscope of gun owners and the media,” she writes. Supporters pushed for child safety, but opponents “kept them on the defensive for weeks,” with questions about stalking and privacy. “By the end, the arguments were not so much about ways to save children’s lives as arguments about who had more cops on their side.” The summary itself outlines Serrano’s political coverage. The same day, in a roundup of election results, “Voters Mostly Say No” (p. A-1, 924 words), she begins with this overview: “Faced with an array of choices on some of the nation’s most contentious issues, voters yesterday resoundingly chose to keep things as they are” In feedback on the handgun coverage, readers and her editors regarded her reporting as fair — even the NRA liked it, she told me.

For the biggest story of the era, she was an observer on the sidelines. After the World Trade Organization (WTO) scheduled its 1999 ministerial meeting in Seattle, *Times* editors defined the event as in the domain of first the business desk, where reporters focused on the Chamber of Commerce and trade, and then the metro desk, staffed with street and police reporters. In our inter-

view, Serrano recalled her frustration that these organizational steps also blocked advance planning to cover the story. City and state officials expected protests, and younger, electronically connected staff at the *Times* saw it coming, but the paper did not consider it within her purview as political editor. Coverage instead centered on the present: the “need to tell readers what’s happening at nine in the morning,” instead of a longer view.

In 2001, Serrano took time off to reflect, spending a year on a Nieman Fellowship. Her career had started with an internship at the *Stockton* (California) *Register*, then under Gannett ownership, where she began as a crusader covering mainly social issues — homelessness, immigration, and “the down-trodden.” Years later she said in our interview, “I almost to a fault go out of my way to make sure that there is nothing in our coverage that shows” liberal media bias. She especially watched “photographs and headlines,” because, as political editor at the *Seattle Times*, “inevitably I’d be the one who would get the phone calls,” which often came from conservatives. After a year at Harvard, she moved to the *Los Angeles Times*, becoming first a political editor during the 2004 presidential campaign and then an entertainment editor covering television and news media. In November 2006, she returned to Washington State, as managing editor of the *Yakima Herald-Republic*, owned by the Seattle Times Company.

Time pressures on reporters and editors, as well as newsroom procedures, can block some journalists from covering events like the WTO story. But with enough autonomy and advance notice, Serrano could pursue hard questions about what led up to a political proposal and what consequences its future passage might reap. In each case, proposal opponents had confidence in the past but expressed uncertainty about the future, painting worst-case scenarios. In professional news, history seems secure and the present clear, despite the persistence of problems, but the future is inherently undependable. Its murkiness makes a compelling story that inherently argues against change.

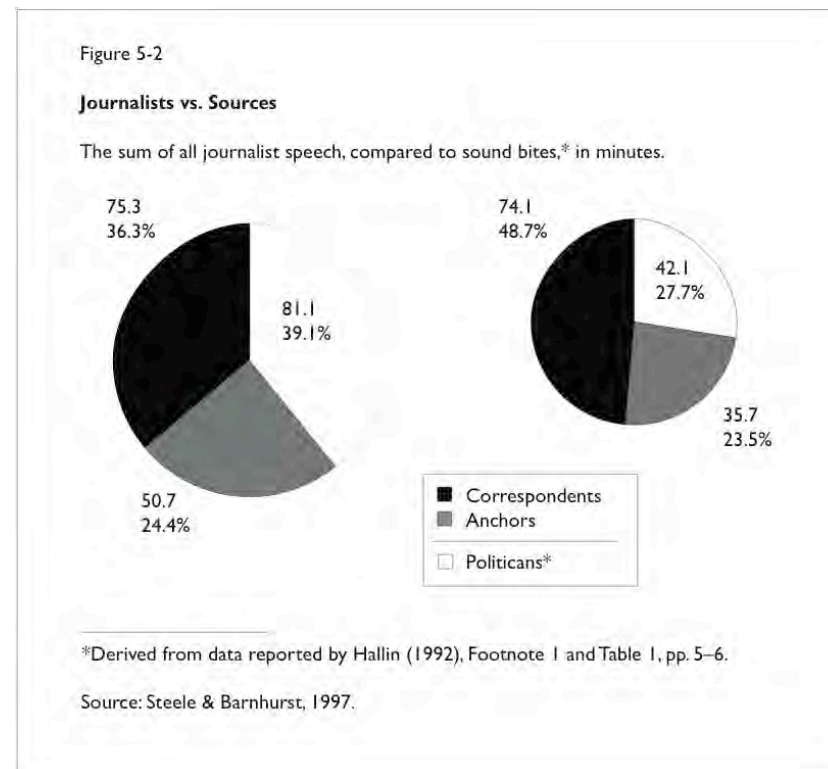
Time on Television

TV journalists feel time pressure even more intensely (Plasser, 2005). Larry Potash, an anchor at WGN, says local TV news departments lack time, “particularly in a city like Chicago, where there’s so much going on” (*American Journalism Review*, June 1997, p. 40). Time is what television sells to advertisers, and the value of programming depends on audiences spending time in front of the set. Even programs like “Sixty Minutes,” which have a full hour to present investigative work, cannot cover stories “in the depth” they would prefer, says longtime correspondent Morley Safer (“‘60 Minutes’: A Candid Conversation,” *Playboy*, March 1985, p. 160). Broadcast reporters also have extra time constraints, such as the CBS standard that prohibits editing interview segments “out of time sequence,” Safer says. “Our rules,” he concludes, “are a lot tougher” (p. 168).

Time in television journalism also has consequences for policymakers. Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright (2001, p. 105), for instance, describes “watching CNN” to track others’ statements and reacting

“much faster,” sometimes based on wrong facts from news outlets.

But did the time crunch grow worse for television journalists? Our studies of network newscast content found that, in some ways, it did (see Figure 5-2). The total minutes dedicated to political reporting in network programs (circle size in Figure 5-2) had gotten smaller by more than a quarter from 1968 to 1988. At the same time, how long the journalist spoke continuously shrank on average, just as the sound bites of politicians had shrunk over the period (Hallin, 1992).



