

# TOWARDS A LABOUR- PROCESS HISTORY OF NEWSWORKERS

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This essay explores writing a history of newswriters from a labour-process theory perspective and attempts to demonstrate how journalism history may be rewritten as a history of the class experience of newswriters. Towards this end, the essay examines theories of the labour process by Harry Braverman (1974) and Michael Burawoy (1979; 1985) with the goal of suggesting their implications for labour historians in the field of journalism.

Although subjects of newswriting and labour have remained objects of descriptive studies in journalism history, they are typically part of a chronicle of celebrated events or famous individuals. Instead, a history of newswriting needs to pay more attention to inconspicuous changes in the structural environment and the everyday experiences of anonymous newswriters. Such a task is possible only through a theoretically informed inquiry into labour history; in fact, theories of the labour process may potentially become major contributors to an understanding of newswriters and their histories.

The theoretical perspective of this essay has been informed by critical Marxist theories and incorporates the notion of class into key elements of a labour history of newswriting. It rejects an economist notion of class, however, and chooses to address the subjective and cultural-ideological dimensions of class experiences among newswriters. Although the notion of class experience is not a clearly defined concept, it emphasises a culturalist approach and suggests the significance of a linkage, without a necessary correspondence, between the structural location and the subjective, cultural aspect of newswriting.

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## Why Has Class Been Missing in Journalism History?

Mainstream communication research, especially in the field of journalism history, has failed to pay sufficient attention to the subjects of labour and class. A few critics attribute this failure to the problematic nature of paradigms underlying standard journalism history textbooks. Issues of labour and class escaped the attention in prominent paradigms, such as "a whig interpretation of journalism history," with its emphasis on history as constant progress, biography, and a sequence of great narratives (Carey, 1974; Hardt 1990; Brennen 1995).

There have been a few attempts to introduce the idea of class into media research and to propose a bottom-up perspective of journalism history as a theoretical alternative. For instance, Hanno Hardt (1990) calls for a labour-centred approach, which emphasises the importance of the working class and the problems of labour in an industrialised society and acknowledges the cultural and political determinants of the professional environment of newswriters (also, Hardt 1996; Im 1990; Brennen 1995). However, details of an alternative history of anonymous newswriters remain unclear.

But the lack of a labour perspective in journalism history does not merely suggest an absence of research projects; it also indicates the absence of a proper theoretical framework for grasping significant aspects of the lives of newswriters. It also does not mean to provide a chronicle of events from the lives of working journalists, which has its place among substantial amounts of descriptive, empirical research. Instead, grasping significant aspects of newswriting depends on understanding the evolving circumstances of the workplace within its social, cultural, and economic context, and connecting them to theoretical issues, such as the skill-composition of labour, labour-market structures, the shifting division of labour, or the political culture of trade unionism. Because historical archives fail to reveal answers to these questions, journalism historians must move beyond traditional sources. For instance, specific concepts may underscore or obscure the importance of certain aspects of newswriting, which often become inconspicuous in historical documents. Thus, the top-down approach of traditional journalism history, with its emphasis on institutions and celebrities, leads historians to ignore less salient changes in the workplace, like the working culture and the work experience of ordinary workers.

The importance of a theoretical perspective may be illustrated by demonstrating problems in recent research on newswriting. A few authors have explored how important aspects of the work environment, such as a "hierarchical division of newsroom labour" and the evolution of the status of newswriters (Solomon 1995) or industrial and technological changes (Salcetti 1995; Kaul 1986) have affected newswriters. Since these studies focus on working-class concerns during a specific period, it could be argued that the time span from the late nineteenth century through the Depression era provides a convenient rhetorical context for the portrayal of newswriters as members of an extremely impoverished working class, since it represents a most dramatically traumatic moment in the lives of anonymous newswriters. It may be difficult to extend this image of newswriters to an investigation of more contemporary newsroom labour. Thus, despite their significant contribution to the field of labour history, these studies also suggest why labour historians need a theoretically informed approach.

Theories of the labour process, which Braverman's work has inspired, represent such a theoretical approach to labour history (Braverman 1974). Traditional business history tends to consider organisational and technological changes in terms of improvement of technical efficiency or progress. However, Braverman argues that the labour process involves social relations, which, in turn, can be reduced to relations between capital and labour. Braverman reconstructs a critical theory of management ideologies from the chronicles of organisational and technological changes. He suggests that industrialisation gradually destroyed craft as a unity of mental and manual labour which led to a significant degradation of labour. Technological innovations enabled management to tighten control over the labour process, while workers gradually lost skills and the scope of discretion in daily job executions. Braverman's argument activated debates over issues of control, skill, and deskilling (for a review, see Thompson 1989). The resulting labour-process theories seem applicable to journalism history, since they may offer useful insights into how technological changes, in particular, have effected the class experience of newswriters.

### Is the Idea of Class Viable in Journalism History?

Braverman's work has revived the notion of class as a central element in the history of technology and labour. He attempts to connect changes in occupational structures to the making and transformation of class. A determination of class locations of newswriters, however, is not only an issue for academic debates, but has real consequences for the political orientations and patterns of trade-unionism in the newspaper industry. Even if a Marxist notion of antagonistic class relations is not accepted, a sort of "class relations," whatever the nature of class, needs to be explained.

