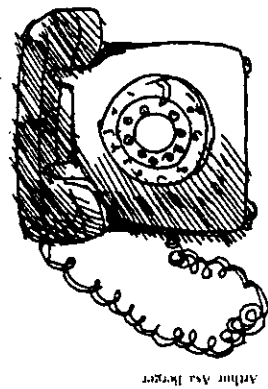


Wurtzel and Turner (5) showed that in a phone blackout subscribers experienced a significant loss in their sense of connectedness with and control over their personal environment. Investigation could also focus on subscribers who lose or "miss" the function of one or another part of the phone. What happens when a local system changes over from the old-fashioned system of relying upon the operator to direct dialing, or when the dial is replaced by the pushbutton system? What adjustments are made by different family members when they lose the use of a phone extension? When people in a community repeatedly overhear snatches of unknown conversations, do they think in terms of being spied upon, or instead, of malfunctioning parts? These types of questions about the role of the telephone in society are just beginning to be asked.

REFERENCES

1. "Admit Calls in U.S. are Overheard." *New York Times*, July 22, 1977.
2. Aronson, S. "The Sociology of the Telephone." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 22, 1971, pp. 153-167.
3. Ball, Donald W. "Toward a Sociology of Telephones and Telephoners." In Marcello Truzzi (Ed.) *Sociology and Everyday Life*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1968, pp. 59-75.
4. Burnham, David. "U.S. is Increasing Phone Security to Fool Russians." *New York Times*, August 27, 1977.
5. Wurtzel, Alan H. and Colin Turner. "What Missing the Telephone Means." *Journal of Communication* 27(2), Spring 1977, pp. 48-57.



Arthur Asa Berger

Mythic Elements in Television News

by Robert Rutherford Smith

The modern narrative is highly structured; "the Greek gods on Mount Olympus were no less remote and only slightly more powerful."

Is television news structured, consciously or unconsciously, on the basis of a limited repertoire of consistent, predictable narratives? If television news reports an unstructured series of events or narratives, we should find them in random variety. If, on the other hand, television is a structuring agent, we may expect to find certain kinds of narratives reported more often than others. If television news is structured as a matter of policy, we should expect to find certain networks, stations, or groups emphasizing certain kinds of narratives. We expect, then, that it is possible to describe the narrative structures of news events, and that certain narratives will recur more frequently than others.

The most obvious method for answering questions about the content of a television program is to count: numbers of males, females, etc. However, questions concerning the measurement of content are different in kind from questions concerning the meaning of content. The first deal with static phenomena while the second concern the integrated meaning of a series of inter-related events. The first is a problem of measurement, the second of interpretation. Thus, we began with an analysis of the content of twenty 30-minute newscasts and, in addition, we attempted to relate the news narratives to traditional narrative categories taken in part from literary criticism and in part from the literature of psychiatry.

Twenty newscasts, all weekday evening newscasts broadcast February 28-March 3 and March 6, 1978 (Tuesday through Friday, plus Monday), were analyzed. The sample included both the ABC and NBC 7:00 p.m. network news, the WCVR-TV, Boston (ABC affiliate) 11:00 p.m. news, and the WGBH-

Robert Rutherford Smith wrote this article while he was Chairman of the Department of Broadcasting and Film at Boston University. He is now Dean of the School of Communications and Theater at Temple University in Philadelphia.

The author is indebted to Ms. Janet Meyer, a graduate student in communication at Boston University, for her assistance in the design of the research instrument, data gathering, and data analysis.

TV, Boston (public television) 10:00 p.m. news. A total of 317 separate news "stories" were analyzed. Sports¹ and weather reports were not included.

In an attempt to discover whether the news responds to spontaneous events or to pre-planned events, we divided all stories into four categories: spontaneous events (floods, accidents); comment upon or analyses of spontaneous events; pre-planned events (press conferences, opening nights); and comment upon or analyses of pre-planned events. As shown in Table 1, pre-planned events and

Table 1: Events

	N	%
Comment on pre-planned events	120	38.1
Pre-planned events	101	31.8
Spontaneous events	63	19.8
Comment on spontaneous events	33	10.3
Total	317	100.0

comments upon them constituted almost 70 percent of all events reported. This goes along with Boorstin's complaint that the media give an inappropriate emphasis to "pseudo-events," that is, to events that (a) are not spontaneous, (b) are planned for the purpose of being reported, (c) have an ambiguous relation to "underlying reality," and (d) involve a self-fulfilling prophecy, e.g., saying that a state of emergency exists creates a state of emergency (1, p. 11). In light of our analysis, this emphasis on pre-planned events illustrates that the television news producers do have control over a major portion of what is chosen as news and how it is reported.

