

Current Affairs on Commercial Television

British Academy of Film and Television Arts
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In the David Lean Room

Welcome from Stephen Jukes Head of Bournemouth Media School

Introduction

Patricia Holland
The 'This Week Project' Bournemouth Media School

This afternoon we will be discussing the contemporary understanding of current affairs as well as looking at the past. Is the present so different that we must simply put the past behind us, and say 'that was great; that happened then; things are different now'? Or can we learn something from the past? Our This Week Project looks at the very long history of a single series which ran on ITV, on the commercial channel, which drew its strength from a regular weekly slot and the security of a long running commitment and a regular team, together with the backing from a confident company -first Associated-Redifusion and then Thames Television. It also had protection from the regulatory authorities of the time -first of all the Independent Television Authority and then the Independent Broadcasting Authority. Despite the rows and disputes that went on between the broadcaster and the Regulator, these bodies protected the place of current affairs in a prime-time slot throughout the seventies and the eighties.

I'd like to begin the afternoon by introducing Dr Victoria Wegg-Prosser, who has done more than anybody else to remember, record and preserve This Week programmes, from her very early days in the National Film Archive, through to her time as a Producer at Flashback Television, and more recently her work as an academic at Bournemouth University, amongst other places. It is Vicki who secured these programmes in the National Film Archive, who physically rewound them with her own hands and made sure they were put onto master tape so that they can be duplicated. Without her, many of the This Week programmes that are now available for viewing wouldn't be seen and we wouldn't be able to write this history. So I'm very pleased to introduce our first speaker who is Vicki Wegg-Prosser.

Part 1 Looking back

This Week: 50 years ago.

Dr Victoria Wegg-Prosser, Freelance Producer and Historian

We must also thank Jeremy Isaacs for the work he did in making sure the film cans of This Week, prior to 1968, went to the National Film Archive when I was working there. And we must thank Thames Television and now FremantleMedia for the continuing that work they put in to preserving material. They spent much more money on the later stuff, but they also look after the pre-1968 surviving items, which started off as very short items within a programme that might have up to eight or nine items within its twenty-five or twenty-seven minutes running time. So I'm going to start with a clip from one of those early programmes. Surprisingly modern in some of its content. It's about ear-piercing:

Film clip.

After those early days, when there was quite a lot of flippant material, the series gradually grew in maturity. The quality of its journalists, film directors and

producers increased enormously, and, of course, the Regulator started to get quite curious and sometimes, concerned about what was going on in that weekly current affairs slot that Redifusion had been granted, as it were, when ITV first went on air. As the other stations came on air they all continued to run This Week. It started off on a Friday night at nine-thirty and then, within about a year, it settled down to its regular slot, usually eight o'clock or nine o'clock on a Thursday. The next three clips run together and I'm hoping that they'll be fairly self-explanatory.

Film Clips

Pat Holland:

I think it's important to look at This Week within the context of the wider independent television network and we're very fortunate to have the editors of the book, *ITV Cultures*, here, which looks at ITV. So I would like to introduce Rob Turnock from Bournemouth University and Dr Catherine Johnson from Royal Holloway College, University of London, who will be talking about the early days of ITV.

The early days of ITV

Rob Turnock (Bournemouth University)

Co-editor *ITV Cultures: Independent Television over Fifty Years* Open University Press, 2005

As I suspect most of you here will know, commercial television in Britain began official transmission in the London area on the 22nd September 1955. So when This Week launched on Associated-Redifusion in January 1956, commercial television was only about four months old. It's the aim of this paper to very briefly sketch out the context in which This Week arrived in 1956. Let's start by saying that the arrival of ITV had been a controversial affair. In 1949 the Labour Government had convened a Committee of Enquiry under Lord Beveridge to consider the future of radio and television broadcasting in Britain. In 1951, the

Beveridge Committee published its findings and it emphatically rejected the idea of commercial radio and television broadcasting. As a result the BBC's monopoly of the airwaves seemed to be assured. Yet very quickly the situation changed, both economically and politically.

Firstly, the austerity and hardship of the postwar years was replaced in the early 1950's by a sense of growing optimism. Not only did events such as the Festival of Britain and the Queen's Coronation point to a new Elizabethan modernity but signs of a flowering economy meant that manufacturers wanted to expand production to wider and new markets. Or, in other words, television manufacturers wanted to make and sell more television sets and advertisers wanted new ways to promote new consumer goods. Secondly a new Conservative Government was elected on the 25th October 1951 which included a new group of young Tory MPs. These new MPs, known as the One Nation Group, were aggressively in favour of competition and were resentful of the nationalisation of industry and State monopoly. In this economic and political climate eyes turned towards the BBC's monopoly of broadcasting. As a result there followed protracted and acrimonious debate in Parliament and in the Press.

As the ITV historian, Bernard Sendall has argued, the battle lines over commercial television were drawn between those who wanted commercial television to provide new programmes and services, and those who were fearful of the impact that commercial television would have on British culture and society. Those against commercial television included the Labour Party, many older Conservative MPs, members of the Church and an establishment intelligencia. Their fear was that commercial television would transmit trashy and vulgar programming, would promote brash American consumerism and would erode traditional British morals and values. Yet despite the strength of the ill-feeling towards commercial television, the 1954 Television Act was passed which legislated for the start of commercial television in Britain and for the breaking of the BBC's monopoly.

Now two key factors swung legislation in favour of commercial television. Firstly, the Conservative Government only had a majority of sixteen MPs which meant it was particularly vulnerable to back bench revolt, and as a result the One Nation Group Tories could wield a disproportionate degree of influence. Secondly, a deal was done in the back rooms of Government. The One Nation Group Tories were promised support for commercial television only if they left BBC Radio alone. At the time BBC Radio was perceived as being particularly prestigious and popular, whereas television was a new medium enjoyed by only a minority audience.

And there's another crucial point here. The intensity of the debate surrounding commercial television meant that the legislation was characterised by negotiation and compromise. As a result, under the terms of the 1954 Act, commercial television was funded by advertising, regionally structured and established as a regulated public service. What we want to do is briefly draw out those three main themes.

The first feature of the new commercial service was that it was funded by advertising, unlike the BBC which was funded by licence fee which viewers paid to the Post Office. Now this particular model of advertiser funding of ITV stemmed from the Beveridge Report's criticisms of the dominant way in which commercial broadcasting in the United States was funded in the 1940s. In the US model, programme sponsorship was allowed which meant that commercial sponsors could exert editorial power over programme makers. Sponsors could threaten to withdraw funding if they did not like a particular programme's tone or content. In contrast to this, a system of spot advertising was adopted in commercial television in Britain and this meant that particular advertisements appeared in designated slots in or between programmes. The aim of this was to create some separation between editorial control of programme making and the hard business end of making money. It would give producers and directors greater independence.

The second key feature of ITV was its regional structure. This too had its roots in the Beveridge Report which had been critical of the London-centric bias of the BBC. The ITV system was set up along regional lines, with Licences issued by the Independent Television Authority for companies to produce and deliver programme services to their franchised regions. In the first franchise round four licences were awarded to companies in three main metropolitan areas, London, the Midlands and the North of England. These companies began broadcasting in 1955 and 1956. The four companies that ran varying across these regions were Associated-Rediffusion, Associated Television, ABC and Granada, and they became known as the Big Four. In the following years transmitters were built around the country and new licences were awarded for new regions. By 1962 ITV had extended nationally with fifteen programme companies covering fourteen regions.

The regional structure was envisaged to have two other functions. As James Curran and Jean Seaton have argued in their book, *Power Without Responsibility*, regionalisation could mean better targeted advertising and marketing to specific audiences and demographic groups. But the other function of the regional structure, as Bernard Sendall has argued, was that regionalisation was the first step towards competition between different commercial companies. Competition in television broadcasting had been envisaged as more than one company in each region vying for advertising revenues and audiences. In the end, however, the expansion of programme companies had been limited. At the same time, networking arrangements were carved up by the big four and this meant that full and economic competition between companies was inhibited.

The third key feature of ITV was that it was legislated as a public service broadcaster with a mission to inform, educate and entertain. As Grace Wyndham Goldie argues in her book, *Facing the Nation*, ITV was set up in the mirror image of

the BBC. It was set up by Statute, by an Act of Parliament and operated by Licence from the Postmaster General. It was also regulated by a public body, the Independent Television Authority, which had overall responsibility for awarding franchises to the regional programme companies. Importantly, in the context of public service broadcasting, the ITA had to ensure that the regional programme companies adhered to public service broadcasting principles as laid down in the Television Act.

In many respects the publicly appointed individuals who oversaw the running of the ITA had a similar function to the BBC's Board of Governors. Like the BBC's Governors, the members of the Authority were recruited from the same pool of the great and the good. So for example the two people that headed the ITA at its outset were both drawn from public service and arts cultures. The first Director General of the ITA was Sir Robert Frazer who had previously been the Director General of the Central Office of Information; the first Chairman of the ITA was Sir Kenneth Clark who had previously been Chairman of the Arts Council and before that Director of the National Gallery. So, despite the fears of trashy programming and American consumerism, ITV was legislated as a public service broadcaster under a public body with high-minded credentials.

Dr Catherine Johnson (Royal Holloway, University of London)
co-editor of *ITV Cultures: Independent Television over Fifty Years* Open University Press, 2005

The public service values of ITV are manifested in two ways specifically in relation to programming. The first is the development of a mixed programme schedule and secondly the maintenance of proper balance, and these two things are linked. In relation to the mixed programme schedule, it meant that ITV, much like the BBC, was to provide a range of programming. This included light entertainment, game shows, comedies, popular drama series, single plays and more serious dramas,

documentaries, arts programmes, regional programming and, as is the focus for today, current affairs and news.

The mixed programme schedule also had to have what was referred to as a 'proper balance' of programming. And this was one of the key roles of the ITA, to ensure that the regional programme companies maintained this 'proper balance' in the kind of programme forms that made up the mixed schedule. What constituted 'proper balance' has been a point of tension and debate over the history of ITV.

Initially there was some anxiety that proper balance might be a difficult thing for the commercial regional franchises to achieve. In order to maintain this proper balance it had initially been envisaged that the new commercial service could have drawn on money from the television licence fee. Bernard Sendall tells how, under the 1954 Act, the new service could claim up to £750,000 from the Postmaster General which was taken from the licence fee to pay for additional programming should any of the company franchises struggle financially to maintain a balance of programming.

Although the programme companies did struggle financially in their first year in 1956, the Post Office was reluctant at that time to part with the money because of the political and financial crisis of Suez that year. After some negotiation the Post Office agreed to offer the ITA £100,000 for the next financial year. But, following a bungled intervention by the big four companies the offer was withdrawn. Importantly what this was to do was to foreclose the principle of any claim that the ITV companies might have on the licence fee in the future -even though that had been initially there in the Act.

This story demonstrates one of the ways in which 'proper balance' was seen to be something that was potentially in conflict with the commercial companies that made up ITV. A more successful example of the maintenance of proper balance and

public service values can perhaps be found in the story of Independent Television News, ITN. ITN was set up in 1955 as the sole news provider to the new commercial service and it broadcast its first programme on the opening night of ITV on 22nd September 1955. The company, which provided national and international news, was paid for by the different regional companies that made up ITV. As Professor Jackie Harrison has argued in a chapter on the history of ITN in our edited collection, *ITV Cultures*, the establishment of one single news company meant that all the national and international news needs of the different regional companies were met. It therefore marked a significant contribution to commercial television's overall public service remit and contributed to the balancing of programming in the mixed programmed schedule across the whole ITV network.

However ITN, like all of the ITV companies, had to balance financial and public service demands. This balancing act led Jackie Harrison to describe ITN as a hybrid organisation, a phrase that can usefully be applied to ITV overall. From its inception and over its fifty year history, ITV has had to negotiate tensions between its public service remit and its commercial operation, and between its regional structure and its national network. ITV has always been a hybrid organisation poised between the demands of commerce and providing a public service. And it's as part of this hybrid and complex organisation that we can situate *This Week*.

So to conclude we can see *This Week*'s relationship to public service broadcasting, to commercial competition and to regionalism emerging in a number of ways.

Firstly, *This Week* was produced by a regional programme company, Associated-Rediffusion, contracted to serve the London area during the week.

Secondly, as one of the first and major programme companies licenced by the ITA, Associated-Rediffusion was one of the four largest companies which came to dominate the ITV networks. As a result *This Week* was nationally networked from

the autumn of 1956, pretty soon after it started, as well as providing important current affairs programming to opinion formers, businesses and Government based in London, because it served the London region in particular.

Thirdly, Associated-Rediffusion, as a company itself, was funded by advertising revenue. But the nature of spot advertising meant that in programme strands such as This Week, producers and directors were to a certain extent buffered from direct commercial imperatives. Programmes like This Week were enabled to uphold the journalistic accuracy and independence that was required by the Television Act.