If the same economic and competitive pressures journalists describe, which helped reduce the size of the political sound bite, also shortened all kinds of news reports, everyone should have been talking less. But that wasn’t the case. Beyond political coverage, reports overall did not grow shorter (see Chapter 1). Of the time available, almost 10 percent shifted away from sources, but correspondents used almost the same number of minutes at the start as end of the period we studied. In effect, journalists increased their share of time compared to their sources’ much-reduced sound bites. The pacing of the news reports picked up, perhaps leaving the impression that time was at a premium, but on-air time limitations did not grow worse for broadcast journalists, even

though others lost ground on television.

Time gives a competitive edge to television, and TV journalists have been pointing to their time advantage since the beginnings of the medium. In a 1938 essay for the magazine *Photoplay*, Gilbert Seldes, who became the first director for CBS News, called television technology “one of the true miracles of modern days” because “mobile units can . . . transmit” events “at the very moment they occur” (quoted in Slide, 1987, p. 107). In contrast, newspapers could publish at best a few hours later, and the nearest TV competitors, newsreels, could update reports appearing in movie houses only twice a week (Barkin, 2003).

The lore of U.S. television cites major benchmarks for in-the-moment coverage in the early 1960s. The first was the televised debates between presidential candidates John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon. Pierre Salinger, who worked with the Kennedy campaign (he suggested what became the first live presidential press conference), said looking back on a long career at ABC News, that live coverage “has become *the* factor, anytime anything important happens” (quoted in Cunningham, 1995, p. 61). Veteran broadcaster David Brinkley remembers: “Spending three days and nights with the Kennedy funeral, I think we really saved the country from . . . crisis. I think we calmed [the public] down. Kept them informed minute by minute by minute” (quoted in Marlane, 1999, p. 113). Dick Salant, a president of CBS News, recalls two other key moments when the network preempted entertainment programs to broadcast events: the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on the Vietnam conflict in 1966 and the Nixon resignation in 1974, both “costly for the network because advertising revenues were lost” (quoted in Buzenberg & Buzenberg, 1999, p. 54).

In the late 1970s, Salant moved to NBC and fought for hour-long national evening news, a proposal that failed. But the founding of Cable News Network (CNN) in 1980 gave newscasters time for coverage twenty-four hours a day (see Chapter 4), along with greater flexibility to use that time (Barkin, 2003). The strategy demonstrated its value when the space shuttle Challenger exploded in 1986 and only CNN had live coverage — the broadcast networks arrived later. They could compete with CNN only with a stroke of luck, such as when the 1989 San Francisco earthquake occurred during live ABC-TV coverage of the baseball World Series or when the O. J. Simpson civil trial verdict came in during broadcast of President Bill Clinton’s State of the Union address in 1997 (Hilliard & Keith, 2005). Each of these events, along with the decision of CNN journalist Peter Arnett to stay in Baghdad when the Gulf Conflict broke out in 1990, highlighted the competitive advantage that having more time available gave to cable and the general enlargement of news audiences during key occasions. Although ratings had sunk much lower by 1997, MSNBC and Fox debuted 24-hour stations that year, beginning what one journalist called “The Cable News Battle” (*Television Quarterly* 28.4: 49–53).

Journalists experienced more competitive pressures, and in the key area, political coverage, the on-air time shrank on the broadcast network evening

news, but in the big picture across all topics and outlets, television journalists had relatively *more* time on the air. More important, time gives TV inherent advantages, especially compared to print. So what can explain the time crunch newscasters describe?

Live News

Going live is a kind of pressure unique to broadcasting. On-the-scene broadcasting adds intensity to meeting a deadline or issuing the latest update. In the late 1990s, the industry trade press observed “The Rise and Rise of 24-hour Local News” (*Columbia Journalism Review*, November–December 1998, pp. 54–57) and noted the call for feeds with “more live coverage” (*Broadcasting & Cable*, August 16, 1999, p. 24). According to the *American Journalism Review*, “The demand for live reports can be so great that there’s precious little time for actual reporting” or digging for facts (September 2001, p. 51). Going live helps television news hold viewers to watch the outcome of, say, a hostage taking, SWAT team police raid, or fire, but in such cases, according to Ted Koppel, “The technological tail is wagging the editorial dog” (quoted in Seib, 2001, p. 40). The arrival of digital high-definition television a few years later raised “Great Expectations” for live coverage (*Broadcasting & Cable*, July 19, 2004, p. 26).

Our study of the visual changes in national evening newscasts gives credence to the growth of on-site coverage. We found that backgrounds behind journalists on screen became more focused on locations (Barnhurst & Steele, 1997). Blank walls, the most common backgrounds for reports in 1968, had all but vanished from network news by 1992. A plain backdrop behind a talking head is timeless, especially compared to a reporter standing at the location of events, with police investigating or a storm raging. On-location backgrounds doubled, from about one shot out of six in 1968 to more than one of three by 1992.

But the most dramatic visual change we found was something else: the emergence of on-screen technology (Barnhurst & Steele, 1997). Before 1980, the networks avoided showing equipment almost entirely, but by 1992 the blinking lights and active monitors of studio technology filled the background in one third of newscast shots. Besides looking up to date, images of technology convey the power (if not the reality) of news organizations to cover events immediately. These changes give the appearance of focusing on the present, pointing to (rather than necessarily carrying out) a core advantage of televised news.

Time on television is multifaceted, and research has tried to sort out news time pressures into constituent parts, a valuable exercise that starts from the journalists’ perspective. As early as the 1960s, Europeans studying how occurrences enter news production identified three time elements at work: *consonance*, *unexpectedness*, and *continuity* (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; see also Fowler, 1991; Schulz, 1982). Later U.S. researchers, after doing fieldwork among practitioners (e.g., Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979), renamed and elaborated on (or redefined) these three: Consonance is the build up to an occurrence

journalists expect, sometimes called a *diary* story, for an item coming up on the newsroom calendar. Unexpectedness is an occurrence journalists cannot predict, also called *spot news*, for items confronting the newsroom unexpectedly (although the occurrences may precede the journalists' detection; Fishman, 1980). Continuity is an ongoing story, with *running*, *developing*, or *continuing* coverage of occurrences spanning all three time-elements of news production.