Yet, the notion of class has been ignored or considered irrelevant to journalism history. In addition, the idea of newswriters as members of the working class may be unacceptable to many journalists and journalism scholars in the United States. Journalism historians have shown a bias against such a concept. According to Carey, for instance, there has never been "a thorough-going Marxist interpretation of press history" (1974, 3). Such a bias and the absence of the concept itself suggest the complicated and problematic nature of applying class to newswriters. But just as the notion of class may not be refuted on the basis of professional romanticism, class may not be constructed based on the fantasy of radical intellectuals.

Fundamentally, it is necessary to examine the contributions and limitations of the notion of class to a labour history of newswriters. Although newsroom employees are wage earners like manual workers, they are white-collar workers who are politically less subordinate than their blue-collar counterparts. Also, the ideological orientations of newsroom employees are considerably different from those of traditional manual workers. What annoys labour historians further is that the subjective understanding of newswriters would not accept a working-class position that is determined by working conditions. A typical example emerges from the discussions surrounding the formation of the American Newspaper Guild in the 1930s (Leab 1970). Most newsroom employees during the early twentieth century experienced extremely poor working conditions and a lack of job security (Smythe 1980). Yet, their wide-spread cynicism towards unionisation lasted for a long time (Johnson 1972). The bohemian culture among newswriters and their reluctance to trade-unionism militated against attempts to improve working conditions (National Labour Relations Board 1938, 114).

Furthermore, one must examine what kept newsroom employees from subjectively developing a working-class consciousness, even when their objective positions vis-à-vis their blue-collar colleagues were inferior. In other words, without a thorough understanding of the newsroom culture, attempts to locate the formation of newswriters as a class will fail.

The difficulty of introducing the idea of class into media studies may be attributable to the "exceptional" nature of newswriting itself. But the problem also lies in the ambiguity of the term, which has a broad range of meanings. Thus, the division between those who declare "the end of class" (Pakulski and Waters 1996) and others who continue the tradition, may be based on divergent conceptualisations of class. Ira Katznelson (1986, 6-7) suggests that the problem stems from an essentialist notion of class, where "class ideas, organisations, and activity tend to be inferred from class structure," and "class formation is seen as an all-or-nothing matter." Based on a comparative study of class formations in France, Germany, and United States, he argues that "there has never been a working class with revolutionary consciousness in the fullest and most demanding sense of the term." He suggests that class needs to be thought of "as a concept with four connected layers of theory and history: those of structure, ways of life, dispositions, and collective action" (14). Although a necessary correspondence among these layers may not be assumed.

Katznelson's definition indicates that class may not be understood merely as a problem of locating clear-cut class boundaries. Instead, the task of labour historians would be to chronicle the process of a loose class formation among workers rather than to assign them class locations. The contradictions among economic, political, and ideological constituents of class are particularly conspicuous at middle-class levels that reveal bourgeois and working-class traits, according to classical Marxist class formation. Thus, the professional segment of newswriting is close to the working class in economic terms, while its political and ideological traits, like job authority and occupational culture, may be identified with a professional middle class. Even though it would be possible to identify newswriters objectively as a class, that class still seems to be in the process of being made. Consequently, labour historians may benefit from less reductionist class theorists within Marxist scholarship.

Nicos Poulantzas (1982, 107) notes that "purely economic criteria are not sufficient to determine and locate social classes ... it becomes absolutely necessary to refer to positions within the political and ideological relations of the social division of labour." In particular, Erik Olin Wright's notion of "contradictory class locations" (Wright 1978) conceptualises the indeterminate-class occupations as sharing the characteristics of both, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; such a view may be helpful for a study of the professional segment of newswriters. For example, questions may be raised about the influence of the "class position" of newswriters on the political orientation of journalistic practices, or why newsroom employees, despite their economically defined working-class position, prefer a professional rather than a trade-union model (National Labour Relations Board 1938, 114; Johnson 1972).

The indeterminate and de-centred nature of class underscores the importance of cultural, ideological, and political elements, while taking into account the economic structural environment of workers, in conceptualising class characteristics of newswriters. Such a notion of class also indicates that it would be possible to interpret the distinctive nature of newswriting as one historical form of class experience. For

instance, class subcultures, such as the shop-floor culture of newswriters, may be understood as historically specific products, which comprise not only working environments but also non-class aspects of their location. Labour historians of newswriting need to incorporate a cultural studies approach into the study of work/class experience of newswriters. They may benefit from the insights of Carey's notion of "cultural history," i.e., "past forms of imagination," or "the entire 'structure of feeling'" of people in the past (1974, 4). Also, E. P. Thompson (1963) and Herbert Gutman (1976) show specific examples of labour history, which successfully synthesises the focus on experiences and consciousness with analyses of class and social structure.

## Technology and Deskilling

Even though one attempts to avoid an economist notion of class, a structural analysis of economic environments of the workplace is crucial for understanding the class experience of newswriters. Braverman's research demonstrates that the class relations between capital and labour and the degradation of labour represent essential features of the workers' experience on the shop floor.

