

"COVERING THE BODY":
THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION
AND
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF JOURNALISTIC AUTHORITY

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Barbie Zelizer

ABSTRACT

"COVERING THE BODY": THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF JOURNALISTIC AUTHORITY

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Professor Larry Gross (Chairperson)

This study explores the narrative reconstruction by journalists of the story of John F. Kennedy's assassination. It examines how American journalists have turned their retellings of assassination coverage into stories about themselves, promoting themselves as the event's authorized spokespeople. At heart of their attempts to do so are issues of rhetorical legitimation, narrative adjustment and collective memory, all of which underscore how journalists establish themselves as an authoritative interpretive community.

The study is based on systematic examination of the narratives by which journalists have told the assassination story over the 27 years since Kennedy died. Narratives were taken from public published discourse which appeared between 1963 and 1990 in the printed press,

documentary films, television retrospectives, trade press
and professional reviews.

The study found that journalists' authority for the event was rarely grounded in practice, for covering Kennedy's death was fraught with problems for journalists seeking to legitimate themselves as professionals. Rather, their authority was grounded in rhetoric, in the narratives by which journalists have recast their coverage as professional triumph and given themselves a central role as the assassination story's authorized retellers. Their narratives have allowed them to recast instinctual and improvisory dimensions of practice as the mark of a true professional, while attending to larger agendas about journalistic professionalism, shifting boundaries of cultural authority and the legitimation of television news. All of this has made the Kennedy assassination a critical incident for American journalists, through which they have negotiated the hows and whys of journalistic practice, authority and community.

This study thereby showed that journalists practice rhetorical legitimation in a circular fashion, circulating their narratives circulated in systematic and strategic ways across medium and news organization. Journalists use

discourse about events to address what they see as issues central to their legitimation and consolidation as a professional interpretive community. This suggests that the function of journalistic discourse is not only to relay news but to help journalists promote themselves as cultural authorities for events of the "real world."

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INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

NARRATIVE, COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND JOURNALISTIC AUTHORITY

Common sense is quite wrong in thinking that the past is fixed, immutable, invariable, as against the ever-changing flux of the present. On the contrary, at least within our own consciousness, the past is malleable and flexible, constantly changing as our recollection reinterprets and reexplains what has happened ¹.

The ability of journalists to promote themselves as authoritative and credible spokespeople for events of the "real world" has long been an unspoken given in journalistic practice. From discussions about Watergate to recollections of the Hindenburg Affair, the world of journalism is cluttered with activities that should generate questions about journalists' right to position and perpetuate themselves as spokespeople for events. Yet audiences - and analysts - have insufficiently considered what makes journalists better equipped than others to offer a "preferred" version of events, particularly those events situated beyond the grasp of everyday life. Both have similarly avoided asking how journalists ascribe to themselves such a power of interpretation, or how it carries them from one news event to another. In short, the boundaries of journalists' cultural authority have remained largely unexplored simply because few people have bothered to ask questions about them.

This study of the cultural authority of journalists aims to address such an oversight. It examines how journalists have established themselves as authorized spokespeople of the events of the "real world." It does so by examining the establishment and perpetuation of journalists as authorized spokespeople for one event - the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Through the narratives by which journalists have recounted their coverage of the event over the past twenty-seven years, it explores how journalists have made the assassination story as much into a story about American journalists as about America's 34th President. In so doing, they have strategically shaped their position as cultural authorities for telling the events of the "real world."

THE WORKINGS OF CULTURAL AUTHORITY AND MEMORY

Positioning certain groups or individuals as cultural authorities has long been a problem of contemporary life, particularly in a mediated age. Ongoing debates about acceptable notions of expertise, domination and power have occupied individuals in all aspects of everyday life. Which particular set of qualities invests one group, or one individual, with more authority than another has generated extensive discourse about the workings by which authority is seen as being most effectively realized.

For groups involved in public discourse, questions of authority are reduced to how speakers promote authoritative versions of real-life events through the stories they tell. Investing speakers with authority takes place through the effective circulation of codes of knowledge among members of the groups to which they belong. This recalls Durkheim's notion of collective representations, which suggests that groups structure through representation collective ways of understanding the world around them². It suggests that notions of authority, like other collective representations, are arrived at by members of groups who give them meaning.

Knowledge about cultural authority is assumed here to work in non-linear ways. Through circular interaction, knowledge is effectively circulated and recirculated. According to Anthony Giddens,

the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute those systems³.

The suggestion that social actors react to others at the same time as they are being reacted to means that knowledge about authority is codified, then fed back to its codifiers, who codify it yet again.

Cultural authority is thus posited as a goal in need of strategic accomplishment. Members of all sorts of groups codify knowledge so as to generate solidarity - and

hence control - over other members. Codifying knowledge helps individuals act in collective, and hence, controllable, ways, making the perpetuation of collectives more feasible. At the same time, the successful codification of knowledge produces authorities who are better versed in its particulars. This has generated broad questions over who constitutes a cultural authority, or how one establishes and perpetuates oneself as an authority.

The workings of cultural authority become particularly interesting when realized through the form of collective memory. Collective memory offers cultural arbiters a specific dimension on which to exercise the full spread of their power across time and space. It is, in G.H. Mead's view, a way of using the past to give meaning to the present ⁴. Using memory as an "instrument of reconfiguration" rather than retrieval has been most effectively discussed in the work of Maurice Halbwachs ⁵. In Halbwach's view, collective memory constitutes memories of a shared past by those who experience it. Collective memories are envisaged from the viewpoint of the group, whose conscious and strategic efforts have kept it alive ⁶. Remembering, and forgetting, helps groups and institutions "locate in memory an earlier version of self with which to measure the current version" ⁷. Collective

memory reflects a group's codified knowledge over time about what is important, preferred and appropriate.

Relevant to this discussion is the notion of critical incidents, by which members of groups and institutions locate certain events in collective memory in a way that helps them reinterpret collective notions of practice. Critical incidents are what Claude Levi-Strauss once called "hot moments," those moments or events through which a society or culture assesses its significance ²⁰. They provide moments in discourse by which members of groups are able to negotiate their own boundaries of practice, through discussion and cultural argumentation ²¹.

These ideas bear particular relevance for an examination of journalistic authority, the specific case of cultural authority by which journalists determine their right to present authoritative versions of the world through stories of real-life events. Journalists have long had access to varied situations - technological, narrative, institutional and others - through which they have effectively perpetuated their memories of critical incidents. Their ability to shape memories in accordance with what they see as preferred and strategically important has directly affected their assumption of positions of cultural authority. In other words, journalists' memories of certain strategic events have

long been fashioned in accordance with collective aims of establishing themselves as an independent interpretive community, although this is one aspect of journalistic practice that has rarely been examined.

THE SPECIFIC CASE OF JOURNALISTIC AUTHORITY

Notions of authority have long figured among journalists as a key to their efficient production and presentation of news. Much journalistic practice has been seen as a type of "undercover work," where journalists have presented events through explanatory frames that construct reality but reveal neither the secrets, sources nor methods of such a process ¹⁰. Journalism has traditionally displayed only partial pictures of real-life events to audiences, and journalists have rarely made explicit the authority they use to change "quasi" or partial accounts into complete chronicles of events. At the same time, journalists' mode of event selection, formation and presentation ultimately hinges on how they justify their decisions to construct the news in one way and not another, bringing some notion of authority directly into the daily accomplishment of journalistic work. Acting appropriately "as journalists" thus depends on a reporter's ability to change codified knowledge in consensual ways. Collective memory, as the vessel of codified knowledge across time and space, reflects a

reshaping of the parameters of appropriate practice through which journalists construct themselves as cultural authorities.

Journalistic authority helps explain journalistic practice in two ways: One has to do with the stature of journalism as a profession; the other is the notion that authority is basically an act of transmission.

JOURNALISTIC COMMUNITY: FROM PROFESSION TO INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY

Journalists have been generally organized into communities with requisite bodies of codified knowledge via the notion of "professions" ¹¹. Professions have been defined as an ideological orientation toward the production of work, realized via certain combinations of skill, autonomy, training and education, testing of competence, organization, codes of conduct, licensing and service orientation ¹². Taken together, these traits generate a shared notion of community for the individuals who comprise such communities.

Standardized codes of knowledge play a large part in maintaining and perpetuating traits of professionalism, at the same time as they help professionals to maintain themselves as communities ¹³. Everett Hughes' much-cited reformulation of "is this occupation a profession" into "what are the circumstances in which people in an

occupation attempt to turn it into a profession and themselves into professional people" signalled such a concern ¹⁴. Via standardized codes of knowledge, Hughes suggested, "profession" was turned into a symbolic label for a desired shared status of actors ¹⁵.

Examining journalism as a profession, however, has yielded an unclear picture. Unlike the "classically-defined" professions of medicine or law, where professionals legitimate their actions via socially-recognized paths of training, education or licensing, the trappings of professionalism have not been required for journalists to practice in the profession: Journalists therefore do not readily attend journalism schools and training programs or read journalism textbooks ¹⁶. Codes of journalistic behavior are not written down, with training considered instead a "combination of osmosis and fiat" ¹⁷. Journalistic codes of ethics remain largely non-existent, and most journalists routinely reject licensing procedures ¹⁸. Journalists are also unattracted to professional associations, with the largest professional association - the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi - claiming only 17% membership of American journalists ¹⁹.

Journalists thereby act as members of a professional collective in only a limited sense. Their rejection of

training and prescribed codes of conduct, licensing and professional organizations, or codes of ethics suggests that the "profession" of journalism has not sufficiently addressed the needs of its journalist members. As one researcher suggested, "the modern journalist is of a profession but not in one... the institutional forms of professionalism likely will always elude the journalist" ²⁰.

Two features of journalism have been most affected through a near-exclusive understanding of journalists as "professional" communities. One has been the emergent view of journalists as "unsuccessful professionals": In this light, journalistic professionalism is faulted for promoting "trained incapacity" ²¹. News professionalism is seen as emerging from specific methods of work (particularly, identifying and verifying facts) rather than answering to a combination of (supposedly laudatory) predetermined traits or conditions ²². This perhaps explains why contemporary journalists have continued to cling to the notion of a fully-describable "objective" world, despite the increasing popularity of philosophical and sociological views to the contrary ²³.

Another feature affected by the emphasis on professionalism are those traits of journalism not found in other occupations and therefore not part of more

general perspectives on professionalism: Most obvious here are the generic and stylistic considerations of news narrative. "How to tell a news-story," distinctions between fact and fiction, general stylistic determinants and specific conventions of the news genre - all have occupied journalists for decades yet are present in few discussions of journalistic professionalism ²⁴.

This suggests that existing models of professions have offered a basically restrictive way of viewing journalistic practice, journalistic "professionalism," journalistic communities and collective lore, and, hence, journalistic authority. The organization of journalists into professional collectives has not provided a complete picture of how and why journalism works. This does not mean that the collectivity represented by professionalism does not exist among journalists. It does suggest, however, that it may be generated by notions other than those offered by formalized codes of professionalism.

Viewing journalists as an informally-coalesced interpretive community suggests an alternate way of examining their collectivity. Sociological studies of news organizations have long maintained that journalists' high degree of specialization and expertise has prompted the replacement of vertical management with horizontal management, thereby substituting collegial authority for

hierarchical authority ²⁵. Journalists absorb rules, boundaries and a sense of appropriateness about their actions without ever actually being informed of them by superiors. This generally laissez-faire environment, called by Tunstall a "non-routine bureaucracy," has generated a certain degree of "creative autonomy" for and among journalists ²⁶. It is against the background of such creative autonomy that a sense of journalistic community emerges. Within these boundaries, cultural discussion takes place, with journalists accomplishing work by negotiating, discussing and challenging other journalists. This suggests the existence of a shared collective or institutional frame which both exists beyond specific news organizations and upon which journalists rely when engaging in cultural discussion and argumentation.

All of this highlights the relevance of examining journalists as an interpretive community. An interpretive community is defined by Hymes as a group - called a "speech community" - that is united by its shared interpretations of reality ²⁷. Fish furthers the notion by claiming that interpretive communities are those who produce texts and "determine the shape of what is read" ²⁸.

Scholarship in anthropology, folklore and literary studies holds that interpretive communities display

certain patterns of authority, communication and memory in their dealings with each other²², a point exemplified by journalists' regular references to stories about Walter Cronkite or Watergate in their discussions of appropriate journalism. The idea that journalists constitute an interpretive community, a group that authenticates itself through interpretations furthered by its narratives and rhetoric, suggests that they circulate knowledge amongst themselves through channels other than the textbooks, training courses and credentialling procedures stressed by formalized codes of professionalism, and that they have ways of collectively legitimating their actions that have little to do with the profession's formalized accoutrements. This does not mean that other professional communities, such as doctors or lawyers, do not do the same. Nor does it mean that the journalistic community is not concerned with professionalism, only that it activates its concern through its discourse about itself, and the collective memories on which it is based.

Such an idea directs the analytical focus of journalists toward alternate attributes of community - such as the individual, organization and institution, or structure of the profession - all of which may provide different motivations for establishing journalistic authority than those implied by discussions of different

journalistic tasks and routines. It suggests that commonplace discourse about distinctions between reporters - such as those differentiating beat reporters from generalists, columnists from copy-writers, anchorpersons from health correspondents - may figure less centrally in journalistic discourse than motivations concerning the individual, organization and institution, and structure of the profession. In other words, professional literature may have done little to elucidate the role discourse plays in unifying journalists into an interpretive community.

This study thus examines the journalistic community not only as a profession, as suggested by sociology, but as an interpretive community, as suggested by literary studies, folklore and anthropology. Such a consideration explores the narrative relay of collective codes of knowledge, as they exist in both tacit and explicit discursive forms ³⁰, substituting commonly-regarded distinctions between journalists with dimensions assumed to figure into the workings of journalism as an interpretive community - individual dimensions, organizational/institutional dimensions, and professional/structural dimensions, each of which will be shown to interact in journalists' promotion of themselves as an interpretive community. Through shared narrative lore, reporters espouse collective values and notions that

help them produce and present news. This suggests that journalists function together as much as apart, presumably guided by certain notions that are suggested in their narratives. This study thereby raises a number of questions about how journalists use narrative to legitimate their right as a community to present the news. How are such narratives perpetuated? What role, if any, does authority play in the construction and perpetuation of certain narratives over others? How do journalists arrive at seemingly "collective" ways of legitimating their actions and shared assumptions about their authority? How do narratives change over time and space? What role does memory play in generating a body of collective knowledge? Approaching the journalistic community as an interpretive community thus attends to the establishment of authority through narrative.

JOURNALISTIC AUTHORITY: FROM TRANSMISSION TO RITUAL

A second reason that a consideration of journalistic authority enhances understanding of journalistic practice has to do with conceptions of authority already in the field. Media researchers have not provided a complete picture of the relevance of journalistic authority for journalists. For roughly the past decade, they have relied upon notions of linearity, effect and influence in conceptualizing relevant angles of "journalistic

authority." Authority has been conceptualized in three basic ways - as an effect on audiences, an effect on organizational actors, or an effect on wide-ranging socio-cultural systems.

Studies of political effects have conceptualized journalistic authority as a one-on-one correlation between "what journalists say" and "what audiences believe" ²¹. This focus adopts a linear perspective as a frame for the entire communication process, with journalistic authority - or "credibility" - seen as a function of the believability it induces in audiences. Journalistic authority is evaluated in accordance with the proportional slice of audiences that appraise a news-story (and, by implication, a journalist or medium) as believable. Authority is thus ultimately reduced to the tangible effect it is seen as having on audiences. As Weaver and Rimmer maintain, they are interested in seeing "how credible (trustworthy, unbiased, complete, accurate) newspapers and television news were perceived (by audiences) to be" ²².

A second group of studies, tentatively labelled here "organizational studies," has regarded journalistic authority as a set of strategies by which actors jockey for power within the news organization ²³. Journalistic authority is seen here as the power by which journalists

co-exist as organizational actors. These studies have focused on organizational strategies which allow journalists to generate authority as organizational actors. Derived from Warren Breed's classic study of social control in the newsroom ³⁴, they hold that journalists are engaged in strategic behavior to gain influence over others. Strategies by which this occurs include time management, imposing predictable frames for organizing resources, mitigating interpersonal conflict, routinization and purposive behavior ³⁵.

Yet a third body of studies has applied a linear frame to larger socio-cultural configurations ³⁶. Journalistic authority is seen here as a social construction reflecting larger socio-cultural questions of power and domination. "Authority" is taken as a marker for some socio-economic or political power which determines how news is constructed. Gallagher, for example, contends that media performances are determined by media ownership ³⁷. Other studies have focused on how external issues of power and domination are co-opted within news discourse ³⁸.

Each of these three conceptions thereby reflects a basically linear view of the communication process. By examining how authority is effected on others, they echo what has been called a "transmission" view of

communication, "the extension of messages across geography for the purpose of control, ...and influence" ³⁹. While "non-transmission" dimensions undoubtedly figure within such conceptions, they nonetheless subordinate all considerations of authority to a consideration of its effect on others. This has tailored explorations of journalistic authority to notions of influence, ignoring its possible internally-directed effects on those who make messages, the communicators.

Yet an alternate view of authority is offered by folklore and anthropology, where authority is viewed primarily as an act of ritual that binds members of communities together in strategic ways. Victor Turner views rituals as moments in space and time where groups are solidified by questioning authority ⁴⁰. Roger Abrahams regards cultural performances of all sorts as a means of internal group authentication ⁴¹. James Carey maintains that the ritual view of communication is "the sacred ceremony which draws persons together in fellowship and commonality...through sharing, participation, association, fellowship and the possession of a common faith" ⁴². Ritual sets up periods of marked intensification and gives members of a community a way to question and ratify basic notions about authority. In this view, authority is seen as a construct of community, functioning as the stuff that

keeps communities together. This allows observers to ask how authority creates a sense of community among the communicators who employ it. All of this has particular relevance for journalists, for it addresses previously-unanswered questions about how journalists use credibility, power or authority for themselves, regardless of its connection with audiences, organizational set-ups or larger socio-cultural questions of power.

RITUAL DIMENSIONS OF JOURNALISTIC AUTHORITY

I have suggested two points that are basic to an alternate view of the establishment and perpetuation of journalistic authority. Briefly restated, they argue:

1) Existing studies on "journalistic authority" have conceptualized it as "transmission" among audiences rather than "ritual" among communicators. They have thus overlooked aspects of establishing authority which generate a collective journalistic lore in legitimating amongst journalists their right to present the news.

2) A collective lore is created through codified knowledge, yet codified knowledge among journalists has been assumed to emerge via channels connected with formalized codes of professionalism. How journalists codify institutional knowledge about authority through discourse may thus have been overlooked. One potentially fruitful way of re-examining journalists is through their

function as an interpretive community, a group that collectively authenticates itself through its narratives and collective memories.

This study examines journalistic authority along both of these newly-formulated lines: It assumes that messages about journalistic authority function to keep the journalistic community together, used by reporters as a ritual act of solidarity and commonality; it also assumes that journalists function as an interpretive community, keeping itself together through its narratives and collective memories. This study thereby asks how notions of journalistic authority are established by and among journalists through narrative, and how their establishment generates for journalists a collective lore by which they legitimate their right to present the news.

Within this question are embedded three sets of secondary issues that are relevant both to understanding the establishment of journalistic authority and its potential role in consolidating a collective lore for journalists:

- What is journalistic authority? Tentatively defining journalistic authority as the ability of journalists to promote themselves as the authoritative and credible spokespeople for the events of the "real" world,

it asks whether journalistic authority is established through narrative;

- How is journalistic authority perpetuated?

- What does journalistic authority individually and collectively mean to journalists? The study considers whether shared notions of authority differ from individual notions. It also asks whether notions change with the passage of time, and, if so, how; whether journalistic authority helps journalists accomplish journalistic work; whether journalistic authority plays a part in consolidating a collective lore for journalists; and what role memory plays in establishing and perpetuating journalistic authority.

THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION AS LOCUS

The assassination of John F. Kennedy provides one fruitful locus for considering all of the above-formulated questions. The Kennedy assassination brings together the threads on which this study is based: It constitutes a critical incident in the annals of American journalism, offering an effective stage on which to gauge the establishment and perpetuation of journalistic authority; it offers a way to examine journalists as an interpretive community engaged in ritual and/or cultural transactions with other journalists; and its persistence as a story

over time highlights the importance of narrative and memory.

THE ASSASSINATION AS CRITICAL INCIDENT

The assassination provides a turning point in the evolution of American journalistic practice not only because it called for the rapid relay of information during a time of crisis, but because it consolidated the emergence of televised journalism as a mediator of national public experience ⁴³. The immediate demand for journalistic expertise and eyewitness testimony which characterized this event in part called for public reliance upon the credibility and centrality of journalists for its clarification. Journalists not only used recognizable practices to cover the events of Kennedy's death, but improvised within the configuration of different circumstances and new technologies to meet ongoing demands for information. Journalists have since used the event to discuss collective visions about appropriate journalistic practice by referencing practices which they or other journalists adopted during those four November days ⁴⁴.

All of this suggests that the Kennedy assassination has functioned as a critical incident against which journalists negotiate their own professional boundaries. They have used it to discuss, challenge and negotiate the

boundaries of appropriate practice. This wide-ranging cultural argumentation has been made possible by the journalistic treatment accorded it ⁴⁵. This has made the Kennedy assassination a particularly fruitful locus for narratives about journalistic practice and authority. The following pages thereby explore how journalists have reconstructed their coverage of the Kennedy assassination over time, with an eye to examining how it has emerged as critical to journalists forming collective notions of community, practice and authority through discourse.

THE ASSASSINATION AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The assassination story has been perpetuated as an independent and finite tale within collective memory. Central to retellings of the events of Kennedy's death were pictorial repetitions of the images of that weekend. Images included the shootings of Kennedy and Oswald, Caroline Kennedy and her mother kneeling beside the coffin, John-John's respectful salute, the eternal flame and the riderless horse. These moments - captured by the media in various forms - have been replayed as markers of the nation's collective memory each time the story of Kennedy's death is recounted.

Narrative has brought these images together in meaningful ways, lending them unity, and temporal and spatial sequencing. Narratives which persisted bear

collective authority ⁴⁶. Equally important, they lend stature to the people who inscribed them in collective consciousness.

Collective remembering of the Kennedy assassination has thus been more actor-based than not, accomodating not only assassination memories, but the people who generated and in certain cases created them. As Ulric Neisser observed in his critique of theories about 'flashbulb memories':

Memories become flashbulbs primarily through the significance that is attached to them afterwards: Later that day, the next day, and in subsequent months and years. What requires explanation is the long endurance (of the memory) ⁴⁷.

Implicit within assassination memories has thus evolved a natural place for journalists as bearers of such recollections. To an extent this has fit in with a more general concern for the past, which has become "a persistent presence in the American mind" ⁴⁸. Yet more important, it has evolved into a strategic accomplishment on the part of American journalists as memory-bearers.

TOWARD A RITUAL VIEW OF THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION

It makes sense to again recall the afore-mentioned claim that communication activities always have ritual functions for groups engaging in them. The assassination of John F. Kennedy has traditionally been approached as

what might be considered a study in transmission. Scholars have considered how many people knew what, how long it took them to know it, and who they knew it from. This was thoroughly accomplished in a collection of research studies edited by Bradley Greenberg and Edwin Parker back in 1965 ⁴⁹. It has also been the perspective adopted by other scholarly treatments of the assassination coverage ⁵⁰.

But this overlooks what Turner, Carey and others would call the "ritual" dimensions of the assassination story, examining what its relay has meant to the journalistic community itself. This study thus explores what the assassination has meant to the journalists who covered it, and how they have used narratives about their coverage to consolidate themselves into an authoritative interpretive community. In short, it explores how coverage of the events of Kennedy's death has helped make American journalists into cultural authorities.

In so doing, this study stresses issues and practices of narrative, context and memory. It traces how journalists have treated the assassination story in narrative, and explores the ways they have turned it on angles critical to their own self-legitimation. Recalling Giddens, Durkheim and Halbwachs, it examines how journalists have used narrative practice as a means of

collectively representing shared codes of knowledge, which they in turn have fed back into the community to set themselves up as cultural authorities.

STRUCTURE OF STUDY

The analysis in this study was predicated on a systematic examination of journalists' published public discourse over the past 27 years. How journalists have recounted their role in covering the assassination was traced in the printed press, trade and professional reviews, documentary films, television retrospectives, books, and journal articles ³¹.

The study is divided into four sections:

- SITUATING ASSASSINATION TALES

This section provides the general background against which journalists have been able to tell the assassination story. It situates the events of the assassination against the more general cultural and historical context of the time, including the state of journalistic professionalism, the emergence of television news, shifting boundaries of cultural authority and the reflexivity of sixties' narratives. Each of these elements is discussed in conjunction with journalists' ability to promote themselves as authoritative spokespeople for the events of Kennedy's death. This section also explores the centrality

of strategies of rhetorical legitimation in journalistic practice.

- TELLING ASSASSINATION TALES

This section conveys the original narrative corpus of the assassination story, from which journalists have worked their retellings over time. It examines the accounts of actually covering Kennedy's death as they were forwarded by journalists at the time and compares them with journalists' initial reconstructions of the same stories in the weeks immediately following the assassination. From this corpus of narratives, journalists have worked through narrative adjustment to reconsider and recast the story in systematic and creative ways over 27 years.

- ACCESSING ASSASSINATION TALES

This section examines larger shifts in boundaries of cultural authority, which have had bearing on the ability of journalists to gain credence for their versions of the assassination story. It details how official assassination memories were first de-authorized and the assassination record made accessible to alternate retellers seeking to reconsider its events, journalists among them. This section explores how journalists have authenticated themselves over other retellers attempting to accomplish

the same aim. Larger developments concerning documentary process and the role of memory are suggested to have upheld journalists' attempts to emerge as the assassination's preferred retellers.

- PERPETUATING ASSASSINATION TALES

This section explores how journalists have perpetuated themselves as authorized spokespeople of the assassination story across time and space. It considers how journalists have kept their narratives alive, by embedding them within recognizable memory systems. Three separate memory systems are considered - celebrity, professional lore, and history - which journalists have employed to effectively perpetuate their assassination narratives and their authoritative role as retellers.

Situating, telling, accessing and perpetuating - each activity is suggested as a central part of establishing and perpetuating journalists as authorized spokespeople for the events of Kennedy's death. Through these mechanisms, this study traces out the canonization by journalists of one of contemporary American history's central moments.

¹ Peter Berger, Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective (Garden City, 1963), p. 57.

² Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life [New York: Free Press, 1915 (reprinted 1965)].

³ Anthony Giddens, Central Problems in Social Theory (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 69.

- 4 G.H. Mead, The Philosophy of the Present (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932).
- 5 Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, "Introduction," Representations (Spring 1989), p. 2.
- 6 Maurice Halbwachs, The Collective Memory (New York: Harper and Row, 1980; translated from La Memoire collective, Presse Universitaire de France, 1950), p. 33.
- 7 Fred Davis, Yearning for Yesterday (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1979), p. 45.
- 8 Claude Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).
- 9 The term is borrowed from George Gerbner, "Cultural Indicators: The Third Voice," in G. Gerbner, L. Gross and W. Melody, Communications Technology and Social Policy: Understanding the New 'Social Revolution' (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973).
- 10 These points are suggested in a range of sources, including Tom Goldstein, The News At Any Cost (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985) or James Carey, "The Dark Continent of American Journalism," in R.K. Manoff and Michael Schudson (eds.), Reading the News (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).
- 11 This includes Magali Sarfatti Larson, The Rise of Professionalism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Eliot Friedson, Professional Powers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Philip Elliott, Sociology of the Professions (London: MacMillan, 1972); or Morris Janowitz, "Professional Models in Journalism: The Gatekeeper and the Advocate," Journalism Quarterly (Winter 1975).
- 12 See Larson, 1977. Also see Wilbert Moore, The Professions: Roles and Rules (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970) and Terence Johnson, Professions and Power (London: MacMillan, 1972).
- 13 Larson, 1977.
- 14 Cited in Johnson, 1972, p.31; also Elliott, 1972.
- 15 This somewhat recalls Howard Becker's discussion of "profession" as a symbol only partly realized in real-life [See Howard Becker, "The Nature of a Profession," in Education for the Professions (Sixty-first Yearbook of National Society for the Study of Education, 1962). Reprinted in Sociological Work (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1970)].
- 16 J. Johnstone, E. Slawski and W. Bowman, The News People (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976); David Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, The American Journalist (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). Also see Lee Becker et al., The Training and Hiring of Journalists (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1987). Says one news-editor: "Now, of course, we have schools of journalism. Most

publications these days - not all, thank God - recruit from schools of journalism. This means they are recruiting from the bottom 40% of the population, since, on the whole, bright students do not go to schools of journalism" (Irving Kristol, Our Country and Our Culture (New York: Orwell Press, 1983), p. 82.

¹⁷ Goldstein, 1985.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Clement Jones, Mass Media Codes of Ethics and Councils (New York: UNESCO Publications, 1980) or Robert Schmuhl, The Responsibilities of Journalism (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). Also see Goldstein, 1985, p. 165. This does not mean that licensing, or credentialling, does not come into play for journalists on a more pragmatic level: The limited credentials which are issued by police departments for reasons of "security", for instance, are often used by journalists to gain access to events for which said credentials have no obvious link. As David Halberstam once said, "your press card is really a social credit card" [quoted in Bernard Rubin, Questioning Media Ethics (New York: Praeger Publications, 1978), p. 16].

¹⁹ Weaver and Wilhot, 1986.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 145.

²¹ Gaye Tuchman, "Professionalism as an Agent of Legitimation," Journal of Communication (Spring 1978).

²² Michael Schudson, Discovering the News (New York: Basic Books, 1978; Tuchman, 1978).

²³ Carey, 1986; Schudson, 1978; Dan Schiller, Objectivity and the News (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981). More general philosophical views are found in Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (New York: Anchor Books, 1969) or Michael Polanyi, Personal Knowledge (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

²⁴ For example, see Robert Darnton, "Writing News and Telling Stories," Daedalus (Spring 1975) or Michael Schudson, "The Politics of Narrative Form," Daedalus (Fall, 1982). The avoidance of story-telling constraints in discussions of news professionalism is especially problematic due to the recent eruption of a number of institutional breaches precisely along the fact-fiction distinction - the Janet Cooke scandal, the reportorial invention of a British army gunner in Belfast, or the case of Christopher Jones, the New York Times Magazine reporter who plagiarized portions of his (fictitious) report on the Khmer Rouge from a novel by Andre Malraux [See David Eason, "On Journalistic Authority: The Janet Cooke Scandal," in Critical Studies in Mass Communication 3 (1986), pp. 429-47, and Shelley Fishkin, From Fact to

Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985)1.

25 See Peter Blau and M. Meyer, Bureaucracy in Modern Society (New York: Random House, 1956). For applications in news organizations, see Gaye Tuchman, Making News (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1978; Mark Fishman, Manufacturing the News (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980); Herbert Gans, Deciding What's News (New York: Pantheon, 1979). Also see Bernard Roshco, Newsmaking (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

26 Jeremy Tunstall, Journalists at Work (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1971). Also see Itzhak Roeh, Elihu Katz, Akiba Cohen and Barbie Zelizer, Almost Midnight: Reforming the Late-Night News (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980).

27 Hymes delineates seven factors at play in a speech community - a sender, receiver, message, channel, code, topic and context [Dell Hymes, "Functions of Speech," in Language in Education (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1980), p. 21.

28 Stanley Fish, Is There A Text in This Class? (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 171.

29 In folklore, scholarship on the folk group and narrative is exemplified in Alan Dundes, "What is Folklore?" in The Study of Folklore (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965) or Linda Degh, "Folk Narrative," in Richard M. Dorson, Folklore and Folklife (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

30 For instance, a recent report on the world of the working journalist conducted for the American Society of Newspaper Editors, discussed at length the causes of (social) isolation among journalists, patterns of organizational communication, management, and reported job satisfaction, yet did not examine the ways in which knowledge by journalists about journalists takes shape [See Judee Burgoon, et al., "What Is News? Who Decides? And How?" Preliminary Report on the World of the Working Journalist (Michigan State University, 1982). This is, however, effectively explored in Michael Schudson, "What Is A Reporter: The Private Face of Public Journalism," in James Carey, Media, Myths and Narratives (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1988).

31 One recent formulation of this perspective was provided by Tony Rimmer and David Weaver, "Different Questions, Different Answers: Media Use and Media Credibility," Journalism Quarterly (1987), pp. 28-36. Other examples include Eugene Shaw, "Media Credibility: Taking the Measure of a Measure," Journalism Quarterly 50 (1973), pp. 306-11 or R.F. Carter and Bradley Greenberg, "Newspapers or Television: Which Do You Believe?" Journalism Quarterly 42 (1965), pp. 22-34.

- 32 Rimmer and Weaver, 1987, p. 36.
- 33 This includes a rich body of material from sociology, including Tuchman, 1978; Fishman, 1980; or Gans, 1979.
- 34 Warren Breed, "Social Control in the Newsroom," Social Forces (1955).
- 35 See Gaye Tuchman, "Making News By Doing Work," American Journal of Sociology 77 (1974), pp. 110-131; studies by Edward Epstein [News From Nowhere (New York: Viking, 1974); Between Fact and Fiction (New York: Viking Press, 1975)]; Tunstall, 1971; Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester, "News As Purposive Behavior," American Sociological Review 39 (1974), pp. 101-12.
- 36 Included here would be scholarship known as critical studies, work by the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, or research from Australia on news discourse. Examples include Stuart Hall, "Culture, The Media and the Ideological Effect," in James Curran et al., Mass Communication and Society (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977); John Fiske, Television Culture (London: Methuen, 1987); John Hartley, Understanding News (London: Methuen, 1982). Also see Todd Gitlin, The Whole World is Watching (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), who contends that "journalism exists alongside - and interlocked with - a range of other professions and institutions with ideological functions within an entire social system" (p. 251).
- 37 See Margaret Gallagher, "Negotiation of Control in Media Organizations and Occupations," in Michael Gurevitch et al., Culture, Society and the Media (London: Methuen, 1982).
- 38 See Gunther Kress and Robert Hodge, Language As Ideology (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); Also see the Glasgow University Media Group's Bad News (London: Routledge, 1976) and More Bad News (London: Routledge, 1980).
- 39 James Carey, "A Cultural Approach to Communication," Communication (1975), pp. 1-22.
- 40 Victor Turner, The Ritual Process (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).
- 41 Roger Abrahams, "Ordinary and Extraordinary Experience," in Victor Turner and Edward Bruner (eds.), The Anthropology of Experience (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 45.
- 42 Carey, p. 6.
- 43 Bradley Greenberg and Edwin Parker (eds.), The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965); Darwin Payne, "The Press Corps and the Kennedy Assassination," Journalism Monographs 15 (February 1970).

44 For example, see Tom Pettit, "The Television Story in Dallas," in Greenberg and Parker, 1965; Ruth Leeds Love, "The Business of Television and the Black Weekend," in Greenberg and Parker, 1965; Tom Wicker, "That Day in Dallas," in Times Talk (December 1963); Meg Greenfield, "The Way Things Really Were," Newsweek (11/28/88), p. 98.

45 Joseph Turow, "Cultural Argumentation Through the Mass Media: A Framework for Organizational Research," Communication 8 (1985), pp. 139-64.

46 This is a point made by Stephen Knapp, who says that "socially shared dispositions are likely to be connected with narratives preserved by collective memory" [See Stephen Knapp, "Collective Memory and the Actual Past," Representations (Spring 1989), p. 123.

47 Ulric Neisser, "Snapshots or Benchmarks?" in U. Neisser (ed.), Memory Observed (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1982), p. 45.

48 Lance Morrow, "Of Myth and Memory," Time (10/24/88), p. 22. He notes that "many Americans have been retreating to the shrine of national memory. Never have so many anniversaries been observed, so many nostalgias set glowing, as if retrospection were now the only safe and reliable line of sight."

49 Greenberg and Parker, 1965.

50 These include Payne, 1970; and Richard Van der Karr, "How Dallas TV Stations Carried Kennedy Shooting," Journalism Quarterly 42 (1965).

51 See Appendix A (Methodological Appendix) for a detailed list of the type of source material employed.

SITUATING
ASSASSINATION TALES

CHAPTER TWO

BEFORE THE ASSASSINATION:
CONTEXTUALIZING ASSASSINATION TALES

The Kennedy assassination took place at the intersection of a number of culturally significant circumstances, which impacted upon how its story would be constituted, remembered, interpreted, challenged and perpetuated by journalists. Images of these circumstances were themselves moulded by recollectors of the period. The fact that the decade's spokespersons often constituted not remote historians sifting through documents to describe its happenings, but participant-observers in the era whose views and actions were part of the story they were writing, inflected in no small way upon retellings of covering the Kennedy assassination. How participants' views of the era, its concerns, images and problems, made the assassination into a critical incident for American journalists is the topic of this chapter.

Journalists' narratives about covering the Kennedy assassination were grounded in three main features of the time: A general mood of reflexivity that interacted with then-current forms of professionalism; pre-assassination ties linking Kennedy and the press corps, amidst accusations of news management and labels of "the

television president"; and professional uncertainties about the legitimacy of television news at the time of the assassination.

PROFESSIONALISM, CULTURAL AUTHORITY AND THE REFLEXIVITY OF SIXTIES' NARRATIVES

Much of what can be understood about American journalism, journalists and their professional memories of covering the Kennedy assassination is wrapped up in the temporal era in which all were situated - the sixties. Recalling the sixties through narrative has produced an extended body of literature into which journalists' reconstructions of the Kennedy assassination would fit. Indeed, many chronicles were written after the events of the assassination were over. Chroniclers of the sixties were reflexive and extensive, their narratives punctuated with questions about cultural authority and the relevance of history in everyday life.

Chroniclers cast the sixties as a time of social, cultural and political transformation ¹. Morris Dickstein recalled how the era provided a "point of departure for every kind of social argument," encouraging everyone to become "an interested party" ². Social and cultural enterprises of the time were lent a historical cast. As one observer, Todd Gitlin, claimed:

It seemed especially true that History with a capital H had come down to earth, either

interfering with life or making it possible; and that within History, or threaded through it, people were living with a supercharged density; lives were bound up within one another, making claims on one another, drawing one another into the common project ³.

Individuals reconstructed their everyday lives as having been infused with history and historical relevance. "We nurtured a daring premise," said one observer, "We were of historical moment, critical, unprecedented, containing within ourselves the fullness of time" ⁴. History was not only viewed as accessible, but it was woven into the missions by which both individuals and collective groups claimed they had sought to authenticate themselves.

THE EVENT AS CORNERSTONE OF SIXTIES' NARRATIVES

Chroniclers of the sixties looked back on the decade through events. Events helped them mark public time, demarcating "before" and "after" periods and generating a collective sense of the decade that gave it its signature of upheaval, social invention and change.

Yet which events were recast - and where - depended on larger social, cultural and political agendas. Many chroniclers maintained that the sixties began with the 1960 Presidential elections. In his celebrated article about the 1960 conventions, "Superman Comes to the Supermarket," writer Norman Mailer hailed the arrival of a hero who could "capture the secret imagination of a

people" 5. Others held that the election was the beginning of a "historical free fall":

assassinations, riots, Viet Nam, Watergate, oil embargoes, hostages in Iran, the economic rise of the Pacific Rim nations, on and on, glasnost, China - that has created an utterly New World and left America searching for its place therein 6.

Chronicles cast the decade in the mould of an amusement park, replete with its barely-controlled chaos, recklessness and theaters of activity on every corner. The assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy raised serious questions about the quality of American leadership, ushering in what the editor of one magazine called "two decades of 'accidental' presidencies" 7. The Vietnam War instilled doubts over the authority and justification of American presence abroad, while the civil rights movement and freedom marches generated large-scale activism on the home front. Publication of the Pentagon Papers and the beginnings of Watergate marked illegalities within the private spaces of government. And finally, student activism and the culture of protest, marked by the Free Speech Movement, university protests and Kent State shootings, displayed the disjunctions that were splitting America's college population.

Many chroniclers cast the Kennedy assassination as a prototype for the events that followed. It was, said one

writer, "the day the world changed", constituting a rite of passage to what was called the end of innocence ⁹. The assassination symbolized a "rupture in the collective experience of the American people" ¹⁰. Looking back, chroniclers held that Kennedy's death generated doubts about existing boundaries of cultural authority. "The whole country was trapped in a lie," recalled activist Casey Hayden. "We were told about equality but we discovered it didn't exist. We were the only truth-tellers, as far as we could see" ¹¹. Said another critic: "We came to doubt the legitimacy and authority of the doctor pounding our chest, and of the cop pounding the beat" ¹².

Doubting authority, chroniclers began to cast themselves as cultural, social and political arbiters. "Where the critic of the fifties would appeal to...tradition, the critic of the sixties was more likely to seal an argument with personal testimony," said Dickstein ¹³. As the values of immediacy, confrontation and personal witness were upgraded, chroniclers legitimated a subjective perspective on events. Recalling the sixties thereby generated a highly reflexive genre of narratives whose chroniclers addressed ongoing questions about cultural authority and history.

The sixties were reconstructed as a chipping-away of consensus. Whether or not such a consensus ever existed became less important than the fact that its eradication was invoked in recollections of the era. In Fredric Jameson's eyes, members of the sixties saw themselves adopting a "reified, political language of power, domination, authority and anti-authoritarianism" ¹³. Questioning power, negotiating power, defying power, eliminating power, and ultimately creating new forms by which power might be realized became characteristic concerns of narratives about everyday life.

One particular group of chroniclers for whom this had relevance were the up-and-coming professionals of the time. Professionalism constituted a valued way of addressing ongoing questions about cultural authority. In Todd Gitlin's view, there was an "approved running track for running faster and stretching farther" ¹⁴. Concerns about an increased access to history were particularly held responsible for bringing professionals directly into the heart of surrounding issues. Events were seen as rattling the foundations of a variety of professions in a way that made professionals rethink the boundaries of appropriate practice, forming the professional identities of writers, artists, doctors through the events of the time. Questions about power and authority thus became

internalized by individuals and groups as direct challenges to the changing boundaries of their professional identities.

JOURNALISTIC PROFESSIONALISM AND CULTURAL AUTHORITY

Journalism was not immune to these circumstances of change. As David Halberstam noted,

(In the sixties) the old order was being challenged and changed in every sense, racially, morally, culturally, spiritually, and it was a rich time for journalists. For a while there was a genuine struggle over who would define news, the people in positions of power or the people in the streets ¹⁵.

Larger questions about changing consensus and cultural authority thus readily permeated narratives that were generated by journalistic professionals.

In looking back, journalists construed the sixties as having been a time of professional experimentation. A special issue of Esquire magazine on "The Sixties" maintained that "no longer were there observers, only participants. This was especially true of journalists. They were part of the problem, part of the solution, and always part of the story" ¹⁶. Being part of the story took on many new forms - in writing, reporting and presenting news. Often, journalists embraced a subjective perspective on events, in large part due to surrounding circumstances that called for their presence within them.

Claims that the boundaries of cultural authority were shifting infused journalists with new challenges, new practices and new ways by which to legitimate themselves. Swelling with the sense of who they could be, they saw themselves experimenting on the fringe with forms of writing and reportage called "new journalism," or with a broad spectrum of underground writing ¹⁷. In the center, they recalled leaving the staid establishments of the "newspapers of record" and venturing into less secure territories of newer media establishments ¹⁸.

This suggests that the questions about authority and power found in more general recollections of the sixties were also a featured part of journalists' attempts to look back at themselves. They readily translated such concerns into professionally-grounded behavior, applying larger questions about cultural authority to localized issues about the appropriate boundaries of journalistic practice. For example, a larger mood of reflexivity encouraged journalists to reconstruct the sixties as a time of professional risk and experimentation. While this did not mean that changes did not take place at other times, it did suggest that in recalling the decade, the shifting boundaries of professional behavior - as one mode of cultural authority - were supported by journalists' narratives on a number of domains.

Journalists' narratives were thereby contextualized by ongoing discourses about the proper boundaries of authority assumed by a variety of social and cultural groups, mainly professionals, in society. These narratives not only emphasized the changing boundaries of cultural authority, a premise ultimately relevant to journalism professionals, but they also bore a distinct pseudo-historical cast, and featured an interest in history's infusion within everyday life. This suggested that journalists, like other chroniclers of the period, would be able to borrow from history to authenticate themselves. Such a point would have particular bearing on journalists' reconstructions of covering the Kennedy assassination.

JOURNALISM AND THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION

One arena of interest to chroniclers of the sixties was the Kennedy administration. It was relevant to journalists' discussions about themselves, because it gave them an extensive institutional framework of interaction. In narrative, journalists consistently highlighted the supportive aspects of Kennedy's Presidency, which they saw as having forwarded many of their professional aims.

PRESIDENTIAL ATTENTIONS

Hints of an aura of favorable relations between the President and the press corps were found already in

Kennedy's campaign for the Presidency. Press Secretary Pierre Salinger maintained that Kennedy had directed his staff to make the 1960 Presidential campaign as easy as possible for the press corps to cover ¹⁰. He gave journalists transcripts of his remarks made on the campaign trail within minutes of having made them. "Instant transcripts," explained Salinger, eliminated the time-consuming chore of reporters having to clear remarks with his office ¹¹.

What he did not say was that they also gave journalists the feeling that the President was attending to their needs. This tension - between catering to journalists and manipulating them - permeated accounts of the Kennedy administration. All but one of his news conferences were "on the record" ¹². Hallmark decisions for which he would be known and remembered as President - decisions to debate Nixon, warnings to the Russians about missiles on their way to Cuba, or assumptions of responsibility for the Bay of Pigs invasion - were interpreted as having been taken, if not motivated, by some regard for the media. One representative account of Kennedy's fastidious media behavior held that journalists were "there to help him arrange reality, to make style become substance, to define power as the contriving of appearances" ¹³.

During the administration's early years, Kennedy's attentiveness to the media was well-received by the press corps. Journalists tended to be complimentary in their dispatches about him. In 1961 Arthur Krock wrote in The New York Times that

press requests are being fielded to the President in greater numbers than previously...And Mr. Kennedy's evaluations of the merit of such questions is fair and generous ²³.

Reporters perpetuated tales of culture, integrity, and generally "good times". Kennedy, for them, appeared to symbolize all that went well with America. Such a mood encouraged a certain suspension of judgment on the part of journalistic chroniclers. Later, reporter Tom Wicker maintained that if the press of the Kennedy era "did not cover up for him, or knowingly look the other way, it did not put him or the White House in his time under as close and searching scrutiny as it should have" ²⁴.

Journalists recalled that other factors dissuaded them from being too critical of the new President. He was thought to be polished and eloquent, energetic and witty. He was Harvard-educated yet a war hero. His rhetorical style, youth and promises of a New Frontier were interpreted as appealing, different and refreshing. In Wicker's view, this encouraged the press to

give Kennedy more of a free ride than any of his successors have had. One was the man's wit,

charm, youth, good looks, and general style, as well as a feeling among reporters that he probably liked us more than he liked politicians, and that he may have been more nearly one of us than one of them...Hence, there was at the least an unconscious element of good wishes for Kennedy ²⁵.

Reporters recalled willingly and consistently overstating these sides of Kennedy in their dispatches, to the same extent that they had understated other points - his Addison's Disease or extramarital affairs ²⁶.

Kennedy's familiarity with journalism was held responsible for endearing many reporters to him. They stressed the fact that in 1945 he had served as a special correspondent for the International News Service (and his wife had been an "inquiring photographer" for the Washington-Times Herald), a point which made him familiar with the conditions under which journalists labored ²⁷. He earned the coveted Pulitzer Prize in 1957 for Profiles in Courage ²⁸. In a lead article in November of 1960, the trade magazine Editor and Publisher lamented the loss of "a first-rate reporter," admitting that:

A President who knows how to write a news-story and a first lady who can snap good news-pictures will be residing in the White House after January 20 ²⁹.

Kennedy was hailed for taking an interest in journalism, with Gloria Steinem recalling years later that it was the only time a reporter felt that "something we wrote might

be read in the White House" ³⁰. All of this made the journalistic community

a natural constituency for him. He was interested in the same things they were, had gone to the same schools, read the same books and shared the same analytical frame of mind. By and large he was more comfortable with reporters than he was with working politicians ³¹.

Whether or not this was true mattered less than the fact that journalists recalled it as having been so.

FROM AFFINITY TO NEWS MANAGEMENT

In journalists' attempts to recollect the Kennedy administration, Kennedy was thereby held to be more a part of the journalistic community than separate from it. One reporter, Hugh Sidey of Time, termed it this way:

Has there ever been a more succulent time for a young reporter? I doubt it...It was a golden time for scribes. He talked to us, listened to us, honored us, ridiculed us, got angry at us, played with us, laughed with us, corrected us, and all the time lifted our trade to new heights of respect and importance ³².

"Had he outlived his time in the White House," added senior columnist Joseph Kraft, "it is probable that in some way he would have turned to journalism" ³³. Although this was in no way verifiable, it was nonetheless significant that journalists continued to make the claim.

Interestingly, journalists' recollections of the President did not focus on one obvious arena - his personal ties with many of them. The fact that Kennedy

maintained social relations with a number of high-ranking journalists - including Charles Bartlett (who had introduced him to his wife Jacqueline), Joseph Alsop and Benjamin Bradlee - was unaddressed in most journalists' writings about the era. When suggestions by James Reston that the President stop seeing reporters socially were rejected outright, there was little ado among the press corps ³⁴. Even correspondent Benjamin Bradlee's book of reminiscences, Conversations With Kennedy, created little stir. Published ten years after Kennedy's death, the book detailed how Bradlee and the President had regularly swapped gossip and information about the administration and the press corps ³⁵. The book was favorably reviewed by a number of magazines, with little mention of the problematics suggested by the revelations ³⁶. One exception was writer Taylor Branch, who lambasted the relationship in Harpers' magazine in an article subtitled "The Journalist as Flatterer." Branch called the book "one of the most pathetic memoirs yet written by an American journalist about his President" ³⁷:

The Bradlee who covered Kennedy was hardly the prototypical reporter - cynical and hard, with a knife out for pretense and an eye out for dirt. He was hardly the editor he became under Nixon ³⁸.

The uneven range of responses directly reflected the shifting parameters of cultural authority assumed by

journalists at the time of Kennedy's assassination, and in the years that followed.

But the aura of affinity between Kennedy and the press corps also wore thin at times, especially when the President's attempts at image management conflicted with his voiced concerns for an independent press. Decades later, columnist David Broder recalled how the President had successfully converted a portion of the press corps into his own cheering section ³⁹. Acts of image management permeated accounts of Kennedy's administration: These included cancelling 22 White House subscriptions to the New York Herald-Tribune because he was upset with its coverage of his administration ⁴⁰; hawling out Time reporter Hugh Sidey in front of his editor because the estimate he had given for a Kennedy crowd was too low ⁴¹; cooling long-standing relations with then-confidante Benjamin Bradlee because of a remark the reporter had made about the Kennedys in one of his dispatches ⁴²; or denying journalists access to staffers because he had taken offense at certain aspects of their stories ⁴³. Charles Roberts, who covered Kennedy for Newsweek, later maintained that the administration was "intolerant of any criticism.... 'You are either for us or against us,' is the way Kenny O'Donnell, the President's appointments secretary, put it to me" ⁴⁴.

Predictably, this somewhat chipped away at the suspended judgment with which most journalists had appraised the administration. Labels of news management began to circulate among reporters covering the White House. Following the Cuban missile crisis, Arthur Krock wrote in a particularly virulent attack on the President that a policy of

news management not only exists, but in the form of direct and deliberate action has been enforced more cynically and boldly than by any previous administration in a period when the U.S. was not at war" ⁴⁵.

I.F. Stone accused Kennedy of deception and deterioration of standards of leadership in his newsletter on April 26, 1961: "The President's animus seems to be directed not at the follies exposed in the Cuban fiasco but at the free press for exposing them" ⁴⁶. Newsweek was charged with regularly adjusting its coverage of events in order to enhance Kennedy's image at the same time as the New York Times was lambasted for suppressing its knowledge of the invasion of the Bay of Pigs ⁴⁷. Years later, Henry Fairlie complained that both Kennedy's policy of news management and his social flattery of journalists had made it difficult for journalists to be objective about him ⁴⁸.

KENNEDY AS "THE TELEVISION PRESIDENT"

All of this set up a certain framework in which journalists could be reflexive about the Kennedy

administration. Images of Kennedy as President set the stage for memories of Kennedy after his death. This pattern was aptly illustrated with the community of television journalists, who recalled that Kennedy had had a special regard for their medium, a regard which earned him the name of "the television president": He and the television "camera were born for each other, he was its first great political superstar" ⁴⁹.

To an extent, Kennedy's affinity with television was thought to have been orchestrated by his family, which had been instrumental in promoting his nomination. David Halberstam related the following story:

In 1959, Sander Vanocur, then a young NBC correspondent, found himself stationed by the network in Chicago and found himself taken up by Sarge Shriver. One evening there was a party at the Shriver's and a ruddy-faced older man walked over to Vanocur and said, "You're Sander Vanocur, aren't you?" Vanocur allowed as how he was. "I'm Joe Kennedy," the man said. "I saw you at Little Rock and you did a good job down there. I keep telling Jack to spend more time and pay more attention to guys like you and less to the print people. I think he's coming around" ⁵⁰.

As Kennedy grew into his administration and his concept of the Presidency, his interest in journalism reportedly sparked his curiosity about television. But perhaps more than other circumstances, his television debates with Nixon convinced him of the value of televised journalism.

Part of the folklore about Kennedy held that he won the election of 1960 because of his understanding of the new medium of television. His performance in the "great debates" was held to have been superior to those who watched him on television: Those who listened to the debates on radio perceived Nixon to be the winner; those who saw the debates on television perceived that Kennedy had won ⁵¹. The debates were seen as helping Kennedy turn around a sagging second place in the polls ⁵². Observers decided that he won the election "largely because of the way he looked and sounded on the TV screens in our living rooms" ⁵³.

Such a point was emphasized by journalistic chroniclers, who told of how Kennedy employed his knowledge of the medium to full advantage: He rested before his televised appearance, used cosmetics to hide facial blemishes and allowed himself to be extensively coached beforehand ⁵⁴. Don Hewitt, who directed the debate that helped him win, later maintained that "television had a love affair with Jack Kennedy" ⁵⁵. The significance of his performance extended well beyond the actual political campaign: Television was held to have become "that much more legitimized as the main instrument of political discourse": It was a "triumph not just for Kennedy but for the new medium; within hours no one could recall anything

that was said, only what they looked like, what they felt like" 56. After the debates, recalled reporter Edward Guthman, the age of television journalism was purported to have begun 57.

Another act that supported positive links between Kennedy and television journalists was his decision to implement regular live televised news conferences. It was a decision then regarded by press journalists as "an administrative disaster second only to the Bay of Pigs" 58, but television journalists were overjoyed. They lauded the detail with which he organized his first conference: Observing that "Hollywood could not have done better in preparing a spectacular", one reporter recalled how Kennedy brought down a TV consultant from New York to arrange staging, set up white cardboard so as to dispel facial shadows, and had the drapes hanging behind the lecturn re-sewn at the last minute 59. Kennedy's preparation for each conference was heralded as "intensive and elaborate" 60. A stringent briefing process preceded it, during which Salinger predicted questions and collected responses from Kennedy staffers. The President then convened a "press conference breakfast" where he practiced answering predictable questions 61.

The live news conferences provided the right stage for Kennedy. Tom Wicker maintained that they gave the President a

perfect forum for his looks, his wits, his quick brain, his self-confidence. Kennedy gave Americans their first look at a President in action...and he may have been better at this art form than at anything else in his Presidency ⁶².

A frequent participant on behalf of The New York Times, James Reston recalled how he "overwhelmed you with decimal points or disarmed you with a smile and a wisecrack" ⁶³. It was therefore characteristic of his administration that on October 22, 1962, Kennedy chose to go on air at 7.00 p.m. to demand that Russian missiles be removed from Cuba. His message's effect on the nation had much to do with its televised delivery:

By delivering the ultimatum on TV instead of relying on normal diplomatic channels, Kennedy magnified the impact of his actions many times over, signaling to the world that there would be no retreat ⁶⁴.

While these acts familiarized the American public with governmental process and the effect of televised journalism on the political process, they also, in David Halberstam's words, "helped to make television journalists more powerful as conduits for politicians than print ones" ⁶⁵.

Kennedy's attentiveness to the medium of television continued through his administration. In December of 1962,

he became the first President to conduct an informal television interview with three network newsmen ⁶⁶. Benjamin Bradlee, upset over the deviation from routine practice, wrote the following:

December 17, 1962. The President went on television live tonight, answering questions from each network's White House correspondent...I watched it at home and felt professionally threatened as a man who was trying to make a living by the written word. The program was exceptionally good, well-paced, colorful, humorous, serious, and I felt that a written account would have paled by comparison ⁶⁷.

When Bradlee confronted the President with the disturbing effect the television interviews would have on print journalists, Kennedy retorted, "I always said that when we don't have to go through you bastards (the printed press), we can really get our story over to the American people" ⁶⁸. Continuing to place television in the forefront of political activity, Kennedy allowed cameras to film his efforts to integrate the University of Alabama ⁶⁹, his trips to Paris, Vienna and Berlin, his warnings to the Russians to keep away from Cuban shores. On other domains, Jacqueline took the American people on a televised tour of the White House. Kennedy's recognition of television's unique qualities thereby legitimated his formalized and viable interest in television journalists.