A U.S. news practitioner-turned-researcher developed a scheme designed to add how sources and audiences experience time in the news: *immediacy*, *recency*, and *currency* (Roshco, 1975). Recency is when the occurrence itself happened, or *event time*, in the lives of sources and actors involved. Currency is when the news audience receives the notice, or *reader time*, including listeners and viewers. But immediacy is the time for production, called *writer time* incorporating broadcast and other media. Writer time works at the level of language: the past tense of the context and background details, the present tense of the scoop, and the future (as well as subjunctive or *semiotic*) tense of trends and analysis (Schudson, 1986). The triad of source-journalist-audience is central to witnessing in human experience (Peters, 2001). Live coverage aims to align journalists, actor or victim sources, and a public audience all at once in time, a precarious performance that depends on the practitioners' understanding of time.

In the 1970s, Philip Schlesinger (1978) applied an earlier sociological analysis of two opposing attitudes toward time, humanistic vs. fatalistic, to his observations of U.K. newsmen and found them exhibiting both. A humanistic attitude is a sense of control and mastery over one's activities in time, experienced during planning and carrying out reporting and editing routines. But as deadlines approach or a live broadcast begins, journalists feel a rush of activity and pressure. The dramatic periods overshadow the rest of the job and also make it meaningful. In other words, journalists describe their work fatalistically, feeling obliged or compelled by time. But that description "diverges from the observed reality" (Schlesinger, 1977, p. 348) of life in news production. Balancing the two attitudes — staying in control during the mayhem — is the mark of media professionalism. But, Schlesinger asserts, journalists' accounts of production give a "spurious coherence" to time in the news (p. 339).

Other social scientists confirm Schlesinger's observation. One content analysis of news discourse found that "uncertainty has news value," and so journalists manipulate expressions of time to make news seem more immediate (Jaworski, Fitzgerald & Morris, 2003, p. 47). In the case of Timothy McVeigh, convicted of the bombing that killed 168 at the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, journalists used phrases like "due to have happened" and "was to be" done (steps getting ready for the execution), inviting the audience to view a future event as having happened recently or as about to happen (depending on when the report would reach its target recipient). Manipulating time frames this way creates the illusion of current news. An ethnography in a news agency found that U.K. broadcast journalists do tend to remodel existing stories, tar-

geting audiences during different time slots rather than doing new reporting (Niblock & Machin, 2007).

Live television can show the scene continuously, let sources speak unedited, and require reporters and anchors to talk extemporaneously. During periods of intense concentration, individuals may feel time compression, the sensation of time standing still, but at a cost (E. Hall, 1983): time becomes an action chain of scheduled, compartmental tasks with little sense of the broader context. The technical challenges and editorial risks of live TV together create stress but also provide what makes television matter, as a medium for covering events in the now. The production experience itself may give the impression of a worsening time crunch, but studies suggest contradictions in television news time, which is fast but slow, limited but unlimited.

Critics & News Viewers

What does television news give the audience through its window on lived events? A content analysis of 24-hour news channels, designed to examine the information cable gives citizens, found: "The only live action on view, most of the time, is that provided by the reporters themselves . . . speaking in front of an appropriate location, generally in conversation with an anchor" (Lewis, Cushion & Thomas, 2005, p. 465). Rather than reporting news as-it-happens (in the present), the stations labeled "breaking news" erratically, to create drama. For example, even after "an attempted cockpit break-in and a suspected bomb" on a United Airlines flight to Los Angeles, July 27, 2004, "turned out to be a hoax" (p. 467), some stations continued to label the story *breaking news*. Overall, about three-fourths of the time stations dedicated to "breaking news" in fact recycled previous stories, and the bulk of live coverage involved a very few, predictable events, such as press conferences and political debates. The study found that 24-hour news stations provide little background and little analysis, concluding that "the focus on presence and immediacy" is "something insidious": favoring "spectatorship over investigation, suiting pre-packaged news events (which are easy to cover live) . . . [and creating] the *feeling of discovery*" (p. 468).

Audiences themselves may differ in their orientations toward time (E. Hall, 1980/1959). Rapidly changing cultures, for instance, may assign dates to events and then file away or forget the past (Gell, 1992). Even within a society, time experiences differ by their context. U.S. social scientists studying television news tend to mirror journalists' experiences during news production, which also reflect in accounts of news time in basic textbooks. One from the 1970s introduces "the rules of journalism" with the phrases, "as in any other business, time is money" (Line, 1979, p. vii). Recent textbooks also teach budding journalists to consider time precious and to project the need for timeliness onto audiences (Itule & Anderson, 1997; Donnelly & Blaney, 2003). U.S. television takes a decidedly modernist view of time as a sequential, scarce resource, like other institutions that "seem to be 'stuck' in" earlier centuries (Wilson, H., 1999, p. 171).

But for audiences, one of the most powerful aspects of television is the op-

posite of linear time: its ability to interrupt the “flow of daily life” (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p. 89). Media events from the Kennedy funeral to the inauguration of the first black American president, Barack Obama, stopped the profane work of advertising and entertaining on national broadcast and cable news stations to enter sacred time, when television is “actively performing” something “akin to the medieval” staging of holy mysteries (p. 91). The ceremonial genre of media events creates a time of unity around the goals that journalists and political actors temporarily share during a ceremony requiring the public to act as witness.

Critical scholars apply a similar logic to all types of television content. Daily news gives viewers pleasure because it fulfills the expectations of a genre with a beginning (“Good evening”) and end (“Good night”) that form a time frame for journalists to fill with something like in-person storytelling (Stam, 1983). Live sports events likewise place television spectators outside ordinary time in the continuous cycle of what appears on the monitor, with commentators speaking in the present tense about freeze frame and slow-mo images from the past (Marriott, 1996). Morning talk shows fuse event time and viewer time into one with producer on-air time by employing an imaginary *liveness* that overcomes the slowness of real-time experience and the segmentation of television programming made from disparate topical packages, changing scenes, and advertisements (Feuer, 1983). The present becomes the *presentation* of the event, built of “a series of juxtaposed ‘traces’ of absences” that live television glues together with talk during so-called live coverage (van Loon, 1997, p. 96).