Fourthly, programmes such as This Week were protected from commercial competition in other ways. For the three decades and until the 1990 Broadcasting Act, the programme companies had to prove to the Regulator of the day, whether it was the ITA or later the IBA, that they were worthy of their franchises. As a result, programme companies such as Associated-Rediffusion, Granada and London Weekend Television, could deploy hard hitting current affairs programmes - This Week, World in Action from Granada and later Weekend World for London Weekend Television- to demonstrate their credentials as public service broadcasters. Even if some of these programmes at times failed to attract large ratings, their journalistic integrity proved evidence of their commitment, and that of ITV overall to public service values.

Lewis Rudd Producer, This Week 1959-:

This is more a sort of hearsay sort of thing from my early days in ITV and I only came in at the very end of 1959. I'm not sure if this is in any of the documentation, but we used to understand that the main reason for the split was not so much towards competition in the future but to share out the cake so that we couldn't be a monopoly. And I believe that Frazer and Sendall discussed having a Monday company, a Tuesday company, a Wednesday company as well. But I don't know if that's true. Have you found out in your research?

Cathy Johnson:

I know there was an awful lot of discussion about exactly how to divide up the pie, you know, and also about whether the week and weekend things were going to work and how the regions were designated. And a lot of the time it was done on kind of practicalities about putting up transmitters rather than any sense of the cohesiveness of a particular region or what would be most practical in terms of broadcasting terms.

But I think the idea of having competition within particular regions, the two commercial companies, I think that was dropped very, very early on because I think they realised it was just not going to be financially viable.

Jeremy Taylor, Producer This Week 1960s:

Jeremy Taylor from This Week in the 1960s. I just wanted to mention the fact that you spoke about the money, and I think that was very, very important at that time, because, as a researcher on This Week -which would be fairly low down but later on a Producer- we just spent what we needed to spend to make good programmes. It was very, very good days in that sense. It was only later in my career that I became aware of finance. I think that was a very, very important factor in the early days of This Week. If something happened we went off and made a background story about it, regardless of where it was. It was a very, very free time in that sense. And people protected us from the management and the financial side. I mean I never met a salesman at all in eight years at Rediffusion, as a journalist.

Nicholas Mellersh Researcher This Week 1960s:

Nicholas Mellersh: just a final point on that. If I can quote Hugh Wheldon who said 'the great characteristic of television in the sixties was freedom to fail.' We had that freedom as well. As Jeremy said, we could go off and spend a fortune on a programme, which just didn't happen. It didn't stand up at the end of the day. And

it was all 'Well you did your best. There just isn't a story there.' And it's a great contrast to today where if you don't reach the story ratings you are in dead trouble. And I think that is reflected clearly in the current affairs industry.

Ian Stuttard Producer This Week 1970s

Ian Stuttard. I was the Producer on This Week in the seventies and as a fledgling I asked the main accountant, money man, to talk me through This Week budget so that I would understand where the money was going, on travel, accommodation, crew costs and so on. And he looked at me with a slight air of bewilderment and put his arm round my shoulder and he said 'Look, you do what you do and I'll do what I do. I worry about the money. You don't have to worry about the money. If the day ever comes when we need to talk about money, we'll do it. But until then please continue.' A total and utter contrast to the way it is now of course.

From This Week to TVEye

Pat Holland, Bournemouth Media School

I'm going to jump a decade and pick up the story from the end of the 1970s. Because what we've had are roughly two periods. There was this frivolous beginning, certainly to This Week and to ITV in general, which was pulled back by the Regulator, by the ITA, who told them to sober up. This Week certainly sobered up and got into the sort of tough journalism and freedom that people have been talking about. And that ran through the 1970s. In fact I was going to quote exactly what Ian Stuttard said just now. I'd heard it that it was Jeremy Isaacs, as Controller of Programmes, who had told the journalists, 'You do what you want to do. I'm Controller of Programmes, I look after the audience. I get them in with popular programmes.' And there was a real settlement within Thames Television which was at that time running This Week. There had been a change in 1968 from Associated-Rediffusion to Thames, but the programme continued in very much the same mode which was a commitment to quality television and to good journalism.

But, as Kathy and Rob pointed out, throughout the history of This Week there has been a tension between a television company as a business, which it always was, and current affairs programmes which saw themselves as part of the democratic project, part of a journalistic contribution to the democratic debate, seeking influence across the social spectrum, as opposed to making money by drawing in audiences for the sake of advertisers. In the history of This Week as I've looked at it, this balance has been worked out in various different ways. It was worked out in a different way in the fifties, and during the seventies when there was incredible freedom.

But there was a pivotal change at the end of the 1970s. And I'm not saying there was a pivotal change just in This Week. There was a pivotal change in the national psyche at the end of the 1970s marked by, although not necessarily solely caused by, the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979. One could say it was a sort of symbol of the changes that were happening. But that need to balance commerce and journalism was certainly not new. Although programme makers always point to these really successful current affairs editions, and to editions of This Week which have called in big audiences, everybody has accepted and everybody recognises that, when the current affairs series comes on, the audience figures dip. And it's the question of how you deal with that dilemma.

I should stress that, particularly in the 1970s, it was important that there *was* a commercial channel. The fact that there was commercial television has always been a central part of the ecology of UK television. It has brought a creative balance between these two different types of funding. The BBC benefited from the challenge from a channel which had to find ways of appealing to its audiences in a much more blatant and overt way, while ITV benefited from the BBC's freedom from commercial pressures. And there continued to be cross-fertilisation between the two. I'm quoting Jeremy Isaacs again in saying 'It remained the general view that competition for audiences and revenue would lead to a lowering of standards

which is to be avoided.’ Nothing so vulgar as audiences and revenue. But we were looking at competition -competition for programme values. And what was constructed was what has been described as a public service *system* rather than the odd public service programme popping up within a much more populist schedule.

The sixties and seventies were remembered -as we’ve heard from people who were working then- as a golden age. Because, in the words of critic Peter Fiddick, ‘Corporate cash and creative drive were caught on the same upswing.’ The companies had plenty of money. They had a monopoly on advertising and the revenue they had to pay to the Government was so structured that it was to their benefit to put money into programmes.

But as well as the economic context and the journalistic factors which I’ve talked about, I think there was a third sort of factor at work and this is the ideological factor; the way that economics are *thought about*, the way politics are thought about. The way people *feel* that it’s correct to deal with these things. And what I want to point to is a sort of shift --this is a very long and complex story and I’ve written about it at greater length in my book *The Angry Buzz*-- but I want to point to the way that there was a shift in the way that the journalistic and commercial imperatives were dealt with at the end of the 1970s, when *This Week* was taken off the air and it was replaced by another programme called *TV Eye*. Nothing else changed. The economics were the same. The politics were the same. Journalistic imperatives were the same. But there was a shift in the way that it was *thought about*.

And to illustrate that I will show a clip. This is a classic piece of absolutely meticulous journalism, detailed, precise information that’s difficult to obtain, and a piece of journalism that proved highly influential. It is an extract from a programme made by Peter Taylor in 1977 which talks about the ill treatment of prisoners -or

was it torture? or on the borderline of torture? The programme was called 'Inhuman and Degrading Treatment' and its director was Ian Stuttard who's sitting before us here. It's fascinating looking at these programmes to see how these issues come round again and again. This suddenly has a very contemporary sort of relevance, when we think about it within the context of Iraq for example. But this was an accusation of ill-treatment by the Royal Ulster Constabulary at Castlereagh Detention Centre in Belfast. This is Peter Taylor laying out the evidence.

Film clip

Inhuman and Degrading Treatment 27 October 1977

Reporter Peter Taylor, Producer Ian Stuttard

That was the sort of stuff that caused two sorts of outraged reaction. First of all from the Government and the authorities who were absolutely appalled, because it challenged the system in Northern Ireland by which terrorism was kept under control. At that point it was a system which involved a judge sitting without a jury and convictions made on the accused's confession alone --which tempted the police to indulge in the sorts of abuses documented here-- and also it drew attention to the veil of silence and possible official complicity which surrounded them. So it was shocking stuff. But it did not draw in the audiences. So it also drew a reaction from programme makers and ITV companies who were anxious to keep up their audience figures. This is the dilemma. And what I'm trying to present is what that dilemma is, the strengths of having current affairs on a commercial channel, the importance of having current affairs on a commercial channel, but how it can be mediated within different ideological climates. In 1978 This Week was taken off the air and replaced with TVEye.

In looking at the history of This Week/TV Eye, we have treated it as a single long-running programme. Many of the same journalists worked on both programmes. There was a lot of continuity. But there was a definite change of mood and a

definite change of approach and there were very strong feelings aroused by the change that was brought by Mike Townson who became TVEye's Editor. When I interviewed him way back at the beginning of the 1990s, he said he wasn't averse to controversial programmes. After all, he had been the editor of Tonight on the BBC and he had also done some pretty tough stuff on Ireland. But this is how he put his criticisms of what was happening on This Week. He said its reporting was overly politicised, it was too narrow in its focus. And the reason for this was that it was dominated by the obsessions of its journalists as opposed to the interests of its audience. This meant that it was issue led rather than story led --and creating stories, structuring programmes with strong characters, is a way to engage the audience. Anybody who has commissioned programmes has probably required that from their programme makers. But his other criticism was that it pursued long term themes and structures. This Northern Ireland programme was a climax of a long decade of challenging programmes about Northern Ireland. It pursued long term themes and structures rather than responding to the events of the moment. In his view current affairs should be *current*; it's about what happens now.

Following his changes there were very powerful feelings amongst the people who worked on This Week. Many of them felt that this was unacceptable. Many of the programme makers left, if not at once, after a year or so. But, at the same time, I would argue that these are actually serious considerations in relation to involving wider audiences. What is the point of a democratic public medium which only addresses a small audience? We have to think about ways of addressing a wider audience, and these considerations should be thought through. But, at the same time the shift in attitude involved a definition of the audience, not as citizens to be involved in what was going on, but as consumers, people to be entertained. And, as we will hear more about as the afternoon goes on, this is a distinction which has been nagged over and it's a crucially important one. You've got to involve more people -but how do you involve them? On what terms?

Many people argued that the shift in attitude led to less rigorous journalism, but I wouldn't necessarily go along with that. I think we have to look at it as a phenomenon, see where it succeeded, see where it didn't succeed. But I think one positive move is that it went hand in hand with an exploration of a broadening of the techniques, of the filmic techniques, the ways of creating current affairs so as to involve an audience. And it led to a real difference, or the beginnings of a real difference in the way that programmes could look.

And so just to mark the difference between 1977 and the early 1990s I want to show a second extract from a programme made at the very end of This Week's tenure. Also about Northern Ireland. Reported by Margaret Gilmore, it's called The Enemy Within -and you'll see the complete difference in filmic techniques.

Film clip

The Enemy Within 15 October 1992

Reporter Margaret Gilmore Producer Martyn Gregory

Notice the music, the heartbeat music, the lighting, the careful reconstructions. This is something which, these days, we take for granted, as part of our factual current affairs programming. Does that approach detract from the seriousness of it? There's no answer to these things. I just wanted to float them as questions.

Ian Stuttard Producer This Week 1972 to 1979

I was with This Week from 1972 to 1979, when Townson came and it became - what was it called?

TV Eye.

TV Eye. I did two shows for Mike Townson and then I left because I thought that his whole approach trivialised a lot of the serious stuff that we were used to doing.

Now I wasn't knocking any of the new techniques, or indeed the technology, but his approach .. it was worse than populist. There's nothing wrong with populist, but it was trashy and very tabloid and even though some of those shows were quite effective like the clip you just showed. They were such a departure from the sort of purist school, maybe old fashioned school, that it was unpalatable to quite a lot of us who were on the show at that time. And everybody kind of melted away and went elsewhere -to the BBC, or elsewhere, or made documentaries from then on. I certainly did anyway.

Pat:

I must say that even when I looked at the TV Eye programmes –and I've heard what you said from many, many people- I don't detect a huge difference in looking at them -which is what is so interesting.

Martin Smith Producer This Week 1975-76

My name is Martin Smith, I was on This Week for a couple of years '75 and '76 and I think the first thing to say is that the two clips were absolutely falsely presented. You compared a studio programme with a film programme. The whole of the time that I was on This Week there was nothing but film programmes being made. The number of studio programmes was really very rare. To pretend that the clip you saw of Northern Ireland was a typical This Week product of the seventies is absolute balderdash. I've never been involved in anything like it. That's not to say it wasn't valuable, because it was something that had to be done. Typically in the two years I was there under David Elstein, structure, narrative, personal interest, story line was always there. It's a lot of nonsense to suggest that story line, narrative and viewer involvement started post the 1990s. When we were on This Week in the mid seventies we were always in the top ten, partly because of brilliant bracketing with a comedy show before it and good thriller afterwards. We knew that bracketing was important. But to suggest that somehow or other we were

cavorting ourselves without paying considerable attention to what a public audience wanted, is really nonsense.