All of this cast him in the role of promoter for the journalistic community, and television journalists among

them. It was thus no surprise that a memorial section of Newsweek, published the week after Kennedy's assassination, hailed his effect on journalism and television, saying

no President had ever been so accessible to the press; no President ever so anxious for history to be recorded in the making; he even let TV cameras peek over his shoulder in moments of national crisis ⁷⁰.

Thus, at a time when the boundaries of cultural authority were changing, the ties between Kennedy and the press corps defined the boundaries of journalistic community that were so important to journalists seeking to authorize themselves. Kennedy's interest in journalism highlighted the authority of members of the profession. Communal concerns about professional practice were given consistent and definitive stages, with Kennedy playing an active part not only in upholding journalism as a profession but in granting legitimacy to those employed by television. In much the same way that larger questions about cultural authority, history and professionalism informed journalistic practice of the sixties, the Kennedy administration provided a focused stage on which to shape many of the same concerns.

THE UNCERTAIN LEGITIMACY OF TELEVISION NEWS

Largely due to these two factors - the shifting boundaries of cultural authority and Kennedy's consistent

interests in journalism - the early sixties were reconstructed as having been "great years for journalism"⁷¹. The Kennedys were applauded by journalists for providing good copy, and the growth of the more established news organizations - The New York Times or Newsweek - was seen as a precursor to more general professional expansion. Observers felt that the stature of journalism as a profession was enhanced. By 1962 journalists

saw their career increasingly as a profession... Which meant that there were obligations and rights and responsibilities that went with it. They were better paid, more responsible and more serious. They were not so easily bent, not so easily used⁷².

Journalists saw themselves entering a period of growth and maturation, whereby it was fair to assume that new stages for cultural and social legitimation would present themselves. To a large extent, this image of growth fit in with narratives about shifting consensus and the changing boundaries of cultural authority and reflexivity that emanated from the decade.

Growth, however, was not shared across media. During Kennedy's ascent to the Presidency, the authoritative boundaries of television news were still being debated. On the one hand, television news was considered a bastard child within the journalistic community, dismissed as "a journalistic frivolity, a cumbersome beast unequipped to

meet the demands of breaking news on a day-to-day basis" 73. Every press journalist still believed that "his was the more serious, more legitimate medium for news" 74. The superiority of print over television was

a view widely shared by TV newspeople themselves in the sixties. The feeling was not entirely unjustified. Examples of original reporting on TV were rare then, and the medium was still essentially derivative 75.

Television reporters with original angles on a story often fed them to wire-service reporters, so as to capture the attention of their New York editors 76. It was thus no surprise that a few months before the Kennedy assassination, the International Press Institute rejected a move to admit radio and television newspeople, stating that they did not constitute bona fide journalists 77 .

THE BEGINNINGS OF LEGITIMATION

Yet already by the early 1960s, interest in the legitimacy of television news had begun to blossom. The average American household used television for four to five hours daily by the summer of 1960, and 88% of all homes owned television sets 78. Certain technological advances, particularly the use of videotape and the employment of communications satellites, helped improve the broadcast quality of television news 79. Networks were able to alter existing formats of news presentation, moving from the "talking head" set-up towards more

sophisticated ways of including actual news footage within broadcasts.

Institutional changes also worked to the advantage of television news. Officials within the Federal Communications Commission suggested an independent news association devoted only to broadcasting ⁸⁰. Newton Minow, the newly-appointed chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, called for an increase in the time devoted to television news to offset what he labelled the "vast wasteland" of television programming. In the fall of 1963, television news' 15-minute time slot was expanded to a full half-hour ⁸¹. To mark the occasion, Kennedy gave interviews to all three networks, and was applauded for agreeing to hold an interview a second time when ABC discovered afterwards that its camera had broken ⁸². Television networks opened new bureaus to accomodate a growing demand for information ⁸³.

The legitimacy of television news was also linked to the the medium's technological attributes, with advocates beginning to suggest that television might be a better medium than print for transmitting certain kinds of news stories. As David Halberstam later commented:

Gradually in the last year of Kennedy's life, (Time journalist Hugh) Sidey noticed a change, not so much in Kennedy's feeling about the magazine's fairness as in his estimation of its importance. The equation had changed with the coming of television. In Washington the power of

print was slipping. Television gave greater access, so television got greater access ²⁴.

Chroniclers pointed to a range of stories at which television excelled, with the civil rights movement later construed as having gained most of its acclaim from television, its "leaders...masterful at manipulating television, conscious of the way certain images could be used to move the electorate" ²⁵. Television's technology allowed cameramen and reporters to "cover candidly things that might have been barred to them in the past" ²⁶. These televisual features prompted the print media to recognize what one critic called their status as "mere 'extras' at JFK's press conferences - shows so obviously staged for television" ²⁷.

In general, journalists thereby hailed television's technological "improvements" - the immediacy, visual element, drama - as responsible for making TV news a bona fide journalistic form. Implicit in what they saw as its burgeoning legitimacy was thus an increasing acceptance of the technological advances associated with television. Television was seen as promoting a 'better' form of journalism than that offered by print. As one observer said, "As he (Kennedy) made television bigger, it made him bigger" ²⁸. Thus journalists' attempts to consolidate themselves were directly linked with Kennedy.

DOUBLE LEGITIMATION: KENNEDY AND TELEVISION

It thus made sense that in chronicles of the decade, the fates of both Kennedy and television journalism were construed as coming together with Kennedy's assassination. Television, said one critic, "was at the center of the shock. With its indelible images, information, immediacy, repetition and close-ups, it served to define the tragedy for the public" ²⁰. By the end of 1963, a Roper survey maintained that Americans relied for news as much on television as on the printed press ²¹. By the late sixties, after "Lee Harvey Oswald was shot on television, presidents dissembled (and) protestors protested in front of the cameras" ²². By then, it was safe to assume that television had come of age as the preferred medium for news.

This posited the Kennedy assassination squarely in the middle of a process by which television was recognized as a legitimate medium of news transmission. Journalists upheld this notion in their chronicles. Television journalism was said to have grown "up in Dallas, for never before had it faced such a story with so much of the responsibility for telling it" ²³. The fact that journalists construed the fates of Kennedy and television as being parallel to each other in itself underscored gropings for legitimation in both arenas. It was

significant that figures in the television industry, particularly television journalists, regarded Kennedy as a midwife to their own birth. A special edition of Broadcasting magazine, published the week after the assassination, included a section entitled "The Dimension JFK Added To Television". It went as follows:

From the Great Debates where America first saw this young man to the TV close-up of a U.S. President telling the American people we were about to blockade Cuba and might even go further, he took radio and television off the second team and made them peers of the older print media. Electronic journalism and its newsmen grew in stature by leaps and bounds...The medium needed no further assurance of its place in society than the President's exclusive interviews with CBS's Walter Cronkite and NBC's Chet Huntley and David Brinkley ²³.

Members of the journalistic community saw Kennedy's interest in the media as engendering the industry's growth and enhancing journalists' professional legitimacy. This was upheld in eulogies about the President, printed in trade publications under titles like "Kennedy Retained Newsmen's Outlook" ²⁴. Thus, in a small turn of irony, Kennedy's efforts at enhancing his image and legitimating his administration made him a central figure in the authentication of journalism and television news ²⁵.

All of this suggests that chroniclers were concerned with the boundaries of journalistic community at the time of the assassination. Their accounts stressed that the profession of journalism was undergoing change and that

one stratum of journalism - television news - was beginning to be held in regard above the others. This cast the assassination coverage against a larger backdrop of legitimating American journalists. Holding television news responsible for communicating the tragedy thus directly supported larger discourses about the authority of journalists. Exposure to the assassination was made possible by television, and to a large degree its technology was hailed for giving America its memories of the event.

Thus the legitimation of television journalists was construed by chroniclers as having been gradual but certain. Like other enterprises of the decade, legitimation was seen as having been realized during the sixties through shifting boundaries of cultural authority and definitions of professionalism, changing consensus about what was important and the increased relevance of history for the concerns of everyday life. In looking back, chroniclers attributed this to a general mood of reflexivity that had allowed for changes on all fronts. This suggests that in telling and retelling tales of the assassination, journalists leaned into a context already made explicit by their narratives. Tales of the assassination were thus explicitly and implicitly formed

by the inflections of the time on larger contemporaneous narratives.

Chroniclers of the decade, its events and focal points were thereby left to negotiate and renegotiate parameters of knowledge and action - about the sixties, about Kennedy's administration, and about the legitimation of television news - until they fit comfortably together within one context. They enmeshed their narratives until the same notions figured in all. Within such a context, it was possible for journalists to readily perpetuate memories of the Kennedy assassination, and they did so in a way that made sense of ongoing issues about the time, the profession and the emerging technologies by which they told their stories.

LENDING CLOSURE TO CONTEXT

By July 1964, the summer following Kennedy's assassination, television journalism had begun to emerge as a powerful force in American life and politics. The scene where journalists contended that this took place was the Republican National Convention at San Francisco's Cow Palace. Seen as "players in the game itself" ²⁶, journalists were booed by convention delegates and carried off the floor by security guards and policemen. Significantly, press journalists did not play alone in such a game. One reporter recalled how

Those fists raised in anger at the men in the glass-booths - the 'commentators' and the 'anchor men', bore this message too: The 'press' had become inextricably linked with television in the public mind ⁹⁷.

Linking press and television journalists underscored attempts to unify them into one community. More important, their role as independent players in the construction of news had turned them into forces meriting careful consideration. Although Barry Goldwater relied upon delegates' promises of support from before the start of the convention, his staff "had not reckoned with television, or how necessary it was to restrain its appetite for drama" ⁹⁸. As Goldwater said later, "I should have known in San Francisco, that I won the nomination (there) but lost the election" ⁹⁹. Television journalists had become a force to be reckoned with.

In looking back, chroniclers saw the Cow Palace as reflecting significant changes in the legitimacy granted television journalists. The fact that the previous year television journalists had been denied membership by an international press organization but were considered "active players" one year later reflected a marked change in the legitimacy accorded practitioners in the medium: The uncertain professional beginnings of 1963 were pushed into hints of legitimacy over the next 13 months. This signalled a clear change in the circumstances by which

television journalists - and by implication, all journalists - could authenticate themselves. What remained unclear, however, was what prompted circumstances to change, and how they did so.

These pages have addressed the cultural and historical context which backgrounded the assassination. They have shown how chroniclers of the era set up the legitimization of Kennedy as President alongside the legitimization of television journalism. Paralleling accounts of the Kennedy Presidency with accounts of the evolution and authentication of television news had direct bearing on how television journalists have taken their places as cultural authorities. Already in chronicles of both Kennedy's administration and the evolution of television news, an affinity was set up that connected the two arenas. This affinity would figure in journalists' attempts at collective legitimization and would infiltrate their stories of covering Kennedy's death.

Legitimizing Kennedy and legitimizing television news were thereby held up as characteristic enterprises of the sixties, reinforced by embedding tales of their authentication in a context shaped by issues of cultural authority, history and reflexivity. Reconstructions of the sixties decade underscored the function of history and historical events for professional legitimization.

Chroniclers of the era stressed the importance of history within the formations of professional identities. The increased access to history was thus construed as infusing a historical perspective into discussions about professionalism. This is not to say that the above-mentioned circumstances made historians out of all professionals, only that history's seemingly increased access inflected how professionals determined their boundaries of appropriate practice. Circumstances made it easier for a range of professionals, such as journalists, to borrow from history in their attempts at self-legitimation. Journalists saw themselves taking on expanded roles of cultural authority, and acting in new and different ways as social, political and ultimately historical arbiters, a point which generated consensus about appropriate and authoritative practices of the time and later. In particular, this informed journalists' subsequent tales of covering Kennedy's assassination, which upheld journalists attempts to consolidate themselves as an authoritative interpretive community.

It makes sense, then, to assume that journalists have reconstructed their part in covering the Kennedy assassination in conjunction with ongoing discourses which they, and others, have perpetuated about the sixties decade. A decade construed as a period of reflexivity -

where existing parameters of authority were questioned, negotiated and altered by persons involved in lending meaning to events - has made way for discussion of a number of then-burgeoning enterprises, one of them the uncertain but growing legitimacy of television news. Such a discourse was supported by the overattentive interest of the Kennedy administration in things pertaining to the media. All of this has directly affected the parameters of the memory systems through which coverage of the Kennedy assassination has been reconstructed by journalists. The context underlying most sixties' reconstructions has suggested an affinity between narratives about television journalism and the Kennedy administration, an affinity that was torn asunder with the President's assassination. In an ironic twist, Kennedy's death fuelled the concerns and energies of chroniclers of the era, offering its members a stage on which to debate timely issues of authority, power, connectedness and historical relevance. His death was used by journalists to legitimate television, making the medium which served him best in life continue to serve him in death.

The Kennedy assassination has thereby become one stage on which journalists have choreographed their legitimation as professionals. It has backgrounded the movement of television journalists from the ranks of

outsiders to "central players in the game." In such a way, it has served as a critical incident for journalism professionals, a stage on which they have evaluated, challenged and renegotiated consensual notions about what it means to be a journalist.

¹ See Sohnya Sayres, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz and Fredric Jameson, The 60s Without Apology (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) for an extended discussion of this theme. In line with many writers of the time, I am suggesting a view of the sixties more as a heuristic construct than chronological category.

² Morris Dickstein, Gates of Eden (New York: Penguin Books, 1989 (1977)), pp. v, 137.

³ Todd Gitlin, The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), p. 7.

⁴ Jacob Brackman, "Shock Waves From the Baby Boom," Esquire 99 (June 1983), p. 198.

⁵ Norman Mailer, "Enter Prince Jack," excerpted from "Superman Comes to the Supermarket," Esquire [June 1983 (1960)], p. 204.

⁶ Lance Morrow, "Of Myth and Memory" Time (10/24/88), p. 22.

⁷ "The Sixties" (Special Double Issue), Witness (II;2/3, Summer/Fall 1988), p. 9.

⁸ Lawrence Wright, In the New World (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 68.

⁹ Thomas Brown, JFK: History of an Image (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 2.

¹⁰ Casey Hayden, "The Movement," in Witness [Special Double Issue on "The Sixties," (II,2/3, Summer/Fall 1988), p. 245].

¹¹ Tom Schachtman, Decade of Shocks: Dallas to Watergate 1963-1974 (New York: Poseidon Press, 1983), p. 62.

¹² Dickstein, 1989 (1977), p. 136.

¹³ Fredric Jameson, "Periodicizing the Sixties," in Sayres, et al, 1984, p. 184.

¹⁴ Gitlin, 1987, p. 20.

¹⁵ David Halberstam, The Powers That Be (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p. 400.

¹⁶ "The Sixties," Esquire [Special Issue, (June 1983)], p.197.

¹⁷ See Tom Wolfe, The New Journalism (New York: Harper and Row, 1973) or Dickstein, 1989 (1977).

¹⁸ Halberstam (1979) discusses this in detail.

- 19 Pierre Salinger, With Kennedy (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1966), p. 31.
- 20 Salinger, 1966.
- 21 Pierre Salinger, "Introduction," in H.W. Chase and A. H. Lerman, Kennedy and the Press (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1965), p. ix.
- 22 Gary Wills, The Kennedy Imprisonment (New York: Pocket Books, 1982), p. 155.
- 23 Quoted in Lewis Paper, The Promise and the Performance (New York: Crown Books, 1975), p. 253.
- 24 Tom Wicker, On Press (New York: Berkley Books, 1975), p. 125.
- 25 Wicker, 1975, pp. 125-6.
- 26 Stories of extra-marital affairs, Addison's disease, crude language or early marriages were systematically wiped from public record as Kennedy began to rise in the political world. The singlemindedness with which problematic or contrary aspects of his life were erased from memory also continued after his death, evidenced by the bitter legal battles that broke out between the custodians of his memory, Robert and Jacqueline Kennedy, and the appointed historian of the assassination, William Manchester. Battles such as these expanded the parameters by which Kennedy's memory would be systematically managed, yet they were foregrounded by the extensive attempts at image management that characterized even the initial days of Kennedy's political career.
- 27 These details were prominently featured in Goddard Lieberman's JFK: As We Remember Him (New York: Atheneum, 1965).
- 28 The validity of Kennedy's reputation as a reporter and writer has recently come under fire from a number of quarters: Both Herbert Parmet's Jack: The Struggles of John F. Kennedy (New York: Dial Press, 1980) and Wills (1982) chronicle the stories by which the reputation was illegitimately instated: "...When the Ambassador arranged for his son to travel to useful places with press credentials, (New York Times columnist Arthur) Krock celebrated him as a brilliant young journalist. Krock even claimed that Kennedy as a journalistic stringer in England predicted the surprise 1946 defeat of Winston Churchill...John Kennedy the writer was almost entirely the creation of Joseph Kennedy the promoter" (Wills, 1982, p. 135). Wills and Parmet also convincingly argue that Kennedy did not write Profiles in Courage without excessive assistance from Arthur Krock and Theodore White. Similarly Wills contends that an earlier book, Why England Slept, was heavily edited by Krock and over-used the ideas of economist Harold Laski.
- 29 Editor and Publisher (11/12/60), p. 7.

- ³⁰ Quoted in Peter Goldman, "Kennedy Remembered," Newsweek, 11/28/83, p. 66. Kennedy's voracious reading habits were cited at length by journalists. Joseph Kraft at one point generously classified the President's regular reading material as comprising most of the journalistic community's news "accounts, editorials and columns" [Joseph Kraft, "Portrait of a President," Harper's 228 (January 1964), p. 96]. Even the fact that this sometimes worked to their disadvantage - evidenced by former CBS Correspondent George Herman's story about the President "chewing out a reporter for a footnote that was buried in a long story" - was subordinated to the interest he appeared to take in their work (See Paper, 1975, p. 324).
- ³¹ David Halberstam, "Introduction," in The Kennedy Presidential Press Conferences (New York: Earl M. Coleman Enterprises, Inc., 1978), p. ii.
- ³² Hugh Sidey, quoted in Kunhardt, 1988, p.6.
- ³³ Kraft, 1964, p.96.
- ³⁴ Henry Fairlie, "Camelot Revisited," Harper's (January 1973).
- ³⁵ Benjamin Bradlee, Conversations With Kennedy (New York: W.W.Norton, 1975).
- ³⁶ Newsweek, for instance, called it a "fond memoir of JFK" (3/17/75), p. 24.
- ³⁷ Taylor Branch, "The Ben Bradlee Tapes: The Journalist as Flatterer," Harper's (October 1975), p. 36.
- ³⁸ Ibid, p. 43.
- ³⁹ David S. Broder, Behind the Front Page (New York: Tuchstone Books, 1987), p. 157.
- ⁴⁰ This is detailed in Paper, 1975.
- ⁴¹ See Kenneth P. O'Donnell and David F. Powers. "Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye" (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970).
- ⁴² Bradlee, 1975.
- ⁴³ Charles Roberts, "Recollections" in K.W. Thompson (ed.). Ten Presidents and the Press (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983).
- ⁴⁴ Quoted in Broder, 1987, p. 158.
- ⁴⁵ New York Times (2/25/63), p. 5:6.
- ⁴⁶ I.F. Stone, "The Rapid Deterioration in Our National Leadership," reprinted in In A Time of Torment, 1961-7 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 6.
- ⁴⁷ Christopher Lasch, "The Life of Kennedy's Death," Harper's (October 1983), p. 33. Lasch also contended that Kennedy was already made a hero during the 1950s, because the "academic establishment, journalists and opinion makers had decreed that the country needed a hero" (p. 33).
- ⁴⁸ Henry Fairlie, "Camelot Revisited," Harper's Magazine (January 1973), p. 76.

40 Halberstam, 1979, p. 316.

50 Ibid, p. 132.

51 It is difficult to find a primary source which documents the fact the results of the debate between Kennedy and Nixon were perceived differently by radio and television users. While a number of studies cite a study which chronicled differences in opinion among audiences, I have not been able to locate the original study. However, even the fact that the claim continues to be made constitutes a relevant piece of folklore for this discussion.

52 Popular readings of the debate, such as that offered by Weisman, contend that at the time it was held, the polls gave Nixon 48% of the vote and Kennedy 42%.

53 John Weisman, "An Oral history: Remembering JFK, Our First TV President," TV Guide (11/19/88), p. 2.

54 Theodore H. White, The Making of the President, 1960 (New York: Atheneum, 1961).

55 Quoted in Weisman, 1988, p. 2.

56 David Halberstam, "President Video," Esquire 85 (June 1976), pp. 94, 132.

57 Quoted in Halberstam, 1979, p. 398.

58 Salinger, 1966, p. 53. Kennedy's estimations of what he could lose by implementing the conferences were revealing. As chronicled by Salinger, they went as follows: "(he) would not even have the temporary protections of a transcript check...He could not go off the record. He could accuse no one of misquoting him" (p. 56).

59 Quoted in Lieberman, 1965, p. 118.

60 Ibid, p. 173.

61 Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), p. 716.

62 Wicker, 1975, p. 126.

63 Quoted in Henry Fairlie, The Kennedy Promise (New York: Doubleday, 1972), p. 174.

64 Barbara Matusow, The Evening Stars (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), p. 84.

65 Halberstam, 1978, p. iv. The possibility of wide public access was at best only a partial hope. Kennedy's statement on the Cuban missile crisis was one of the few times that he went on prime-time television. Most of the President's news conferences were scheduled at noontime, when television viewing audiences were small.

66 Paper, 1975, p. 234.

67 Bradlee, 1975, p. 123.

68 Ibid, p. 123.

69 The film was Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment, produced by Drew Associates in 1963. It was later screened in 1988 by PBS as part of the series The American

Experience under the title Kennedy v Wallace: A Crisis Up Close.

70 "John Fitzgerald Kennedy," Newsweek (12/2/63), p. 45.

71 Halberstam, 1979, p. 558.

72 Ibid, p. 346.

73 Gary Paul Gates, Airtime (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 5.

74 Matusow, 1983, p. 85.

75 Ibid, p. 85. This was similar to the situation of radio in the 1930s.

76 Matusow, 1983.

77 New York Times (6/8/63), p. 52:6.

78 White, 1961, pp. 335-6. While television news appeared to make inroads at the time in question, this did not suggest that it had no history before 1960. Already in 1941, CBS was broadcasting two fifteen-minute daily newscasts to a local New York audience. The newscasts generally offered unsophisticated footage with talking heads, and film was taken from newsreel companies. While John Cameron Swayze went on air daily with NBC's Camel News Caravan, the onset of See It Now in 1951 quickly ranked Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly as journalistic celebrities. Their probing coverage of McCarthyism helped underscore the potential importance of television news. Television's coverage of the 1952 Presidential elections in 1952 not only set up the venerable team of David Brinkley and Chet Huntley on NBC but also coined the term "anchorman" for the role played by Walter Cronkite on CBS. Huntley and Brinkley soon became the ranking team on television news. See Eric Barnouw, Tube of Plenty (London: Oxford University Press, 1975). Also see Gary Paul Gates, Airtime (New York: 1978) and Mitchell Stephens, A History of News (New York: Viking Press, 1988).

79 This is discussed at length in Gates, 1978.

80 New York Times (8/27/63), p. 1.

81 Halberstam, 1979.

82 Pierre Salinger, quoted in Weisman, 1988.

83 Gates, 1978. The growing realization among journalists and other participants of the decade that television might be capable of offering a different background for news was held responsible for exacerbating an already existent rivalry between the two networks, CBS and NBC. To the disadvantage of ABC, at that time still a fledgling operation, CBS and NBC were competing over who would take first place in the world of news. NBC - with the enterprising team of Chet Huntley and David Brinkley - reportedly possessed the largest share of the news audience. Their combination of wit, earnestness and intelligence made the program a mainstay that was unequalled by CBS. Furthermore, CBS's woeful, and wrong,

prediction of the 1960 elections - giving Nixon a victory over Kennedy by odds of 100 to one - had made CBS heads realize that they needed to "catch up" with the other network. They took a number of steps designed to help them capture first place. They were first to adopt the expanded half-hour format for news, and they opened new bureaus. One such bureau was in Dallas, headed by an up-and-coming correspondent by the name of Dan Rather. They also adopted technologically sophisticated equipment, which they hoped would help them efficiently combat the personality cult that characterized NBC's Huntley-Brinkley Report.

⁹⁴ Halberstam, 1979, p. 361.

⁹⁵ Matusow, 1983, p. 85. This also worked in the reverse direction: For example, the Bay of Pigs was called a total disaster, but "not a televised disaster: There were no cameras on the scene, and although the response to the Bay of Pigs was televised, Kennedy had the power, and the authority, and the cool to handle it, putting off all serious questions about why it had happened in the first place on the basis of national security" (Halberstam, 1979, p. 385).

⁹⁶ Halberstam, 1979, p. 384.

⁹⁷ Matusow, 1983, p. 85.

⁹⁸ Halberstam, 1979, p. 316.

⁹⁹ Shachtman, 1983, p. 47.

¹⁰⁰ White, 1982, p. 174.

¹⁰¹ Stephens, 1988, p. 282.

¹⁰² Wilbur Schramm, "Communication in Crisis," in Bradley Greenberg and Edwin Parker, The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1965), p. 11.

¹⁰³ Broadcasting (12/2/1963), pp.44-5.

¹⁰⁴ Editor and Publisher (11/30/63), p. 65.

¹⁰⁵ The legitimization of television news was refracted in chronicles of the decade through many of its other events. By the end of the sixties, observers would maintain that "most of us learned about (the events) through television...It was through the living room pipeline that we experienced them together" (See Shachtman, 1983, p. 15).

¹⁰⁶ Wicker, 1975, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 175.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 175.

CHAPTER THREE

RHETORICAL LEGITIMATION AND JOURNALISTIC AUTHORITY

Journalists' ability to forward themselves over time as the authorized spokespeople for the events of Kennedy's death was predicated on their use of narratives about Kennedy's assassination in deliberate and strategic ways. To a degree, narrative's relevance in accomplishing such an aim has been built into existing models of journalistic practice. For while journalists have long been viewed as skilled tellers of events who reconstruct activities behind the news through stories, their claims to legitimacy are also rhetorically based. The suggestion that journalists legitimate themselves through the rhetoric they use thus has particular bearing on their emergence as authorized tellers of the assassination story.

In the pages that follow, I discuss the particular role played by journalists' narrative and rhetoric in setting them up as the authorized spokespeople of the story of Kennedy's assassination. This chapter first explores the theoretical relevance of narrative as a tool of rhetorical legitimation. It then discusses three major strategies of narrative reconstruction by which journalists have attempted to retell the assassination

story. Finally, it considers the significance of narrative adjustment, and the way in which it has offered journalists fertile ground on which to authorize themselves as preferred tellers of the assassination story.

CREATING A PLACE FOR NARRATIVE

Legitimizing speakers through rhetoric has traditionally concerned analysts of public discourse. Its salience was particularly foregrounded when the ascent of the mass media generated what were construed as changes in the structure of discourse. Media technologies were seen as creatively expanding the range and type of stages available to public speakers, thereby altering the potential by which they could effectively authorize themselves¹. But the ability of speakers to legitimate themselves through their tales has long been of concern to rhetoricians, small-group communication researchers, folklorists, anthropologists and sociologists alike. As modern forms of public discourse have offered an increasingly complex mix of different kinds of content attending to different communicative aims, media researchers have also begun to focus on the problems implied by rhetorical legitimation in mediated public discourse².

One shared assumption about the legitimation of speakers through rhetoric is the view that it is both a rational and strategic practice. Aristotle was perhaps first to define rhetoric as invoking the effect of persuasion, or the wielding of power:

The primary goal of rhetorical discourse is what the persuasion achieves...Rhetorical narratives exist beyond (their) own textuality ³.

A regard for narrative as an act of strategic dimension was also suggested by sociologist Max Weber, who forwarded the notion that people act rationally in order to legitimate themselves ⁴. But the potential for legitimating oneself through rhetoric has been most directly addressed by Jurgen Habermas. Habermas maintains that speakers employ language to effect various kinds of consensus about their activity:

Under the functional aspect of reaching understanding, communicative action serves the transmission and renewal of cultural knowledge; under the aspect of coordinating action, it serves social integration and the establishment of group solidarity; under the aspect of socialization, it serves the formation of personal identities ⁵.

Speakers use language, discourse and by implication narrative to achieve aims often related to freedom and dependence, with objectives like social cohesion, group solidarity or legitimation directly upheld or disavowed by what a speaker says ⁶.

Notions about narrative as strategic practice suggest its implication in the accomplishment of community and authority. In particular, narrative is seen as an effective tool in maintaining collective codes of knowledge. In this light, narrative functions much like a meta-code for speakers, a point proposed nearly two decades ago by Roland Barthes. It offers speakers an underlying logic by which to implement more general communicative conventions and allows for the effective sharing and transmission of stories within culturally and socially explicit codes of meaning ⁷. This idea - which upholds the ritual dimensions of communication activities - has been suggested by theorists as wide-ranging as Hayden White, Lucaites and Condit, the narrative paradigm of Walter Fisher, and in a more general fashion by social constructivists like Berger and Luckmann ⁸. Within the meta-code of narrative, reality becomes accountable in view of the stories told about it. But it becomes accountable only to those who share the codes of knowledge which it invokes.

These three points about narrative - its ability to invoke community, its employment as a strategic act of legitimation and its function in constructing reality - suggest that journalists, as speakers in discourse, have employed a broad range of stylistic and narrative devices

to uphold parameters of their own authority. As Hayden White argues:

once we note the presence of the theme of authority in the text, we also perceive the extent to which the truth claims of the narrative and indeed the very right to narrate hinges upon a certain relationship to authority per se⁹.

This suggests that with public speakers in a variety of modes of discourse, questions of narrative are at least partially entwined with questions of authority and legitimation.

The role of narrative reconstruction in achieving legitimation becomes particularly relevant when considering the evolution of particular stories over time. Many literary theorists have allowed for the possibility of false authority in the communication of historical narratives. Work in folklore has also made suggestions about the dissemination of narratives across time and space¹⁰. The cumulative addition of new speakers - hence, new information - as time and space unfolds is thereby seen as positioning and repositioning speakers vis a vis original events, reconfiguring their authority. In such a way, different aims having little to do with narrative activity are seen as becoming differentially embedded as narratives are replayed across time and space. This focuses attention on tellers of the tale, for as Hayden White notes,

a specifically historical inquiry is born less of the necessity to establish that certain events occurred than of the desire to determine what certain events might mean for a given group, society, or culture's conception of its present tasks and future prospects ¹¹.

Which speakers emerge as authorized voices of a given story thus reveals much about the practices by which they are rhetorically legitimated and the authority through which they are culturally constituted. It suggests that telling a tale has much to do with the attributes and authority of its teller. Ultimately, this focuses attention on the inevitability of narrative adjustment in retelling a given tale, and the possibility that the reconstructive work it implies can be taken in accordance with aims associated with the speaker's legitimation.

Such premises about narrative and rhetorical legitimation are of direct relevance to journalism professionals, whose work has long been characterized as an entanglement of narrative, authority and rhetorical legitimation ¹². While nearly all professional groups have evolved in association with formalized bodies of knowledge, much of the professional authority of journalists has come to rest not in what they know but in how they use it in narrative practice. This means that their rhetoric offers them an effective way of realizing their legitimation as public speakers. Such an analysis not only emphasizes the ritual dimensions of

communication, but it again suggests the regard for journalists as an interpretive community, held together by its tales, narratives and rhetoric.

In such a light, the foundations of creating journalistic authority for the assassination are embedded within the narrative framework by which journalists have told its story. This is facilitated by the fact that rhetorical legitimation constitutes a characteristic trait of journalistic practice. Journalists have used their narratives to legitimate their actions as professionals. The immediate and ready linkage between journalists and their narratives has thus invited a wide-ranging and identifiable corpus by which journalists have addressed not only their coverage of Kennedy's death but also ongoing discourses about cultural authority, journalistic professionalism and the legitimation of television journalism.

Journalists have employed a number of narrative strategies by which they reference their own legitimation through the assassination story. While each of these strategies will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters, they are mentioned here in order to generate an understanding of how rhetorical legitimation works and how narrative functions to promote a shared lore among journalists.

STRATEGIES OF RETELLING THE ASSASSINATION

The assassination of John F. Kennedy constitutes one incident which has invited narratives addressing the rhetorical legitimization of journalists. Seen as a critical incident among journalism professionals ¹³, that journalists have used to evaluate and reconsider notions of professional practice and journalistic authority, the assassination story has offered journalists a particularly fruitful corpus through which to construct and reconstruct the story of their assassination coverage. Through it, they have also set up foundations by which they can claim to be the story's authorized spokespeople.

Retelling the assassination of John F. Kennedy has provided a viable cornerstone against which the reconstructive work of journalists has flourished. Retellings of the assassination have produced a huge body of literature, including nearly 200 books within 36 months of his death, hundreds of periodical pieces, television retrospectives and at least 12 newsletters ¹⁴. In all media, names of reporters have been thrust forward, often in front of the names of organizations employing them. Stories of the assassination coverage have traded and paraded the names of individual reporters as emblems of authority for the events of those four November days. Retelling the Kennedy assassination has given journalists

a stage on which to spread tales and gain status for their telling.

Journalists were not the only ones vying to retell what had happened, especially when the possibilities of conspiracy became more palatable during the late 1960s. By that point, "newsmen, police, intelligence agencies examined the evidence" ¹⁵, as did historians, novelists and screenplay writers. One early suggestion that journalists would not play an understated role in retelling the events of that November weekend was found in Newsweek correspondent Charles Roberts' critique of assassination buff Mark Lane. Roberts complained that Lane, who provided "the only complete published list of witnesses" to the assassination, failed to include "some 50 Washington correspondents who were on press buses" ¹⁶. This suggested as early as 1967 that journalists would promote themselves as central players in establishing the official record of Kennedy's assassination.

Over time, journalists have chosen many formats in which to incorporate themselves and their memories into the assassination story. Appraisals of Kennedy's administration have been marked with references to his assassination. Nostalgic "period" pieces have reserved a place for journalists' personal memories. Articles, books and documentaries have provided investigatory glimpses of

the assassination, including fresh perspectives on then-reigning conspiracy theories. Regardless of format, most attempts to address the assassination have referenced some aspect of the reportorial role in covering it. As one 1988 television retrospective remarked on showing Kennedy being hit by bullets:

President and Mrs. Kennedy in the final seconds before that awful moment (pause, while shot from Zapruder film shown). A moment etched forever in our hearts. An hour later NBC correspondent Chet Huntley and Frank McGee relayed the news we had all feared most ¹⁷.

The relay of memories about the assassination ensured that the journalist-as-teller became embedded in the event's telling. This has created a place for narrative within the retellings of the assassination. Over time, it has also created a situation by which actual news coverage has been held up by journalists as the "preferred evidence" of their assassination recollections.

Implicit in retelling the assassination - regardless of the medium which journalists have used to do so - is narration, or how journalists have narratively retold events. Retelling the events of November, 1963 constitutes an imprecise history by which journalists have narratively reconstructed the story in ways which address - and reinforce - their own legitimation and authorization as speakers. By definition, narrative accomodates the inclusion of narrators within the assassination story.

telling the story (of recollections of the assassination) of the story (of the assassination coverage) through the story (of the journalists who covered it) has introduced rounds of narration that mediate the resulting narration record.

This was exemplified in a 1988 NBC television retrospective on the assassination. The documentary positioned Edwin Newman as external narrator; Chet Huntley, David Brinkley and Frank McGee as internal narrators; and various reporters - like Bill Ryan or Tom Pettit - as on-the-site chroniclers of events ¹⁰. The story progressed as if there were no visible difference in the temporal frames occupied by each chronicler: Yet Edwin Newman spoke 25 years after events, Frank McGee spoke the night of the assassination, and Tom Pettit spoke a few moments after Oswald was shot. The fact that they were all brought together as if they were relating one chronological story neutralized the differences involved in occupying alternate temporal frames. It made the role of external narrators central in a way that suggested a (false) proximity to the events in Dallas, enhancing the authority of those spokespeople who were both temporally and spatially furthest from the original events of Kennedy's death.

Narrative has thereby accomodated the inclusion of narrators regardless of the part they originally played in the assassination coverage. It has also given journalists a way to legitimate their connection to the story years after the assassination took place, and miles away from its original events. It is thus no surprise that very few articles or news-items about the assassination have remained anonymous. Those that did are generally editorials that bear the collective mark of the institutions that produced them. Instead, most efforts at journalistic recollection have not only been authored but identified by individual author's name. One CBS retrospective, for instance, documented the four days of Dallas coverage through the persona of anchorperson Dan Rather. By repeatedly coming back to film clips of Rather, the documentary gave the impression that he was responsible for all of the network's original coverage from Dallas ¹⁹. This supports his central presence in the documentary as narrator.

This is not to suggest that narration has been realized in a haphazard or sporadic fashion. As Lucaites and Condit have suggested, narrative functions as a pragmatic and critical choice on the part of speakers. Rhetorical narrative, in particular, has evolved as

distinct from other kinds of narratives due to its dependence on larger discourses:

Rhetorical narration constitutes only one part of the discourse in which it appears...The claim supported by a rhetorical narrative must be calculated outside of the narration ~~so~~.

The fact that the original recording of events - such as the television footage or step-by-step prose accounts of Kennedy's shooting - has often stayed the same while the narration about it has changed with each retrospective or publication has allowed journalists to differentially contextualize stories of their coverage. The strategic adjustments of memory which narration implies has tended to correspond to larger discourses through which journalists have recalled the assassination. They have done so in ways which uphold ongoing discourses both about the legitimacy of television news and the consolidation of journalism professionals.

Recognizing the need for narrators in assassination retellings in itself references a collective code by which journalists have agreed to accomodate their presence in their tales. The place created for narrative within assassination retellings thus upholds more general notions about the role of narrative in consolidating them into a community. It also references the role of narrative in constructing reality. In particular, the narrative adjustments by which journalists have retold their part in

the assassination suggests the employment of narrative to realize aims of legitimation. The fact that narrative has persisted over time and space allows speakers to reposition themselves around such an aim in a variety of ways.

Journalists have relied upon three main narrative strategies to recollect the assassination. These strategies have been invoked both alone and in tandem, exemplifying the complex nature of journalists' reconstructive work in retelling their coverage of the events of Dallas: They include synecdoche, personalization and rearrangement.

SYNECDOCHE

Synecdoche, or the narrative strategy by which the part is called to "stand in" for the whole ²¹, is frequently used by journalists in recollecting their accounts of Kennedy's death. Within the assassination narrative, this strategy allows journalists to borrow the authority accrued from having covered certain events, and apply it to events they did not experience.

For example, a rifle being withdrawn from a window in the Texas Schoolbook Depository was used to stand in for witnessing Oswald's shooting ²². References to a bullet being pumped into Oswald's stomach signified his shooting

23. A foot sticking into the air from the back of the president's limousine signified Kennedy's death 24.

The most illustrative example of synecdoche can be found by examining the actual facts behind journalists' coverage of the assassination story. Scholarship on the assassination has established that journalists effectively covered the events of the longer weekend 25. In particular, they covered the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald by capturing his shooting on live camera, a feat then labelled a "first in television history" 26 and since hailed as exemplary reporting. Similarly, their coverage of Kennedy's funeral made them into masters of ceremonies, who were lauded for having played an active part in healing the nation 27. Against these two aspects of the longer assassination weekend, journalistic coverage of Kennedy's assassination has been touted as one of the journalistic triumphs of contemporary history.

Yet closer examination reveals that this was a constructed notion that set in after the assassination weekend had passed. Moments of triumph were unevenly scattered across the assassination weekend. Journalistic coverage began, in reporter Tom Wicker's words, "when it was all over" 28. Although journalists provided prompt and comprehensive coverage, it was fraught with problems: Most journalists did not see Kennedy shot, did not hear Kennedy

shot, chronicled reports on the basis of hearsay and rumor, lacked access to recognizable and authoritative sources, and processed faulty information ²⁹. Proven journalistic methods - such as reliance on eyewitness status, accessing high-ranking sources, or fact verification - were all unhelpful. The speed with which information could be transmitted outpaced the reporters' ability to gather it. They simply could not keep up. And this took place in front of one of the largest audiences in media history.

Moreover, the extensive involvement of amateurs and laypersons challenged the professionalism of journalists. Eyewitness testimony was provided not by the fifty-some journalists in the motorcade but by ordinary bystanders who had not been paid to "cover the body" of the President, but who did so anyway. Photographic documentation, including the famous Zapruder film, was provided not by the 50-some journalists riding in the Presidential motorcade but by local merchants, housewives, businesspeople and other laypersons ³⁰. Abraham Zapruder, the dressmaker who provided what has come to be called one of the most studied films in history, actually forgot his motion-picture camera and had to go home to retrieve it before the motorcade's arrival ³¹.

While these points will be addressed in more detail in later chapters, the sketchy overview offered here suggests that journalists' coverage of the death of John F. Kennedy was problematic. On the provision of information, the original journalistic task of covering his shooting, journalists simply did not make the grade. From this perspective, their coverage reflected a situation of journalistic failure, casting the ability of journalists to serve as spokespeople for the event as false. Authority needed to be constructed not through their actions but through their narratives about those actions. In other words, journalists needed to rhetorically legitimate themselves in order to offset what was in effect a basically problematic performance.

The ability of journalists over time to forward not the problem-ridden version of the assassination coverage but the version that hailed their activities as a professional triumph has been made possible in part through the narrative strategy of synecdoche. Through synecdoche, journalists have made the assassination narrative into one long story that extended from Friday until the following Monday. It tells the tale of Kennedy's death, Oswald's murder and the funeral of the President in a way that lends closure to the upheaval suggested by the events of those four days. By adopting one long narrative,

journalists have successfully overstated their successes of coverage and underplayed their failures. By invoking what was seen as "successful" coverage - the funeral or the shooting of Oswald - as representative of all journalistic performances of the assassination weekend, they have turned aside potential criticism of their performance.

Rhetorical legitimation has thus been facilitated by the natural tenor of events during that long weekend. For example, many of the problematic aspects of coverage on the day Kennedy was shot were resolved by the day he was buried: Journalists' lack of eyewitness status in the shooting was resolved by their presence both at the funeral and at Oswald's murder. Issues of fact verification appeared less salient once the more general facts of Kennedy's death and Oswald's presumed role in it were confirmed. The accessibility of sources played less of a role as the unravelling of what had happened took shape through the eyewitness accounts of non-official sources, usually bystanders. Disjunctions between the rapid pace of information relay - made possible by wire services, radio and television - and the slower pace of journalists' information gathering became less central as the events of the weekend edged into the funeral, where little information-gathering was necessary. Within all of these circumstances, the fact that journalists missed the

shooting was recast as an incidental part of a larger journalistic triumph rather than maintained as an independent mishap that cast serious doubts on their professionalism.

It is important to note that technology has been portrayed as central to the accomplishment of journalistic work. Photographs, affidavits, films all have given journalists a way of going back and retelling their role in the assassination in a way that let them take responsibility for both the work of other journalists and news organizations. It facilitated synecdochal representations of the event, by which journalists could emerge as authoritative spokespeople for the assassination story, regardless of what they personally had done, seen or heard. This situation was particularly fruitful for the legitimation of certain journalists as speakers over others.

Thus synecdoche has given journalists a credible role in the larger assassination narrative, constructed by them as extending from Kennedy's shooting to his funeral four days later. Portraying events within one long narrative has made them responsible for the story in its entirety. Synecdoche blurred the problems that characterized many of their activities. It blurred what was and was not "professional" about their coverage. It also helped

journalists assume responsibility for events which went beyond their personal experience, by hinging discussions less directly on what journalists had actually done and more on the images of journalistic coverage that both journalists and news organizations were interested and invested in perpetuating.

PERSONALIZATION

A second strategy of retelling the assassination is through personalization. Recollecting events has been accomplished through the persona of reporters, with assassination coverage documented through their personal experiences. Journalists have tended to set up their familiarity with the events of Dallas, so as to later play off the authority which it gave them.

Personalized narrative has been most effectively grounded in journalists' physical presence in Dallas during the assassination weekend. Journalists who were there wrote and spoke of their eyewitness experiences under titles which underscored their authority for events. Time correspondent Hugh Sidey authorized his account of the Kennedy Presidency by noting that "I was with him in Dallas, Texas on November 22, 1963. Few correspondents who were there will ever forget that day" ²². New York Times correspondent Tom Wicker credentialled one of his books with the note that "his two years as White House

correspondent included coverage of President Kennedy's assassination" 33. Pictures from the assassination weekend were reproduced with markers encircling reporters' heads or torsos. An article by Newsweek reporter Charles Roberts reproduced a photograph of Roberts at the LBJ swearing-in aboard Air Force One. In the picture, thick white arrows pointed at Roberts' head, situated behind that of the Vice-President 34. A book by the same author reproduced a picture of the press credentials that Roberts had used in Dallas on its back flap 35.

Television retrospectives began by setting out the November 1963 presence of their narrators, detailing exactly where in Dallas they had been. Reporter Steve Bell, now anchorperson on Philadelphia's Eyewitness News but then a national correspondent, recollected the 25th anniversary of Kennedy's death on the evening news in the following way:

In Omaha, Nebraska, this young reporter and his wife had just been told by the doctor that our first child would be born any day now. Then the President was dead, and I was sent to Dallas to cover the aftermath 36.

The program then proceeded to document not only what had happened when Kennedy was shot but what else Bell had done in Dallas. For example, it included repeat on-air footage of Bell's original televised coverage twenty-five years earlier.

Setting up the journalist's presence in Dallas was central to legitimating the journalist as an authorized speaker for the assassination story. Recalling the assassination story was also grounded in the monitoring positions which certain reporters - like Harrison Salisbury or Walter Cronkite - held at network or newspaper headquarters. In an article entitled "The Editor's View in New York," Salisbury recalled how his position at the New York Times had him organizing the assassination coverage ³⁷. His reconstruction of events reinforced the importance of his role in covering the assassination. Indeed, the relevance attached to monitoring the assassination story was somewhat underscored in assassination tales from their outset. Said Marya Mannes in The Reporter of December 19, 1963:

I listened to the familiar voices of those men who we are highly privileged as a people to have as interpreters of events: Edward Morgan and Howard K. Smith, Walter Cronkite and Eric Sevareid and Charles Collingwood, Chet Huntley and David Brinkley, Marvin Kalb and Robert Pierpoint ³⁸.

Few of the reporters Mannes mentioned were in Dallas. Most were anchorpersons or correspondents who monitored and commented upon the assassination story from afar ³⁹.

Journalists also used their tales to document their intentions of having been present at the event in Dallas: Twenty-five years after the assassination, television

reporter Edwin Newman was called upon to narrate NBC's opus six and one-half hour reconstruction of events. He began his narration by saying that "I myself, having been told that I would be going to Dallas went instead to Washington on a plane NBC had chartered" ⁴⁰. Reporter John Chancellor introduced another television retrospective by talking about his experiences in Berlin at the time that Kennedy was shot ⁴¹. What was not made clear in either case was why these experiences credentialled them to authoritatively speak about the events of Kennedy's death.

Personalization, made explicit by the personal experiences and narratives of journalists, has thus helped to anchor and authenticate institutional recollections of the assassination. It allows media institutions to invoke the experiences of certain journalists as legitimate reconstructions of the assassination story. In both the press and broadcast media, journalists are able to position themselves in authoritative positions vis a vis the assassination weekend through their personal experiences. Doing so, however, blurs the fact that many personal narratives based on such experiences bear questionable authority for the events in Dallas. Working on the assassination story from afar thus constitutes a potentially faulty frame through which to recollect the assassination weekend. The fact that personalized

narrative has been held up by news organizations as a legitimate way to anchor institutional recollections of the assassination story, however, reinforces its importance. Wittingly or not, it has also set up a credible framework by which to legitimate certain journalists as speakers for the assassination story, regardless of the role they actually played in covering it.

REARRANGEMENT

Yet a third way of retelling the assassination is through rearrangement. Rearranged narrative has generated many holes of memory in the assassination story, as journalists have reconstructed their assassination coverage by rearranging time, people and places connected with original assassination tales. The role of radio, for example, was literally erased from institutional recollections of events. Although most television retrospectives employed radio broadcasts as background when discussing television's part in covering the assassination, few have problematized radio's coverage or identified it - either by medium, network or individual reporter. Books and articles employ fragments of radio broadcasts, usually vaguely referencing them as "radio broadcasters".

Other holes of memory perpetuated by rearranged narrative include the controversy surrounding television's facilitation of the death of Lee Harvey Oswald. The disappearance of this specific discourse over time has played directly into ongoing notions of what it means to be a journalism professional. The intruding presence of journalists in the corridor where Oswald was shot - the cables, equipment, sheer numbers - was enough of a problem after the assassination to generate many official and professional censures of journalistic behavior ⁴². The Warren Report even had a special section called "The Activity of Newsmen," where it examined the problematic aspects of journalistic performances in Dallas ⁴³. Yet contemporary mention of that dimension of journalistic behavior in Dallas is difficult to find. Contemporary renditions of the Oswald story have instead cast it as the professional triumph that was implicit in the scoop of having caught the murder on live camera. Other holes of memory have included the role of amateur photographers and filmmakers in capturing Kennedy's shooting, and the assistance engendered by local media in covering the assassination. Although immediately hailed for the help lent national media during the events in Dallas ⁴⁴, today local reporters receive nary a mention in assassination recollections.

The most interesting rearrangements of assassination coverage are found in the people who have disappeared from institutional recollections of the story. CBS reporter Eddie Barker, for example, who was news director of CBS's affiliate in Dallas, played a major role in the assassination coverage, providing the first unconfirmed reports that Kennedy was dead. As Broadcasting magazine conveyed shortly afterwards:

KRLD-TV newsman Eddie Barker, after having talked to a doctor at the hospital, made the initial report that the President was dead. Walter Cronkite in New York continually referred to this report but emphasized it was not official. Thus, CBS had a beat of several minutes that Mr. Kennedy had died of his wounds
45.

Also at the scene of the assassination, Dan Rather followed Barker's dispatch with two unofficial confirmations before Kennedy's death was officially established.

Yet how has this story held up over time? In contemporary chronicles, Barker's role in the story is mentioned in only the most extensive and detailed accounts. Generally, they follow the line taken by this 1989 recounting:

"The eyes of Walter Cronkite swelled with tears when he heard, from a young Dan Rather, that President Kennedy was dead" 46.

Another version, penned in 1983, claimed that "thanks to Rather, CBS achieved another 'first' - the news that

Kennedy was dead" ⁴⁷. Yet another, written in 1978, mentioned that first Rather, then Barker had received word that Kennedy was dead ⁴⁸. A number of facts have been invalidated by these accounts: That Cronkite heard the news initially from Barker and only afterward from Rather; that Cronkite's eyes swelled with tears when he received official confirmation of the death, not when he heard it from Rather; and that the "first" of confirming Kennedy's death was accomplished by Barker, not Rather. Most accounts of CBS' coverage of events have rarely conveyed correct versions of the incident, instead highlighting Dan Rather within the story at the expense of the lesser-known (and non CBS-employed) Eddie Barker. In other words, the role of the local reporter has been consistently understated alongside the more extensive accounts accorded his or her national counterpart.

The purpose of rearranged narrative is thus to help certain journalists and news organizations rhetorically legitimate their presence within the assassination story. There are many examples of what is gained here: Understating the role of radio overstates the role of television; shifting attention away from the role of amateurs focuses attention on the function of journalism professionals; deleting mention of local media enhances recollections of the performances of national media.

Rearranged narrative has thus reflected ongoing discourses about the rightful boundaries of journalistic practice and authority. Journalistic recollections of the assassination coverage have been strategically rearranged to produce a uniform narrative that plays up the role of professional journalists, particularly those employed by the national broadcast media, in covering the assassination story. Rearrangement is thus directly linked with larger discourses about shifting boundaries of cultural authority, changing definitions of journalistic professionalism and the emerging legitimation of television news.

The narrative strategies by which journalists have retold the assassination story have thereby set up an extensive network by which journalists are able to rhetorically reconstruct the part they originally played in the assassination story. Personalization centers recollections on journalists' personal experiences and narratives, highlighting the importance of the reporter within the larger context of Kennedy's death. Rearrangement promotes the presence of certain journalists, practices and news organizations within those recollections. And synecdoche contextualizes the personalized rearrangements of journalists within larger narratives about the legitimation of television journalism

and journalistic professionalism. While the precise ways in which journalists have used these strategies will be addressed in coming chapters, it is fitting to note here that journalists' strategies of retelling the assassination have foregrounded a self-referential discourse that in many cases conceals a false authority for the events of that weekend. Regardless of the integrity of such a discourse, it has played a critical part in journalists' self-legitimation as their assassination tales have been disseminated across time and space.

RHETORICAL LEGITIMATION: CULTURAL AUTHORITY THROUGH NARRATIVE ADJUSTMENT

By setting up the foundations by which journalists would emerge as authorized spokespeople for the assassination through their retellings of its story over time and space, narrative has thereby fostered the rhetorical legitimation of journalists. While it did not signal the complete process by which journalists would emerge as the story's authorized spokespeople, it has nonetheless provided the groundwork on which their authorized presence could and did flourish. The fact that journalists' retellings of the story of Kennedy's death have accommodated the presence of narrators, in a variety of forms, has made retellings of the story largely

dependent on journalists' presence as storytellers. Narrative has thereby set in motion a somewhat circular process of legitimating journalists as authorized public speakers: Over time, the assassination story has most effectively been told by journalists authorized to speak for its events. But by the same token, journalists have become increasingly authorized and legitimated as spokespersons for the story through their presence in the narratives which have relayed its events.

Much of this has been realized through the acceptance and recognition of narrative adjustment as a legitimate way of retelling the assassination. The implicit acceptance of constructed versions of reality, making reality accountable through the stories told about it, has allowed journalists to strategize their assassination retellings by adjusting them to meet collective aims. The fact that narrative adjustment - in all its forms - has evolved into an acceptable practice for telling the assassination story has erased barriers that in other circumstances might have obstructed journalists' rhetorical legitimation. The peculiar reality-based claims of assassination narratives, coupled by the large spatial and temporal spans through which they have been disseminated, suggests that they have involved a mode of adjustment that fertilizes journalists' attempts to

legitimate themselves. This in turn has increased the possibility of adjusting narratives in accordance with even larger agendas - about journalistic professionalism, cultural authority, and television journalism - engendering the cyclical nature of rhetorical legitimation. Within such parameters, the consolidating moves of journalists around the centrality of narrative have upheld their functioning as an interpretive community and solidified the ritual aspects of their retellings.

It is important to note that the acceptance of narrative adjustment as a mode of retelling the assassination was derived in no small part from the chaos that surrounded the events of Kennedy's death. Audiences existed - for however transient a period of time - in circumstances of confusion, void and uncertainty. The ability of journalists to step into those circumstances and emerge as authoritative spokespeople was thus in part circumstantial, with legitimacy derived from the audience's suspension of judgment. Yet the overwhelming need for cohesion and community - not only on the journalists' part but on the public's too - has allowed journalistic authority to flourish through the narratives that journalists have told.

Against these circumstances, these pages have suggested how, in the case of the Kennedy assassination,

narrative set the groundwork by which journalists have transformed themselves into more authoritative spokespeople than warranted by their actual connection to the assassination story. Journalists have used narrative strategies of adjustment to offset what was often false authority for the actual assassination story. The rhetoric of self-legitimation on which this was predicated has been embedded by journalists within the assassination tales themselves. This exemplifies Habermas' contention that speakers in public discourse use "street wisdom" as effective rationale to exercise a basically false authority.

Narrative has played a central role in setting up a certain image of journalists in conjunction with their coverage of the events in Dallas. In order for journalists' versions of the assassination story to emerge as authorized perspectives, there was need for routinized and repeatable narratives by which the part played by journalists would be told. Reporters' assassination tales has thus become instrumental in setting up and maintaining the parameters of the events of Kennedy's death not only for those concerned with the tale of the President's death but with the tellers who told it. While the rhetoric of journalistic legitimation has been subsequently cemented by other features - such as journalists' assumptions of

different roles through their assassination narratives - the process of legitimating journalists as spokespeople for the assassination story is grounded in its legitimation as a strategy in public discourse. Through narrative, the ability of journalists to promote themselves as cultural authorities for the story of Kennedy's assassination was made possible.

¹ This argument has been most forcefully advanced by technological determinists who contend that the form of establishing authority in public discourse is directly determined by the attributes of the medium at hand [See Harold A. Innis, Empire and Communications (Toronto: 1972); Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964)].

² This point is suggested by Barbara Herrnstein Smith, On the Margins of Discourse (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). Communication studies in this area include work by the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, the Glasgow University Media Group [Bad News (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976); More Bad News (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980)], and work from Australia on institutional language [i.e., Gunther Kress and Robert Hodge, Language as Ideology (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979)]. Each perspective focuses upon the workings of language and authority in institutional and mediated settings.

³ Cited in John L. Lucaites and Celeste Condit, "Reconstructing Narrative Theory: A Functional Perspective," Journal of Communication (Special Issue entitled "Homo Narrans: Story-telling in Mass Culture and Everyday Life"), (Autumn 1985), pp. 93-4.

⁴ Max Weber, Max Weber: Selections in Translation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

Legitimation, he contended, provides an effective rationale for most communication acts, in that individuals are ultimately concerned with legitimating themselves. Rational acts across domains - such as speaking or telling stories - can thus be seen as attempts to realize objectives of power.

