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NEWSMAKING AND CRIME

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There is a powerful 'common-sense' view that the relation between crime and 'the news' is a simple one: crime occurs - the police act to apprehend the criminals - the courts punish them: all this is news - and gets reported, as accurate information, in the media. The aim of this paper is to challenge, and, if possible, to overthrow this viewpoint; for it seems to us naive and misleading. There is no consistent relationship between the rates for different kinds of crime in the Criminal Statistics and the relative frequency with which these are reported in the press. The post-war 'crime wave' does not seem to have been accompanied by a major increase in press coverage; but also, the decline in the official rate between 1950 and 1955 was not accompanied by a corresponding decrease in news coverage. Though the rates for different kinds of crime vary, the patterns of crime news remain remarkably constant. Some of the distortions are also strikingly consistent. For instance, more serious crime or crimes of topical social interest are consistently over-reported: murder is consistently "very markedly over-reported": so are more serious punishments. Thus, though crime news must and does bear some relation to the rates of reported crime, this relation is neither simple nor transparent. (Roshier, 1973: Hauge, 1965).

What in fact we are dealing with is the relation between three different definitions of crime: the official, the media and the public definitions of crime. Each of these definitions is socially constructed a social event not a fact in Nature; each is produced by a distinctive social and institutional process. The official definition of crime is constructed by those agencies responsible for crime control - the police, the courts, the statisticians, the Home Office. This definition is the result of the rate of reported crime, the clear-up rate, the focussed and organised police response to certain crimes, the way the patterns and rates of crime are interpreted by judges and official spokesmen in the crime control institutions and so on. The media definition of crime is constructed by the media, and reflects the selective attention of news men and news media to crime, the shaping power of 'news values', the routines and practices of news gathering and presentation. The public definition of crime is constructed by the lay public with little or no direct experience or 'expert' knowledge of crime. It is massively dependent on the other two definitions - the official and the media definitions. The selective portrayal of crime in the mass media plays

an important part in shaping public definitions of the 'crime problem', and hence also (through further feed-back) in its 'official' definition. So we must replace the simple equation: crime = apprehension - news about crime, with a more complex model, which takes full account of the shaping power of the intervening institutions. Thus:

crime (volume & incidence unknown)	→	'crime' (product of insti- tutional definition by crime control agencies)	→	news values (the selec- tive insti- tutional practices of 'news making')	→	'crime-as- news' (the se- lective portrayal of crime in the media	→	public definition of crime (the consequence of information provided by official and media sources)
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The 'common sense' equation - crime = news - suggests that the primary function of 'news' is to give the public, accurate information about crime in society. But 'crime news' serves other, equally important, but less strictly informative, functions. Erikson reminds us that "confrontations between deviant offenders and agents of control always attracted a good deal of attention" in the past; there was good reason why "the trial and punishment of offenders were staged in the market place". The reform which abolished Tyburn and the other public spectacles of retribution, Erikson noted, "coincided almost exactly with the development of newspapers as a medium of mass information". Crime is thus one of the oldest, most perennial topics of public interest. Similarly with punishment which has a symbolic as well as an instrumental value and must therefore be seen to be done as well as done. As Sir Charles Curran noted, "social rejection is part of punishment". The stigmatization of the wrong-doer is a critical part of the punishment process and for stigmatization to work, it must be made public - publicised. 'News' about crime and punishment thus plays an important social function in demonstrating where the moral, legal and normative boundary lines which define 'society' fall and how they are applied. Society needs to be continually reminded where these normative boundaries, which define it as a community, lie: how they are being tested, redesigned or undermined: who is transgressing them. It also needs public reassurance that, despite these transgressions, the boundaries remain intact. Society is fascinated by this endless unfolding drama between order and disorder, consensus and dissensus. Since crime breaches our 'normal' expectations about the world, the people rely on the control institutions to define, place and 'make sense of' the illegal, the abnormal, the 'unthinkable'.

And if control is to be applied in defence of the interests of 'society as a whole', society needs to have publicly provided those explanations and rationales which legitimate that control. In Erikson's memorable phrase - "In a figurative sense, . . . morality and immorality meet at the public scaffold, and it is during this meeting that the line between them is drawn".

There is, indeed, a striking convergence between crime as a topic and the structure of 'news values'. Crime stands out against the background of all that is massively 'taken-for-granted' about the social world. That is why, though there has never been a society without crime, nevertheless crime always comes across as unpredictable, unusual, disruptive of the social order, and of the consensual moral framework, a break in the routine; and thus dramatic, sensational. But 'news', too, is defined against the background of normal expectations and taken-for-granted routines. The 'news' is precisely what is 'new', unusual, a break in the pattern, unpredictable, disruptive, dramatic, sensational. As Mr. Larry Lamb, editor of the Sun noted, "only big time crime is news, or small crime with big features, or which can be so featured". What happens everyday to everyone is hardly ever 'news': but anything that goes thump or bang in the night is potentially a front-page story. Crime and 'news values' thus exhibit a strikingly similar structure. Consequently crime has for a very long period been a consistent and recurring focus of news attention: one of the most perennial of news themes, intrinsically 'newsworthy'. In the history of the press, crime is one of the oldest, one of the most 'natural' of news categories.