(Note: Martin Smith directed some remarkable programmes for This Week, including Death in the West (1976), a highly filmic visit to ‘Marlboro country’ to find that many rugged cowboys, like those shown smoking in the Phillip Morris advertisements were, in reality suffering from smoking related diseases. This sort of provocative programme making –which led to an injunction against the film- also contributed to This Week being replaced by TVEye)

Michael Heller Queen Mary Business School

There’s just two points really that are just general. The first one, what you’re suggesting by constructing, reconstructing these images, that somehow leads to a lessening of quality, I totally disagree with that. I’m a historian and you see this in history programmes. A fantastic example of that was the BBC’s series on Auschwitz where they reconstructed, for example, the Wannsee Conference which decided on the annihilation of the Jews. That adds to quality and that actually deepens the historical understanding of the viewer. So, I mean, I would totally disagree that reconstructions in any way lower the quality. The second point is this dichotomy and I’m sure it will be a dichotomy that will be made throughout this, between the consumer and citizen. I mean I just see this as a completely false dichotomy, because all consumers are citizens. All consumers have rights and all citizens consume.

Pat:

These issues are going to come up again and again in speakers later on this afternoon and also this evening. So we should keep all the balls in the air. And at this point I’ll introduce our next speaker because he will address some of these issues. This Week was certainly not the only long running current affairs series.

World in Action, made by Granada from Manchester was an extremely important one. Peter Goddard has been working on a project at Liverpool University on the history of World in Action. He's currently co-writing a book and, keeping our chronology, he's going to be talking about the later years.

World in Action: The last ten years

Peter Goddard (Liverpool University).

Currently co-authoring a book on the history of World in Action to be published by Manchester University Press

I'm also very pleased you've introduced this issue about popularity versus value, which I shall say something about later on in relation to the later years of World in Action. It's extremely interesting also that Pat's done this project which in some ways parallels mine, because This Week and World in Action acted in parallel as the twin poles of ITV's current affairs for so many years.

And I'd like to begin .. and Rob and Catherine have helped me in this .. by saying the long running current affairs series is a uniquely British format I think. And it's a product of public service television in the British sense. I suggest that from 1955 until 1990 or thereabouts, British public service broadcasting was peculiarly effective, if rather haphazardly formed, and its accidental structure is surely that programming which was able to serve a wider public interest could co-exist alongside programming which served popular taste. And the two are, as has been pointed out, not necessarily distinct from one another. Also television companies were able to compete for quality as well as for popularity.

There are two reasons that obviously underlie this. Firstly you've got the parallel but not competitive funding systems of the licence fee and of commercial, advertising funded commercial television. And when Channel 4 came along that too was not competitive because the funding was collected by the ITV companies. So they benefited regardless and then passed it on to Channel 4. And the other

feature is the legislative and the regulatory structures. In the case of ITV, as Catherine and Rob said, the natural inclination of the market to tempt broadcasters to maximise audiences and to go for profit at the expense of quality, or breadth of output was tempered by the regulatory structure, the need for a balanced schedule. And so programmes like This Week, World in Action, News at Ten and so on, were 'mandated' by the IBA for most of the history of those programmes.

So in effect current affairs had a premium. It brought a kudos to ITV. It brought brownie points to the producing companies. It was worthwhile even though the ratings were not necessarily as high as the slots could have commanded if entertainment programmes had been shown instead. So there was a commitment, as you've just seen at ITV, and also at the BBC, to broadcast excellent, factual, documentary and informative programmes in prime time. And it's that prime time aspect which is crucial. And so it was that some of the finest and bravest and most significant moments in British journalism -and not least investigative journalism- took place in television and not in the press in the sixties and the seventies and the eighties. And so it was that there was this triumvirate of long running current affairs programmes with experienced permanent regular teams running them, This Week, World in Action, Panorama, who commanded huge respect and contributed substantially, I would argue to the public health of the nation, and the public knowledge of the British people.

And I would say that that system worked extremely well until the late 1980s. And for various reasons it no longer operated properly at ITV in the 1990s. This Week was cancelled in 1992 and it was not replaced significantly. World in Action was cancelled at the end of 1998 and replaced by Tonight with Trevor MacDonald. And I've called this talk The Last Decade of World in Action 1988 to 1998 and I've also subtitled it The Decline and Fall of Current Affairs Television. I apologise to those of you who think that British current affairs television is in good health and thriving

at present because I don't believe that Tonight with Trevor MacDonald is the same beast as World in Action or This Week or Panorama used to be.

So I'm going to use the case of World in Action to give a kind of outline of the causes of this decline as I see it; what caused it, and within World in Action at least, what its consequences were. And I think there are four principle causes. *Firstly* there was increased commercial pressure on ITV from the mid-1980s onwards which led to a greater imperative for companies to maximise profits. *Secondly* there was the 1990 Broadcasting Act. *Thirdly* there was the development of centralised scheduling which followed from that Act and *fourthly*, in the case of World in Action there were particular changes at Granada Television which reflected those commercial pressures and that new realism of broadcasting.

To run through them one by one. I have not satisfactorily, in the brief time I've been pulling this together --this is actually notes for a chapter I'm in the process of writing-- I've not really got to the bottom of why ITV became so much more pressurised financially and commercially in the 1980s. It was after all a time of burgeoning advertising revenues. The companies were able to be more profitable than they'd ever been before except for the late 1950s. Yes, there was pressure from Channel 4, so the advertising pot was spread thinner because there was one more commercial channel. Yes, there was some pressure on programme budgets from the rise of independents and the realisation that programmes could be made much more cheaply than had hitherto been thought. Yes, there were changes to the levy in 1986, although I don't think those changes from my initial investigations actually reduced the profitability of ITV companies.

The imponderable, which I'm still trying to investigate, is the consequences of diversification. One of the things that ITV companies did in the eighties, because they had this money, was to begin to diversify. And so there was a point where several companies found themselves using the television business to support their

adventures elsewhere in business. Granada, for example, as I'm sure you are aware was a very acquisitive company indeed. It has all kinds of different arms including publishing, including the television rental company, including motorway catering, including various kinds of retailing, including investments in quite a number of foreign broadcasting or leisure companies. So it may be, and I have yet to get to the bottom of this, that Granada's problem was caused by the fact that it had expanded too far and too fast and the TV business had to support that. And of course from 1992 onwards, after the Broadcasting Act was passed, there was far greater competition because of the threat to revenues from the rise of satellite TV. And that leads us to the position where we are now where ITV is one of many, many channels for most of us and not just one of five.

So what were the effects of this on World in Action? It's detectable, I think, as early as about 1987. Much of my work here comes from Granada's own archives so I'm able to find things which are not necessarily previously in the public domain. There was a decision that some of you will know by the IBA to increase advertising minutage in prime time by one minute in 1987. And that led to a pressure to reduce the length of World in Action by one minute, because the network was not keen to reduce the length of the entertainment programmes, so it wanted to cut back on the current affairs programme. Granada resisted this with some support from the IBA. And it also resisted moves to create a centre break in the programme which journalists -rightly I think- thought would spoil the character of the piece. But those pressures re-emerged.

In the late 1980s Granada found itself in a lengthy battle with Thames TV, which felt that Granada's protection of World in Action was unfair on the rest of the network. There was a considerable removal of goodwill between Granada and Thames. For example there had always been a convention that occasionally World in Action might overrun by thirty seconds or so. There were a couple of occasions when Thames, who ran the network, actually faded the end credits of World in

Action, to make the point that they were not going to tolerate over-runs any more, much to the fury of Granada as you can surely imagine. Thames also ceased to trail World in Action. They refused to give it the four trail, network trail spots that it had hitherto commanded. Individual companies could trail it if they wished. Granada, to its great credit, continued to trail This Week in the North West, but Thames refused, on principle, for about three years to trail World in Action programmes.

There was also pressure at Granada to downsize World in Action budgets --and 'downsize' was the word that was used. I think that's quite a significant indication of the change, and the introduction of business speak in television. There was a voluntary redundancy scheme in 1989 which had the unfortunate effect of leading to the departure of Leslie Woodhead and David Bolton who had been two of the most significant and senior figures in Granada's current affairs. And I came across a note from David Plowright, the Chairman, specifically regretting that these two had departed because of the voluntary redundancy scheme.

But nonetheless the ethos of the programme in the late 1980s was pretty much as it always had been. It had a spectacular success with the Birmingham Six. It ran three programmes, investigative programmes, which demonstrated that the Birmingham Six were not guilty, and furthermore demonstrated that many people in positions of authority had known this since a year after their conviction. And it ran Who Bombed Birmingham?, the celebrated drama documentary which told the whole story from start to finish in dramatized terms. Shortly afterwards, of course, the Birmingham Six were released. World in Action deserve some credit for that. That's what programmes like World in Action and This Week, in my opinion, should be doing. If not week in week out then certainly on a reasonably regular basis.

The 1990 Broadcasting Act: sharp eyed readers of Broadcasting in the Nineties, which was the White Paper that preceded the Act, would have noted the following

phrase. "Each Channel 3 Station will be required to show high quality news and current affairs, dealing with national and international matters, and to include news (and possibly also current affairs) in main viewing periods". It's the space between the brackets, which was actually the title of an article that Richard Lindley wrote for the IBA Quarterly at the time, which is the significant feature here. The imperative to show current affairs in prime time is being lost at this point. Current affairs is no longer an absolute requirement. And the 1990 Act removed much of the legislative and regulatory framework which had safeguarded the place of current affairs in prime time.

The IBA was replaced by the ITC which was spoken of as a 'lighter touch' regulator, certainly a less pro-active regulator, and crucially scheduling powers were removed from the regulator and given to the companies with the establishment of the ITV Network Centre. So there were no longer brownie points to be had in showing current affairs in prime time, and in fact the companies themselves had a considerable incentive to remove it from prime time so as to maximise their revenue.

Which leads us to the issue of centralised scheduling, the third factor precipitating the decline, I think. The notion of mandating here was no longer applicable, since the Authority was not mandating the companies to show things, the companies were making decisions themselves. The Authority could put pressure on the Network Centre but it couldn't mandate in the same way.

In 1991, a year and a half before the Network Centre was actually up and running, I came across a Paper within Granada pointing out that it was absolutely essential for the company to sell the idea of World in Action very hard to the network, rather than simply relying on it as having been a fixture of the schedule for a very long time. And suggesting that if it could sell it well enough, then some sort of 'quasi-mandating' --this was the phrase that was used-- could actually be retained. But,

in July 1992, Paul Jackson, who was Chief Executive of Carlton, which had just assumed the ITV London franchise, gave an interview in which he said 'When the Network Centre comes into force at the start of 1993, current affairs programmes will have to attract eight million audiences to stay in the peak time schedule.' In other words they would be judged on their appeal to audiences rather than their value in any wider sense. He said in the same interview, 'World in Action and other factual series must be made to win ten million audiences, not to get people out of prison'. Clearly a reference to the Birmingham Six. The eight million formula was reiterated by Andrew Quinn immediately after his appointment as Head of the Network Centre, as Chief Executive of the ITV Network. And ironically Quinn had come straight from Granada which produced World in Action.

So I had a quick look at World in Action's ratings at this time. And this is a very kind of snap-shotty process because I don't have the figures, I only have sort of references elsewhere and I haven't been back and looked through the figures properly. In early 1988 World in Action was averaging 5.2 million, which is a pretty healthy figure. In autumn 1988 its programmes had a range from 4.5 to 7.9 million. In autumn 1991 it was averaging 7.1 million and in autumn 1992 it was averaging between seven and seven and a half million. And three programmes achieved audiences of nine and half million for a prime time current affairs programme. The references earlier on to Tonight with Trevor getting three and a half million puts that in context I think. Nine and a half million is a fantastic figure, but it's not as high as World in Action and indeed This Week and Panorama were getting occasionally in the sixties, World in Action in particular. In 1994, four and a half million to at least eight and a half million was the range across a season.

So the eight million target is not impossible, but it's not sustainable without radical changes to the programme content and to the format. It's worth pointing out also that the current affairs programmes would be set in ratings terms by fluctuations which are caused by subject matter. It's very much to do with what you put on for

that particular week and how well you publicise it. There isn't a running audience which will always watched World in Action or This Week or Panorama. But there are people who will tune in if it's a subject they think is interesting. The problem with a topical current affairs programme is it's very difficult to publicise in advance if you're still editing the programme on the Sunday night before Monday transmission.

Granada then, in the early nineties, was not immune to the new ITV focus on profits, ratings and costs. Interestingly, Andrew Quinn, in the same Times interview as Head of Network Centre in which he mentioned the eight million threshold, said --and I think this says everything about ITV in the 1990s-- 'Not having produced a programme doesn't matter. I know how programmes are made and how much they cost.' Well I think that says it all.

Anyway at Granada this new reality was brought into perspective very quickly. A couple of days after the award of the Granada franchise in 1992, the renewal of the franchise, there was a boardroom coup. World in Action had always had unstinting support within Granada Television. Many Granada heads and executives had worked on the programme at different times in their career. It always had the support of the leading figures at Granada, Sidney Bernstein and Denis Foreman, but by this time both of those had retired.