⁵ Jurgen Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action (Vol. I) (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981), p. xxiv-xxv.

⁶ Robert Wuthnow et al, Cultural Analysis (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 190. The ability of communication to uphold consensus in realizing these aims determines whether true, or effective, communication has been achieved.

⁷ Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," in Image, Music, Text (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

⁸ See Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity," in W.J.T. Mitchell, On Narrative (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Lucaites and Condit, 1985; Walter R. Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," Communication Monographs (March 1984), pp. 1-22; Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (New York: Anchor Books, 1966).

⁹ Hayden White, 1980, p. 18.

¹⁰ See, for example, Richard Bauman and Roger Abrahams (eds.), "And Other Neighborly Names" (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), for a wide-ranging collection of essays about how narrative authority is shaped across time and space.

¹¹ Hayden White, "Historical Pluralism," Critical Inquiry 12 (Spring, 1986), p. 487.

¹² Studies examining the narrative dimensions of journalism include a collection of essays edited by James W. Carey (ed.), Media, Myths and Narratives (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1988); Michael Schudson, "The Politics of Narrative Form: The Emergence of News Conventions in Print and Television," Daedalus 3(4), 1982; Robert Darnton, "Writing News and Telling Stories," Daedalus (1975); and Graham Knight and Tony Dean, "Myth and the Structure of News," Journal of Communication 32 (2), 1982.

¹³ The concept is borrowed from George Gerbner, "Cultural Indicators: The Third Voice," in G. Gerbner, L. Gross and W. Melody (eds.), Communications Technology and Social Policy: Understanding the New "Cultural Revolution" (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973). See Chapter Two for a discussion of how it was generated.

¹⁴ Andy Logan, "JFK: The Stained Glass Image," American Heritage Magazine (August, 1967), p. 6; Frank Donner, "Conspiracies Unlimited," The Nation (12/22/79), p. 658.

¹⁵ Dan Rather, quoted in Four Days in November, CBS News Documentary (11/17/88).

¹⁶ Charles Roberts, The Truth About the Assassination (New York, Grosset and Dunlap, 1967), p. 15.

¹⁷ Steve Bell, KYW Eyewitness News [Channel Four Late-Night News, Philadelphia (11/22/88)].

¹⁸ JFK Assassination: As It Happened, NBC News Documentary (11/22/88).

¹⁹ Four Days in November (11/17/88).

- ²⁰ See Lucaites and Condit, 1985, p. 101.
- ²¹ Kathleen Hall Jamieson's Eloquence in an Electronic Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) discusses how news conventions incorporate synecdochal representations of events.
- ²² Tom Wicker, "A Reporter Must Trust His Instinct," Saturday Review 47 (1/11/64), p. 81.
- ²³ Tom Pettit, NBC News (11/24/63).
- ²⁴ Bert Schipp, quoted in John B. Mayo, Bulletin From Dallas (New York: Exposition Press, 1967), p. 142.
- ²⁵ See Bradley Greenberg and Edwin Parker (eds.), The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1965), for a thorough collection of essays on this subject.
- ²⁶ Broadcasting (12/2/63).
- ²⁷ See Greenberg and Parker, 1965. Also see Elihu Katz and Daniel Dayan, Media Events: On the Experience of Not Being There (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
- ²⁸ Tom Wicker, "A Reporter Must Trust His Instinct," 1964, p. 81.
- ²⁹ More detailed support for this statement can be found in Chapters Four and Five. An extensive description of the problems faced by journalists in Dallas is found in Darwin Payne, "The Press Corps and the Kennedy Administration," Journalism Monographs (February, 1970).
- ³⁰ The only professional photographer to capture Kennedy's death on film was an AP photographer who was hailed by the trade press as "the lone pro" on the scene [See Editor and Publisher (12/7/63), p. 10].
- ³¹ William Manchester, The Death of A President (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).
- ³² Hugh Sidey, John F. Kennedy, President (New York: Atheneum, 1963), pp. vi-vii.
- ³³ Tom Wicker, JFK and LBJ (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1968), p. 299. A similar theme was found in assassination narratives that were compiled as "The Reporters' Story," Columbia Journalism Review (Winter, 1964).
- ³⁴ Charles Roberts, "Eyewitness in Dallas," Newsweek (12/5/66), p. 26.
- ³⁵ Roberts, 1967.
- ³⁶ Steve Bell, KYW Eyewitness News (Channel Four Late-Night News, Philadelphia, 11/22/88).
- ³⁷ Harrison Salisbury, "The Editor's View in New York," in Bradley Greenberg and Edwin Parker, The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965).
- ³⁸ Marya Mannes, "The Long Vigil," The Reporter (12/19/63), p. 16.

- ³⁹ Similar recollections were voiced elsewhere. One observer mentioned how "in the days immediately following the assassination, voices of men like Huntley, Brinkley and Cronkite became more prominent than those of my own parents" [John P. Sgarlat, "A Tragedy on TV - and the Tears of a Crestfallen Nation," Philadelphia Daily News (11/22/88)]. Again, mention was made not of on-site reporters but the anchorpersons who monitored their words.
- ⁴⁰ Edwin Newman, JFK Assassination: As It Happened (11/22/88).
- ⁴¹ John Chancellor, The Week We Lost John F. Kennedy, NBC News (1989).
- ⁴² Foremost here was a special session of the ASNE (American Society for Newspaper Editors), which brought together the heads of 17 top news organizations to discuss journalistic performance in Dallas [New York Times (10/9/64), p. 21].
- ⁴³ See Warren Report: Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1964), pp. 201-8.
- ⁴⁴ Richard Van der Karr, "How Dallas TV Stations Covered Kennedy Shooting," Journalism Quarterly (Autumn, 1965).
- ⁴⁵ Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 40.
- ⁴⁶ "Television's Fiftieth Anniversary," People Magazine (Summer 1989), p. 100.
- ⁴⁷ Barbara Matusow, The Evening Stars (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), p. 105.
- ⁴⁸ Gary Paul Gates, Airtime (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 3.

TELLING
ASSASSINATION TALES

CHAPTER FOUR

"COVERING THE BODY" BY TELLING THE ASSASSINATION

"This numbed grief must be made articulate"

- Editorial, The Reporter (12/5/63), p.19.

November 21, 1963 was a routine day for the fifty-odd journalists who travelled with President John F. Kennedy on a campaign trip to Dallas. They had been assigned to "cover the body." This assignment held them responsible for the activities of the President of the United States, particularly if the unpredictable were to arise. "Covering the body" gave news organizations one way of routinizing the unexpected ¹.

On November 22, however, "covering the body" took on a more literal connotation: The assassination of John F. Kennedy threw the boundaries of appropriate journalistic practice into question. What journalists could and could not do - or did and did not do - in covering the assassination rattled their shared notions of journalistic professionalism, and the boundaries by which their practices could be labelled professional. In this chapter, I identify what happened to those boundaries by tracing the narratives through which journalists recounted their part in the assassination story. Through journalists' narratives that were published and circulated at the time

of Kennedy's death, the following pages describe how journalists relayed their activities of that weekend through narrative. Through their coverage of the events in Dallas, they displayed what they considered to be boundaries of appropriate journalistic practice and authority.

During the quarter-century since John F. Kennedy was assassinated, journalists have transformed their accounts about his death into one long narrative memorializing the slain President. Journalists' memories extend over what appeared to be four continuous days of grief and mourning. They begin with the arrival of the Kennedys in Dallas, extend through the President's motorcade and death, and conclude with his state funeral. Stories of this four-day stretch of events have come to constitute the master narrative by which the particulars of Kennedy's death have been told. Through it, journalists have assumed responsibility for many of the smaller events comprising the assassination story, regardless of what they themselves saw, did or heard.

Yet at the time journalists faced tasks that were far more discrete. Covering the assassination called for behavior that was somewhat "out of bounds" of formalized journalistic standards. It constituted what Gaye Tuchman has called the "what a story" category, the story which

sidesteps routinized expectations, has no steadfast rules of coverage and calls for strategies of improvisation and redefinition ². Herbert Gans has similarly discussed the "gee whiz" story, the classification that embodies the residue of other more commonplace types of news stories ³. The assassination story thus called for trained instinct on the part of journalism professionals. In their attempt to effectively routinize and control its unpredictability, they approached aspects of the assassination as independent moments of coverage. News organizations assigned individual journalists to seemingly finite "mini-events" within the more generalized assassination story.

This presented a quandary, of sorts. For while journalists did not possess the kind of standardized guidance they needed to cover the story, what journalists did, or said they did, had much to do with how they viewed themselves as professionals. Embedded within their activities, and narrative reconstructions about those activities, were explicit notions about professionalism, journalistic practice and the media technologies that assisted and hindered them in formulating authorized stories about the assassination. The fact that they did so in circumstances that offered few guidelines for covering news other than an emphasis on instinct and improvisation

has made an examination of their authority all the more critical.

In this chapter, I consider journalists' accounts of covering the assassination at the time of Kennedy's death. I trace the master narrative of the assassination, by focusing on journalists' original accounts of covering Kennedy's shooting, Johnson's swearing-in, the follow-up to the shooting and the mourning of the President. Through notions of professionalism, authority and journalistic practice that were embedded in these accounts, I consider how covering the assassination story was an act of journalistic failure. Yet its transformation into a story of professional triumph - and its invocation as a cornerstone by which the craft of journalistic authority would be realized - displays the workings of rhetorical legitimation.

"COVERING THE BODY": THE STORY AS CORPUS

By most existing models of journalistic practice, the assassination of John F. Kennedy constitutes one event that has rattled formalized notions about what it means to be a professional journalist. The assassination story moved from the shooting of the President to the shooting of his presumed assassin, from the improvisory swearing-in of a new President to the ceremonial burial of an old one, with a rapidity that stunned most journalists seeking to

inscribe its chronology. Reporters "covering the body," the beat that assigned journalists to the President's activities should the unpredictable arise, faced difficult and unanticipated circumstances.

Although they provided prompt and comprehensive coverage, journalists did not see the event, sometimes did not hear the event, incorporated hearsay, rumor and faulty information into their chronicles, and failed to access recognizable and authoritative sources. Journalistic methods upon which most reporters had come to rely - such as eyewitness status, access to sources or fact verification - proved unhelpful and rendered an incomplete version of the story. The speed of information transmission outpaced their ability to gather it, and their inability to keep up was apparent to the largest viewing audience in media history.

When Kennedy was assassinated, news editors quickly labelled the event "the biggest story of their lifetime"⁴. Within 24 hours more than 300 media representatives arrived in Dallas⁵. Because of the story's numerous unpredictable and potentially unmanageable angles, assignments did not always match anticipated events. It remained a "breaking story" throughout: The "transfer" of Lee Harvey Oswald became coverage of his murder. Covering the succession story became an eyewitnessing of LBJ's

inauguration amidst the cramped conditions aboard Air Force One. Those assigned to write the follow-up on Kennedy's shooting wrote instead of the killing of Officer Tippit or confused medical briefings about the President's body. Although the state funeral provided one forum in which the story's different threads were temporarily brought together, journalists approached the larger assassination story through stages manageable to them. This meant that they concentrated on independent and often isolated moments of coverage that were later brought together in larger narratives. Those moments offered journalists individual but separate loci on which to reconsider, recall and rethink the hows and whys of journalistic practice.

MOMENTS OF COVERAGE

While intended here as an analytical tool, reducing the assassination story into discrete moments of coverage in effect reflected the task-orientation of journalists covering the story. Journalists recounted concentrating on the immediate tasks to which they had been assigned. Their accounts focused on four moments of coverage: the shooting of Kennedy; the hospital; the swearing-in of Lyndon Johnson; the follow-up to Kennedy's shooting, including the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald; and Kennedy's funeral.

The following pages summarize how journalists recounted those moments at the time of the assassination story.

THE SHOOTING

Despite the presence of fifty-odd Washington correspondents in the President's entourage, at the moment of Kennedy's assassination most were corralled inside two press buses taking them to downtown Dallas. As a result, covering the assassination began in one reporter's view "when the central fact of it was over" ⁶. By the time the few reporters riding in press photo cars had broken loose ⁷, the President's car had already sped off to Parkland Hospital. Consequently, reporting on the assassination was reconstructive and derivative from the beginning. Most reporters simply missed the initial event.

Typical reports of the shooting, taken respectively from radio, television and the print media, went as follows:

It appears as though something has happened in the motorcade route. Something, I repeat, has happened in the motorcade route. Parkland Hospital - there has been a shooting. Parkland Hospital has been advised to stand by for a severe gunshot wound. The official party, as I can see it, turning around, going to the emergency room at Parkland Hospital ⁸.

At about 12:32, the motorcade turns a corner into a parkway. The crowds are thinner...three shots are heard, like toy explosions. (NBC cameraman Dave) Weigman jumps from his car, running toward the President with his camera running. People scream, lie down grabbing their

children. I leave the motorcade and run after police, who appear to be chasing somebody. The motorcade moves on fast ⁹.

As our press bus eased at motorcade speed down an incline toward an underpass, there was a little confusion in the sparse crowds that at that point had been standing at the curb to see the President of the United States pass. As we came out of the underpass, I saw a motorcycle policeman drive over the curb, across an open area, a few feet up a railroad bank, dismount, and start scrambling up the bank ¹⁰.

The perspective was partial; no account confirmed that the President had been hit. Accounts began through the uncertain perspective of the bystander and reflected innuendo, rumour and half-truth. It took time before journalists definitively knew what had happened. Afterwards some reporters maintained that they "were not aware that anything serious had occurred until they reached the Merchandise Mart two or three minutes later"

11.

For journalists invested in upholding their status as preferred observers of the event, this posed problems. The assignment of "covering the body" gave them what were essentially generous boundaries - of proximity and access - in which to play out their authoritative presence in the story. The fact that they missed the event in effect constituted a blow to their professionalism. Because news organizations hungered for a continual stream of

information, the disjunctions felt by reporters sent to "cover the body" were magnified.

When Kennedy was shot, the Associated Press' Jack Bell was in the pool car in the Presidential motorcade. The New York Times published his account the next day, prefacing it with the observation that he had "witnessed the shooting from the fourth car" in the procession ¹². The feasibility of that feat was doubtful, a point borne out when Bell himself authorized the event through what he had heard, not what he had seen:

There was a loud bang as though a giant firecracker had exploded in the caverns between the tall buildings we were just leaving behind us. In quick succession there were two other loud reports. The ominous sounds of these dismissed from the minds of us riding in the reporters' pool car the fleeting idea that some Texan was adding a bit of noise to the cheering welcome...The man in front of me screamed, "My God, they're shooting at the President" ¹³.

As Bell looked back at the building where he thought the shots had come, he said he "saw no significant signs of activity" ¹⁴. His actions suggested that he also did not believe what he did see: When the pool car pulled up at Parkland Hospital, he jumped out and looked in the back seat of the Presidential limousine:

For an instant I stopped and stared into the back seat. There, face down, stretched out at full length, lay the President, motionless. His natty business suit seemed hardly rumpled. But there was blood on the floor. "Is he dead?" I asked a Secret Service man. "I don't know," he said, "but I don't think so" ¹⁵.

Even faced with first-hand evidence of activity that other reporters contended had blown half of the President's head away, Bell needed confirmation.

Ironically, the AP's eyewitness account for the assassination came from a staff photographer. Photographing the motorcade, James Altgens telephoned his Dallas editor with the news that Kennedy had been shot. "I saw it," he said. "There was blood on his face. Mrs. Kennedy jumped up and grabbed him and cried 'oh no!' The motorcade raced onto the freeway" ¹⁶. The AP ran that account in full. Altgens' photograph of a Secret Service agent climbing over the back of Kennedy's limousine was transmitted 25 minutes after the shooting ¹⁷. Two weeks later, Editor and Publisher issued a profile about Altgens entitled "Lone 'Pro' on Scene When JFK Was Shot". Tracing his career as a professional photographer, the article hailed the fact that Altgen's photographs remained exclusives "for 24 hours - until some amateur film turned up" ¹⁸.

During the shooting, UPI's Merriman Smith was seated in the same pool car as Bell. Like Bell, he did not see the event but heard the shots. Over the pool car's radiophone, he reported that "three shots were fired at President Kennedy's motorcade in downtown Dallas" ¹⁹. Seeing but not knowing, hearing but not seeing, neither

seeing nor hearing: Such were the foundations from which journalists generated authorized accounts of the event. As William Manchester later said of Smith:

Smith was not as astute a reporter as he seemed. Despite extensive experience with weapons, he had thought the sounds in the plaza were three shots from an automatic weapon, and in a subsequent message he identified them as bursts. But his speed was remarkable ²⁰.

Initial reports of the assassination, while rapidly transmitted, thus displayed the authority of partial knowledge.

This was exacerbated by the fact that the machinery of government information was virtually paralyzed. Unlike the death of Roosevelt, which was "announced by a simultaneous phone call to three wire services from the White House" ²¹, official channels of information relay were blocked, confused or simply nowhere to be found. Journalists had three choices: to exclude problematic information, to include it or to qualify its inclusion by admitting that it had not been verified. As Wilbur Schramm later said, reporters on the Dallas story were "up against one of the classical problems of journalism: What constitutes evidence? When does a report have enough support to justify passing it along?" ²². Reporters lacked the time, sources or circumstances in which to satisfactorily resolve such issues.

Information about the shooting was strung together in bits and pieces. Reporters needed to first establish the presence of shots, then the fact that the shots had wounded the President, the possibility that the wound was fatal, the rumors of his death, and finally the fact that he had died. With each step in that sequence, the certainty among journalists about what had happened grew. But each step also generated new questions, uncertainties and inaccuracies. Accomplishing professional goals of coverage in an accurate, fact-based and verifiable fashion was virtually impossible.

The main thrust of coverage was to inform the public quickly. Approximately 61 minutes elapsed while journalists worked their way down the initial story's sequence. First reports reached the wires a meager four minutes after the shots were fired ²³. Six minutes later, at 12.40 p.m., Walter Cronkite broke into CBS' "As the World Turns" to announce - in UPI's words - that "in Dallas Texas, three shots were fired at President Kennedy's motorcade. The first reports say that the President was seriously wounded" ²⁴. Radio brought intermittent and fragmented updates, mostly reworded wire-service accounts:

We interrupt this program to bring you a special bulletin from ABC Radio. Three shots were fired at President Kennedy's motorcade today in downtown Dallas, Texas...State and

local police have sealed off the area at Hyannis Port, where the Kennedys live. No one permitted to get near that area ²⁶.

Before Kennedy was officially pronounced dead, over half of the nation had heard news of the assassination attempt ²⁶.

This does not suggest that many journalists knew more than their dispatches revealed. As William Manchester later recounted, during that first hour

the ratio between the public and its true informants was roughly 38,000,000:1. The Cronkites and Huntleys were as out of touch as their demoralized listeners; the best they could do was pass along details ²⁷.

Filmed footage showed journalists huddling in groups outside Parkland Hospital, clutching notepads and pencils. Many listened to radio, whose reporters, relatively unencumbered by equipment, transmitted the paraphrased accounts of wire services. Television followed suit. As the story moved on, local news staffers helped national organizations flesh out details ²⁸. New York Times reporter Tom Wicker maintained that "nobody thought about an exclusive; it didn't seem important" ²⁹. Cooperation, as a standard of action, was "greater than it ever had been in the industry's history" ³⁰. Although tales of rivalry and competition did exist in a fashion typical of everyday journalistic practice, it was telling how much journalists' retelling of the story of their coverage

emphasized the notion of cooperation. This in itself suggested the ritual aspects of telling the assassination tale, and how it was invoked by journalists to establish community and authority.

THE HOSPITAL

An impromptu press conference at Parkland Hospital gave journalists their first marker of institutionalized journalism, less than an hour after the President was shot³¹. Later cited as one of the major sources of confusion over the exact nature of Kennedy's head wound, the conference, held by acting press secretary Malcolm Kilduff, confirmed that the President was dead. The medical briefing that followed was later called "the most tempestuous hour in the history of American journalism":

The scene was bedlam. Several correspondents were hysterical. A question would be asked, and the doctor would be halfway through his answer when another reporter broke in with an entirely different question. Misquotations were inevitable...Medical briefings were supposed to quash misunderstandings. The one at Parkland did exactly the opposite³².

When reporters asked Dr. Malcolm Perry if it was possible that one bullet could have struck the President from the front, the doctor replied affirmatively. Time reporter Hugh Sidey, realizing the implications, cried, "Doctor, do you realize what you're doing? You're confusing us." But reporters quickly transmitted his

confusing answer to the public, and the next morning Americans across the country were already "convinced that a rifleman had fired from the top of the underpass" ³³. This in turn generated one of the major misreadings of the nature of Kennedy's head wound.

Soon after, transport of the Presidential coffin on its way from the hospital to Air Force One gave some journalists what would be their closest and most authoritative sightings of the President. In the New York Times, Tom Wicker's account of the procession around the bronze coffin was laced with the intricate detail of eyewitnessing:

Mrs. Kennedy walked beside (the coffin). Her face was sorrowful. She looked steadily at the floor. She still wore the raspberry-colored suit in which she had greeted welcoming crowds in Fort Worth and Dallas. But she had taken off the matching pillbox hat she wore earlier in the day, and her dark hair was windblown and tangled ³⁴.

His account focused solely on the grief of the widow. Ten days later, his account of the same event was more distanced and appeared to be less stunned:

They brought the body out in a bronze coffin. A number of White House staff people - stunned, silent, stumbling along as if dazed - walked with it. Mrs. Kennedy walked by the coffin, her hand on it, her head down, her hat gone, her dress and stockings spattered. She got into the hearse with the coffin. The staff men crowded into cars and followed ³⁵.

In the second account, Wicker contextualized Jacqueline Kennedy's actions alongside those of the White House staff people, suggesting a metaphoric step backward to include them in the picture. Ten days later, the reporter was sufficiently distanced from her grief to contextualize her activities around the casket within a larger discourse about the continuity of government and government machinery.

The removal of Kennedy's casket was replayed extensively by the media. Reporters recounted looks of dazed shock on the faces of staffers and family. Photographic images of Jacqueline Kennedy, her dress spattered with blood, holding onto the side of the coffin, were one of the first filmed shots provided by news photographers. The casket's removal was also, in Tom Wicker's words, "just about the only incident that I got with my own eyes that entire afternoon" ²⁶.

The events at Parkland Hospital slightly offset the jarring confusion of the first hour that followed Kennedy's shooting. There was a temporary overstatement of formalized journalistic practices, with the medical briefing reinstating semblances of the channels through which reporters usually obtained their information. Transport of the President's coffin upheld the eyewitness status of those journalists who witnessed it. Journalists'

presence at Parkland Hospital provided details which helped journalists authorize themselves as spokespeople for the story: For that reason details from the hospital - stories of journalists milling about outside, the medical briefing, the transport of the body - filled audio, prose, photographic and filmed assassination accounts. This was not because the hospital constituted a central part of the larger assassination narrative. It was because it signalled a return to order until more authorized filmed and photographic records of the shooting would become available. Coverage of journalists' hospital presence offered journalists a viable way to uphold their professionalism, and therefore authorize their coverage of the story. Emphasizing this particular moment of coverage helped them lend credence to their presence within the larger assassination narrative.

THE SWEARING-IN

Following the shooting, coverage of the assassination branched in three separate directions ³⁷. In one arena of coverage, journalists were assigned to what William Manchester later suggested was the "other story" - Lyndon Johnson's succession as President ³⁸. As the coffin was brought out, a group of reporters "made (their) way to the hearse...and the driver said his instructions were to take the body to the airport" ³⁹. Confused communiques between

Kennedy's staff, Attorney-General Robert Kennedy in Washington, and the President-elect generated a hasty decision to inaugurate Johnson at the airport before Air Force One was airborne. To facilitate an unproblematic succession, Johnson agreed for reporters to be present as eyewitnesses ⁴⁰.

This made the swearing-in one of the few times during the assassination story that journalists took on officially-recognized roles of eyewitnesses. Three journalists agreed to serve as the press pool. Said UPI's Merriman Smith:

Jiggs Fauver of the White House transportation office grabbed me and said Kilduff wanted a pool of three men immediately to fly back to Washington on Airforce One, the Presidential Aircraft... Downstairs I ran and into the driveway, only to discover that Kilduff had just pulled out in our telephone car. Charles Roberts (of Newsweek), Sid Davis (of Westinghouse Broadcasting) and I implored a police office to take us to the airport in his squad car ⁴¹

Davis went aboard the plane to cover the swearing-in but did not return to Washington ⁴². He instead supplied pool coverage of the event to a busload of reporters that arrived as the plane took off. Said one reporter:

I shall not soon forget the picture in my mind, that man (Davis) standing on the trunk of a white car. his figure etched against the blue, blue Texas sky, all of us massed around him at his knees as he told us of what had happened in that crowded compartment in Air Force One ⁴³.

Thus was chronicled Johnson's swearing-in. Special importance was accorded the role of photographers, who produced the official photograph of the event. It was later labelled by Editor and Publisher as "one of our historic photographs" ⁴⁴.

But the uncertainty and hasty arrangements surrounding Johnson's swearing-in produced coverage that was spotty and uneven. The New York Times complained that "no accurate listing of those present could be obtained" ⁴⁵. The 34 words which made Johnson President were recounted verbatim, with little attempts at enclosing them within larger narratives. Accounts, scripted like descriptions of photographic details, stiffly recorded who stood next to whom and what color clothes each person wore. The coverage, while authenticated as eyewitness reporting, was seen as stiff and uninspired prose.

The fact that reporters eyewitnessed the swearing-in was nonetheless important for their notions of professional credibility. It gave them a professional presence within the larger assassination story, and that presence was highly regarded by other members of the press corps. Charles Roberts was interviewed on the Huntley-Brinkley Report the night of the assassination about his experiences in eyewitnessing the swearing-in ⁴⁶. Roberts also used his attendance at the swearing-in and the plane-

ride home to justify his writing of a 1967 book called The Truth About the Assassination ⁴⁷.

THE FOLLOW-UP

A much larger group of journalists set to work unravelling the assassination's threads. Their follow-up work began Friday night, when Dallas police attempted to hold a midnight photo opportunity with Kennedy's accused killer, Lee Harvey Oswald. At the time, over 100 persons filled the halls of the police station, whose conditions were "not too much unlike Grand Central Station at rush hour" ⁴⁸. Dallas was ill-equipped to handle the growing influx of reporters, and the police's attempts that night to address mounting pressure for information proved to be a fiasco:

Cameramen stood on the tables to take pictures and others pushed forward to get close-ups...After Oswald had been in the room only a few minutes, Chief Curry intervened and directed that Oswald be taken back to jail because, he testified, the 'newsmen tried to overrun him' ⁴⁹.

The police planned to transfer Oswald from the city to the county jail the next morning. Armed with details of the transfer, the press corps arrived in groups. ABC's cameraperson was one of the few told to relocate at the county jail so as to await Oswald's arrival there ⁵⁰. By 10:00 a.m., an estimated 50 journalists were in attendance in the basement of the city jail, including still

photographers, television camera-people and reporters from all media ⁵¹. Conditions for coverage were among the best available to journalists during the larger assassination story, which in itself suggested the degree to which journalistic authority was negotiated with other cultural and professional groups.

One detective relayed the following account of the police attempt to transfer Oswald:

Almost the whole line of people pushed forward when Oswald started to leave the jail office, the door, the hall - all the newsmen were poking their sound mikes across to him and asking questions, and they were everyone sticking their flashbulbs up and around and over him and in his face ⁵².

The "near-blinding television and motion picture lights which were allowed to shine upon the escort party increased the difficulty of observing unusual movements in the basement" ⁵³. This would later generate discussions about whether or not journalists had facilitated Oswald's death. As NBC's Tom Pettit recalled one year hence:

In that throng it was difficult for any reporter to sort out who was who. But for the television reporters the problem was compounded by the need for simultaneous transmission. What was recorded by microphones and cameras (either film or live) would go on the air without much editing. What transpired in the hallway was broadcast without much opportunity for evaluation. And the television reporter could not move about freely, since his own movement was limited by the length of his microphone cable ⁵⁴.

What happened after that became, in the eyes of certain observers, "a first in television history" ⁵⁵. Jack Ruby stepped out from the group of reporters, drew a gun and pulled the trigger. Oswald slumped to the floor. Journalists recorded the event in sound, in prose, in still photographs, and transmitted it live on television.

Written accounts detailed the incredibility of Oswald having been shot in view of the television cameras ⁵⁶. Still photographs of the homicide pushed editors at the Dallas Morning News into a second edition: The photograph on its front page displayed Ruby clearly pointing a gun at Oswald. Robert Jackson of the Dallas Times Herald would later win a Pulitzer Prize for his picture of Oswald crumpling under the bullet's impact ⁵⁷. One trade article, entitled "Pictures of Assassination Fall to Amateurs on Street", went as follows:

the actual shooting down of the President was caught mainly through out-of-focus pictures taken by non-professional photographers. But the actual shooting of his accused assailant was recorded in full view of press photographers with their cameras trained right on him and this produced pictures which may rank with the greatest news shots of all time ⁵⁸.

The article offset the largely amateur photographic recording of Kennedy's shooting - and its emphasis on pictures that were "out of focus" and photographers who were "non-professional" - with the professional photographic recording of Oswald's murder. Photographic

coverage of the second event upheld the professionalism of news photographers which, other than Altgens' photograph of the President slumping in the car or the official photograph of LBJ's inauguration, had until that point been a questionable dimension of recording the story. The fact that most trade publications juxtaposed coverage of one event with the other suggested the problematics presented by their earlier performance. As Editor and Publisher noted in a moment of professional vindication, "if President Kennedy's death was left for the amateur photographers to record, the situation reversed itself on Sunday, November 24" ²⁰.

Radio reporters called out the news of Oswald's shooting, with Radio Press International broadcasting sound of the shot to its subscribers around the world ²⁰. Ike Pappas was then a reporter for WNEW Radio in New York:

My job on that day was to get an interview with this guy, when nobody else was going to get an interview. And I was determined to do that...I went forward with my microphone and I said, this is the last time you can talk to Lee Harvey Oswald, ask that question again, and I said "Do you have anything to say in your defense?" Just as I said "defense", I noted out of the corner of my eye, this black streak went right across my front and leaned in and, pop, there was an explosion. And I felt the impact of the air from the explosion of the gun on my body... And then I said to myself, if you never say anything ever again into a microphone, you must say it now. This is history. And I heard people shouting in back of me "he's been shot". So I said the only thing which I could say, which was the story:

"Oswald has been shot. A shot rang out. Oswald has been shot" ⁶¹.

Despite Pappas' on-the-spot presence, he did not himself put together the information that Oswald had been shot. His relay of the incident was thus in some sense derived from the accounts of reporters around him.

But the story of Oswald's murder belonged mainly to television:

For the first time in the history of television, a real-life homicide was carried nationally on live television when millions of NBC-TV viewers saw the November 24 fatal shooting in Dallas of the man accused of assassinating JFK two days earlier ⁶².

The story played live on NBC. CBS recorded the event on a local camera. Although the network's New York headquarters were not featuring that camera on live feed, they were able to replay immediate coverage from a videotape monitor ⁶³. ABC, whose cameraperson had moved to the county jail, had to compensate with non-film accounts of the story ⁶⁴.

More than perhaps other moments of coverage within the assassination story, the presence of journalists was made an integral part of Oswald's murder. A caption under the photograph of Oswald sinking to the floor read "Dallas detectives struggle with Ruby as newsmen and others watch" ⁶⁵. Reporters recounted the cries of NBC correspondent Tom Pettit and other reporters on the scene. Replays of Pettit shouting "He's been shot, he's been shot, Lee Oswald has

been shot!" constituted one way to legitimate the journalist as eyewitness. It also referenced the institutional presence of the news organization to which he belonged.

A special section of Broadcasting magazine, issued one week after the assassination, carried the following description of Oswald's murder:

Oswald, flanked by detectives, stepped onto a garage ramp in the basement of the Dallas city jail and was taken toward an armored truck that was to take him to the county jail. Suddenly, out of the lower right hand corner of the TV screen, came the back of a man. A shot rang out, and Oswald gasped as he started to fall, clutching his side ⁶⁶.

A telling feature about this narrative rested in its second sentence, which was repeated verbatim in numerous prose accounts by journalists: "Suddenly, out of the lower right hand corner of the TV screen, came the back of a man". The juxtaposition of reality and televised image, by which Oswald's killer was seen coming out of the television screen, rather than a corner of the basement, paid the ultimate compliment to television's coverage of the event. In the case of Oswald's death, television was featured as offering a reality that seemed momentarily preferable to the real-life situation on which it was based.

Coverage of Oswald's murder thus somewhat resolved the uncertain eyewitness status of reporters that had

characterized their coverage of Kennedy's shooting. The adjunct technologies used by journalists authenticated them as eyewitnesses through various replays of the incident. The event, now camera-witnessed, emphasized journalists' presence, particularly that of news-photographers and television journalists, and brought it into assassination chronicles. Reporters would replay the murder across media with the assistance of tapes, recordings and photographs, their reactions becoming embedded through technology in the story's retelling.

THE MOURNING

Still another arena of coverage took shape in Washington. From Saturday onwards, the media began to attend to the growing processions of mourners. The fact that Kennedy's body would lie in state in the Capitol Rotunda before the funeral offered journalists a continuous stage of activities connected with the assassination story. Decisions to display those activities reflected far-reaching normative and organizational responses to the assassination story.

Newspapers cancelled columns of advertisements in order to make room for extra copy ⁶⁷. Parade magazine held up distribution of an issue that featured an article about Jackie Kennedy in the White House ⁶⁸. Networks cancelled commercials and substituted scheduled programming with

special coverage ⁶⁹. Making the Kennedy assassination their only story through Monday evening, television cameras focused non-stop on groups of citizens viewing the Presidential coffin. NBC broadcast continuously for 42 hours ⁷⁰. The long and continuous coverage provided a glimpse of what many observers called the best of television, the way it "transported the viewer to the scenes of news" ⁷¹. Coverage culminated in Kennedy's funeral on Monday, which by Nielson estimates constituted the heaviest day of television viewing within the assassination story ⁷².

Central to all moments of coverage within the assassination story was the journalist's role of consolation and reassurance. Covering the assassination turned journalists into effectors of unification and reassurance. The "individual catharsis, the laying of doubts to rest and the reinforcement of American norms" were more the rule than the exception ⁷³. Communication channels "reassured people that the functions of government were being carried on smoothly, that there was no conspiracy and that there was no further threat" ⁷⁴. Said TV broadcaster Edwin Newman, the night of the assassination:

We shall hear much in the next few days about the need to bind up the wounds of the nation, and about the need for all Americans to stand together. We may treat those words as empty

slogans or as real needs to be genuinely met. Whatever we do, that can be no guarantee that what happened today will not happen again. But what is within our power, we should do. And it is within our power to be more serious about our public life ⁷⁵.

James Reston's Washington column the day after the assassination was perhaps first to set out the parameters of journalistic consolation in print. Entitled "Why America Weeps", the column began as follows:

America wept tonight, not alone for its dead young President, but for itself. The grief was general, for somehow the worst in the nation had prevailed over the best...There is however consolation in the fact that while he was not given time to finish anything or even to realize his own potentialities, he has not left the nation in a state of crisis or danger ⁷⁶.

Celebrated by other journalists as "magnificent...its content better than reality", Reston's column was eventually regarded as a landmark piece of assassination coverage ⁷⁷. Other news organizations positioned the words of journalists in prominent places. One Colorado newspaper relocated the column of Walter Lippmann to the lead spot on the front page and ran his reaction alongside details of the assassination ⁷⁸.

The consoling role of journalists reached new heights with their coverage of the mourning and the funeral. Media presentations were saturated with messages of stability, unity and continuity. Mourning Kennedy was treated like the grieving of a personal friend. Political questions,

such as the possibility of disruption or threat implicit in the fact of the assassination, were thrust aside, even momentarily. The mood was one of continuity rather than disruption.

The sounds of mourning resounded long after the event concluded at Arlington National Cemetery. The day after Kennedy's funeral the New York Times recalled

the tattoo of muffled drums, the hoof beats of the horses, the measured cadence of the honor guards, a tolling of a distant bell, and the sound of bands as they played marches and hymns⁷⁹.

Sounds were broadcast with an immediacy that brought listeners into close contact with the event⁸⁰. The silence of journalists who catered to them reinforced their supportive role.

But the poignancy of the weekend belonged overall to television. It was ironic that television's triumph emerged from the fact that "the voices of the networks were silent"⁸¹. The New York Times reported that "when the day's history is written, the record of television as a medium will constitute a chapter of honor"⁸². Broadcasting magazine labelled television's continuous coverage mature, dignified, expert and professional⁸³. "Touches of pure television", in addition to the murder of Oswald, included Jackie Kennedy kneeling in the rotunda with Caroline to kiss the flag on the coffin, John Jr.

saluting the caisson outside St. Mathews cathedral, the towering figure of de Gaulle beside the tiny frame of Haile Selassie, and the riderless horse ²⁴. In many of those moments, the "good taste of television asserted itself as the cameras veered away to ensure privacy"; in others, the cameras visually anticipated what the audiences wanted to see ²⁵.

Thus the ability of journalists to tell the story of the assassination of John F. Kennedy was realized through a number of discrete moments of coverage. Some of these moments - such as the funeral or the capture of Lee Harvey Oswald - constituted professional triumphs. Others - notably the shooting of President Kennedy - were fraught with conduct that shadowed professional standards. In the latter case, formalized notions of journalistic practice were rattled in favor of journalists' ability to respond instantly to unexpected circumstances: The lack of access to sources produced an overemphasis on activities at the hospital, even though journalists' decorum at the hospital press conference helped generate one of the most contested readings of Kennedy's head wound. Coverage of the swearing-in was spotty, uneven and stilted, and was hailed for its photographic record of the event by photojournalists rather than its capture in prose. The

capture of Oswald posed serious questions about the intrusive nature of journalistic practice.

This suggests that journalists' ability to present coverage of the assassination as a story of professional triumph was not supported by journalists' activities on the scene. It was, however, embedded in the narratives by which they later reconstructed their activities. In retelling their coverage, journalists thereby emerged as professionals. Rhetorical legitimation was invoked as an antidote to what was basically a situation of journalistic failure.

Already by the end of the assassination weekend, journalists had begun to refine the story in the direction of a larger narrative. CBS' Charles Collingwood gave the following brushed-up scenario of the Kennedy shooting Monday evening. By then, he was armed with a still photograph of the incident:

This was the scene in the big open Lincoln a split second after that shot. The President is slumping to his left. Mrs. Kennedy, half rising, seems to stretch out an encircling arm. Governor Connally, in the seat ahead of the President, is half-turned toward the President. He's either been hit himself or is about to be. At this moment, no one knew how seriously the President had been wounded. But from this moment, events in Dallas moved with dizzying speed **.

Collingwood's account differed considerably from the wire service reports which television correspondents had delivered verbatim just four days earlier. In the later

version, the photograph of the shooting provided the focal point of Collingwood's story. His familiarity with its details hid the fact that he had not eyewitnessed the event. The photograph legitimated him as an eyewitness - if not of the event, then of its record. In this way, the reconstructive work bolstered his partial authority for the event. It also embedded the media's role in telling the story within the event's retelling. As Collingwood said on the evening of November 25, "in this day of television and radio, the word spread quickly. Work in offices and homes came to a standstill, as people sat transfixed by television and radio sets" ⁴⁷. It was a point that not many accounts of the assassination left out.

It is therefore no surprise that what journalists said they did in covering the assassination story often did not match their original activities. The fact that many problems of coverage were worked out through the long weekend - with, for example, a lack of eyewitness status resolved at both the funeral and at Oswald's murder; a need to access high-ranking sources resolved by the eyewitness accounts of bystanders about Kennedy's death; the pressure to verify facts resolved as the more central facts of Kennedy's death or LBJ's swearing-in were confirmed; and disjunctions about the pace and unevenness

of information relay neutralized as events gave way to the funeral, where little information-gathering was necessary - all suggest that within the larger context of the assassination weekend, the individual mishaps which characterized moments of coverage were recast as incidental parts of a larger drama.

This suggests that already by Monday many journalists had begun to retell the event through the perspective of authorized chroniclers, their accounts substituting the uncertain words of bystanders with more certain authorized observations. Armed with bystanders' eyewitness accounts, amateur photographs, preliminary reports offered by the police and medical establishments, and later filmed chronicles, journalists began to systematically counter their problematic authority for the event through their retellings. Because their retellings contextualized discrete moments of coverage within one coherent narrative, they blurred what was and was not "professional" about coverage. What constituted a "professional" would emerge not from singular events like the Kennedy shooting but from the larger narrative into which they were eventually recast. This made journalists into authoritative spokespeople for the story in its entirety, not just for the discrete moments of coverage they personally saw and heard, or in the worst of cases,

did not see and did not hear. More important, their retellings began to reveal characteristics of the larger discourses into which stories of the assassination would eventually be co-opted.

The fact that original assassination accounts were constructed from discrete moments of coverage, each bearing different journalistic goals, thereby had less impact due to journalists' reconstructive work. Once recontextualized as one overall assassination narrative, the different problems concerning journalistic practice and authority that emerged during the weekend had little bearing on the general tone of the assassination coverage. Journalists reconstructed their role in covering the assassination by assuming responsibility for the narrative in its entirety. This allowed them to assume responsibility both for the work of other journalists and for coverage in which they played no role. It gave them a credible role in the larger narrative, regardless of what they personally did, saw or heard. Technology - photographs, eyewitness accounts and, later, films - assisted them by giving them a technological base on which to conceal or offset the parameters of their (often false) authority for the event. This was essential for their emergence as an interpretive community.

CONSOLATION VERSUS INFORMATION

These pages have suggested that in recounting their part in covering Kennedy's assassination, reporters created boundaries of the event that went beyond the actual moments during which the President was killed. Adopting synecdochal representations of the story, they reconstructed the event as one long narrative, that began Friday morning, when Kennedy and his wife were met with bouquets of red roses at Love Airfield in Dallas, and ended Monday afternoon, when the slain President was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery. The fact that this stretch of four days has entered the collective consciousness and has been perpetuated by reporters as one story within its repertoire of collective memory certainly lent closure to the events of Kennedy's death. But it also imposed closure on the meanings behind journalistic presence within such a story. It made their presence meaningful not only because of the information they provided but because of their ability to narrate a gripping public drama. Their talents of information-provision were thus recast as a rhetorical exercise, much like the validation of their authority had in essence always been.

This set up a situation by which journalists could justifiably legitimate themselves as an authoritative,

interpretive community. The ability of journalists to act as masters of ceremonies and play an active part in healing the nation is certainly a capacity they played well, exemplified by the dignified mode of conduct exhibited by many reporters covering Kennedy's funeral or the temporary abandonment of investigatory procedure for reverence ^{aa}. But this analysis has shown that even consolation was only part of the picture. On a number of counts, journalists provided neither information nor consolation. Within many of the moments of coverage that comprised the assassination story, journalists failed to align themselves with either the formalized professional standards that guided them during regular news coverage, or standards of improvisation and instinct, the "what a story" category implicitly reserved for special event coverage.

Yet tales of their coverage have endured. In part their lasting significance rested with technology. It is not coincidental that the parameters of journalists' memories of the assassination parallel the coverage lent the event by television. Professional memories begin and end in direct correspondence with the coverage provided by television journalists, adopting the four-day time span that lent the event continuity. It is in these terms that journalists became, in the terminology of Elihu Katz and

Daniel Dayan, performers of a media event, putting the American people collectively through its paces of shock, grief and reconciliation ²².

The fact, however, that the technological parameters of television were adopted by journalists in reconstructing the event raises serious questions about the degree to which their authority for telling it was originally justified. The unroutinized and unpredictable conditions for coverage, coupled with institutional demands for information and the shadows laid over normative forms of journalistic practice - access to sources, eyewitness status, or fact verification - embedded problems of journalistic authority in much of the assassination coverage. The settings by which journalists could experiment with improvisory and instinctual forms of professional behavior also increased their receptiveness to new media technologies. That over time they would perpetuate the narratives offered by one technology over others belied the extent to which their professionalism depended on the medium of television. Technology, in a sense, stabilized the improvisory nature of their professional practice.

It is worth noting that journalists' dependence on television was also illustrated by the relatively unproblematic role of radio: In journalistic accounts of

the assassination, radio was rarely mentioned or acknowledged, even when both television and print journalists borrowed the words of its reporters. It was also rarely identified, either by medium, network or individual reporter. Journalists recast radio as having played a minor role in covering the assassination story, literally erasing it from institutional recollections because of the implicit importance they ascribed to television.

The master narrative of Kennedy's death has thus told of "covering the body," in both its literal and figurative forms. Its implicit message is one of solace and consolation, lending closure to events which might have otherwise remained difficult and incomprehensible. But the sub-text behind this narrative, presented alongside such messages of comfort and consolation, has tried to forward a story of journalistic professionalism. Much retelling of Kennedy's assassination has thus been invested from the beginning with legitimating journalists, and particularly television journalists, as professionals. Journalists' memories of the assassination are narratives that have celebrated their own professionalism. This chapter has shown that the actual coverage of Kennedy's assassination was fraught with conduct that made formalized professional standards problematic. Authority for the assassination

story, then, which journalists might have assumed for their coverage of events, was rarely, if ever, grounded in practice. Instead, it was grounded in rhetoric, in the narratives by which journalists have given themselves a central role as the assassination story's authorized retellers.

In this chapter, I have examined the basic narrative corpus by which journalists recounted their part in the assassination at the time that it happened. These narratives have revealed that the assassination coverage was in many cases a situation of problematic journalistic professionalism. Journalists turned their failures into triumphs already by the end of the assassination weekend. This means that the reconstructive work of journalists was part of the assassination story from its inception and was basic to their emergence as authorized spokespeople for the assassination story.

The accounts presented here constitute only one level of an intricate network of recollections, reminiscences and reconstructions by which the assassination story has been told and perpetuated. Over time, the central and authoritative presence of journalists has been firmly embedded in the tales by which they retold the assassination story. Journalists have come to strategically use the assassination to legitimate

themselves as professionals, transforming it as much into a story about American journalists as about America's 34th President. This chapter has traced the narrative corpus against which such a process began.

¹ Gaye Tuchman, Making News (New York: The Free Press, 1978), p. 39ff.

² Tuchman, pp. 59-63.

³ Herbert Gans, Deciding What's News (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), p. 157.

⁴ William Manchester, The Death of a President (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 329. I have elected to use Manchester's account of the assassination to set the chronological background against which journalists' tales were initially told.

⁵ Warren Report: Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), p. 201, henceforth referred to as the Warren Commission Report.

⁶ Tom Wicker, "A Reporter Must Trust His Instinct," Saturday Review (1/11/64), p. 81.

⁷ Darwin Payne, "The Press Corps and the Kennedy Assassination," Journalism Monographs (February, 1970).

⁸ Unidentified radio newscaster (11/22/63), quoted on "25th Anniversary of JFK Assassination," Good Morning America, ABC News (11/22/88).

⁹ Robert MacNeil, NBC News (11/22/63).

¹⁰ Wicker, Saturday Review, 1964, p. 81.

¹¹ Tom Wicker, New York Times (11/23/63), p. 2.

¹² New York Times (11/23/63), p. 5.

¹³ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁶ "The Reporters' Story," Columbia Journalism Review (Winter, 1964), p. 8.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 5, 8.

¹⁸ Editor and Publisher (12/7/63), p. 10.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 14.

²⁰ Manchester, 1967, p. 167.

²¹ "The Assassination," Columbia Journalism Review (Winter, 1964), p. 27.

²² Wilbur Schramm, "Communication in Crisis," in Bradley S. Greenberg and Edwin Parker (eds.), The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1965), p. 11.

²³ Editor and Publisher (11/30/63), p. 14.

- 24 Walter Cronkite, CBS News (11/22/63).
- 25 Unidentified radio newscaster (11/22/63), quoted on JFK, ABC News Documentary (11/11/83).
- 26 Schramm, in Greenberg and Parker, 1965, p. 4.
- 27 Manchester, 1967, p. 190.
- 28 Richard Van der Karr, "How Dallas TV Stations Covered Kennedy Shooting," Journalism Quarterly (Autumn, 1965).
- 29 Wicker, Saturday Review, 1964, p. 82.
- 30 Elmer Lower, "A Television Network Gathers the News" in Greenberg and Parker, 1965, p. 71.
- 31 New York Times (11/23/63), p. 2.
- 32 Manchester, 1967, pp. 222, 242.
- 33 Ibid, p. 222.
- 34 Wicker, New York Times (11/23/64), p. 2.
- 35 Wicker, Saturday Review, 1964, p. 82.
- 36 Ibid, p. 82.
- 37 This chapter attends only to those aspects of the assassination story which figured prominently in chronicles of journalistic practice. Other units of coverage - such as the murder of Officer Tippit or the apprehension of Oswald - played an important part in defining the tone of coverage but were less central to discussions of appropriate journalistic practice.
- 38 Manchester, 1967, p. 222.
- 39 "The Reporters' Story," Columbia Journalism Review, 1964, p. 14.
- 40 Jim Bishop, The Day Kennedy Was Shot (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 266.
- 41 "The Reporters' Story," Columbia Journalism Review, 1964, p. 15.
- 42 Payne, 1970, p. 7.
- 43 "The Reporters' Story," Columbia Journalism Review, 1964, p. 16.
- 44 Editor and Publisher (11/30/63), p. 67.
- 45 New York Times, (11/23/63), p. 2.
- 46 David Brinkley and Chet Huntley, NBC News (11/22/63).
- 47 Charles Roberts, The Truth About the Assassination (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1967).
- 48 Warren Commission Report, 1964, p. 202.
- 49 Ibid, p. 208.
- 50 Gary Paul Gates, Airtime (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).
- 51 Warren Commission Report, 1964, p. 213. Because the Warren Report provides the most comprehensive step by step account of how journalists covered Oswald's murder, I have elected to use it here in providing a chronology of events around his death.
- 52 Ibid, p. 216.
- 53 Ibid, p. 227.

- 54 Tom Pettit, "The Television Story in Dallas" in Greenberg and Parker, 1965, p. 63.
- 55 Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 46.
- 56 Newsweek (12/2/63), p. 21.
- 57 Payne, 1970, p. 12.
- 58 Editor and Publisher (11/30/63), p. 16.
- 59 Ibid, p. 17.
- 60 Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 37.
- 61 Ike Pappas, quoted in On Trial, London Weekend Television documentary (11/22/88-11/23/88).
- 62 Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 46. Oswald's murder was actually not the first murder on television. The closest parallel occurred in October 1960, when a Japanese political leader was knifed on a public stage in Tokyo. Video-taped recordings were played back on Japanese television ten minutes later [New York Times (11/25/63), p. 11. However the large-scale audiences which viewed Oswald's death were considerably larger and more attentive than were those of the earlier incident.
- 63 Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 46.
- 64 Gates, 1978, p. 254.
- 65 Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 46.
- 66 Ibid, p. 46.
- 67 Editor and Publisher (11/30/63), p. 6.
- 68 Ibid, p. 73.
- 69 Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 36. The flip side of this reorganization was the pressure brought to bear on news organizations unable to do so. How they justified it was exemplified in the following office memo published on the front pages of The Progressive:
- "The December issue was irrevocably in the mails early on November 22. If you felt it was strange that the December issue, reaching you in late November or early December, carried not a word of the world's irrevocable loss of JFK, please understand how it happened. Daily newspapers, despite crushing problems of their own, faced no such problems. Weekly magazines could reach their readers in a matter of days after the tragedy. Other monthlies fared worse than The Progressive, or somewhat better, depending on their publication and mailing dates. It is a minor irony that we had advanced our mailing date to Friday November 22, to get the magazine to the post-office before the weekend, as a way of overcoming the expected slowness of the mails during the following week of the Thanksgiving holiday" (1/1/64, p. 1).
- 70 Broadcasting (12/2/63).
- 71 Schramm, in Greenberg and Parker, 1965, p. 12.
- 72 Nielson Co., TV Responses to the Death of a President (New York:1963).

- 73 Schramm, in Greenberg and Parker, 1965, p. 25.
- 74 Greenberg and Parker, 1965, p. 382.
- 75 Edwin Newman, NBC News (11/22/88).
- 76 New York Times (11/23/63), pp.1, 7.
- 77 Richard L. Tobin, "If You Can Keep Your Head When All About You....," Saturday Review (12/14/63), p. 54. On July 31, 1987, ABC broadcast a "Person of the Week" segment on Reston, during which it hailed that specific column.
- 78 Editor and Publisher (12/7/63), p. 44.
- 79 New York Times (11/22/63), p. 11.
- 80 Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 37.
- 81 Ibid, p. 54.
- 82 New York Times (11/26/63), p. 11.
- 83 Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 50).
- 84 Tobin, Saturday Review, 1963, p. 53.
- 85 New York Times (11/26/63), p. 11.
- 86 Charles Collingwood, CBS News (11/25/63).
- 87 Ibid (11/25/63).
- 88 This point is discussed in Elihu Katz and Daniel Dayan, Media Events (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
- 89 Katz and Dayan, forthcoming.

CHAPTER FIVE

"COVERING THE BODY"
THROUGH PROFESSIONAL ASSESSMENT

Journalists' reconstructive work in turning the assassination story into a marker of professional accomplishment began in the weeks immediately following Kennedy's death. Particularly in professional and trade circles, marking assassination coverage as professional triumph had bearing on the collective sentiments that prevailed among journalists. Journalists' reconstructive work signalled the parameters of appropriate journalistic practice through stories of triumph, failure, irony, mishap and tragedy, all replayed as integral parts of assassination retellings.

In the following pages, I explore how journalists, faced with problems of professionalism in covering Kennedy's death, endeavored to cast their practices as professional. I consider how journalists professionally assessed their coverage at the time by emphasizing the improvisory and instinctual behavior that helped them emerge triumphant and downplaying angles problematic to formalized notions of professionalism. This chapter first considers the narratives that appeared shortly after the assassination in mediated discourse, and then the narratives that appeared in trade publications and

professional forums, both of which showed how journalists stretched boundaries of professional behavior and journalistic practice in order to legitimate themselves as authorized spokespeople for the assassination story.

ASSESSING COVERAGE THROUGH MASS MEDIA

In the media, journalists assessed their coverage of the assassination story in two main ways: One way problematized the limits of journalism and journalistic practice through stories of mishap; the other way paid tribute to those same limitations through stories of triumph.

STORIES OF MISHAP

The fact that the assassination story placed "perhaps the heaviest burden in modern times on the news-gathering capabilities of the American press" ¹ figured directly in journalistic stories of mishap. For its circumstances - the disorder, frequency and salience of independent moments of coverage, lack of access to sources, inability to verify facts - called for coping strategies among journalists. They needed to depend more on improvisory and instinctual behavior than on formalized notions of journalistic practice, and their stories of mishap reflected this dependence.

To an extent coping strategies were necessitated by the event's uniqueness, and the fact that it generated unending demands for information. New York Times reporter Tom Wicker heard a car radio blare news of the President's death while he was milling about outside Parkland Memorial Hospital. "No authority," he said later of the broadcast. "No supporting evidence, but I believed it immediately because in that situation it sounded right and it sounded true" 2. Elsewhere he said that he knew of

no reporter who was there who has a clear and orderly picture of that surrealistic afternoon; it is still a matter of bits and pieces thrown hastily into something like a whole 3.

The chief editor of The Reporter displayed a similar attempt to cope when he justified his "numbed grief" expressed in a column written "on November 22, a few hours after the President died" 4. Practices and behavior which figured in assessments signalled journalists' ability to respond instantly to unexpected circumstances, bend established rules and procedures on a hunch and be correct in doing so. This helped journalists deal with mishaps by raising questions about certain givens of practice and rearranging the significance attached to them.

- MISSING THE SCOOP

One given was the journalistic "scoop". The fact that coverage of Kennedy's shooting was accomplished by

amateurs, not professionals, denied journalists the major scoop of the assassination story: Prose accounts readily incorporated the words of eyewitnesses as journalists tried to piece together what had happened; amateurs, notably dressmaker Abraham Zapruder, Mary Muchmore and Orville Nix, similarly recorded the shooting on film, outpacing the "TV cameras recording the motorcade (which) didn't get usable pictures" ⁶; and still photographic evidence of the Kennedy shooting was provided by amateur photographers Mary Moorman and David Miller, who captured the moment with simple Polaroid cameras, in what one trade publication said was distanced, unprofessional and unfocused footage ⁷. Other than the Associated Press' shot of the Secret Service agent sprinting onto the back of the Kennedy automobile, professional photographers admitted that they "never had a chance to take a picture" ⁸.

These facts challenged the professionalism of journalists covering the story. In order to cast coverage of Kennedy's death as a story of professional triumph, it thus became necessary to bypass the importance of "the scoop" by redefining what it meant. Goals thereby moved from generating first-hand information to collecting it second-hand: UPI, for example, "claimed it provided the

first film for TV of President Kennedy's assassination when it sold sequences shot by Dallas amateur photographer Mary Muchmore to WNEW-TV New York" ⁹. Life was hailed for running Zapruder's sequence as a four-page photographic spread in its November 29 issue. In both cases, the poor alternative this offered to providing the footage themselves was not visibly problematized: For example, in the text accompanying the pictures in Life, Zapruder's name was not mentioned, and the sequence was labelled a "remarkable and exclusive series of pictures" which displayed the details of Kennedy's death "for the first time" ¹⁰.