Government investigations, hearings, and meetings provided the single largest category of news subjects.

Looking at Table 2, if we note that appearances by leaders and most items concerning foreign news are also related to government activities, government-related stories accounted for 45.4 percent of the stories. Some health stories were also government-oriented. If we include all of these, governments (city, state, and federal) are the subjects of more than half of the stories in our sample. What is striking is the absence of reports concerning the private sectors: corporations, families, clubs, etc.

We next asked what happens in these stories: who acts? whom do they act upon? As shown in Table 3, the individual actors in the news items with which we are concerned were primarily males. Voluntary groups (consumer groups, trade groups, school groups) accounted for 14 percent of all "actors," and government agencies accounted for slightly more than one-third. Impersonal forces, such as airplanes, flooding rivers, or trains, accounted for less than 4 percent of all actors. Despite the number of stories reported concerning the

¹ Sports would have been included if they were part of the regular news (not narrated by a sports reporter), but no such stories occurred.

Table 2: Story subjects

	N	%
Govt. investigations	72	22.7
Panama, foreign	50	15.8
Crime, wrecks, floods	49	15.5
Feature	37	11.7
Health, educ., culture	31	9.8
Coal strike	27	8.5
Leaders (Pres., mayors)	22	6.9
Economy	19	6.0
Nature, ecology	9	2.8
Other	1	0.3
Total	317	100.0

Table 3: Actors

	N	%
Government	105	33.0
Males, age 46+	54	17.0
Voluntary groups	45	14.8
Males, age 31-45	41	12.8
Corporations	26	8.2
Other	11	3.2
Train, plane	10	3.2
Union	7	2.2
Females, age 19-30	5	1.6
Females, age 31-45	5	1.6
Males, age 19-30	3	0.9
Family	3	0.9
Males, age 1-18	1	0.3
Females, age 1-18	1	0.3
Total	317	100.0

nationwide coal strike: only 2.2 percent of the total news items described the union as the actor.

We used similar categories to record the persons or institutions who were "acted upon" in the news stories (see Table 4). Again, individuals are seldom identified as the party acted upon in the narrative. Men are identified slightly more often than women, but individuals were identified in a total of only 7.3 percent of the stories analyzed.

Perhaps the most important aspect of these numbers is what might be termed the "acted to acted upon ratio."

Males acted more often than they were acted upon (5.82); voluntary groups were acted upon more often than acted (1.45); the government was also more often acted upon than acted (.85); corporations acted only slightly more often than they were acted upon (1.04). The United Mine Workers, despite having

Table 4: Acted upon

	N	%
Government	123	38.8
Voluntary groups	101	31.9
Corporations	25	7.9
Union	16	5.0
Family	15	4.7
Other or none	14	4.5
Males, age 31-45	10	3.2
Males, age 46+	7	2.2
Train, plane	3	0.9
Females, age 19-30	2	0.6
Females, age 1-18	1	0.3
Total	317	100.0

precipitated a crisis by striking, were depicted as being acted upon more often than acting (.44). It should be noted that many of the male actors were government leaders.

Television news, during the evenings studied, presented a narrative in which government was the dominant subject, the primary actor and the primary acted-upon. Voluntary groups were more often acted upon. Men acted more often than they were acted upon, and women were represented infrequently in any role.

In an attempt to determine what kinds of stories were told, we categorized the narratives according to Jungian categories as shown in Table 5. Although

Table 5: Narratives

	N	%
Man decides	110	34.8
Suffering	86	27.1
Villain caught	66	20.8
Trickster	19	6.0
Wise man	13	4.1
Rescue, escape	12	3.8
Nature	4	1.3
Woman nurtures	3	0.9
Woman liberated	3	0.9
Other	1	0.3
Total	317	100.0

our method is empirical, we have chosen those narratives Jung found to be the common stuff of his patients' experiences as a way to relate our data to the general human experience. Those narratives, derived from the wealth of his clinical observations, have "been absorbed into the wider presentation of those common denominators of psychic experience, the archetypes" (2, p. xxv). The most common archetypes identified by Jung (Narcissus, Dionysos, Christ, the child) have not been used and speculative interpretations (e.g., Barbara Walters as an animus figure) have been omitted. We have selected only those with *prima facie* application to the stories in the news.