Especially, Braverman's thesis of "deskilling" and his unique definition of skill allow labour historians to investigate the significant, though less prominent and often invisible, transitions in the work experience of anonymous workers. Braverman, following Marx's ideal of labour, emphasises the importance of the unity of manual and mental elements of labour and defines skill more broadly than "dexterity," in order to subsume the subjective dimension. The concept of skill involves "the combination of knowledge of materials and process with the practical manual dexterities required to carry on a specific branch of production" (Braverman 1974, 443). Craft serves as a historical archetype of skill, in that craft emphasises learning skill in its totality of experience.

The deskilling thesis represents an interpretation of how technological devices have transformed the status and skill requirements of a job in newspaper organisations. The technological innovations, such as the linotype and computer, take on new historical significance when re-interpreted in terms of their impact on capital-labour relations and labour autonomy. Although his thesis seems to emphasise the labour-degrading characteristics of technology, the introduction of technology comes to a considerable extent from the exigency of management to cheapen and control the labour process.

Journalism historians may translate the thesis into research agendas addressable in the context of journalism history. The first issue is whether deskilling can be affirmed empirically as a historical trend in the history of newswriters. While Braverman suggests that general deskilling is a long-term historical trend of the capitalist labour process, empirical studies show that the actual process has involved a heterogeneous process of both deskilling and reskilling. The deskilling thesis may be applicable to some sectors of newswriters. The decline of the printing craft in the newspaper industry represents a perfect example of deskilling in Braverman's sense. Historically, printers in the nineteenth-century America enjoyed a relatively privileged status in the newspaper industry. As Robert Sobel (1976, 11) writes, printers, such as pressmen and compositors, were "the aristocrats of the industry, while reporters were considered hangers-on, the most dispensable part of operation." Printers maintained considerable control over the pace and content of their work. Before the mid-nineteenth century, it was common to combine the work of editor and printer, and "it was a dis-

grace for a printer not to edit his own paper" (Hamilton 1936, 150). Consequently, it is difficult to characterise nineteenth century printers either as white- or blue-collar workers.

Literature on technology indicates that a series of innovations in printing technology brought about typical deskilling and direct managerial control of printers, degrading their jobs to a peripheral status (Baker 1957; Kelber and Schlesinger 1967; Porter 1954; Zimbalist 1979). The linotype in the late nineteenth century, for example, enabled management to substitute less skilled linotype operators for skilled compositors and debased the general skill requirement of printing jobs. As printing gradually became a subsidiary and mechanical part of newspaper production, printers lost control and knowledge over journalism practices. The decline of the printing craft seemingly substantiates Braverman's thesis. Of course, it may not be entirely unproblematic to glorify the printing craft of journalism as an autonomous mode of newswork. However, it should be noted that Braverman idealises not the concrete craft itself but the autonomy and unity of conception and execution which the skill of this craft entails.

Nevertheless, the problem is also complicated by the fact that the rise of the newsroom, as the centre of newswork, accompanied the decline of the print shop. Thus, a broader analysis is necessary in order to conclude whether the craft of print journalism has declined. Braverman himself emphasises that "it is the class as a whole that must be studied, rather than an arbitrarily chosen part of it" (1974, 26). It is indispensable to examine what has happened in the newsroom and how the restructuring of the division of labour and the shifting focus from printing to reporting have affected newswork as a whole.

The redefinition of copy-desk work through the introduction of computer technology represents another interesting case of deskilling. The advent of VDTs and the cold-type production process in the 1970s substantially transformed the work of copy editors. However, unlike the printing craft, the decline of copy desk jobs was revealed not in lower pay but in rapid turnovers and decreasing prestige and popularity of the position (Solomon 1985). The transition in copy-desk work took the form of re-assignment of tasks.

When VDTs and the cold-type process substantially eliminated production jobs in print shops, the type-setting functions came to be incorporated into the tasks of newsroom employees. As one news editor said, "copy editing is now half editing and half printing" (216). To streamline the production process, management "[devalued] copy editing in favour of the copy desk's production tasks" (213). There was more emphasis on coding than on the content and substance of the story. VDTs themselves did not change the nature or content of traditional copy-editing work. Instead, the changes consisted of a shifting emphasis among diverse tasks of the copy desk. By stating that copy editing is the least important responsibility of the copy desk, management underrated copy editing and is now able to "exploit' the position. Instead of specialising "in the bundle of tasks associated with copy editing work, the copy desk staff person is expected to be a newsroom generalist" (220).

The degradation of copy-editing work could be attributed to the fact that VDTs limited the time available for editing. However, Solomon notes that a more fundamental reason lies in changes in the "management's view of, and policy toward, the copy desk" (221). Hypothetically, as the copy desk comes to include production as well as newsroom tasks and becomes a more crucial decision-making point within the

overall production process, the position could be up-graded. However, despite the comprehensive nature of copy-desk skills, the criteria for hiring and evaluating copy editors rarely improved. The shift of emphasis by management involved a de facto devaluation of the position, which could be worked out in different ways, depending upon management-labour negotiations. From a labour process perspective, the re-definition of copy-desk work represents an interesting case, suggesting that the evaluation of skill does not necessarily originate with the determination by technology but, to a greater extent, is socially and culturally constructed.

Both printers and copy editors represent cases in which technology has undermined long-inherited workplace relations and the cultural integrity of the occupational groups. To this extent, the deskilling thesis provides valuable insights into journalism history. Nevertheless, such a thesis is applicable only to isolated, parochial sectors of newswork, such as printer or copy editor, and fails to grasp the overall picture of the evolving division of labour throughout the newspaper industry. A long-term view of the changes in the labour process does not necessarily substantiate a simplistic picture of the incessant degradation of newsworkers.