Professional photographer Richard Stolley recounted how Life sent him to engineer purchase of the Zapruder film. He observed that

(Zapruder) was gentle with us, almost apologetic that it was a middle-aged dressmaker and not one of the world-famous photographers with the Presidential press party who had provided the only filmed account of the President's murder ¹⁰.

Bidding over the heads of UPI, the Associated Press and other news magazines, Life paid \$150,000 for all rights to the film. The purchase was obviously engineered in order to boost magazine sales, but it also corrected a basically flawed journalistic performance, redressing with money what Life's staff had missed in practice. Interestingly, it also highlighted the importance of technology, for Life

bought the technologically-produced record of the assassination, not the coverage itself.

Similar attempts to offset missing the scoop surrounded still photography. James Featherston, a reporter for the Dallas Times-Herald, told of obtaining a Polaroid photograph of the shooting from a woman bystander, although some reports held that he "stole" or took it by force ¹¹. Photographs were sometimes published without mentioning the amateur photographers who took them, a violation of commonly-followed rules of acknowledgement. And certain narratives by which photography's role in events was retold recast the missed scoop of news photographers as a professional triumph: For example, a 1968 Quill article about "Professionalism in News Photography" featured a picture of bystanders stretched atop the grassy knoll near the assassination scene, under the following caption:

Seconds after the John F. Kennedy assassination bullets hit their mark, news photographers kept on working as bystanders "hit the dust" for protection. Photographers, including the one who took this picture, reacted instantly as professionals should ¹².

Original accounts of the shooting showed that this was not the case, for with one exception photographers missed the Kennedy shooting. It was telling that recasting this mishap as a professional triumph was engineered by a trade publication, where the need for professional legitimation

may have been more salient than in other types of publications.

Discomfort over missing the major scoop of the assassination weekend was reflected in interviews conducted with journalists one year later. They held that most news organizations - lauded for their good taste in not having shown explicit photographs or footage of Kennedy's assassination - would have displayed the footage had it been available, a judgment borne out by their coverage of Oswald's murder:

the American public beyond Dallas did not witness the assassination of the President simply because the television cameras had not been set up in the fateful block and because film of the event was not available until some time later, when its news value had changed to historical value ¹³.

Missing the footage thus punctured a hole in journalists' professional personae that Friday.

Yet the importance of missing the scoop was redefined with the assistance of technology. Technology made it possible for journalists to turn first-order collections of information into second-order collections of the information gathered by others. Journalists adjusted "missing the scoop" into a second-order practice, by which they bought, stole or borrowed the records generated by other journalists of their own scoops. Technology - which

made such an adjustment possible - helped journalists hold onto their professional identities.

- BEING A SECOND-HAND WITNESS

Tales of mishap also centered on a feature that has since become a mainstay of on-the-spot journalism, the eyewitness report. Questions of eyewitness testimony - and who was sufficiently competent and authorized to provide it - were complicated by the large numbers of people who had informally gathered to watch the Presidential motorcade. Journalists mingled with the crowds, and their observations were countered or supported by lay testimony. This fact put the eyewitness report, as a specific form of journalistic record-keeping, in a problematic light. Journalists provided eyewitness testimony in their roles as bystanders or spectators to the assassination, rather than as professional journalists. Eyewitness testimony provided the details of the crime before it was called upon to realize professional aims.

The effect that this had on journalistic notions of observation, seen by journalists as a professional activity, was tangible. In Newsweek correspondent Charles Roberts' eyes, journalists were supposed to be "trained professional observers"¹⁴. Yet few journalists actually saw the President being killed. Few had access to circumstances which could improve their perspective. As

William Manchester later said, reporters "weren't learning much where they were...They were dependent on the cooperation of colleagues and tolerant passers-by who hopefully would be reliable" ¹⁵. While the inability to provide eyewitness testimony about the Kennedy shooting was partly mitigated by the provision of eyewitness testimony by others, its absence nonetheless left a mark of amateurism on overall journalistic accomplishments of the weekend. This made the authority of journalistic accounts problematic.

This was admitted readily by some journalists. "If I learned anything in Dallas that day, besides what it's like to be numbed by shock and grief, it was that eyewitness testimony is the worst kind," said Charles Roberts ¹⁶. In his 1967 book on the assassination, Roberts tore apart the authority of the eyewitness report as a genre. The "more that is written about Dallas on the basis of eyewitness recollection, the more my suspicion is confirmed," he said ¹⁷. Tracing his own faulty recall of details associated with the President's car, the grassy knoll, the inauguration, he called eyewitnessing the "worst kind" of record-keeping available to journalists:

To be a witness to the events that followed the final shot was like witnessing the proverbial explosion in a shingle factory and not knowing, at each split second, where to look. I would hesitate to testify under oath to some events I saw peripherally. With hindsight, I now realize

that many of the words I frantically took down from the mouths of witnesses during the next few hours were the product of imagination, shock, confusion, or from something much worse - the macabre desire of some bystanders to be identified with a great tragedy, or to pretend greater first-hand knowledge of the event than they actually possess ^{1a}.

Roberts complained that eyewitness testimony provided incomplete, faulty, subjective data that could be easily overturned.

Yet Roberts carefully documented his own eyewitness stature. His book was billed as an "eyewitness reporter's documented point-by-point study" ^{1b}. Its back flap displayed a picture of his press credentials under the title the "official White House badge which (he) wore during the assassination." The flap also told readers that

(Roberts) was in the first press bus of the Kennedy motorcade when the shots rang out. He was one of only two reporters who witnessed the swearing-in of Lyndon Johnson aboard Air Force One at Dallas and then accompanied the new President, his wife and Mrs. Kennedy to Washington aboard the plane bearing the the body of the slain president.

Roberts' book bore a picture of the Johnson swearing-in under the caption "standing behind the President is Charles Roberts, author of this book" ^{1c}. The same picture was reproduced in Newsweek with a thick white arrow superimposed in the direction of Roberts' head, under the caption, "The long voyage home: Charles Roberts (arrow) covers LBJ's swearing-in" ^{1d}. All of this suggests that

while Roberts was ambivalent about his eyewitness status, he was also careful to document it.

Roberts was not the only reporter to admit such an ambivalence. Tom Wicker, writing in the New York Times the day after the assassination, pointed out that

most reporters in the press buses were too far back to see the shooting...It was noted that the President's car had picked up speed and raced away, but reporters were not aware that anything serious had occurred ~~was~~.

Wicker went on to lament the faulty vision which most reporters in the motorcade shared. Yet Wicker's own eyewitness account was systematically circulated as one of the better eyewitness reports of the assassination coverage.

Eyewitnessing was thus invoked both as a basis for journalistic authority and as a faulty method of journalistic record-keeping. This ambivalence suggests that journalists were unclear about the part to be played by this practice, and hints at why the reordering of certain professional practices was necessitated by Kennedy's death.

Some journalists tried to overcome the eyewitness report's unreliable status by constructing their authority for the assassination story in other ways. One alternative, mentioned earlier, was providing synecdochal representations of what had happened, making the part

"stand in" for the whole. Another was concentrating on those aspects of the assassination story which either engaged journalists' observation in a professional fashion - as in Oswald's murder - or made eyewitnessing irrelevant - as in the funeral. This made problems with the eyewitness report less central to the overall assassination record.

It is also important to note that journalists bolstered the unreliability of eyewitnessing through technology. Technological output, notably photographs and films, produced a record of journalistic presence that authenticated their eyewitness status to events of the assassination weekend. Due to the preservation capabilities they offered, reporters' eyewitness status was generally upheld within the larger assassination narrative, including footage that "witnessed" Oswald's shooting, for example. By concentrating on events which visibly featured journalists as eyewitnesses, being a second-hand witness became less of a mishap in the assassination's overall narrative than it might have been. Again, this stressed how technology helped journalists uphold their professional identities by redefining givens about journalistic practice.

- INTERFERING WITH EVENTS

The possibility that journalists had interfered with events of the assassination weekend was also aired by journalists. In particular, stories of this kind of mishap typified tales of covering Oswald's murder. Journalists were faulted on three points - for circulating half-truths, prematurely establishing Oswald's guilt, and possibly facilitating his murder. Newsweek magazine attested to the invalidity of Oswald's statement that he had not killed anyone with the statement, "This was a lie" ²³. Following publication of a New York Times banner headline which read "President's Assassin Shot to Death" ²⁴, one observer lamented the fact that the press had taken to calling Oswald "the assassin" rather than "the alleged assassin". The facts were insufficient to prove his guilt, contended Richard Tobin in the Saturday Review:

Lee Harvey Oswald had not yet legally been indicted, much less convicted, of President Kennedy's assassination. The New York Times had no right whatever under American law or the standards of journalistic fair play to call the man the "President's assassin"...What did the Times' own banner line do if not prejudice without trial, jury or legal verdict? ²⁵

The headline prompted Times editor Turner Catledge to admit his paper had erred ²⁶.

Journalistic interference in the events surrounding Oswald was problematic for reporters who publicly questioned the viability of journalistic presence. Their

discussions largely centered on technology and the so-called "intrusive equipment" of television journalists. Marya Mannes penned her complaints in The Reporter a few weeks after the assassination:

The clutter of newsmen and their microphones in the basement corridor. The milling and talking, and then those big fat men bringing the thin pasty prisoner, and then the back of a man with a hat, and then Oswald doubled, and then pandemonium, scuffles, shouts and young Tom Truitt and his microphone in and out of the picture trying to find out what happened. Questions seethed through my mind: How in God's name could the police expose a President's assassin to this jumble of people at close range? 27

Ultimately, however, journalists' interference in the events around Oswald was addressed by quarters outside of the journalistic community, when the Warren Commission took issue with it.

Interfering with events posed particular problems for journalists on the assassination story due to the fact that television was still an uncertain medium for news. Other reporters were unused to the cables and camera equipment which television journalists brought with them. As ASNE (American Society of Newspaper Editors) head Herbert Brucker maintained, the murder was

related to police capitulation in the glare of publicity...to suit the convenience of the news media...(the problem grew) principally out of something new in journalism...the intrusion of the reporter himself in the news 28.

These particular points monopolized public appraisals of the assassination coverage for months following the event. But they were absented from subsequent journalistic accounts of the assassination, a point showing what journalists were willing to perpetuate about their assassination coverage. Over time, interfering with the events around Oswald did not fit collective perceptions about themselves.

- SUCCUMBING TO TECHNOLOGY

Stories of lesser mishaps ranged from minute detail that was wrongfully conveyed to entire stories that never made it to print or broadcast. These included misquotations and inaccuracies, contradictory reports about the make of the gun, the number of shots, the number of assassins, and the location from which the assassin had fired ²⁹. Even whether or not Jackie Kennedy's skirt had been spattered with blood was disputed ³⁰.

Many mishaps had to do with technology, and the fact that journalists could not always master it as needed. Dallas TV reporter Ron Reiland, "the only reporter" to accompany police to the Texas theater where Oswald had hidden, "reversed the process for indoor filming, suffering one of the hardest scoop losses of the period" ³¹. NBC's Bill Ryan read verbatim from AP bulletins held by technicians at his feet and held up AP photographs of

the motorcade because there was "no videotape and no film". A phone patch to NBC correspondent Robert MacNeil at Parkland Hospital failed because of overloaded circuits ²². It took CBS nearly 20 minutes to join Walter Cronkite's face with his voice, a feat which encouraged network officials to later install a special "flash studio" facilitating simultaneous visual and audio transmission ²³.

One reporter's story of technological mishap was often another's triumph. Within a general air of cooperation, tales of rivalry and competition nonetheless found their way into retellings. After the shots were fired at Kennedy, UPI's Merriman Smith and Jack Bell of the Associated Press rushed for a telephone to report the story. Seated in the front seat of the pool car, Smith accomplished the task first by radiophone. William Manchester provided the following reconstructed account of that incident:

(Smith decided that) the longer he could keep Bell out of touch with an AP operator, the longer that lead would be. So he continued to talk. He dictated one take, two takes, three, four. Indignant, Bell rose from the center of the rear seat and demanded the phone. Smith stalled. He insisted that the Dallas operator read back the dictation. The wires overhead, he argued, might have interfered with his transmission. No one was deceived by that. Everyone in the car could hear the cackling of the UPI operator's voice. The relay was perfect. Bell, red-faced and screaming, tried to wrest the radiophone from him. Smith thrust it between

his knees and crouched under the dash...(then) surrendered the phone to Bell, and at that moment, it went dead ³⁴.

There was also a flip side to the triumphs of technology for the reporters who experienced them. As NBC reporter Tom Pettit said of the minutes after his live televised broadcast of Oswald's murder, "when other reporters were free to go inside police headquarters to get more information, I still was tied to the live microphone" ³⁵. Pettit saw himself limited by the very instruments of technology which had earned him, in the words of Broadcasting magazine, a "place in television history" ³⁶.

Stories of journalistic mishap during the assassination were thus largely thematized through technology: On one hand, normative upsets - missing scoops, becoming second-hand witnesses or interfering with events - were construed as having been redressed by technology, which often facilitated additional standards of action that allowed journalists to hold onto their professional identities. On the other hand, journalists admitted succumbing to technology. All of this gave journalists an extensive foundation on which to consider standards of journalistic practice and authority. Through their stories of mishap, they raised questions about the boundaries of journalistic coverage appropriate to the

event. The unpredictability, salience and frequency with which large and crucial issues crossed their paths generated questions about the degree of authority they could comfortably and legitimately claim for interpreting the assassination story. Stories of mishap allowed them to air concerns about the insufficiency of formalized notions of practice. This helped journalists bring issues of their authority for events into the forefront of discussions about covering the assassination.

STORIES OF TRIUMPH: BEING "THE FIRST", "THE BEST" AND "THE ONLY"

Journalists did not only see the assassination story as being problematic, however. Many of its angles were upheld as triumphs of coverage. Stories of triumph were cast against the larger background in which coverage took place, with its emphasis on unprecedentedness and disorder. Whereas tales of mishap allowed journalists to air concerns about formalized notions of professionalism, in tales of triumph they valorized on-the-spot judgment calls and hunches as signs of the "true" professional. These stories generally assumed one of three forms - "being the first", "being the best" and "being the only".

- BEING THE FIRST

The Kennedy assassination offered parameters of action which were on the one hand unpredictable and

unroutinized, and on the other, the focus of extended and exclusive media attention. Such circumstances gave journalists the opportunity to implement a series of "firsts" in covering the story. Authority was derived from cases where such practices prevailed.

Conceptions of "being the first" referenced the presentational style that remained after the Kennedy story had been told. "Being the first" in the event of Kennedy's death differed from media presentations of other events. For example, while radio's role in the death of President Harding challenged existing notions of journalistic practice, it did not produce the kind of sustained stage that Kennedy's assassination did. Many journalists had never before covered the death of a President. Television journalists had not yet had the opportunity to play a central part in presenting such an event, and certainly not in the long, protracted manner of the assassination weekend ³⁷.

This set up alternate parameters by which journalists could cover the assassination story: On one hand, most journalists lacked the professional precedents to help them rehearse the event. They also lacked identifiable markers by which to cue their moves ³⁸. On the other, the sustained nature of media coverage during the assassination offered them the possibility of acting

differently for extended periods of time. The quality of "firstness" which the Kennedy assassination offered was therefore unique not only because it set up circumstances that were different from normal coverage but because it sustained them.

Differences in journalistic practice generated by these sustained settings added new dimensions to notions about appropriate professional practice. For example, interrupting scheduled programming and sustaining the interruption, for example, was a different kind of "first" that directly enhanced the stature of the broadcasting networks capable of accomplishing it. Similar feats took place in other media - replating magazine copy or issuing second newspaper editions.

The event's newness was best articulated by then-NBC reporter Robert MacNeil on the eve of the assassination:

This is one of those days that a reporter finds himself musing about when he's half asleep. Sometimes in a plane. Your mind drifts as you prepare for the big story. What is likely to happen at this moment is that sometimes your mind drifts to the most extreme thing that could happen but you hastily dismiss it, because the most extreme thing never does happen. You pull your mind back to the ordinary things that always do happen ³².

When the most extreme thing did happen, journalists were faced with finding new ways to crank out authoritative interpretations of why it did. This was because "old ways" were rendered unhelpful, with sources unavailable,

verification unworkable. At the same time, institutional pressures on journalists to produce information persisted. Providing information thus became as much an institutional necessity as a professional goal, a circumstance embedded in the demands created by new technologies.

- VALORIZING IMPROVISATION. Journalists told of accomplishing work tasks by improvising, redoing completed tasks and reorganizing around last-minute changes. When local WBAP-TV reporter Robert Welsh was refused entry to Parkland Hospital by the police, Journalism Quarterly hailed the way he drove over the curb through the barricade and up to the hospital entrance ⁴⁰. Meg Greenfield recalled how stories were "hysterically remade on deadline" ⁴¹. NBC correspondent Bill Ryan was preparing the 2.00 p.m. radio newscast when

an unnerved staffer burst into his office, shouting, "Get back to TV right away! The President has been shot!" It was 1.45 p.m., and NBC was off the air for its daily noon break...Technicians had to hastily rig a patchwork of telephone lines before NBC could tell America that President JFK had been shot in Dallas. Even then, NBC couldn't tell an anxious nation whether Kennedy was alive or dead. It didn't know. In 1963, there were no satellite links, no microwave relays, no you-heard-it-here-first reports from on-the-scene correspondents. Seated in a closet-size studio, Ryan and Chet Huntley scrambled not only to report the news but also to learn it ⁴².

These stories constituted awkward but successful attempts at improvisation. Journalists conveyed how well they adapted to last-minute changes, redoing even those tasks which had already been finalized. Ultimately their ability to do so reflected well on the organizations where they worked.

Perhaps the most startling attempt at improvisation was reflected in the broadcasting industry's decision to focus its cameras on the procession of mourners viewing Kennedy's casket. This decision, culminating in NBC's 42-hour marathon broadcast of lines of mourners to hushed background music, constituted "a first" in broadcasting that was called "television's finest hour" ⁴³. Journalists were lauded for their good taste and sensitivity, for the "unobtrusive coverage of the final rites (that) underscored broadcasting's dignity and maturity in covering the news" ⁴⁴. Embedded in these comments was a regard for the improvisory skills of television journalists, by which they adapted to the events of mourning in a way that contradicted the investigatory and intrusive practices favored by other members of their trade.

The written press did not go unpraised. Staffers at the three major newsmagazines were lauded for "getting everything into their issues in spite of incredible

deadline problems": Editorial staffs tore out huge holes at the front of their magazines, with Newsweek, Time and U.S. News and World Report adding tens of pages of fresh type at the last minute. Both Time and Newsweek were hailed for having replated twice - once after Oswald's murder and once after the Dallas Morning News published a photograph of Oswald's murder ⁴⁵. Journalists hailed the cancellation of columns of scheduled advertising ⁴⁶. On Friday alone, newspapers issued as many as eight "extras" ⁴⁷. The press set new sales records, with the New York Times selling 1,089,000 papers on November 26, nearly 400,000 above its normal sales ⁴⁸. Magazines were lauded for working around Friday afternoon deadlines. As the Columbia Journalism Review said, "these magazines made over whole sections - in some cases interrupting press runs to add late developments - and still reached most of their readers on time" ⁴⁹. Replating, resetting, redoing prose accounts were all seen as improvisory practices that were substantial sacrifices to the usual order of printing a newspaper or magazine.

- VALORIZING INSTINCT. Other stories of "being the first" focused on the journalistic "hunch", or the instinct which guided journalists in their work. A lack of obvious rules for covering the assassination and its unpredictable circumstances meant that journalists did not

always know what to do. Tom Wicker relied on instinct when he heard from another reporter that Kennedy had been shot:

One thing I learned that day. I suppose I already knew it, but that day made it plain. A reporter must trust his instinct. When (Marrienne) Means said those eight words - I never learned who told her - I knew absolutely that they were true. Everyone did...That day a reporter had none of the ordinary means or time to check or double-check matters given as fact. He had to go on what he knew of people he talked to, what he knew of human reaction, what two isolated "facts" added to in sum - above all what he felt in his bones ⁵⁰.

Harry Reasoner's "instincts told him it would be better not to broadcast" an item that Oswald had been shot by a black man ⁵¹. Henry Brandon of the London Sunday Times made the trip to Dallas because he thought there might be trouble ⁵². Two Dallas newspapers ran editorials calling for restraint of public sentiments against the President ⁵³. Reporters confessed journalistic hunches that Dallas would turn into a "big story": CBS news executives discussed the possibility of a hostile demonstration in Dallas at their regular news briefing before the assassination ⁵⁴.

While it is difficult to retrospectively ascertain how the journalistic hunch crept into journalists' tales, the "I told you so" position it implied helped them regain control of an event whose unpredictability had made it unwieldy. In other words, the journalistic hunch or instinct helped journalists reinstate certainty in their

tales about the event. In using tales of instinct to anchor the uncertainty surrounding situations of "being the first", journalists offset their partial knowledge and authority for the event. The fact that few hunches generated substantive discussions about the assassination in the days following Kennedy's shooting suggests the degree to which political questions were temporarily suspended by journalists covering the story. But relying on instinct also had its rewards, as when CBS reporter Dan Rather urged his network to assign extra reporters to cover Kennedy's Dallas trip. In at least one account, that premonition earned him rapid promotion through the ranks at CBS ⁵⁵.

As with tales of mishap, embedded within journalists' stories of triumph was a larger discourse about professionalism. The editor at the Saturday Review hailed "as professional a job...as one could care to see" ⁵⁶. An editorial in Broadcasting magazine noted that the last-minute reorganization of reporters and the energetic and creative ways in which they revamped existing set-ups to meet the pace of the event "was not a job that amateurs could have done...It was a job for professionals" ⁵⁷. The ability to improvise, reorganize and redo, on one hand, and to anticipate events through instinct, on the other,

were cast by journalists as activity that legitimated them as professionals.

Thus, stories of "being the first" to a large extent displayed how journalists valorized improvisory and instinctual behavior as the true mark of the professional. Being able to quickly respond to unpredicted circumstances, bend established rules and procedures on a hunch, and do so correctly were touted as signs of professionalism. Through their stories of improvisation, redefinition and instinct which held that they had effectively covered the assassination story, journalists thus made claims of professionalism for behavior not necessarily valorized by formalized cues of professional practice. In highlighting instinctual over formalized dimensions of practice, journalists constructed an authoritative role for themselves in retelling the assassination story.

- BEING THE BEST

Where tales of "being the first" highlighted the improvisory and instinctual dimensions of journalistic practice, in tales of "being the best" journalists expounded on the range of activities by which they could do so. Because much of the assassination coverage was structured through discrete units, "being the best" often meant excelling in the professional tasks at stake within

each discrete moment of coverage. "Being the best" in covering Kennedy's shooting meant quick relay, for example, while covering his funeral called for reverent, slowly-paced and hushed reportage. "The best" was differently reflected in James Reston's condolence column the day after the assassination than in Frank McGee's choked-up relay of the news that Kennedy was dead.

For television journalists, in particular, Kennedy's funeral became a fruitful institutional stage to spread tales of "being the best". How television journalists adapted to the decision to broadcast processions of mourners generated numerous tales of practice that was different yet acceptable. For instance, the broadcasting industry was hailed for having cancelled advertisements, costing by one estimate some \$3m. in direct spending and ten times that in advertising revenue loss ⁵². Its coverage

was one of superlatives - the most people, the most hours, the biggest losses and the most raw emotion that broadcasting had ever known ⁵³.

Television was complimented for having efficiently "played to the largest audience in its history" ⁵⁴. These appraisals were often set against a background of professional expertise. As Broadcasting magazine stated:

Were it not for the experience that broadcasters have acquired in the day-to-day practice of their form of journalism, their coverage of the

wholly unexpected events of Nov. 22-25 would have been impossible ⁶¹.

One irony behind tales of "being the best" was that they legitimated what elsewhere might have been considered lapses in professional behavior. In the 1964 United Artists documentary Four Days in November, a local reporter was shown rushing into a Dallas television station, with "you'll excuse me if I'm out of breath but...". The rejoinder, breathlessly delivered, constituted his introduction to news of Kennedy's assassination. In addition to successfully conveying the import of the news, the delivery suggested how out-of-place was the collected demeanor of the professional television commentator. Similarly, tales of "being the best" implied that other, possibly unusual, qualities were required to professionally cover the assassination. In a special column entitled "If You Can Keep Your Head When All About You...", the Saturday Review reviewed the performance of journalists by highlighting their "special talent" and "training". Editor Richard Tobin maintained that "it took coolness under the fire of highly-charged events" to carry out one's reportorial tasks ⁶².

But "being the best" did not mean the same thing to all journalists, and no one set of rules characterized all assassination coverage. This was displayed in the range of journalists' stories of "being the best," which provided

reporters with alternate backgrounds against which to spread their tales of superlative practice:

- BEING THE "MOST DEDICATED". For many, "being the best" meant "being the most dedicated", or the degree of personal deprivation accrued in accomplishing one's work tasks. This ranged from sleep and food deprivation to affecting a semblance of no emotions. Meg Greenfield, walking around with other journalists in a "disembodied, high-octane state", told of how she did not go home until Saturday ⁶³. ABC News Division's president said late-night planning conferences prevented staffers from getting more than three to four hours of sleep ⁶⁴, and reporter Bill Seamans "was forced (after 36 hours) to take a break when his eyes became so irritated from lack of sleep that he couldn't force them open all the way" ⁶⁵. NBC correspondent Bill Ryan held back his emotions until he got off the air, where he "cried like hell" ⁶⁶. Walter Cronkite did not realize until he was relieved from his anchoring duties that "I was still in my shirtsleeves, although my secretary hours before had draped my jacket over the back of my chair" ⁶⁷. A sense of dedication, in each case, was derived from the reporter's ability to place the public's right to know above basic personal requirements. Dedication thus referenced an absolution of self in face of the news organization's needs.

- BEING THE "MOST HUMAN". For others "being the best" constituted "being the most human," or the ability to momentarily abandon one's professional demeanor. NBC's Frank McGee, The New York Times' Tom Wicker and CBS's Walter Cronkite both became choked up while relaying news of Kennedy's death. As Cronkite relayed the news to the audience, "his voice broke with emotion and he wiped a tear from his eye" ⁶⁸. He removed his eyeglasses, then put them back on in a distracted fashion. In another incident, Cronkite delighted telling how, on his first break from anchoring the Kennedy shooting, he answered a studio phone whose caller admonished CBS for allowing Cronkite to anchor the broadcast. 'This is Walter Cronkite,' he said angrily, 'and you're a goddamned idiot'. Then he flung the receiver down ⁶⁹. Journalists used these tales to work out the personal and professional incongruities imposed by the assassination coverage, an important dimension of consolidating themselves as an interpretive community.

- BEING THE "MOST TECHNOLOGICALLY ADEPT". Journalists dwelled on technology in many of their stories, with "being the best" constituting "being the most technologically adept". These stories conveyed journalists' triumphs over the technologies where they worked. Often this meant utilizing technologies other than one's own in generating stories. Watching television

coverage from the Dallas-Ft. Worth airport, Tom Wicker incorporated an eyewitness interview it showed into his prose account of Kennedy's shooting ⁷⁰. NBC's Frank McGee cradled a telephone in his hand while on-air and repeated verbatim the words of a correspondent on the other end ⁷¹. Press reporters huddled around radios while waiting for information outside of Parkland Hospital ⁷².

Mention of technology reflected how journalists were able to carry out their tasks despite technological limitations. Tom Wicker made reference to the fact that he was without a notebook that day in Dallas ⁷³. NBC Correspondent Bill Ryan made the same point when he remembered the precise conditions of the flash studio, and its "lack of technical sophistication":

We didn't even have a regular news studio. We had to go to what they called the flash studio in New York, a little room where they had one black-and-white camera set up ⁷⁴.

References to instruments of technology - the notepads, pencils, cameras or studios - were invoked by journalists as reminders that professionalism did exist. They suggest that journalists tried to be professional about their assassination coverage. The ways reporters worked to offset the primitive state of the media thus formed one cornerstone to discussions of professionalism. Journalists saw themselves legitimated as professionals because they had mastered the limitations of technology, using their

acumen to make technology work for them. Such claims were not incidental to establishing their authority in retelling the assassination.

Tales of "being the best" thereby legitimated a range of practices by which journalists made claims to journalistic professionalism. In tales of "being the best," journalists expanded the range of improvisory and instinctual activities by which they continued to be labelled professional.

- BEING THE ONLY

Tales of "being the only" constituted the stage by which journalists backgrounded themselves as individual reporters. They conveyed how journalists integrated themselves into situations which valorized instinctual behavior over formalized professional cues. "Being the only" told the tale of individual moves of adaptation to improvisory cues of professionalism. To a large extent, these tales marked the personalities that would emerge as celebrities in conjunction with the assassination story.

Stories of "being the only" allowed journalists to valorize the tales and practices of certain reporters and news organizations over others. In daily news "being the only" tends to be a temporary category, where a journalist's interest in a story is validated by other journalists doing similar stories. Thus by the Friday

afternoon of the assassination, there would be many confirmations of Kennedy's death. Nevertheless, the reporters who confirmed it first would be accorded special stature. For a time, because of the aforementioned telephone dispute, UPI's Merriman Smith was the only reporter to have relayed news of the President's shooting.

Said William Manchester:

(The) bulletin was on the UPI printer at 12.34, two minutes before the President's car reached Parkland. Before eyewitnesses could collect themselves, it was being beamed around the world. To those who tend to believe everything they hear and read, the figure of three (shots) seemed to have the sanction of authority and many who had been in the plaza and had thought they heard only two reports later corrected their memories ⁷⁵.

That this was altered once the pool car reached public telephones did not affect the stature derived from the fact that Smith had for a time been "the only reporter" to convey the news of Kennedy's shooting. He would later win the Pulitzer prize for his coverage, and the UPI reproduced his account in its in-house organ UPI Reporter. It called it "an historical memento...for what it shows about how a top craftsman dealt with the fastest-breaking news story of his generation" ⁷⁶.

Another well-known tale of "being the only" was found in the activities of KRLD-News (and CBS affiliate) director Eddie Barker, who initially reported that Kennedy was dead. He was at the Trade Mart when Kennedy was shot:

A doctor I know who is on the staff at Parkland Hospital came to me, and he was crying...He had learned that President Kennedy was dead. When I announced this over the air, the network panicked. No official announcement had yet been made, and the validity of my source was questioned. However I knew that this man was trustworthy, so I kept repeating that the President was dead ??.

Barker's decision to announce the President's death without official confirmation was, in one observer's eyes, possibly "the most important journalistic event of the period...one of the greatest snap evaluations of a source in the history of broadcast journalism" 7a.

Another risky practice which generated a similar tale of "being the only" was employed by CBS reporter Dan Rather, then stationed in Dallas along the motorcade route. Rather was one of the first reporters to confirm Kennedy's death. His account of how he did so went as follows:

Keep in mind that I had heard no shots. I didn't know what was wrong. I only knew that something appeared to be very wrong...and so I began running, flat out running, sprinting as hard as I could the four blocks to our station...I got through to Parkland Hospital. And the switchboard operator was not panicked but not calm. And very quickly she told me it was her understanding that that the President had been shot, and was perhaps dead. And I'll never forget her saying that. And I followed up with that, and tried to talk to one of the doctors and a priest at the hospital, both of whom said that the President was dead. But nobody had said this officially 7b.

The account prompted CBS to relay unofficial reports that Kennedy had been confirmed dead, thereby earning for Rather the title of "being the only" reporter to do so ⁸⁰.

Other stories of "being the only" remained exclusives long after the events which generated them. Walter Cronkite's removal of his eyeglasses in order to shed a tear set up the outer parameters by which it was possible to anchor the news, yet few journalists looked upon it as behavior to be emulated. Thomas Thompson's exclusive interview of Oswald's wife and mother, held before the police had found them, put him "high on the list of Life interviews" ⁸¹, while circumstances prevented other reporters from generating similar stories. Theodore White's post-funeral discussion with Jackie Kennedy, naming the Kennedy reign "Camelot", was hailed for years afterward by the journalistic community ⁸². In that interview, Jackie Kennedy revealed that her husband liked to play the record of "Camelot" before going to bed.

Sometimes "being the only" offered journalists a way to turn mishaps into triumphs. Harry Reasoner was working at the CBS anchor desk the morning that Oswald was murdered:

At the moment Oswald was shot, CBS was broadcasting a live report from Washington...Reasoner, who was watching the Oswald story on a closed-circuit monitor, saw it happen - or saw, at least, that something had happened. Although seldom given to emotional

outbursts, Reasoner began jumping up and down in his chair, screaming for the control room to switch to Dallas. A few seconds later, the switch was made...Thanks to videotape, CBS soon was able to broadcast an 'instant replay' of the shooting ⁶³.

Interestingly, the fact that CBS "missed" original coverage of the event became intriguing from an institutional point of view, because the scene was recorded by the CBS camera-person but was not replayed on national television until after the fact. The "presence" of journalists thus oddly existed but was not institutionally legitimated or supported.

Journalists also told more literal tales of "being the only": Richard Stolley was "the only reporter" among Secret Service agents to view the Zapruder film ⁶⁴; Henry Brandon the only foreign correspondent in Dallas on November 22 ⁶⁵; James Altgens the only professional cameraperson to catch spot pictures of Kennedy's shooting ⁶⁶. Entwined within these tales was the notion of having left one's personal signature on history: That Tom Pettit "made TV history at the scene of the shooting of Oswald" was possible because he had been "the only television reporter" on live television ⁶⁷. This suggests that assassination memories were formed by instinctual and improvisory behavior which was not followed by other reporters.

Thus journalistic tales about covering the assassination reveal much about existing parameters of journalistic practice at the time. While covering the assassination was not necessarily outlined by formalized professional codes, in their tales of mishap journalists aired concerns about the insufficiency of such codes. In their stories of triumph, they valorized on-the-spot judgment calls as the mark of the true professional. They replayed the event in three categories of tales: One - stories of "being the first" - opened up formalized codes of professional behavior and offered journalists instinctual and improvisory ways to do their work; a second - stories of "being the best" - expounded upon the range of activities by which it was possible to do so; a third - stories of "being the only" - brought individual journalists in contact with improvisory codes and cues of professionalism. In all of these tales were entrenched different notions about technology, professionalism and the appropriate boundaries of journalistic practice and authority. Interestingly enough, the ability to rearrange existing standards was made possible by the informal networks connecting reporters. This helped strengthen their status as an independent interpretive community, that relied on the circulation of narratives through the media for collective authentication of its members.

ASSESSING COVERAGE THROUGH PROFESSIONAL FORUMS

These pages have suggested that journalists assessed their coverage of the assassination story in two main ways: They often invoked the same attributes of coverage to generate totally opposite appraisals of performance. For example, the technology of television was hailed for producing live coverage of Oswald's murder, yet its instruments - the cables, microphones and cameras - were held responsible for facilitating his death.

This was especially borne out in trade publications and professional forums, where the ambivalence over journalists' coverage was linked to the story's complex nature. Trade publications particularly concentrated on the demand for information that did not let up through the weekend. This was complicated by the fact that television journalism was coming into its own as a legitimate medium for news. One critic lamented that "broadcasting resembles the little girl in the nursery rhyme. When it is bad, it is horrid. But when it is good it is very very good" ²². For a community trying to legitimate itself as an authorized interpretive group, these circumstances made professional assessments a critical part of retellings.

PRAISING COVERAGE

For the first year after Kennedy's death, the assassination story occupied nearly every professional

journalistic forum. During their 1963/64 meetings, the ASNE (American Society for Newspaper Editors), NAB (National Association of Broadcasters), and the Radio and Television News Directors Association each independently considered what would have constituted appropriate coverage of the Kennedy assassination. Trade and semi-trade publications, including Columbia Journalism Review, Editor and Publisher, The Quill, Broadcasting and Television Quarterly, devoted special sections to the assassination. The 1964 meetings of the Association for Education in Journalism dedicated a plenary session to journalism and the trial of Jack Ruby ²⁰.

On one hand, these forums lauded the assassination coverage. The Columbia Journalism Review said that

Like no other events before, the occurrences of November 22 to 25, 1963, belonged to journalism, and specifically to the national organs of journalism ²¹.

In its annual report, the Associated Press called the assassination the "major national news event of 1963" and boasted that the AP had "thrown more resources into covering the assassination than any single news-event in its history" ²². An editorial in Editor and Publisher called the story "the most amazing performance by newspapers, radio and television that the world has ever

witnessed" 22. Self-congratulatory advertisements filled the pages of Editor and Publisher and Broadcasting magazines.

The broadcast media received special attention. Broadcasting magazine claimed that "in those four terrible days, television came of age and radio reasserted its capacity to move to history where it happens" 23. Radio was hailed for broadcasting over 80 hours of coverage 24. The radio-television industry received a special Peabody Award 25. Televised coverage of the funeral was voted the best foreign program of the year by the British Guild of Television Producers and Directors 26. The NAB sent its subscribers a full-page newspaper advertisement that echoed praise accorded the broadcasting industry 27.

Embedded within these appraisals was journalists' recognition of a new form of news coverage. Television Quarterly hailed the

full emergence of a televised documentary form (in which) the conditions which define the role and function of the artist and reporter in television journalism have begun to take shape 28.

Indeed, how journalists covered the assassination story would determine the parameters of similar stories in later years : Covering Kennedy's assassination, for instance, taught journalists how to approach assassination attempts on Gerald Ford or Ronald Reagan 29. Coverage of Kennedy's

funeral showed journalists how to cover the funeral of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat ¹⁰⁰.

CRITICIZING COVERAGE: THE IMBROGLIO OVER OSWALD

Yet in many professional quarters grumblings had begun to circulate about the problems caused by journalists' assassination coverage. For every attribute, there was a violation:

the central question is whether the best tradition of the press is good enough...The lesson of Dallas is actually an old one in responsible journalism: Reporting is not democratic to the point that everything posing as fact has equal status ¹⁰¹.

Coverage of the Oswald case drew the greatest criticism. Journalists faulted themselves for not having been easily identifiable to local police, possessing intrusive equipment and arriving in numbers too large for the police to handle. While not the first event to do so, Oswald's homicide and its coverage shed light on the problematic boundaries surrounding journalistic obligations, rights and privileges in covering criminal cases.

The Warren Commission Report played an active part in crystallizing these problems for members of the journalistic community. In a special section called "The Activity of Newsmen," it traced the events leading up to Oswald's murder:

In the lobby of the third floor, television cameramen set up two large cameras and

floodlight in strategic positions that gave them a sweep of the corridor in either direction. Technicians stretched their television cables into and out of offices, running some of them out of the windows of a deputy chief's office and down the side of the building. Men with newsreel cameras, still cameras and microphones, more mobile than the television cameramen, moved back and forth seeking information and opportunities for interviews. Newsmen wandered into the offices of other bureaus located on the third floor, sat on desks and used police telephones; indeed, one reporter admits hiding a telephone behind a desk so that he would have exclusive access to it if something developed...The corridor became so jammed that policemen and newsmen had to push and shove if they wanted to get through, stepping over cables, wires and tripods" ¹⁰².

A detective was quoted as saying that the journalists were "asked to stand back and stay back but it wouldn't do much good, and they would push forward and you had to hold them off physically ... The press and television people just took over" ¹⁰³. When Oswald was brought into view of the journalists, "his escorts...had to push their way through the newsmen who sought to surround them...when (he) appeared, the newsmen turned their camera on him, thrust microphones at his face and shouted questions at him" ¹⁰⁴. The Report concluded that partial responsibility for Oswald's death "must be borne by the news media" ¹⁰⁵ and it called on journalists to implement a new code of ethics.

Such an idea was already circulating among journalists. In January of 1964, ASNE association head

Herbert Brucker had plaintively called for media curbs. Laying out his views in a Saturday Review article entitled "When the Press Shapes the News", he stated that "pressure from the press...had set the stage for (Oswald's killing, with)...little doubt that television and the press must bear a share of the blame" ¹⁰⁶.

Independently considering where - and if - they had gone wrong in covering Oswald's murder, trade publications discussed what the Columbia Journalism Review labelled "judgment by television" ¹⁰⁷. A forum conducted in 1964 by Current magazine, entitled "The Life and Death of John F. Kennedy," concluded with a final section called "Trial By Mass Media", which asked:

in their competitive eagerness to report every aspect of the story, did the media ignore and trample the rights of Kennedy's accused assassin? ¹⁰⁸.

CBS President Frank Stanton offered monies to the Brookings Institute to establish a voluntary inter-media code of fair practices ¹⁰⁹. In October of 1964, the ASNE convened a meeting of 17 top news organizations - including the American Newspaper Publishers of America (ANPA), Associated Press Managing Editors Association, Sigma Delta Chi, NAB, UPI, National Press Photographers Association and the Radio and Television News Directors Association - to discuss complaints about journalistic practice ¹¹⁰. Ten days later, the group issued a statement

that warily conceded the news media's influence over events. It echoed earlier reservations about journalistic practice voiced by the ASNE:

If developing smaller TV cameras is beyond our control, we can certainly try by our own example to teach the electronic newsmen larger manners and a deeper understanding of the basic truth that freedom of information is not an unlimited license to trample on individual rights ¹¹¹.

While allowing for pooled coverage under certain circumstances, the statement stopped short of permitting codes or other external bars on media performance ¹¹².

The idea that external forces would regulate journalism seemed anathema to the notion of a free press. A Washington Post editor urged journalistic self-restraint over 'magic codes' to curb excesses typical of Dallas ¹¹³. New York Times editors Turner Catledge and Clifton Daniel separately called on members of the press corps to use their own judgment in covering similar events ¹¹⁴. The president of the Associated Press Managing Editors Association complained that the Warren Commission should have lauded the press instead of scoring it ¹¹⁵. And television reporter Gabe Pressman, in a Television Quarterly article about ethics, journalism and the Kennedy assassination, complained that his medium was being used as a scapegoat:

Because we have the capacity of telling a story efficiently, dramatically and with a maximum amount of impact - because we have the ability

to satisfy the need of the American public for instantaneous journalism in this modern age - does it follow that we have to be paralyzed because people react badly? ¹¹⁶

published under the title "The Responsible Reporter", the article considered whether journalists could carry out their job without intruding on others, despite their "cumbersome equipment". It suggested directing the focus of journalism to

the matter of reportorial taste and judgment, as well as the respect for the individual in an open society. Since Dallas, many have voiced their concerns about these issues ¹¹⁷.

One interesting interchange in the article mentioned that television's newness magnified the irritation caused by television cameras: In defense, Pressman said that "the camera is used as a newspaperman uses his pad and pencil. And yet, the camera is the most faithful reporter we have. The video-tapes don't lie and the film doesn't lie" ¹¹⁸. Unquestioned here were two basic suppositions about this newly evolving medium for news: One was the notion that the camera equipment to which Pressman and others referred made for a better journalism; the other was the suggestion that television provided a more truthful and hence authoritative form of reportage. Whether Ruby shot Oswald, for instance, was not debatable, for the camera had recorded it. Yet these assumptions were largely

unproblematized in most broadcasters' accounts of their assassination coverage.

It is worth noting that legal quarters picked up the controversy about journalistic performance and condemned the press' insistence on the right to know. They claimed that it had seriously interfered with Oswald's right to a free and private trial and hampered police efforts to transfer the accused. The director of the American Civil Liberties Union held that Oswald was "tried and convicted many times over in the newspapers, on the radio and over television" ¹¹⁹. When Jack Ruby's trial necessitated quick decisions about acceptable parameters of press coverage, District Judge Joe Brown consulted only with press representatives before ruling to prohibit television, radio and still photographers from the courtroom. Said Brown:

The microphone and the television camera in open court are intrusions that no judge or defendant should have to put up with. There is enough ham acting by prosecutors, defense lawyers and even judges without this further invitation. Reporters bearing pads and pencils, photographers carrying candid cameras are enough. They give the public the news the public is entitled to ¹²⁰.

Television journalists grumbled about the judge's decision, but generally did little else to contest it. Their reluctance to act possibly stemmed from the salience of more general criticism about their coverage of Oswald's

murder. Indeed, the fact that Oswald's murder generated two opposite appraisals of journalistic practice among journalists is interesting: Some observers used attributes of coverage to condemn journalism; others used the same attributes to hail it. The instruments of technology - cameras, cables, microphones - both facilitated live coverage and were held responsible for creating circumstances which led to Oswald's death. This seems to suggest that journalists used instruments to be professional, but unthoughtfully-used instruments were a hindrance.

At stake within professional assessment was a larger discourse about the relationship between professionalism and technology: Questions over whether journalists constituted better professionals by succumbing to technology or mastering it inflected debates not only about coverage of the Oswald homicide but also more general discussions about the tenor of coverage of Kennedy's assassination. In a sense, then, discussions about Oswald's homicide provided a microcosm of larger debates evolving across media about journalism and the assassination story.

MASTERING COVERAGE BY MASTERING TECHNOLOGY

How the Oswald imbroglio figured in journalists' tales of triumph and mishap about the assassination

reveals much about the embedded discourses of technology, professionalism, and journalistic authority through which journalists sought to position themselves as authorized spokespeople for the events in Dallas. Because the specific events of Kennedy's death embedded problems of journalistic authority in much of the assassination coverage, retelling the journalists' part in covering the story called for reconstructions of their performances as effective professional triumphs or understandable - but salvageable - professional mishaps on the part of journalistic performers. This took place both in the mass media and trade publications in the months immediately following Kennedy's death.

Through their tales of triumph and mishap, journalists thus set the stage for self-authorization via discourse about professionalism. Journalists' retellings gave reporters a way to cast their hunches and improvisory behavior as the mark of a "true" professional. On one hand, the fact that this discourse was set up through tales of "being the first", "the best" and "the only" underscored how little journalistic professionalism had moved from baser notions of competition. The discourse by which journalists legitimated themselves had individual dimensions, in that it served as a springboard for certain reporters' careers. Yet in a larger sense, it had

collective dimensions too, for it helped to legitimate journalists as professionals and to uphold the professionalism of television journalists. In such a light, it made sense for journalists to cast their actions as the mark of professionals. Their tales functioned as an antidote to basically insufficient cues of formal practice.

Their ability to do so depended largely on technology. Technology was seen as facilitating - and hindering - the emergence of collective and individual professional identities. It allowed journalists to hold onto professional identities at the same time as it hindered them from doing so. This embedded the possibility of forwarding alternate professional practices within a larger discourse about technology, with technology seen by journalists as allowing them to cast improvisory behavior as professional.

It is within such a discourse about technology that two distinct assessments of assassination coverage simultaneously prevailed. These assessments displayed the extent to which the acceptable parameters of journalistic professionalism were still being debated at the time of the assassination. One, personified by the Warren Commission and court decisions barring television cameras from courtrooms, emphasized the foibles of television. It

advanced the view that journalistic coverage had extended beyond its appropriate limits in covering the assassination, acting irresponsibly and intrusively in covering the Oswald homicide, in particular. Such a point - which underscored television's invasion of the rights of the accused - overturned the technological base which television journalists had used to legitimate themselves. For journalists to agree with it would have been tantamount to invalidating those qualities distinguishing television journalism from print. In other words, the imbroglio about Oswald threatened to upset the shaky legitimacy of television practitioners.

Thus most journalists preferred the second argument, which emphasized the attributes of television. They regarded the assassination coverage as a positive enhancement of the professionalism of journalists, laying testimony to different standards of professional behavior. Its proponents saw appropriate journalistic performance as journalists' successful adaptation to the new technology of television. This story about the Oswald murder prevailed, showing how technology was constructed as working ultimately to journalists' advantage.

In other words, over time the appraisal which criticized television journalists for their coverage of the Oswald story has more or less disappeared from

journalistic accounts. This is because it threatened the legitimacy of television, equating questions about journalistic practice with an assault on television technology and television journalism. This means that larger concerns about legitimating television have thereby promoted the collective forgetting of the Oswald imbroglio. Memories of the Oswald story have been instead recast as narratives legitimating the scoop of having caught the murder on live television. They uphold the professionalism of journalists, as redefined by television technology.

This chapter has examined how the professional assessments of assassination coverage entwined the role of television technology within journalists' attempts to promote themselves as professionals. Television technology offered journalists alternate ways of repairing to professionalism, by helping them to classify activities realized by loosely-defined improvisory standards as professional. This discourse thus helped to consolidate the journalistic community around certain issues central to its professionalism. Such professional assessments upheld journalists as an interpretive community, setting out certain collective notions about the improvisory and instinctive nature of their practices, their emphasis on informal networks and the innovative ways in which they

mastered technology. Professional assessment - in both the mass media and trade publications - has thereby signalled what it means for journalists to speak authoritatively about the assassination. It embedded notions of authority in professionalism and technology, and in the tales by which their importance was narratively constructed, setting up an effective base for assassination memories to spring forth over time and space.

¹ Darwin Payne, "The Press Corps and the Kennedy Assassination," Journalism Monographs (February 1970), p.

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² Tom Wicker, quoted in Goddard Lieberson (ed.), JFK: As We Remember Him (New York: Atheneum, 1965), p. 223.

³ Tom Wicker, "That Day in Dallas," Times Talk (12/63).

⁴ Max Ascoli, "Our New President," (Editorial), The Reporter (12/19/63), p. 14.

⁵ Ibid, p. 16.

⁶ Editor and Publisher (11/30/63), p. 16.

⁷ Ibid, p.16.

⁸ Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 37.

⁹ Life (11/29/63), p. 24.

¹⁰ Richard Stolley, "The Greatest Home Movie Ever Made," Esquire (11/73), p. 134.

¹¹ Payne, 1970, p. 8, p. 26.

¹² "Professionalism in News Photography," The Quill (November, 1968), p. 55.

¹³ Ruth Leeds Love, "The Business of Television and the Black Weekend" in Bradley Greenberg and Edwin Parker, The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public (Palo Alto:Stanford University Press, 1965) p. 84.

¹⁴ Charles Roberts, "Eyewitness in Dallas," Newsweek (12/5/66), p. 26.

¹⁵ William Manchester, The Death of A President (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 191.

¹⁶ Charles Roberts, The Truth About the Assassination (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1967), pp. 12-13.

¹⁷ Charles Roberts, 1967, pp. 12-13.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 13, p. 15.

¹⁹ Roberts, 1967.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 129.

- 21 Charles Roberts, "Eyewitness in Dallas," (12/5/66), p. 26.
- 22 Wicker, New York Times (11/23/63), p. 2.
- 23 "The Marxist Marine," Newsweek (12/2/63), p. 27.
- 24 New York Times (11/25/63), p. 1.
- 25 Richard Tobin, "If You Can Keep Your Head When All About You," Saturday Review (12/14/63), p. 54.
- 26 New York Times (11/27/63).
- 27 Marya Mannes, "The Long Vigil," The Reporter (12/19/63), pp. 16-7.
- 28 Herbert Brucker, "When the Press Shapes the News," Saturday Review (1/11/64), pp. 75-76. Brucker held broadcasting equipment responsible for creating the sense of intrusion, paralleling it with an earlier incident that had surrounded the introduction of radio - the 1937 trial of Bruno Richard Hauptmann for the kidnap-murder of the Lindbergh baby: "The new medium of radio, together with news photographers' flashbulbs made a circus of the trial" (p. 77). Interestingly, new media are often legitimated through discussions of changing borders between private and public space.
- 29 William Rivers, "The Press and the Assassination" in Greenberg and Parker, 1965, p. 57.
- 30 Roberts, 1967, p. 19.
- 31 Richard Van der Karr, "How Dallas TV Stations Covered Kennedy Shooting," Journalism Quarterly 42 (1965), p. 647.
- 32 All quoted in Alan Robinson, "Reporting the Death of JFK," The Philadelphia Inquirer (11/22/88), p. 8E.
- 33 Gary Paul Gates, Airtime (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 3.
- 34 Manchester, 1967, p. 168.
- 35 Tom Pettit, "The Television Story in Dallas," in Greenberg and Parker, 1965, p. 66.
- 36 Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 42.
- 37 Wilbur Schramm, "Communication in Crisis," in Greenberg and Parker, p.3.
- 38 One journalist with such a precedent was David Brinkley, who recalled having mispronounced the word "cortege" during the broadcast of F.D.R.'s funeral 18 years earlier. Left alone in NBC's Washington office when word arrived that Roosevelt had died, the then 25-year-old correspondent had been reprimanded for his gaffe (Manchester, 1967, p. 144). The experience haunted him while covering Kennedy's funeral.
- 39 Robert MacNeil, NBC News (11/22/63).
- 40 Van der Karr, 1965, p. 647.
- 41 Meg Greenfield, "The Way Things Really Were," Newsweek (11/28/88), p. 98.
- 42 Bill Ryan quoted in Robinson, The Philadelphia Inquirer, p. 8E.

- 43 Brucker, Saturday Review, 1964, p. 77.
- 44 Tobin, Saturday Review, 1963, p. 53; Broadcasting, 1963, p. 54.
- 45 Tobin, Saturday Review, 1963, p. 53.
- 46 Editor and Publisher (11/30/63), p. 6.
- 47 "The Assassination", Columbia Journalism Review (Winter, 1964), p. 20.
- 48 Ibid, p. 20.
- 49 Ibid, p. 24.
- 50 Tom Wicker, "A Reporter Must Trust His Instinct," Saturday Review (1/11/64), p. 81. The problematic nature of relying on instinct was conveyed in Jim Bishop's reconstruction of the same scene: "Wicker hurried a little and caught up to Hugh Sidey of Time magazine. 'Hugh,' he said, puffing. 'The President is dead. Just announced on the radio. I don't know who announced it but it sounded official to me.' Sidey paused. He looked at Wicker and studied the ground under his feet. They went on. Something which 'sounds official' meets none of the requirements of journalism" (Jim Bishop, The Day Kennedy Was Shot (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 264).
- 51 Gates, 1978, p. 9.
- 52 Ibid, p. 38.
- 53 Warren Commission Report, 1964, p. 41.
- 54 Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 40.
- 55 Gates, 1978, p. 10.
- 56 Tobin, Saturday Review, 1963, p. 53.
- 57 Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 108.
- 58 "The Assassination," Columbia Journalism Review, 1964, p. 18.
- 59 Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 36.
- 60 Tobin, Saturday Review, 1963, p. 53.
- 61 Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 108.
- 62 Tobin, Saturday Review, 1963, p. 53.
- 63 Greenfield, Newsweek, 1988, p. 98.
- 64 Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 38.
- 65 Elmer Lower, "A Television Network Gathers the News," in Greenberg and Parker, 1965, p. 68.
- 66 Bill Ryan quoted in Robinson, Philadelphia Inquirer (11/22/88), p. 8E.
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ACCESSING
ASSASSINATION TALES

CHAPTER SIX

DE-AUTHORIZING OFFICIAL MEMORY

Continued public interest about Kennedy's death meant that journalists would not alone attempt to emerge as spokespeople for its story. The recognition of journalists as the story's preferred spokespeople evolved in association, negotiation and contest with other groups vying to tell their versions of the same tale. Journalists did not simply contrive to assume the role of speaker, but more general circumstances associated with cultural authority had bearing on their assumption of that role.

What took place beyond journalism directly affected journalists' attempts to legitimate themselves as authorized retellers of the assassination story. In the following pages, I discuss three such circumstances: One was the different readings of Kennedy's death that linked the assassination with images of JFK as President; a second was the establishment of conditions of documentary failure, by which official bodies and recognized institutional forums for documentation failed to bring closure to the assassination; and a third was the recognition of alternate retellers of the assassination story, including journalists, assassination buffs and historians. These three circumstances made the

assassination record an attractive locus for journalists seeking to consolidate their own authoritative position as speakers in public discourse. This became even more the case as their assassination memories became part of the repertoire by which they authenticated themselves as an interpretive community.

DEATH CREATING LIFE: THE ASSASSINATION AND IMAGES OF JFK

John F. Kennedy was once called the "most fascinating might-have-been in American history" ¹. It is thus no surprise that individuals and groups have remembered him through his assassination, with the Kennedy image often seen as created by the Kennedy death. Gore Vidal suggested as much in 1967 when he said that "Kennedy dead has infinitely more force than Kennedy living" ². Twenty years later Todd Gitlin advanced a similar theme, maintaining that "Kennedy could be appreciated better in his absence" ³. The fact that Kennedy's death remained as vital an issue as his administration - and that understanding the assassination took place at the same time as observers began to appraise his Presidency - brought the assassination directly into the heart of the growing national repertoire of Kennedy stories. Through the assassination, the Kennedy story was recast as one of tragedy. It thus had direct bearing on images of Kennedy, his Presidency and his administration.

THE HERMENEUTICS OF KENNEDY'S DEATH

In the years after Kennedy died, chroniclers attributed much of America's enthusiasm for him to the fact of his death and its violent circumstances ⁴. Said Daniel Boorstin:

His untimely death reminds us of how history assesses public figures who die too soon. In the making of historical reputations, there are advantages and opportunities to brevity ⁵.

Cutting his rapidly-engendered status as a legendary hero, one journalist lamented that

The Kennedy myth came into being only after he was dead, and then only as a means of coping with his death...Anyone with a clear memory or a willingness to read through editorials in the liberal journals of those years knows that very substantial segments of the American public, particularly its liberal elite, were well able to contain their enthusiasm for John Kennedy while he was alive...All those splendid great expectations that we are now convinced we had back in the early 60s were discovered for the first time after the assassination ⁶.

The assassination was seen as having provided Kennedy with "a reprieve, forever enshrining him in history as the glamorous, heroic leader he wanted to be, rather than as the politician buffeted by events he could not control" ⁷. Much of the enthusiasm for the President thus set in after his death, by people with vested interests in its persistence.