Television news reported primarily stories about decision-making and suffering. The suffering was characterized by the imprisonment of two former legislators, the victims of a flood in California, etc. Decision-making included President Carter deciding to invoke the Taft-Hartley Act, decisions by miners to remain on strike, etc.

We also looked for the thematic content of the news stories. As shown in Table 6, corruption, injustice, law and justice were the themes of some 38 percent of the stories. This is consistent with the emphasis noted earlier upon government actions.

Table 6: Themes

	N	%
Helpless, injustice	43	13.6
Corruption	42	13.2
Test of strength	41	12.9
Progress, cooperation	37	11.7
Law and justice	36	11.4
Armageddon	31	9.8
Hero rescues	17	5.4
Sacredness of life	14	4.4
Brotherhood	13	4.1
Other	12	3.9
Nature, destructive	9	2.8
Innocence	9	2.8
Progress, scientific	7	2.2
Nature, benign	3	0.9
Patriotism	3	0.9
Total	317	100.0

What we have termed themes are the general stories of which the narratives are special illustrations. One may think of the narrative as a response to the question "what happened?" and the theme as a response to the question "what was the story about?"

Finally, we looked at specific symbols identified visually in the news report (see Table 7). In some cases these were flashed on a screen behind the news

Table 7: Symbols

	N	%
None	98	31.0
Governmental activity	40	12.6
Judging, testifying	34	10.7
Wreck	28	8.8
Public speaking	26	8.2
Public building	22	6.9
Gun, tool	20	6.3
Commercial activity	19	6.0
Fighting, competing	17	5.4
Cooperating	13	4.1
Total	317	100.0

reader. In others—for instance, standing before the White House—the symbol provided a setting for the story. The most surprising aspect of this analysis is that one-third of all stories did not contain any identifiable visual symbol. Judging, testifying, and governmental activities were the most frequent symbols.

If we gather the three most frequent items from each of these categories, we can construct a model of the narrative structure of the news items we have described.

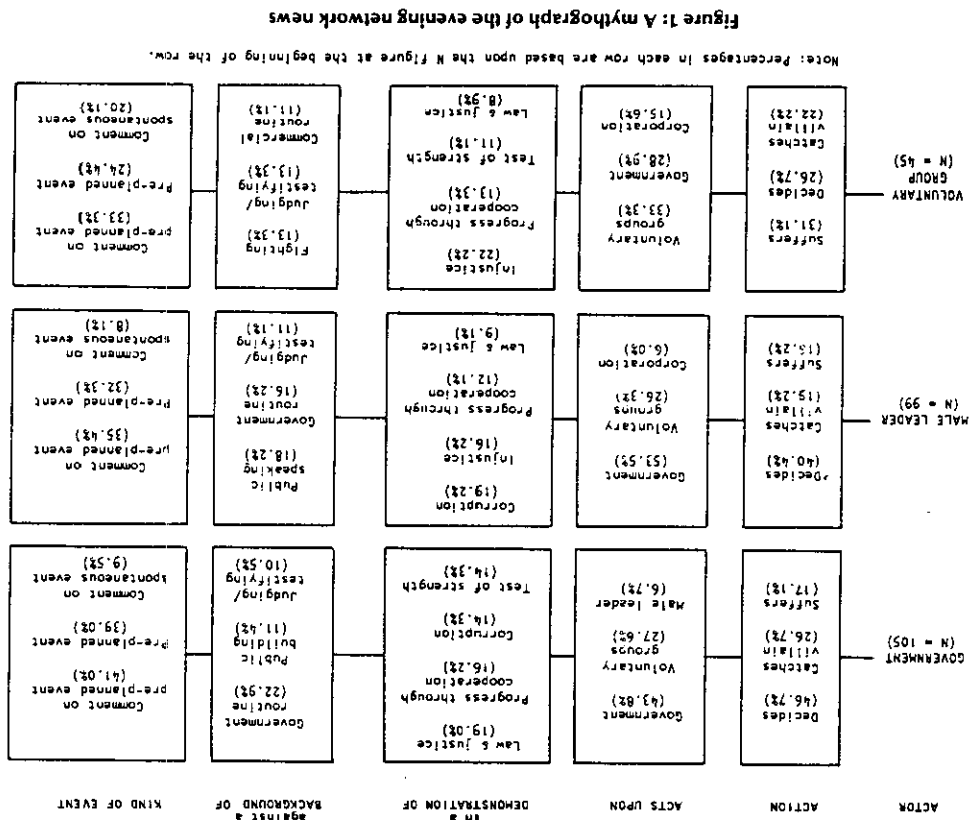
There are some clues in the data which suggest how specific stories were constructed (see Figure 1). We have provided an analysis of the stories in the analysis related to the three major actors: government leaders, males, and voluntary groups. Unfortunately, our sample is too small to allow us to perform a contingency analysis or describe the typical story from each category. The data do suggest, however, that regularities exist and that certain stories are repeated much more often than others.