Critical scholarship tends to unsettle the clear-seeming structures of time in the news. In television, particularly, modern time is a supply of modules that have exchange value (van der Poel, 1997). The “temporal flow” in television implies steady, linear progress and allows journalists to assign causes and effects (Pan et al., 2001). TV news takes a narrative form, and storytelling makes time visible (Ricoeur, 1984). But the story journalists tell about “working against the clock” is itself another narrative, one that leads to systematic “over-accessing” of the “powerful and privileged” (S. Hall et al., 1978, p. 58), who are reachable now and prepared to respond quickly. Rather than being a scarce resource, time is a malleable aspect of events, giving journalists much more freedom to select and adjust stories than one would expect, given their descriptions of a rush-to-the-present in their work. The urgency and time compression of television, critics say, is illusory.

Time for a TV Journalist

Scott Talan has experienced news time as an elected official and television political reporter. When he was in the third grade, his family moved from New York City into the East Bay community of Lafayette, California. He first encountered politics in the Reagan era, as an elected student council member at the University of California at Davis. The campus press was “Democratic leaning” and “liked to target” those “not part of their ilk” in student government, he said in our 2001 interview. He “was fascinated” by how “all

these stories and pictures and headlines . . . came about.” He ran and lost an election for student president and, after finishing a degree in politics and economics in 1985, returned to the family home to care for his ailing mother. Two years later he made a run for city council, an unpaid position, and lost. But he again stood for and won election in 1989.

He was the youngest member in Lafayette City Council history, and local media made him a source for routine coverage: the only councilman to speak, for instance, in *San Francisco Chronicle* stories on the 1991 debates over pay boxes for city parking lots (Why not “paint the lockboxes red, white and blue?” he says; September 6, p. A-19), a bronze statue of the city’s namesake (“a ‘safe’ piece of public art,” he says; Tuesday, September 17, p. A-14), and plans for a farmers’ market (which he “proposed,” Thursday, October 3, p. A-20). When Domino’s Pizza wanted to build a store at a busy intersection, he got national attention by asking the franchise to waive its 30-minute delivery guarantee, for safety reasons. Domino’s refused and lost its bid.

After three years, the council elected him mayor in 1992, at age 29 the “Youngest Mayor in the Bay Area” (*Chronicle*, November 25, p. A-17). In his first month he faced trouble with garbage haulers, whose proposed 45 percent hike in fees “raises your eyebrows,” he says: “there’s lots of money to be made in garbage” (*Chronicle*, December 14, 1992, p. A-15). By spring the *Chronicle* ran a profile of him at age 30, with a photo and the quotation, “The less I sleep, the more energy I have,” in the subtitle (April 19, 1993, p. A-13). Time was clearly at a premium in his political life. The piece noted his popularity “among the large anti-tax faction of the town,” which “incorporated in 1968 as a ‘no-property-tax’ city.” But a fellow city council member groused that his energy might have been raising false hopes. He decided not to seek reelection and left the city council at the end of his mayoral term in 1993.

His next career, in the media, had already begun. In college, after losing the student presidential election, he filled the extra time on his hands by creating a campus radio program, a general talk show with a quiz and questions for discussion. The year he won a seat the Lafayette City Council “was bittersweet”: his girlfriend broke up with him, and so he filled his time with “a hobby,” a similar talk show but this time for public access cable. On the weekly “Bay Area Talks,” he hosted figures such as sports agent and attorney Leigh Steinberg and Kevin P. O’Brien, the longtime general manager of KTVU (Channel 2), whom a *Chronicle* columnist later called “one of the most colorful and successful broadcasting executives in Bay Area history” (November 9, 2001, p. D-2). Under O’Brien’s leadership the station, part of Cox Enterprises, managed to become a Fox affiliate and also win a “reputation for quality” (p. D-2). Talan recalled that after his public access interview, O’Brien said, “If you ever want to go into TV, call me.”

A few months later Talan did just that. O’Brien invited him to put together a story, which took him two days (rather than the two hours it takes experienced TV journalists). With that “introduction into real news in the real world,” Talan left his promising career in government and spent the next summer completing an intensive broadcast journalism certificate program at

Stanford, which had students produce work at a San Francisco CBS affiliate, KPIX-TV. The training and clips landed him a television news job. Like many broadcast reporters, his career was relatively brief. He started with an NBC affiliate, KNVN Channel 24 in Chico, California. He would wake up, listen to “Morning Edition” on NPR, read the newspaper while watching local news at breakfast, follow radio news during his commute, and work in an office with television news in the background. Coming up with stories usually involved more time off the clock, so that before the morning news meeting, when he had to pitch a story, he had everything ready to pull the story together in a matter of hours. “The quicker your pitch can be,” he says, “the better.” But then comes the pressure to produce a package.

Working long hours for low pay, he began angling for something better. He won a fellowship, funded by the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation, to visit and study journalism in Germany, France, and the then-emerging European Union. From there he landed work for KRQE-TV, the CBS affiliate in Albuquerque, as a political reporter based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In the capital city, he covered not only the state legislature but also Governor Gary Johnson, a Republican who proposed legalizing drugs such as heroin and marijuana. The case of Los Alamos National Laboratory scientist Wen Ho Lee, whose name the *New York Times* published as the target of a spy investigation that fell apart, with recriminations for journalism and for the Clinton Administration and the courts, was a local story for Talan.

In Santa Fe he could escape his Capitol Building cubicle to take time with sources. He would try to “make friends or be friendly,” he said in our interview: “find out where they’re from, get to know them as a person,” rather than “just doing the interview and leaving.” On a tip from a police sergeant, he learned that a resident of Chimayo, a community about thirty miles north of Santa Fe, was “putting up posters” exposing “who the heroin dealers are — risking his own life” to help the neighborhood. Talan did an interview on neutral ground, the sergeant’s office, with the resident, who agreed to appear with his face darkened. Then Talan drove by some homes of “suspected heroin dealers and even walked up to doors, with my photographer forty feet away— with me with a microphone—to see if anyone would answer. No one would answer.” The team got pictures of the activist’s signs. “We even found some needles on the ground and took pictures that day. So that’s how we put together the story.” Afterward, Talan kept in touch with the resident, who was the source for subsequent reporting — time well spent.