Journalists played a key role in implanting and perpetuating images about Kennedy within collective

memory. Already in 1964 a major news-magazine applauded the fact that Kennedy's face was plastered "all across the nation - in newspapers and magazines, on TV screens" ⁸. News organizations hurriedly produced books and films on Kennedy's Presidency and administration - The New York Times' The Kennedy Years, NBC News' There Was A President, and Pierre Salinger and Sander Vanocur's book of tributes to the President ⁹. Documentary films like Four Days in November premiered in 1964 ¹⁰. As the years wore on, extensive patterns of image management - through media eulogy, commemoration and simple repetition - persisted. Twenty years later, Americans were being treated to what one journalist called "a media bath of reassessment" ¹¹.

More important, many of their efforts directly linked Kennedy's death with his life. The Kennedy Years was appended with a 48-page booklet on the assassination ¹². UPI and American Heritage magazine published a book, Four Days in November, that described the assassination and the three days that followed ¹³. Books began to appear on anniversaries of Kennedy's death ¹⁴.

Media involvement promoted varied interpretations of the events of Kennedy's death. While a lack of consensus over their precise circumstances increased over time, with greater recall generating less agreement, the failure to generate a complete or agreed-upon version of the

assassination story challenged the media's authority as storyteller. Media organizations continued to invest large amounts of time, money and resources in the assassination story. But the more attention that they paid and the more fervently that they played the story, the more holes in collective memory about the assassination they generated. In many senses this created a professional dilemma for journalists seeking to provide an authoritative account of the assassination: It denied them the ability of assuming the role of authoritative spokespeople yet encouraged them to continue trying. It also played into the attempts of different groups seeking to add to and enhance the assassination record, by creating a situation ripe for the emergence of different groups vying to tell the authorized, and hopefully final, story of Kennedy's assassination.

It is important to remember that such was not always the case. Immediately after Kennedy's death, chroniclers provided instant interpretations. They assumed that knowledge about the circumstances of his assassination would bring closure by generating a final reading of its events. This prompted journalists to initially impose hermeneutic readings on Kennedy's death, as in James Reston's much-acclaimed column "Why America Weeps", where he claimed that the assassination represented the

intrusion of irrationality into the national character ¹⁵. Yet the route by which many Americans came to abandon either-or interpretations of Kennedy's death and to entertain more complicated notions about the assassination was a certain one. It was also directly dependent on the active role that journalists played in giving voice to views from many sides.

There were two main readings of Kennedy's death, what journalist Jefferson Morley has called "shorthand for making sense of public life" ¹⁶: Nostalgic visions of the promise that was cut short in Dallas, visions of Camelot and King Arthur's court versus notions of conspiracy and an emphasis on the undertow of Kennedy's public existence. In Morley's terms, Camelot and the yearning for morally heroic leadership were set against conspiracy and the fear of undemocratic plots. It was because the assassination brought together these "two elemental themes of American history" that its "anniversary endures as a national rite" ¹⁷. Depending on which image of Kennedy was adopted, the circumstances of his death became at least partly comprehensible in conjunction with it.

The first popular sentiment held Kennedy in lofty, almost mythic regard, a peculiar point due to the circumstances by which it was generated. In 1978, writer Theodore White recalled how Jackie Kennedy summoned him to

Hyannis Port one week after the assassination. She told him how Kennedy used to play the record "Camelot" before retiring at night:

She wanted Camelot to top the story. Camelot, heroes, fairy tales, legends were what history was all about...So the epitaph on the Kennedy administration became Camelot - a magic moment in American history. Which of course is a misreading of history. The magic Camelot of JFK never existed ¹⁸.

While the "selling of 'Camelot' was too insistent, too fevered, accompanied by too much sentimentality and too little rigorous thought" ¹⁹, it was a "purchase" that appealed to his friends and sympathetic authors like Theodore Sorensen, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., or Pierre Salinger. Capitalizing on the insider's status they had held at Kennedy's White House, they depicted him as

the ideal personification of the values of cultural modernism and rationality...The Kennedy assassination (thus) had almost totemic significance: It was the sacrificial offering by the prince of Camelot to the forces of bigotry, irrationality and fanaticism ²⁰.

More substantive appraisals lauded Kennedy's support of the Peace Corps, the Alliance for Progress and, in certain circles, legislation on civil rights.

At the same time, a second popular sentiment was generated by the cold warriors' somber visions. Kennedy was faulted from both left and right, alternately seen as a Communist agent who was "killed because he failed to fulfill Moscow's decisions quickly enough" ²¹ or

criticized for failing to effectively lead Congress, faulty administration and the Bay of Pigs invasion ²².

Distinctions between Camelot and the cold warriors' view of Kennedy reflected distinctions between discourse and action, rhetoric and record. The oral and written rhetorical practices and strategies by which the slain President had talked about his aims were frequently set against the actions by which he realized them. Admissions that his time as President had been too brief to produce adequate substance meant to many observers that "we cannot measure Kennedy's standards purely by specific acts of statecraft because his time was too short" ²³. This brought Kennedy's assassination directly into evaluations of his Presidency and administration, with observers using his death to justify many of his activities as President. Yet both perspectives endured, a point that was reflected in the entire spectrum of opinions represented on the New York Times' best-seller list during one week in 1964: It included Kennedy's mythically-inclined Profiles in Courage, Victor Lasky's critique of the former President, JFK: The Man and the Myth, and Four Days, a UPI book about the assassination ²⁴. This brought memories of his death to the forefront of Kennedy stories, upholding the status of retellers who had much to offer on that particular domain of action, namely journalists.

ULTIMATE LINKAGE: LIFE THROUGH DEATH

In such a way the link between Kennedy's death and life was embedded within the repertoire of commemorative practices. It is important to note that Kennedy's family tried to sever images of his death from appraisals of his life, reconstructing the particulars of his death from the beginning. Family members actively shaped the President's stately funeral, engaged in their own commemorative practices, and boycotted public services not to their liking ²³. By the seventies, the family had begun to avoid dedication services in Dallas and called for national commemorations not on November 22, the date of Kennedy's death, but on his birthday ²⁴. By the twentieth anniversary of his assassination, it succeeded in prohibiting official ceremonies near the place he was shot in Dallas. Attempts to dilute assassination memories were most evident during the mid-1960s, when the family set in motion what one news-magazine called "the biggest brouhaha over a book that the nation has ever known" ²⁵. "Trying to copyright the assassination" ²⁶, the family agreed, then reneged, to let writer William Manchester publish an authorized history of Kennedy's death. The book, said Time magazine, "was to be a rara avis: a history that would be independent but would still carry the authorization of the Kennedys and require their approval before publication"

29. But conflicts between Manchester and Jacqueline Kennedy, in particular, over inclusion of a variety of details brought publication to a standstill in 1966 and engendered a lawsuit over a number of charges on which Manchester eventually yielded 30.

While the Kennedys appeared to emerge the victors, in a larger sense they failed. For at the same time that "the Battle of the Book" was waging between Manchester and the Kennedy family 31, persons in less recognized quarters were busily documenting their versions of the events of Kennedy's death. Such efforts, not dependent on the Kennedy family's agreement to retell the assassination story, produced a number of alternate perspectives on it, such as Edward J. Epstein's Inquest or Mark Lane's Rush to Judgment. The Kennedys' focused efforts on the so-called authorized history of Kennedy's death thus rendered them unable to manage all assassination memories. Moreover, their attempts to censure the media earned negative press. In an insightful overview of Manchester's quibbles with the Kennedy family, Andy Logan pinpointed how "during Kennedy's term of office, his staff was accused of trying to manage the news. Now, of course, the charge on several fronts is that of managing history" 32. History, like news, "has always been subject to some management." But

the difference, maintained Logan, was that "the stage directions should be out of earshot" ³³.

All of this was important to the legitimation of journalists as spokespeople, in that they generally eschewed the Kennedy family's attempts at image management. Few journalists agreed to commemorate Kennedy on his birthday, and at one point the New York Times marked the "sixth month anniversary" of Kennedy's death, which ironically fell six days short of his birthdate ³⁴. Interpretations of Kennedy's assassination thus held that much of his life was seen through his death, many of them forwarded by journalists intent on promoting their own interpretations of events. As one observer commented, "what JFK was unable to do for his country in life, he has been able to do for his country in memory" ³⁵. Or, as a journalist for The Progressive lamented, "in the midst of Death, we are in Life" ³⁶. The assassination was thus directly foregrounded as a cornerstone of memory about Kennedy. Links between his life and death were forwarded in large part by the hermeneutic perspectives of chroniclers, particularly journalists, trying to understand his death at the same time as they were appraising his Presidency. Particularly for journalists, who profited by routinized occasions for their media presentations, yearly commemorations of the President on

the date of his death gave them a predictable stage on which to spread their assassination tales. In a sense, this suggested that already from the beginning journalists recognized that their media access would help promote their assassination tales above those of other speakers.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DOCUMENTARY FAILURE

But the story's successful circulation also depended on the recognized forums for documentation. At the same time as Kennedy's image was being linked with circumstances of his death, developments beyond the actual Kennedy legacy had begun to create circumstances that made the assassination's retelling more accessible to alternate groups of retellers.

Access to the assassination story depended in large part on surrounding issues that were brought into focus by documentary agencies attempting to resolve the ambiguities of Kennedy's death. These recognizable documentary forums - the police, FBI, CIA, and various investigatory commissions and committees set up over the years to examine the assassination - kept the assassination a salient and topical issue, providing markers by which it was possible to collectively remember Kennedy's death. Yet they also failed to lend closure to the assassination record, producing circumstances which I call "documentary failure". It was the failure of official forums of

documentation to lend closure to the record of the assassination that in effect helped promote journalists as authoritative spokespeople of its story.

THE WARREN COMMISSION AND ATTEMPTS TO LEND CLOSURE

By the year following the assassination, extensive official paperwork was being directed at the events of Kennedy's death. The Warren Commission, originally hailed as the body capable of providing definitive answers to the mysteries of Kennedy's death ³⁷, set to work examining over hundreds of reports and documents and interviewing over 550 witnesses ³⁸. By the time it had concluded its deliberations, the sheer volume of its documentation - over 17,000 pages housed in 26 volumes of prose ³⁹ - initially laid to rest most substantive questions.

Published in late 1964, the Commission's report held that Kennedy was killed by a lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald. The documentation was so wide-ranging as to be later labelled "the most completely documented story of a crime ever put together" ⁴⁰. In one observer's semi-fictionalized view, it was "the novel in which nothing is left out" ⁴¹.

While the Warren Commission's conclusions were initially circulated by the media, much of its documentation was also made readily available to the general public. For \$76.00, people were able to purchase

copies of the document, allowing them to peruse it at their own pace and interest ⁴². Abridged editions, less cumbersome than the report's 26 volumes, were also made available ⁴³, suggesting that a preliminary groundwork was set up already by 1964 where both lay-people and non-official groups of professionals could authoritatively comment upon the official assassination record.

Journalists' participation in the official assassination investigation was evident from the onset. Reporters were called as key witnesses, and they testified to hearing the firing of shots or photographing the windows of the Texas School Book Depository ⁴⁴. The New York Times issued its own version of the report, with journalist Harrison Salisbury writing a special preface ⁴⁵. The Associated Press also issued its own edition, appending it with what it called "An AP Photo Story of the Tragedy," a series of 14 pictures of Kennedy's final moments ⁴⁶. In a footnote, the editors addressed possible problems connected with their having incorporated the AP's account within the abridged yet official record:

As indicated, the supplement of pictures inserted in the front section of the book is not a part of the Commission's report. It was added in order to recall more vividly the tragic four days which made the report necessary ⁴⁷.

Journalists thereby appeared initially to join in the efforts of recognized institutions to generate extensive

documentation about the assassination, all in conjunction with conclusions forwarded by the Warren Commission. The record resulting from these efforts, bolstered by the non-official enthusiasm and support of a number of public and professional quarters, produced what appeared to be a whole and complete official account of the events circumscribing Kennedy's death.

CONSPIRACY, THE BUFFS AND DOCUMENTARY QUESTIONING

The two streams by which Kennedy was commemorated immediately following his death persisted into the decade after the Warren Commission Report was published: More realistic Camelot-like sentiments lingered, at the same time as did revisionist readings, consensual notions that the former President had himself been a conventional cold warrior.

Journalists played an active part in shaping memories on both fronts. A writer for the New York Times contended in 1971 that Kennedy was on his way to becoming great when he was killed ⁴⁰. The 10th anniversary of Kennedy's death fell in the midst of the Watergate scandal, allowing JFK's admirers to contrast their hero with Nixon's stealth ⁴¹.

At the same time, Kennedy was dubbed

an unimaginative and perhaps even conservative politician who bore systematic responsibility for the woes of the Johnson-Nixon years: an escalating arms race, widening military

entanglements aboard, racial turmoil and abuses of presidential power ⁵⁰.

Asked by American Heritage magazine to name the most overrated public figure in history, author Thomas Fleming chose JFK

with a lump in my throat. But the record shows his public relations approach to the Presidency was almost a total disaster for the nation ⁵¹.

I.F. Stone discounted Kennedy in 1973 as "simply an optical illusion" ⁵². By the tenth anniversary of his death, the Kennedy shrine, in one news-magazine's words, was beginning to show its "cracks and termites" ⁵³.

Such a "coarsening of the collective memory" ⁵⁴ about Kennedy's life and death had direct bearing on the salience of the assassination story. A growing trend toward critical thinking - whether in the Camelot or revisionist mode - promoted a more critical view of the assassination record itself. This was particularly the case with journalists, whose alternate readings throughout the seventies began to suggest a more complex and critical view of the assassination than that suggested by the Warren Commission's lone-assassin theory. Critical thinking made the possibility of intricacies, mysteries and of conspiracy in Kennedy's death more feasible.

This produced a number of questions about the validity of the Warren Report during the late 1960s and early 1970s, which largely centered on conspiracy. In some

quarters re-appraisals began to take shape immediately after the Commission's deliberations were published, with Esquire publishing a "Primer of Assassination Theories" in 1966 that suggested 30 versions of Kennedy's murder at odds with official documentary record ⁵⁵. Books by assassination buffs Mark Lane, Edward Epstein and Josiah Thompson went into circulation by the middle of the decade ⁵⁶. New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison accused prominent businessman Clay Shaw of involvement in Kennedy's death, in what came to be called the Clay Shaw-Jim Garrison affair ⁵⁷. Kennedy aide Richard Goodwin called for an independent group to weigh charges of inadequacy against the Warren Commission ⁵⁸. Groups of citizens began gathering signatures for petitions that urged the investigation's reopening ⁵⁹. A television panel pitted Commission critics against its defenders for an on-air debate and received widespread media coverage ⁶⁰.

As the earlier role of journalists in upholding documentary record about the assassination had been central, so were the efforts of journalists in questioning it. Movement from acceptance of the Commission's documentation, in however partial a form, to questioning its basic parameters, was exercised with their assistance. For example, in September 1966 reporter Tom Wicker criticized the Commission for failing to quiet public

concerns that Oswald had been the assassin ⁶¹. The following year the New York Times decided to reinvestigate the assassination, with editor Harrison Salisbury justifying the decision due to "the torrent of conspiracy yarns, challenges to the Warren Commission Report and general hysteria about the assassination" ⁶². CBS conducted its own 7-month probe of questions arising from the Warren Commission Report, aired in a four-part special in 1967 ⁶³. The program was billed as "very well the most valuable four hours you ever spent with television" ⁶⁴. A press release by CBS News President Richard Salant praised it as "professional" and "genius" ⁶⁵. TV Guide held that "it ranks as a major journalistic achievement....a masterful compilation of facts, interviews, experiments and opinions - a job of journalism that will be difficult to surpass" ⁶⁶. This suggests that already at that point, a technical discourse about documentary process was being hailed as the best of investigative journalism ⁶⁷.

Moreover, media reports outlined calls by other news organizations - including Life magazine and the Boston Globe - to reopen the investigation ⁶⁸. Reporter Jack Anderson detailed stories of Kennedy-approved plots against Castro in his column of March 3, 1967 ⁶⁹. In 1975,

U.S. News and World Report stated that conspiracy theory had taken on speed when

several news reporters disclosed recently that the late President Lyndon Johnson had told them confidentially that he believed Cuba's Communist Premier Fidel Castro might have been involved in the Kennedy slaying ⁷⁰.

It added that a score of books, three motion pictures and many magazine articles on the assassination had helped arouse public interest ⁷¹.

This does not suggest that only journalists activated the call for reopening the investigation. At the same time as journalists began to question the validity of existing documentary record, the degree of public access to the Warren Commission's documents, begun years before with the transcript's public purchase, was steadily increasing. In 1974, the Assassination Information Bureau drew 3,000 people to Boston University, for the first public showing of Abraham Zapruder's film of the shooting ⁷². Optics technician Robert Groden screened on national television his own presentation of certain frames of the Zapruder film, by which he concluded that Kennedy was the victim of crossfire ⁷³. In March 1975, the entire Zapruder film was shown on network television for the first time, displaying for millions of American viewers the graphic footage that had originally documented Kennedy's fatal head wound ⁷⁴. In one historian's view, "this episode convinced many that

the Warren Commission had erred" 75. That same year Representative Henry Gonzalez proposed a resolution calling for a congressional investigation into Kennedy's murder, that rapidly generated support in Congress 76.

Such efforts were accompanied, if not precipitated, by the increasingly prevalent intervention of one specific group of interested observers - the assassination buffs. That largely amateur group of citizens that took it upon itself to investigate the assassination record shook many givens behind interpretations of Kennedy's death. Buff Mark Lane organized a Citizens Commission of Inquiry, whose purpose was to pressure Congress to reopen the assassination investigation 77. The buffs discussed conspiracies ranging from the Dallas police, FBI and Secret Service to Texas right-wingers and right-wing oil-men 78. In their zeal, they "propounded the questions that more 'responsible' authorities nervously dismissed" 79.

Public acceptance of the buffs was gradual. Even their name implied "a harmless fixation like collecting old cars" 80. In 1967, journalist Charles Roberts levelled a particularly scathing attack on what he considered a threat to the integrity of the Warren Commission:

Who are the men who have created doubt about a document that in September 1964 seemed to have reasonable answers...Are they bona fide scholars, as the reviewers took them to be, or are they, as Connally has suggested, 'journalistic scavengers'? ...unlike Emile Zola

and Lincoln Steffans, who rocked national and local governments by naming the guilty, the Warren Report critics never tell us who's in charge of the scheme that has victimized us all. Nor are they able to define its purposes, although they offer half a dozen conflicting theories ²¹.

The fact that Roberts chose to frame his criticism of the buffs on professional grounds, comparing them with the most renowned writers and journalists of the muckraking tradition, on the one hand, and with academics, on the other, was telling. This was because by and large the assassination buffs were neither scholars nor journalists. Rather, they comprised a group of lay-persons who independent of their professional calling voluntarily decided to investigate the assassination. Roberts' attempt to classify them as one group recognized for its documentary exploration only reinforced how extraordinary was their intervention. The assassination buffs' attempt to retell the assassination thus considerably challenged the lead position that other groups, generally professional by nature, assumed in retelling the assassination.

The buffs' involvement made conspiracy into a more acceptable reading of Kennedy's death. They made accessing the documentary record less problematic, turning the notion of access into a professional challenge for groups whose professional identity was wrapped up in documentary

exploration. The buffs made it possible to differentially interpret existing documentary record, showing that professional expertise and training did not necessarily produce the most authoritative perspectives on Kennedy's death. This not only suggested the possibility of conspiracy, but it intensified the need to reexamine existing official documentary record about the assassination.

THE FORMATION OF THE HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE AND DOCUMENTARY FAILURE

In looking back, one news-magazine examined the ascent of the assassination buffs against a larger background by which Americans began to question recognized forms of authority and documentation:

In the 1960s, the tendency of many Americans was to regard attacks on the Warren findings as the ideas of 'kooks' or 'cranks' or of 'profiteers' seeking to exploit the great public interest in the Kennedy case...Now, however, cynicism generated by the Watergate affair, the Vietnam War, and revelations about CIA operations have made both officials and the American public more inclined to accept a 'conspiracy' theory as possible ²².

The increased access to official documentation, as represented by the buffs, constituted a cultural phenomenon that called into question a number of givens about the role of the individual in decision-making. This directly challenged the authority of those expected to tell the story of Kennedy's assassination.

To an extent, questioning authority was borne out in developments that stretched beyond the assassination story. Undoing its official record took place during "a period when entrenched authority was to be challenged and confronted ^{a3}, part of what one observer called "the tearing-loose - the active beginning of the end of life within the old institutions" ^{a4}. By the mid-1970s, skepticism of things official had extended to a "popular mistrust of official history," and that mistrust was shared by journalists ^{a5}. Skepticism was directly facilitated by Watergate and other scandals of the seventies that rocked existing trust in public institutions. Growing mistrust in government was accompanied by what was seen as an increasing governmental dependence on secrecy and concealment. Ramparts magazine held that

We have learned (or should have) much about ourselves in the past decade. We slaughtered women and children in Vietnam and then covered it up; there was bombing in Cambodia and then a coverup; there was massive espionage at Watergate and then a coverup. Given the atmosphere in Dallas in 1963, and the admitted inadequacies of the Warren Commission Report, is it not equally possible that the assassination of President Kennedy was followed by a coverup?...It is clear that a reopening of the assassination investigation is now in order ^{a6}.

Questioning the record of the assassination thus had its roots in larger cultural and political enterprises that promoted a general questioning of government institutions

and recognized forms of documentation ⁹⁷. Within this larger setting, it is thus no surprise that other agencies began to conduct official and semi-official investigations into the events of Kennedy's death. To a large extent, this had to do with revelations about faulty process exhibited by certain official investigatory agencies, such as the CIA or FBI ⁹⁸. The shadowed integrity they suggested made a reopening of the case more palatable, if not necessary.

All of this generated a period of documentary questioning. One initial official investigatory effort, comprised of medical practitioners, was called the Clark Panel. Appointed by Attorney-General Ramsey Clark in 1968, the team reviewed the autopsy photographs and x-rays to reveal "serious discrepancies between its review of the autopsy materials and the autopsy itself" ⁹⁹. One such discrepancy was the disappearance of photographs of Kennedy's body. Another effort was mounted by the Rockefeller Commission in 1975. Formed to investigate a number of assassination plot schemes - such as possible CIA involvement in Kennedy's death - the Committee found no conclusive link with Kennedy through any of the plots it investigated ¹⁰⁰. Yet another official investigatory attempt was the Church Committee. Billed as "a Congressional Committee to Study Governmental Operations

with Respect to Intelligence Activities," the Committee confirmed in 1976 the failure of the federal intelligence agencies to examine a number of conspiracy leads in Kennedy's death, as well as illicit sexual connections between Kennedy and Judith Campbell Exner ²¹. But it produced no conclusive results about what had been its stated intention - pinpointing Kennedy's exact role in plots to kill Castro - and thereby failed to lend closure to the one point it set out to resolve ²².

By the mid-seventies these independent investigatory activities engendered a number of doubts about the validity of the Warren Commission Report, regardless of what one felt about Kennedy's image, administration or death. As The Saturday Evening Post commented:

In the eleven years since its publication, the Warren Report never convinced the majority of Americans that the killing was the work of one man acting alone...The return of the assassination of President Kennedy to the headlines twelve years after the events of November 1963 brings with it a new national resolve to have a final satisfactory accounting of this American tragedy ²³.

Ambiguities, falsities, mishandling of information and witnesses all made the Commission's conclusions into an issue of credibility.

This upheld the accessibility of alternate retellers, such as journalists, who were invested in actively doubting the official assassination record's validity. In

particular, the fact that the media lent firm and continued stages to these doubts helped enhance their own credibility. For it was not only a stage for the reports of others that the media provided. While reopening the assassination record, journalists were accused of deliberately undermining the assassination inquiry ⁹⁴. Efforts by Jack Anderson, Harrison Salisbury and a number of other reporters to reopen the record made them central figures in a larger atmosphere of documentary questioning. The Rockefeller Commission, in particular, owed its emergence largely to journalist Jack Anderson and his reports that the CIA had plotted Castro's assassination with Kennedy's backing ⁹⁵. TV anchorperson Walter Cronkite went on-air in 1975 to contend that former President Lyndon Johnson had indicated years earlier that he felt international connections might have been involved in Kennedy's assassination ⁹⁶. Cronkite showed parts of an interview with Johnson that had been deleted from the original broadcast at the President's request.

Documentary questioning directly affected the integrity of the original official documentary body - the Warren Commission. Its abuses were seen as wide-ranging: It had failed to procure relevant information from the FBI ⁹⁷, over one-third of the assassination-related documents in the National Archives were still being withheld in 1969

sa, army intelligence files on Lee Harvey Oswald were destroyed as late as 1973 ⁹⁹. Such representative vagaries tainted the integrity of official documentary process, with recognized forums for documentation seen as having failed to resolve the circumstances of Kennedy's death. Instead, the inadequacy of the Warren Commission's address to Kennedy's death had generated questions with no answers.

Documentary questioning similarly blew holes in the images by which Kennedy's life was appraised. It deromanticized most Camelot-like perspectives:

the notion of Camelot, always overblown and romanticized, has barely survived, if it has at all, allegations and disclosures about assassination plots and Mafia women, wiretaps and Conversations with Kennedy ¹⁰⁰.

By the end of the seventies, "Camelot (had come to be) portrayed as a hoax, conspiracy as realism" ¹⁰¹. It was

as if the epistemology of the New York Times and the Washington Post had been replaced by that of the National Enquirer and People magazine. Camelot, it seemed, could never again appear to be the pristine place its celebrants had claimed - there were simply too many Mafia dons and party girls dwelling within its precincts ¹⁰².

Documentary questioning was also upheld by cultural productions like the movies Executive Action, Winter Kills or The Parallax View, all of which underscored the possibility of conspiracy - through odd configurations - in the assassination story.

By the late 1970s, these circumstances - the efforts of the assassination buffs, the atmosphere of documentary questioning and the smaller semi-official investigations into troublesome aspects of Kennedy's death - produced a decision in 1976 to reopen the official federal investigation of the assassination, known as the House Select Committee on Assassinations. Bringing together the killings of Kennedy and Martin Luther King in one cultural repertoire, the Committee's 170-member study group sought to uncover what had been left ambiguous by the Warren Commission 12 years earlier and the rapid sentencing of James Earl Ray in King's murder. In the case of Kennedy's assassination, most of its subpoenas were directed at CIA and FBI-held files ¹⁰³.

The House Committee took two years to reach its deliberations, at an expenditure of \$5.8 million ¹⁰⁴. According to historian Michael Kurtz, its mandate was fourfold. It was to uncover:

- 1) Who assassinated President Kennedy?
- 2) Did the assassin(s) receive any assistance?
- 3) Did United States government agencies adequately collect and share information prior to the assassination, protect President Kennedy properly, and conduct a thorough investigation into the assassination?
- 4) Should new legislation on these matters be enacted by Congress? ¹⁰⁵.

The investigation lasted from January to July 1978, followed by two months of public hearings. The report was issued on December 30, 1978.

The committee ruled that there had probably been a second gunman in the killing of Kennedy, but it could not determine who. Noting that Kennedy was "probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy," it conceded that it could not identify the identity or extent of such a conspiracy ¹⁰⁶. Rather, it produced extensive documentation about who might have been interested in pulling a second trigger, including the Cuban government, the Kremlin, right-wing Cuban exiles, the Mafia, the CIA, the FBI and the Secret Service. The 686 pages housed in 27 volumes produced conclusions that were by all counts inconclusive, a point that dismayed most assassination observers. Its final report, issued the following July, mentioned that elements of organized crime were "probably" involved, but said little more ¹⁰⁷.

In one observer's view, the Committee's efforts "were an exercise in bathos" ¹⁰⁸:

The investigation uncovered some new evidence, particularly the acoustical analysis, but on the whole it proved as limited as that of the Warren Commission...The committee's refusal to operate publicly, its lack of expert cross-examination of witnesses, its failure to attach the proper significance to numerous pieces of evidence resulted in an investigation of the assassination that raised more questions than it originally sought to answer ¹⁰⁹.

Because the Committee found insufficient evidence to implicate possible agents in Kennedy's assassination, its deliberations were as much a disappointment as the Warren Commission's had been twelve years earlier. It overturned the Warren Commission's basic supposition and upheld then-existing bias that there had been a conspiracy, but lent that notion little substantial support ¹¹⁰. Its failure to resolve the uncertain aspects of Kennedy's murder thus exacerbated the documentary questioning set in motion by the Warren Commission twelve years earlier.

The Committee's failure to provide documentation that could resolve the gunman's identity - despite a plethora of evidence, documents and expertise - was crucial because it reproduced failings exhibited earlier by the Warren Commission. In both cases, the plethora of documentation was insufficient and ineffective in lending closure to the assassination record. Bolstered by a number of semi-official investigations which similarly produced more questions than answers, institutional forums of documentation were lodged in a situation of what I call documentary failure. Recognized forums for documentation were unable to generate conclusive answers about Kennedy's assassination, suggesting a failure of documentary process in regard to the assassination record.

Rather than generate closure, documentary failure diminished closure where it existed, and generated questions where there had previously been answers. As assassination buff Josiah Thompson said, normal investigatory procedure of homicides tend to produce a convergence of the evidence. But in Kennedy's homicide, "things haven't gotten any simpler; they haven't come together." More information only generated more questions¹¹¹. Despite their status as legitimate and recognized holders of memories about the assassination, official forums for documentation were unable to provide an authorized and complete account of the events of Kennedy's death: They produced a situation by which

We are not agreed on the number of gunmen, the number of shots, the origin of the shots, the time span between shots, the paths the bullets took, the number of wounds on the president's body, the size and shape of the wounds, the amount of damage to the brain, the presence of metallic fragments in the chest, the number of caskets, the number of ambulances, the number of occipital bones¹¹².

Ultimately documentary failure exposed the basically constructed nature of documentary process, and showed how relative were the "truths" such forums sought to uphold.

This generated conditions by which other figures eagerly sought to re-examine the assassination record. The assassination story was opened up for renegotiation, its official memories de-authorized. Implicitly or explicitly,

this invited other groups - such as journalists - to lend closure through their versions of events. In other words, the failure of documentary process made it possible for other groups vying to tell the assassination story to emerge as its authorized spokespersons. Documentary failure made possible the legitimation of alternate forms of documentation in conjunction with the story of Kennedy's death.

THE ASCENT OF ALTERNATE MEMORIES AND ALTERNATE RETELLERS

For other retellers striving to tell their versions of Kennedy's death, this generated immediate opportunity. The vacuum of recognized authority suggested a need for other kinds of evidence providing other angles to the crime. As Don DeLillo remarked:

Powerful events breed their own network of inconsistencies...The physical evidence contradicts itself, the eyewitness accounts do not begin to coincide. There are failures of memory, there are conflicting memories ¹¹³.

For speakers trying to forward their authoritative presence within the assassination tale, this suggested that by offering a different interpretation of the events of Kennedy's death, they could solidify their position as its authorized spokespeople. As David Lifton suggested in his book about the assassination, "What you believe happened in Dallas on November 22, 1963 depends on what

evidence you believe" ¹¹⁴. What he did not say was that as important as what one believed was who one believed had the right to assist in determining beliefs about the assassination.

Given the re-search necessitated by documentary failure, individuals and groups began to document the documents of others. Because they were no longer able to access the original assassination story, documents which had previously been sealed were opened; testimony was re-given within different parameters and circumstances; and access to secondary sources of information became equally important as access to the original crime. Journalists in particular often found themselves commenting upon their own documentation. For example, in discussing one of the more recent books on the assassination, author James Reston Jr. was told that he had no new evidence. Reston replied that his argument came from rereading the documents themselves ¹¹⁵. His comment upheld the legitimacy of secondary access, and recognition that the layperson's re-reading of old texts was a viable practice of interpretation, or documentary exploration. Attempting to advance its legitimacy in effect justified the access of laypersons to the documents of the assassination record, and suggested the central role they could play in deconstructing its contents. It also upheld the views of

non-official persons as legitimate and recognized interpretations of Kennedy's death. The fact that many new theories, new evidence and expertise all relied on re-readings of the same documents and statements thereby made the memories of alternate groups of people a potentially salient and valued source of documentation.

Another example was found in a 1988 edition of Nova, which traced the kinds of evidentiary practice that had figured over the years in readings of Kennedy's death ¹¹⁶. Using Walter Cronkite as narrator, it explored 25 years of investigatory efforts through the categories of evidence and expertise that had been invoked to interpret its circumstances, suggesting that which assassination reading people adopted depended in large part on the categories of evidence, testimony and expertise in which they believed. This suggests that following documentary failure, the assassination was reinvested with cultural importance, but from a different perspective - that of alternate groups of speakers with their own memories and stories to tell. Officialdom's failure to document the assassination story inadvertently focused attention on the authority of alternate speakers in places where official forums had failed. This foregrounded the involvement of journalists and other retellers, and paved the way for alternate readings of the events of Kennedy's death. By allowing

them to position themselves through different interpretive practices around the gap of authority created by documentary failure, it put alternate documenters of the record - like journalists - into viable positions by which they could jockey for more authority through references to their own documentation about the assassination.

In particular, journalists' ability to do so was made easier because secondary access was a practice with which they were comfortable. Many journalists had used secondary access to the documents of others in order to initially generate their own authority for covering the story of Kennedy's death. For example, broadcaster Eric Sevareid, brought in to comment on a CBS Report on the Warren Commission, was criticized because "as a witness, his credentials...seemed to consist entirely of his agreement to watch the CBS documentary" ¹¹⁷. Yet for lack of a viable alternative, secondary access, or access to the documentary efforts of others, evolved into the optimum form of investigation. This put journalists and their professional practices in a positive light.

Because journalists played such a large part in fashioning "the record of the record," ordering its documents implicitly upheld their placement as professionals. At heart, then, of the reopening of the assassination record was a definitive movement from the

authority of the recognized official body to that of the non-official, the layperson and amateur. Because so much of the record was documented by journalists, they played a central and strategic part in shaping that movement. Retellers with access to technologies of dissemination promised not only a new way of reconstructing the events of Kennedy's death but of replaying them in convincing and plausible narratives. From such a perspective, journalists occupied a particularly advantageous position. Their ready access to technology and familiarity with practices of second-order access cast them as central players in retelling the assassination.

FORMS OF MEMORY

As the assassination story edged into the eighties, journalistic memories of the assassination took on many forms. There continued to be an emphasis on personal memories of eyewitnesses, newspapers filled with articles like "Many Remember the Scene As It Was" ¹¹⁸. Emphasis was on presence, both actual and symbolic. As journalist Mary McGrory said in an article entitled "You Had To Be There to Know the Pain": "Those who did not know him or did not live through his death may find it difficult to understand the continuing bereavement of those who did" ¹¹⁹.

There were also recollections of a more theoretical nature, both by journalists and other retellers of the

assassination story. Assassination retellings oscillated between the two themes by which it had been most successfully codified, adopting slightly novel configurations of Camelot and conspiracy. On one hand, thirty-four percent of Americans were quoted as saying in 1988 that Kennedy had been the country's most effective President ¹²⁰. Camelot-like sentiments produced books like William Manchester's One Brief Shining Moment: Remembering Kennedy, a long tribute to the President that mentioned neither plots to assassinate foreign leaders nor stories of Kennedy's sexual alliances, and romanticized television series like Kennedy with Martin Sheen ¹²¹. Some observers maintained that there was a "Camelot backlash":

The 20th anniversary of the assassination received even more media exposure than had the anniversaries of 1973 or 1978 - much of it devoted to nostalgia about the Kennedy family and the Kennedy charm. The underside of Camelot was also acknowledged, dismissed as unimportant ¹²².

Articles were written about "Camelot Revisited" or "Camelot On Tape," detailing how Kennedy had taped his ongoing White House conversations regularly ¹²³. Camelot was maintained intact, despite its acknowledged failings.

At the same time revisionists demoted Kennedy from a "great" President to a merely "successful" one: "A dry-eyed view of his thousand days suggests that his words were bolder than his deeds" ¹²⁴. Herbert Parmet's book on

the Presidency succeeded in thoroughly documenting the underside of Kennedy's Presidency but stopped short of castigating him for his failings ¹²⁵. News-magazines were filled with more realistic re-readings of Kennedy's Presidency ¹²⁶. In 1985, Hofstra University conducted a conference on Kennedy entitled John Fitzgerald Kennedy: The Promise Revised. The conference director maintained that the theme was chosen to provide a fair evaluation of the former President ¹²⁷.

Conspiracy readings also flourished "with a vengeance" ¹²⁸, as in Don Delillo's 1988 novel Libra or the NBC mini-series Favorite Son ¹²⁹. New books on the assassination suggested different angles to old information: One posited Texas Governor John Connally as the assassin's target rather than Kennedy ¹³⁰; others gave new reasons for the Mafia wanting to kill Kennedy ¹³¹. Gary Wills' The Kennedy Imprisonment and Peter Collier and David Horowitz's The Kennedys furthered suggestions of Kennedy's sexual activity and dubious connections ¹³².

THE ABSENCE OF REVELATION

The eighties thus brought with them few revelations into the assassination record. As one journalist remarked, "there are no new facts about the Kennedys, only new attitudes" ¹³³. Indeed, not everybody remembered, or cared

about, the events of Kennedy's death. As Pete Hamill observed, by 1988

an entire generation had come to maturity with no memory at all of the Kennedy years; for them, Kennedy is the name of an airport or a boulevard or a high school ¹³⁴.

A 1987 photograph showed two visitors at Kennedy's grave on the 24th anniversary of his death ¹³⁵, a far cry from the hordes of people that had gathered earlier at his graveside. There appeared to be a certain national amnesia about the tawdry revelations of the seventies ¹³⁶. A 1983 Newsweek poll showed that relatively few Americans associated John F. Kennedy with either sexual misconduct or plots to murder foreign leaders ¹³⁷. Reporter Jefferson Morley found an impatience with the ambiguities of the assassination, and held that "Camelot and conspiracy in Dallas were domesticated for prime time: 'Who shot JFK?' became 'Who shot J.R.?' " ¹³⁸. Media forums ranging from the Washington Post to Newsweek were content to admit that the truth would never be known ¹³⁹.

Yet retellings persisted. This suggests that attention turned from uncovering new content about the assassination to the processes by which the assassination record had been documented. This played into the authority of journalists and other retellers, who became experts at secondary access. As Don DeLillo maintained:

The operative myth of the Kennedy years was the romantic dream of Camelot. But there is a recurring theme or countermyth that might prove to be more endearing. It is the public's belief in the secret manipulation of history. Documents lost, missing, altered, destroyed, classified. Deaths by suicide, murder, accident, unspecified natural causes. The simplest facts elude authentication ¹⁴⁰.

Understanding the manipulation of the record thus became as important as understanding the circumstances that caused Kennedy's death. Less concerned with finding whole theories or complete versions of what happened in Dallas, Americans began to look to other quarters for authoritative versions of smaller incidents of documentary abuse. Christopher Lasch generated an aptly titled article called "The Life of Kennedy's Death," which detailed the story's lingering effect on ongoing definitions not about Kennedy or the assassination but about those who produced such definitions ¹⁴¹. In his view, the assassination has remained a national obsession because it validates conflicting historical myths about insiders and outsiders, professionals and laypersons. In such a light, ABC News produced its first two-hour length retrospective on the President in 1983 ¹⁴². Dallas finally opened what the New York Times called "its most infamous public space," the Texas School Book Depository ¹⁴³, amid wide-ranging controversy over the collective and individual meanings generated by such a move.

This growing interest in the processes by which the assassination was documented - the meta-discourse about the record of the record - helped to focus attention on alternate forms of documentation, including professional memories, directly highlighting the role of journalists. The memories of those persons who were present in some professional capacity at the events of Kennedy's death offered a different perspective on tales which had been told many times over. As one reporter said, "what began with the assassination was not the present but the past"¹⁴⁴. The past, however, was not necessarily the past of America's 34th President but of persons attempting to work out their own histories, both personal and professional. Memories were thus set up in competition with the official accounts that had until then been held sacred. Given the failure of such official accounts to lend closure to the record, the alternate form of documentation suggested by professional memories became an attractive alternative.

This does not suggest that the alternate form of documentation which professional memories offer provided a more "accurate" or "truthful" version of events. One chronicler maintained that in addition to the failure of official investigations into the assassination, there were failures of "non-official" investigatory efforts:

We've seen documentaries and docudramas. We've watched the Zapruder film over and over again.

We've heard sound experts tell us that the evidence proves that there was a fourth shot and therefore two gunmen. We've read cheap fiction and superb fiction. In the end, nothing has been resolved ¹⁴⁵.

But reconstructions are in some ways not expected to make sense of everything. Stories of the 1980s became more realistic and personalized than those offered earlier. They were also less grandiose, less encumbered by large-scale visions. They constituted the folklore of the assassination record, based on the personal experiences and memories of those who had been present during the events in Dallas. Journalists took their place at the head of the list of those waiting to share their tales.

All of these circumstances made the retelling of Kennedy's death a particularly attractive locus through which to establish and perpetuate one's authority as a speaker in public discourse through memory. The fact that the assassination record was promoted at a point in time when, in Christopher Lasch's words, truth has given way to credibility, "facts to statements that sound authoritative without conveying any authoritative information," ¹⁴⁶ in effect enhanced the appeal of alternate records based on memory.

¹ Tom Wicker, "Kennedy Without End, Amen," Esquire (June 1977), p. 69. The phrase appeared to be a neatly-turned version of a remark made by James Reston the day after the

assassination: "What was killed in Dallas was not only the president but the promise. The heart of the Kennedy legend is what might have been" ["Why America Weeps," New York Times (11/23/63), p. 11. It also became the title of a much-acclaimed article by Reston one year later called "What Was Killed Was Not Only the President But the Promise," New York Times (11/15/64), sec vi, p. 1.
 2 Gore Vidal, "Camelot Recalled: Dynastic Ambitions," Esquire (June 1983, reprinted from "The Holy Family," April 1967), p. 210.

3 Todd Gitlin, The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), p. 150.

4 See Elizabeth Bird, "Media and Folklore as Intertextual Communication Processes: JFK and the Supermarket Tabloids," in Margaret McLaughlin, Communication Yearbook 10 (1987), for a brief overview of different folkloristic readings of Kennedy as hero.

5 Daniel Boorstin, "JFK: His Vision, Then and Now," U.S. News and World Report (10/24/88), p. 30. Such a view was expressed across media. For example, one leading journalist maintained that "had he not been martyred as President, his Presidential rating would be much lower." [See Harrison Salisbury, A Time of Change (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 64].

6 Andrew M. Greeley, "Leave John Kennedy in Peace," The Christian Century (Special Issue entitled "JFK: Ten Years Later", 11/21/73), p. 1150.

7 Ronald Steel, "The Kennedy Fantasy," The New York Review of Books, 1970.

8 "A Year After the Assassination," Newsweek (11/30/64), p. 26.

9 Review of The Kennedy Years, New York Times (11/22/64), sec. VII, p. 6; Review of There Was A President, New York Times (1/16/67), p. 39. Salinger and Vanocur's book was discussed in New York Times (3/27/64), p. 10.

10 Four Days in November was shown on 10/7/64 [New York Times (10/8/64), p. 48].

11 "Camelot Revisited," The Nation (11/19/83), p. 483.

12 New York Times (8/28/64), p. 27.

13 New York Times (2/16/64), sec. vii, p. 8.

14 One proclaimed book was Jim Bishop's The Day Kennedy Was Shot, whose issuance was timed to coincide with the fifth anniversary of Kennedy's assassination. The book was billed as "the book that the former Mrs. John F. Kennedy urged Jim Bishop not to write," an odd twist to the Kennedy family's attempts to manage assassination memories ["New Kennedy Book Set For Release," New York Times (10/24/68), p. 95].

15 James Reston, "Why America Weeps," New York Times (11/23/63), pp. 1, 7.

- 16 Jefferson Morley, "Camelot and Dallas: The Entangling Kennedy Myths," The Nation (12/12/88), p. 646.
- 17 Ibid, p. 646.
- 18 Theodore H. White, "Camelot, Sad Camelot" (Excerpt from In Search of History: A Personal Adventure), Time (7/3/78), p. 47.
- 19 Pete Hamill, "JFK: The Real Thing," New York (11/28/88), p. 46.
- 20 Thomas Brown, JFK: History of An Image (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 104.
- 21 Ibid, p. 45; also "Birch View of JFK," Newsweek (2/24/64), pp. 29-30.
- 22 William G. Carleton, "Kennedy in History," Antioch Review 24 (Fall 1964), p. 278.
- 23 "JFK: Reflections A Year Later" (Editorial), Life (11/20/64), p. 4.
- 24 New York Times (2/16/64), sec. vii, p. 8.
- 25 This included a public exhibit of his mementoes, including amateur attempts at painting, notes from a boyhood try for a raise in allowance, and ship models from the President's personal collection. See Jacqueline Kennedy, "These Are the Things I Hope Will Show How He Really Was," Life (5/29/64), pp. 32-38.
- 26 New York Times (6/25/70), p. 1; Other figures loyal to the official Kennedy memory made the same plea [See Theodore Sorensen, New York Times (11/22/73), p. 37]. Attempts persist to the present day, evidenced by Barbara Gamarekian's 1988 comment that the Kennedy family want to remember JFK by his life, not death ["Hundreds are in Capital for 25th Remembrance," New York Times (11/22/88)].
- 27 "The Presidency: Battle of the Book," Time (12/23/66), p. 15.
- 28 Jim Bishop, The Day Kennedy Was Shot (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. xvi. The number of writers censored by the Kennedy family far exceeded those who were granted familial approval for pending manuscripts. The family tried to block Governess Maud Shaw's memoirs of her White House years, White House Nannie, and did the same with former JFK confidante Paul Fay's In the Pleasure of His Company, which was reportedly cut in half after persuasals by Jacqueline Kennedy. The pattern also persisted into the eighties, with sixties analyst David Horowitz, who co-authored The Kennedys: An American Drama, maintaining that the Kennedys exercised "totalitarian control" over their memories and cancelled interviews with him at the last minute ["Re-evaluating the Kennedys," U.S. News and World Report (5/4/87), p. 68]. Also see "Camelot Censured," Newsweek (11/3/66) and Andy Logan, "JFK: The Stained Glass Image," American Heritage magazine (August 1967), p. 6.

- ²⁹ "The Presidency: Battle of the Book," Time (12/23/66), p. 15.
- ³⁰ New York Times (12/17/66), p. 1; New York Times (1/23/67), p. 1. See also "Camelot Censured?", Newsweek (11/3/66), pp. 65-66; "The Presidency: Battle of the Book," Time (12/23/66), pp. 15-18. Ultimately this also worked to the disadvantage of Kennedy's memory. As one journalist remarked, Kennedy was "overmemorialized in too short a time. It seems...that the Kennedy family, driven in their grief as powerfully as in many other things, must accept some responsibility for the truth that the sudden folk hero has obscured the man" [Loudon Wainwright, "Atlantic City and a Memory," Life (9/4/67), p. 17].
- ³¹ "The Presidency: Battle of the Book," Time (12/23/66), p. 15.
- ³² Andy Logan, "JFK: The Stained Glass Image," American Heritage Magazine (August 1967), p. 7. Enlightening here was what Logan called the "style sheet" for historical material. Stylistic rules included "don't call Bobby 'Bobby', as everyone else does"; "pretend you have always called the President's wife 'Mrs. Kennedy' or 'Jacqueline', not 'Jackie' as the whole world knows her"; "the President's father is not to be called 'Joe', 'Old Joe,' or 'Big Joe'. Refer to him as Mr. Joseph P. Kennedy or 'the Ambassador - and always respectfully" (p. 75).
- ³³ Ibid, p. 77.
- ³⁴ New York Times (5/23/64), p. 6; One of the few news organizations that complied with suggestions to commemorate Kennedy's birthday instead of his death was McCall's magazine. It published a commemorative article by Theodore Sorensen under the simple title "May 29, 1967", where Sorensen candidly discussed the gains to be had in remembering Kennedy's birthday. This included a somewhat peculiar statement that "no matter how old or preoccupied he became, John Kennedy always took a boyish delight in celebrating his birthday and opening presents" [Theodore Sorensen, "May 29, 1967," McCall's (June 1967), p. 59].
- ³⁵ Mel Elfin, "Beyond the Generations," U.S. News and World Report (10/24/88), p. 33.
- ³⁶ Milton Mayer, "November 22, 1963," The Progressive (December 1964), p. 25.
- ³⁷ This favorable reception also lingered for the first year or so after the Commission published its findings. See the New York Times (9/29/64) or "November 22 and the Warren Report," CBS News (9/27/64).
- ³⁸ "John Kennedy's Death: The Debate Still Rages," U.S. News and World Report (11/21/83), p. 49.
- ³⁹ "JFK/MLK: Is There More to The Story?" Senior Scholastic (11/18/76), p. 9. Also Calvin Trillin, "The Buffs," The New Yorker (6/10/67), p. 42.

40 Priscilla McMillan, "That Time We Huddled Together," New York Times (11/22/73), p. 37.

41 Don DeLillo, "American Blood: A Journey Through the Labyrinth of Dallas and JFK," Rolling Stone (12/8/83), p. 28.

42 David Welsh and William Turner, "In the Shadow of Dallas," Ramparts (1/25/69), p. 62. Also see New York Times (9/23/64), p. 20.

43 These included a summary report made available in both hard and paper-cover by the Government Printing Office for \$3.25 and \$2.50 respectively, a New York Times soft-cover edition available at \$1.00 or an AP hard-cover edition made available to members for \$1.00 [New York Times (9/23/64), p. 20].

44 They included photographers Robert H. Jackson of the Dallas Time Herald and Thomas Dillard of the Dallas Morning News, and Malcom Couch and James Darnell, both television newsreel camerapersons (Warren Commission Report, pp. 64-65). Other reporters gave testimony about the botched press conference at Parkland Memorial Hospital and the televised shooting of Lee Harvey Oswald.

45 New York Times (9/23/64), p. 20.

46 The Warren Report (Published by the Associated Press, 1964). Interestingly, these pictures did not document the assassination itself, only the moments that led up to it, suggesting yet again the basic failure of photographic technology to have captured the actual shooting of the President.

47 Warren Commission Report, 1964, p. 366.

48 W. Shannon, New York Times (10/19/71), p. 43.

49 Thomas Brown, 1988, p. 66.

50 Ibid, p. 51.

51 Quoted in Fred Bruning, "The Grief Has Still Not Gone Away," MacLeans (11/28/88), p. 13.

52 Quoted in William E. Leuchtenburg, "John F. Kennedy, Twenty Years Later," American Heritage Magazine (December 1983), p. 53.

53 Richard Boeth, "JFK: Visions and Revisions," Newsweek (11/19/73), p. 76.

54 Hamill, 1988, p. 46.

55 "A Primer of Assassination Theories," Esquire (December 1966), pp. 205-10.

56 Mark Lane, Rush to Judgment (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1966); Edward J. Epstein, Inquest (New York: Viking Press, 1966).

57 James Kirkwood, American Grotesque (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968). In the late 1980s, Garrison sought to publicize his version of the by-then defunct case. See Jim Garrison, On the Trail of the Assassins (New York: Sheridan Square Press, 1988). But it was largely derided

in the media, particularly by Edward J. Epstein in an article simply called "Garrison," [The New Yorker (7/13/68), pp. 35-81].

⁵⁸ Richard Goodwin, quoted in New York Times (7/24/66), p. 25.

⁵⁹ "Assassination: Behind Moves To Reopen JFK Case," U.S. News and World Report (6/2/75), p. 31.

⁶⁰ The station was WNEW-TV, and the program was discussed in the New York Times (11/15/66), p. 1.

⁶¹ New York Times (9/25/66), sec. iv, p. 10.

⁶² Harrison Salisbury, A Time of Change (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 71. Ultimately, he admitted, "the massive inquiry remains on the shelf, unfinished, unpublished...Nothing in our new investigation undercut, contradicted or undermined in any fashion the basic conclusions of our original work or that of the Warren Commission" (p. 72).

⁶³ See New York Times (6/29/67), p. 87 for review of first part of series; also see TV Guide (6/29/67).

⁶⁴ New York Times (6/25/67).

⁶⁵ CBS News Press Release (6/29/67), cited in Lane, 1968, p. 98.

⁶⁶ TV Guide (7/29/67).

⁶⁷ Interestingly, this was the very point at which some of the assassination buffs faulted journalists, for not being sufficiently investigative in their efforts to reopen the assassination record. See Lane, 1968.

⁶⁸ "JFK: The Death and the Doubts," Newsweek (12/5/66), p. 25.

⁶⁹ Jack Anderson, Washington Post (3/3/67).

⁷⁰ "Assassination - Behind Moves to Reopen JFK Case," U.S. News and World Report (6/2/75), p. 30.

⁷¹ "The American Assassins," CBS News (11/25/75-11/26/75);, "Assassination: An American Nightmare," ABC News (11/14/75); "JFK: The Truth is Still At Large," New Times (4/18/75).

⁷² Michael Matza, "Five Still Probing the JFK Killing," Philadelphia Inquirer (11/22/88), p. 1-E.

⁷³ "Assassination: Behind Moves To Reopen the JFK Case," U.S. News and World Report (6/12/75), p. 32.

⁷⁴ Geraldo Rivera, "Good Night America," ABC News (3/26/75) Reviewed by New York Times (3/27/75), p. 61.

⁷⁵ Michael L. Kurtz, Crime of the Century (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982).

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 30, p. 158.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 158.

⁷⁸ Briefly, a few frequently-cited works on various assassination involvements included Harold Weisberg's Whitewash: The Report on the Warren Report (Hyattstown, Md: 1965) implicating the Dallas police; Weisberg's

Whitewash II: The FBI -Secret Service Cover-Up (Hyattstown, Md: 1966) on FBI and Secret Service involvement; Penn Jones, Jr.'s Forgive My Grief (Midlothian, Texas: Midlothian Mirror, 1966) on Texas right-wingers; and Thomas G. Buchanan's Who Killed Kennedy? (New York: Putnam, 1964), which implicated right-wing oil-men. Admittedly, there are many more.

⁷⁹ "A Decade of Unanswered Questions," Ramparts (December 1973), p. 43.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 43.

⁸¹ Charles Roberts, The Truth About the Assassination (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1967), p. 119. Interestingly, Roberts also contended that the reason that conspiracy books were so well-received was because they got good reviews from people little acquainted with the assassination. He said: "Where the newspaper had assigned journeyman reporters - many of them veterans of Dallas - to 'cover' the Warren Report, their book editors assigned literary critics - including some who had only a headline-readers' knowledge of the assassination - to review the books that appeared to destroy the Warren Report" (p. 118).

⁸² "Assassination: Behind Moves to Reopen JFK Case," U.S. News and World Report, p. 31.

⁸³ "A Decade of Unanswered Questions," 1973, p. 43.

⁸⁴ Michael Rossman, "The Wedding Within the War," cited in Mitchel Stephens, A History of News (New York: Viking Press, 1988), p. 125.

⁸⁵ Morley, 1988, p. 646. Particularly among leftists, the feverish discussion in favor of conspiracy was analysed as "a culture of narcissism" by Christopher Lasch [Culture of Narcissism (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979)]. This was evident in the search for immediate political highs and fascination with the sensational that characterized the conspiracy theorists.

⁸⁶ "A Decade of Unanswered Questions," 1973, p.44.

⁸⁷ As early as 1973, one writer juxtaposed the Kennedy assassination and the Nixon impeachment as "paraphrases of each other" - two examples of parricide. See Priscilla McMillan, "That Time We Huddled Together," New York Times (11/22/73), p. 37. While this is not the theme advanced here, it nonetheless suggests distinct parallels between the two events and a deep-seated psychological need for documentary questioning.

⁸⁸ Contending that both agencies had lied to the Warren Commission, Senator R. Schweiker commented that "we pursue some hot leads" to resolve who killed Kennedy [New York Times (5/15/76), p. 13]. For example, as late as 1977, the FBI even issued its own report on the assassination that took 14 years and over 80,000 pages of documentation, and

which basically upheld the Warren Commission Report's conclusion that Oswald had acted alone ["The FBI's Report on JFK's Death," Time (12/19/77), p. 18]. This was at a time that the climate of opinion was moving steadily towards interpretations of conspiracy.

⁸⁹ Kurtz, 1982, p. 87. Kurtz provides a detailed analysis of the Clark Panel. Also see 1968 Panel Review of Photographs, X-Ray Films, Documents and Other Evidence Pertaining to the Fatal Wounding of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, Undated Report).

⁹⁰ Report to the President by the Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States, Nelson A. Rockefeller, Chairman (Washington, D.C.: 1975).

⁹¹ Not incidentally, Exner had at the same time served as the mistress of two Mafia figures who had allegedly participated in CIA plots against the Cuban leader - John Roselli and Sam Giancana [U.S. Congress, Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders: An Interim Report (Washington, D.C.: 11/20/75), p. 129; cited in Thomas Brown, 1988, pp. 72-31. Suggestions of the Judith Campbell Exner - JFK connection were first leaked to the Washington Post (12/17/75) and were confirmed following a press conference which Exner convened in 1975, where she admitted having regularly seen Kennedy but did not confirm having sexual relations with him or having acted as a courier with the Mafia [See "JFK and the Mobsters' Moll," Time (12/29/75) and "A Shadow Over Camelot," Newsweek (12/29/75)]. In Newsweek's view, Exner's story at the time "broke a gentleman's code of silence that had long sheltered Kennedy's private diversions from public view" in that she was "the first of the Other Women in his life to come forward out of the shadowland of gossip, with documentation for her claim to his interest" (p. 14). Sexual relations between the two were confirmed by the Church committee, but by 1988, Exner herself corrected earlier admissions, when through People magazine she admitted simultaneous affairs with Giancana and Kennedy, as a means of servicing Kennedy ["The Dark Side of Camelot," People (2/29/88), pp. 106-114].