There is, in fact, a spectrum or continuum of types of crime. But crime news is basically structured around the two extreme poles of the spectrum. Basically, crime news is either routine or sensational. A study of the reporting of crime and violence in the popular press ("A Mirror For Violence" in Shuttleworth, Cserango & Lloyd, 1975) has remarked on the very small space, the impersonal and abbreviated manner, in which much 'mundane' crime is routinely reported. Like the $3\frac{1}{2}$ column inch story about an elderly spinster found stabbed to death in her home (Daily Mirror, 5 May, 1973). These routine items seem to say little more than that 'another serious crime has been committed'; they are simply blips on the crime screen. Nevertheless, the press remains so highly sensitized to crime that even the most routine and mundane transgressions are potentially 'news-worthy'. Though crimes of this small order occur

all the time and are clearly 'normal', they continue to appear, in small items in the press. Crime of any kind has potential news visibility. Where the small, routine items of crime news are concerned, the press does not give them much space: but it seems to continue to exercise the function of continually patrolling and monitoring the routine incidence of crime. TV and radio where 'space' (that is, time) is scarce, is, of course, even more selective in terms of this routine treatment, than the press. These media only 'monitor' 'routine' crime at the local programme level, or in the form of general comments about 'the crime rate'. Only the more outstanding crimes catch the national radio and TV headlines.

In the press, the consistent volume of 'mundane' crime stories is matched, on the other side, by the big, dramatic, sensational crime stories. Big, sensation crime stories possess some characteristics, embody themes or touch social preoccupations which enable them to be built up and featured. The size or volume of the crime involved, the characteristics of the gang or criminal personalities involved are open to the more dramatic application of news values and this pushes them out of the routine and into the more feature or spectacular category of news presentation. Stories referring to the spectacular exploits of gangs like the Krays, the Richardsons or the Great Train Robbers are 'naturals' for feature news or colour supplement treatment. But even lesser crimes can be built up to feature stories, or have the space and size devoted to them in the paper increased, as a consequence of the particular choice of news angles. The bizarre story of the murder of 3 babies impaled on some house-railings (S. Mirror 15 April 1973) rated inch-wide headline (HORROR OF BABIES SLAIN BY MANIAC), covered most of one tabloid page with a picture of a tent graphically spread across the garden wall. Undoubtedly the unusual nature of the murder and the fact that babies were involved helped to lift this crime story into its more sensational front-page exploitation. The Mirror story of how a press photographer was punched, with a lot of space, capitalized headline and aggressive photo would surely not have been there if the press hadn't been involved and the man who threw the punch wasn't a high status personality in the celebrity stakes - Marlon Brando. At least, in the 2 month period around this event, there is no other story of a remotely comparable kind in the paper. Trivial, and sometimes non-existent, events can also be lifted into 'news visibility' if they can be connected with a prominent crime theme. The fact, reported in the Mirror of 30 May 1966, that the police had to

use walkie-talkies to help two lost little boys would surely not have been news, had it not been possible to link this human interest tit-bit to the fact that the police concerned were on "Mods and Rockers patrol". Nor would the story the same day in the local press (Evening Argus, 30 May 1966), under the strap-line, 'Violence', that "In Brighton there was no violence in spite of crowds of teenagers on the beach". Thus, in the last story referred to above, the absence of violence in Brighton is 'news' only against the background of the expectation - much sustained previously by the press itself -, that there would be fresh outbreaks of violence between teenagers on the holiday beaches that weekend.

This tendency of crime news coverage to polarize between the 'routine' and the 'sensational' must be related to the point made earlier: namely, that news consists of the 'abnormal' contrasted against what is consensually taken to be 'normal', the norm. "The media select events which are atypical, presents them in a stereotypical fashion and contrasts them against a backcloth of normality which is overtypical". (Young). Sometimes this polarization between the 'untypical' and the 'overtypical' is to be found within a single story, and provides its news pivot. The News of the World story (4 Feb 72) of the 'mugging' and death of a man outside his home must have gained extra news value from the counterpoint between "the brutal thugs" . . . "cruel killers" . . . "Horrible injuries" . . . "Battered and kicked to death . . . all for the sake of just £ "2"; and "Tom, a quiet, inoffensive family man who enjoyed a pint and a chat at the local", who that night was "his usual cheerful self". In general, the closer a story can be angled upwards towards the spectacular threshold - violence, sex or violence, gang or group crime, crime for pleasure, political crime, etc - or the more single events can be mapped into a 'crime wave' or (better still) "an orgy of crime", the more newsworth it gets, the greater news value it realizes, and the more sensational the treatment and presentation accorded to it.