First, it is impossible to properly understand the transformation of newswork without a broadly ranging analysis of various segments of labour within the industry. The decline of the craft of print journalism may not be understood without reference to the industrialisation of the newspaper business and the emerging importance of reporters. Research into the deskilling process must contain not only an inspection of deskilled labour, but also a comprehensive examination of the relevant sectors and the shifting division labour.

Second, even when the degradation of labour represents a long-term tendency, a more microscopic view may reveal the uneven process of deskilling and the reverse trend of reskilling. The introduction of new technology does not necessarily have a one-sided adverse effect on the skill and job-control of workers. For instance, Michael Goldhaber (1983) suggests that new communication technology involves reskilling and makes room for subverting the centralism of control and building new workers' control.

There is a further problem in applying the deskilling thesis to the history of newswork. It is easier to externally identify changes in the skill level of printers, because, in most cases, changes in the print shops of newspapers involve a physically visible introduction of new technologies. There have been relatively few technological innovations in the newsroom. The most conspicuous changes in the work process of newsroom employees involves shifts in journalistic standards and the role of the press rather than drastic transformations of physical work environments. The changes in reporting are more subtle, subjective, and open to controversial evaluations. Because an analysis of the deskilling process presupposes a notion of skill as a normative criterion, the implications are much broader than empirical hypothesis testing.

## Skill and the Transformation of Newswork

It is difficult to analyse events in white-collar sectors, where in many cases, displacements of mechanical tools are relatively less conspicuous than in blue-collar sectors. However, because Braverman was concerned with changes in the subjective elements of skill and discretion, he suggests that analyses of deskilling could be directed at white-collar as well as blue-collar workers. To clarify the point, technology needs to

be broadly conceptualised to include principles, such as rationality, efficiency, and accuracy, as well as the mechanical means of production. Although technological innovations affect workers' lives through the physical replacement of mechanical means, these transformations often take place more fundamentally in the principles by which organisations are run. To illustrate the implications of this definition, I will examine the rise of objective reporting, which does not necessarily emerge from technological innovations.

Shifts in newswork are difficult to evaluate, because they do not necessarily coincide with a transformation of the physical work environment. For instance, when one discusses the impact of the telegraph on newswork in late nineteenth century America, it is necessary to distinguish two aspects of the historical process: the introduction of new technological devices, such as the telegraph, typewriter, and telephone, and the transition in the principles of journalistic work, or the standards, by which news is produced. In short, neither the telegraph, typewriter or telephone brought about a completely new form of journalistic practice or newswork, but these technologies may have accelerated changes already under way. Indeed, the adoption of new technologies and their tremendous impact will make sense, when located in the context of shifts in the principles of journalistic work or the standards of newswriting.

The most conspicuous transformations of newswork took place around the turn of the century, when the invention of mechanical devices influenced, to varying degrees, the way work was executed in the newsroom. However, newsroom technology did not undermine the economic position of newsroom employees as dramatically as printing technology influenced printers; its impact involves more abstract, subtle, and ideological aspects.

Alfred McClung Lee (1937, 628-629) describes how typewriters and telephones helped "stream-line" the labour process in the newsroom during the late nineteenth century. Telephones expanded the geographical scope of reporting and led to the separation of routine reporting by "leg men" and writers who did not leave the office. The introduction of the telegraph had an even more profound influence on the evaluation, style, and presentation of the concept of news itself (Carey 1969; Shaw 1967; Smith 1978). It was influential in shaping a journalist's perception of his/her craft. As news judgement came to resemble a mechanical selection process, news became a tangible item that could be transported, measured, reduced, or timed. Metaphorically, the meaning of reporting became an analogy of the telegraph, i. e., a mechanism of transmitting something across space. Accordingly, it is tempting to interpret the technology of the telegraph as the determining force in formulating a new conception of journalism, like "objective reporting," as the transmission belt of objective facts.

However, from a labour-process approach, technology itself may not bring on a new form of newswork. Technology originates with the specific determinations of social relations in the workplace. An evaluation of the impact of technology also needs to pay attention to its cultural and social milieu. Even in the case of printers, technical means alone did not give autonomy and privilege to craftspeople in the nineteenth century. Technical knowledge acquired on the job was imbedded in a mutual ethical code, also acquired on the job, and only together did these attributes provide skilled workers with considerable autonomy and enabled them to resist the employers' intervention (Montgomery 1979, 14). In short, socio-political and cultural traditions played a substantial role in determining specific configuration of a job autonomy.

Consequently, the advent of the telegraph necessitated the conversion to a new form of journalistic practice only under conditions of changed journalistic standards and public expectation of the role of the press. Indeed, a "transmission" model of journalistic practice had already been forming when an older notion of journalistic skill — a mixture of printing craft and personal journalism — was being replaced by procedures emphasising the impersonal presentation of facts. It may well be that the telegraph merely provided a strong impetus for developing different standards of journalistic practices. The key questions in an account of deskilling of newswriters include how the shift in notions of skill occurred and how the changes influenced the status and culture of newswriters.