In our interview, he also described work on a slow day, July 14, 1998: “There’s no news. It’s summer.” The calendar shows “it’s Bastille day,” and rumor has it “there’s a French Consulate in Santa Fe,” of all places. He and the photographer pitched a diary story, saying, “Trust us. And it was a slow news day; they couldn’t argue. They had nothing else.” At the consulate was a fellow “who could have been an actor in a French movie, sitting poolside—I mean it couldn’t be any better—collar up, and he spoke with a thick accent.” At a French restaurant was “a guy named Paul Pairee,” and “the Tour du France was also happening,” so they “went to a bike shop.” They visited “a

French bakery” where Talan bought a baguette. “France just won the World Cup,” and at a soccer field he “was willing for my standup to use my head to put a soccer ball in the goal.” It “turned out to be a heck of a story” and received “rave reviews from people in the newsroom and regular people who saw it.” But after about two years of serious and sometimes “wacky New Mexico stories,” KRQE hired a different news director, who fired the balding Talan (and in 2000 hired the actress Andrea Thompson from the TV series “NYPD Blue,” who went on to a brief, controversial stint on CNN Headline News).

Talan then went after a job in Florida by sending in story ideas and studying up on state politics, eventually getting work reporting statewide for NBC affiliates. There he describes a key experience in a reporter’s timing: while covering the 2000 presidential election recount, he “scooped others in getting the first interview” with then Secretary of State Katherine Harris. After a cabinet meeting, reporters “were waiting for Governor Jeb Bush to come down the stairwell.” Talan asked his boss, another reporter, “Why don’t I scout Katherine Harris? There’s no reason for two of us to be here.” Talan knew which door she used and waited there, “but she blew right past us.” So he “opened the side door where the state police were.” They said, “You can’t come in here.” But instead of leaving, Talan asked if the entryway was private. They said, “No,” and he had “them on record, the camera rolling”:

And so I just peel open the door, and they let me in. Now they won’t let my photographer in, and I pretty much just yanked him in. And the cops—they knew us—they just said, “Go in.” We go up to the dais—I told my guy through the mike, “Roll, just roll-roll-roll, have the tape going”—walk up to her. She walks away from us and we kept walking toward her. And all the other reporters are outside waiting for Governor Bush. And I just walked up and first question: “Madame Secretary, how can you tell Florida voters that elected you, that you’ve done the right thing?” Legitimate, serious question, fair question, tough for her to say, “No comment.” She starts talking. I reel off four other questions—even stuff, light stuff like, “What’s it like to have Jay Leno talk about you unflatteringly?” So, the bottom line: after that was done, all the networks purchased it from us because it was the first time she’d talked . . .

The timing involved doing what “a normal person who’s not a news reporter” would not likely do, that is, asserting public access, moving quickly past the guards, keeping the camera on, and asking rapid-fire questions. Talan could push because he believed a million Florida viewers had his back. But competition also drove him to the gambit, “because if I walk around and another reporter sees me walk in” and asks, “What’s Talan up to?” the others will follow, and “there goes the scoop.” The payoff is profit for his news organization, yes, but also a demonstration of his mastery of how broadcast journalists must handle time.

He left Florida after eighteen months to study for a master’s degree in Public Administration at Harvard Kennedy School of Government, where I interviewed him. He then moved between private and public sectors, becoming a

communications officer for a Harvard research center, a writer-producer for Charlie Gibson and Diane Sawyer, co-hosts of the ABC program, “Good Morning America,” a producer for UNICEF, and then communications director for the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, while teaching journalism on the side. In his public relations career, which began early on at the March of Dimes and the Mount Diablo Hospital Foundation in Concord, California (during his years as a city councilman), he has tried to get news time for non-profit groups. At Johns Hopkins University, he has taught a summer course, Pitches, Press Releases, and Messages. He says television leaves viewers with quick impressions, “and if you can do it in less time, that means another story can get in.” He prides himself on doing “a story in a minute—the beautiful part about that” is answering, “What is the story?” The interviews and pictures “are just telling that one sentence thing. What’s the point? Why am I listening to this? Why am I telling you this? Why do I care as a viewer?” Getting “down the essence” is good, “and that tight time frame forces you” to ask, “What’s this story really about?” His careers in government, journalism, and non-profits show that TV news runs on modern time, hammering home the value of time, the competition for a scarce resource, and the key role of news as the mediator between the powerful and the public.

Internet News

In 1969, novelist Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., described a character who “has come unstuck in time.” Billy Pilgrim is “a senile widower” who may wake up on his wedding day or walk from one room in 1951 into another in 1941, then return to find it 1963. With no control, he has become “spastic in time” (p. 20). Popular commentary about the internet describes a world not so different from Billy Pilgrim’s. In 2000, Jonathan Alter wrote that “television is, unquestionably, more central to American politics than newspapers and magazines,” but he saw the web as a threat, fragmenting “the old media firmament . . . almost beyond recognition” (pp. 89–90). Social scientists place the internet “at the heart of the 24-hour news revolution” (Kansas & Gitlin, 1999, p. 73). Technology has created new conditions not just for journalists but also for ordinary users. A writer for *Slate* magazine explained in 2001 how “the transnational, time-contracting interconnectedness of the internet has changed our lives” (*New York Times Magazine*, Sunday, June 3, p. 17), by, for instance, broadcasting e-mail messages containing locker-room braggadocio into an enlarged public, costing users their privacy, reputations, and even jobs. By 2003, Howard Rheingold lamented that journalism had become trivialized. Newspapers, radio, and television turned audiences into consumers, but the new, mobile media create users “with powers of their own” (p. 197). The change affects temporal experience, fragmenting time, making filling it seem more urgent, and building a sense among the public of being much busier. This despite the documented increases in leisure hours in wealthy countries, where the labor force lives longer and works fewer years (Castells, 2000).