The media, then, select from the pool of reported crime especially those stories which fit the structure of news values: and they connect these crime stories with what they take to be the structure of public interest about crime. It is by way of this 'connection' that news values are realized, or, to use a more vulgar word, 'cashed'. But there are many different kinds of 'news interest' or public interest in crime. There is the interest in the 'one-off' spectacular or dramatic crime event or personality. Equally important, is the interest

in crime itself as a 'social problem'. The Evening Standard headline, "LONDON MUGGING? JUDGE TALKS OF CITY IN FEAR" is clearly actively orchestrating a relatively minor event into a much larger, more menacing, threatening and resonant theme. This theme, - spreading panic about muggers-- is the news value of the story; the facts of this particular case are really incidental to it. Hence what is headlined is not who mugged whom, but what the judge said and the 'city in fear' to which he referred. The report of the actual mugging here only provides the news peg, on which to hang the story. (Sept. 72). This is a particularly interesting example, since it is one of the stories which inaugurated the massive media build-up and public panic about mugging in 1972-3: and the tentative use of the question mark, there, by the Standard is important. A day or two later, the question mark was to disappear: a sign that unequivocally, 'Mugging' had at last arrived. But the news interest in 'the problem' behind the story is already perfectly clear from the story's headline and details: "Londoners are afraid to use the underground and underpasses late at night for fear of being mugged (no question or quotation mark) . . . "; the Judge's remarks that "Mugging is becoming more and more prevalent . . . We are told that in America people are even afraid to walk the street at night . . . This is an offence for which deterrent sentences should be passed": These are the real points of news interest in the story. The specific crime event has been almost entirely swallowed up by the wider social themes.

There is another kind of crime interest - in the crime rate itself, interpreted by the control culture and the media, as a 'social barometer'. For example, the 'use' of the Moors murder in 1966 as a social indicator of the consequences of 'permissiveness' and 'pornography' (S. Express: "ARE BRADY AND HINDLEY THE ONLY GUILTY ONES?"). Then there is the interest in crime as an aspect of control - the 'law and order' link. This sort of connection is often made in editorials, which don't refer to any actual crime news story in detail at all, but 'take off' on the basis of one such incident to issue a general cry for stronger discipline, tougher sentences: more law and order measures. The Sunday Express, News of the World and other Sunday populars, frequently 'moralize' and campaign about crime itself in this way. But the connection is not exclusive either to Sunday papers or to editorials. The Daily Mail ended its story on the killing of 3 policemen in London in 1966 with the report that "A dazed incredulity is followed by the realization that order is not to be taken for granted. The jungle is still there. There are

still wild beasts in it to be controlled". Crime therefore engages a wide range of social themes: and the newsworthiness of crime stories can be directly increased by pushing a story down towards the 'deeper issues' which lie within it, or by linking and 'mapping' a particular crime story up into one of these broader themes.

The media have little direct access to crime as such. Some papers are skilled at rewriting proceedings in court to make it appear that 'your reporter' was actually present when the dark deed was done. Some papers serve the function of private-public confessionals to quality villains. The TV networks have to be more circumspect about allowing criminals to appear: and if someone confessed on screen to a crime for which no one had yet been apprehended, the networks would be required to pass their names and addresses to Scotland Yard - which can't greatly increase the numbers of villains taking the primrose path to Television Centre. Some papers do make a heavy investment in investigative feature crime reports and in the routinely sensational crime exposée: though, where the latter are concerned, illegality, immorality and engineered moral outrage tend to blur into one another. But the majority of crime stories, and the 'good news' about the crime rate, must come to the news media via the police, the courts and the control agencies and departments. This means that, with respect to crime and crime news, the crime control agencies are the principal and primary sources and thus definers of crime. Their definitions of crime and the criminal prevail: they stand at the apex of the 'hierarchy of credibility'. This position of the control institutions in relation to the defining process about crime is enhanced by the 'official' and institutional nature of their role (they are also the controllers); and by the absence - of course? - of the criminal, in crime stories and reports and thus of any alternative counter-definitions. The power to control crime is thus inseparable from the primary power these institutions have to define what crime is, who the criminal is likely to be, and why the rates for different crimes are what they are: "the social and political definitions of those in dominant positions tend to become objectified in the major institutional orders, so providing the moral framework for the entire social system" (Parkin). There is no mystery about the regular access which these control institutions have via the media to the public definitions of crime. They are, after all, the institutions charged with crime apprehension, production and control.

They stand in the front line of the 'fight against crime'. They see crime at first hand every day. Their knowledge, definitions and interpretations of crime therefore command the field. They are also the main sources of 'the news' about crime. The media depend on them as privileged sources. The more competitive news-gathering becomes, the more newsmen rely on the institutions in control, who can brief and (pre-schedule" events for the media, thereby reducing the "incessant pressures of time . . . resource allocation and work scheduling" (Murdock).