⁹² New York Times (7/2/76), sec. I, p. 26.

⁹³ "The Question That Won't Go Away," The Saturday Evening Post (December 1975), pp. 38-9. Interestingly, the same article also pinpointed the journal's activity in reopening the assassination. It went on to claim: "In a January 1967 editorial The Saturday Evening Post called for a reopening of the case, noting that 'the possibility of a conspiracy is too ugly and too important to be left

to gossip and speculation,' and in December 1967 it again urged a new investigation. Now, eight years later, the editors and staff of the Post voice their hopes that the doubts of more than a decade will finally be put to rest" (p. 39).

⁹⁴ The claim was made by Representative Walter Fauntroy on the TV program America's Black Forum [New York Times (4/24/77), p. 18].

⁹⁵ Jack Anderson, Washington Post (3/3/67).

⁹⁶ Walter Cronkite, CBS Evening News (4/25/75). Also see New York Times (4/26/75), p. 12.

⁹⁷ This particularly centered on an FBI memo which detailed conversations between Lee Harvey Oswald and Cuban officials about Oswald's intention to kill Kennedy, and which was never given to the Commission. As the New York Times said, this suggested that the Warren Commission's conclusion of Oswald's lone culpability was based on incomplete evidence [New York Times (11/13/76), p. 9]. Also see Kurtz, 1982, p. 206.

⁹⁸ David Welsh and William Turner, "In the Shadow of Dallas," Ramparts (1/25/69), p. 71. One-half of the FBI reports and 90% of the CIA documentation was also still classified.

⁹⁹ Don DeLillo, "American Blood," Rolling Stone (12/8/83), p. 24.

¹⁰⁰ Tom Wicker, "Kennedy Without End, Amen," Esquire (June 1977), p. 67.

¹⁰¹ Morley, 1988, p. 649.

¹⁰² Thomas Brown, 1988, p. 76.

¹⁰³ New York Times (11/18/76), p. 17.

¹⁰⁴ David W. Belin, Final Disclosure (New York: MacMillan, 1988), p. 187. Belin contended that the committee made an about-face three weeks before handing over its verdict, at which point it hastily and, in his view, messily adopted a pro-conspiracy line in its deliberations.

¹⁰⁵ Kurtz, 1982, p. 160.

¹⁰⁶ New York Times (12/31/78), p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ New York Times (7/15/79), p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Brown, 1988, p. 79.

¹⁰⁹ Kurtz, 1982, pp. 186, 187.

¹¹⁰ Frank Donner, "Conspiracies Unlimited," The Nation (12/22/79), p. 654.

¹¹¹ Josiah Thompson, quoted in "Who Shot President Kennedy?" Nova (11/15/88).

¹¹² Don DeLillo, "American Blood," Rolling Stone (12/8/83), p. 22.

¹¹³ DeLillo, 1983, p. 22.

¹¹⁴ David S. Lifton, Best Evidence (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 1980), introductory remarks.

¹¹⁵ The book was a 1988 renewal of an earlier theory that Oswald intended to kill Connally and not Kennedy. See "25th Anniversary of JFK's Assassination," Nightline, ABC News (11/22/88).

¹¹⁶ Who Shot President Kennedy?, Special Edition of Nova (11/15/88), PBS Productions. This program was in some ways an updated and more sophisticated version of an earlier CBS Special, screened in June 1967, where Walter Cronkite screened on-site acoustic tests (New York Times (6/29/67), p. 87.). The earlier program was, in one observer's eyes, "a major journalistic achievement...a masterful compilation of facts, interviews, experiments and opinions - a job of journalism that will be difficult to surpass" [TV Guide, cited in Mark Lane, A Citizen's Dissent (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 98]. Regardless, it is telling that television, the most technologically-determined of news media, would have taken it upon itself to produce an overview of the different technologies, bodies of expertise and evidence by which it was possible to differentially "read" Kennedy's death. The fact that the 1988 show was more technologically advanced than the earlier one only fit in with surrounding discourse about technology, evidence, testimony and expertise.

¹¹⁷ Mark Lane, A Citizen's Dissent (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 96. Continued Lane: "Since Severeid is stationed in Washington, D.C., he might easily have journeyed to the National Archives and there asked for the index-source material relied upon by the commission" (p. 97).

¹¹⁸ Washington Post (11/23/88), p. A8.

¹¹⁹ Mary McGrory, "You Had to Be There to Know the Pain," Washington Post (11/20/83), p. F1.

¹²⁰ Henry Allen, "JFK: The Man and the Maybes," Washington Post (11/22/88), p. E2.

¹²¹ William Manchester, One Brief Shining Moment (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983). Other examples here included Jacques Lowe's Kennedy: A Time Remembered (New York: Quartet/Visual Arts, 1983) and Philip B. Kunhardt, Jr.(ed.), Life in Camelot (New York: Time Inc, 1988). Kennedy (Landsburg Productions).

¹²² Morley, 1988, p. 649.

¹²³ "Camelot Revisited," The Nation (11/19/83), p. 483; "Camelot On Tape," Time (7/4/83), p. 122.

¹²⁴ Goldman, "Kennedy Remembered," 1983, p. 63.

¹²⁵ Herbert S. Parmet, JFK: The Presidency of John F. Kennedy (New York: Dial Press, 1983).

¹²⁶ Examples included "A Great President? Experts size up JFK," U.S. News and World Report (11/21/83), p. 51; Lance

Morrow, "After 20 Years, the Question: How Good A President?" Time (11/14/83), p. 58.

¹²⁷ New York Times (2/17/85).

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 649.

¹²⁹ Don Delillo, Libra (New York: Viking Press, 1988); Morley, "Camelot and Dallas," p. 649.

¹³⁰ James Reston, Jr., The Expectations of John Connally (New York: Harper and Row, 1989); excerpted in James Reston, Jr., "Was Connally the Real Target?" Time (11/28/88), pp. 30-41. Reston and Connally were also interviewed on ABC's Nightline (11/22/88).

¹³¹ These included John H. Davis' Mafia Kingfish and David E. Scheim's Contract on America (New York: Zebra Books, 1988), both of which were discussed in detail in "Did the Mob Kill JFK?" Time (11/28/88), pp. 42-44.

¹³² Gary Wills, The Kennedy Imprisonment (New York: Pocket Books, 1982); Peter Collier and David Horowitz, The Kennedys (New York: Warner Books, 1984).

¹³³ John Gregory Dunne, "Elephant Man," (Review of Gary Wills' The Kennedy Imprisonment), New York Review of Books (4/15/82), p. 10.

¹³⁴ Pete Hamill, "JFK: The Real Thing," (11/28/88), p. 46.

¹³⁵ New York Times (11/23/87), sec ii, p. 10. This was somewhat revived during the following year, when estimates of the people in Dealey Plaza ranged from 400 [New York Times (11/23/88), p. A16] to 2,500 [Washington Post (11/23/88), p. A11].

¹³⁶ Thomas Brown, 1988, p. 76.

¹³⁷ Peter Goldman, "Kennedy Remembered," (11/28/83), p. 64.

¹³⁸ Jefferson Morley, "Camelot and Dallas: The Entangling Kennedy Myths," The Nation (12/12/88), p. 649.

¹³⁹ Jefferson Morley said as follows: "The Washington Post said the truth would never be known. A Los Angeles Times reporter dared to conclude that the Warren Commission was right. Newsweek left the public misgivings about the government's version of events to an inarticulate barber in Iowa" (Morley, "Camelot and Dallas," 1988, p. 649).

¹⁴⁰ Don Delillo, "American Blood: A Journey Through the Labyrinth of Dallas and JFK," Rolling Stone (12/8/83), p. 24.

¹⁴¹ Christopher Lasch, "The Life of Kennedy's Death," Harpers' (October 1983), p. 32.

¹⁴² JFK, ABC News (11/11/83).

¹⁴³ New York Times (8/18/87), p. 8.

¹⁴⁴ Henry Allen, "JFK: The Man and the Maybes," Washington Post (11/22/88), p. E2.

¹⁴⁵ Pete Hamill, "JFK: The Real Thing," (11/28/88), pp. 46-7.

¹⁴⁶ Cited in Frank Donner, "Conspiracies Unlimited," (12/22/79), p. 657.

CHAPTER SEVEN

NEGOTIATING MEMORY: SITUATING PROFESSIONAL RETELLERS

The establishment of Kennedy's assassination as a viable locus for retellers trying to professionally authenticate themselves through memory encouraged a wide range of speakers to situate themselves in and around its story. The emergence of certain retellers as preferred over others took place through the attempts of many groups vying to tell their versions of the same tale. Tensions were created by the different strategies of self-authorization they used.

In this chapter, I explore the process by which journalists have emerged as the preferred retellers of the assassination story. I first examine the practices of credentialling that took place across groups of different retellers - notably, assassination buffs and historians. I then explore how journalists borrowed from the professional codes of other speakers to establish themselves as the story's preferred retellers. Finally, I consider how journalists solidified their credentials for the story by strategically situating themselves inside it.

COMPETING FOR MEMORY

The assassination story constituted a locus around which different groups of retellers were constantly shifting in an effort to authorize their versions of what had happened. Implicit in retelling its story was the question of who was authorized to speak for the events of Kennedy's death. In retelling, authority was negotiated through continuing tensions by which retellers appraised the rightful positioning not only of themselves but of others.

Uncertainty over how to best position oneself was reflected in how speakers borrowed from the professional codes of other groups: Historians were labelled journalists; reporters pawned themselves off as historians; assassination buffs sought to be called muckrakers. These shared references for professional authentication not only suggested how shaky was the terrain on which all retellers stood, but how valued a terrain it was.

Speakers seeking to retell the tale came from all walks of life, and they used the assassination to unravel their own interpretive sidebars to the events of Kennedy's death. The group which most directly motivated this contest for the position of authorized spokesperson was the assassination buffs.

THE RETELLINGS OF ASSASSINATION BUFFS

Although initially derided as "cranks" or "profiteers" ¹, by the end of the sixties the assassination buffs had emerged as a primary group by which the assassination story would be reliably told. After public cynicism about documentary process set in and later solidified by Watergate, the Vietnam War, and revelations about CIA operations, "officials and the American public (were) more inclined to accept a conspiracy theory as possible" ². This by implication focused attention on the buffs, who had been directly responsible for forwarding notions of conspiracy.

- THE EVOLUTION OF THE BUFFS. The buffs posed a direct challenge to the ability of other professional groups seeking to position themselves as authorized spokespeople of the story. Despite their amateurism, they turned an interest in the events of Kennedy's death into an avocation, with sleuth ranks including sales-personnel, graduate students and housewives. Their function was to "get around" the existing official account. As journalist Richard Rovere said in his introduction to Edward Epstein's book, Inquest, "he is dealing with the record and disentangling the evidence from the conclusions" ³.

Attempts by the buffs to retell the assassination from their point of view were complicated by the fact that

they did not constitute a cohesive social group. They lacked both a community and a collective set of behavioural standards by which to practice their trade. As The New Yorker magazine reported:

an aura of unanimous acceptance had grown up around the official version of what had happened in Dallas, and most Americans did not even want to listen to any theories that contradicted it. Most of the assassination buffs, even those with a large circle of friends, suffered for at least a while from the special kind of loneliness that comes from being obsessed by something that nobody else seems to care about ⁴.

Their efforts were comprised of independent but often parallel investigations, which ranged from that of Sylvia Meagher, who on "finding the commission's index next to useless prepared and published her own" ⁵, to that of David Lifton, who left a Master's degree in Engineering to pursue his own investigation.

The lonely and idioyncratic nature of being a buff presupposed a need for codes of validation. Eventually a sense of community was forged when many buffs discovered others with similar sentiments, and there sprouted an informal network for sharing information. But the buffs also needed to validate themselves externally, within behavioral parameters that were familiar to the general public. They thereby sought to authenticate themselves through the professional codes of other groups of retellers, figuring that understanding the buffs within

the confines of journalistic or historical activity was easier than contemplating them as an independent entity, seemingly sprung from nowhere.

While the buffs' investigation of the assassination did not immediately gain momentum because "they did not have the resources to get answers for many of the questions they proposed,"

the very fact that they asked them was vitally-important, for they broke ground the Warren Commission was disposed to ignore ⁶.

A Ramparts investigation of the buffs' efforts claimed "they were doing the job the Dallas police, the FBI and the Warren Commission should have done in the first place" ⁷. As time wore on, and other quarters failed to address the questions that the buffs raised, their presence within the assassination story began to generate serious questions over whether official experts were needed to adequately deconstruct the assassination record. At heart of discussions of their role in retelling the assassination story were thus considerations about the role of the amateur in a world generally run by experts, and a mound of poorly evaluated evidence in a context where tidy official piles of documentation were assumed to have worked best. As one buff said,

It's possible that (what I've found) is completely unscientific. But my answer to people saying 'you're no expert' is 'where are the experts?' ⁸.

- SHARED CONCERNS, SHARED DISCOMFORTS. From the onset, the buffs saw themselves driven by concerns that were shared by both journalists and historians. "Constantly aware of the place in history reserved to whoever solves the puzzle" of Kennedy's death ⁹, history motivated them to pursue their investigations. Generally nonplussed by the crevices they added to the record, they sought to advance their often idiosyncratic versions of events with the general population. "Only in textbooks was history tidy," said one editorial in their support ¹⁰, in effect suggesting both that history was the ultimate locus of the assassination record but that historians needed assistance in its construction.

Other retellers tended at first to dismiss the quirky theories they propounded. Kennedy's in-house historians, for example, originally ignored the raucus being generated by the more vocal Commission critics. Yet there seemed to be a growing, if uneasy, recognition of the fact that the assassination buffs addressed points about the assassination that historians had failed to see. This became particularly problematic as the volume of retellings by assassination buffs increased over time, taking the place generally assumed by historical record.

A number of journalists, accustomed to acting themselves as a fourth estate of government, found that

the buffs' practices encroached on their territory and labelled them a "media offspring" ¹¹. Journalist Charles Roberts exemplified a characteristic trend of dismissiveness when he maintained that "clearly the pattern with Warren Commission critics is: If the experts agree with you, use them. If they don't, ignore them" ¹². Interestingly, the fact that the same had been often said about the journalistic community did not promote the same kind of evaluations about journalism. Criticism focused on the buffs' lack of expertise and the fact that they based their authority on a groundwork laid by the press corps. Journalists in particular faulted them for building their assassination libraries from newspaper clippings, thereby constructing an assassination record on documents provided largely by journalists ¹³. In an environment where journalists themselves sought to emerge as the assassination's authorized spokespeople, the buffs' dependence on journalistic record was problematic. For they needed to set themselves apart from journalists, establishing their authority as an independent interpretive community, and that objective was obscured by their usage of journalistic documents to do so.

- DISTANCING MECHANISMS AND THE BUFFS. In attempting to authorize themselves, the buffs particularly tried to distance themselves from the journalistic community. They

were critical that journalists had not adequately realized their own professional calling. "Reporters were everywhere in Dallas that day," said one buff, but the record they provided "still remains inexplicable" ¹⁴. Another held that after the assassination,

we all thought, 'it's almost going to break. This is just too blatant and obvious. There are bright newsmen working on this thing.' Well, of course it didn't break ¹⁵.

Bufs accused journalists of knowingly or unknowingly failing to "break the story," their inability to exercise professional authority seen as contributing to the defects of the assassination record.

Other buffs complained that the media refused to play out their stories: David Lifton faulted the national media - both television and print - for its reluctance to address the issues raised in Best Evidence ¹⁶. Similar complaints were levelled by Mark Lane, perhaps the most vocal assassination buff. Journalistic failure at times prompted the buffs to take up the task of documentary exploration themselves.

It is worth examining Lane's contentions in detail, because they underscored how the buffs in many cases regarded themselves as journalists. Lane's book, A Citizen's Dissent, began as a call to journalistic conscience, where he contended that European reporters

were puzzled by the obvious endorsement of the (Warren Commission) document by the American press...they asked how the independent American newspaperman had been silenced or cajoled into supporting the Report ¹⁷.

Bothered by the failure of a call to arms by American journalists, he asked "how do the American media act when a matter of historic dimensions occurs and when the Government takes the very firm position that that which is demonstrably false is true?" ¹⁸. Providing his own answer, he called American journalists a "biddable press" and contended that the American people lacked confidence "in the media for their many efforts to endorse the Report" ¹⁹.

Lane also vigorously contested the selective - and in his eyes wrongful - exercise of memory displayed by certain reporters. Directly in his line of fire was UPI reporter Merriman Smith:

(He) had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his eyewitness reporting of the assassination. If ever one wishes to develop an argument against such awards, one need merely reread the Smith dispatches from Dallas in the light of the facts now known, making allowance for the fact that standards which an historian might be expected to adhere to cannot be applied to a reporter ²⁰.

Although Lane's comments at times assumed the tone of a diatribe, they nonetheless exemplified how the buffs tried to authorize themselves through the standards followed by other groups of speakers. In this case, Lane bypassed the

reportorial standard in favor of the historical one, all in an attempt to legitimate the buffs' endeavors.

Yet in general, Lane attempted to recast the buffs' tellings as effective journalism. In concluding his book, Lane called for a reopening of the official investigation, saying that

the heroes of journalism are not those who crusade for the popular, who attack the weak and who are awarded the much-sought prizes. They are those who calmly assess the evidence, those who do not permit a sense of self to interfere with their professional obligations. They are too few; they are a disappearing breed ²¹.

The reference again to "heroes of journalism," and the attempt to legitimate the work of the buffs as the best of journalism, was telling.

Lane's claims were important for two reasons: They not only undermined the authority of journalists vis a vis the assassination, as appeared to be his intention, but they contextualized the work of the buffs as investigative reporting. In other words, the assassination buffs were seen - amongst themselves, if not others - as assuming the role of the press corps. Lane's framing of the buffs' efforts within a larger discourse about journalists and journalism suggested how related were the two spheres of practice. It also suggested the implicit centrality of journalists to retelling the assassination story.

Lane's comments also suggested an understanding of how professionalism is conveyed in discourse, with the buffs promoted by chipping away at the exclusivity with which certain behavior was traditionally associated with other groups of retellers. By framing his discussion as journalism, Lane thereby blurred both the amateurism of the buffs and the professionalism of the journalists. This exercise elevated the professionalism of the buffs at the same time as it detracted from the professionalism of reporters, casting the buffs as respondents to the professional challenges raised by the journalistic community.

THE RETELLINGS OF HISTORIANS

History was an integral part of assassination retellings. Observers made much of the fact that Kennedy had had an affinity for history. In an article called "History on His Shoulder," Time correspondent Hugh Sidey held that Kennedy "knew he was on history's stage" ²². Jackie Kennedy was quoted as saying that "history made Jack what he was" ²³. Nancy Dickerson explained that Kennedy videotaped his activities "because he thought that they could provide a new kind of record, a record so that people in the future could look back and see history more directly for themselves" ²⁴. Kennedy's interest in history was thus set up as a context which anticipated the

reciprocal interest shown him by historians after his death.

- ON THE VIABILITY OF HISTORICAL RECORD. While most historians did not directly address the assassination, they did mention the loss it embodied. They not only engraved it within the nation's collective consciousness, but planted it firmly within the kinds of contexts that made it meaningful. Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s A Thousand Days and Theodore Sorensen's Kennedy provided generally sympathetic views on the Presidency from persons who had served on the White House staff ²⁵. The reprinting of many of these publications in popular magazines assured their availability to a wider public ²⁶.

Yet their attempts to do so were met with antagonism by other retellers. It was as if what one reporter called "a historian's detachment" ²⁷ was not well-positioned within the story's retelling. This sentiment was particularly evident among journalists, perhaps because differences between the two groups, traditionally considered ones of perspective or temporal distance, did not bear out in the assassination's retelling. While historical references implied an authority to be applied "after the fact," precisely what constituted "after the fact" in the case of Kennedy's assassination remained unclear. The story's many loose ends did not yet call for

a perspective of detachment. Thus the persistence of the story's retellers failed to provide cues as to whose mission it was to report it. The legitimate parameters of the charter of "reporting history" remained unclear to all potential retellers.

This generated doubts as to the viability of one definitive history about the assassination. Doubts were expressed over whether one history was possible, attainable or desirable, as were questions over the role of historians in retelling the events of Kennedy's death. Part of this rested with the larger regard for the constructedness of the assassination record, which by definition assumed that there were many versions of the events of Kennedy's death, not just one.

Public critiques were levelled on historians' performances, particularly by journalists. They were critiqued for "missing the boat": "Historians Lost in the Mists of Camelot" was how one article in the Los Angeles Times proclaimed readings of Kennedy's administration and assassination ²⁸. Journalists spoke of certain historians as stuffy, distanced observers whose analyses of all things pertaining to Kennedy suffered from their formality ²⁹. Even one historian admitted that:

For the most part, professional scholars have neglected the assassination, as if it never occurred. This lack of attention has created a vacuum filled by journalists, free-lance

writers and others, most of whom have examined the assassination more for its sensational value than for its objective value ³⁰.

The narrative, professional and perspectival standards regularly employed by historians were all seen as working against renewed considerations of the assassination story. They also failed to underscore the importance of memories as a viable way of documenting it.

One direct challenge to the legitimate presence of historians within the assassination story came from writer Theodore White. White had enjoyed an extensive relationship with Kennedy while writing The Making of a President, 1960, and his relatively easy access to Kennedy's 1000 days in office made him a familiar face at the White House. On such a basis Jackie Kennedy summoned him the week after Kennedy died, having decided she wanted him to write about the slain President:

She had asked me to Hyannis Port, she said, because she wanted me to make certain that JFK was not forgotten in history. She thought it was up to me to make American history remember...She wanted me to rescue Jack from all the 'bitter people' who were going to write about him in history. She did not want Jack left to the historians ³¹.

From their meeting came the title of "Camelot." This memorable construction of Kennedy's administration made a journalist, not a historian, responsible for popularizing Kennedy's memory, transforming him into an instant

evaluator of history. Such a fact was energetically stressed by journalists in their chronicles across media.

In search for history's precise role of history within the assassination story, interest was also stirred in other potentially authoritative voices, as that exemplified by fiction. History and journalism were posited alongside fiction and drama. Edward Epstein lambasted William Manchester's reputedly "authorized" history of the assassination, Death of a President, as a novel frivolously begun as Death of Lancer ³². Underlying all these discussions was the fact that retellers of the assassination competed with a number of perspectives and agendas in retelling the assassination story. There was thus a growing awareness that the assassination story could be seen by many different perspectives, dependent on one's larger aims in telling it.

- DISCOMFORT WITH THE ROLE OF HISTORIANS. One consequence of this was an extensive back-biting, particularly by journalists, about historians' efforts at record construction. Articles debated whether Arthur Schlesinger's work constituted more "gossip" than "history": His memoirs were discussed under the title "Peephole Journalism," with the somewhat caustic comment that "he has made the most of a few occasions when he was permitted to see more than the average reporter" ³³.

Reporter Meg Greenfield castigated the work of memoirists about the Kennedy administration, through a discussion of commonly-accepted journalistic practices:

Any reporter can tell you how hard it is to recall even a brief quotation word for word after an interview, and the fact that certain memoirists repaired to their diaries in the evening is not even mildly reassuring in view of the extensive verbatim exchanges they have produced ³⁴.

These tensions in part emerged from whether it was the journalist's or historian's mission to report history. Chronological and linear demarcations between the two professions were somewhat blurred by the story's persistence. That fact in itself created spaces where different groups of public spokespeople could contest the right to tell the story's authorized version. But it was exacerbated by the varied involvement by which different groups sought to professionally authenticate themselves via the tale's telling. Professional needs thereby intensified the circumstances for competition among different groups of speakers. As DeLillo admonished, "establish your right to the mystery, document it, protect it" ³⁵. It was a challenge directly taken up by all retellers of the assassination, but it was a challenge to which journalists appeared particularly well-suited.

SITUATING THE JOURNALIST AS PREFERRED RETELLER

Situating journalists within and around the assassination story was thus shaped in conjunction with the retellings of two other groups of professional speakers - assassination buffs and historians. Journalists reworked basic standards of action common to both groups in order to fashion their own authority for retelling the events of Kennedy's death.

It is telling that the hierarchy suggested by competitive retellers of the assassination story - according to which assassination buffs strove to be labelled journalists, or better yet historians; journalists were intrigued by their historical role in retelling the assassination; and historians sought to uphold their own distanced position as tellers-from-a-distance - began to be unravelled over time. All professional tales focused on the lore of professional memories. But competition among retellers to a large degree rose and fell with the availability of stages through which to promote one's version of the assassination record. Members of alternate forums for documenting Kennedy's assassination competitively strove to tell their versions of the tale of his death according to the availability of such stages.

This was crucial to the emergence of journalists as preferred retellers, for it gave them the upper hand over other groups of speakers. In contrast to other groups, journalists possessed easy and continued access to the media. The central part they played in bringing the tales of all speakers, including historians and assassination buffs, to the public at times made them into mediators of a record in-the-making. In a sense, they became moderators of all versions of the assassination tale. Their ability to moderate and mediate tales that were generated and perpetuated by other speakers therefore worked to their advantage.

Journalists' regular appearances in the media helped thrust them into the forefront of the assassination story. For example, a 1988 article in the Los Angeles Times by reporter Jack Valenti was entitled "Anniversary of an Assassination: Memories of a Last Motorcade" and suggested the importance of Valenti's memories in documenting what had happened ³⁶. A 1983 special edition of Good Morning, America featured the personal and professional memories of a number of reporters and photographers who had been with the President in Dallas ³⁷. Each speaker independently established where in the Presidential motorcade they had been and what they remembered. Significantly, the entire program was

comprised of such recollections, suggesting that by 1983 memories alone had begun to be considered sufficient documentation of the events in Dallas.

The professional memories of journalists became even more entrenched by 1988, when media retrospectives included them in a wide array of forums. Journalists' recollections comprised central segments of a PBS documentary called JFK: A Time Remembered³⁸, which was billed as a "collection of reminiscences about the fall of Camelot." Journalists ranging from Nancy Dickerson and Charles Bartlett to Tom Wicker, Sarah McClendon and Dan Rather inscribed what they saw, heard and remembered. By 1988, journalistic presence at the events of Kennedy's death - symbolic or physical - was being extensively referenced across media. Journalists' memories began to be legitimated over those of other groups of speakers.

Indeed, by the twenty-fifth anniversary of the assassination, televised institutional recollections of Dallas included nearly every facet of recollection possible. Televised recollection appeared to be more the norm than exception, taking on a wide range of forms. While early recollections gave blow-by-blow accounts of what had happened in Dallas³⁹, later years produced a number of special programs that specifically addressed the assassination⁴⁰. Each subsequent anniversary of the

assassination received greater and more varied media attention than the ones preceding it ⁴¹.

By the twenty-fifth anniversary, televised recollection of the assassination was so pervasive that it not only generated special documentaries but also pervaded existing programs. Regular news was filled with small commemorative segments, from a ten-minute segment called "JFK Remembered," on Philadelphia's Action News, to a special hour-long edition of ABC's Nightline, to an eight-part series about the assassination which was broadcast on the CBS Evening News ⁴². News-organizations produced their own institutionally-grounded retrospectives, ranging from one-hour recaps - like NBC's JFK: That Day in November - to long six and one-half hour reconstructions of events ⁴³. Tabloid television recounted the assassination on programs by Oprah Winfrey, Mort Downey, Jack Anderson and Geraldo Rivera ⁴⁴. Programs like Entertainment Tonight or Philadelphia's Evening Magazine even bore their own assassination-related segments ⁴⁵. The reconstructed versions of events which media retrospectives offered encouraged one reporter to somewhat caustically mention that "if you don't come to Dealey Plaza this year, the assassination is very much as it was 25 years ago: reality framed by a television set" ⁴⁶. The freedom with which the assassination story was rendered entertainment suggested

how effective was the story as folklore. More important, these efforts underscored the centrality of television in documenting the lore of journalistic memories.

TELEVISION: REFERENCING PRESENCE THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

The ultimate difference between most historians and assassination buffs, on one hand, and many journalists, on the other, was what the lore of professional memories rested upon - presence. In the final reading, the authority of retelling came down to the ability of retellers to establish the fact of "actually (having been) present" ⁴⁷.

Assassination buff David Lifton said that after purchasing a negative of a photograph taken on the grassy knoll, "watching the images come up to full contrast, I felt I was joining the ranks of the eyewitnesses - a year and a half after the event" ⁴⁸. Journalist Meg Greenfield phrased it more bluntly in an article entitled "The Kiss and Tell Memoirs," where she posed the following dilemma:

If the author stood somewhat outside the event, has he let us take this fact into account - or done so himself? Is there evidence that (as a historian) he has made some effort to fill in fairly those parts of the story he knew he had missed? Or has he taken advantage of the ingenuousness of a public that can hardly be expected to realize that he speaks with different degrees of authority on different subjects - a public that is already inclined to invest any insider with broad oracular powers on the vaguely understood ground that he was there?

Comments like these suggested that much of the authority for retelling the assassination was found in the presence of retellers at the events of Kennedy's death. It thus became an unvoiced goal among retellers to lend a sense of their own presence to the story.

The systematic attempts to construct presence where there was none, and to imply presence through authoritative retellings, ultimately put journalists at an advantage over other groups of speakers. Novelist Don DeLillo noted that "when experience is powerless, all things (however constructed they may be) are the same" ⁵⁰. The fact that many journalists had been present when other professional speakers had not - as well as the fact that journalists had systematic means by which to invoke and perpetuate a sense of that presence - served them well, making them well-equipped to engender the kind of framework ensuring their words would be heard and remembered.

This is not to say that journalists simply created their role in the story because of their access to technological and institutional support. Their professional memories, narratives, particular mode of storytelling and technologies they used were all predicated on presence. Unlike many historians or assassination buffs, certain journalists involved in

retelling the assassination story had been present at some of its events. When they were not, their technologies and narrative strategies allowed them to construct their tales as if they were. These foundations of journalistic authority not only encouraged presence but were predicated upon it. The record by which journalists constructed their tales of the assassination was thereby devoted to constructing a sense of proximity to the events of Kennedy's death.

To a large extent, this was made possible by television. Television allowed journalists to reference their presence as if it were a given in the assassination story. Journalists' professional memories and their implication of presence at Kennedy's death were solidified by television technology. Mere attentiveness to the role of television developed into an extensive self-referential discourse, by which reporters, particularly television journalists, sought to document extended aspects of the role the medium played.

The fact that journalists' recollections of their coverage began to be amassed into their own record immediately after the assassination encouraged reporters to generate extended self-referential accounts of assassination stories that recounted the events of Kennedy's death. Television journalists were deemed

particularly active players in punctuating the assassination record. Inscribing their punctuations in memory over the years was reinforced by the appraisals lent television over the two and a half decades that followed Kennedy's death. As the status of television - as a legitimate medium for telling news - grew, so did journalistic appraisals of television's role in covering Kennedy's death.

It was therefore no surprise that by 1988, recollections of Kennedy were intimately linked with the media, in general, and with television, in particular. To an extent this was built into circumstance, for, as one writer commented, "Kennedy was cut off at the promise, not after the performance, and so it was left to television and his widow to frame the man as legend" ⁵¹. But in addition to circumstance, the "anniversary spate of books and TV specials" ⁵², in one newsmagazine's words, produced much information that was media-linked. As Newsweek magazine maintained, television helped create a flashbulb memory, the indelible freeze-framing of the event at its most trivial incidental detail:

The Kennedy in that freeze-frame is the Kennedy of Camelot, not the man who miscarried the Bay of Pigs invasion or shared a Vegas playgirl with a Mafia don; it is as if the shadows had been washed away by the flashbulbs or the tears ⁵³.

The role of television in perpetuating journalists' presence was upheld in narratives across media. A special commemorative edition of Good Morning, America proclaimed that the assassination made television into "irreversibly the most important medium for communication": The death of our first television President marked the beginning of the age of television as the dominant medium in our lives" ⁵⁴. Newspaper recountings of the assassination in 1988 proclaimed television's triumph, under headlines like "TV Retells the Story of Slaying," "CBS Replays November 22," "JFK and a Tribute to TV" or "TV: The Ghost of a President Past" ⁵⁵. Said one such article:

Television has marked the 25th anniversary of the assassination of President Kennedy in a wave of programming that is as much a reminder of how large a role television played in reporting the tragedy and its aftermath as it is a retelling of the event ⁵⁶.

Even one historian began his account of the assassination with an introductory remark about television, which underscored the medium's centrality and vitality in perpetuating the assassination story. He said:

Television brought the assassination and its aftermath vividly into the national consciousness. In their finest hours, the electronic news media captured the events unfolding in Dallas and Washington and transmitted them instantaneously to the American people. Far more graphically and realistically than the printed page, the video screen depicted some of the most unforgettable scenes in recent history ⁵⁷.

Efforts like these finalized the stage by which JFK, his administration, assassination and television became inextricably linked. At heart of these links were journalists, who lent the story its narrative form.

Thus persistent emphasis on television technology as the medium that most effectively memorialized Kennedy enhanced the position of journalists, and particularly television journalists, as competitive articulators of the assassination's memory. Television technology perpetuated the presence of journalists within the assassination story. The positioning of journalists, initially squeezed in with other groups working out their own memories, was further enhanced by easily-accessed stages where they performed their versions of Kennedy's death. As one reporter observed in 1988, "the amount of coverage (given the assassination story) suggests how strongly television executives believe the event still grips the American population" ²².

What all of this suggests is that as the assassination narrative was splashed across time and space, negotiation for the position of its authorized spokesperson worked to the advantage of journalists - from the perspective of narrative standards, professional standards, organizational priorities and institutionally-bound discourse. Journalists' practices and values worked

to their favor, helping to establish, authenticate and perpetuate them as rightful retellers of the assassination story.

CREDENTIALLING THE JOURNALIST

All of the above-mentioned circumstances - the background of documentary failure, contest over the place of authorized spokespersons for the assassination story, viability of television technology - helped journalists credential themselves as authorized spokespeople of the story. It is interesting that this took place despite the fact that they had often not covered the story when it happened. Yet the fact of associating themselves with the assassination story became a professional goal in itself, encouraging them to create and perpetuate new and different ways of connecting themselves with the events in Dallas.

Yet what has happened since? Journalists have not left their negotiations for the position of authorized spokespeople to external developments. Instead, journalists have over time adopted four main roles in their attempts to narratively situate themselves as retellers of Kennedy's death. Each role links journalists with ongoing discourse about journalistic practice, professionalism and the legitimation of television news, in that it highlights a different dimension of

journalistic practice - eyewitnessing, representation, investigation and interpretation - all central to journalists' professional codes of behavior.

Through narrative, journalists have situated themselves within the assassination story in each of these roles, as eyewitnesses, representatives, investigators and interpreters. Each implicates slightly different foundations by which journalists claim to be legitimate speakers of the assassination story. The fact that roles have often been invoked in concert with others underscores the complexity of the rhetoric by which journalists have attempted to legitimate themselves.

- THE JOURNALIST AS "EYEWITNESS": SAME TIME/SAME PLACE. One way of situating oneself within the assassination story is as an eyewitness. While an earlier chapter addressed the eyewitness role in narratives generated by journalists at the time of Kennedy's death, journalists have also used it across time and space to credential themselves within the story. Journalists use their eyewitness status to events to generate personalized narratives by which they establish themselves as preferred, or authorized, retellers of the assassination story. Being an eyewitness carries with it the authority of having "seen" what happened. That position became

important in light of increasingly prevalent debates about conspiracy in the Kennedy assassination.

Reporters like Hugh Sidey or Tom Wicker recollected Dallas through their experiences as eyewitnesses. Sidey recalled that

perhaps we knew when the first sound reached the press bus behind President Kennedy's limousine. A distant crack, another. A pause, and another crack. Something was dangerously off-key ⁵⁰.

Wicker recounted how he was

sitting on the press bus, I think the second press bus, with a local reporter from Texas. He observed this, people running and so forth, and he dashed up the front of the bus and then came back to me and said, 'something's happened. The President's car just sped away, they just gunned away' ⁵¹.

There were eyewitnesses to Oswald's shooting, as when "NBC News Correspondent Tom Pettit, at the scene, exclaimed in disbelief 'He's been shot'" ⁵². Eyewitness tales were frequently embedded within journalistic recollections of the assassination. While at times they referenced problems of eyewitnessing, they nonetheless invoked it as a common journalistic practice.

The eyewitness role was generally invoked from Dallas but it was also applied to journalists' presence in Washington, where they awaited arrival of the plane carrying Kennedy's body. NBC correspondent Nancy Dickerson recalled that

we were on the air, talking, and Air Force One arrived and I saw them. They were all confused as far as I was concerned. They weren't doing it the right way. Instead of opening the front door of Air Force One, they were opening the back door. And they had a hydraulic lift there, and of course they were taking the body out the back door in a casket ⁶².

Eyewitnessing was recounted not only in direct conjunction with the events of the assassination. NBC News Correspondent Sander Vanocur recalled standing outside of the west wing of the White House when he saw Kennedy's rocking chair being brought out and LBJ's mounted saddle brought in. "Power changes very quickly and very brutally in Washington," said Vanocur. "I'll never forget the exchange of those two pieces of furniture within a 20 minute period" ⁶³.

By situating themselves as eyewitnesses, journalists have authenticated themselves for having been in the same time and same place as the events of the assassination weekend. The same time and place that characterizes these personalized narratives took journalists from Dallas to Washington, where the assassination culminated in Kennedy's funeral. Being an eyewitness has ensured the access of journalists with stories that bear space-time qualities equivalent to those of the assassination itself. Invoking the role of eyewitness, journalists have legitimated themselves through an authority derived from

having been in the same time and same place as the events of Kennedy's death.

- THE JOURNALIST AS "REPRESENTATIVE": SAME TIME/DIFFERENT PLACE. A second way of credentialling oneself is through the role of representative. Journalists have generated authority for their tales by assuming the role of representative. Such a role is predicated upon professional affiliation, with journalists positioned as representative players in the assassination story through their professional affiliation as reporters. The role of representative is invoked when eyewitnessing was not possible and reporters did not work on the assassination story in either its Dallas or Washington frames. One NBC retrospective used John Chancellor's experiences during the assassination weekend as a focal point for its footage of events in Dallas:

I was NBC's correspondent in Berlin then. Kennedy had been there a few months before his death, and he was idolized by Berliners...The people there were devastated by (Kennedy's) death. In West Berlin, you would get in a taxi, give your destination, and the driver would say 'America'? If you said yes, the meter would be turned off and you rode free ⁶⁴.

The fact that Chancellor's experiences as a correspondent in Berlin bore little relevance to the events of the assassination weekend was not visibly problematized. Instead, his professional standing at the time of the

assassination credentialled him to speak about Dallas. Even if his personal memories of the events in Dallas were tendered from the less-than-vantage perspective of Berlin, NBC incorporated it because it authorized him as a representative spokesperson for the assassination weekend.

The role of representative is thus authorized by the fact that narrators were reporters at the time of the assassination. Professional standing is invoked to justify the fact that seemingly "unconnected" reporters could nonetheless authoritatively interpret events of the assassination weekend. As one reporter said, "When the shots were fired, I was working for Life as a reporter in the education department" 65. While she then flew to spend the day with Rose Kennedy in Hyannis Port, other reporters were never even assigned to the story. Journalist Chuck Stone, featured on Philadelphia's late evening news, "recalled being a Washington newsman covering Kennedy" 66. The news-item showed a framed photograph of Kennedy at one of his news conferences, presumably authenticated by Stone's presence, although that was not made clear. Peter Jennings introduced an item on the assassination as "a reporter who covered this region in the mid-60s" 67. Malcolm Pointdexter, in 1963 a reporter for the Philadelphia Bulletin, recalled in a television interview

how "we sat there. We couldn't believe what had happened. We asked members of the police department, 'could it happen here?'" ²². None of these reporters was situated anywhere near Dallas during the assassination; nor were they in any way connected with the story elsewhere. Yet the fact that they had been reporters at the time of the assassination thrust them into a position years later of authoritatively retelling its story. Using their words to index the assassination reinforces journalists' ability to act as authorized spokespersons.

Journalists were thus credentialled as representatives for having been in the same time but a different place as the events in Dallas. The relevance of professional affiliation at the time of the assassination implicitly supports the emerging status of journalists as the story's authorized retellers. The fact that journalists did not work on the assassination story is obscured by the frequency with which news organizations have used tales of the representative to authorize assassination recollections. These tales expand the foundation by which journalists legitimately provided an authorized version of events. Not only do they perpetuate associations with the assassination story that bear little connection to the part journalists originally played in its coverage, but they equallize the access of reporters

whose stories displayed definite spatial disjunctions from the events in Dallas.

- THE JOURNALIST AS "INVESTIGATOR": DIFFERENT TIME/SAME PLACE. Yet a third role assumed by journalists in their narratives is that of investigator. The role of investigator allowed journalists to invoke authority through their activities as investigative reporters, a recollection supported by increasingly prevalent discourse about conspiracy in Kennedy's death. In particular, the heightened role of assassination buffs in the years following the assassination gave tales of the investigator momentum and increased credence. As one reporter said, "the story would die down for a while and then crop up again. Something was always coming up" ⁶².

Situating reporters as investigators was implicit in journalistic coverage of the assassination from its inception. It was implied in the way that journalists crowded Dallas police headquarters the night of the assassination, hoping to catch a glimpse of Kennedy's accused killer, Lee Harvey Oswald. One specific dialogue was widely recounted across the media:

Reporter: Did you kill the President?

Oswald: No. I have not been charged with that, in fact nobody has said that to me yet. The first thing I heard about it was when the newspaper reporters in the hall asked me that question.

Reporter: You have been charged.

Oswald: Sir?

Reporter: You have been charged ⁷⁰.

Later, Oswald was reported to have said that "the first thing I heard about it was when the newspaper reporters in the hall asked me that question" ⁷¹. The role of journalists as investigators was thereby foregrounded almost from the first days of the assassination story.

Tales of the investigator are couched in the fact that Kennedy's death is "an incomplete story" ⁷². One reporter remarked that "having covered the story as a working journalist on the scene, I cannot accept as proven facts the incoherent conglomeration of circumstantial evidence against (Oswald)" ⁷³. The assassination story was full of "loose strands, improbable coincidences, puzzling gaps" ⁷⁴, which made deciphering difficult. Attempts to resolve the story's unknowns have thus given journalists tasks through which to authenticate their professional identities, recasting them as tales of investigation.

Dan Rather referred on-air to the years he spent investigating the story ⁷⁵. New York Times editor Harrison Salisbury maintained that journalists at the Times continued to actively investigate the assassination story "to the limits of the correspondents' ability" ⁷⁶. Ultimately, boasted Salisbury, "there was little

likelihood" that other evidence would materially change the fundamentals which the Times established in its initial reporting. Jack Anderson hosted his own special on the assassination that credentialled him as a "Pulitzer Prize winning journalist" and detailed his "twenty year investigation of the crime of the century" ⁷⁷. Walter Cronkite summed up a special edition of Nova by saying that its investigation had "explained many but not all of the questions about the assassination" ⁷⁸. Tales of the investigator thereby reference career trajectories by which reporters have conducted independent investigations into various unsettled aspects of Kennedy's assassination. Implicit in these discussions are references to practices of exploration, discovery and scrutiny. Journalists are portrayed as having made "exhaustive" and "painstaking" efforts at unravelling the assassination story ⁷⁹.

This has applied to news organizations too. Life magazine was hailed by Newsweek in 1966 for having led the call for a new investigation ⁸⁰, while a myriad of newspapers - including The New York Times and the Boston Globe - were heralded for having supported the call ⁸¹. Difficulties in playing the investigator role were widely discussed, as when columnist Nora Ephron commented in the mid-seventies that "only a handful of reporters (are) working the assassination story":

This is a story that begs for hundreds of investigators, subpoena power, forensics experts, grants of immunity: it's also a story that requires slogging through twenty-seven volumes of the Warren Commission Report and dozens of books on the assassination...The whole thing is a mess ^{as}.

But the plethora of unravelled and unresolved threads about the assassination have made it an attractive task for many journalists.

Situating themselves as investigators have thus given journalists authority for having returned to the place of the assassination to conduct their investigations. It is not coincidental that they do so many years after the events in Dallas. These tales - of same place but different time - have created a way for journalists who did not take an active part in covering the assassination weekend to authoritatively retell aspects of the assassination story. They legitimate journalists who associate themselves with the assassination story by reopening its record years after the events in Dallas. Journalistic access to the assassination's retelling is thereby ensured despite the temporal disjunction which these stories embody.

- THE JOURNALIST AS "INTERPRETER": DIFFERENT TIME/DIFFERENT PLACE. Journalists also situate themselves within the assassination story as interpreters. The role of interpreter focuses attention on the interpretive

activities of journalists in conjunction with the events of Dallas. Borrowing from the experiences of eyewitnesses, representatives and investigators in making interpretive claims about the assassination, the role of interpreter implies that it was unnecessary to have been in either the same place or time as the events in Dallas in order to make authoritative claims about the assassination story.

Certain journalists fulfilled the function of interpreters, despite the fact that they also acted as eyewitnesses, representatives or investigators in their narratives. Charles Roberts' book on eyewitnessing, for example, claimed to "examine coolly and critically some of the odd theories and rumours that have burgeoned...looking at the whole record" ²³. In a semi-philosophical moment, Tom Wicker commented that the assassination was "as if our country had been struck down," dealing a "terrible blow to one's sense of the possible" ²⁴. Walter Cronkite contended years later that the assassination had dealt a "serious blow to our national psyche" ²⁵. Hugh Sidey maintained that "we were never the same, nor was the world" ²⁶.

Situating the journalist in the role of interpreter was indicated in the days immediately following the assassination. Wrote reporter Marya Mannes of the press corps:

for four interminable days, I listened to the familiar voices of...so many who never failed us

or history during their greatest possible ordeal. Shaken as they visibly were, infinitely weary as they became, they maintained calm and reason and insight throughout the marathon of madness and mourning ⁸⁷.

But the references which have evolved over time and space in conjunction with journalists' interpretative role have blurred both the temporal and physical distance from which they can be expected to reliably pronounce judgment on the events of Kennedy's death.

This means that a number of reporters have assumed the interpretive role without any visible linkage to other roles. In such a case, situating themselves as interpreters not only allows journalists to generate authority for events from distant positions, such as that of New York anchorpersons or news-editors, but it legitimates persons who have little association with the assassination at the time. ABC's Forrest Sawyer conducted a one-hour retrospective of the assassination on Nightline, yet did not explicate how he was associated with the events in Dallas. Other than mentioning that "for those of us who are old enough, this has been a day of remembering, recalling the glamour of the Kennedy presidency and how it felt then" ⁸⁸, Sawyer made no attempt to credential his interpretation of the assassination story. Similarly, writer Lawrence Wright

concluded his book on the sixties, which dealt in part with Kennedy's assassination, with the observation that

it began as an essay for Texas Monthly about growing up in Dallas in the years preceding the assassination of President Kennedy. I did not intend to make myself a character so much as a guiding sensibility to the thoughts and passions of the moment ²².

In both cases, the most obvious connection to the assassination story was a contemporary professional affiliation with journalism.

The role of interpreter is thus legitimated through contemporary professional ties to journalism: Whereas the role of representative is authenticated by a journalist's professional association at the time of the assassination, the role of interpreter is credentialled by his or her professional association at the time of the assassination's recollecting. The shift in recognizable boundaries is significant, for it has helped to render retellers of the assassination with no obvious link to the story into authorized spokespersons for the events in Dallas.

Journalists thereby situate themselves as interpreters despite the fact that many journalists acting as interpreters told their tales from a time and place different from the Dallas story. Invoking the role of interpreter has allowed journalists to become authoritative spokespeople despite - or, perhaps, because

of - the spatial and temporal disjunctions which their tales embodied. In one assassination buff's view, this has generated a breed of journalists years after the assassination who have no first-hand knowledge of it, making them better able to approach the story without bias so. Spatial and temporal distance has thus legitimated the ability of journalists to act as authoritative interpreters of the assassination story, likening their role as spokespeople to that of historians. Like other roles by which journalists have credentialled their recollections of the assassination, situating themselves as interpreters constitutes a way for journalists to associate themselves with the assassination story without having had any prior professional connection with it.

The four roles through which journalists have narratively positioned themselves vis a vis the assassination have thus created a range of situations by which they can rhetorically legitimate themselves as spokespersons of the assassination story. Access to the assassination story, as offered by these roles, has expanded the foundations by which reporters can legitimately claim to be its spokespersons.

Access is ensured through a span of time-space disjunctions: The role of eyewitness legitimates journalists for having been in the same place and same

time as the events in Dallas; the role of representative authorizes them to speak about the time period of the assassination but from places other than Dallas; the role of investigator allows them to perpetuate stories that were generated from the same place but from a different time period; and finally the role of interpreter makes it possible for journalists to recollect the assassination despite the fact that they had been in neither the same place nor time period as the Dallas events. Each role allows journalists to legitimate themselves as spokespeople for the assassination story not through the role they originally played in covering the assassination but through a wide range of activities that took place in times and places beyond it. The wider range of activities their tales reference aptly suits journalistic codes of professional behavior. In all of these ways, journalists have used the expanded access these roles gave them to turn stories of the assassination into stories about themselves. They have effectively used the assassination of Kennedy as a stage through which to exercise their own legitimation, both collective and individual.

¹ "Assassination: Behind Moves to Reopen the JFK Case," U.S. News and World Report (6/2/75), p. 31.

² Ibid., p. 31.

³ "Richard Rovere, "Introduction," in Edward J. Epstein, Inquest (New York: Viking Press, 1966), p. viii.

- 4 Calvin Trillin, "The Buffs," The New Yorker (6/10/67), p. 43.
- 5 David Welsh and William Turner, "In the Shadow of Dallas," Ramparts (1/25/69), p. 62.
- 6 "A Decade of Unanswered Questions," Ramparts (December 1973), p. 43.
- 7 Welsh and Turner, 1969.
- 8 Trillin, 1967, p. 45.
- 9 Ibid, p. 65.
- 10 "A Decade of Unanswered Questions," 1973, p. 43.
- 11 Frank Donner, "Conspiracies Unlimited," The Nation (12/22/79), p. 660.
- 12 Charles Roberts, The Truth About the Assassination (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1967), p. 57.
- 13 Trillin, 1967, p. 43. This in itself lent another intriguing dimension to the authority of journalists in retelling the assassination story. They built up the record against which other groups of public speakers built their own authority.
- 14 Mark Lane, A Citizen's Dissent (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 11.
- 15 Quoted in Trillin, 1967, p. 41.
- 16 David S. Lifton, Best Evidence (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 1980).
- 17 Lane, 1968, p. x.
- 18 Ibid, p. x.
- 19 Ibid, p. xi.
- 20 Ibid, p. 144.
- 21 Ibid, p. 253-4.
- 22 Hugh Sidey, "History on His Shoulder," Time (11/8/82), p. 26.
- 23 Theodore White, "Camelot, Sad Camelot" (Excerpt from In Search of History: A Personal Adventure) Time (7/3/78), p. 47.
- 24 Nancy Dickerson, Being With John F. Kennedy, Thomas F. Horton Associates, Inc. (1983). This was somewhat dampened when it was revealed that Kennedy had secretly taped his conversations with politicians and diplomats [See "In Camelot, They Taped Alot," Newsweek (2/15/82)].
- 25 Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965); Theodore C. Sorensen, Kennedy (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).
- 26 In the summer of 1965, this included Sorensen's book in Look and Schlesinger's in Life.
- 27 Mary McGrory, "And Did You Once See Kennedy Plain?" America (9/18/65), p. 279.
- 28 "Historians Lost in the Mists of Camelot," Los Angeles Times (10/21/88), sec 1, p. 1.
- 29 One critic of Schlesinger was Meg Greenfield, "The Kiss and Tell Memoirs," The Reporter (11/30/67).

- 30 Michael Kurtz, The Crime of the Century (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), p. vi.
- 31 White, "Camelot, Sad Camelot," 1978, p. 46.
- 32 Edward J. Epstein, Between Fact and Fiction (New York: Vintage Books, 1975). Said Epstein: "Far from being a detailed and objective chronicle of the assassination, it was a mythopoeic melodrama organized around the theme of struggle for power" (p. 124).
- 33 "Peephole Journalism," Commonweal (9/3/65), p. 613.
- 34 Meg Greenfield, 1967, p. 15.
- 35 Don DeLillo, "American Blood: A Journey Through the Labyrinth of Dallas and JFK," Rolling Stone (12/8/83), p. 27.
- 36 Jack Valenti, "Anniversary of an Assassination: Memories of a Last Motorcade," Los Angeles Times (11/23/86), sec. v. p. 1.
- 37 "Remembering JFK," Good Morning, America, ABC News (11/22/83).
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- 39 Examples here include a 1964 United Artists documentary called Four Days in November, David Wolper for United Artists (1964) and KTRK-TV's Kennedy: One Year Later, KTRK-TV, Houston, Texas (1964).
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PERPETUATING
ASSASSINATION TALES

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE AUTHORITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL:
RECOLLECTING THROUGH CELEBRITY

To be talked about is to be part of a story, and to be part of a story is to be at the mercy of storytellers - the media and their audience. The famous person is thus not so much a person as a story about a person ¹.

Once journalists promoted themselves as an authorized presence within the assassination story, they set about locating ways of perpetuating their presence over space and time. Journalists fit their assassination tales within larger memory systems, retelling their tales according to pre-determined patterns of collective memory. By linking in with existent memory systems, they were better assured of their tales' successful perpetuation.

In the pages that follow, I discuss the workings of one memory system by which the stature of individual journalists was promoted above the stories they told - celebrity. How celebrity has helped journalists not only perpetuate their presence in the assassination story but gain independent leverage from it constitutes a basic cornerstone of their authority as spokespeople. This has had particular bearing on journalists' constitution as an interpretive community, where the emphasis on the individual was central.

The following chapter has three parts: It addresses general characteristics of journalistic celebrity, particularly its function as a memory system; discusses the Kennedy assassination as a ground from which journalistic celebrity sprouted, with emphasis on specific cases of journalistic celebrity; and finally explores how the celebrity status of certain reporters has been institutionally perpetuated.

CELEBRITY AS A MEMORY SYSTEM

Defined as "persons well-known for their well-knownness" ², celebrity functions as a set of rules for speakers and actors, giving them idealized notions about how they should be or act. It reflects "shifting definitions of achievement in a social world" ³. Depending in large part on the mass media, it has evolved into its contemporary form through an interlinking of different kinds of mass-mediated texts ⁴. The media legitimate celebrities through a network of institutional activities that generate extensive public discourse about them. Constructing and perpetuating celebrity is thus as much an institutional concern as an individual one, with institutional practices necessary to generate and maintain individual cases of celebrity.

Such is the case with journalistic retellings of the assassination. While journalists have systematically

promoted themselves as retellers within their assassination tales, in certain cases their status as storytellers has effectively elevated their importance above that of the tales they told. Celebrity has both helped them strategically interpret the significance of their coverage as well as highlight the presence of certain figures within their narratives. It has thus promoted the actions of certain journalists as a frame of reference for journalistic behavior in contexts stretching beyond assassination retellings.

From a theoretical standpoint, the ability to highlight individual personalities within - and independent from - assassination tales underscores an important dimension of assassination retellings - the significance of the individual. Journalists' ability to constitute themselves as an independent interpretive community through their assassination retellings has depended on the role played by individuals in delineating boundaries of community and authority. The featured presence of the individual reporter within assassination narratives has thus keyed members of the community into boundary changes within the profession.

Tales of celebrity were initially formed via references to larger discourses about technology and professionalism. The then-emerging state of television

news reinforced the fact that television had begun to develop its own form of journalistic storytelling, which wove the celebrity of reporters directly into TV news presentation ⁵. Celebrity status was furthered by television's visual, dramatic and personalized dimensions, which generated an authority characterized by style, personality or flair ⁶. The authority with which television would eventually come to promote the on-site recognition of journalists - establishing forums, like televised interviews, that associated news with faces - thereby figured already within the structure of assassination tales. Moreover, the uncertainty surrounding television news at the time generated a flurry of attention around television journalists, whose invocation and utilization of the new medium thrust many into the critical public eye for the first time.

A concern for professionalism also permeated journalists' attempts to promote themselves as celebrities. Legitimizing the new medium of television allowed for the rearrangement of professional roles in existing media, giving celebrity alternate forms not only in the medium being introduced but in other media too. Notions of celebrity became differently informed by the nascent forms of authoritative storytelling and new professional identities that adoption of each medium made

not only possible, but - if institutional inter-media competition were to survive - necessary.

