



未名社科·媒介与社会丛书（影印版）

News Culture (second edition)

新闻文化 第二版

〔英〕斯图亚特·艾伦 (Stuart Allan) 著



北京大学出版社
PEKING UNIVERSITY PRESS

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未名社科·媒介与社会丛书（影印版）

主编 高丙中 杨伯溆

总 序

媒介是神奇的,社会也是神奇的,媒介与社会的耦合生产出无限的神奇。从涂尔干《宗教生活的基本形式》关于“社会”与唤起社会意识的符号与仪式共生的理论来看,媒介使社会显得神奇的过程也造就了自身的神奇。

人类在现代大众传播成为现实之前对于“神奇”的感知是经由巫师及其巫术的转化来实现的。澳洲土著在图腾舞蹈的狂热中感受到超个人的社会力量的存在。满身披挂的萨满用舞蹈和神歌请灵降神,让已经消逝的显露原形,让凡人通常不可见的显现真身,让千山万水之遥的即刻大驾光临。借助巫术,时间和空间的障碍可以暂时克服,过去的、未来的都可以在现实中出现,墓室中的、仙山上的都可以召唤到面前。

这些神奇经验在现当代越来越彻底地被大众媒介所造就,电视、网络等图像传输技术在其中发挥着关键作用。大人物像变戏法一样总跑到百姓居室内高谈阔论,历史的亡灵在荧屏上召之即来,挥之即去。媒介使常人具有千里眼、顺风耳,看见那原本遥不可见的,听清那从前根本就听不到的。媒介是神奇的,它在社会中的运行有如巫术。几百年的现代化对世界“祛魅”,结果我们看到人类社会所集聚的全部的“魅”都汇聚于媒介,并被媒介无限放大。

长期耳濡目染,对媒介的神奇人们已经习以为常了,就像前现代的人对巫术习以为常一样。但是,这个过程一直都是知识界探讨的课题。现代大众媒介的各种新形式从一开始出现的时候就会被知识界作为新事物加以关注。从较早的照相、无线电广播到电影、电视,再到近年的新媒介传播,关于大众传媒研究、文化研究、虚拟社会研究的知识生产就一直紧随媒介发展的步伐。媒介研究在发达国家已经形成庞大的群体和细密的分工,这个群体既能够追逐传播领域的新事物,也能够通过专业的眼光让人们习以为常的许多方面显出怪异来,从而引发众人的注意和分析的兴趣。我们国内的媒介研究在这两个方向上都需要培育自己的能力。

依靠现代大众媒介运行的社会是一种机制极其不同的社会,中国社会正在越来越深地涉入其中。

高科技媒介的威力以不断增强方式发挥出来,世界虽然还成为不了地球村,

但是人与人之间的联系方式、人与各种层次的共同体的联结机制都发生着变化。

社会因媒介成为可能,因新媒介而成为新的可能。社会是个人之间相互挂念、相互意识到而成为可能的。在短暂的一天和有限的一生里,个人在多大范围里意识到多少他人的存在、记挂多大范围的他人,这是靠媒介运作的结果。基于集体意识和共同想象而形成内在联系的社会,是存在于媒介(运作)中的。在中国境外的许多城市,华人移民在本地新闻中看到唐人街的春节表演而确证自己与华人群体的认同,全世界的中国人因为春节文化的展演而想象自己属于一个十多亿人口的共同体。网络新媒介创造了新的人际联系方式,虚拟社区借助新媒介产生出来,人们之间隔空互动,与传统真实意义上的面对面交流的主要差别只是不能“臭味相投”而已。

媒介见证社会实体的存在。人类共同体因为联合国的新闻、国际救灾行动的画面而被呈现;国家共同体因为制造媒介事件的奇观(spectacle)而被世人记住;地方共同体因为地方风物、特产或节庆被传播而知名;行业罢工、同性恋群体因为游行的极端表演而受注意。优势的存在是在媒介中具有正面形象的实体。

媒介见证社会力量的博弈。各种社会力量要竞争,最好的方式是围绕媒介、借助媒介展开能见度高的竞争,展开正面形象的竞争。国际政治的软实力、国内政治的亲民形象、商业竞争的名牌效应、文体明星的商业价值……都是靠媒介的舞台定位的。社会力量竞争的王牌是通过媒介制造“奇观”,造成举世瞩目的效果。制造“9·11”事件的组织选择纽约世贸大厦为目标,是因为他们不仅要使行动成为媒介事件,而且还要使媒介事件具有奇观效应(spectacularity);美国占领伊拉克,对媒介画面进行筛选,突出精确打击的画面,限制伊拉克平民死伤的画面,既在避免负面效果,也在凸现战争奇观。强势的社会力量是媒介中的主动力量。