At the level of news gathering, there is considerable and widespread routinization of contacts between crime reporters and correspondents, and official crime control sources. Sometimes - as in the case of the media transmitting news of police plans to apprehend a villain who is still at large and no doubt listening in - the goals of the crime controllers and the media diverge. But, routine contacts must be maintained and regularized. There is indeed, a 'taking over wholesale of the institutional perspective' by some newsmen who have been too long on the crime beat; so that their prose is only a heartbeat - so to speak - away from the policeman's. (Roshier) This cannot be good for anyone - including the police. And it especially results in an overwhelming loading of the dice when we recall that, in this area, the criminal is unlikely either to be 'accessed' or to be 'balanced'. So far as television and radio are concerned, as with the press, the spokesmen for the crime control agencies have privileged access - they are always called on first when an aspect of crime and prevention becomes controversial or a topic in current affairs treatment and they have an absolute right of reply should they care to exercise it. Two other practices of newsmaking confirm and reinforce this privileged access of the control institutions to the definition of crime in the news. The first is the requirement - a general one in the press, a tight and specific one in radio and especially TV - that the media should be balanced and impartial. This means that, in a controversial area like crime, the media would not go very far in reporting crime or interpreting the criminal statistics without substantiating their views by quotation from the 'official sources', or by grounding and witnessing what they say in the 'official' view of crime. This circle is further tightened by the fear of contempt and the constraints of sub judice rules. These may, indeed, partly account for the very abbreviated nature of many routine crime reports. But, in the

more spectacular aspects of crime, the media are on safer legal ground, but also appear more impartial and balanced, if they can rest a report squarely on a direct interview with or indirect quotation from, a control spokesman or from proceedings heard and seen in court (again, if possible, with direct quotes); or from a judge's homily made during sentencing, or from an official interpretation - usually at high ranking level - of the statistics and rates and movements of crime. The whole range of crime news is thus massively founded in these official sources and definitions. Indeed, most extensive crime stories are really stories, not about a crime event, but about a court case: and many of the most vivid headlines about crime are taken directly out of a judge's summing-up reflections on the (usually rapidly declining) state of the world as a result of crime. We can see both the process itself, but also the translation by the media up the scale of aggression in this example of a Mirror story, based on the Chief Inspector of Constab.'s presentation of his Annual Report in 1973 (14/6/73). What the Chief Inspector is quoted as saying - the first major interpretation of the movement of crime in that year - was that "the increase of violent crime in England and Wales has aroused justifiable public concern". You will note that this is not a simple statement of statistical fact, nor even simply an interpretation of the statistical facts. It does not simply note that violent crime is going up: it affirms that the public is justified in its concern about violent crime. It is, therefore, public legitimation by a police spokesman, of what is and what is not "justifiably" a matter of public concern. With this warrant behind it, it is hardly surprising that the Mirror then headlined this item: "AGGRO BRITAIN - 'Mindless Violence' of bully boys worries top policemen".

As we have seen, the crime control agencies act as the primary definers of crime. But the media not only relay and reproduce these definitions - they transform, translate and mediate crime, as reported and interpreted, into the selective patterns of crime-as-a-news-event. We have already spoken about the general play of news values across the reporting of crime: of the angling and framing which extracts added news value to a story: of the thematization and contextualizing of crime in terms of issues and problems. Here we want to pinpoint certain broader features of this 'translation' process, as 'crime' moves from its official and institutional, to its media and news definition. Selectivity and angling are only some of the practices which are at work here. There is also the transforming of the crime event into a

finished news item - the coding of crime stories within the formats and rhetorics of the journalistic discourse. The transformation of the Chief Inspector's remarks into the AGGRO BRITAIN headline referred to above accomplishes at least three things. (1) It dramatizes, sensationalizes and exaggerates a considered official statement about crime - partly, no doubt, for effect; to catch attention, to strike home with its readers. (2) At the same time, it translates the measured language of an official spokesman into the vigorous public language of popular journalistic rhetoric. In this way it helps a carefully framed judgement to become more widely accessible - it slots the crime into a wellworn groove in public consciousness. It normalizes and diffuses the statement, at the same time as it sensationalizes it. But (3) it also interprets, contextualizes, gives a social reference for a particular 'fact' about the crime rate. By using the terms "AGGRO" and "Bully boys", the report connects - whether legitimately or not is another question - the "increase of violent crimes" specifically with Skinheads (the term 'Aggro' is theirs), and football hooliganism, both highly sensational social phenomena. It also connects the 'facts' about a particular crime with a wider, though less well defined, highly generalized theme - the fear of "mindless violence" in the streets. This last point - the active giving of meanings and social contexts to crime, the broad identification of crimes with certain categories of individuals and the thematization of crime in terms of public anxiety - these are the most pivotal translations of all, which the media accomplish. Here the press is no longer simply in an informative or reproducing role. The media have become active mediators.