Technology and professional roles thereby helped journalistic celebrities link their assassination retellings with larger discourses external to the journalistic community. In recollecting their coverage of the Kennedy assassination, journalists were able to promote themselves as celebrities parallel to both ongoing discourses about journalistic professionalism and the legitimation of television as a news medium. Celebrity offered journalists ready-made ways of making sense of assassination tales by offering them specific cues of memory. Individual reporters were made the pivotal point of criss-crossing discourses about the assassination, on one hand, and technology and professionalism, on the other. Over time, this has offered assassination retellers an effective way of both perpetuating their own presence within their tales and gaining stature independent of them. It has also set out the appropriate boundaries of community. While offering a temporally and spatially bounded memory system of shared perceptions and recollections about Dallas, celebrity allows for the systematic substitution of different reporters as part of the assassination story, systematically thrusting certain reporters into the public eye over others. According to

such a substitutional rule, different journalists are effectively "plugged in" as celebrities for having covered the story. Differentially associating the Tom Wickers, Dan Rathers, Walter Cronkites or Theodore Whites with the assassination story, dependent on the larger discourses about journalism that were at hand, is thus a critical dimension of the workings of celebrity. Individual journalists receive celebrity status because they have attended to larger discourses about journalism.

Thus tales of journalistic celebrity have not only helped journalists focus on themselves, thereby reinforcing their celebrity status and promoting them in a fashion separate and independent of the assassination tales they tell, but they have also set up the collective boundaries of journalistic practice. Certain journalists have been legitimated in ways which set them up as independent frames of reference for the journalistic community. Celebrity has thereby helped mark memories of the assassination, at the same time as it has signalled both the status of memory-bearers and the boundaries of the community where they reside. It has made the assassination narrative into a locus by which journalists' celebrity status has given them a more generalized stature as cultural authorities.

THE CONTEXT FOR JOURNALISTIC CELEBRITY

The Kennedy assassination constituted one obvious cornerstone upon which tales of journalistic celebrities could grow. The Kennedy administration, like the assassination that brought it to an end, catered to journalists' celebrity status. In recalling his coverage of Kennedy's reign, Washington Post reporter David Broder maintained that the President's live television conferences drew reporters who generally eschewed institutionalized set-ups:

Some of those (reporters) Kennedy recognized regularly became TV stars themselves, and that status - reinforced by invitations to White House parties and dinners - did nothing to hurt the administration⁷.

Kennedy's administration was "an American court where the rich, the glamorous and the powerful congratulated each other. It was a pantheon of celebrity"⁸. The President set up parameters which made celebrity a viable context for remembering his life and death.

Over the 25 years since Kennedy was shot, journalistic retellings of the assassination have upheld these parameters⁹. Certain journalists developed into celebrities for their post-assassination reconstructions of Kennedy's reign¹⁰. Others found that retelling the assassination was a fertile ground for reporters to be perpetuated from positions of well-knownedness. Labelling

writers Theodore White and Hugh Sidey "Kennedy's elegists" was a case in point ¹¹. Upholding reporters as celebrities, often in front of the names of organizations employing them, was thus realized in a systematic and regularized fashion. Assassination narratives displayed the names of individual reporters as emblems of authority for the events in Dallas.

Retelling the Kennedy assassination thus gave journalists a stage on which to gain and maintain status. Their record of the assassination allowed them to narratively reconstruct its events in ways which addressed - and reinforced - their own celebrity. Four individual reporters have been consistently mentioned in conjunction with assassination retellings - Tom Wicker, Dan Rather, Walter Cronkite and Theodore White. Each has become a celebrity because tales of his rise to fame attended to more general concerns at issue for journalistic professionals.

TOM WICKER

Narratives about Tom Wicker perhaps best exemplify how members of the journalistic community felt about successfully covering the assassination as a member of the printed press. Tales told of Wicker being on the scene continuously for the first day of events, until he filed his report at day's end from an airport terminal. His

performance was regarded as an ideal performance of American journalism, for it showed how the goals of speedy coverage, eyewitness reporting and terse prose could still produce a journalistic success story.

Years later, colleague Harrison Salisbury praised Wicker's on-the-scene reporting by saying that

The coverage had begun with classic reportage - Tom Wicker's on-the-scenes eyewitness. It could not be beat. (I told him to)...just write every single thing you have seen and heard. Period. He did. No more magnificent piece of journalistic writing has been published in the Times. Through Tom's eye we lived through each minute of that fatal Friday, the terror, the pain, the horror, the mindless tragedy, elegant, blood-chilling prose ¹².

One telling aspect of Salisbury's comments is located in his final sentence - "the horror, the mindless tragedy, elegant, blood-chilling prose." The transformation by which Salisbury quietly moves from telling the horror of the event to telling the elegance of the writing in which it was inscribed is a seemingly innocuous one. But in so doing, Salisbury reinforces an intrinsic association between Wicker's role in telling Kennedy's death and the events of the death themselves. Salisbury makes it appear as if Wicker himself is a natural part of the assassination story, a pattern frequently repeated in tales of journalistic celebrity.

Narratives of Wicker's celebrity status have been predicated upon such an association - Wicker in Dallas as

part of the Dallas story. Indeed, Wicker's performance in Dallas has been reinforced in subsequent stories of his own career trajectory. Said one observer, "Wicker was a product of events, an individual whose career had been advanced by the reporting of the assassination" ¹³. The point at which he became known in his own right was not long in coming.

The professional gains associated with covering the assassination story were indicated already a year after Kennedy's death. At that point Spy magazine reported that

Along with tangible profits, many people's careers have received boosts thanks to Oswald's marksmanship. The brilliant performance of Tom Wicker of The New York Times, writing from Dallas for the newspaper of record - under what was obviously incredible pressure - so impressed his bosses that he is now the Washington bureau chief ¹⁴.

Wicker's promotion - the "most bruising, office-politics wise" because it propelled him ahead of veteran reporters who had been led to expect the same post ¹⁵ - was significant for it came directly after Dallas. As Gay Talese mentioned, "after the assassination story that day, and the related stories that followed, Wicker's stock rose sharply in The New York Times" ¹⁶. It thus made sense that The New York Times itself sought to thereafter uphold and perpetuate Wicker's celebrity status. Upholding Wicker as a celebrity for having exemplified what was construed as journalistic professionalism did not only accomplish

individual aims. It also justified organizational actions taken on his behalf years earlier.

Tales of Tom Wicker the celebrity have thus been linked with highly topical discourses about what it meant to be a print-media professional in the age of television. Through the individual, this celebrity tale has allowed larger discourses about television journalism and journalistic professionalism to intersect with assassination narratives. It underscores the viability of print journalism and shows that celebrities have been generated by that medium too. For larger boundaries of journalistic community, commonality and authority, this tale thereby suggests the relevance of different media in the making of journalistic celebrities.

DAN RATHER

Narratives about the performance of Dan Rather in Dallas were similarly linked in with ongoing discourses about journalistic professionalism and television journalism, but from the side of television. Tales about Rather address attempts to legitimate television correspondents as bona fide reporters. Rather too was on-the-spot when Kennedy was killed, but rather than remain on the scene, as Wicker had done, he rushed to the nearest CBS affiliate where he succeeded in providing rapid up-to-date relays of what was happening in the city.

A comparison here is telling. While Wicker anticipated the deadlines of printing by following the story to the airport, where he labored in less-than-supportive conditions to turn out prose, Rather anticipated the demands of television technology by rushing away from the story and towards the technology of its telling. In other words, he ran to the nearest affiliate. The fact that he successfully filed the story depended directly on his subordinates, who remained on the scene to supply him with information. The difference in these tales - which outlined how the story was covered by two different media - suggests how necessary was the celebrity tale for validating television journalists at the time.

Narratives about Rather gave him an individual vantage point, becoming frequently referenced in stories about his personal career trajectory. In November of 1964, Spy magazine pointed out the fact that

Dan Rather, CBS's slightly wiggy Dallas correspondent, seems to have caught the fancy of his superiors. He may end up with a plummy foreign assignment - perhaps Vietnam ¹⁷.

While the magazine erred in the exact details of Rather's promotion, the upwardly-mobile nature of its account proved true over time. Rather's cool-headed performance in Dallas was construed as having earned him a White House posting, "over the heads of several more experienced

Washington reporters" ¹⁸. Journalistic lore held that "he came to national prominence through his coverage of the Kennedy assassination" ¹⁹, and that the day that Kennedy died was

in career terms, the most important day in Dan Rather's life. His swift and accurate reporting of the Kennedy assassination and its aftermath that weekend transformed him from a regional journalist into a national correspondent ²⁰.

Institutionally-grounded discourse has thereby upheld Rather as a celebrity, through his assassination coverage.

But the celebrity tale does not only have individual repercussions. It has also figured in organizational overviews of CBS News and more generalized discussions about the legitimacy of television journalism. By reflecting larger attempts to legitimate television correspondents as bona fide reporters, tales of Rather's activities are important to the community because they have set up parameters of journalistic practice, community and authority. They pay deference to larger discourses about journalistic professionalism and television journalism, showing that it is possible to gain celebrity status through the broadcast media.

Tales about both Tom Wicker and Dan Rather can be seen as playing an important communal role. They have foregrounded for all journalists the indicative dimensions of journalistic performance. Tales of celebrity have set

out the appropriate parameters of journalistic practice, by grounding what journalism professionals "do." At the same time, they uphold the two sub-communities which comprise the larger community of journalism professionals, broadcast and print, thereby highlighting the ritual aspects of creating community that retellings of the assassination achieve for its retellers. More important, they suggest that it is possible to assume an authoritative presence in such retellings, regardless of the medium where one is employed.

WALTER CRONKITE

While tales of Wicker and Rather underscore the propriety of standard journalistic practice across media, other narratives highlight the elevated forms in which individuals worked in each medium. Narratives about Walter Cronkite's performance in Dallas provide such a stage in discussions about television journalism. While discussions about Rather underscore the standard dimensions of broadcast journalism, narratives about Cronkite signal the more refined and sophisticated dimensions of journalistic performance within that same medium.

Narratives about Cronkite have created a reference point in discussions not only about coverage of the Kennedy assassination but about the evolution of American television journalism. Cronkite stayed on-air for much of

the first day of events, and was responsible for conveying to the public the news that Kennedy was dead. His emotional relay of that fact, coupled with a number of activities which appeared to underscore the anchorperson's distressed state - notably, removing his eyeglasses in a distracted fashion and forgetting to put on his suit jacket ²¹ - made his performance an effective example of how it was possible to cast professionalism as improvisory and instinctual behavior. Cronkite cried, looked distraught, appeared emotionally moved, and then composed himself to carry the nation through its evolving crisis. He sidestepped his own personal distress to act as father figure and master of ceremony throughout the four-day ordeal.

Cronkite's activities were important for the then-burgeoning authentication of anchorpeople as journalists. Discourse centered on both his deeds and words. One 1983 Newsweek article on the assassination typically held that

Walter Cronkite broke into a popular CBS soap opera, "As the World Turns," with the first TV bulletin of the attack on JFK ²².

The next sentence noted that Cronkite was "for 19 years anchorman of the CBS Evening News." Like other institutionalized recountings of the assassination, Newsweek in this way reinforced the link between the anchor's role in covering the assassination story and his

personal career trajectory. Another 1983 discussion of coverage of the Kennedy assassination was entitled "The Age of Cronkite" ²³. Yet another print retrospective of television's fiftieth anniversary hailed Cronkite for having taken the American people through assassinations, conventions and space shots:

(his) reputation for being the TV news authority had evolved in the early 60s and was underscored by his coverage of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. For four straight days, beginning on Friday afternoon, Cronkite sat in the anchor chair, sometimes in his shirt sleeves and sometimes in tears, through the Monday when JFK was buried at Arlington National Cemetery ²⁴.

Seen as producing a "new personae" for American journalists, the image of solid integrity that Cronkite projected would thereafter be emulated by journalists across the country ²⁵. It was "Cronkite's performance that was invariably cited" when admiration was expressed "for the restraint, the taste and the all-around professionalism of TV's coverage that weekend":

Some of the things he did that day would pass into folklore and become part of the legend. More than a decade later, journalism professors would still be telling their students, who were mere children at the time, how Walter Cronkite cried on air when he had to report the official announcement that President John F. Kennedy was dead ²⁶.

That fact depended no less on institutional efforts at commemorating his deeds and words than the role he originally played in covering the assassination.

The legitimation of television anchorpersons, as exemplified by discussions of Cronkite's celebrity, has thus become a central dimension of many assassination tales. Tales of Cronkite as celebrity have created, and reinforced, not only his individual status, but also the legitimate presence of television journalists and the consoling role of anchorpeople in times of crisis. Cronkite's activities in Dallas have made him a celebrity by upholding the improvisory and instinctual behavior that journalists looked upon as the mark of the true professional. Perhaps more than other journalists, tales about Cronkite underscore the recasting of professional paradigms suggested by the events of Kennedy's death. In addition, they are important for evolving discussions about the relevance of anchorpeople as a separate yet functional breed of journalists. These tales uphold the subjunctive mood of journalistic practice by outlining "what should be" to members of the community.

THEODORE WHITE

A subjunctive mood of practice was similarly upheld in narratives about Theodore White. In much the same way that tales of Cronkite reflect the elevated forms of broadcast journalistic practice, narratives about White signify the more refined dimensions of the print media. White's performance on the assassination story was coopted

within discussions of the glory of the written journalistic word. This is significant, for the written word, as an effective mode of journalistic story-telling, underwent questioning following what was perceived to be the successful televised coverage of Kennedy's death.

While White was not present during the immediate events of Kennedy's death, his summons by Jacqueline Kennedy one week later drew him into the public eye. White's narrative recounting of her experiences in Dallas, coupled with the labelling - at Jackie's behest - of the Kennedy administration as "Camelot" cast White as one of the more effective storytellers of the time. White's success with the written word rapidly turned him into a journalistic celebrity. His ability to successfully wrestle prose into desired form evolved into an archetypal type of narrative structure that was emulated by journalists in all media. His appearance at Jacqueline Kennedy's Hyannisport home a week after Kennedy's death was portrayed in fictionalized form in the film Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, where their meeting alone was used to signify Kennedy's death ²⁷. All of this drew White away from periodicized journalism and toward book publishing. He remained interested in the larger, more general issues that rested behind the making of current events, and his series of books on the Presidential campaigns were

considered first-rate by other journalists. Nonetheless, he continued to define himself and was defined by others as a journalist. His eulogy, printed in Time in 1986, called him "a reporter in search of history" ²².

Within larger discussions of journalistic community and authority, narratives about White as celebrity suggest again how it was possible to cast the boundaries of professional journalism in different ways. His self-defined interest in history, his search for general impulses in society, his exemplary writing style all reconfigure the limits of what good print journalism is thought to be. In much the same way that Cronkite epitomizes the anchorperson as an effector of unity and consolation, White epitomizes the print reporter as a person who not only wrote well but was concerned with issues beyond the contemporaneous event of news reporting. Thus tales about White as celebrity, like those about Cronkite, have upheld the subjunctive mood of journalistic practice. They signify what print journalism professionals "should be." In both cases, tales of celebrity signal the emulatory state of journalistic professionalism to members of the community. Circulation of these narratives have played an important role to journalists trying to authenticate themselves as an interpretive community. It is significant that both subjunctive and indicative

dimensions of journalistic celebrity are held up through the pivotal point of the individual reporter. For it suggests how central is the individual within the collective lore circulated among journalism professionals.

These four cases - while not the only celebrities associated with the assassination story - suggest that assassination recollections have produced uniform narratives that feature journalists with tenable celebrity status. Recollections which reinforce the celebrity status of certain reporters have been perpetuated, while tales which documented the presence of lesser-known journalists have been left out. The Theodore Whites, Dan Rathers, Walter Cronkites and Tom Wickers have been successfully incorporated as journalistic celebrities because tales about their activities have attended to ongoing discourses about journalism: Accomodating a tale about Dan Rather not only effectively tells the assassination story but it also attends to then-current doubts about the legitimacy of television journalists. By weaving the lives and careers of certain reporters into recollections of the assassination story, assassination narratives have thereby highlighted the professional activities of well-known journalists, particularly national television journalists, in covering the story. This has allowed journalists to facilitate the growth of their celebrity status in a way

that separates it from the assassination's retelling, giving them independent stature. But it also at the time reinforced hidden institutional agendas about then-nascent features of journalistic professionalism and television journalism, setting out both indicative and subjunctive dimensions about what constitutes appropriate journalistic practice. The celebrity tale thus has both individual and collective dimensions.

INSTITUTIONALLY PERPETUATING CELEBRITY

The above-mentioned personalities have not been perpetuated as celebrities for having covered the assassination story simply because they reported or desired it, however. Their association with the events of Kennedy's death has been systematically promoted by institutional discourses and practices. In the final analysis, creating celebrities from assassination retellers has depended on the institutional backdrop from which journalists told their tales. The fact that assassination tales set up certain journalists as celebrities while dropping others from collective consciousness was realized in accordance with the institutional support lent them. Gaining status for retelling the assassination has thus depended on media backing.

News organizations played an active part in legitimating the celebrity status of reporters who covered the assassination. This does not mean that no journalists went across media boundaries to perpetuate their authority for retelling the assassination story. In 1988, for example, reporter Robert MacNeil compiled a pictorial history of the assassination entitled The Way We Were. Discussions of the book were used as part of Good Morning America's attempt to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of Kennedy's assassination, and MacNeil was introduced as having been "in Dallas on this day 25 years ago when President Kennedy was assassinated" 29. One PBS documentary about Kennedy featured print reporter Tom Wicker recounting his own narratives almost verbatim 30. The possibility for cross-breeding across media was derived in both cases from the reporter's celebrity status. Celebrity was also reinforced by one's words being systematically reprinted and circulated by other media.

News organizations have effectively perpetuated journalistic celebrity through two arenas of discourse and practice - commemoration and recycling. Both arenas have been used alone and in tandem to systematically signal journalists' celebrity status.

COMMEMORATIVE DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE

Commemoration constitutes one way to accord journalists special status for having covered the assassination story. Commemoration accords assassination discourse a self-referential status, giving the events in Dallas their own authority. For example, a news-item about Dallas on the anniversary of Kennedy's death references the assassination story in a way that sidesteps possible controversy about whether it is well-placed. Thus writer Gary Wills waited for the twentieth anniversary of Dallas to publish his book The Kennedys, as did William Manchester in writing One Brief Shining Moment ³¹. Anniversaries, in particular, have given media institutions marked ways of commemorating the assassination coverage. Anniversaries serve not only as loci of memories of the assassination, but also as loci for the journalists who bear such memories. As one journalist remarked, they produce their own genre of news story - "anniversary journalism" ³².

Anniversaries offer journalists a wide range of media formats by which to associate themselves with the assassination story. In print, journalists have used recognized and routinized dates to generate special commemorative issues about the assassination, special sections in journals and commemorative volumes ³³.

Commemoration ranges from actual reconstructions of the assassination story to extensive "where were you" articles that key into the recollections of prominent people ³⁴. In the broadcast media, journalists have coordinated the production of media retrospectives around assassination anniversaries ³⁵. The tone and content of televised recollections not only reflect existing trends in news programming but it has been tied into larger moods and concerns at the time of each anniversary: Issues of technology, for instance, were first discussed in 1967 in an early CBS series about charges of conspiracy and the assassination, but were doubly revived in 1988, when CBS's Four Days in November stressed the technological triumphs and limitations of television and PBS used scientific technology to reexamine the evidence in Kennedy's assassination ³⁶.

These commemorative efforts have helped journalists perpetuate their chronicles as the longstanding record of one group of assassination retellers. Its record has increasingly incorporated journalists as its narrators, a point particularly borne out by the broadcast media: Early assassination retrospectives were narrated by actors like Cliff Robertson, Larry McCann, Hal Holbrook or Richard Baseheart; later efforts employed the skills and talents of Edwin Newman, Walter Cronkite, Dan Rather, Nancy

Dickerson, Tom Brokaw or John Chancellor. Choosing journalists over actors for the part of narrator highlights the emerging authority of journalists as legitimate retellers of the assassination. It also reinforces the growing part played by narrators of television retrospectives in institutional recollections of the assassination.

Journalists also have commemorated assassination coverage by highlighting "the club" of reporters who originally participated in the story. Assigning them collective status has perpetuated the stories of a few reporters as representative of tales of the many. Perpetuating "the club" also underscores the relevance of the norm in consolidating professionals into one cohesive group, a point with direct relevance for the emergence of journalists as an interpretive community.

In such a light, nearly all television retrospectives conclude with long lists of names of journalists who had participated in the original coverage. One 1988 PBS documentary proposed to identify people "by their positions or affiliations in the fall of 1963", creating an "as if" mood to the recollections they embodied ³⁷. Broadcasting magazine published lengthy lists of both correspondents, management personnel and technical crew who had participated on the assassination story in radio

and television ³⁹. NBC's JFK Assassination: As It Happened ended with "a note to more than 500 people who pooled their efforts to provide continuous and extensive coverage." Slides showed names of the "key members of the team" ⁴⁰.

Certain "lead" status has also been assigned to journalists viewed as having led "the club" of reporters working the story. For example, many television and print retrospectives stressed the role played by columnist Walter Lippmann, whose words of interpretation were moved to front-page columns alongside actual assassination coverage ⁴⁰. The New York Times' James Reston was also frequently cited. Reston, whose consolatory columns in the days following the assassination were lauded across media, was hailed in a 1987 ABC celebrity profile, which called him the "most influential journalist in the country":

There is no way in television, sadly, to preserve Reston's prose or capture the real essence of his influence, for burdened by the pain of loss for millions of people, Reston has made the world less confusing ⁴¹.

In the item, anchorperson Peter Jennings quoted verbatim from Reston's assassination coverage, seen against still pictures of John-John saluting his dead father. The semiotic message of Reston's narrative prose being used to anchor the visuals supplied by television fit well into

larger discourses about celebrity, technology and professionalism.

Perpetuating "the club" has also been realized in a more literal fashion. In November of 1988, the original press corps who covered the assassination convened in Washington to commemorate the events 25 years earlier ⁴², underscoring the assassination's centrality for those journalists who had covered it. The fact that nearly all television and print retrospectives have assigned collective status to the reporters who originally worked on the assassination story - and kept their status alive - suggests how central it is not only to collective and individual professional identities but also to the formation of collective status around celebrity tales.

Commemorative discourse and practice has thus given journalists routinized ways through which to promote their associations with the assassination story. News organizations have given budding celebrities the opportunity of consolidating their status at the same time as they strengthen and reinforce the stature of journalists independent of the assassination story itself. For journalists intent on building up their authoritative presence within the assassination story, commemorative discourse and practice has thus given them an institutional base on which to do so.

RECYCLED DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE

Recycled discourse and practice is a second arena that has given journalists in both the broadcast media and printed press a way to perpetuate their own stories, presence, authority and, ultimately, celebrity in conjunction with Kennedy's assassination. Each medium's technological features have allowed for the furtherance of original tales that first appeared in it, with the ability to recycle discourse dependent on decisions by media organizations that such discourse was worthy of being recycled.

- REPRINTING. Special issues of magazines, journals, newspapers and books have systematically borrowed the words of reporters which had originally graced their pages. The dispatches of certain journalists were highlighted via their circulation in in-house journals: Merriman Smith's dispatch of November 23 was reproduced in UPI's UPI Reporter and later reissued as part of a special UPI book entitled Four Days ⁴³. It was also reproduced in the trade publication Editor and Publisher, together with a letter where UPI editors hailed Smith's coverage as "an historic memento, an example of narrative style at its best" ⁴⁴. The words of Associated Press correspondent Jack Bell were featured in its 100-page book The Torch is Passed ⁴⁵. The Columbia Journalism Review published an

extensive compilation of reporters' original assassination accounts under the title "The Reporters' Story" ⁴⁶. Reprintings reinforced the importance of original accounts, as well as their links with original tellers.

One journalist whose words have been frequently reprinted was Tom Wicker. One of Wicker's first pieces about the assassination, entitled "That Day in Dallas," was reprinted in December in the in-house New York Times organ, Times Talk ⁴⁷. It was again reprinted one year later in the Saturday Review under the title "A Reporter Must Trust His Instinct" ⁴⁸. Wicker used the space provided him to question the validity of eyewitness testimony, journalistic clarity, even the ability to remember what went on during those four days. "Even now, I know of no reporter who was there who has a clear and orderly picture of that surrealistic afternoon," he commented ⁴⁹. Wicker's piece raised questions about the performance of journalists and the boundaries of appropriate journalistic practice during the assassination. Its reprinting reflects the problems of journalistic practice and definitions of professionalism raised by the assassination.

But other words of Wicker have also been reprinted. Seven months after the assassination he penned an article for Esquire entitled "Kennedy Without Tears" ⁵⁰, that was

acclaimed as outstanding journalism and called a "non-textbook history" of the 1960s ³¹. While that label attested to the already burgeoning tensions between journalists and historians over the role of authorized retellers of the assassination, it nonetheless reinforced Wicker's celebrity for having covered the original assassination story. The piece was subsequently reprinted as a book within the year and in Esquire ten years later ³², where it was so identified in a small blurb:

Tom Wicker's brilliant (and heart-breaking) coverage of the assassination for the New York Times moved Esquire to ask him to write this essay seven months later in June 1964. Mr. Wicker went on to become chief of the Washington bureau and an associate editor of the Times ³³.

Notes about the author commented that he "covered most of the events of the Kennedy administration and was riding in the Presidential motorcade when John Kennedy was murdered in Dallas" ³⁴. Wicker's presence at the assassination thus became embedded in tales of the events of that November. The career trajectory by which he covered the assassination and went on to heights of journalistic glory was clearly documented by the institutions which have reprinted his words. Later, they would figure in accounts upholding his celebrity status independent of the assassination story which facilitated it.

In some cases reprinting original assassination accounts has allowed journalists to key in to other

narratives. For example, a special commemorative volume on Kennedy, issued 25 years after his death, was linked to the events in Dallas by reprinting two articles by Theodore White - an essay which he had written twenty-five years earlier for Life and his famous post-assassination interview with Jackie Kennedy that labelled the Kennedy administration "Camelot" ⁵⁵⁵. Not accidentally, the label of "Camelot" became part of the title of the commemorative volume, which had itself been sponsored by Time-Life books, the parent company of Life magazine. Other Time-Life publications, including Time magazine, similarly reprinted excerpts of the original White essay ⁵⁵⁶.

The fact that news organizations have chosen to reprint original assassination prose accounts in order to reconstruct the events in Dallas suggests much about the authority of journalistic presence. Recollections of the assassination coverage are given an authority accrued from recapturing - and reproducing - the events "as they were". Yet the decision to reprint the story's original tellings also embeds the names of original tellers within institutional recollections. Reprinting practices thus reinforce associations between the assassination story and the names of certain reporters in a way which allows journalists to uphold their celebrity status separate from

the event. The fact that many reprintings have proliferated around the assassination's anniversary only reinforces how central to the original story journalists have become.

- MEDIA RETROSPECTIVES. In the broadcast media, recycled discourse and practice has been accomplished through media retrospectives and special documentaries about the assassination. These presentations function similarly to reprinting in the press, in that they give journalists a way to narrate - and thus reconstruct - their original stories of coverage. Journalists incorporate contemporary voice-overs to original film-clips, thereby embedding references to their own celebrity status.

Of the broadcast journalists featured by media retrospectives, CBS' Dan Rather perhaps best exemplifies how retrospectives effectively uphold journalistic celebrity. His performance has been systematically replayed in various CBS retrospectives, many of which employed him as narrator: He narrated a three-part news series in 1983 investigating the myths and realities behind Kennedy's assassination, an eight-part news series in 1988 and a two-hour documentary called Four Days in November, which aired on the 25th anniversary of Kennedy's

death 57. Ending his narration of the documentary, Rather concluded with

a personal note, based on the many years CBS News and I have spent investigating, thinking about those four days. It was a day we haven't shown that also has alot of meaning for me - the fifth day. Tuesday. On Tuesday, American went back to work...So it is Tuesday I often think of 58.

That line, labelled "Rather Blather" by one observer 59, nonetheless reinforced Rather's role as an authoritative interpreter of the assassination story. Connections between the assassination narrative, his interpretation of it and his status as a journalist were thus embedded within media retrospectives. The fact that stories of his assassination coverage have been found equally in chronicles of his career shows how that authority has helped make him into a journalistic celebrity for his coverage.

- SELF-QUOTED DISCOURSE. Yet another type of institutionally-backed discourse which has perpetuated assassination tales through journalists' celebrity status is self-quoting. In itself a specific case of recycled discourse, self-quoted discourse allows journalists to incorporate original tales within larger contemporary accounts of the assassination. This permits them to look back - and comment - upon their own words, creating a

self-referential discourse by which they can assume the position of commentator on their own views.

Like other kinds of recycled discourse, self-quoting depends on media backing in order to be effectively staged. To a certain extent, it was anticipated already when reporters interviewed other reporters on the night of the assassination: For example, that night NBC's Huntley-Brinkley Report interviewed reporters about what they had seen and written ⁶⁰. But self-quoted discourse has been most effective when realized over time. Reporters' appearances on talk-shows and documentary specials, and frequent interviews in the press about the words through which they originally reported the assassination story create and reference the authoritative presence of certain reporters over others. Such presence effectively references the added authority that comes from commenting on one's own performance from afar.

For example, radio reporter Ike Pappas took part in the following televised exchange about his coverage of Oswald's murder 25 years earlier:

Pappas: My job that day was to get an interview with this guy, when nobody else was going to get an interview...So I said the only thing which I could say, which was the story. Tell the story: "Oswald has been shot. A shot rang out. Oswald has been shot".

Rivera: Is that the single most profound or dramatic moment of your life?

Pappas: It's an extraordinary story. Probably the most extraordinary story I'll ever cover ⁶¹.

The exchange both referenced Pappas' professionalism, contextualized it as a critical incident in his professional memory and upheld his ensuing independent stature as a celebrity. Later reviews of Pappas' professional career were structured around his coverage of the Kennedy assassination ⁶².

Self-quoting lends an air of "I was there" but "now I'm here" to narrative. Phrases like "the crime of the century," "the end of innocence" or "Camelot" are paraded about - and commented upon - by journalists years after their original coinage. For example, accounts of Time correspondent Hugh Sidey were partly quoted, partly paraphrased by the same magazine 25 years after Dallas ⁶³. In narrating CBS' Four Days in November, Dan Rather pointedly commented that "back then, this is what we knew, and this is how I reported it" ⁶⁴. The documentary was filled with clips of Rather's coverage from Dallas, conveying the sensation that he had almost singlehandedly mastered the entire assassination story. Reporter Steve Bell introduced an on-air repeat of an original film-clip of himself standing in front of the Texas School Book Depository 25 years earlier ⁶⁵. In a 1977 Esquire piece, Tom Wicker wrote that

within weeks (sic) of the assassination in Dallas - which, as the New York Times White House correspondent, I'd covered on November 22, 1963, I had written for Esquire a long article that the magazine ran as a cover piece, and called "Kennedy Without Tears" 66.

Wicker then quoted two lengthy paragraphs from his original assassination coverage. He repeated the practice in another essay, where he commented that "I wrote that morning (of November 23) what I thought about the way things were, and would be" 67.

Self-quoting allows reporters to set up their version of "who Kennedy was" or "what happened during the assassination" in order to revise it. In Wicker's case, later articles detailed where he had earlier erred, allowing him to conduct a dialogue with his own earlier discourse. This self-referential framework not only punctuates the authority of reporters for the events of Kennedy's death, but it connects their original words, revised with hindsight, to later discourses, thereby upholding the independent nature of their celebrity status.

These institutionally-backed discourses and practices have thus set up an extended background against which to perpetuate certain journalists as celebrities. Tales have generally been recycled in the medium where they were originally conveyed. Commemoration has given news organizations convenient, recognizable and routinized ways

to highlight - and perpetuate - the status of certain reporters. Recycling and self-quoting have maintained a focus on the words of certain reporters, while deflecting attention from those of others. Institutionally-backed discourses and practices have thus depended first on in-medium deliberations, on decisions taken by news organizations that pronounce certain tales worthy of being commemorated, recycled or quoted. Once pronounced worthy, the words and deeds of journalists about the assassination have been turned into fodder for extensive institutional efforts at reproducing them. With time, the investments surrounding such efforts have justified recognition of the tale's original tellers as celebrities in their own right.

THE DOWNSIDE OF CELEBRITY

The fact that a range of personalities has been perpetuated as celebrities for their part in retelling the Kennedy assassination highlights different underlying discourses about journalistic practice and authority. Discourses connecting many journalists with the events of the assassination weekend have been played out, and ultimately either discarded or legitimated. Those journalists who received institutional backing have been promoted most effectively as celebrities over time.

But a number of other journalists who were actively associated with Kennedy's assassination have not received

general acclaim. Some journalists lost their jobs due to their assassination coverage. CBS' Robert Pierpoint was rumored to have lost his Washington posting to Dan Rather, because Pierpoint's cumulative experience did not match Rather's skill in covering Dallas ⁶⁶. Other reporters lost their positioning in the organizational hierarchy to Tom Wicker of The New York Times ⁶⁷. Tom Pettit, whose on-site, on-air coverage of Oswald's murder for NBC was hailed in 1963 by Broadcasting magazine as "a first in television history" ⁷⁰, disappeared unexplained from collective memory in later years.

Other journalists have been shunted into collective oblivion. Reporter Hugh Aynesworth, for example, whose assistance to more renowned reporters working the assassination story earned him the title of its "longest running reporter," was pushed aside to make place for journalists with greater celebrity status ⁷¹. Penn Jones, who uncovered a series of mysterious deaths related to the assassination, was labelled "a sign of hope for the survival of independent journalism" ⁷², but cries of acclaim were confined to the leftist press. Tabloid journalist Geraldo Rivera claimed the dubious honor of having first run a frame-by-frame analysis of Zapruder's footage of Kennedy's shooting on nationwide television, in a series he hosted in the mid-70s called Good Night,

America, but his tactics kept him marginalized to the serious cadre of reporters working the story ⁷³. French journalist Jean Daniel published interviews conducted shortly before the assassination with Fidel Castro and Kennedy, which pointed to a shared belief in U.S. capitalism and Cuban communism, but media discussions of Daniel's journalistic performance invariably labelled him as being "too involved in politics" ⁷⁴. Leads by reporter Jack Anderson about Mafia involvement occupied columns of the Washington Post during the 1970s, but were eventually marginalized as tabloid journalism. Anderson's 1988 assassination documentary bore a 900-telephone number which viewers could call if they wanted to reopen the investigation, a far cry from the hard-news formats with which Anderson had been earlier associated ⁷⁵.

The actions of each journalist have been rendered marginal to consensus about appropriate journalistic performance, denying celebrity status to the journalists behind them. The fact that certain journalists have fallen from fame and acclaim despite admirable original performances in covering the assassination reveals much about the workings of celebrity as a memory system. It works by and through larger discourses of relevance to the larger community of American journalists. Reporters fell from fame because their performances did not attend

to larger discourses about journalism. This does not suggest that they did not attend to any discourses, only that they attended to the wrong ones. They lacked institutional support because their performances did not sufficiently address or complement issues of concern to journalism professionals. For example, Dan Rather's performance highlighted a more salient hidden agenda about journalism - the legitimacy of television journalism - than did that of Penn Jones or Hugh Aynesworth, both of which addressed rightful parameters of investigative journalism. Thus both were marginalized by other journalists for being too political, too left-wing, too tabloid or too local. Marginalization has denied them the kind of institutional backdrop necessary to perpetuate their tales and promote their celebrity status.

The point that certain noteworthy performances have failed to generate celebrity status for their tellers, while others that are potentially less praiseworthy have produced such status is telling. It suggests that the workings of journalistic celebrity depend less on actual journalistic performances than on institutional agendas and surrounding discourses about journalism. Celebrity status for journalists is derived not only from the quality of their performances but from larger agendas related to the institutional apparatuses of American

journalism. Both the institutional support that journalists found available for retelling their tales, as well as the technological, professional and cultural discourses that made them timely, thus constitute factors which have figured into the workings of journalistic celebrity.

THE VIABILITY OF PERPETUATING TALES THROUGH CELEBRITY

All of this attests to the viability of celebrity as a memory system. Positioning individual reporters as pivotal points for criss-crossing discourses about the assassination and about technology and journalistic professionalism constitutes an effective means of perpetuating collective memories. In that light, Walter Cronkite's performance became important in discussions of parameters of televised journalistic practice, by authenticating the consoling role of anchorpeople. Dan Rather's coverage reflected growing attempts to legitimate television correspondents as bona fide reporters. Theodore White's coverage highlighted the glory of the written word, which faced competition following the effective televised coverage of much of the assassination story. Tom Wicker's performance highlighted the old guard of American journalism, showing that objectives of speedy coverage, eyewitness reporting and terse prose still constituted viable goals. Tales of celebrity attested to the

subjunctive and indicative dimensions of individual journalistic performance, thereby setting up the narrative parameters by which journalists can agree on what constitutes appropriate journalistic practice and authority.

Other performances - related to ongoing investigatory agendas or uncovering conspiracies - have had less to do with the workings of celebrity because they do not directly highlight relevant tensions within the institutions of American journalism. Celebrity, then, constitutes an effective memory system for journalists precisely because it focuses attention on issues crucial to journalism through individual reporters. As cited earlier, celebrity gives journalists idealized notions of how to act or be, but within institutionally-correct versions of such actions. Celebrity, as a memory system, helps to mould journalists within the contours of institutionally-supported agendas. As Leo Braudy has commented,

the urge to fame is not so much a cause as a causal nexus through which more generalized forces - political, theological, artistic, economic, sociological - flow to mediate the shape of individual lives ⁷⁶.

Yet even Braudy's list does not account for all possible features of journalistic celebrity. Technological, cultural, institutional and professional factors are among

those which inflect upon its workings as a memory system. The emergence and perpetration of contemporary journalistic celebrity is thus neither simplistic nor static but a complex matrix of larger discourses and practices on a variety of issues. Tales which become markers of journalists' celebrity status cluster around professional issues central to journalism. In retelling the assassination, these issues concerned the legitimacy of television as a medium, with tales often used to embed the authority of reporters within larger discussions of television technology.

Journalists have thus used celebrity to gain the advantages offered by systematized recollection. Celebrity has cued users into certain personalities and individuals as opposed to more global forms of remembering, all the while providing the illusion of closure and embedding new cues and signals within an already existent associative framework. This makes implicit sense to a community that authenticates itself through its narratives, memories and rhetoric. It also solidifies the ritual dimensions of the very act of retelling.

These pages have addressed the tales and practices that have made the storytellers not only more prominent than the assassination stories they told but remembered and appreciated in a fashion independent from the

narratives which originally thrust them into the public eye. It thus makes sense that celebrity as a memory system has lingered in the reconstruction work by which journalists fashion their assassination tales. Celebrity not only provides a set of shared perceptions and recollections about Dallas through which certain reporters have been systematically thrust into the public eye over others, but it helps mark memories of the assassination in a way which independently signals the status of memory-bearers.

Perpetuating assassination tales through celebrity thus effectively blurs distinctions between "the event" and "the event as told" in journalistic accounts of the assassination. It suggests how journalists as tellers-of-the-event have become the most valued part of the assassination's retelling. By embedding their own presence in their assassination tales, journalists have created a situation which references their own stature as an integral part of it. Invoking celebrity as a memory system has encouraged journalists to remember the events of Kennedy's death by recalling the Walter Cronkites, Dan Rathers and Tom Wickers who gave them voice. Equally important, recalling the Cronkites, Rathers or Wickers has become a goal in its own right.

- ¹ Leo Braudy, The Frenzy of Renown (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). p. 592.
- ² Daniel Boorstin, The Image (New York: Atheneum, 1962), p. 57.
- ³ Braudy, p. 10.
- ⁴ Richard Dyer, Stars (London: British Film Institute, 1978), p. 7.
- ⁵ This has parallels in other era. For example, during the 1940s, journalistic celebrity was defined through radio, with personalities like Edward Murrow or Howard K. Smith celebrated through the immediacy of their news dispatches. Certain presentational formats have also traditionally spotlighted the news-tellers alongside their news-stories: The column, for example, gave print journalists the opportunity to highlight themselves while relaying the news, making them comparable to many contemporary television anchorpeople [See Michael Baruch Grossman and Martha Joynt Kumar, Portraying the President (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 209]. All of this reinforces the fact that journalistic celebrity has in some senses been around for as long as journalism. Therefore, suggestions that television has produced journalistic celebrity, due to the intensified focus on anchorpersons, generated by satellite transmission and improved video equipment may be misplaced. The association may have more to do with the fact that television is the most recent medium for news, and when that status changes so will discussions of journalistic celebrity.
- ⁶ Michael Schudson, "The Politics of Narrative Form: The Emergence of News Conventions in Print and Television" in Daedalus (Fall, 1982).
- ⁷ David Broder, Behind the Front Page (New York: Touchstone Books, 1987), p. 158.
- ⁸ Lawrence Wright, In the New World (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 34. Certain reporters even exploited the celebrity status they gained during the Kennedy reign, as when Washington Post editor Benjamin Bradlee published Conversations with Kennedy (New York: W.W.Norton, 1975), a book that detailed the intimate workings of his friendship with the President. That same year, Harper's Magazine levelled a sharp critique of the book and the way it compromised Bradlee as a journalist (Taylor Branch, "The Ben Bradlee Tapes: The Journalist as Flatterer," Harper's Magazine, October 1975).
- ⁹ Another side to constructions of celebrity and the Kennedy assassination was the pathology of celebrity, exemplified by Oswald's statement to a Dallas police officer that "everybody will know who I am now" [quoted in Frank Donner, "The Assassination Circus: Conspiracies

Unlimited," The Nation 237 (12/22/79), p. 656]. Similarly, in reference to Oswald's mother, Newsweek said "it was as if she had been waiting all her 56 years for this one floodlit moment of celebrity ("The Assassination: A Week in the Sun," Newsweek 2/24/64, p. 29). That side of celebrity, however, goes beyond the bounds of this discussion.

¹⁰ Some of the best-known journalists who discussed Kennedy's administration after his death included Time's Hugh Sidey, Newsweek's Benjamin Bradlee, and the New York Times' Arthur Krock and Tom Wicker.

¹¹ Gary Wills, The Kennedy Imprisonment (New York: Pocket Books, 1982), p. 94.

¹² Harrison Salisbury, A Time of Change (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 71.

¹³ Gay Talese, The Kingdom and the Power (New York: 1970), p. 505.

¹⁴ "The Fine Print," Spy (debut issue, November 1964), p. 5; Reprinted in Spy (November 1989).

¹⁵ "The Times," Spy (debut issue, November 1964), p. 7; Reprinted in Spy (November 1989). The two veteran reporters who were reportedly pushed aside by Wicker's promotion were Max Frankel, who resigned and then rescinded his resignation, and Anthony Lewis.

¹⁶ Gay Talese, 1970, p. 36.

¹⁷ "The Fine Print," 1964, p. 5.

¹⁸ Gary Paul Gates, Airtime (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 12.

¹⁹ People magazine (11/28/88), p. 70. See also Barbie Zelizer, "What's Rather Public About Dan Rather: TV Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity," Journal of Popular Film and Television (Summer 1989), pp. 74-80, for a more general discussion of Dan Rather as a contemporary example of journalistic celebrity.

²⁰ Gates, 1978, p. 293.

²¹ The latter of these two activities possibly promoted a similar action by Dan Rather in October 1989, when he neglected to put on his suit jacket while anchoring CBS' breaking story about the San Francisco earthquake. Whether or not the action on Rather's part was intentional or accidental, it seemed to suggest - to those who paid attention - the ultimate sacrifice to professionalism, the all-encompassing dedication for conveying the late-breaking story quickly.

²² "What JFK Meant to Us," Newsweek (Special 20th Anniversary Issue entitled "Kennedy Remembered", 11/28/83), p. 66.

²³ Barbara Matusow, The Evening Stars (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983).

²⁴ TV Guide (5/6/89), p. 27, p. 30.

- 25 Gates, 1978, p. 6.
- 26 Ibid, pp. 6-7; p. 1.
- 27 Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy. In the movie, Jackie Kennedy referred to White as "one of the friendlies."
- 28 Evan Thomas, "A Reporter in Search of History," Time (5/26/86), p. 62.
- 29 Robert MacNeil, quoted on Good Morning America (ABC News, 11/22/88).
- 30 Wicker, quoted in JFK: A Time Remembered (11/21/88).
- 31 Gary Wills, The Kennedy Imprisonment (New York: Pocket Books, 1982); William Manchester, One Brief Shining Moment (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1983).
- 32 Meg Greenfield, "The Way Things Really Were," Newsweek (11/28/88), p. 98.
- 33 A sampling of these included "25 Years Later," Special Section, U.S. News and World Report (10/24/88); "Kennedy Remembered," Special Anniversary Issue, Newsweek (11/28/83); "Ten Years Later: Where Were You?", Esquire (November 1973); and Philip B. Kunhardt, Jr. (ed.). Life in Camelot (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, in association with Time-Life Books, 1988).
- 34 This technique was favored by most popular media forums, notably Esquire ["Ten Years Later: Where Were You?", Esquire (November 1973)] and People magazines ["November 22, 1963: Where We Were," People (Special Section, 11/28/88)]. Not surprisingly, these compilations of recollections also included those tendered by journalists.
- 35 These included the "25th Anniversary of Kennedy's Assassination," Nightline (11/12/88); "Who Shot President Kennedy?" Nova, special episode coinciding with the 25th anniversary (11/15/88); and JFK Assassination: As It Happened (11/22/88), NBC's attempt to reproduce the exact coverage of twenty-five years earlier.
- 36 The Warren Report, CBS News Documentary (6/25/67-6/29/67); Four Days in November (11/17/88); "Who Shot President Kennedy?" Nova, PBS Documentary (November 1988).
- 37 JFK: A Time Remembered (11/17/88).
- 38 Broadcasting (12/2/63), pp. 36-46.
- 39 JFK Assassination: As It Happened (11/22/88).
- Perpetuating "the club" of journalists who participated also permeated semi-reconstructed events that were later associated with the assassination, as in writer James Kirkwood's discussion of journalists covering the Garrison investigation of New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw:
- "The camaraderie of the (other reporters) was immediately evident. Most, if not all, had covered the preliminary hearing two years earlier and they were like war correspondents. The hearing had been their Korea and now they were once more gathering at

the battleground for Vietnam. They were all seasoned journalist-reporters" [James Kirkwood, American Grotesque (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. 78].

- 40 Richard L. Tobin, "If You Can Keep Your Head When All About You...", Saturday Review (12/14/63), p. 54; Editor and Publisher (12/7/63), p. 44.
- 41 "James Reston," ABC Evening News (7/31/87).
- 42 Barbara Gamarekian, "Hundreds Are in Capital for 25th Remembrance," New York Times (11/22/88).
- 43 UPI Reporter (11/28/63); Four Days - The Historical Record of President Kennedy's Death (UPI, published in association with American Heritage Magazine, January 1964).
- 44 Letter quoted in Editor and Publisher (11/30/63), p. 8.
- 45 Jack Bell, The Torch is Passed (Associated Press, in association with Western Publishing Company, December 1963).
- 46 "The Reporters' Story," Columbia Journalism Review (Winter 1964).
- 47 Wicker, "That Day in Dallas," Times Talk (December 1963)
- 48 Tom Wicker, "A Reporter Must Trust His Instinct," Saturday Review (1/11/64).
- 49 Ibid, p. 81.
- 50 Wicker, "Kennedy Without Tears," Esquire (June 1964).
- 51 John Berendt, "Ten Years Later: A Look at the Record," Esquire (November 1973), p. 263.
- 52 Wicker, Kennedy Without Tears (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1964); Wicker, "Kennedy Without Tears," reprinted in Esquire (October 1973).
- 53 Wicker (1973), p. 196.
- 54 Wicker (1964), p. 63.
- 55 Philip B. Kunhardt Jr, Life in Camelot (New York: Time-Life Books, 1988), pp. 295-7.
- 56 Theodore White, "Camelot, Sad Camelot," Time (7/3/78), pp. 46-7. Even non Time-Life publications referenced "Theodore H. White's poignant 'Camelot' epilogue in Life" [See "The Black Horse," Television Quarterly (Winter 1964), p. 85].
- 57 The series, titled "The Kennedy Assassination: Myth and Reality," aired in November of 1983 on CBS.
- 58 Rather, quoted in Four Days in November (11/17/88).
- 59 Sandy Grady, "JFK: A Look Back," Philadelphia Daily News (11/22/88), p. 5.
- 60 Chet Huntley and David Brinkley, Huntley-Brinkley Report, NBC News (11/22/63).
- 61 Ike Pappas, quoted in On Trial: Lee Harvey Oswald (11/22/88).

- 62 "High Profile: Ike Pappas," Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine (9/10/89), p. 8. Pappas was described as having begun his career as "a UPI crime reporter at age 19 who eventually witnessed 'the crime of the century' while standing five feet from Jack Ruby when he shot Lee Harvey Oswald".
- 63 Hugh Sidey, "A Shattering Afternoon in Dallas," Time (11/28/88), p. 45.
- 64 Rather, quoted in Four Days in November, CBS News (11/17/88).
- 65 Steve Bell, KYW Eyewitness News (11/22/88).
- 66 Tom Wicker, "Kennedy Without End, Amen," Esquire (June 1977), p. 65.
- 67 Tom Wicker, "Lyndon Johnson and the Ghost of Jack Kennedy," Esquire (November, 1965, p. 152. Wicker quoted four long graphs from the piece.
- 68 Gates, 1978, p. 169.
- 69 "The Fine Print," Spy magazine, 1964.
- 70 Broadcasting magazine (12/2/63), p. 46.
- 71 Nora Ephron, "Twelve Years on the Assassination Beat," Esquire 85 (February 1976), p.60.
- 72 David Welsh and William Turner, "In the Shadow of Dallas," Ramparts (1/25/69), p. 63.
- 73 Geraldo Rivera, quoted in On Trial: Lee Harvey Oswald, (11/22/88).
- 74 "Reporter Engage," Newsweek (12/23/63), p. 70.
- 75 Jack Anderson, Who Murdered JFK? American Expose, Saban Productions (11/2/88).
- 76 Braudy, 1986, p. 585.

CHAPTER NINE

THE AUTHORITY OF THE ORGANIZATION AND INSTITUTION:
RECOLLECTING THROUGH PROFESSIONAL LORE

There were memory systems other than celebrity which offered journalists alternate ways of effectively and advantageously promoting their part in the assassination story over time. One such system is professional lore, or the institutionalized body of knowledge that journalists and news organizations systematically circulate amongst and about themselves. Professional lore gives journalists a cohesive memory system by which to institutionally perpetuate certain perspectives on their actions. In recollecting assassination coverage, professional lore has offered journalists a set of texts, discourses and practices that allows them to tailor their assassination memories into a celebration of their own professionalism. Perpetuating this lore plays a central role in keeping journalists, as an interpretive community, together.

In the following pages, I discuss how assassination retellings have been perpetuated through the professional lore of the journalistic community. Three major themes figure in this lore: Tales of the novice, technological aids to professional memory and the authorization of television technology. Assassination narratives have been systematically re-used - in both organizational and

institutional contexts - in ways which uphold these themes.

THEMES OF PROFESSIONALISM

The relevance of professionalism for establishing journalistic authority was already suggested in the days immediately following the assassination, when the events of covering Kennedy's death were systematically turned into a story of professional triumph. The fact that this transformation figured so directly within immediate recountings of assassination coverage made an emphasis on its professional aspects central to the eventual formation of collective notions about journalism. This set up a framework by which the incorporation of assassination tales within organizational and institutional overviews about journalism as a profession and, more specifically, overviews about the technology of television news would make sense. How assassination tales have been accommodated within professional lore reveals much about the authority they are construed as giving journalists and the journalistic community.

Professional lore gives journalists and news organizations an elaborate set of cues about the appropriate standards of journalistic practice and, by implication, authority. While its function has been debated by journalism scholars, who hold that it serves

less to key journalists into professional behavior than members of other professions¹, its particular relevance here derives from its function as a memory system. As a memory system, professional lore offers journalists an alternative to perpetuating tales of the individual, suggested by tales of celebrity. It offers them instead a way to perpetuate tales of the news organization and institution, linking them through assassination tales to collective notions about professionalism and professional lore. Professional lore in this sense serves as a tool of socialization, which circulates collective notions about practice and authority to members of the journalistic community.

Like other memory systems, professional lore also works by a substitutional rule, "plugging" alternate news organizations, news institutions and journalistic practices within communal lore: It suggests that what CBS did today, NBC could do tomorrow. Just as the individual reporter was rendered the pivotal point of tales of celebrity, in tales of professional lore the news organization and institution are positioned as points through which larger discourses about journalism criss-cross with discourses about covering Kennedy's death. The organization and institution constitute the loci by which

discourses about television journalism or journalistic professionalism are linked with assassination retellings.

In retelling the assassination story over time, only certain dimensions of professionalism have been sustained as part of the professional lore. Narratives that attest to the viability of certain news organizations, the journalistic profession or the attributes of television news have bolstered larger discourses about the viability of journalism in strategic ways, by using an array of organizational and institutional issues as their loci.

Equally important, professional lore blurs time spans in a way that bears little respect for temporal modification: One reporter relates her involvement in the assassination story ten years later in much the same way that another narrates his tale a quarter-decade after the event. Neither case addresses or problematizes the passage of time within their narratives. This co-opting of professional lore within larger contemporary discourses about journalism, conceived and penned at different points in time from that of the assassination itself, conceals the fact that these narratives reflect the words of the contemporary - and successful - professional looking back. Selecting the assassination story as a locus through which to illustrate professional codes and practices thus gives professional lore the air of a backward-looking discourse,

a self-retrospective that systematically glorifies certain points within its own history from the vantage points of those who can afford to look back. Lost in the shuffle is the perpetuation of any critical perspective on the original journalistic coverage of Kennedy's death. What remains are clear-cut messages about professionalism that have effectively helped journalists perpetuate themselves as an authoritative interpretive community.

TALES OF THE NOVICE

In one way or another, all professions have traditionally maintained themselves through their origin narratives. Origin narratives give members of groups collective ways of referencing themselves and their shared heritage, tradition and values ². They constitute an important part of professional lore, setting in place the parameters of successful entry into the profession. At the same time, professional lore constitutes one viable locus for origin narratives to flourish. Therefore, origin narratives help maintain lore at the same time as lore upholds the status of origin narratives: Each new tale about the successful adaptation of novice members into a community upholds the status of the lore that records it. Tales of professional acclimatization are thus central to the lore's ability to function as a memory system. They tell the story of untried individuals making their way

into the professional community, attesting to the worth of the profession and, by implication, the professional lore that records its impulses.

Assassination narratives have been used by journalists to generate an extensive set of tales of acclimatization. The route by which naive and unknowing novices make their way into the inroads of the journalistic profession has been anchored by many journalists within coverage of Kennedy's death. Their tales legitimate the professional journalist at the same time as they uphold the displacement of the amateur. The implication - that journalists need to view the assassination as a locus for the onset of professional behavior - has encouraged them to generate tales of the novice within professional lore about it.

One example was provided by reporter Meg Greenfield, who wrote a commemorative piece about the assassination for Time magazine 25 years later. Entitled "The Way Things Really Were," the article traced Greenfield's professional identity back to the day that Kennedy was killed. It was, she said, the day that she began to think and act like a journalist:

I date everything back to November 22, 1963, so far as my adult working life is concerned...What I experienced that day, for the first time, was our peculiar immunity as a trade. We became immune by a crush of duty...allowed, even expected to function outside the restraints of

ordinary decent behavior. We had a job to do. Our license was all but total ³.

Recalling the detached and disembodied "high-octane state" into which she and her colleagues were thrust by Kennedy's death, Greenfield detailed the high-paced frenzy which pushed them into action and kept them there. Her tale recounted the displacement of emotion, the intrusive nature of journalistic work and the semblance of indifference that characterized journalists' activities of those four days.

Similarly, Barbara Walters recalled her own past as a writer on the Today Show, where she heard the news that Kennedy had been shot:

That next Monday, I had one of my first on-the-air assignments, reporting on the funeral of President John F. Kennedy, and being still a novice, I wondered how I could possibly manage to keep the tears out of my voice ⁴.

The fact that she did so, and did so well, is implicit in her ability to recount that particular performance from a well-regarded contemporary position within the ranks of television news personalities. Her ability to ascend beyond the anxieties of a first-time broadcast qualifies her as a capable television journalist.

Even former anchorperson Jessica Savitch, then a high school student anxious to break into journalism, was construed as having reacted "with a curious mixture of personal horror and professional excitement":

As soon as she heard the news, she raced to a pay phone and called in a report to WOND on the reactions of Atlantic City high school students. Jessica and Jeff Greenhawt thought of trying to do a special edition of Teen Corner, but in the end they were overtaken by the dimensions of the event. The show was canceled ☹.

Although not yet employed as a reporter, Savitch already displayed the proper attributes of being a journalist - the intensity, drive and motivation, ingenuity.

Dan Rather offered yet another tale of the novice. In his autobiography, The Camera Never Blinks, Rather related how, on the day that Kennedy was shot, he had been sent to Dallas in "what had been intended as a backup role" ☹. Attempting to verify the fact of Kennedy's death by telephone, at one point he was simultaneously talking to both local reporter Eddie Barker in Dallas and his New York office on different lines. Rather's recounting of the ensuing incident went as follows:

In one of my ears, Barker was repeating what the Parkland Hospital official had told him at the Trade Mart. I was trying to watch and listen to many things at once. My mind was racing, trying to clear, trying to hold steady, trying to think ahead. When Barker said again that he had been told the President was dead, I said "Yes, yes. That's what I hear too. That he's dead." A voice came back, "What was that?" I thought it was Barker again. It wasn't. The "what was that" had come from a radio editor in New York....At that point I heard what my mind then recognized clearly as someone in New York announce, "Dan Rather says the President is dead."...I began shouting into the phone to New York, shouting that I had not authorized any bulletin or any other kind of report. Confusion burst anew. I was told that I had said not once but twice that

Kennedy was dead. Now it came through to me: Those weren't Barker's questions I had been answering 7.