The late nineteenth century saw the decline of the printer-editor position with its all-inclusive skills and the rise of reporters as the dominant form of editorial staffing. Newspaper publishing was turning from an extension of individual voices and vehicles for supporting or opposing social causes and political candidates, to an impersonal process of objective reporting. Dicken-Garcia (1989, 30, 63) describes how journalistic standards and the role of the press in the United States shifted over the decades of the nineteenth century from an "idea-centred" "political model" through an "event-oriented" "information model" to a "business or market model." The idea of news emerged gradually as the central value of American journalism and devalued the expression of "thought-out" editorial opinion that had been the foundation of the previous generation (Lee 1937, 629). A new breed of reporters, trained in reporting facts and stories, replaced the great editors of the penny press era. Newspaper production was turning from a personal and despotic system (i.e., management by persons) to management by an impersonal organisation.

How did the skill of journalists and their conception of the craft shift with institutional changes that made journalism an impersonal process? And how did the transformation of the nature of journalistic skill affect, for instance, work practices, the autonomy of newswriters, and the ideals of a free press? The shift to objective reporting has been hailed by mainstream journalism textbooks and historians as a process of "professionalisation" of journalists, lifting them out of the "dark" age of the party press era (see Emery et al. 1996; Mott 1942). James Carey (1969, 32), on the other hand, offers a pessimistic account of how journalists went through a "conversion downwards" from the role of an independent critic, interpreter, and contemporary historian to a species of technical writers. These opposite accounts are difficult to reconcile, presumably because both are largely based on an evaluation of ideological notions, such as the role and responsibility of the press. Carey's embellishment of personal journalism as independent, literary and intellectual may be somewhat exaggerated, because the prototype of American journalism had emerged from the printing craft rather than from established political and intellectual traditions, as in some European countries. Nevertheless, Carey indicates some important aspects of changes in journalistic skill.

Braverman's concept of skill may help explain why the craft nature of journalistic skill involves an idea-centred, personally controlled nature of journalistic practices. Thus, while the craft of journalism combines knowledge and manual dexterity, assuring journalists complete control over their own work, journalists lose the subjective nature of the craft when they surrender control over the idea, conception, or goal of their work with the rise of impersonal, objective reporting.

How did the technical rationalisation of newswork fail to contribute to a real professionalisation of journalistic practices? Although the emerging division of labour and systemisation occasioned by mechanical devices and business gave rise to a central, specialised role of reporting, the division did not produce "a career-oriented vocational caste of reporters which resembled a profession, but a functional specialization performed by employees directed by a standard hierarchy of bureaucratic management," according to Douglas Birkhead (1982, 162). The critical function, determining what kind of information was to be identified as news and how it was to be treated, was not associated primarily with the activity of reporting. The emphasis on a separation of facts from values made journalistic writing conform more strictly to technical procedures and conventions. The key figure in developing these conventions of journalism was the editor-manager, who brought a management perspective into the newsroom, while reporters functioned as tools to meet the requirements of news production.

With the technically defined nature of reporting and news, the discretion of journalists diminished and the control of reporters became more invisible. The reliance on beats as official sources, the technical writing style, as well as the telegraph greatly influenced and transformed the conception of news. As Birkhead writes, "the journalist as professional seemed to extend the rationality and efficiency of technology into the newsroom" (1982, 220). Reporters, as a newly created breed of newsworkers, still carried the old label of journalists, but without as much individual voice and discretion — skill, in Braverman's sense — as journalists in the days of personal journalism. As a result, a technical definition of the craft of journalism, or what Philip Elliott (1977, 149) calls "skill and competence in performance of routine work tasks," has become a taken-for-granted part of the culture and education of journalists in the United States.

For instance, Charles Derber (1983) discusses how the "technicalization" of professionals affects their world view and values to lead to "ideological proletarianization." While professionals do not experience the loss of physical control over the means of labour like manual labour, they fail to maintain control over the goals and social purposes of work. Consequently, they come to base professional identity "increasingly not on distinctive values and moral objectives but on technical expertise" (1983, 331). Derber's discussion helps illuminate how the technical notion of journalistic skill functions as an effective control mechanism for newsworkers, even though workers retain relative job autonomy. Similarly, by conceptualising technicalization as deskilling, Braverman may provide the conceptual basis for a critique of ideological implications inherent in emerging news conventions, such as objectivity.

Despite these fruitful implications of his concept, however, Braverman tends to grasp skill and subjectivity only in terms of technical and economic relations. He fails to elaborate on the culturally and socially constructed nature of skill and its implications for labour politics. Although he defines skill in terms of subjectivity and discretion, the meaning of skill is far from being clear except when discussed negatively, i.e., in terms of deskilling or external control. Without conspicuous deskilling or external control, it remains rather ambiguous how subjectivity unfolds in its complex social and cultural nexus. These conceptual limitations of Braverman's approach lead to some problems in the account of newswork.

For instance, degradation of newswork has hardly led newsroom employees to experience the same form and degree of deskilling as blue-collar workers. Thus, what

is necessary is a more specific framework to help differentiate various forms of deskilling. Just as subjectivity is culturally constructed, skill is closely interwoven with the state of consciousness of workers and workplace culture. Even media technology does not merely involve material changes. The notion of technology is also deeply imbedded in the field of public discourses. Michael Burawoy, for instance, provides an analysis of the ideological-cultural dimension of skill.