The process of mediation does not necessarily end with the representation of crime in press reports. For, a story about crime, especially when signalled as significant by a spokesman for the crime control agencies or by a judge in court as 'a legitimate matter of public concern', can then also support a newspaper; escalating into a more active editorializing role. By taking 'the public voice', assuming the mantle and aura of moral guardian, the newspaper can begin actively to shape public opinion on the issues of crime and punishment; a paper can even actively develop a campaign about crime. As the post-war consensus has withered and society has become more polarized around the basic issues of our moral, economic, industrial, social and political life, so the media have begun more openly and consistently to campaign about crime;

issuing calls for harsher sentences, tougher measures, coupled with an attack on soft liberals, wishy-washy-penal reformers and intelligent do-gooders. The press, on some occasion, has actively stimulated the panic about crime as well as contributed to an informed public about crime. They have, at times, precipitated the development of 'law and order' campaigns. I make this charge seriously and directly, because I believe it to be of the utmost public concern. By 'developing a campaign about crime' we mean something more than the traditional adoption of a tough editorial stance about crime control - though this, of course, regularly and frequently occurs. The story about 'Tom' quoted earlier from the News of the World, beginning as a crime news-story, gradually evolves, via a substantiating quote from the Judge ("Conditions in this country are approaching those that prevailed 200 years ago . . ."), into a crusading appeal "In all conscience", for anyone "with the slightest scrap of information to go to the police station . . ." "Let's show the muggers, before anyone else gets hurt, maimed or killed, that they cannot get away with it". This is quite a mild example, in fact, of press campaigns on the crime question. We have in mind, for example, the orchestration of whole centre or front pages in the popular press around the crime menace. Examples in the late 1960s and early 1970s could be selected in any week of that period from, say, the Sunday Express: with, for example, on the left hand, an editorial resuming the figures, the pro's and con's of the debate, but ending with a strong plea for tough measures and a prophecy of escalating danger: on the far right - - of the page, I mean - the 'John Gordon' column, with its unceasing onslaught on soft liberals and reformers and the menace of 'soft crimes' like homosexuality and permissiveness written in its usual vigorous polemical-swearing style: top, centre, a grim black Cummings cartoon, depicting the 'threat' promised editorially, with a headline which articulates closely with the centre 'feature: such feature layouts might include a regular column by another accredited spokesman, definer and interpreter - often, in these years, Lord Hailsham, mobilizing his immense institutional power and charisma in this area, with a 'measured' reflection on the state of society as registered by the crime thermometer, and a warning that, though red paint on the cricket pitch may seem a long way from anarchy, it may be the thin edge of the red wedge . . . (cf: for example, a similar treatment of the Paul Storey 'mugging' in Birmingham in 1973 in the Sun).

This kind of presentation is no longer just 'good hard-hitting journalism'. It is the press in its fully orchestrated crusading role. Campaigns of this kind can spiral and develop a series of feed back loops, even when they are not laid out with the full rhetorical resources. One familiar spiral is where the paper quotes a judge giving sentence: endorses and reinforces the sentiments expressed: and campaigns behind him; at the same time, referring its editorial view to 'increasing public anxiety and concern' - perhaps simply as intuited by the paper, at other times as it surfaces in the letters from a selective slice of readers: this being then followed by a judge who, in giving (usually) a 'tougher sentence' grounds his use of deterrence in - 'public concern' as reflected and expressed in the press . . . And so on round the circle, the press warranting its chosen stance in judicial precedent, then orchestrating opinion and feeding it back into the judicial process. (6/Oct 72) Judge Hines told 3 'muggers', in Birmingham sentencing them to 3 years "The course I feel bound to take may not be best for you young men individually, but it is one I must take in the public interest", the Mirror added to this report its editorial weight by endorsing his judgement: "Judge Hines is right". Then, a week later, there is the Sun (TAMING THE MUGGERS - 13/10/72) aligning 'the public' with deterrent sentencing: "if punitive jail sentences help to stop the violence . . . then they will not only prove to be the only way. They will regrettably, be the RIGHT way. And the judges will have the backing of the public". This spiralling up the ladder of control by public spokesmen and campaigning media has been rightly described as a concerted 'move towards closure' in the control culture. It is most likely to occur at moments of social tension, when uncertainties about the future or fears about the polarizing nature of social conflict assumes the all-too-convenient scape-goat form of a public panic about crime. In an area as delicate as that of crime and control the prospect of such fully-orchestrated spirals inspires terror.