Not only are the stories regular, but the actors are "licensed," in Lévi-Strauss' phrase, by newsreaders who set the terms of the actor's authority. For instance, we might view the male actor as one armature, the government and voluntary groups as two others. The narratives (injustice, test of strength, etc.) are codes which relate the armatures to the myths (see 3, pp. 35-38).

The meaning of the pattern we have detected depends upon the framework in which we cast it. Let me point to a definition of myth devised by Paul Olson (4, p. 4): "Myth is any narrative which explains or renders in fictive or anthropomorphic terms perceptions of physical nature of social life." Television news, to the extent that it is a medium for the communication of myths, can be understood, in this sense, as a narrative that "explains" or "renders" in fictive terms perceptions of our social environment.

What is the story of these myths of male actors, government bureaucracies, and voluntary groups who suffer, decide, and catch villains?

1. Television reports social reality by creating stories in which males are the primary individual actors. Most of these males occupy positions in government.
2. The government is the actor more frequently than any other group.
3. The government is also the group most frequently acted upon.
4. Women neither act nor are acted upon. They are part of the chorus.
5. These actors engage in prolonged decision-making, suffering (usually portrayed by discomfort rather than pain), and occasionally catch villains.
6. These stories are concerned with injustice, corruption, testing of the strength of the actor against the acted-upon, with a lesser emphasis upon progress through cooperation.



It is difficult to make a claim that television news is used for the creation of myths. We cannot stand outside our own culture and describe its features dispassionately. It is likely, though, that television is one of the media used for the transmission and reinforcement of the myths of our time.

Television news is cast in traditional mythic forms less often than expected, if our sample is a useful index.² In the place of sirens, demons, sensations of flying or falling, we have a new narrative: political leaders as an omnipotent elite, beyond both marketplace and law, struggling with each other to determine the rules under which the rest of us must live. The Greek gods on Mount Olympus were no less remote and only slightly more powerful.

REFERENCES

1. Boorstin, Daniel J. *The Image*. New York: Atheneum, 1962.
2. Jung, C. G. *Psyche and Symbol* edited by Violet S. de Laszlo. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1958.
3. Moore, Tim. *Claude Lévi-Strauss and the Cultural Sciences*. Birmingham, England: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Occasional Paper #4, n.d.
4. Olson, Paul A. (Ed.) *The Uses of Myth*. Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1968.



Jacques Ellul's Contributions to Critical Media Theory

by Clifford G. Christians
and Michael R. Real

... Day after day the wind blows away the pages of our calendars, our newspapers, and our political regimes, and we glide along the stream of time without any spiritual framework, without a memory, without a judgment, carried about by "all winds of doctrine" on the current of history, which is always slipping into a perpetual past. Now we ought to react vigorously against this slackness—this tendency to drift. If we are to live in this world we need to know it far more profoundly; we need to rediscover the meaning of events, and the spiritual framework which our contemporaries have lost.

—Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (p. 138)

Since 1935 Jacques Ellul has argued for *la technique* as the twentieth century's most distinctive phenomenon. Through that principle his work offers a primary focus for theoretical considerations of modern communications media and their role in human society. The work of the 66-year-old Ellul has begun to emerge as a major contribution to what Paul Lazarsfeld (11) labeled "critical research," the undernourished counterpart to the more prevalent "administrative research" in communications.

Clifford G. Christians is Assistant Professor of Communications at the University of Illinois—Urbana. Michael R. Real is Assistant Professor of Communications at the University of California—San Diego.

² Preliminary analysis of a one-month sample of TV news broadcasts yielded similar results.