媒介毕竟是社会的媒介。媒介为社会中的人所运用。人具有神性和魔性。社会既是温情的港湾,也是邪恶的渊薮;社会既以公正相标榜,也以不平等为现实。运行于社会中的媒介也兼具人性和社会的两副面孔。媒介制造人间奇迹:新闻报道能够让尼克松总统下台,能够让孙志刚事件改变弊端连连的城市收容制度,能够让绝望中的重症患者借助社会力量得到救治……媒介也产生遗憾和问题,媒介暴力、媒介色情、媒介偏见一直层出不穷。

媒介是社会的舞台、社会的缩影,媒介本身就是社会。媒介被政党看作一个特殊的战线,一个意识形态斗争的领域。主导的力量会设法控制公共舆论的导向和社会议题的设置,其他的社会力量或附和、追随,或批评、抵制。弱者有弱者的媒介武器和媒介阐释策略。沉默或参与,是一次选择。参与而主动解码,借题发挥,进而用反讽来消遣权势,则潜藏着无数持续的选择。大众媒介在社会的运行中产生着层出

不穷的问题。

媒介不仅是信息、思想、政治,也是经济。从事媒介行业的人也是经济动物,媒介也是经济利益的集散地。媒介造就百万富翁、亿万富翁,造就中产阶级,造就报童、报摊,当然也造就自己的消费者群体。这是一个不断膨胀的产业。新媒介成为新的产业,往往使原有的一切产业具备新的形式和运作机制。媒介产业是其他产业发展的助推器。世界是人的天地,也是产品的库房。产品世界的秩序是由媒介按照品牌进行编码和排列的,从而形成“物的体系”,以此支撑着人的世界成为一个多样而有序的“消费社会”。

媒介是一种信息产业,是一个经济领域的范畴。媒介又是现代文化,因此媒介作为经济就应该更加准确地被称为文化经济(文化工业)。媒介卷入的是共同体集体利益和共同体内部的利益、地位、声望的分配问题,因此媒介涉及的问题是政治经济学的问题。这些问题在社会博弈过程中消长,媒介成为社会进步的助力,有时也为社会制造解决问题的障碍。媒介与社会,纠结着人类伟大的成就和太多的问题。凡此种种,我们就让有心人、术业有专攻的人去一一论说其中的究竟吧。

是为序。

高丙中、杨伯淑

2007年8月,北京大学

For my parents, Beverly and Robert Allan, with love and respect

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Introduction

THE CULTURE OF NEWS

Have you noticed that life, real honest-to-goodness life, with murders and catastrophes and fabulous inheritances, happens almost exclusively in the newspapers?

(Jean Anouilh, dramatist)

I believe that no mass journalism in history has lived up to its responsibilities as well as have American network television news organizations. But we need to find some innovations without lowering our standards. There is only a limited professional satisfaction in informing people who have gone to sleep.

(Harry Reasoner, broadcast journalist)

Excited declarations that we live in a 'news-saturated society' are being made so frequently these days that they almost risk sounding clichéd. The types of developments usually cited include 24-hour televisual newscasts, of which CNN's is now one of several, as well as 'news-talk' radio ('all news, all the time') stations, the rise of 'infotainment' television (ranging from 'news-magazine shows' to 'fly-on-the-wall' docu-soaps and reality-based television programmes), the expansion of interactive 'info-channels' with the advent of digital news services, or the rapid proliferation of 'cyber-salons' or newsgroups, as well as formal news conferences, being held on the Internet. No doubt most would agree that these are indeed fascinating developments worthy of serious attention. Still, if we accept that 'news' of some description has been in circulation since the earliest days of human society, then assessing its relative degree of 'saturation' for people's lives over the years would prove to be a rather challenging task. What would appear to be above dispute, however, is that the sheer range of different forms of news discourse has never been greater than it is today.

Looking back over the course of the twentieth century, it is possible to begin to place these more recent developments in the news culture of countries such as Britain and the United States within a larger context. In the first decades of the century, for

instance, the newspaper press ruled the day – ‘press barons’, such as Northcliffe, Rothermere and Beaverbrook in Britain or Hearst and Pulitzer in the USA, were able to exert considerable control over the public agenda. Competition over the definition of the most pressing news stories of the day also came from the cinema. *Newsreels* were a regular feature in cinemas by the time of the First World War, informing captivated audiences about a world far beyond their personal experience. *Time*, the first weekly news magazine in the USA, began publication in 1923, with its main competitor *Newsweek* appearing ten years later. Broadcast news similarly began in the 1920s with the BBC in Britain and fledgling commercial stations in the USA, although radio journalism would not fully develop until the Second World War. Televisual newscasts had assumed a form that we would recognize today by the mid-1950s, and had displaced newspapers as the most popular source of news by the 1960s. During the 1970s, journalists began using ENG videotape cameras to record their stories, and were able to relay them from virtually any point in the world via portable communications satellite link-ups by the late 1980s. The 2003 war in Iraq saw journalists scoop their rivals by filing stories from the field using satellite telephones and notebook computers. Needless to say, each of these developments, among a myriad of others, has had profound implications for how journalists go about their work and, just as importantly, how their audiences relate to the world around them.