## Control and Division of Labour

Despite some useful insights for labour historians, Braverman's contribution is considerably marred by his primary emphasis on the objective side of labour history without much attention to the consciousness and culture of workers. Consequently, his approach to class and its applicability to newswork is somewhat problematic. Braverman admits the "self-imposed limitation to the 'objective' content of class and the omission of the 'subjective' will" (1974, 27). But the problem is not merely the omission of one of the important factors. The subjective formation of class and work experience represents as rather crucial part of the formation of class and, therefore, may not be taken apart conceptually. Braverman separated "class in itself" (class determined from "objective" relations of production) and "class for itself" (class self-conscious of its objective position) and implies that the latter flows from the former.

The limitations of Braverman's notion of class are conspicuous in his discussion of control. First, it is problematic to define the working class as a homogeneous group and to present direct control as the only effective strategy available to management. It is more convincing to assume that management employs diverse strategies to deal with heterogeneous groups. Second, he seems to assume that direct control of workers through deskilling represents the most crucial imperative of management. Although skill represents an important element, deskilling is not the ultimate concern of capitalists in formulating managerial strategies. While, as Braverman notes, skill has a social-relational nature, the relations have dimensions much more complex than he suggests. The specific language of social relations at the workplace includes not only the conflict-laden confrontation but also the consensual aspect of labour-capital relations. Accordingly, labour historians must pay attention also to political and ideological relations in the labour process.

The multiplicity of managerial strategies of control depends, to a great extent, on the heterogeneous nature of labour. It is crucial to examine how the composition of labour in an industry affects the relations among segments of labour as well as capital-labour relations. Given the diversity of skill levels, mechanisation, job interests, and occupational cultures in each sector of newspaper industry, the modes of job control vary from sector to sector. Based on the heterogeneous nature of labour, critics of Braverman, such as Richard Edwards (1979) and Andrew Friedman (1977) have developed various typologies of modes of control. Although Friedman's distinction between "direct control" and "responsible autonomy" or Edwards' typology of "simple," "technical" and "bureaucratic" controls may not be directly applicable to newswork, they provide useful heuristic tools of analysis. For example, through a series of technological innovations, management has attempted to secure direct control over printers in the newspaper industry. Nevertheless, because of the relatively unpredictable nature of job tasks, newsroom employees have retained relative autonomy in daily job executions. The diversity of managerial strategies becomes more crucial for man-

agement when an industry-wide union does not exist, because the division and heterogeneity of workers per se may function as an effective way of control over labour as well.

Consequently, it is inadequate to discuss the control mechanism of one sector, reporting for instance, in isolation from others. For instance, it is necessary to examine how professionalism in the newsroom is related to blue-collar unionism in print shops. A professional model with its emphasis on individual competition and autonomy helps foster the anti-union bent of most professional newswriters as demonstrated by the paucity of unionisation in the United States. By distinguishing newsroom employees from blue-collar workers of the Typographical Union, the professional model in journalism also could undermine ideologically the possibility of strong industry-wide unionisation. It may not be mere coincidence that professional newswriters have failed to claim other major elements of professionalism, such as economic security and job stability.

Diversity or division is not the only characteristic of managerial strategies of control. Together with the typology of control, Friedman's distinction between "central" and "peripheral" workers(1977, 109) helps explain how the changing division of labour has led to shifts in control strategies in the newspaper. Central workers are those who are "considered essential to secure long-run profits." Friedman notes that although the centre-periphery distinction continues, the particular groups of central or peripheral workers may change over time(1977, 8). Labour historians should examine how the dominant mode of control, directed at centrally located workers, has evolved.

While white-collar workers occupy the centre within the division of labour in the contemporary newspaper, this division of labour has gone through historical shifts and redefinitions. In the nineteenth century, the printing function was the most central skill that included an editorial function, and reporters were the most dispensable "hangers-on" in a print shop (Sobel 1976, 11). With the rise of objective reporting, formerly peripheral jobs rose to the centre of production, and printers were confined to the periphery. Where printers retained a central status, management applied various means of direct control through deskilling. On the other hand, reporters, who are the central workers in contemporary newspapers, are given considerable autonomy in job executions. As newswriting has converted from a printing craft to an editorial activity, in Friedman's terms, the dominant mode of control in the newspaper has moved correspondingly from "direct control" to "responsible autonomy."

Why is it that the dominant strategy of control has turned from direct control to responsible autonomy as the central segment of labour has shifted from printers to reporters? Decisions of specific modes of control take into consideration a broad managerial environment; the primary problem of the newspaper business moved from mechanical aspects of production to marketing. In the nineteenth century, when the printing process was slow as well as expensive and sales were rather limited, a tighter control of labour might have been crucial for a viable business. But as technology made printing cheaper and produced fast growing markets, sales effort rather than production management and labour control became a more urgent problem (Soffer 1960, 145).

To understand the specific determination of control strategies, it is also necessary to examine the choices available to management and to consider potential resistance and pressure from workers attempting to protect their interests. Even though the term

control connotes an initiative of the managerial side, control is a relational concept. On the side of management, the discretion of capital is limited by the market situation, the state of the labour market, and the ideological and political presuppositions of management.