From the mid 1980s David Plowright had been Chairman of Granada Television. It was Plowright who devised the revamped World in Action in 1967. And at the start of February 1992 Plowright was removed, forcibly by a coup starring Gerry Robinson. The night of the long knives as it was called. And Plowright's departure was really not unlike Greg Dyke's [the BBC Director General] departure from the BBC a couple of years ago. There were employees in tears. There was a round robin letter with a thousand people signing on the day of his departure giving messages of support. There were moans and wails in the press about the

declining quality that this would bring about in Granada and so on and so forth. Plowright was described in the papers the following day by Paul Fox of all people, as the last of the musketeers --which is a phrase I rather like-- in succession to Bernstein and Foreman.

As these commercial pressures intensified and there was no safety net any longer within ITV. By the time of Steve Boulton's editorship which was '94 to '98 World in Action was subject to continual budget attacks. People were constantly coming along and saying 'Well we'll just give you a little bit less this year. We'll just take away some of that money we'd earmarked for a Special and put it to something else.' Specials were now impossible because the network wouldn't wear the idea of an hour long current affairs programme in prime time. Boulton found that he couldn't afford to hire independents who by that time were considered to be the best source of current affairs ideas, because he simply did not have the budget to do it. And generally trawling through the World in Action archives, such as they are, for the 1990s at Granada, you find far, far more about ratings and budgets and far less about programme content.

And of course, for all its eight million viewers (occasionally) World in Action was still consistently the lowest rating prime time programme that Granada made and I think probably the network showed. So it was still under pressure. And there was pressure on its slot. In 1988 there was pressure to move it - it had long had a slot at eight thirty- there was pressure to move it either to eight or to ten-thirty, out of prime time. Granada resisted successfully. This pressure resurfaced, largely from Thames I think, in 1989, nine or nine-thirty had been suggested. But again Granada fought off the change.

In April 1994 --and we're now into the new era of ITV- there was the third EastEnders episode launched by the BBC and the Network Centre responded by sacrificing that week's World in Action and running a James Bond film as a spoiler.

That was seen very much as a sign of things to come. Plowright commented, 'It was a sign of the television times when World in Action is silenced by a soap opera and not by those agents of Government and big business who have tried and failed.' Lovely. I love it. 'It could not have happened without the removal' he said 'of the regulatory oversight and scheduling that happened in the 1990 Act'. And he's absolutely right.

Advertiser pressure led to a special meeting at the ITV Network Centre in 1995 to consider schedule changes so as to increase ratings. The Monday 8pm to 9pm slot was considered to be fair game. It was suggested again that World in Action was moved out of prime. In January 1996, having fought a rearguard action, Granada managed to maintain World in Action in prime time by moving it to eight o'clock, half an hour earlier. But of course eight o'clock was the slot occupied by EastEnders. So from that point on it was running against a soap opera and any prospect of getting eight million or even five million regular viewers was lost. Steve Boulton was furious about this. He felt that eight-thirty itself was too early for the World in Action demographic. People were still not home from work or hadn't eaten. The kind of people he wanted to appeal to were the audience at nine-thirty that the BBC had on Mondays with Panorama.

So the weakening of World in Action in the 1990s was clear. It was not only due to its declining value as a brand I think. World in Action as we've said, as Pat has said, was on the horns of this dilemma, now writ much larger than affected This Week in the seventies and the eighties. Should it cover more popular subjects to bring in greater audiences or should it cover the subjects which it considered to be of the greatest journalistic public value so as to maintain its authority and its reputation. And it tried to do both. Certainly World in Action continued to mount programmes of considerable public value. A notable example is the Jonathan of Arabia programme of course which led to the Jonathan Aitken libel trial and his defrocking as a Government Minister.

It's worth pointing out that even Jonathan of Arabia by the earlier World in Action earlier standards, is a very strange populist programme. The team hired a camel and some Arab robes and made a researcher sit on the camel and walk up and down Southport beach as sort of background footage for the investigation, which is not something well World in Action was always famous for stunts, but that's a bit crass. It was also accused of being racist -with some reason I think probably. But nonetheless the effect of the programme was as big as the effect of any World in Action programme.

But the character of the series generally had changed. And that was foreseen. Commenting on the 1988 White Paper, Richard Lindley wrote an article for the IBA Quarterly in which he suggested that the US Sixty Minutes model was likely to become the only viable type of current affairs that could survive in an increasingly competitive British television culture. And he quoted Jonathan Powell, then Controller of BBC 1, saying 'the vulnerability of human nature may become the only currency of current affairs.' And I think that was quite prophetic. Others in the industry had similar predictions. At the time of the launch of the ITV Network Centre I'd come across articles by Glenwyn Benson who was Editor of Panorama and by Paul Woolwich, retiring Editor of This Week, both predicting the rapid demise of current affairs on ITV. Woolwich wrote that "the eight million threshold will mean that difficult and demanding subjects, such as Ulster, will be ignored in favour of more obvious glamour themes". And so I think, by and large it proved.

There was a detectable interest in World in Action in programmes featuring or fronted by members of the public, often the kinds of programmes in which people talk about or observe their experiences in confronting challenges from the Health Service or crime or public policy or the service industries. Consumer programmes, if you like. And that meant a kind of refocusing of the series away from the voices of journalists and experts in favour of experiential programmes or versions of a sort

of consumer populism involving public or consumer testimony. In other words the programme stopped looking at the causes, the structural causes of things and began to look at the experience of being confronted by those problems. In other words it became much less hard hitting and much more user friendly.

And Paul Woolwich was right about glamour too. There was also a lot more sex. There are a number of programmes that illustrate this point. As early as February 1989 the first programmes that I found in which this sort of 'real people front the programme' approach is taken, were two programmes about a runaway teenager called Mandy -which some people might remember, it was quite powerful- in which the parents of Mandy talked about and reconstructed their quest to find her. The Times Review condemned it as inauthentic. There was much staging of scenes it says and staging of supposedly spontaneous talk. It was 'collusive fiction in which viewers are encouraged to accept the director's set-ups and real people have to be groomed in the art of playing themselves.' Perhaps that's a little bit negative but it does illustrate the distinction I think. And that's a technique that is now absolutely commonplace in television, so that no-one bats an eyelid when they see this stuff going on. This is the stuff of reality TV. I'm not condemning it outright, but it's a different kind of TV from the sort that we'd seen before.

A three-parter in 1992 had an undercover reporter, Adam Holloway, living as a homeless person on London's streets and filming his experiences. Another experiential programme, albeit fronted by a journalist. And that was thought to be absolutely remarkably innovative at the time. An innovative documentary technique. But this has also become a frequently used device, notably in World in Action after Donald MacIntyre was recruited in 1995. And this is the stuff of MacIntyre's programmes nowadays. My problem with MacIntyre's programmes is not what they investigate, but the focus seems to be more on the bravery of the investigator than on the subject of the investigation a lot of the time.

In 1992, the much criticised Sultan of Sleaze edition was published. This was an expose of David Sullivan, the proprietor of the Sunday Sport. And it revealed to a horrified audience that the Sunday Sport had elements which were pornographic and had ladies without very many clothes on. One reviewer commented 'That it was more like a winge from some moral crusader than a serious investigation by ITV's current affairs flagship. An investigation of World in Action's reputation should direct its artillery at less easy targets.' Another one pointed out that an obvious alternative target might have been the Maastricht Treaty which was signed in the same week. The David Sullivan programme was one of those that achieved a rating of nine and a half million. Programmes of that sort became more frequent.

By the late 1990s, the Reality TV era was dawning and World in Action was contributing to this. The series began to be more and more focused towards these sorts of reality type programmes. The fashion for ordinary people fronting investigations had become commonplace. Amongst the formats launched within World in Action were Neighbours from Hell which was a World in Action edition in I think 1996. The first programme I think in television history to use the 'From Hell' tag, which has now become so overblown; also House of Horrors which is still running periodically. This is the programme where they equip a house with lots of faulty gear and expect tradesman to come and fix it and then reveal them as cowboys. These were both World in Action editions.

So to round off it's perhaps remarkable that, through the ever increasing injections of populism and the partial move downmarket, World in Action actually survived until 1998, and did manage to protect its ability to mount serious, heavy investigations and, as it were, worthy programmes in amongst the increasing number of rather more populist ones. And when the inevitable came, it proved that Richard Lindley's prediction ten years earlier was absolutely right. Tonight With Trevor was commissioned as a replacement for World in Action by the Network

Centre as a result of an auction of bids to produce what was openly referred to as the British Sixty Minutes.

I'll just leave you with one thought. To what extent can we say that the health of current affairs television in Britain, which has been such a keystone of the idea of public service television, is an indicator of the health of the public service system generally?

Questioner:

That impression is coming across all the time. There are lots of good programmes. They are not called current affairs. If you look at Channel 4 News, if you look at Andrew Marr's Sunday morning programme on BBC. If you look at Newsnight or popular Sky News, or breakfast programmes, there's tons of good journalism around. It's just different. It isn't the same. I think the idea that we ought to have current affairs programmes as such... television has changed so enormously now with multi-channel, it's just completely changed and I just wanted to comment on it.

Questioner:

I wonder how much it's appropriate to place the emphasis on the modes of address and the different forms available to those producing current affairs, and on the regulation of current affairs, and how much you want to look at the wider social and political scene. So for example the peaks in the current affairs programmes which you cited in the early nineties were the moment of New Labour coming in and let's say a revised enthusiasm for considering community and welfare and civic possibilities. And what we got, if I can say this unpolitically, is a Government which focused increasingly on choice, on consumerism, on the experience of being a service user. And that's a much broader culture within which we can see the way in which those programmes shifted in focus. So how much one can expect those producing current affairs to counter the kind of prevailing culture, seems to me a real question.

Peter Goddard:

It seems to me that this is actually a question about journalism and what journalism is for. And the form in which journalism takes place follows from the answer to the question of what its purpose is. And this ties in with the point someone made earlier about on about democracy. It is certainly true that World in Action and other kinds of factual programming became more democratic. The traditional problem that had been seen with television from the fifties, sixties, seventies onwards was that there was this big split between those who were allowed on TV and those who weren't was being broken down. This is the beginning of the access programme movement. And in that sense I don't think anybody can dispute it. I wasn't trying to say there is something wrong with getting people to tell their own stories. What I was saying was it's a notable shift from the form in which television journalism in current affairs programmes had been done earlier and the form in which it's done nowadays. I think it has the effect of not looking at causes, or looking at things in the round but of concentrating on people's experiences. I'm not saying that that shouldn't be done, but it shouldn't be done to the exclusion of looking at the causes which underlie the problems.

Part 2: The data

Presentation of the This Week Project database

Pat Holland

As I said in my introduction, to understand the history of the series, we have to know what was *in* it. We have to know what were the rubbish programmes as well as the good programmes. We have to know what was the routine, every week sort of production. And that has been one of our aims. Due to the excellent research that Vicki has done on the This Week from Associated-Rediffusion, and to the access that Thames Television gave us to their written archive when they lost their licence to broadcast in 1992, we have been able to accumulate a wealth of data –

also through the good auspices of Bournemouth University and its librarian, Matt Holland, (no relation of mine, though he happens to share the same name) and through the British Universities Film and Video Council and its Director, Murray Weston. They will display to you the database which we have made, and which will be accessible -and they will explain how- to scholars and authenticated users. So may I introduce, first of all, Murray.

Role of the BUFVC

Murray Weston, Director, British Universities Film and Video Council

The British Universities Film and Video Council now finds itself running some of the deepest data online about television. It's something we've pursued for maybe two decades, and in the last decade we've managed to make some advances. The This Week database is a great asset -still to be fully completed. In fact all databases are living things. They're the skeleton on which you hang more flesh as we go along, because, historically speaking, these things are going to be very, very important in the future. And our aim is to keep them up there and available for you to use in the long term.

I want to go into one or two points about data on broadcast programmes which are general but important. We need data on the programmes that were made and went out; we need information about what was in them; we need the correspondence; we need access to the context of the programmes. Because if you're under the foolish impression that by keeping a stack full of cans full of films in a library somewhere, or in an archive on its own, you've captured what's required for posterity, you're wrong. And unfortunately in the recent past we have been failing ourselves hugely. We have no unified national catalogue for television or film. The British Film Institute, of course, has a very big database which is not yet online but will be at some point, and we are doing our best to help the situation. There's been a general neglect of written records. They're going into skips left, right and centre still. We retrieved a huge amount from Cumberland Avenue when

Visnews and Reuters moved out of there -and I know Stephen Jukes [formerly of Reuters] was involved in gathering some data which was later preserved. So the paper records -and we're talking about records from the 1930s and 1940s- the cinema newsreel records of why they shot things, and what they shot, and what they kept and what they threw away, was all put in the bin for no apparent reason. And it's still going on.

So there's continued disposal of information which is important to us. And of course there's no process of statutory deposit in the United Kingdom for moving pictures: text, we spend millions of pounds a year on. Euston Road and Boston Spa consume around a hundred and twenty million pounds a year to look after text in one copyright library situation. And don't forget we've got the Bodlean and there's Dublin - which is included in British copyright law- the Scottish National Library, and the Welsh National Library. And yet we spend just a few million on keeping moving pictures as a national asset. This is the underlying stuff we need to get access to.