Journalists say the new media have wrought profound changes in their

work. Soon after becoming president and CEO of the Associated Press, Tom Curley wrote that “a journalist’s job is actually harder” (*Quill*, September 2004 Supplement, p. 40). The same Society of Professional Journalists magazine has since published “Time-saving Tips” to help journalists cope (May 2006, p. 26). “Goodbye Gutenberg,” a special issue of the Harvard *Nieman Reports*, a quarterly journalism magazine, describes how the interconnections of web information embed stories in a matrix with the past and create a different relationship with the present: with the new regime of continuous updating, “deadlines are gone” (and were “artificial constructs” in the first place, Winter 2006, p. 67). One practical result is the creation of a *continuous news desk*, responsible for coordinating the updates needed online. While staffing it for the *New York Times*, Neil Chase wrote that the new practices contradict the image of journalists spending today “doing the interviews and thinking through the analysis that form tomorrow’s story” (p. 64). Reporters instead contribute to blogs and other new kinds of journalism, either by “sneaking in bits of online work whenever there’s time” or by engaging in “smart time management” (p. 66). Almar Latour, managing editor of the Wall Street Journal Online, describes “the urgency of getting things out” but points to online opportunities, such as “reaching a constituency of readers very fast, and getting feedback” (quoted in *Media Business*, October 1, 2007, p. 29).

A main component in the internet journalists’ story about time involves the accelerating *news cycles*. Each new technology sped them up. Just as larger, faster presses made more editions possible for newspapers, successive waves of broadcasting technology gave the public more free headlines over the air, eroding the market for newspapers and forcing print journalists to rethink their content (see Chapter 1). The emergence of 24-hour news on cable erased the older broadcast cycles that turned on the daily deadline for evening network news. Subsequent changes in technology, not only the internet but also newer mobile devices, increased competition and stepped up the cycles. And journalists anticipated the fallout for themselves and for citizens.

Social scientists tend to accept journalists’ view of a time-obsessed, present-focused cycle and a chronic scarcity of time (e.g., Briggs, 1982). Researchers replay accounts of accelerating news cycles as a frame for research (e.g., Wicks & Kern, 1995) or as background for declines either in news quality — journalists have less time to reflect and so make more mistakes, and issuing corrections becomes more difficult (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2000) — or in government quality — leaders have less time to make decisions (Gilboa, 2003). The internet poses a threat to older news outlets, especially those serving local communities (Patterson, 2007a). Web traffic shows growth for the sites of major national newspapers and television networks, as well as smaller broadcasters, but not local newspapers, and all news organization sites have grown more slowly compared to other online news disseminators, such as internet service providers and search engines, among others (Patterson, 2007b).

Studies have also measured journalists’ perceptions of how the shortening cycles harm news. Radio stations in one survey said the shift to 24-hour news formats reduced the share of serious stories and expanded softer news features

(Riffe & Shaw, 1990). In surveys and interviews journalists say they now use sources in superficial ways and have “less time for serious reporting and checking of facts” (Plasser, 2005, p. 59). News agency logs document journalists’ view that cycle-by-cycle monitoring increases competitive pressures (Palmer, 2003). A study comparing candidate advertisements to news content found that journalists came to rely more on candidates’ agendas (from press releases, for instance), although less so on television (Ridout & Mellen, 2007). The internet adds to these disparities by creating a digital divide for news outlets. Websites of smaller newspapers lag behind larger ones in interactive capabilities (Greer & Mensing, 2004), and news online has begun to diverge from print, as some organizations expand wire service content online (Gasher & Gabrielle, 2004).

Critics and social scientists agree with journalists that a shift has occurred in the understanding of time. They cite changing technology as a root cause, especially acute under competitive market conditions, and journalists as a result race in faster cycles that debase content.

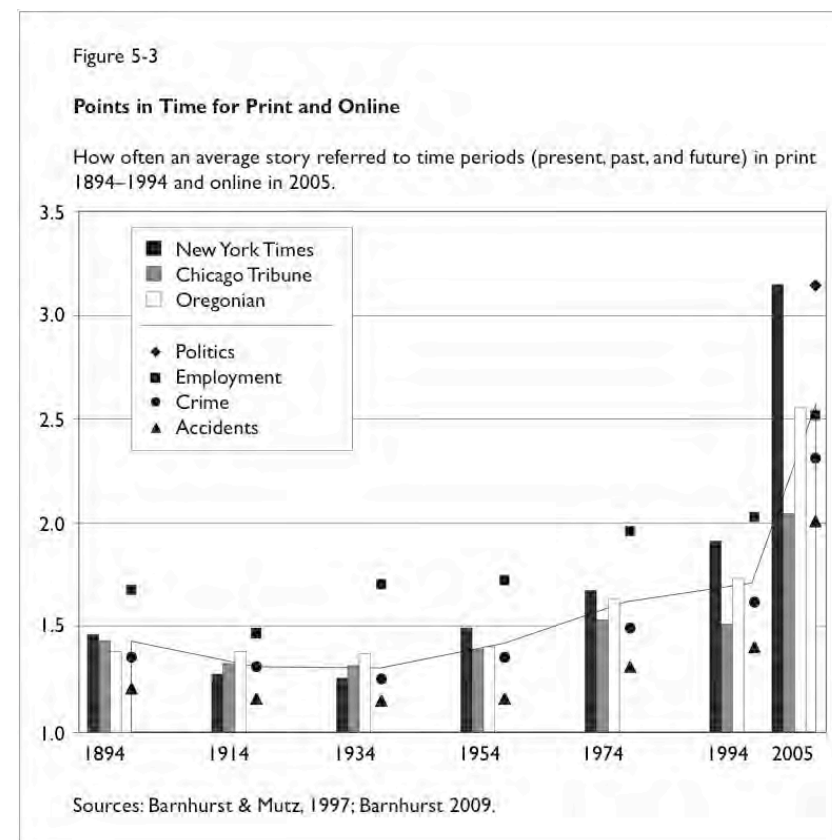
Testing the Time Shift Online

How solid are these assertions? My studies of newspaper web sites confirm that change is underway in news content. In their prior history as print-only outlets, the national *New York Times*, regional *Chicago Tribune*, and local *Portland Oregonian* had slowly increased references to the past, to trends, and, as the turn of each century approached, to the future (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997). After moving online, the papers’ electronic editions continued the same pattern in the *when* of news but at a faster pace (see Figure 5-3).