'Crime' is, of course, also transformed (as well as reported on or campaigned about) by the presentational devices employed by the media. Visualization by TV will inflect a crime story one way, accenting its vivid and spectacular aspects. National and local press treatments will also vary significantly. In all the media, the position of crime items in the news hierarchy, the length and forms of the coverage (in terms of the linking interviews, reports with expert opinion and so on) layout and visual means of exposition serve to bring emphasis, to rank and place

crime news in the overall hierarchy of public attention. We call this the agenda setting function of the media - the placing of a particular topic, like crime, in the hierarchy of public concerns. It is in this way that crime has gradually become a major political cause for concern. The press employ different presentational devices from TV - using position, captioning, space, headlining, rhetoric, illustration and so on to lend an item emphasis and weight. The use of these devices make a story 'more visual' or 'more interesting' . . . But it also shapes how the public 'makes sense' of crime. As a story passes from one format to another, so different frameworks of are brought to bear on it. Thus 'news' treatment places the accent on the factual legal side of a story. This highlights the eventfulness of crime - act, criminal, victim, circumstances, event, arrest - but necessarily displaces the social background, the causes or motivations, of crime from the centre of attention. Features in the press, or documentaries and current affairs 'specials' in TV, by contrast, are concerned with the 'background', the causes and explanations, the whys and wherefores, of crime. These 'explanations' draw on and reflect the various public ideologies about crime. There are often discrepancies between the 'news' and 'features' parts of a paper some of which are never resolved. The 'news', through its attachment to drama and event, may use (and abuse) common stereotypes of the criminal, and traffic in public labels, at the same time as the more 'investigative' features are questioning the stereotypes and figures and unpacking the labels. There is no necessary consistency here, even in the so-called 'quality' press, between the frameworks for crime adopted in one and another part of the same paper. The Sunday Times, for example, which takes often a sociological and environmental or 'social problem' viewpoint on crime, also regularly runs the Spectrum column which is unswervingly addicted to a psychopathic, chemical, genetic, indeed, near-Lambrosian, 'explanation' of criminal and deviant behaviour. Though criminology has long aspired to the condition of a science, the fact is that explanations of crime are powerfully and massively overlaid by lay ideologies. These ideological frameworks set whole chains of explanations in motion; whole families of criminal types and categories are set going, which knit together, while appearing to unravel, the enigma of crime and its causation. Here one often finds the complexities of crime - those complexities to which the Governor of Chelmsford Prison made indirect reference - 'classified out' into the genetic, or the psychopathic, or the environmental, or the sociological, or the psychiatric - or the socially-disorganized and undersocialised 'explanations'. To each cluster of explanations is attached an appropriate typology of criminal: the under-chromosomed, the unregenerated

evil, the criminally insane, the deprived, the sick, the weak, the mother-deprived, criminal type. To each is often also attached its chain of motivations: the irrational, the driven, the neurotic, the search for kicks, the congenitally-wicked, motive. To each, often also belongs the appropriate social setting or scene: the back street, or multiply-deprived working class area; the bomb site; the high-rise block and the unused telephone kiosk; the football end; the drug scene or hippie pad . . . No doubt something of the truth lurks and hovers within and between these stereotyped and clustered maps of meaning. But they are rarely pressed through in depth and detail to the difficult and complex but necessary social connections which they index. Sometimes, after a parade of 'explorations and explanations', the argument is dissolved ideologically: into one of the great Public Images - Inner City Slum, Family whose Mother went out to work, etc - which bring the account conveniently to 'an end', if not to a resolution. Here, from the Sunday Times (5/11/72) is an extended example of a schematic ideology of crime parading as a 'scientific' explanation: (THE MAKING OF A MUGGER - by Peter Watson). Everything we know about 'mugging' suggests that what is at work here is a mind-blowing tissue of ideological inflexions and constructions.

"There is nothing new about mugging someone except the name - after all a few years ago the same sort of violence used to be called coshing.

But the enquiry the Home Secretary set up into the phenomenon last week could well discover at least one new point about the gangs behind the attacks: the presence in them of hysterical impressionable "lieutenants" dependent on the gangs' leaders and who tip the gangs' activities in a violent direction.

Three types of youth appear to be involved in these muggings. First, at the centre of the gangs, is usually found a highly disturbed and unstable boy or girl. He or she invariably has a highly troubled background - a violent or alcoholic father is common - and shows early and predictable aggressive tendencies.

Arrayed round the gang leader will be the "lieutenants". Their backgrounds tend to be unhappy and deprived rather than violent. Finally, the third type, which makes up the outer ring of the gang, consists typically of fairly normal youths from backgrounds not generally thought of as disturbed or abnormal in any way. The

"lieutenants" relationship with the gang leaders is highly ambivalent - half admiration, half fear. But it means that there is now much more chance for the "disturbed factions" in a gang six or seven strong to assume leadership.

Probation officers and psychiatrists I spoke to were in no doubt that collective violence by youths has risen considerably in recent months, and that very young boys and girls are concerned (down to 12 in some cases). And three probation officers told me quite independently that a possible explanation of this crucial relationship between the disturbed and the impressionable might lie in the wider availability of drugs in recent years.

Drugs offered the opportunity for friendship between the different kinds of disturbed individuals who were attracted to their use. Both the seriously disturbed and the hysterical types, for example, are attracted to the "instant experience" offered by drugs. On top of this, though, the more "exotic" and exaggerated behaviour of some highly disturbed youths when under the influence may appeal to the dependent hysterical boys or girls who then, in a sense, become "addicted" to the more disturbed youths.