But our starting point is the data and it's important to use that because without the catalogue you don't know what you've got -and you've got to start somewhere.

So my belief is that without the data all of these circumstances will undermine the long term value of your lifetime's work if you've worked in the business. And it's important that we sustain this stuff and grab hold of what we can as we go along. We now have the technology to deliver more online than ever before to dispersed audiences, and to serious academics, researchers and others, both in the commercial sector and the academic one.

You won't believe it but all the EPG [electronic programme guide] information that you receive through Sky and all the rest, up until a few years ago was being thrown away. Three months after the date, who wants to know what programmes went on

television -because they'd been out. This is the sort of philistine view of the world we had. There is a commercial view of this of course; storing it would be too much trouble. But the BUFVC have been taking a feed now since 2001 -in fact we've been creating data pre-that from about 1985- and we now keep *all* the output of information -including the Adult Channel, the Playboy Channel and everything else, to see the entire ecology of broadcasting, radio, television, regional variations, the whole lot, in a database. We get the data ten days in advance of transmission, like all other publishers, and we enhance the data. One of my colleagues is here, Marianne Open, who works alone on this database -now 5.8 million records, accumulating at 1.3 million records a year. This is a huge thing and it is available for higher and further education and for members of the BUFVC. Unfortunately we can't deliver it to the general public for copyright reasons.

Murray demonstrates TRILT

This is the sort of thing you'll see and this is the sort of framework we created for what we call 'TRILT', into which we have now put other assets which have been created by Bournemouth University. They have made huge strides with a TV Times database by retyping in most of the TV Times from 1955 to 1985. Huge task. Had to be done. There's another disposable commodity, people throw away the TV Times and think it's of no value. But it is of value. Radio Times, no-one's done it yet. So there are a number of targets in our sights. This is the sort of thing you'll see in the simple search in front of these 5.8 million records.

I've put in 'David Frost' just this morning. For the last two weeks and the two weeks forward he's going to be thirteen times on television receivable in the United Kingdom. And you'll see 'Frost Tonight, ITV 1 London, you'll see 'Sky Travel'. He's on Sky Travel.

Pat

Just to interrupt you Murray, David Frost worked on This Week as a researcher. That was an important bit of information.

Murray

Absolutely. And of course I found him in your database too. I could have chosen any one of a number of contributors. And we're recording and keeping some forty-four thousand hours a year of British television in a big library, again, held at Bournemouth, which allows post transmission access for scholars under Section 35 of the Copyright Act. That's the component which actually underpins all of this, that's the resource that we can deliver.

Murray demonstrates TVTip

Bournemouth has worked and recently delivered online through our system -and it's all Bournemouth data, funded through the Arts and Humanities Research Council- the TV Times data from 1955 to 1985. I believe 1985 was when the Time Out listings thing blew up and that's why they stopped then. It's accessible via *Athens*. This is the authentication system used in higher education, and you won't know much about it if you work in the general public. It's a very secure system which allows students and staff in universities to have access to valuable content without upsetting the commercial market. This has some 250,000 hand crafted records by colleagues at Bournemouth. And it's there, ready to be further enriched. The point is that you get a certain amount of programme information, and those who contributed to the thing might want to add more. And I think that might be the message of some of the This Week database.

Now for the This Week database -and really Matt is going to be the person to drive this along. Again, it's authenticated via *Athens*, the authentication system. But if you want access and you're in an organisation which may be outside the academic wall, talk to us at some point and we may be able to find a way to give you access

to this data, because it is interesting. And indeed if people want to enhance it or help us to enhance the data then you should be in touch with us anyway.

The This Week Project database
Matt Holland, Bournemouth University Library

Just a couple of things we should say about the data: it has come from an incredible variety of sources; from notebooks, from archives, from documents, from people and it's probably one of the most complex gatherings of data that I've ever worked on, and I've worked on a few.

We're going to demonstrate one record, so that we can just give you a flavour of what the database is. And if it works, we'll take the risk of asking people from the audience to call out things and we'll see if we can find them or their programmes or whatever.

Matt shows This Week database: Death on The Rock.

So, Death on the Rock. This was, as you know, a very famous This Week programme. It was actually broadcast in various forms three times. There was the original broadcast programme, then there was the enquiry, and finally there was a retrospective of This Week which included Death on the Rock. So it has three individual records on the database. The records are in three parts. The first part is about the programme, there's a title, there's a synopsis -which again has been culled from various sources- and there are key words. There is information about the *programme content*, for example whether it was a domestic or overseas and so forth. In the second part there is information about the *documentation*. There is some documentation at Bournemouth, and there is some documentation that remains in the Pearson Archive [Note: at the time, the This Week archive, originally from Thames Television was owned by Pearson. From mid-2006 it has been owned and administered by FremantleMedia] as well. The locations of those

documents, together with other useful information about the programme, for instance publications and so on, are included in the record. And finally we get down to the bottom, which is probably the bit that's going to interest people more today, the *credits*, so the producers, directors, cameramen and researchers are all listed in the database.

Now a risky moment; the search page. Is there anybody brave enough to want to find themselves in the database?

Several people put their names forward. Some can be found. Some can't.

Questioner:

Could you say something about how this relates to the records in the British Film Institute and how a researcher would decide what's available.

Vicki:

It's a while since I worked at the BFI, but their database, which is now called BID, will include a lot of British television going back to the fifties. It's not complete but they're trying to make it comprehensive. The data will come primarily from the Radio and TV Times and occasionally from press release material and so forth. But they won't go into the sort of detail that Pat Holland has here, including information on the documentation and the further research materials. So this is not only exclusive to This Week, but much more specialised than the more general database the BFI's able to provide.

Pat:

If I could just add a very tiny extra point. In the database of This Week Project, if you search on where things are being kept, if it says it's in the BFI then that's one way of finding out where it is. And post -68, it's with FremantleMedia.

Steven Barnett:

Can I ask a general question about Trilt, rather than This Week. You get the .. this is the ongoing ..you get the stuff ten days before publication. Does that mean that all the information in Trilt is the published information pre-broadcast, as opposed to programmes as broadcast. In other words it can't keep up with changes in the schedule, over-runs, special events that were not originally scheduled to take place.

Murray:

We do get updates up till the time of transmission as a matter of fact, and Marianne, my colleague, who's in charge of Trilt actually enhances things later. Sometimes the EPG data is wrong and we have to sort it.

Steven Barnett:

So, if for example Panorama changes its mind at the last minute because there is something of massive public importance. That would actually go in, in place of the originally advertised programme?

Murray:

It should do. Yes.

Marianne Open

Usually that does happen and we get updates to Trilt right up to transmission. However something like the Queen Mother dying, we didn't get the updates for that or the bombings. Once something's been transmitted they don't go back and retrospectively change it. So if that happens very close to transmission we'll have the original schedule. But we can add extra information. So if we are aware of the changes we will try and reflect that in the database.

Pat:

Can I ask for one more This Week search.

Ian Stuttard;

I'm just curious, Stuttard, S T U T T A R D.

This is a hell of an indulgence but I'm very curious.

Matt:

Oh, you've got some. Two pages worth. Starts 1969 and if I go on to the second page, with luck, we'll see .. it says that 1988 is the last record.

Ian Stuttard;

Yeah, I can't remember. There's something very gratifying isn't it when someone else has put it in. It's like the internet movie database if you've got any sort of films.

Pat:

I think that's a great moment to end and to thank Matt and Murray very much. We do welcome input from people who know more than we do, you know. So please get in touch with BUFVC, Bournemouth University, me or Vicki and we will update this database and it will get ever more comprehensive and more fascinating as time goes on.

[More information through <http://www.media.bournemouth.ac.uk> and www.bufvc.ac.uk]

Pat:

We're now looking forward in the light of all that stuff about the past –asking what sort of purchase does the past have on the present, and on the huge changes which happened in the 2003 Communications Act. I'd like to welcome Professor

Sonia Livingstone who will be talking about the run up to that Act and the debates which went on.

Part 3: Looking forward

'Consumers or citizens?'

Sonia Livingstone

Professor of Media and Communications, London School of Economics

This is a bit of a shift in focus. I want to look back just a couple of years, but not very far, to the passing of the Communications Act, and pick up on the themes that have been here throughout the afternoon in terms of the tensions between market pressures on broadcasting and the social or civic or even democratic purposes of broadcasting, and think about the role of the Regulator. We've heard about the legacy of regulators that preceded Ofcom and I want to focus on the Act that led to the formation of the new regulator, Ofcom [the Office of Communications], and to think specifically about the discourse, the terms that are being used to talk about the audience, the ordinary people who are the beneficiaries, if you like, of this broadcasting.

I should have said here that I'm talking as an academic from LSE and this is part of an academic research project which is looking at how across the country we are changing the ways in which we regulate for risks in a risk environment or a risk society. And so one possible risk here, or one area of risk is what is happening to our communications, to our culture? What are the risks of social exclusion and inclusion and so forth? This is a project in progress.

Slide:

“Today our viewers and listeners are far more empowered. Digital television, the internet and increasingly broadband is putting more choice in the hands of the user. As a regulator, we will reflect that, welcome and encourage it. There can no longer be a place for a regulator ... determining what people ‘ought’ to have
(Stephen Carter, CEO Ofcom)

I want to think about the two terms, 'citizens' and 'consumers', and I want to think about the way Stephen Carter.. doesn't in fact use those terms, but puts ordinary people at the centre of a new regulatory regime. Here he talks about listeners and viewers which is interesting, since Ofcom doesn't much talk about listeners and viewers and users at the moment. But they do say people are becoming 'empowered'. People are at the centre of regulation, but at the same time the Regulator can now stand back rather more than the earlier regulators, as we've heard.

I'm interested in this kind of statement. How did it become appropriate and possible for this to be the dominant, the main way in which the Regulator presents its role? And I want to see this as part of a broader shift towards regulating for risk; lighter touch regulation, discursive regulation. It's been given lots of names but there's a sense that across lots of different sectors, not just communication, but also financial services or health services or education or wherever. We have some more risk-focused, more public-facing regulation in which people can play a different role. People might be more engaged. There will be more consultation, more participation, more deliberation in public about how regulation should proceed.

I think that's where we've got to. And I want to look back, recap very fast on how the Communications Act came to focus, as it did, on 'citizens' and 'consumers'. This is only to tell one little part of the story of a very heavily debated, heavily consulted and rather contentious Act, as you know. I'll just tell one part of the story, which began seven years ago now, eight years ago, with a Green Paper which hoped that radical regulatory reform would not be required -that 'consumers' -and I want you to think about these discourses- that 'consumers' are conservative, and so regulation could take its time to adapt to a converging media and communication environment. I can't tell the story of the considerable consultations

that happened in each step in between, but the White Paper which followed it was very different. It proposed Ofcom, in many ways in the form that we now see it --but in many ways different. And it has cut up what many of us used to call 'the audience', into three ways. It's interested in 'consumers', it's interested in public expression, and it's interested in the interests of 'citizens'.

And that seemed a different way of thinking about audiences, listeners, viewers, users, whatever we were going to call them. And it offered a way of cutting up what their interests might be, what it is that they might need, how they might be regulated, and what kind of provision would be appropriate. And it occasioned a very lively consultation which resulted in a draft Bill a couple of years later in which 'citizens', publics and 'consumers' were all gone and we had a Bill about 'customers'. The primary functions of Ofcom were defined in terms of what 'customers' needed, and 'customers' were rather carefully defined as people who pay the bills or might pay the bills. And there was some confusion about whether 'customers' at all referred to ordinary people sitting in their living rooms or whether in fact it referred to the advertisers and the commercial content providers.

So, again, a considerable amount of consultation, the next key step -at least in the story as I see it- was the Joint Select Committee [of the two Houses of Parliament] chaired by Lord Puttnam, which went almost back to the White Paper. It argued against the idea of thinking about people as 'customers' and argued that Ofcom should have the principle duties of furthering the interests of 'citizens' and the interests of 'consumers'. And, when I had a doubt about whether all this talk mattered, and does it matter what we call people, I was fascinated to see that the DTI [Department of Trade and Industry] and the DCMS [Department of Media, Culture and Sport] have issued a note on terminology to say what 'citizens' and 'consumers' mean for those of us who are confused. I think seeing what the associations are, helps us to think about these different aspects -of course we're all human beings, but different ways of thinking about the needs, the interests, the

concerns, the regulatory demands; whether it's helpful to divide things in terms of an economic and a cultural focus, a focus on networks and a focus on content; a thought about the individual and the community and so forth.

Slide:

DTI/DCMS note on terminology

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| <u>Consumer interest</u> | <u>Citizen interest</u> |
| Economic focus | Cultural focus |
| Networks and services | Content |
| Individuals | Community |
| Consumer Panel | Content Board |
| (Legacy – Oftel) | (Legacy – ITC, BSC) |

What this revealed about the DTI and DCMS's thinking is that they took the previous regulators, Oftel (Office of Telecommunications), ITC (Independent Television Commission), BSC (Broadcasting Standards Commission) and sort of mapped them on to the new parts of Ofcom -the Content Board and the Consumer Panel. You could see how from the past to the future, from different areas to convergence, we could see how Ofcom was going to work. And it was going to cut up the 'citizen' and the 'consumer'.