In choosing the title *News Culture* for this book, it is my intention to signal from the outset a commitment to establishing a rather unconventional agenda for the study of the institutions, forms, practices and audiences of journalism. To the extent that one can safely generalize about the wide variety of existing examinations of the news media within the humanities and social sciences, I think it fair to suggest that many of these analyses share a distinguishing feature. That is to say, they usually prioritize for examination a media–society dichotomy which treats the respective sides of this relationship as being relatively exclusive. Studies tend to focus on either the media themselves, so as to ask questions about how they affect society (the findings usually make for grim reading) or they centre on the larger society in order to explore how it affects the media (‘the public gets the media it deserves’). In both instances, the relationship implied by the media–society dichotomy is often simply reaffirmed as one consistent with the role ‘everyone knows’ the news media play in a democratic society. To borrow an old maxim, the news media are assumed to be afflicting the comfortable while, at the same time, comforting the afflicted.

A key aim of this book is to render problematic this media–society dichotomy. I want to suggest that the invocation of such a dichotomy is placing severe limits on the sorts of questions that can be asked about the news media in our society (or, for that matter, just how democratic our society is in the first place). Should the news media be removed, in analytical terms, from the social, economic and political contexts within which they operate, we run the risk of exaggerating their power and influence. Similarly, any inquiry into how modern societies are ‘made and remade in every

individual mind' on a daily basis, to use Williams's (1989a [1958]) apt turn of phrase, needs to account in one way or another for the efficacy of the news media. In other words, then, I want to argue that we need to break down this media–society dichotomy so that we may better grapple with all of the messy complexities, and troublesome contradictions, which otherwise tend to be neatly swept under the conceptual carpet. It is important that we take sufficient care to avoid losing sight of how the news media are embedded in specific relations of power and control while, at the same time, recognizing the ways in which they are working to reinfect, transform and, if only infrequently, challenge these same relations over time.

It is with this concern in mind that I have introduced the notion of 'news culture' as a means to help facilitate critical efforts to transcend the media–society dichotomy. A closer inspection of this dichotomy reveals some of the ways in which it shapes different modes of inquiry into news as a distinctive research object. Three such lines of investigation may be briefly sketched as follows:

- *News as an object of policy formation:* for approaches giving priority to the governmental sphere, news is treated as an agent of representative democracy. Questions are raised about state regulation of the news media, including issues such as 'due impartiality' or 'fairness', official secrets (such as where 'national security' is concerned), DA-Notices, censorship, libel and defamation, advertising, freedom of information, privacy, doorstepping and 'cheque-book journalism'. Members of the news audience tend to be conceived of primarily as voters possessing rights which require protection through agencies such as the Press Complaints Commission (PCC), Independent Television Commission (ITC) and the Radio Authority in Britain, and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the USA.
- *News as an object of commodification:* viewed from the vantage point of an economic approach, the status of news as a commodity to be bought and sold is emphasized. Audience members are primarily thought of as current (or potential) consumers, the attention of whom may be purchased in turn by advertisers (or, in the case of public news broadcasting, quantified in order to justify public subsidy or licence fees). The changing dynamics of news media ownership are scrutinized, particularly as they pertain to relations of profit accumulation and maximization at local, national or global levels.
- *News as an object of public opinion:* still another approach situates news as an object of 'rational-critical debate' within the realm of the public sphere (the writings of Habermas (1989, 1992) are particularly applicable here). Attention focuses on the decisive role the news media play in establishing a discursive space, one framed by the state and economic domains on either side, for public deliberations over social issues. The formative influence of the news on popular attitudes is accentuated by conceiving of the news audience as citizens engaged in public dialogue.

Each of these approaches has proven to be extremely important in generating vital insights into how the news media operate in modern societies such as those of Britain and the USA. Nevertheless, each is also necessarily partial and selective in what it identifies as being relevant to its concerns. This book will attempt to dwell on those aspects which tend to fall between the cracks of these more familiar types of approaches.