This, they agreed, might also account for the conflicting patterns of muggings - some of which seem to be carried out for kicks and some for gain. For the stolen money and watches may serve, in some cases, as funds with which to buy drugs in an increasingly expensive market.

And mugging as a spill-over effect from the drug scene might also explain why girls' gangs are now taking part in violence, something unknown in recent years. Drug use shows less difference between the sexes than to most other crimes.

This three-part structure of the gangs, if it proves to be correct means, however, that the blanket administration of longish sentences by the courts tends to be counter productive in the case of the impressionable "lieutenants" who would usually respond to probation. And the outer - mainly innocent - ring probably needs the minimum amount of attention from the authorities.

Which function a youth fulfils in his or her gang can usually be gauged from the social reports which probation officers prepare on young offenders. Yet in mugging cases they are rarely used by the courts.

It is ironic that the courts do not recognise this three-part structure since the special unit set up by the police in Brixton and by London Transport. Their aim is to get at the "lieutenants" who will respond to an authority greater than that of the gang leader.

By not discriminating between leaders and led, the probation officers feel that the courts may in this case be committing the prison and borstal impressionable youngsters who will only get worse after a spell alongside more independent characters."

The media provide the bridge or link between crime and the public anxiety or concern about crime. There is, of course, a widespread and growing anxiety about crime and its upward movement. But, over and above what we know of rising crime either from reported crime, or from the offered interpretations of the criminal statistics, there has been also the closely related phenomenon of a public 'moral panic' about rising crime: on the one hand panics about certain specific crimes which connect with troubling public issues (e.g. race, drugs, pornography, youth; or, on the other hand, panics about the highly generalized but nameless unspecified 'tide' or 'epidemic' of crime itself. These 'panics' have grown in intensity and number through the post-war years; they clearly reflect very deep-seated public anxieties and uncertainties; but, they are distinguished, above all, by 4 things: (1) the discrepancy between the scale of the known facts, and the depth, intensity and escalation of the public perception and response; (2) the focussing of these 'panics' around key social themes and social groups (e.g. blacks) or social categories (e.g. drugs offenders; (3) the way each 'panic' feeds off and spirals with other concerns which are mapped into it, or in some other way, identified with it; (4) the way in which 'moral panics' issue into control crusades and 'law and order' campaigns. Now, one important element in the construction of social panics is the use of powerful labels by the media. Labels have a powerful effect in shaping public perception of events which are, at one and the same time, both troubling, perplexing and not clear-cut or well-defined. They resolve unclear social phenomena into clear-cut identifiable and controllable categories. The use of a label like, for example, 'mugging' can help to cluster into one category events which are not in any simple sense, the same. We have looked closely at examples of crimes which, one day in August 1972 were not labelled 'a mugging' and where a day or two later an almost identical event, having been so labelled, escalates rapidly in news visibility; and, of course, contributes to the orchestration of crime into distinct and threatening patterns or waves. Labels also attach whole types of people to crimes. Rightly or wrongly the mugging label has irreversibly attached black youth to a particular pattern of crime. Labels allow supplementary attributes to be 'mapped into' the criminal pattern. Thus, the use of the 'mugging' label in the Watson article, its associations with America, permitted him, quite unwarrantably in the known evidence, to add or ascribe the whole quite different connotations of drug-taking and drug pushing to the 'mugging pattern'.

Thus different crimes, different attributes, different types of people converge under the convenient roof of the label. This convergence has the effect (a) of constructing disparate events into a crime wave - a whole movement of crime - where perhaps none exists; (b) of stimulating the public perception and fear of the upward drift of crime; in short, of escalating it; (c) of reinforcing the notion that different strands of crime are indeed coming together to produce one, massive, overwhelming but nameless and generalized 'tide of crime'. As student protesters become thugs and hooligans, and muggers become drug-pushers, and pornography readers become sex murderers through the thin edge of the wedge principle, so a general panic with its accompanying calls for greater control, is triggered. These 'panics' clearly have their origin in much wider and deeper social and political issues: but they tend to be displaced from the difficult and problematic terrain on which they form up, into the better defined, and well controlled theatre of crime. The media have at times actively participated in the construction of such spirals. We do not know how the 'mugger' is made or how many of him there are: though we are convinced it has more to do, as I've suggested, with the situation of the young, unemployed and alienated black youth, their dislocated biographies and strategies for survival in the crippling conditions of life in the inner-ring colonies than it does with the drama of the corrupted core and the corruptible lieutenants which passed itself off as an explanation in the Sunday Times article. We do know that the 'mugging' label was widely and vividly disseminated in the British press long before any single specific criminal act in Britain was labelled 'a mugging'. We know that, though it has a history of several hundred years in Britain, its recent use was a transplant from the American experience; it came with all the power of its rich connotations and meanings: black crime, ghetto-violence, the breakdown of the city, the collapse of law and order, in which at one point in time both previous President and Vice-President invested so much of their political fortunes. The 'mugging' label was also used as a means of prophesying events in Britain following their American example, long before there was evidence of its actually doing so: Cf the headline, "Must Harlem Come To Birmingham?" over an article which contained little factual support for this ominous prediction cast in the form of a question. The 'mugging' label with its resonances, not only triggered fears and anxieties, especially about the black population and its increasingly misfit and drifting youth; it led to a prior sensitization of both the public and the police to 'mugging's' possible