Puzzlingly, and perhaps anyone can help me understand this, when the Communications Bill came out (November 2002), 'citizens' had gone again and Ofcom had the principle duty of further the interests of 'consumers' -not 'customers'. So small point won by the Joint Select Committee but not more than that. And the interests of 'consumers' is seen as being promoted, where appropriate, by competition. And then there was a debate in the House of Lords at which Lord Puttnam moved the amendment to put 'citizens' back in. It was a lively debate which ended with Puttnam saying 'Let's not quibble over words, but words do matter'. And one of the ways they matter is that 'citizens' are something more than the individual, something more than the aggregate of individuals. They are

about the collectivity. They are about the society, the civic, whatever. And he was unhappy with the Government's suggestion that we might talk about the community as a whole.

So there was a debate which the Government lost. And the Communications Act, when it did then come out very shortly after, produced the principle duties of Ofcom as we now know them. Which is number one to further the interests of 'citizens' and number two, to further the interests of 'consumers'.

slide:

The Communications Act (July 2003)

Clause 3:

It shall be the principal duty of Ofcom, in carrying out their functions;

- to further the interests of citizens in relation to communications matters; and
- to further the interests of consumers in relevant markets, where appropriate by promoting competition.

And here is a quote from Ofcom's Chairman, where he's rather miffed about this change and concerned about what it means for the Regulator that the 'citizen's' interests have been put into the Bill -and to have been put, as he sees it, as paramount:

slide:

"You may well have noticed that the careful balance established in the Communications Bill between the duties to citizens and those to consumers has been upset by a recent House of Lords amendment ... that requires Ofcom to give paramountcy to the citizen in all matters ... This late change... seems to us to be unfortunate". (David Currie, Chair of Ofcom)

So there was an argument about terms and I think that it was interesting that the terms used seemed very important.

But now we have the Act and Ofcom, as it often says, is a creature of statute and does what it says in the Act. But in fact there is continued scope for interpretation. Many are now engaged in continuing to debate and ask 'What does this idea of furthering the interests of 'citizens' and 'consumers' mean?' And I think this is a debate in which many here can and should be engaged.

But the very next move, at the point at which Ofcom became a key voice, was to hyphenate the 'citizen' interest and the 'consumer' interest in the way that some have protested about and others find a sensible resolution of what seemed a puzzling distinction. And so here's Ofcom's Mission Statement, which as many of you know, is written on their wall.

slide:

'Ofcom exists to further the interests of citizen-consumers through a regulatory regime which, where appropriate, encourages competition.'

Maybe it's rude to think of it as the Ben and Jerry solution, but they're often talked about, 'citizens' and 'consumers', as the one phrase and as two sides of the same coin -and seriously discussed as precisely, how can we make a division? As somebody said here earlier, we're all 'citizens' and we're all 'consumers' and we're both of them at the same time. So put them together and address their interests where appropriate by encouraging competition.

This seemed to allow a converged model of the purposes of Ofcom. We still have the Content Board and the Consumer Panel, but the legacy regimes get harmonised and regularised, and kind of transcended through this. And we can ask how the interests of the 'citizen-consumers' are now being addressed in what the Regulator has done since.

But there is another voice, within Ofcom and outside, and it's a voice which keeps them distinct. And there are many critics who are concerned about the furthering of the 'citizen' interest through competition. The Act, if you recall, says that we further the 'consumer' interest through competition but not the 'citizen' interest. I took this from a speech that Ed Richards [Senior Partner at Ofcom, Head of the review of Public Service Television] gave a year or so ago in which he says, 'No. Let's keep them separate. They're not two sides of the same coin. We can distinguish 'citizens' from 'consumers' and it appears sensible to do so.' And he distinguished them in his speech in the following way, which we could see as an elaboration of the DTI, DCMS note on terminology, which says they are different things: 'Consumers' have wants and 'citizens' have needs. 'Consumers' are individuals, an aggregate of individuals, but 'citizens' operate at a social and a cultural and a democratic level. We can talk in the language of choice or we can talk in the language of the right to be included or the necessity for certain democratic provision. We can focus on the short term or long term. We can regulate against. I think this is an important one. Are we regulating against things

going wrong for the 'consumer' or are we regulating for a statement of positive public values in the public interest? Do we want more or less regulation and what would be the justification for that?

Slide:

Citizens vs. consumers

Consumer rationale

Wants

Individual level

Private benefits

Language of choice

Short-term focus

Regulate against detriment

Plan to roll back regulation

Citizen rationale

Needs

Social level

Public/social benefits

Language of rights (inclusion)

Long-term focus

Regulate for public interest

Continued regulation to correct market failure

So I think that even within the current framework, what seemed like a solution, when we'd come through the debates and formulated the Act, is still open for negotiation and discussion. And my understanding is that Ofcom, in its own internal deliberations, is also asking itself 'What are the boundaries and what are the definitions of furthering 'citizen' interest and the 'consumer' interest and how do we know when we've done it?' And, you know, every time an academic puts up oppositions, everyone can start deconstructing them -because these columns don't align and it doesn't help to say that this is what the Consumer Panel does and that's what the Content Board does. In practice that isn't how it works. We might want to talk about 'citizens' interests in terms of choices -and often we do when we're talking in terms of democratic theory and so forth. So these are kind of unstable oppositions. It's interesting that they appear to work but in practice, but you might also say that they unravel.

So my question really is whether this is just words, whether it matters what we call audiences, whether it matters what we call people. Lord Puttnam said 'Yes. It's more than just a matter of words. These words are worth fighting about and arguing over and getting right.' And if it's more than a matter of just words, what is

it a matter of? And how should we think about the people whose communication environment is being provided for and regulated in this way. And I want to end by making a few suggestions about what it seems might have been going on -but this is, for me, very much a question, and others may see it differently.

One kind of answer is that the public is put at the centre of the regulatory framework. The primary duties of Ofcom are to do with 'citizens' and 'consumers' rather than markets or industries or organisations. So there's a different kind of focus to the way in which regulation is justified and the way in which regulation is legitimated and defended. One might say -and many are quite optimistic about the new language of empowerment- the new language of choice and rights and so forth are illustrated by the quote from Stephen Carter that I began with. Some are trying to argue that 'consumers' may achieve 'citizen' ends through acting as a 'consumer', and we could think of the Green Consumer Movement as an example of where making a consumer choice has a kind of a civic outcome. And many are cynical and skeptical and say 'This is the language. This is the new discourse which is deflecting our focus from asking what the Regulator or the industry is in fact deciding or doing'. So we have a kind of a descent into consumerism, an illusion of publicity and accountability. There's lots of consultation but are people's views really taken into account? There's lots of participation and publicity but does that really change the kind of regulatory decisions that are made? And I think many would say that the jury is out and quite a few are worried.

Of course there are some rival discourses. I was intrigued to see that if Ofcom has citizens and consumers on its wall, then the BBC still has audiences on its wall. And painted on one of the buildings at least it says, 'Audiences are at the heart of everything we do.' And I wonder if that makes a difference. And audiences to me, though this is also debatable, seem to be pitched at the level of the collective, rather than at the level of the individual. We might ask what it is that audiences could and should do, whereas, reading into the citizen-consumer, we should see

an individual who is getting on with it anyway and it's the job of regulation not to interfere too much.

And I think there are some ways in which, having got 'citizens' into the Statute Book, Ofcom's primary role is to further the interests of citizens. Now is a very good moment to ask what that means and what it could mean, and to push for it to mean something. Because the point about accountability and transparency is that anyone in civil society can now say 'So what are you doing to further the interests of citizens?'. And what could that mean? And what *does* that mean in the converged media environment? And does it mean that this a way to argue for, as we've been discussing here, certain kinds of broadcasting, certain kinds of content like current affairs. Is it a way to argue for certain kinds of values, like quality, diversity, universal provision and so forth? Is it a way to argue for certain kinds of technical and service facilities like universal service for broadband or must carry rules or whatever? So what kind of an argument? What kind of an opportunity is it that Ofcom's number one duty is to further the interests of citizens as well as consumers? Is it in the interests of citizens to keep those two terms separate or to allow them to become hyphenated? And how might those ordinary folk, and I think for these purposes I might count myself among them, get engaged in that kind of debate as part of the ongoing consultation processes? So those are my questions and thank you for your attention.

Questioner:

I think the wording does matter a great deal. I think it's correct to say that consumers are always citizens because you can't consume without this kind of background of contracts and rights which citizenship brings. But there are many areas of citizenship which don't seem to involve consumption and what Ed Richards' list of distinctions does, and I don't think the DTI /DCMS one did, was to bring in this kind of very political, very democratic element of citizenship. And I think it's that which, so far, hasn't been developed so much in what Ofcom's done.

It doesn't seem, for example, to fall under the remit of the Content Board. I think there's definitely a very big distinction between citizenship and consumption there.

Questioner:

We were talking earlier about documentaries, quality documentaries. A key programme here of course was Adam Curtis's Century of the Self where again there's that central argument. The twentieth century has witnessed the death of the citizen. He's simply turned into a consumer. And talking about the discourse, what is actually interesting here of course is you can say that there is a dichotomy between citizens and consumers in terms of language, but an awful lot of that citizen language has been appropriated by consumers. So we talk, for example, in branding. A key concept in branding is co-authorship whereby the consumer and the producer co-operate together, for example in an Apple I-Pod. And then the consumer is empowered. You know, we talk about developing long term relationships with consumers. So it seems to be that an awful lot of that language, you know, this distinction between the two, is already becoming mixed up. Particularly in marketing. We use an awful lot of that language of citizenship already for consumers.

Sonia

I think that's absolutely right of course. The language of citizenship's been co-opted by the market and of course the language of consumption has been co-opted by the Government. So there's a blurring in both directions and that's why I understand why it seems to make sense to hyphenate the terms. But then I wonder why? Do we need them both in? Why didn't we just say it was fine when, in the Communications Bill, it just says 'consumers', you know. What was being added by putting in the interests of citizens? And one of the problems which I think you were alluding to, is that it was never stated and it wasn't really debated. There are lots of possibilities, but it wasn't very clearly stated in the debates and it wasn't precisely put into the Act. I suspect if there'd been any attempt to define what the

difference between citizen and consumer interests had been in the Act, that Lords' debate would have fallen apart in disarray and Puttnam would never have got his amendment through. Because there isn't very clear agreement. And yet it seems to me it is there as an opportunity to say 'This is what citizen interest means. What is the Regulator going to do to advance that?'

Questioner

As somebody who's worked in programming for some years, it seems to me that the outcome of this which might be interesting for students and people who are here, that the outcome of this has resulted in the scrapping of all requirement for a fair quota of local programming. That previously was the element on which franchises were awarded. They were entirely on that provision, how well the companies were going to provide local programming. The result is the slimming down of most of the local companies and everything's now coming from the main network providers. And that really was the big element about ITV, that we had all these regional companies and the diversity of that and their local programming and that's all changed I'm afraid.

Pat:

We're going to move on now, because our next speaker is actually from Ofcom, from the Regulator itself. So many thanks to Sonia for setting up this debate and I'd like to welcome Steve Perkins who is Head of Public Service Content at Ofcom.

Ofcom and current affairs

Steve Perkins, Head of Public Service Broadcasting Content OFCOM

I am very struck by the cultural shifts that have taken place within my lifetime from the early days of This Week, where money didn't really come into it at all, to an

Ofcom powerpoint presentation where money comes into it quite a lot. But hopefully not too much.

I was asked first of all to talk about our Public Service Broadcasting Review which was one of the first key tasks that Ofcom undertook after it was formed. We went for a new definition of public service broadcasting, focusing on what the programmes were for, rather than what genres and boxes they fitted into. The first is in bold because it's the one that it's all about today,

Slide:

- **Informing ourselves and others, and increasing our understanding of the world through news, information and analysis of current events and ideas**
- Stimulating knowledge and interest in arts, science etc
- Reflecting and strengthening cultural identity
- Making us aware of different cultures and viewpoints

Through programming that is

- High quality
- Original
- Innovative
- Challenging

And this is how the institutions that ultimately are responsible for the output might look as we move towards the famous analogue switch off and digital switch over, which is less than three years away in some parts of the country.

slide:

Institutions from analogue to digital age

- BBC: Continuing cornerstone of PSB [public service broadcasting]
- Channel Four: Focus on public purposes and innovation
- Public Service Publisher: New institution drawing on public funds and providing creative competition for BBC
- ITV/Five: Evolving roles. Focus on high quality original production, news, current affairs and (ITV) regional
- Cable and satellite: Market will contribute, variable by genre

You have to recognise absolutely the role of the BBC, as long as it is sustainable - and we're doing some work this year on how it might be possible to make it sustainable. Channel 4 will be focusing on its public purposes, and in particular innovation.