The changes were not without precedent. Overall time references doubled between 1934 and 1994, ramping up to the larger increase in the decade after going online. The content changed temporally in almost every way. References to past and future became much more common per story, and references to change over time increased. But the differences were not uniform. Over the previous century, employment stories always referred to other times more often than did accident and crime stories. All of them followed the same upward course with almost identical timing after dipping slightly between 1894 and 1914. In 2005, the topics from the previous study (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997) became more uniform, with accident stories mentioning somewhat fewer time frames and crime shifting closer to employment stories. An exaggerated change occurred in political stories, which jumped between 2001 and 2005 (Barnhurst, 2002; 2009). For politics, reporters made more than twice as many references to distinct time periods as they had for the general run of reporting a century before.

Among the news outlets, differences became more pronounced. The disparity first appeared in the 1994 data, before the internet became an important factor, and increased in the following decade. The *Times* since the 1950s had referred to other time periods with the greatest frequency and by 2005 had tripled that rate. The *Tribune*, by contrast, had mentioned the fewest different times in its coverage since the 1950s. Even though it doubled its rate by 2005,

its stories referred to the fewest past, future, and changed times. The *Oregonian* traveled a middle course, but the gaps between it and the other two papers enlarged by 2005.



The online editions also diverged in other ways from the print editions. Although a majority of online and print stories were identical or had only minor changes to the headline or dateline, about one in seven stories had larger differences. Some full stories online appeared as digest items or briefs in print, probably because of space limitations. But about a quarter of the stories online never saw print. In both cases, the contrasts most often applied to wire stories rather than the work of in-house reporters.

It remains unclear how any general time reorientation underway in society extended to news content as it went online. The main argument about accelerating news cycles may hold, but is not a product of the internet. The term *news cycle* emerged in the 1920s (Jenson White, 2008), when newspapers were issuing multiple editions daily but references to *when* were in decline. The ramp-up in *when* references in our studies coincided with the television be-

coming a news outlet, which began with an evening broadcast and added morning news in 1952. TV loomed larger for newspapers, but radio stations had covered important news events since the 1920s and were distributing regular news content by the 1940s. Their cycles were hourly by the 1960s. And all news media had ways of covering breaking stories by interrupting the normal news cycles. After the founding of cable news in the 1980s, along with the emergence of satellite transmissions, when the phrase, “24-hour news cycle” appeared (Jenson White, 2008), the newspapers in our study slowed their rate of growth in time references. Wire services preceded the internet in moving toward a continual cycle and finally abandoned the AM and PM cycle designations entirely in 2000. In short, the story journalists tell about newspapers responding to the increasing competition from other media with shorter cycles is inconsistent not only with data on the stories they published but also with events in news cycle history.

Despite the prominence of news cycles in the imagination of newswriters and academics, research on the phenomenon has been rare. One of the few studies, a content analysis and survey dating from the 1980s (Lacy & Bernstein, 1988), found that an outlet’s position in the news cycle had less to do with content differences than did other organizational conditions: its staff size, news content size, and audience size.

Time references in the newspapers we studied decreased at the turn of the previous century, the last time scholars suggest that a revision in time concepts occurred (Kern, 1983), but not in the decade as the internet emerged. Journalists this time responded by doing more of the same, expanding references to other time periods, not changing course. The availability of electronic news archives and search engines made referring to other times more convenient, but the internet cannot explain the increase in references to the future. That practice had been increasing as part of the older transformation from event-centered news to the new long journalism. In other words, the inclination to refer to other past, present, and future events preceded and likely drove the use of resources the internet made available. Reporters and editors, who point to competition and the internet, no doubt felt busier and overworked: they were not only persisting in but also *accelerating* their progress toward longer, more temporally complex journalism. The growing long news already had them doing more. The causes journalists and social scientists point to and the consequences they see for the quality of news and policymaking flow from journalists sticking with the old-fashioned, modern sense of time.

Just in Time News

Theorists offer alternative explanations for the current transformation in conceiving of time. From one perspective, time by the end of the 20th century had become postmodern. David Harvey (1989), in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, suggests that modes of production embody time. He cites the view of German existentialist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, that in the modern world, the newspaper replaced prayer to mark the passing of the day (p. 273). A kind of narrative realism, typical also of newspapers, came to pre-

sent events raw, as a succession of causes and effects. Modern time synchronizes multiple, disparate events across space, making them present at once, just as on a newspaper page. Modern aesthetics then manages to tame the jumble of co-present events, just as our research found in the modern newspaper, which arrays events on the page to map conditions in society (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). One of Harvey’s main arguments is that a sea change occurred after 1972, when new ways of experiencing time came to dominate. The postmodern sense of time collapses events and time into images in which “aesthetics predominate over ethics” (Harvey, 1989, p. 322).

In *The Network Society*, Manuel Castells (2000) agrees. He calls the new temporal concept *timeless time*, a “space of flows” where global capital works in “real time,” manufactures value by capturing future time, and in the process absorbs time itself, damaging the “correspondence between production and reward” (p. 467). Postmodern time breaks down the connection between biology and society, producing a kind of arrhythmia by ignoring key elements in the cycle of life and society such as death and war — events that occur to others only and repeat numbingly in the media. Narratives such as history become mere collections of images from the available stock, reassembled for each genre, including news, to guide consumer decisions.

Although aiming to encompass journalism along with entertainment and advertising, the postmodern or network concept of time does not describe the texts journalists have been producing. Our studies of journalism reveal that news content is growing longer and more elaborate in references to time periods, not eliminating sequencing as the theorists of postmodernism expect. Journalism texts persist in modernist temporal narratives laden with professional aspirations and embedded in newsroom relations. But Castells and others acknowledge that the “new concept of temporality” leaves behind some functions and persons (Castells, 2000, p. 465).