emergence in Britain - an anticipation of trouble before it began. Indeed, so thick was the air with American 'mugging' reports in the year before August 1972, - that, had the black mugger not appeared in or around mid-1972, we would have been obliged to construct him. There is evidence of parallel sensitization in the police, especially where the formation of the London Transport Police's 'Anti-Mugging squad' was concerned: a vigorous focussing of police attention and resources in certain areas, especially of South London. You may recall, several early cases, - predating the 'mugging panic' of August 1972 and after - not, as it happened, at all reported in the overground media: where certain charges against black youths near tube stations were dismissed because of the lack of witnesses other than the arresting officers, and in circumstances showing some evidence of what might be called 'anticipatory arrest', e.g. the case of the 'Oval 4'. The first specific use of the 'mugging' label to refer to an actual British crime, in August 1972, initiated a wave, not of actual mugging stories in the press, but of reports of cases now labelled mugging in the courts. Paradoxically the headline over this first report was based on a police quote - "a mugging gone wrong - presumably because the victim was seriously injured and subsequently died. Were these also 'muggings'? All of them? Some of them? More of them in early 1972 than in 1971? The hard statistical evidence of this 'wave' is even harder to pin down than crime figures usually are, though they provided the headline and story bases for most of the press and TV coverage of 'mugging' in general. Since there cannot be an actual 'mugging' figure, (for there is, strictly speaking, no such crime), these publicly referred to figures were composed of selected proportions of the figures for other types of robbery. But how much of, which figures? The 'hard evidence' which one hopes and expects lay behind such headlines as 'Mugging up 104%' gets softer as one sees reports and the figures for 'mugging' retrospectively projected back to 1968, when, indeed, the label was hardly known or used, although no doubt some people at that time were being jostled and robbed on the street. Such considerations had no effect in cutting off the head of steam building up behind the massive coverage of the 'mugging crime wave' which lasted until mid-1973; nor of undermining the spiral in the scale of control which crested in March 1973 with the Paul Storey 20 year sentence; nor, indeed does it seem to have established the smallest danger signal for the future - for example, in 1974 and again, now, in 1975 - as we begin what looks very much like a second escalation in the 'mugging' spiral. The play and interplay between label, public

perceptions about crime. (cf: "Mugging and Law-and-Order" Jefferson, et al CCCS Stencilled Paper No. 35).

The media not only sometimes bring together under a single label unrelated things; they have sometimes also helped to amplify and extend the perceived levels of the threat. They may thus have contributed to the amplification of public anxiety about crime: sometimes by 'reading' events, in terms of their most sensational - and illegal - element: the 'illegal' aspect of 'permissiveness': the political aspect of 'illegality': the 'violent' aspect of political protest and so on. Events troubling to the traditionalist, though not necessarily illegal, can be made - depending on how they are treated in the press - to pass through a series of boundaries or thresholds.

Permissiveness is wicked, but not a crime; crime may be illegal but not politically intended; political dissent, though going beyond the formal limits of institutional politics, is not necessarily violent. But it is easier to comprehend, and to enlist the lay public behind control unreservedly, once an action or practice has been 'criminalized', i.e. defined or abstracted in terms of its illegal or 'criminal' element alone). Not everyone will march under the banner against sexual liberation: but who will not take ~~arms~~ against 'violence', especially when defined as a dagger pointed at the heart of the state itself?

We have in this paper deliberately focussed (in an inevitably summary and condensed form) on those aspects of the relation between crime and the news which are least remarked, least and least studied - and, for that very reason, most troubling. By no means all the media share an equal responsibility in the processes we have been describing. Certainly, they cannot be ascribed to the 'bad faith' of individual editors, or newsmen. We have been talking about institutional processes, not personalities: about the role of the media in the complex equation of crime and control - not about a few 'rotten journalistic apples'. We have put the case as sharply as we could because we think the situation is near danger point: but also because, in our experience, those in the media are ~~sometimes~~ very unwilling indeed to take anything but the most immediate, pragmatic view of their role and responsibility in this field. This defence mechanism among journalists has helped to preserve what at the beginning we called the 'naive' view of the crime/news equation, and kept it in place. The fact is that, in the present situation, the naive view is no longer good enough, if only because it has anything but 'naive' consequences for the lives of most people and of society as a whole.