We put forward the possibility of tapping some of the money that, by a slightly hidden subsidy -which I'll try and explain a bit more later if you haven't already heard about it- to capture some of the public funding that's going into public service broadcasting currently on the commercial channels, and will not be available through the same mechanism in future, to capture that, and look at a new institution that would commission content. I'm not thinking here necessarily in terms of linear TV channels -although doubtless it would include those- but content available through other distribution mechanisms.

The levers you can pull to pressure commercial licence holders like ITV and Five in the run up to switch over are declining rather rapidly. At the point of switch over - although I'm not myself a pessimist for the world coming to an end at the point of switch over- nevertheless it [regulation] will become much more difficult, as the

value of the analogue frequencies becomes zero when they're switched off. Their role will change. Cable and satellite, well, I think it's already been said here today, these channels do contribute in different ways.

This is the great economist slide. This explains why the deal has to change with ITV because this slide is meant to show what it costs ITV to do different kinds of programmes.

slide:

The slide shows that regional programming and regional news represent a far bigger cost than other programmes on ITV

It is not merely the cost of the programmes -although you can see that regional programmes come out as the most costly for the rather obvious reason that you have to make them fifteen times- but this also reflects what the cost of the replacement programmes would be, and how much more extra revenue you could collect if you were making output that attracted bigger ratings. Which is not to say that regional programmes or current affairs or anything else always get bad ratings. But they sometimes do. And you will see that on this analysis, current affairs costs ITV an extra fifteen million pounds a year. That money is, in effect, public subsidy that comes from the discount that they get the analogue spectrum. And the analogue spectrum, as I said, is being switched off. That mechanism at the IBA, ITC and Ofcom -the lever that we could pull- will no longer work. So you have to look at how this will operate in the future.

I thought I might get through this whole thing without mentioning citizens or consumers, but that is really what that slide is about.

slide:

The slide shows whether different television genres are of 'personal' or 'social' importance

This measures how much audiences think the output is of societal importance -- which I think means citizens- or whether it's of personal importance -which means consumers- and how much they want to watch. News is at the top, and that is pretty much the same for both. Current affairs is about half way down, and you'll see that the citizen interest comes out a bit more on top. When it comes to movies people are much keener on watching them themselves than necessarily thinking they should be available for other people to watch.

Further analysis from the Public Service Review discusses current affairs, and over the last five years this is what we can measure most accurately: the level of output has been maintained; the total audience for current affairs has been stable. Over the last three years it's been going up quite fast and I haven't quite got to the bottom of that. A lot of it seems to be driven by audiences for current affairs on BBC 1. Our research showed that audiences are less persuaded of the importance of current affairs than news, and they're not saying 'Well, we'd like more' necessarily. They think the provision looks about right. But, as other studies have found, there's less programming on politics, policy and international than ten years previously -certainly at the time of the Review which was a couple of years ago now.

I think it's important to notice that News often carries longer and more analytical pieces than it used to do in former decades. The commissioners that we talked to, broadcasting commissioners, felt that innovation was important but they were slightly discouraged that when they tried innovation the ratings didn't always support them. We've done some more research on this. Audiences seem to be quite inclusive of a wide definition of current affairs which clearly would be centered around traditional definitions, but they seem to be willing to go wider.

As I said at the start, we believe in what the programmes are *for* rather than ticking particular boxes, but current affairs, with news and regional, is still protected by

quotas. Those are the only three areas under the Communications Act that are still protected in this way. And, as far as I can tell, somebody correct me if I'm wrong, I believe the quotas that are now in operation are as high as they have ever been. And you can see what they are:

slide:

- Minimum quotas set at historic levels:
 - 7 hours per week across BBC One and Two (2 hours in peak)
 - 2.5 hours on ITV1 (40 mins in peak)
 - 4 hours on Channel 4 (1.5 hours in peak)
 - 2.5 hours on Five (12 mins in peak)

BBC 1 and BBC 2 achieve them together, seven hours across the week, two hours in peak; two and a half hours on the ITV channel, ITV 1, of which forty minutes has to be in peak; four hours on Channel 4, an hour and a half in peak; and two and a half hours, but a rather derisory amount in peak, on Channel 5.

The Act handed over a lot of the responsibility for regulation of the content of PSB to the broadcasters themselves. They set their annual policies and they review their own progress under the Act. But Ofcom are very good at collecting data. We collect a lot of data and we do a lot of research, and the first wave of research that we've done on audience tracking has been very positive about delivery of PSB -but we have back-stop powers to intervene if necessary. And our PSB Review reviews the delivery, covering all the channels, including the BBC, taken together every five years. We do not focus on ITV 1 or indeed any other particular channel.

Here are some numbers: I'll put this on our website or if anybody wants this emailed to them I'll do that, so let me know [www.ofcom.org.uk; steve.perkins@ofcom.org.uk].

slide:

This slide shows comparative current affairs hours on all terrestrial channels from 1998-2004

The high looking bars for BBC 2 are because that includes live parliamentary coverage which I don't think is quite what it's all about. But it shows that BBC 2, for example, is broadcasting about two hundred and fifty hours a year of current affairs; BBC 1 just over a hundred; ITV 1 just under a hundred; more on Four and in the daytime on Channel Five. But this I think is more important.

slide:

This slide shows comparative current affairs at peak hours on all terrestrial channels from 1998-2004

That is what the peak time graphs look like and, lo and behold, while Five has collapsed because they took out a lot of the current affairs bits that they were doing in the news and some other programmes, the other channels are pretty much going up, notably ITV and BBC 1, compared with the last few years. Channel 4, I believe will be doing more in peak time. So it's quite encouraging.

This is what they spend:

slide:

The slide shows comparative current affairs costs between at peak hours and other times on all terrestrial channels from 1998-2004

That has stayed level for the last five years. Peak time programmes on any of the channels cost about £140,000 per hour; £60,000 off peak.

slide:

'The iceberg –heading North again??'

That's not a cryptic crossword clue, it's an allusion or a homage to the report that Steven Barnett and his team did about six or seven years ago, 'A shrinking iceberg travelling south'. So, because I am optimistic by nature, I wanted to put up a few suggestions, including but not restricted to what I said about the ratings figures, that the iceberg may be heading north again.

slide:

28 1-hour *Dispatches* in 2006,
20 *Unreported World* and
20 *Thirty Minutes*, all on C4 in peak time

That's an expression of Channel 4's new commitment that they've made quite a thing of. That's what they will be broadcasting in prime time in 2006 in terms of their main investigative programmes Dispatches, Unreported World on international topics, and Thirty Minutes on a domestic agenda.

I mentioned the cable and satellite channels. More 4 is provided by Channel 4 as a public service corporation. It doesn't have a PSB remit, but it does contribute -like the season on Iraq that they did last week [The More 4 Iraq Season]. I'm picking out stuff I like: The Power of Nightmares I thought was a terrific three part BBC documentary about neo-conservatives; Jamie's School Dinners -well you can argue with me about that, but to me it set the agenda pretty effectively for the nation for a period; The Secret Policeman, a well known investigative report about racism in the police; Panorama, I've picked out some recent ones to try and illustrate their agenda;

slide:

Panorama – Darfur, Brown's Miracle Economy, Undercover in NHS

The Corporation --very, very long form and serious, originally theatrically released, documentary about the role of corporations in society. It was on More 4 schedule for three hours at nine o'clock in the evening which clearly wouldn't have been possible in the pre-multi channel era.

I'm not one of those who would argue that Tonight with Trevor MacDonald [on ITV] fills the roles of World in Action and This Week, but, it would be foolish to ignore the contribution it makes to current affairs taken together -which is how we look at it. There was an undercover investigation of the Father's for Justice organisation, and last week's programme was about fake medicines entering the NHS.

So, I'm going to stay an optimist. I think that regulation and the institutions look quite robust in the short and medium term. But there are certainly questions about what it will look like when we do our next PSB Review in two or three years time - about delivery of content and usage of all of the platforms. Interestingly there was a great decline in viewing of linear TV over Christmas. People were using their computers. You need to factor that in, and we will.

Now, on the earlier comment about regional television, taking the two areas you were concerned about: there's been no major decline in the output of purely regional television. In England, around the edges of the schedule -the cheap stuff- ITV have been allowed to cut that. But the main regional non-news programmes that were in peak time are there just exactly as they were. The level of regional news I think is at its highest. There has been no cut. Obviously regional news is the main function of the purely regional services. And in the nations outside England, the non-news output has been maintained at a significantly higher level than in England and very little less than it was before.

The other side of the coin, which is at least equally important, is the reflection of the regions of the UK on the networks. All of the networks, notably the BBC, have a responsibility here, but ITV has the biggest heritage. And it also has the biggest commitment because, at the same time that the level of non-news programmes in England came down, we put up substantially the amount from regional sources that had to be shown on the ITV network. Now, half of what's on the network -both in the volume of it and the spend on it- has to come from outside London, which is more than it was before.

Questioner

Can I ask how channels are able to define what current affairs is? The BBC in particular have been putting out quite a lot of programmes in the last couple of years which they have defined as current affairs, and which have been funded by

the current affairs department --Smallpox UK, If, The Man Who Broke Britain, The Day Britain Stopped-- which frankly are drama and not current affairs. You are presenting lots of charts about how more people are watching current affairs, but I'd suggest that's because programmes which previously might have been considered dramas are now being counted as current affairs.

Steve Perkins:

Well, the definition itself hasn't shifted. It's to do with reflection of current events, and I can send it to you if you want -the whole thing. But obviously it can be done in different ways. And I guess we'd probably just have to agree to differ on this, because to me something like 'If' may have a dramatised approach, but it told some important stories and analysed them. And I guess this is one of the areas where maybe they're a bit disappointed by the ratings response to an attempt at innovation, but I would give them marks for trying on that. I think they were trying to address current events in a new way and I think that's positive.

Questioner

This is perhaps a somewhat unfair question or comment to point at you, because you are just one remove from the Government –so, if the academics are listening, perhaps they will want to comment. This whole afternoon, one subject has been implicit in everything that’s been said, apart from the construction of the database - -politics. It’s been there the whole afternoon, implicit, but never explicitly explained; the context in which all of this developed. Now I came into this business when I was fifteen, sixteen, I beg your pardon. This Week was one year old. The war had only just been over. We were a deferential society. What has been missing or what is missing, as far as I’m concerned, is an economical analysis that parallels the analysis being done with regard to This Week and current affairs, and a sociological analysis on how society has changed, how the structures have changed and so on and so forth. For instance, in 1979 I stood on Euston Road for twelve weeks [for an Association of Cinema and Television Technicians (ACTT) strike] and the only thing I heard from the bus platforms was ‘When are we going to get back Coronation Street?’. If you go back to the sixties, there are those who probably look on the sixties as a golden age -that’s a matter of debate and argument- but the fact is that coming out of that period, post-war, when the Russian threat was still real and so on, there was a desire for people to understand their policies. Will someone explain to me that in those days of deference, post-war, voter participation at general elections was very, very high. And as the generations have gone on, the actual participation in general election in the body politic has gone down and down. I think there should be parallel analysis of trying to explain what it is that has changed in our society. Is there a parallel analysis going on, sociological, economic, political and voting. Is there a correlation between any of these things?

Steve Perkins:

I’d just quickly say then that there have been conferences -I’ve been to them- about the relationship between voter turn out and what is in the media. I think the

conclusions have tended to be that it's not the fault of the media that voter participation is going down. There's certainly a debate about whether television should be used more to drive voter turn out, which I'm personally resistant to. While it's making us more an arm of the democratic system than of the Government, I still feel a little bit uncomfortable with it, because impartiality and separation from Government in terms of what we do with content is terribly important. You can say that we're one removed from Government because we're set up by an Act. An Act of Parliament rather than Government. Anyway, that's my quick take.

Steven Barnett

I've just got a very boring technical question after that broad sweep, which is quite simply, those figures that you gave us on current affairs quotas. I spent ages trying to find them over the net in the last twenty four hours. Where did they come from? They're not in the Communications Act as far as I know. Are they Ofcom's?

Steve Perkins:

No. They're certainly quoted in the PSB Phase 1.

Steven Barnett

But have they been laid down by Ofcom? I mean Ofcom can't lay down quotas for the BBC.

Steve Perkins:

Well the BBC -to simplify a lot- they have to agree them with us.

Steven Barnett

And they have agreed seven hours per week on One and Two.

Steve Perkins:

Yes.

Steven Barnett

This is publicly available information, is it?

Steve Perkins:

It's there. I'll send it to you. To the best of my knowledge it's out there.

Steven Barnett

And the others for commercial channels, Ofcom has laid down as targets, minimum targets?

Steve Perkins:

I don't say targets, they're quotas.

Steven Barnett

But they are obligations?

Steve Perkins:

Yes.

Pat

Regulation is absolutely central; it's been central for the history of current affairs and I think it has to be central to the future of current affairs and it's something we need to pay attention to, which is why that last question was important. And the person who asked that question will now take the rostrum. This is Professor Stephen Barnett, respected commentator on media affairs, newspaper columnist, who will wind up the afternoon and no doubt summarise where he thinks we're going.