The concept of 'news culture', I shall argue, resists the analytical separation of the 'cultural' from the 'economic' and the 'political' prefigured by the media–society dichotomy. In so doing, it may be employed to help rethink the ideological assumptions, modes of perception, and even unconscious expectations, which need to be sustained by journalist and audience member alike if a news account's claim to be a factual representation of reality is to be upheld. As a form of social knowledge, a discourse identified as 'news' exhibits certain evolving yet characteristic features which are shaped in accordance with cultural rules or conventions about what constitutes 'the world out there'. That is to say, while journalists typically present a news account as an 'objective', 'impartial' *translation* of reality, it may instead be understood to be providing an ideological *construction* of contending truth-claims about reality. This is to suggest that the news account, far from simply 'reflecting' the reality of an event, is effectively providing a codified definition of what should count as the reality of the event. This constant, always dynamic process of mediation is accomplished primarily in ideological terms, but not simply at the level of the news account *per se*. Instead, the fluidly complex conditions under which the account is both produced and consumed or 'read' will need to be accounted for in a critical approach to news culture.

It will be my objective over the course of this book to discern the contours of news culture with an eye to mapping several of the more prominent features of its terrain. Accordingly, a brief overview of the different chapters is as follows:

- The discussion commences in Chapter 1 by tracing the emergence of 'news' as a form of discourse from the earliest days of human civilization up to and including the early twentieth-century newspaper press. Special attention is given to the rise of 'objective' reporting methods, showing how by the 1920s they had been formally legitimized by many news organizations in Britain and the USA as being consistent with professionalism.
- The focus shifts in Chapter 2 to examine the early days of radio (new material about the reporting of D-Day is added in this edition) and televisual news in Britain and the USA. Of particular interest are the ways in which the narrative forms and devices of broadcast news were conventionalized. Many of the news formats and reporting practices familiar to us today are shown to have been the subject of considerable discussion and debate, their larger significance for the coverage of public affairs being anything but clear at the time.
- Chapter 3 returns us to the current 'mediasphere', to borrow Hartley's (1996) term, in the first instance by engaging with competing conceptions of the role the

news media play in structuring public debate. Next, an evaluative assessment is offered of a variety of studies concerned with the routine, day-to-day practices of news production or newswork. Particular attention is devoted to journalists' interactions with their sources, together with the attendant implications for news access.

- In Chapter 4, the textual features of news as a distinctive form of discourse are centred for investigation in relation to newspapers, radio and television. Special priority is given to the question of 'hegemony' as it informs critical research into the ways in which these different genres of news *naturalize* or *depoliticize* certain definitions of reality as being representative of 'common sense', of what 'everyone knows to be true'.
- Following next in Chapter 5 is an exploration of how news texts (both broadsheet and tabloid newspapers, as well as televisual newscasts) are actually 'decoded' or 'read' by viewers, listeners and readers. The varied uses of news, particularly in the household, will be considered so as to discern the lived materiality of the daily practices, rituals, customs and techniques shaping the negotiation of its meanings within the context of everyday life.
- Insights provided by feminist and gender-sensitive critiques of news form the basis of Chapter 6. Beginning with an analysis of the gender politics of 'objective' reporting, the discussion proceeds to show how the norms and values of white, middle-class male journalists typically sustain a 'macho culture' in the newsroom. Attention then turns to the recurrently sexist ways in which women are represented in the news media, particularly with regard to news coverage of incidents of male violence committed against them.
- Chapter 7 develops Hall's (1990) distinction between 'overt' and 'inferential' racism so as to deconstruct the racialized projection of an 'us and them' dichotomy in the news. The ways in which this dichotomy is maintained, reinforced and contested are examined in relation to the reporting of 'law and order' issues, as well as during times of war. In terms of the latter, this edition also discusses how Al-Jazeera, an Arabic news network, reported on the casualties of the war in Iraq. Lastly, the chapter scrutinises the pressures routinely placed on ethnic minority journalists to 'write white', that is, to produce news accounts which conform to a predominantly white audience's preconceptions about the social world.
- Chapter 8, a new chapter for this edition, examines online journalism. It begins by situating journalism within the brave new world of the Internet, before proceeding to discern several key innovations in the development of Web-based reporting. Included in the discussion of the emergent forms, strategies and conventions of online news is a consideration of how the Oklahoma City bombing was reported. Next, we turn to the atrocities of September 11, 2001, paying particular attention to citizen-produced reporting on the Web. Lastly, the challenges posed in covering the war in Iraq are examined by focusing on 'warblogs' as an alternative type of reporting.

- The book draws to a close in Chapter 9, which has been expanded since the previous edition. It focuses, in the first instance, on various critiques of the news media, not least those which contend that 'real journalism' is at risk of disappearing into a 'sleazoid infotainment culture'. In this context, the chapter proceeds to examine television news, before engaging directly with issues around 'newszak', celebrity and 'tabloidization'. Lastly, in making the case for rethinking journalistic practice, several strategies for change are identified and explored. The reader is thus encouraged to continue with the work of calling into question the familiar types of assumptions ordinarily made about news culture by both journalists and their critics alike.