Furthermore, on the side of labour, the potential outbreak of conflicts may force management to consider the demands of labour and to initiate ways of co-opting as well as controlling labour. In a sense, the notions of control and resistance tend to obscure the taken-for-granted and less conspicuous mechanism of securing daily routine practices of the labour process. Although labour resistance is influential in determining specific forms of control, conflicts and resistance are rather occasional incidents and are usually concerned with the details of employment relations. The basic framework of management-labour relations is rarely challenged. As Littler and Salaman (1982, 253) point out, "control must be seen in relation to conflict and sources of conflict and in relation to the potential terrain of compromise." To chronicle the specific terms and conditions in which capital-labour relations are expressed in daily practices, it is necessary to see how the labour process is reproduced, or how consent is organised in the workplace.

## From Control to Hegemony

To properly understand the meaning of consent, it is essential to examine the historical context in which the mechanism of consent has been produced and recreated. In other words, an analysis of consent in the workplace requires an investigation into the terms by which the social relations in the labour process are translated into specific work practices. Because consent as a dominant mechanism of control took shape in certain periods and historical contexts, one has to scrutinise the evolving forms and terms of social relations at the workplace and to reflect on their implications.

To conceptualise control in its complexity, it is necessary to examine an "adequate vocabulary to describe different levels, intensities and forms of ideological relationships" (Littler and Salaman 1982, 258). In addition, one needs to develop a conceptual framework for analysing the political mechanism of co-optation in the labour process. Burawoy provided a sophisticated Marxist analysis of the specific forms of social relations in the workplace. His observations might provide useful insights for a labour historian that attempts to analyse specific terms and languages of domination, conflict, and consent in the newsmaking process.

Using a Gramscian notion of hegemony, Burawoy (1979, xii) attempts to demonstrate "how consent is produced at the point of production — independent of schooling, family life, mass media, the state, and so forth." Burawoy's emphasis on consent originates with an assumption that the specific organisational practices, or the specific language of social relations in the production sphere, are complexly determined by various political, economic, and ideological forces. For Burawoy, the antagonism in labour-capital relations, based on the relations of production, exists only at the abstract level. The daily practices and the specific conflicts in the workplace arise out of the workers' particular understanding of their interests, which is as real as the objective definition of the relations of production. To understand the particular ways whereby the meanings and experiences of work are organised in the workplace, he expands the conception of production beyond the narrowly defined economic moment to include the ideological and the political.

His metaphorical notion of "game" (1979; 1985, 38-39) may explain one of the ideological mechanisms of "manufacturing consent." While Burawoy underscores the consensual side of control, he attempts to avoid a functional notion of "adaptation" and leaves room for agents to oscillate between the active involvement in and resistance to routine practices. According to Burawoy, the daily execution of the labour process is analogous to a game whose goal is "making out," or reaching a certain quota within the time limit. Although various conflicts and cynicism may exist among newswriters and management, making out is recognised and defended by both as the fundamental and taken-for-granted rule of the game (1985, 10). The very act of playing a game has the effect of generating consent to its rules and "the desirability of certain outcomes" (1985, 38) and of obscuring the conditions that framed the rules. Thereby, "the game becomes an ideological mechanism through which necessity is presented as freedom" (1985, 38).

In newswriting, the notion of game illuminates the ideological aspects of competitive individualism and technical skill. Individualism becomes an important ideological mechanism. "Making out ... inserts the worker into the labour process as an individual rather than as a member of a class distinguished by a particular relationship to the means of production. ... [and] the system of reward is [consequently] based on individual rather than collective efforts," according to Burawoy (1979, 81). Making out appears to correspond merely to doing a "good" job based on individual job skills. Because doing a good job is primarily a matter of technical performance, competition in making out highlights primarily the individual calibre of doing well within the given rules of the game.

Similarly, the notion of competitive individualism underscores individual abilities of doing routine jobs, such as meeting a deadline, finishing a job quota, and sometimes getting a by-line or scoop. Complete control over the execution of their own job may give individual newswriters an imaginary sense of freedom and autonomy in their daily activities. The highly unpredictable environment of newswriters makes physical control rarely feasible, and nearly the only conspicuous control is "the prime organisational requirement: getting the story in time to disseminate it" (Tuchman 1978, 78). What obscures the ideologically framed nature of news practices to newswriters is the individualistic nature of playing the game. In other words, the autonomy which newswriters retain in their daily activities tends to obscure the fact that their discretion is considerably confined by technical and taken-for-granted conventions.

The technical facade that constructs news conventions also becomes a mechanism that obscures the ideological implications inherent in the rules of the game. Skill may not only provide workers with autonomy but also function as an effective control mechanism. While certain literature attributes control to organisational policy, associating professional skill with autonomy (Starck 1962; Sigelman 1973), it fails to answer the question which aspects of skill will give autonomy to newswriters. Professional norms in contemporary newswriting include: "technical norms [which] deal with the operations of efficient news-gathering, writing, and editing; [and] ethical norms [which] embrace the newsmen's obligation to his readers and to his craft and include such ideals as responsibility, impartiality, accuracy, fair play, and objectivity" (Breed 1955, 179). In practice, however, technical and ethical norms are intertwined; moreover, ethical norms tend to be reduced to and defined in terms of technical norms. Even though ethical norms guarantee almost unlimited discretion, the leeway of

newswriters is considerably confined within the range of what skill dictates technically. As some organisational studies point out, a control mechanism is imbedded in the technical skill of professional workers, and skill becomes the most effectively binding norm for newswriters (Tuchman 1978; Soloski 1989). Even though the discretion of newswriters is constrained, the strait jacket to manoeuvring appears only as a technical matter. Consequently, newswriters may have a strong sense of autonomy and freedom, based on professional skill, which at the same time serves as a control device.