The future of current affairs television

Steven Barnett, Professor of Communications, University of Westminster;

'A Shrinking Iceberg Travelling South' was a study that I did with Emily Seymour at the end of the last century -which I love saying- on changing trends in British Television, and we did look at drama and current affairs as case studies. We introduced about a dozen producers in each genre. That wonderful quote actually came from one of the interviewees. He said 'the quality end of the television market

is a shrinking iceberg travelling south.’ Which we thought was such a great quote, that’s why we titled the report that. Interestingly it was a drama producer who said that and not a current affairs producer. But they all tended to be much of a muchness. But today I was quite determined, knowing that I was going to speak last, to try and end upbeat.

One of my lines was going to be ‘I wonder if the iceberg is about to change direction?’ The other one was to say ‘I think I want to title this Reasons to be Cheerful’ because what I want to do, while honouring and respecting the programmes of the past and the great things that TV current affairs has done, is to try and move on and accept that the environment is different, television is different, journalism is different and audiences are different, and, picking up the point made by the last questioner, the social, economic and cultural climate is different. I think we can do something with the past which is relevant to the future and that’s to try and identify in fairly cold analytical terms, what the ingredients were which did give us some really ground breaking current affairs programmes, and then try and apply that analysis to the future. There is a wonderful children’s book, which I used to read to my kids, called ‘The Sky is Falling, the Sky is Falling’, and what I want to try and do is to say maybe the sky isn’t falling, and lead us to a rather more hard-headed view of what the future of current affairs on television might be, and how we can foster the kind of current affairs that we believe to be democratically healthy as well as feasible.

The other premise that I think we’ve assumed throughout today is that, unlike the market liberal view which is so prevalent in America, I think there is a general consensus in the UK that we want to encourage the use of the airwaves for purposes beyond just chewing gum for the eyes. I do think it’s worth saying these days that some of the old public service certainties probably need to be restated, but I do think there is still a consensus that the fourth estate ideals of holding the powerful to account; revealing corruption, dishonesty, incompetence, negligence,

malpractice etc.; and trying to create a more informed citizenry, are still aspirations that we welcome. I'm going to take that premise for granted, as I suspect this audience will too, and ask what would be the ingredients that allowed television of the past to produce those kinds of programmes, accessible to millions in peak time, performing a valuable fourth estate function, and then ask how they apply today.

I think there were five factors -and some of them have been mentioned today more than others. I apologise for any repetition, but what I'm trying to do is to bring it all together. The first, as many people have said, is simply *resources*. You have to have money for good, hard-hitting, especially investigative, current affairs. Death on the Rock required researchers who had to be paid for several months, possibly, as someone said, without any kind of result. An investment in personnel and programme making without any definite return is something that is almost impossible in today's environment. So, those were the days, in ITV in particular, where there was a licence to print money. Monopoly of revenue, the advertising revenue which lasted until -or in fact beyond- 1990, -it lasted I think until the beginning of '92-, may have been an anathema in market and business terms, but it did allow investment in high risk programmes with real public value. Those days are gone.

The second factor was the *regulatory environment*. We needed and we got a Regulator with unambiguous statutory powers first. But second, with the will and strength to implement them, if necessary against the wishes of the contractors. The ITA and then the IBA were born not only out of frustration with the mindlessness of early ITV but out of a real political will to foster the kind of public service ethos in commercial television, and to copy the BBC. And that continued with the 1982 Act which set up Channel 4 and only started to become dismantled in 1990 -although I would argue that the roots of that, the results of that deregulation, didn't actually start filtering through until the '90s.

So that was the second factor, the regulatory environment. The third I've called the *television environment*. And what I mean here is that the people who actually commissioned the programmes, whether they were internal and part of a vertically integrated structure, or external as in Channel 4 commissioning from independents, needed to have a real appetite for doing current affairs. And that's different from having regulations or obligations imposed upon you, because Regulators can enforce times and they can enforce volume. They can even enforce, as Ofcom can do on ITV even now, investment in terms of money. What they can't do is dictate quality and commitment. The fact that there was regular traffic in personnel between ITV, Channel 4 and the BBC, was a testament to the people, to the fact that the people who were making and commissioning programmes on commercial television were imbued with the same sense of professionalism and commitment as had started in the BBC. That was the third factor.

The fourth factor, and one that actually we haven't talked about today although I think is one of the most important, is the *journalistic environment*. And I'm talking about journalism in the broadest possible sense, not just in terms of television journalism. An environment where investigative or difficult journalism thrived and was rewarded and was grounded in real training and learning opportunities. It's the journalism of thalidomide as well as Death on the Rock. Whereas sometimes extravagant sums of money are spent on undercover journalism, which is only journalism that results in revelations about England's soccer manager, or thinking that Michael Owen might be unhappy at Newcastle, or that Kate Moss was having treatment at a drug addiction centre --or was it Naomi Campbell, I get these revelations mixed up. Of course the nation is interested in celebrities and that's been the excuse for concentration on royal family and celebrity stories for many years. But there was always room, journalistically, for more substantial issues which involved furthering the public good or public knowledge.

And that brings me to the fifth factor which Steve talked about and I want to say a bit more about, which is *audience taste*. We heard before from Peter that audiences of six, seven, eight million for World in Action as well as for This Week were not unusual. And yes of course there were only three or four channels and of course they were helped by the hammocking effect and inheritance from other programmes, but these people were not forced to watch, and those programmes were often scheduled against light entertainment programmes or more popular programmes. It suggests that there really was an appetite for watching programmes on serious issues.

Now let's look at each of those five factors and see how they might pan out in the foreseeable future and see if there really are any reasons to be cheerful. Well, first of all resources, clearly a problem. Budgets are tighter, controls on expenditure are much more severe than they used to be. In some of the interviews we did for the Iceberg study, virtually every single person we talked to in drama and current affairs complained about the kinds of cuts that were being imposed. Obviously the environment is much more competitive. It is more difficult to make a living. And furthermore the business model of television selling television air time to make money is under threat. That's a longer term issue. The fact is that ITV and Channels 4 and 5 are still profitable. They don't make as much money as they used to, but there is money there to spend, and it can be spent wisely if the will is there. So maybe it is not such a problem as sometimes is made out.

The second factor was regulation. Well, we still have a Regulator. We even have a Regulator, as Sonia told us, who has a duty to promote the interests of citizens. The problem is that it also has a duty to promote the interests of competition and as far as ITV is concerned that is clearly where its priorities lie. In fact, one or two of Ofcom's executives excluded, Steve being one of them, I would suggest that the whole culture and institutional environment of Ofcom owes much more to the Oftel and DTI model of regulation than to the ITC and BSC model of regulation. And

one of the issues that has been a factor in the politics of broadcasting over the last twenty years, and this hasn't been really brought out today, has been the battle between the DTI and what used to be the Home Office, then the Department of National Heritage and is now DCMS. And it was very interesting, I didn't know that Sonia was doing this research on the origins of the Communications Act, but I know for a fact that the Green Paper on the Communications Bill in 1998 was actually more or less hi-jacked by the DTI. And the way citizens were written in was because Chris Smith [at the time Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport] managed to get his hands on it in between the Green and the White Paper. And that way of thinking, that intellectual mindset, runs through the senior civil servants to this very day. And my understanding is that there is a complete dissonance, a complete lack of understanding between Ofcom and the senior civil servants and the DCMS. They are simply on different planets. Steve might want to say something publicly but I'm not sure what he might want to say privately.

So, going back to the point. There is an ongoing battle within Ofcom which has been implicit in broadcasting regulations for at least twenty years which is, as I say, DTI versus DCMS. But, I have no doubt that it's the DTI philosophy that's winning. If it's competition, it is market led and Stephen Carter [Ofcom Chief Executive at the time] made some very interesting remarks in his interview with [the journalist] Maggie Brown last week, which I urge everyone to read, where he clearly said that he wanted to go further in de-regulating ITV. There was a battle with the Content Board. The Content Board sort of won but that isn't going to be the case for ever. The internal culture of Ofcom, I do not believe is conducive to pursuing public interest objectives, and I think ITV knows this. So I'm very pessimistic about the regulatory environment.

Third factor, television environment. I think that the television environment unfortunately eventually follows behind the regulatory environment. That said, we still have the legacy of fifty years of public service tradition in commercial television

with programme makers still actively wanting to make good accessible meaningful current affairs with strong journalistic content. I don't think there is a huge appetite amongst programme makers to go down that sort of celebrity route. That may change. It would certainly change with an American takeover of ITV. For the moment I think we have a positive television programme environment.

However, the fourth factor, I don't think we have anything like the same journalistic environment as we did twenty years ago. I think one of the things that we are missing -and I think this is a serious public interest problem for this country- are the training programmes, the education, the learning opportunities for young investigative journalists who aspire to doing the kind of fourth estate jobs that journalism is supposed to be about. There are fewer opportunities in television, in the press, in magazines. In fact the only expanding area is the internet. And these are skills that have to be acquired, that take time, that need fostering. More journalism today is opinion based. It is about pop stories and that's primarily because it's easier and cheaper as well as there being less talent around to do the difficult jobs. I think that's a problem.

Finally audience tastes may not have changed as much as we're led to believe. And I think Steve's figures on the increase in audiences over the last year or so for current affairs are very telling. I don't necessarily believe that the appetite, the audience appetite for current affairs, is as dulled as some people think. And actually the tyranny of the ratings, where the most popular programme grab prime time, is arguably against the consumer interest. That's a more complicated argument and Paddy Barwise of the London Business School is the best proponent of it. I won't go into that now.

So it's a mixed picture, but I want to pick out the straws in the wind. These are the reasons to be cheerful. OK these are the models for new current affairs for the future and why we shouldn't throw in the towel and say the sky is falling.

First. Someone mentioned, one of the speakers mentioned, the increased number of analysis slots within news programmes. The point is that both programmes like Newsnight and Channel 4 News -and sometimes even the main news bulletins- can offer not just insights and context for the news, but something equally important, they become a journalistic vehicle and offer a sense of cohesion for the journalists who are working on them. And part of the journalistic importance of World in Action and This Week was precisely that kind of journalistic vehicle which offered, not just learning opportunities, but a sense of cohesion amongst a group of people who could work together and produce something important. And I think actually some of those news programmes provide that sort of vehicle.

Secondly. I think there is a growing recognition that current affairs is still worth doing and that perhaps we need to apply more ingenuity and more innovation. We cannot get away today, like it or not, with someone simply sitting down in a chair speaking to camera. That looks terribly old dated. It may be part of the dumbing down, that we don't have the attention span to sit and listen, but we don't, and that's the reality. There's just too much else on. I think there are some very good creative brains who are prepared to invest time and resources in making current affairs accessible and that's an issue that we ought to be prepared to celebrate.

Third reason. An example of this, and I'm going down the same kind of line here that Steve went down and I support his view entirely, is that there are different strands emerging which break down the boundaries between genres. The old fashioned category of current affairs as a piece of factual programming on film or to camera or whatever, can now be broken down in many different ways. One of them is drama. Another one is, if twenty years ago someone had said 'Let's make a groundbreaking programme revealing the crap that are children are forced to eat in schools' that would have been a very interesting one off programme for This Week or World in Action. I think it's actually more interesting, more innovative and

had much more impact that it was turned into a Channel 4 series which actually resulted in legislation. So whether it's Jamie Oliver or whether it's other kinds of stranded factual programming, some of those are taking the place of what used to be current affairs.

Fourth reason, leading on from that, is the other innovation which is documentary, drama documentary. And I entirely agree with Steve. I think that the example that he gave, 'The Power of Nightmares', I would add programmes like 'The Day Britain Stopped', the 'If' series on things like the energy supply crisis, involved using new techniques to bring serious difficult issues which people ought to be thinking about and ought to be worried about to a much larger audience than would otherwise be the case. And the 'If' series was also supplemented by a series of discussion programmes afterwards. Drama techniques, computer animations, re-enactments, CCTV footage, mobile phone video, all of those new technology operations allow producers to think differently and to think more innovatively about how they can do current affairs and I think we ought to encourage that.

And the final reason to be cheerful. The BBC: its commitment to building values, to increase current affairs by sixteen hours of midweek specials a year, adding another ten and half hours of peak time each week, including an extra three million pounds per annum. I don't think there's any excuse for the other free to air channels, commercially funded, to have similar kinds of obligations imposed on them and I do think that at the moment we are seeing a regulatory cop out. It's six o'clock so I'm going to stop there. But as I say I think there are still reasons that we don't have to throw in the towel quite yet.

More information on the This Week Project database and the other Bournemouth databases through <http://www.media.bournemouth.ac.uk> and www.bufvc.ac.uk]

More information on Ofcom from <www.ofcom.org.uk>; steve.perkins@ofcom.org.uk.

Patricia Holland's book *The Angry Buzz: 'This Week' and Current Affairs Television* is published by I.B.Tauris