From another perspective, the current shift in understanding time fits within a long development of temporal concepts. Modern time emerged as an external flow in the physics of Sir Isaac Newton and became a chain of causality in the 18th-century philosophy of Immanuel Kant (Nowotny, 1992). Linear, clock time worked in modern thinking as an *a priori* intuition about the world. In the 19th century, sociologists such as Émile Durkheim proposed the idea of *social* time, which goes in cycles in response to natural time, and Anthony Giddens later argued that social time takes the form of change and the movement of resources. But modern time contains a dichotomy, being linear (moving from past, through present, to the future) but simultaneously cyclical (Bergmann, 1992). By the early 20th century, the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl had added the concept of subjective or *inner* time and Alfred Schütz, who bridged between phenomenology and sociology, had added the concept of historical or *world* time. Later in the century, another theory, the social construction of time, emerged (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), which acknowledges differing senses of time for each cultural group. Women, for example, might have distinct time experiences, and feminists have argued that, as markets invade, women must defend private time (Nowotny, 1994). Something

similar may be working among journalists.

By the end of the 20th century, questions arose about the dualities in concepts of time: social vs. natural, cyclical vs. linear, universal vs. plural. Equating clock time to objective and quantifiable nature, in contrast to cyclical time of subjective social life, for example, contains an irony (Adam, 1988), because all concepts of time are integral to the natural world and its cycles, *except for* linear, clock time, an entirely human construction. Michael Crichton had a similar insight in the novel, *Timeline*: “time doesn’t flow. The fact that we think time passes is just an accident of our nervous systems — of the way things look to us. In reality, time doesn’t pass; we pass” (1999, p. 108).

Crichton arrives at the previously ignored temporal understanding of Chicago sociologist George Herbert Mead, who outlined a theory of action in time (see Nowotny, 1992). Instead of a motion from past to future, acts are events that emerge and *make* the present, simultaneously making the past and future as perspectives (or horizons). Events constitute time, through what Mead calls *emergence*, any novel interruption in the continuity of life (see Bergmann, 1992). The present is reality, the past is the hypotheses about what preceded, and the future is the reconstructions of what may lead out from the event (Nowotny, 1992), but they all emerge in every act. Citing Mead, sociologist Barbara Adam says that humans are “activity-matter, causal and non-local communication networks, biological clocks that beat in ‘off-beat’ to the rhythms of our earth: growing and decaying dynamically in interdependence with other systems” (1988, p. 218), and so time itself “evolved as an aspect of sociality” (p. 218), which exists not only among humans but among and between species and the objects of the earth.

In this scheme, the media play a central role in defining acts — such as, for instance, the risks growing out of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and the potential for political responses (Adam, 1999). Adam (2004) follows the phenomenologists in distinguishing an *act* from *action*. Action is the ongoing present, but humans define parts of the ongoing action as acts. An act is known *retrospectively*, as humans look back and explain, and *prospectively* as humans project forward and attribute potential meanings. Journalists select acts from an unlimited array of actions (or *occurrences*, see Chapter 3), and only those acts become news events. But journalists’ professional expectations shape their choices — the events they recognize as news along with all other aspects of their work, words, and productions (Bell, 1995). Their world in the newsroom, television studio, or computer workspace constitutes time “interactively and subjectively” (Adam, 2004, p. 66), but following institutional expectations established under earlier modern concepts of time. Whether the event is tragedy or comedy, journalists impose order and sequencing, present the event in relation to others in the modernist present, to the past of previous news stories, and to the future of policy options and decisions.

In its history, journalism has always lagged behind other cultural institutions (Barnhurst & Owens, 2008). Newspapers are stuck in late-19th-century modern time, broadcast news in mid-20th-century modern time, and their web editions reflect the same institutional time memory. New interactive and mo-

bile technologies create a space of temporal discomfort to journalists, whether it operates in Mead’s emergent time or in the postmodernists’ timeless time. The old senses of time empowered journalists, giving them clear tools for selection and sequence, the discipline of deadlines, and the competition of the scoop and the exclusive story, with the underlying assumption that time is money. The new sense of time removes from journalists the illusion of some control in a political life formerly attuned to their own news cycles. If communication is a ritual, then journalism is a prime means of arresting time, akin to monumental architecture, the plastic arts, and myth. James Carey wrote: “Journalism is the keeping of a serial biography of a community in a more or less fixed and regular way” (2007, p. 8). But journalists, like everybody else, now realize they must create (not spend) time through “cultural rhythms, sequences, and duration” (Adam, 2004, p. 97). Suddenly (it seems), news practice has become more improvisatory, a performing art like music, dance, and oral narrative. Mainstream American journalism, at least in our measurements, does not compress and process time, but perhaps its competitors, the news aggregators, bloggers, and portals, are more adept in the current time regime. And that may be why the old journalism is failing.

What frames the classic of science fiction, *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells (1895), is a meeting where the Time Traveller tells his story to the book’s narrator and several notables. Among them are the Editor and the Journalist, and Wells makes sport of their inability to comprehend what they hear. The Editor is a glutton, who eats without waiting for the Time Traveller. While this late and disheveled host goes to tidy himself up, the Editor thinks aloud in headlines: “Remarkable Behaviour of an Eminent Scientist.” The befuddled Journalist looks for an angle. “What’s the game?” he asks, imagining panhandling, a swindle, or some other news chestnut. In response to their curiosity, the narrator finally mentions the Time Machine, but the Editor first raises objections and then resorts to caricature. “The Journalist, too, would not believe at any price, and joined the Editor in the easy work of heaping ridicule on the whole thing.” Amid the shouted jokes about “The Special Correspondent in the Day after To-morrow,” the Time Traveller returns. “‘Story!’ cried the Editor.” He offers “a shilling a line for a verbatim report.” Even after hearing the Time Traveller out, the Editor remains skeptical, while the Journalist is all practicality: time being money, he is checking his watch and worrying about a cab. On the ride home he declares “the tale a ‘gaudy lie.’” The two journalists embody an institution already stuck in time more than a century ago.

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