Burawoy provides examples of the terms and levels of ideologies which constitute part of the class experience of newswriters. The individual and technical aspects of the game of newsmaking serve as a hegemonic mechanism through which participants experience and interpret reality. The hegemonic nature of those ideas also means that they could be redefined. From a historical point of view, individualism might have been neither the most developed nor the universal form of job autonomy. Raymond Williams (1983, 325) considers class morality, such as individualism, as a key feature which distinguishes working-class from middle-class culture. According to him, while bourgeois morality is based on individualism, working-class depends on the ethics of collectivism. David Montgomery (1979) notes that a collective and mutualistic culture provided and sustained job autonomy among craftspeople in the nineteenth century.

Burawoy's insights may be further extended to analyses of more general forms of work-legitimizing ideologies, which became a natural and unquestioned part of the workplace culture. At the most general level there are cultural norms which acknowledge "the legitimacy of property rights in the enterprise" (Littler and Salaman 1984, 66). The ideology of property rights affirms that editors may edit according to their final judgement, and newspaper owners may publish what they desire. Although owners may rarely interfere with news coverage in their newspapers, they have "the last word on how an issue will be handled" (Tuchman 1978, 169). However, such a definition of press freedom has rarely been contested by newswriters in the United States.

At a more specific level are managerial ideologies, which attempt to demonstrate the importance of the managerial function as a necessary organisational activity (Littler and Salaman 1984, 66). Although this notion may look indisputable, it gained legitimacy only in this century. John Child (1969) attempts to show historically how British managers were originally faced with problems of legitimacy and how, once established as legitimate, issues shifted to technical problems of efficiency. This ideological notion, once accepted, performs important functions. Workers come to accept "normality of their subordination;" and, "Resistance, when and if it occurs, will be largely about details. The important aspects, the hierarchical nature of the enterprise, the location of decisions . . . have effectively been removed from the agenda" (Littler and Salaman 1984, 67).

The specific types of work-legitimizing ideologies vary from period to period, from society to society, and even from organisation to organisation. Those notions are open to negotiation and reinterpretation; they are far from being natural premises for newswriting. For example, the labour movements in the Korean newspaper industry in the late 1980s show that the fundamental assumption of a capitalist press system may be challenged and re-interpreted even within a capitalist society. During this period, newspaper and broadcasting unions contested the legitimacy of owners to maintain final control over staffing and editorial policies. After a series of disputes, including

strikes, both sides agreed that newsroom employees may elect the managing editor of the newsroom. At some newspapers, the union acquired rights to veto appointments of key positions by management. Certain unions pushed management even further to allow reporters to participate in important editorial decision-making processes (Korean Federation of Press Unions Newsletter, May 31, 1990).

The diversity of working ideologies in the newsroom suggests that the taken-for-granted assumptions of the newsroom culture may be vulnerable to contests, depending on the particular status of labour movements and the economic, social and cultural conjuncture. A historical perspective is, therefore, urgently needed to describe the specific terms through which social relations in the workplace have operated. Labour-process theories, such as Burawoy's, exemplify how such a task may be executed in the field of labour history.

## Conclusion

The intellectual poverty of mainstream journalism history has had a devastating impact on our understanding of the historical meaning of contemporary forms of newswork. Although journalism historians have paid occasional attention to the topic of labour, they have rarely furnished theoretically informative research on the culture and work experience of newswriters. Consequently, what we may call a "new labour history" (Krueger 1971) of newswork needs to shift the focus from a description of events, celebrities, and institutions to unobtrusive and long-term tendencies or changes in the work experience of anonymous workers. A theoretically and conceptually informed approach will be beneficial to interpreting and contextualising the myriad of descriptive studies on labour history. This essay represents an attempt to synthesise the literature of labour history in search for a conceptual framework of a new labour history of the newspaper. Consequently, the labour-process approach is explored as a conceptual alternative to mainstream journalism history.

The labour-process approach locates studies of the workplace within a broader social context and addresses theoretical questions of class, social relations, control, skill, or hegemony. Indeed, these issues may produce useful insights for an understanding of the historical significance of technological, organisational, and cultural changes in the newsroom. Furthermore, an alternative configuration of journalism history has much broader implications for thinking about the meaning of journalistic autonomy on the shop floor and about the relationship between media and democracy in contemporary society. In a sense, a commercial model of media, in which management retains control over editorial decision-making and excludes the participation of professionals, has been a taken-for-granted part of viewing media. Mainstream journalism historians have consolidated such a mythic notion, without any reflection on its historical implications, as a historical necessity and have rarely explored the possibility of an alternative vision of journalism history.

With the demise of socialist systems, the political significance of class as actors of social change has considerably declined. The class analysis as early Marxists envisioned may not be viable any more. Nevertheless, as far as social divisions persist and capitalism as a system of commodity production survives, class theories may shed light on understanding the complex structures of conflict and contradictions at the workplace in contemporary society. The implications of class theories for journalism history have not been exhausted yet.

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