Rather recalled contemplating the possible repercussions of what he had done, saying that "it dawned on me that it was possible I had committed a blunder beyond comprehension, beyond forgiving" 8. Because it took a full half-hour before official confirmation of Kennedy's death came through, the tensions of that time-span struck him in full. He knew "that if the story was wrong, I would be seeking another line of work" 9. The fact that Rather was right, though shaken, has helped to rank him among the qualified professional journalists who covered the assassination story.

Implicit in each narrative is a regard for the assassination as a professional trial ground by which the journalistic acumen of the untried reporter is tested. Interestingly, tales of the novice uphold the known dimensions of journalistic practice: Unlike Walter Cronkite, who cried on air, or the various reporters who recast notions of professional practice in order to provide coverage, tales of the novice play directly into accepted and recognized standards of action. Journalists emerge as part of the community for having proven themselves within already-defined parameters of journalistic practice and professionalism.

Tales of the novice thus relay the story of professional transformation. In each case, reporters are transformed by their coverage of the story, emerging on the other side as individuals with professional reportorial experience of the first order. This makes the assassination story a locus bearing fruitful implications for more general discourses about journalism, journalistic professionalism and the legitimation of television news. As Rather concluded in his story, "if that weekend, beyond the trauma, became a shared experience in journalism, it was because without exception those called on responded so well to the pressure ¹⁰. In other words, the novice's ability to respond effectively to the circumstances of Kennedy's death is instrumental in upholding the appearance of journalistic professionalism that has come to be associated with the event.

Greenfield made a similar point in her narrative, which by its end had set her, too, within the solid ranks of veteran reporters. In concluding, she called the ongoing efforts to commemorate Kennedy's death "anniversary journalism". The title is apt, for it suggests the importance of journalists' positioning themselves within their assassination tales. Because tales of the novice recount the transformation of largely untried cub reporters into hard-nosed journalists,

recalling the events of Kennedy's death becomes a way of marking this transformation within professional lore. Recalling the "way things really were" becomes important within ongoing definitions about what it means to be a professional journalist. Tales of the novice are thus less instrumental for what they suggest about the personal career trajectories of individual reporters and more important for what they suggest about journalistic professionalism. This suggests that professional lore constitutes an important dimension by which journalists consolidate themselves as an interpretive community.

TOOLS OF TECHNOLOGY AS AIDS OF PROFESSIONAL MEMORY

A second theme central to professional lore is technology. Professional lore is filled with tales of the technologies that journalists employ in their work as reporters. While this has traditionally comprised a large dimension of discourse about journalistic professionalism¹¹, in retelling the assassination it allows journalists to link their tales with viable ongoing discussions about the legitimacy of television technology and television news.

This means that assassination tales have been refracted in professional lore by the technologies which facilitate their perpetuation. For example, the irony of the fact that journalists have been called upon to recall

activities of decades earlier in order to generate contemporary appraisals of the profession has been mitigated by technology. Journalists readily admit to the vagaries and inconsistencies of human memory, citing faulty recall of that weekend's particulars ¹². Many mention aids which they found helpful in perpetuating memory, admitting that they used certain tools of technology to keep their assassination tales fresh.

Technology is thus invoked as a means of maintaining their position as authorized retellers of the assassination story. Although they differ according to the media where reporters work, the presence of tools of assistance within professional lore suggests that to some extent journalists enmesh the formation of their own professional identities with the technologies they use. Journalists' professional memories have thus been construed as depending on the tools of technology they employed in perpetuating assassination tales. They see themselves as more professional for having used them.

The early tales by which journalists recount their part in covering the assassination foregrounded the importance of technology as part of professional lore. Tales of triumph - where reporters hailed themselves for having been "the first," "the best" and "the only" in covering Kennedy's death - set up the kind of context that

allowed them over time to celebrate their professionalism in conjunction with technology. Immediately after the assassination, in an early defense of television, one journalist claimed to use the camera like a newspaper reporter uses his pad and pencil ¹³. This suggests that already then, reporters were attending to the reconfiguration of practices which technologies of all kinds offer their users.

One tool mentioned frequently by reporters recollecting their assassination coverage in professional lore is the practice of note-taking. In both print and televised media, journalists have recounted at length how they took copious notes of events. Note-taking is seen as stabilizing memory. The fact that they set down on paper what they had seen or heard has made their recollections valid.

One television item bore this out particularly well. Reporter Steve Bell, called upon in 1988 to anchor a local news station's version of the assassination anniversary, did so by incorporating a repeat broadcast of his original coverage of Kennedy's death. As Bell recalled that "we were on a round-the-clock vigil for information, and Police Chief Jesse Curry was the primary source of information," the picture of Curry faded to one of Bell taking notes years before in Dallas ¹⁴. The semiotic

message conveyed by his note-taking was its ability to authorize him 25 years later to speak about the assassination.

Another example was provided by New York Times reporter Harrison Salisbury, who organized his newspaper's coverage as editor in New York. In an impassioned chronology of his career as a reporter, Salisbury recollected the role of notes in setting down his memories of the assassination:

On November 27, 1963, five days after Kennedy was killed, the first moment I had time and strength to put down what I felt, I wrote a memorandum to myself. I said that in the year 2000 the Kennedy assassination would still be a matter of debate, new theories being evolved how and why it happened ¹⁵.

Referring back to his notes as a viable recording of events stabilized memories. Salisbury proceeded to quote from the memorandum he had penned two and a half decades earlier. But rather than link it with personalized discourse about himself as a journalist, he used it to reference an already existent lore about journalistic professionalism:

I had concluded before going to work for the Times in 1949 that the essence of journalism was reporting and writing. I wanted to find things out - particularly things which no one else had managed to dig out - and let people have the best possible evidence on which to make up their minds about policy ¹⁶.

Taking notes thereby linked Salisbury with professional lore, allowing him to cast himself as "more professional" for having decided to take notes. This implied an interest in posterity, perhaps history, and at the very least a recognition that note-taking facilitates accuracy and stabilizes memory.

This was also displayed in the recollections of New York Times reporter Tom Wicker, who noted how he

had chosen that day to be without a notebook. I took notes on the back of my mimeographed schedule of the two-day tour of Texas we had been so near to concluding. Today, I cannot read many of the notes; on November 22, they were as clear as sixty-point type ¹⁷.

Two years later, he recounted how

I sat in a stuffy, cramped room in the Baker Hotel in Dallas on the morning of November 23, when the great plane had borne its burden of mortality back to Washington, and the fact of death was palpable and tearful in every heart, and Lee Harvey Oswald was snarling his tiny pathetic defiance a few blocks away in the Dallas jail. I wrote that morning what I thought about the way things were, and would be ¹⁸.

Wicker's continued references to his attempts to write down what he saw signified his efforts to stabilize memory. The technology of note-taking gave him a helpful tool to set down his presence as a professional at the site of Kennedy's death. Note-taking offered a particularly visible accoutrement of journalistic professionalism.

Failure to take notes worked to the disadvantage of other reporters. Washington Post editor Benjamin Bradlee, for instance, prefaced his Conversations with Kennedy twelve years after the President's death with the premise that he had not kept regular notes of his meetings with the former President, but could unbelievably "still quote verbatim whole chunks of conversations with him" ¹⁹. Reporter Jean Daniel, the foreign editor of the French weekly L'Express, neglected to take notes during a series of interviews with Fidel Castro and John Kennedy shortly before Kennedy's death. When Daniel contended that both men had said they shared a belief in American capitalism and Cuban communism, he was discredited because "no one else was present, and Daniel, by his own account, took no notes" ²⁰. His zeal was held to have "outperformed his memory," a statement suggesting that his failure to take notes had cast him as unprofessional.

Another tool mentioned in professional lore is photographic technology. References to the filmed and photographic sequencing of the events of Kennedy's death have been scattered across media accounts. For example, CBS' documentary Four Days in November incorporated still photographs, particularly of Oswald being shot, within its filmed footage ²¹. Elsewhere, Edwin Newman recalled how:

Americans went to sleep with images of assassination spinning in their heads. It all

seemed some horrible dream from which we would awaken. But it wasn't. We would awaken to more and more images, images that would become forever burned in our memories. We remember Jacqueline Kennedy, her dress stained with her husband's blood, standing beside LBJ as he took the oath of office. We remember her, kneeling with her daughter to kiss the flag-draped casket. We remember a little boy salute to his father. We remember the riderless horse Blackjack ~~==~~.

Repeated references to assassination images have made the image-making technology a relevant tool in circumscribing memory.

Photographic and filmic technology have become central to professional lore, largely because photographs and films give journalists a way of going back and retelling their role in the assassination in certain strategic ways. It was suggested earlier that at the time of the assassination journalists readily adopted the sequencing supplied them by television technology: The assassination narrative was transformed into one long story that stretched over four days of seemingly continuous happenings rather than maintained as piecemeal accounts of discrete moments of coverage. This has appeared in memory as well, making journalism professionals across media dependent on television technology for their definitions of professional behavior. By borrowing the technology used by journalists in one medium, reporters in other media have thus in effect

became second-class tellers of the lore surrounding the assassination narrative.

This suggests that implicit in the tales by which journalists have sought to promote themselves as professionals for having covered Kennedy's death is a recognition that professionalism depends to some degree on technology and reporters' effective use of it. The fact that journalists aspire to a regard for technology as a tool of assistance is interesting, for in consolidating themselves as a professional community journalists have emphasized the unique access generated by their unique tools. Their discussions, in other words, have not stressed the collective skills as journalists, per se. Yet the reporters' ability to position themselves around technologies is held up as a reflection of their professionalism across media. It is used to bolster their collective memory of the event, much like it was used to bolster professionalism at the time of the assassination.

RE-USING ASSASSINATION TALES

The incorporation of assassination tales within professional lore has not only emerged through individual tales about upholding professional behavior through technology. In much the same way that tales of journalistic celebrity succeed due to the extensive recycling patterns by which they are circulated, so too

has the professional lore of journalists depended on such lore's re-usage. Re-using assassination tales is particularly enlightening for what it reveals about the collective body of knowledge by which the journalistic community perpetuates itself. How a narrative makes its way from one context to others reveals much about the patterns of individual and collective legitimation by which that community solidifies its position in public discourse.

Here again, tales become central parts of collective lore through reprintings and retrospectives. They emphasize the organizations or institutions where individuals work, focusing attention on the organizations that produce the tales being re-used. Professional lore is thus in part motivated by an organization's own decision to circulate its tales. For example, in the press journalists have reprinted original assassination tales through special issues of magazines, journals and newspapers, special sections within those same journals, and entire commemorative volumes. This pattern was exemplified by Life's magazine's twenty-fifth anniversary issue which reprinted its original memorial edition: An outer-leaf was affixed to the original edition, bearing a picture of the cover published a quarter-century earlier and the word "reprint" slashed diagonally across it. The

outer-leaf proclaimed that "we recall him 25 years later with this historic issue," and a brief insert went as follows:

The first copies of this magazine, published two weeks after John F. Kennedy's killing, sold out immediately as a grieving America, seeking a memoir of its sadness, turned to Life...We believe this account to be richer than any anniversary review could be. So we have reprinted our original for the 100 million Americans who are too young to remember - and for those too old to forget - the assassination of a President ==.

Other than these alterations, and a raised price (from \$.50 to \$3.95), the edition was reprinted exactly as it had been issued 25 years earlier. Similar patterns were found in books and in-house journals.

Organizational re-usage has also recirculated assassination photographs, which perhaps constitute the most systematically reprinted part of assassination lore: Shots of LBJ being sworn in as President, of Jackie Kennedy close to her husband's casket, of Oswald crumpling under a murderer's bullet, of Caroline touching her father's coffin were replayed in newspapers, magazines, journals and commemorative volumes about the slain President. A commemorative volume by Time-Life books, entitled Life in Camelot, concluded with two pictures taken from the assassination and pre-assassination coverage - one of John-John saluting his father's casket;

the other of Kennedy walking on the sand dunes near Hyannis Port. The inscription read:

This is how Life ended its special JFK memorial following the assassination. In this retelling of Camelot so many years later, it still seems fitting to let these two pictures close the story ²⁴.

Many of these pictures had appeared 25 years earlier in Life magazine ²⁵, etched into collective memory by earlier institutional efforts. References were again made by parent companies, with Forbes magazine endorsing the photographs in the following fashion:

In the November Life are some of the most vividly famous photographs of the instant and stunning aftermath (of Kennedy's death)...the First Lady in her blood-soaked pink suit standing by as Lyndon Johnson is sworn in as President on Air Force One...the coffin being lowered from the plane for the dead President's last White House sojourn...John-John saluting the coffin. De Gaulle, towering, as they walk behind the caisson to Arlington ²⁶.

The special commemorative volume also featured many pictures of photographers who had photographed Kennedy ²⁷.

Televised tales have been circulated within professional lore through the modicum of television retrospectives. In this case, retrospectives were forwarded as part of the lore of news organizations. Often, they took on different names, allowing journalists and organizations to profit a number of times from the same footage. ABC, for instance, reused one basic compilation of assassination coverage but titled it

differently - JFK Assassination: As It Happened when screened on the Arts and Entertainment Cable Network in 1988, and a three-part set called The Week We Lost Kennedy when sold on the private market one year later ²². Although different narrators introduced the clippage, the coverage it presented was nearly identical.

Film clips from assassination footage have also been replayed in news programs, special documentaries and media retrospectives: Sequences showed the funeral caisson, the riderless horse, the processions of mourners, the murder of Oswald. Photographs have been recycled: A special 1988 eight-part CBS series on the assassination was introduced with a color montage of the event's best-known photographs, upholding the stature accorded photographs in recollecting the story ²³.

Coopting assassination narratives within other texts has made re-usage patterns most explicit. Where an assassination narrative has been re-used by journalists and news organizations is instrumental in determining its importance. For example, the fact that the narrative about Dan Rather in Dallas was promoted as part of CBS' organizational lore reveals how important the story was to CBS. The same narrative's incorporation within ongoing histories about television as a news medium reflects its importance to the emerging legitimacy of television

journalism. Similarly, incorporating the same narrative within general overviews about news as a profession suggests the tale's centrality to an understanding of news at its most generalized level.

Thus where an assassination tale has been re-used says much about the underlying patterns of authority perpetuated by the journalistic community's professional lore. The effectiveness of professional lore in upholding assassination retellings is found in the reuse of assassination tales in milieux other than those in which they were originally intended. This directly upholds the consolidation of journalists into an interpretive community, by displaying how its communal lore depends on the continuous recirculation of narratives that celebrate journalistic professionalism.

THE TEXTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL MEMORY

Journalists and news-organizations have re-used assassination narratives in two main groups of organizationally-bound texts - overviews of specific news organizations, such as histories of CBS or The New York Times, and the biographical and autobiographical perspectives of individuals on professional life within these news organizations. Both have been used to lend a valorized past to organizations. Organizational overviews

of both types have used the locus of the news organization to recall what happened in 1963.

The most illustrative example of this kind of discourse was found in one history of CBS News, Gary Paul Gates' Airtime ³⁰. Gates' book began with a chapter entitled "Kennedy's Been Shot" that detailed how CBS covered the assassination. The chapter's central placement reflected the fact that the assassination constituted a turning point in the organization's stature, with assassination coverage making CBS into a viable news organization. In a semiotic sense, framing the book around the assassination coverage thus highlights the role it played in legitimating CBS News. Such a role was stressed throughout the book. Like other accounts found in professional lore, Gates' recounting of the assassination story was laced with praise for television technology. He traced how CBS would be able to produce coverage like that exhibited on Kennedy's death - the 1962 opening of three new CBS bureaus, one in Dallas; expansion of network news coverage from 15 minutes to 30; the addition of Telstar and videotape. This contextualized CBS' successful coverage of the story as a natural evolution grounded in organizational decision-making. Its decision - not only to accept technological and organizational advances but to facilitate their incorporation within CBS - made it seem

as if the assassination coverage was the result of organizational foresight. This coopted the assassination story within a larger discourse legitimating the news organizations.

Similar stories were featured in professional lore about NBC. One biography of former NBC anchorperson Jessica Savitch detailed how NBC had set the scene for television broadcast coverage of the assassination, when executive Robert Kintner decided that NBC would yank all programming, including commercials, after Kennedy was shot. "His competitors at CBS and ABC followed suit, but NBC garnered the credit for public-spiritedness", went the account ³¹. The same story was featured in other overviews of NBC News ³², suggesting that organizational decisions at NBC had helped to make the assassination story into the special-event coverage that it became. This supported linkages between the assassination story and NBC's prestige as a news organization ³³.

In each case the assassination story has been used to bolster the prestige of the organizational locus from which the tale emerged. As one television retrospective maintained, "it was at times like these that a news organization finds out how good it is, whether it can do the hard jobs, the grim ones" ³⁴. Professional lore has helped to perpetuate the critical nature of the event for

most news organizations. Re-using organizational tales has functioned much like the recycling of celebrity tales discussed earlier: While recycling the celebrity tale serves the individual journalists whose praises it sang, by heightening and solidifying their personal stature, re-usage of organizational tales serves the organization, by stressing the gains it garnered by covering Kennedy's death.

INSTITUTIONAL CONCERNS AND PROFESSIONAL LORE

At the same time, assassination narratives have been re-used extensively within institutional overviews, including discussions about journalism as a profession and the evolution of television news. In each case, assassination narratives have been coopted within more general discourses that have helped create a valorized past for the institutions and institutional concerns in question.

One representative claim has held that television news and the Kennedy assassination were ripe for each other. This claim's centrality in professional lore has been borne out quantitatively: One comprehensive tome on the evolution of television, Erik Barnouw's Tube of Plenty, described coverage of the assassination in nearly 10 pages of text ²³, a pattern repeated elsewhere too.

Mention of the Kennedy assassination is found in nearly every institutional overview of the medium of television.

But the qualitative nuances of claims about the loyalties of television and the Kennedy assassination have been of more enduring significance. In a special issue celebrating television's 50th birthday, TV Guide held that the assassination story constituted a moment of crucial importance for the medium. "From this moment on," claimed the magazine, "television becomes the primary source of news for Americans" ³⁶. Life magazine produced a special feature about television, highlighted by pictures of both Kennedy's funeral and Oswald's shooting ³⁷. A CBS documentary maintained that

America needed calming, and it happened because television carried it all. Hour after hour, day after day, from murder to burial, the flow of images and pictures calmed the panic. Someone has said that those four days marked the coming of the age of television ³⁸.

In account after account, the assassination retellers and television were construed as having given each other effective stages for collective legitimation.

- TIME, SPACE AND THE AUTHORIZATION OF TV TECHNOLOGY.

This had to do in part with notions about time and space, and how television played with them. It was a pivotal year for television. Not only did more people say in 1963 that they got more news from television than from newspapers,

but the advent of the half-hour newscast intensified the "bond of familiarity and dependence between anchor and viewer" ³⁹. Coverage of the Kennedy assassination was construed as capping off what had become an advantageous situation:

Television had already proved its ability to cover large-scale events that were pre-planned, but never before had it attempted to keep up with a fast-breaking, unanticipated story of this magnitude...Remarked one executive at the time, "I think we were frightened when we saw our capability." In a medium not noted for its dignity or restraint, the commentators and reporters also performed admirably, conscious perhaps of their role in keeping the nation calm and unified. What the networks lost in commercial revenues during the four days was more than compensated for by the good will generated...Television news had come of age ⁴⁰.

This played directly into the hands of the newly-empowered television networks.

In much the same way that organizational tales have contextualized the assassination as the result of organizational foresight, institutional tales have viewed it as the consequence of institutional developments in technology, political climate, and the social and cultural legitimation of television. Television was seen as an active player in the assassination drama. Through the assassination it became

the central nervous system of society, an instrument of perception and feeling...Commentators and reporters tried to fill the vacuum in our thoughts. Cameras

searched for some meaning in the tangle of Dallas, Washington and finally Arlington ⁴¹.

Historical overviews thereby have focused on the relationship between then-current forms of professionalism and technology, repeatedly mentioning the influence of the medium of television on memories of Kennedy's death:

until (Oswald's death), TV had been exclusively a medium of fantasy, so that part of the shock of Ruby's action was simply that it was real...Suddenly we understood television in an entirely new way, in a manner that prepared us for the many murders to come, for the 'living room war' of Vietnam, for the constitutional lessons of Watergate, and finally, monotonously, for the local murders of the ten o'clock news ⁴².

In another's view,

On that day, American television changed forever...Unlike the day Kennedy died, (when) the networks had been poor cousins to radio and newspaper...the assassination created a new hunger for TV news, and almost overnight, made television the pre-eminent medium for information ⁴³.

Thus the assassination has been contextualized as one of the first circumstances where journalists showed they were capable of acting in a way demanded of them by television technology. This has made the authorization of television a central part of professional lore about the assassination. Attempts to incorporate the assassination narrative within larger discourses about professionalism and technology have directly upheld television's legitimation.

The changing configurations of space and time that figured within these notions have been featured in professional lore. For example, a special 1989 issue of People magazine about television's fiftieth anniversary introduced a section entitled "Unforgettable Images" with "collapsing time and distance, TV created instant history and hurled it at light-speed into our homes and memories"⁴⁴. The same section used three pictures - of the Kennedy-Nixon debates in 1960, Kennedy's funeral cortege and Oswald being shot - to illustrate TV news' coming of age. It happened

by confronting the unspeakable tragedy of life. The eyes of Walter Cronkite swelled with tears when he heard from a young Dan Rather that President Kennedy was dead. Tom Pettit's voice filled with horrified excitement as he broadcast TV's first on-air murder of Lee Harvey Oswald, on NBC. The world sat in on these extraordinary events through the marvels of communication satellites that could usually and instantly united the globe⁴⁵.

Implicit in these comments was a recognition that television had changed the forms by which the American public would remember its events. It solidified its status as "a collective reference point" and shaper of American memories⁴⁶. It was not only, as one analyst observed, that by bringing the assassination and its aftermath "vividly into the national consciousness...far more graphically than the printed page, the video screen (has) depicted some of the most unforgettable scenes in recent

history" 47. It was also that it has made certain dimensions of those scenes available for collective perpetuation. Collective perpetuation fit well into journalists' attempts to uphold collective notions about themselves, upholding the ritual dimensions of assassination retellings, and the ongoing patterns of community and authority by which journalists are consolidated as an interpretive community.

- THE PERSISTENT PRESENCE OF THE REPORTER. Yet the emphasis on television technology as an institutional issue of concern to journalists has not erased consideration of the reporter's individual relationship to technology. Technologies have remained "peopled" in professional lore. In narrating the 1988 CBS documentary Four Days in November, Dan Rather cautioned viewers that they were about to watch a

hastily-prepared biography CBS News broadcast that weekend. Tapes and films were rushed from our vaults, and my colleague Harry Reasoner improvised from notes 48.

A 1988 Associated Press dispatch relayed the earlier performance of NBC correspondent Bill Ryan with the following account:

It was Ryan who read the AP flash that Kennedy was dead.

"It's jarring when somebody comes up to you and says, 'You're the one who told me President Kennedy was dead,' " Ryan said.

What Ryan, McGee, Huntley, David Brinkley and millions of others couldn't know was that on that day, American television changed forever
40.

The article recounted the difficulties and circumstances of technical naivete which Ryan was expected to overcome in covering the story. "We didn't even have a regular news studio," he said, observing that "it wasn't like today, where you could punch up the whole world by satellite in a minute and a half" 50.

Implicit in both accounts were references to the improvements of television technology since the days of the assassination. Yet also implicit was the admission that even without the sophisticated equipment of contemporary television, television journalists played their trade well in covering Kennedy. Stories about the legitimation of journalists as professionals were thus forwarded in conjunction with, but not dependent on, stories about television technology.

It is perhaps in such a light that in the same CBS broadcast, Rather chose to introduce the program with a detailed overview of the state of television technology at the time of the assassination:

In 1963, television news was broadcast in black and white. Lightweight portable tape equipment did not exist. Our signals moved mostly by hardwire or microwave relay. In some film clips which follow, you will see watermarks, looking like rain on the screen. The film had no chance

to dry out. It was broadcast from wet stock. But the message went out across the country ⁵¹.

The embedded message suggests the triumph of reporters over what was then an undeveloped technology. When separated from the visuals which documented the story of Kennedy's death, Rather's words told the story not only of Kennedy but of the evolution of television, on one hand, and the triumph of the reporter in such an evolution, on the other. These issues have been central to the consolidation of journalists as an interpretive community that authenticates itself through its narratives.

- OTHER TECHNOLOGIES, OTHER ISSUES. This does not suggest that other technologies have not been similarly woven within the story of Kennedy's death. Overviews about photojournalism, for example, have lauded the assassination story's photographic footage. A special Time survey of 150 years of photojournalism included the Oswald shooting as one of the ten greatest images in the history of photojournalism ⁵². Another essay in that same issue noted that in 1963 "as historical events darkened, photojournalism regained some of its tragic power...A Dallas Times-Herald photographer caught the instant of Lee Harvey Oswald's death" ⁵³.

Yet the professional claims of photojournalists to the story of Kennedy's death have become secondary to

those voiced by television journalists. As the same essay went on to say, the fact that television caught the moment of Oswald's death prompted photojournalists to ask whether "picture taking, no longer history's first witness, (would) ever again be more than stenography?" ⁵⁴. The systematic and repeated incorporation of the assassination narrative within institutional overviews about journalism professionalism and the onset of television news has suggested that it would not. The fervor with which organizational and institutional memory has made television technology a given in recountings of the assassination story has left little space for contrary claims about the professionalization of other groups.

Radio has seen a similar fate. While most people told of receiving their first accounts of Kennedy's death from radio ⁵⁵, many had turned to television by the time the assassination weekend was over, a point suggesting that radio fulfilled an important but transient function. The fact that references to its role have more or less disappeared from collective memory about the assassination is connected with larger discourses about television technology that ensued in the interim. Linking memories of the assassination with organizational and institutional efforts to reference television's glorious past via the assassination story suggests that little room has remained

for radio practitioners to make similar attempts at valorization. This perhaps explains why even in professional lore, the role of radio has been thinly woven into institutionally-bounded narratives about the assassination. In a sense, it became a local medium next to the nationalization of television. Similar arguments can be advanced about the disappearance of discourse about local media.

Thus the assassination story has been systematically perpetuated within discourse about institutional concerns connected with television technology and professionalism. This has reinforced the collective need to view Kennedy's death as a locus for professional behavior and technological legitimation. Organizational and institutional memory has thus helped journalists and news organizations perpetuate versions of the assassination narrative by which they can most effectively profit. Like the celebrity tale valorizes individual reporters, organizational and institutional tales have helped to valorize specific news organizations, institutions and institutional values. The repeated and systematic co-optation of these tales within professional lore has helped journalists create the kind of past that appears to logically enhance and valorize not only the stature of

journalistic professionalism but of television news as well.

ON MEMORY AND PROFESSIONALISM

Thus television technology has shaped not only professional lore but the collective perceptions of journalists about themselves. Walter Cronkite, asked to comment on television's fifty years of broadcasting, reflected on using television to look back at television. "You'll be amazed at how much you've forgotten that you remembered," he said ³⁶. Claims such as these matter less for their accuracy and more for the notions that they encourage journalists to circulate about and amongst themselves. Within and across the journalistic community, journalists have held that the assassination was "reality framed by a television set" ³⁷, and they have formed their self-definitions as professionals in conjunction with that view.

This is important, because it has helped journalists turn themselves into an interpretive community by using their assassination retellings as an act of communication that holds them together. Pivoting assassination retellings on professional lore rather than individual tales of celebrity suggests that such lore is dependent on the organizational and institutional loci where individual reporters work. Individual reporters are not only cast as

players who uphold proven parameters of professionalism but certain organizational and institutional loci provide frames for their activities both at the time of the assassination and their perpetuation of narratives about those activities years later. Journalists' professional memories are thus derived not only from individuals but from the organizational and institutional loci where they fit. Through both dimensions, journalists are able to constitute themselves as an independent, authoritative community.

It is worthwhile to quote writer Lance Morrow, who used a recent essay about photojournalism to consider certain intersections of memory and professionalism that technology has generated. His comments went as follows:

Taking pictures is a transaction that snatches instants away from time and imprisons them in rectangles. These rectangles become a collective public memory and an image-world that is located usually on the verge of tears...The pictures made by photojournalists have the legitimacy of being news, fresh information...(But) it is only later that the artifacts of photojournalism sink into the textures of the civilization and tincture its memory: Jack Ruby shooting Lee Harvey Oswald, John-John saluting at the funeral

Morrow's comments reflect what journalism professionals have done with the assassination narrative, in all its forms. Through the assassination story, they have rearranged instantiations of time and space in order to effectively fashion the kinds of memories that most

directly benefit the organizational and institutional concerns of American professional journalism. It is within these larger discourses that their narratives have become ultimately meaningful and powerful.

Already in 1964, one of the leading trade journals maintained that the occurrences of November 22 to 25, 1963, "belonged to journalism, and specifically to the national organs of journalism" ⁵⁹. The professional lore that has unified the American journalistic community has done much to uphold the validity of such a statement. This chapter has attempted to describe the way in which such a goal was not only accomplished, but rendered an integral part of how journalists collectively look at themselves.

¹ A large body of literature exists on professionalism and journalistic practice, including D. Weaver and G.C. Wilhoit, The American Journalist (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986) and its precursor J. Johnstone, E. Slawski and W. Bowman, The News People (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976). Also see Lee Becker et al, The Training and Hiring of Journalists (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1987), for a general overview on professionalism.

² The term is borrowed from folklore, and connotes the ability of groups to consolidate themselves through narratives which detail the group's origin.

³ Meg Greenfield, "The Way Things Really Were," Newsweek (11/28/88), p. 98.

⁴ Barbara Walters, quoted in "Ten Years Later: Where Were You?" Esquire 80 (November 1973), p. 136.

⁵ Gwenda Blair, Almost Golden: Jessica Savitch and the Selling of Television News (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 71.

⁶ Dan Rather with Mickey Herskowitz, The Camera Never Blinks (New York: Ballantine, 1977), p. 145.

⁷ Ibid, pp. 126-7.

⁸ Ibid, p. 127.

⁹ Ibid, p. 128.

- ¹⁰ Ibid, p. 152.
- ¹¹ Journalistic training manuals, for instance, tend to provide extensive sections about how to operate whatever technology is at hand in news-work. The current vogue in so-called "new technologies" also generally motivates discussions about ethical dilemmas generated in journalism, usually related to privacy. See, for example, Stephen Klaidman, The Virtuous Journalist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) or Tom Goldstein's The News At Any Cost (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985) for discourse about news and technology.
- ¹² See Tom Wicker, "A Reporter Must Trust His Instinct," Saturday Review (1/11/64) or Charles Roberts, "Eyewitness in Dallas," Newsweek (12/5/66).
- ¹³ Gabe Pressman, Robert Lewis Shayon and Robert Schulman, "The Responsible Reporter," Television Quarterly (Spring 1964), p. 15.
- ¹⁴ Steve Bell, KYW Eyewitness News (11/22/88).
- ¹⁵ Harrison E. Salisbury, A Time of Change: A Reporter's Tale of Our Time (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 70.
- ¹⁶ Ibid, p. 67.
- ¹⁷ Tom Wicker, "A Reporter Must Trust His Instinct," 1964, p. 81.
- ¹⁸ Tom Wicker, "Lyndon Johnson vs the Ghost of Jack Kennedy," Esquire (November 1965), p. 152.
- ¹⁹ Benjamin Bradlee, Conversations With Kennedy (New York: W.W.Norton, 1975), p. 7.
- ²⁰ "What's Fit to Print?" The Reporter (1/2/64), p. 12. Also see "Reporter Engage," Newsweek (12/23/63), p. 70.
- ²¹ Four Days in November, CBS News (11/17/88).
- ²² Edwin Newman, JFK Assassination: As It Happened, NBC News (11/22/88).
- ²³ "John F. Kennedy Memorial Edition," Life, Special Edition Reprint (Winter 1988).
- ²⁴ William B. Kunhardt Jr., Life in Camelot (New York: Time-Life Books, 1988), p. 317.
- ²⁵ "John F. Kennedy Memorial Edition," Life, 1963.
- ²⁶ "Can You Believe That 20 Years Have Passed," Forbes (12/5/83), p. 26.
- ²⁷ Kunhardt, 1988, pp. 8, 13.
- ²⁸ JFK Assassination: As It Happened, NBC News (11/22/88); The Week We Lost Kennedy, NBC News (March 1989)
- ²⁹ The series was screened on NBC during November of 1988.
- ³⁰ Gary Paul Gates, Airtime (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).
- ³¹ Blair, p. 199.
- ³² In particular, Barbara Matusow goes into great detail about how Kintner's exploits enhanced the prestige of NBC News [See Barbara Matusow, The Evening Stars (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), pp. 76 ff].

- 33 In keeping with the fact that ABC had not originally performed the event in a way that made it worthwhile to remember, assassination narratives have not featured as prominently within organizational histories of that news organization.
- 34 Edwin Newman, JFK Assassination: As It Happened, NBC News (11/22/88).
- 35 Erik Barnouw, Tube of Plenty (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- 36 "The Moments You Can Never Forget," TV Guide (5/6/89), p. 4.
- 37 William A. Henry III, "The Meaning of TV," Life (March 1989), p. 68.
- 38 Four Days in November, CBS News (11/17/88).
- 39 Matusow, 1983, p. 107.
- 40 Ibid, p. 106.
- 41 Richard A. Blake, "Two Moments of Grief," America (11/24/73), p. 402.
- 42 Lawrence Wright, In The New World (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 71.
- 43 Alan Robinson, "Reporting the Death of JFK," Associated Press Dispatch, carried by The Philadelphia Inquirer (11/22/88), p. 8E.
- 44 "Television's Fiftieth Anniversary," People (Summer 1989), p. 9.
- 45 Ibid, p. 100.
- 46 Peter Kaplan and Paul Slansky, "Golden Moments," Connoisseur (September 1989), p. 136.
- 47 Michael A. Kurtz, Crime of the Century (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), p. v.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Robinson, "Reporting the Death of JFK," 1988, p. 8E.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Dan Rather, Four Days in November, CBS News (11/17/88).
- 52 "Icons: The Ten Greatest Images of Photojournalism," Time (Special Issue on 150 Years of Photojournalism), (Fall 1989), p. 8.
- 53 "New Challenges: 1950-80," Time (Special Issue on 150 Years of Photojournalism), (Fall 1989), p. 56.
- 54 Ibid, p. 56.
- 55 See Bradley Greenberg and Edwin Parker, The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965).
- 56 Walter Cronkite, quoted on Fifty Years of Television: A Golden Anniversary, CBS News Special (11/26/89).
- 57 Judd Rose, "Twenty-fifth Anniversary of JFK Assassination," Nightline, ABC News (11/22/88).
- 58 Lance Morrow, "Imprisoning Time in a Rectangle," Time (Special Issue on 150 Years of Photojournalism), (Fall 1989), p. 76.

59 "The Assassination," Columbia Journalism Review (Winter 1964), p. 5.

CHAPTER TEN

THE AUTHORITY OF THE PROFESSION:
RECOLLECTING THROUGH HISTORY AND THE CUSTODIANSHIP OF
MEMORY

"What is accessible to all of us is the memory of ourselves during that bleak November weekend" ¹.

The continued recognition of journalists as the preferred retellers of the assassination story ultimately depended on the ability of reporters to authorize themselves outside of journalism. Because the story of Kennedy's death was not only a story about journalism, one preferred mode of perpetuating journalistic associations with it was through the authentication of reporters in parameters not related to their own professionalism. Such a mode posited journalists in authoritative positions that were culled not from journalism, but from history. It authorized journalists as historians.

This third memory system has encouraged journalists to perpetuate notions of themselves as the story's preferred spokespeople through the role ascribed them by history. Brought into play alongside the memory system offered by celebrity - which has elevated the importance of the individual reporter - and that offered by professional lore - which has elevated the importance of news organizations and institutions of professional journalism, the memory system of history has helped

journalists effectively perpetuate their assassination tales by elevating the importance of considerations basic to the general structure of the profession. This chapter explores the link between journalism and history, considering history's function as a privileged record or anachronism in reconsidering the assassination, the ability of journalistic record to function as historiography, and the emergent focus among journalists on the custodianship of memory in their assassination retellings. Specifically, I address how journalists, in an attempt to validate themselves beyond the profession, have established their custodianship of assassination memories in order to establish themselves as the story's authorized historians. This makes history the most general and final stage in journalists' attempts to consolidate themselves as an authoritative interpretive community around their assassination retellings.

HISTORY: PRIVILEGED RECORD OR ANACHRONISM?

As a memory system, history has long been lauded for its ability to lend depth to the events it retells. In one view, it is a "discipline which (seeks) to establish true statements about events which have occurred and objects which have existed in the past" ². Both in perspective, narrative standard and analytical method, historians have tried to be record-keepers of a system predicated on

distance ³. In their attempt to be analytical, remote and seemingly objective about the impulses they inscribe in their chronicles, they ascribe to a view of their record as value-free ⁴.

For observers examining events over time and space, history offers two advantages: One is the detached, even remote, view it offers; another is its larger perspective, where looking at events from afar appears to give observers a more stable view of what happened. The illusion of a greater record or narrative by which events can be chronicled gives them a seemingly "natural" relevance, making them sensical by their implantation within a larger context. It displays a "certain kind of relationship to 'the past' mediated by a distinctive kind of written discourse" ⁵. History is thus seen as deepening the record of an event, traits which have set it apart from other modes of chronicling.

But from a traditional perspective, history does not make room for memory. Among traditional historians, memory and history have been seen as offering "mutually opposed ways of appreciating the past" ⁶. Memory is expected to give way to history, its subjective images yielding "to the historian's description of objective facts" ⁷. Over time, memory becomes a tool in the historian's hands,

suggesting that as long as memory remains vital, history cannot assume an authoritative role in discourse.

For retellers of the assassination, most of whom lived through its events, the tension between history and memory bore directly on their activities. Retellers attended to history in different ways, with assassination buffs playing into their stereotyped role as sharpshooters. Their involvement in the story was sporadic, often erratic. Historians, on the other hand, displayed a consistent interest in the story but tried to fasten it within larger discourses about Kennedy's administration and Presidency. With few exceptions, their interest rested less with the assassination story per se and more with how they could use it to illustrate larger developments of the time ^a. Even historical textbooks tended not to mention the assassination in detail ^a. Situated in and around these groups was the journalistic community, with its own professional codes, modes of storytelling and technologies for telling tales that were all predicated on its presence within the assassination story. Such a presence implied the importance of memory.

To an extent, all assassination retellers expected that the events of the assassination would eventually be inscribed as part of historical record and that professional lived memories would decrease in importance.

In large part this was because as the story of the assassination moved across time and space, it moved directly into the historian's domain. It was an "event in history," claimed one trade publication already one week after events ¹⁰. Years later, in 1967, Newsweek contemplated the historical status of the story under the title "Assassination: History or Headlines?" ¹¹.

The inevitability of history was a natural expectation. As one journalist proclaimed in 1966:

Millions of words, spoken and written, have already been dedicated to the subject (of the assassination), and there will be millions, if not billions, more before (Kennedy's) assassination takes its place as part of history ¹².

History was seen as a resting place to which all retellings voluntarily or involuntarily aspired.

Yet, as these chapters have shown, retelling the assassination was not a conflict-free enterprise. Shortly following Kennedy's murder, Tom Wicker recalled how

a few friends - journalists, political figures, academics - were lunching informally in Washington. Their attention turned, not unnaturally, to Kennedy. What, they asked, would history most likely remember of him? ¹³.

Wicker's reference to three groups vying for authority over Kennedy's memory is significant, for while it pointed out what appeared to be a shared perspective on history - that it held the natural rights to the assassination story - it also underscored the competition by which alternate

retellers were attempting to shape collective memory about Kennedy's life and death.

It is thus no surprise that the idea of history taking over the assassination story met with resistance by other retellers. In part, this was due to the particular kind of participant-observer valorized by historical record - someone who embodied a sensitivity to the larger picture, objectivity and a detached perspective, a sense of analytical remoteness about events. Because these qualities are in some way determined by the passage of time, observers needed to wait in abeyance until it was possible to pronounce suitable judgment on the events of Kennedy's death. In order to produce a sequencing of the event over time, they had to wait to implement their retellings ¹⁴. In the case of historical retellings, then, the "participant" dimension of the participant-observer was considerably subordinated to the "observer," which remained highly valorized.

Such a situation was at odds with larger developments of the time, contradicting the reflexivity of sixties' chronicles and the increased proximity of history for those seeking to set up new boundaries of cultural authority. It failed to recognize the pseudo-historical cast of most accounts generated by people who came of age in the sixties, or the possibility that forming their own

professional identities was infused with history and historical relevance. Even larger questions about documentary method emphasized professional memories as an alternate form of documentation, which in essence valorized qualities in the assassination reteller that are lacking in the traditional historian.

But most important, the idea of history taking over the assassination story has remained problematic because it fails to account for the continued vitality of memory. For example, the emphasis on a reteller's presence has evolved as a valued part of assassination retellings, circumventing the difficulties that the evidence of memory has traditionally presented for historians. As one observer remarked, "Memory has always been difficult for historians to confront...(It) is considered an information source to be confirmed by scholarship" ¹⁵. Yet more general suggestions that all people with recollections - not just historians - are able to effectively consider the assassination story have highlighted the legitimacy of memory. This is borne out by Tom Wicker's comments about the three purveyors of memory - the journalist, academic and politician - who sat together to transcribe the parameters of collective memory about Kennedy. They underlined the actor-based nature of the memory systems through which many assassination recollections have been

effectively forwarded. By underscoring the importance of recollectors as players, they made memory a salient part of the historical record of Kennedy's death. Over time, this has both highlighted the potentially active role played by recollectors from a range of professional domains and undermined the privilege accorded traditional historians.

Thus, as a memory system, history has offered advantages that are valorized but a means of record-keeping that is not. Advantages - of perspective, stability of interpretation, or a sensitivity to the larger picture - have successfully separated history from other chronicles of the assassination, but its valued mode of record-keeping and participant-observation have remained problematic. This does not mean that other retellers of the assassination have deemed history irrelevant. Rather, they have attempted to locate ways to best correct its surrounding problematics. They have set about proving that they can play the historical role better than historians, directly boosting their ability to consolidate themselves as an independent authoritative community.

JUSTIFYING JOURNALISTIC RECORD AS HISTORY

Invoking history as a memory system linked into journalists' uncertainty over the degree of

distinctiveness between the two professions. To an extent, journalists' interest in history and historical record appeared to be somewhat woven into their own retellings. "Historic photographs" were referenced across media ¹⁶; historic films were lauded as media triumphs ¹⁷; "historic coverage" became one frequently-aired label of journalistic performances of the assassination story ¹⁸. Even one well-known saying about journalism held that it constituted the first rough draft of history. That comment, offered by Washington Post publisher Philip Graham ¹⁹, was widely quoted throughout the assassination literature.

ON THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF JOURNALISM AND HISTORY

Journalists initially saw themselves helping history and historians in retelling the assassination. One trade publication held that "never before has there been such documentation of history-in-the-making" ²⁰, while another reporter admitted that if "future historians will have a full record of events," it was because "they will know exactly what Lee Harvey Oswald looked like" ²¹. This implied that television, by disseminating images of the assassination, had supported the making of history. Journalists, particularly television reporters, viewed themselves as having offered the American public a "new dimension in understanding history" ²².

Defining themselves as aides to historians encouraged journalists to emphasize differences between journalistic and historical retellings of the assassination story, which necessarily highlighted journalists' specific contribution to the assassination record. As one observer remarked:

Reporters and scholars are inclined to think of themselves as antithetical. Call a newspaperman's copy recondite and he reaches for a pica ruler; tell a professor his paper is just journalism and he invites you to join him in the gym. The feud is an old one. It is time to stop it. The only difference between the two is a difference of time; today's journalism is tomorrow's history ²³.

Journalists construed the privileged character of history as being one of temporal demarcation. As Theodore White said, "We reporters are the servants of history, offering up our daily or passing tales for them to sort out" ²⁴. Journalists were responsible for the events of today, historians for the events of yesterday. Television documentaries became occupied with the point at which "history reexamined the facts" ²⁵. Journalists defined their function as providers of a "first draft," and saw their activities preliminary to a final draft of the story to be written by historians. One article in The Progressive noted that

The commentators, responding in the tragic passion of the moment, have had their say about Mr. Kennedy, and the historians, writing in the coolness of time, will have theirs one day ²⁶.

This implied that history would take up where journalism left off, with history offering a finite point of completion where all contradictory or transient claims to the story would be discarded, made permanent or immobilized. This promoted journalism as a form of uncooked history, where "the participants' memories haven't yet entirely faded and the historians haven't yet taken over" ²⁷, a view that in effect detached and distanced historians from the assassination story. Because journalists were closer to the story, their authority derived from their presence therein, they had an advantage over historians, whose authority would only come after the facts became clear.

It is thus no surprise that the differences between journalistic and historical perspectives were not upheld as assassination retellings were perpetuated. The clear-cut temporal demarcation between them was to a large degree undermined by circumstance, with the President's early demise itself giving journalists an advantage over historians: While historians had had insufficient time to gauge the Kennedy regime, journalists, who had been granted easy access to the 1,000 days of Kennedy's administration, were placed in the position of becoming its preferred evaluators. This was certainly the case with Theodore White ²⁸. As Norman Mailer said:

Much of what we had to say, intended to have the life of contemporary criticism (became) abruptly a document which speaks from...a time which is past, from history 30.

Journalists, whether or not they so desired, were cast by the circumstances of Kennedy's death into the role of instant historians.

Moreover, the traditional distinction between journalists and historians, which separated contemporaneous accounts from accounts after-the-fact, became less relevant as retellings of the assassination story persisted over time. In part this was because news reports themselves lacked a temporal finiteness:

The (New York) Times would not be thrown away by readers a day later, it was a collectors' item...It would pass on, as a family heirloom or a relic or a vague testimony to existence on the day a President was shot 30.

The function and role of media accounts took on a historical cast, by which journalists' documentation was used to anchor the events of that weekend in memory 31. The fact that retellings of the events of Kennedy's death persisted worked to historians' disadvantage, its persistence raising serious questions about the length of time journalists were expected to retain their positions as spokespersons for events, and at which point historians were expected to take over.

Demarcations between journalists and historians were also blurred by the period of suspension expected of

historians. That state of limbo, by which historians were expected to wait before they began their analysis of Kennedy's death, never ended. Instead, the story's persistence prevented them from "being able to complete a coherent account of this extraordinarily complex event"³². This put them in the peculiar position of having a "non-role" in the assassination's retelling. It also meant that notions about history as the end of a process, where the interim nature of news was made permanent, were displaced by the involvement of other retellers.

The ability of historians to uphold history was also undermined by questions of professional perspective. It was suggested earlier that the larger focus on the participant and reflexive quality of sixties' narratives set up standards of analysis and storytelling that traditional historians could not fulfill. Rather, the emphasis on presence, participation and memories made the detached mode of historical storytelling ineffective in retelling the assassination tale. Even notions about the constructed nature of the historical record undermined the position of historians, whose attempts to forward the "truth" were deemed problematic. The constructed nature of the assassination record suggested that there was no one "truth" to be had. The fact that their own professional practices depended on the eventual weaving of

contradictory threads into one coherent narrative put historians into a professional quandary.

Yet all of these points have worked to the advantage of journalists: Proximity and presence uphold their perspective on events; their mode of storytelling is valorized within larger attempts to reconsider the assassination record; and the memories they provide are a legitimate mode of record-keeping. This means that professional justifications for journalistic and historical involvement in the assassination story has put journalists in an advantageous position, and supported their attempts to assume the role of historians in their retellings. Rather than define themselves as aides to historians, journalists have thereby begun to see themselves as independent makers of the historical record.

HISTORIANS' ATTEMPTS TO ACCOMODATE REFLEXIVITY

This does not mean that historians and other persons qualified to engage in historical research have not attempted to resolve tensions between the valued mode of detailed historiography and a more general demand for participant, reflexive narratives. Transitions within the history profession, particularly during the early seventies, generated professional hybrids who appealed to an alternate view of historical record ³³. One such hybrid, mentioned earlier, was the assassination buff.

While the buffs were situated outside of the ranks of historians per se, they wreaked havoc on the recognized boundaries of cultural authority in a variety of professional domains, including history. Their ability to contest acceptable limitations of a citizen's right to reconsider official documentary record constituted a testament to the viability of "otherness" within documentary process. Not only did their activities uphold the reflexivity of the time but they supported a larger context where individuals appealed to a sense of history in making their lives meaningful. As time passed, and the volume of material produced by assassination buffs increased, their presence within the assassination story constituted a direct challenge to the role generally played by historical record.

Another such professional hybrid generated by disjunctions between the historical mode of detachment and an emphasis on reflexivity and participation was the so-called "participant" historian, or historian of popular memory. Individuals like David Halberstam, Garry Wills, or possibly Todd Gitlin have sought to effect an alternate mode of documenting history that attended to their own participation in it. Unlike traditional historians, who were wont to shift through documents from a distance, popular historians - many of them historians - have used

their experience within events to look at them from nearby.

In retelling the assassination, popular historians have built up a distinct advantage over their more traditional colleagues. Their views and actions are seen as a legitimate part of the stories they wrote, a point that links them with ongoing discourses about participation, reflexivity, and the relevance of memory. Halberstam's The Best and the Brightest, for example, documented the trappings of American politics in a way that left little doubt as to his own perspective on them, and he did so while events relevant to his chronicle continued to take place ²⁴. But even the fact that popular historians have sometimes displaced more traditional record-keepers of the assassination tale did not earn them status as an integral part of the professional community of historians ²⁵.

Other attempts to accomodate reflexivity have been found in discussions about what constitutes preferred historical documentation. This was borne out by the various changes in perspectives on memory, with historians and historical theorists beginning to break down traditional opposition to memory and deconstruct the rigidity of such an opposition. For certain observers, such as Aries or Braudel, memory is seen as complementary

to history, in that it allows access to domains that history cannot reach ³⁶. Yet another, equally innovative perspective is one which equates memory with history, as featured in the work of Pierre Nora ³⁷. This has had direct relevance for journalists, for their method of record-keeping and perspective on events are closely aligned with what historians are trying to achieve in their attempts to accomodate reflexivity. Discourse about historical reflexivity has thus upheld journalists' attempts to consolidate themselves as an independent and authoritative community.

Yet other alternatives to the detached mode of historical record-keeping are found in alternate forms of historiography, such as memoirs or biographies. Chroniclers have used them to promote versions of the story that are less detached, writing "personal memoirs based on remembered experiences" ³⁸. For example, Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s A Thousand Days used its chronicler's insider's status at Kennedy's White House to generate an historical view of what had transpired therein, as did Theodore Sorensen's Kennedy ³⁹. Alternate modes of historiography have played a particularly important role in highlighting the reflexive dimension of historians' retellings of the story of Kennedy's life and death. But again, as with popular historians, they have remained

separate from the general set of texts considered first-rate historical documents ⁴⁰. Like the popular historians, their hybridization, as a mode of record-keeping, has kept their chroniclers in marginal positions vis a vis the larger community of historians.

THE CRITIQUE OF JOURNALISM ON HISTORY

The existence, however tentative, of professional hybrids and practices of hybridization suggests that there is room for definitional flexibility over what constitutes historical record and the role to be played by historians. For as historically-anchored chronicles have begun to lend their signature to the record of Kennedy's death, journalists have been forced to rethink their own distinctiveness from historians. Shortly after the assassination, the work of memoirists, biographers and particularly popular historians began to punctuate the record. In particular, the popular historians' attempts to accomodate their own reflexivity were met with skepticism by many reporters.

Interestingly, journalists generally criticized these historians for the very qualities that made them different from their traditional colleagues. Journalists lambasted them for being subjective, too close to events, too hasty, and not sufficiently detached ⁴¹. Attempts by historians to adopt either a more participatory stance on events or a

less analytically remote perspective in their analysis were treated harshly. This was perhaps because reporters felt that historians were encroaching on their domain. Popular, or participant, historiography was particularly seen as being too similar to journalism.

In that light, William Manchester's publication of The Death of a President, touted as the official history of the assassination, was panned in reviews which brushed it off as "compelling narrative but hardly as impartial history" ⁴². Columnist Mary McGrory asked whether it was possible to "once see Kennedy plain," as she plied a critical look at biographers who produced, in her view, "early, perhaps hasty, memoirs" ⁴³. Biographers' accounts were caustically labelled "memorists" by one reporter, who asked "what are the proprieties and improprieties of all this secret-baring?" ⁴⁴. In the discussion that followed, Kennedy's biographers were assumed to have overstepped their participation in historical record:

The a fortiori argument does not apply to the memoirists' other stated intention, that of rendering a service to history. But history - even somewhat precipitately written - has its claims...The circumstances under which these books were written would dictate that they meet the same set of criteria: that the history at a minimum be accurate, the the assessments be reasonably fair, and that the disclosures be made for some recognizably serious purpose ⁴⁵.

The article documented how memoirists had undermined their commitment to accuracy, and then concluded that drama had been served "at the expense of history" ⁴⁶.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. was perhaps the most direct victim of the journalistic community's scorn. "Brief, not a history," went Newsweek's critique of Schlesinger's A Thousand Days ⁴⁷. His attempts to tamper with the historian's detachment and objectivity ruffled the backs of many journalistic observers. Said Andy Logan:

It's all right to be taken aback when Schlesinger in the Life serialization of A Thousand Days has the President crying in his wife's arms after the Cuban setback and then removes the scene from his published book...Apparently where John Kennedy is concerned, the previous winner of the Bancroft, Parkman and Pulitzer prizes in history thinks of historic material as something that may be tried this way, turned around and tried that way, and balled up and discarded if it doesn't seem entirely becoming to the subject ⁴⁸.

An accompanying drawing portrayed Kennedy and his "instant historians" - including Schlesinger, Theodore Sorensen, William Manchester and Pierre Salinger - in the role of Jesus and his disciples ⁴⁹.

Thus attempts by historians to infuse their own chronicles with a reflexive, participatory mode of analysis have been denigrated by the journalistic community. Journalists tended to upbraid popular historians for abandoning the detached mode of record-keeping favored by their traditional counterparts, and

have paid little attention to the corrective this brought to the anachronistic dimensions of traditional historiography. This has had to do in no small part with the fact that popular historiography has brought historians substantially closer to journalists' own mode of chronicling. By adopting alternative modes of historical record-keeping, historians interested in accomodating reflexivity are seen as stepping into the journalists' domain.

Historians' growing involvement in the assassination story in ways that resembled the reportorial mode of story-telling has thus encouraged journalists to clearly define their own involvement in the story. Rather than contextualize their activities as assisting in the making of historical record, journalists have begun to see themselves as makers of the historical record. They have moved from acting as facilitators of historians, to historical facilitators. This has lent a new dimension to their attempts to use the assassination retelling as a ritual act of communication. It suggests that retellings have not only authorized journalists amongst themselves but among other interpretive communities as well, underscoring basic assumptions about the structure of the journalistic profession.

In such a way, journalists' narratives about the Kennedy administration and assassination have addressed notions about history and historical record overlooked by historians. Journalists have begun to consciously promote themselves within the larger corpus of historiography and the making of historical record. Memoirs, biographies and popular histories were provided by reporters and writers like Theodore White or Pierre Salinger³⁰. All of them have continued to define themselves as reporters despite their forays into historical interpretation.

Already one week after the assassination, trade publications hailed "a dark day in history (that) was covered superbly by the mass media which in turn made history"³¹. Journalists saw themselves addressing points in the record that historians had missed, and stressed that they were doing the work of historians: Media critic Gay Talese said that for reporters, "the test in Dallas was like no other test...(New York Times correspondent Tom) Wicker was writing for history that day"³². A New York Times book called The Kennedy Years was billed by one paper as a "history prepared by New York Times staff under H. Faber's direction"³³. Referring to his hunger "to contribute to the recording of contemporary history"³⁴, reporter Benjamin Bradlee recounted how he was motivated

by his "unique, historical access" to the Kennedy administration:

I knew enough of history to know that the fruits of this kind of access seldom make the history books, and the great men of our time are less understood as a result ⁵⁵.

At heart of the considerations through which Bradlee negotiated his right to act as historian was an almost unvoiced assumption that his history would be preferred to that offered by professional historians. Such a view was also implicit in an appraisal that Tom Wicker's articles and books about Kennedy were "non-textbook histories" ⁵⁶. In that view, Wicker was praised for having worked against the distortions effected by historical record on memories of Kennedy.

Attempts to recast journalistic retellings as history have existed across media. For example, reporter Jack Anderson justified his televised report on the Kennedy assassination by lamenting the suspended involvement of historians. He said that

The government has sealed the most sensitive files on the Kennedy assassination - the key CIA file, the critical FBI file - all in the name of national security. By the time these files are jarred loose from the agencies that could be embarrassed by them, the information will be ancient history, and only the historians will care, but we care now ⁵⁷.

Anderson saw journalists providing a degree of participation that historians had missed.

Another particularly illustrative example was found in a set of video-cassettes about Kennedy's administration and assassination that NBC produced in 1988. The blurb on the back of the tape, entitled The Week We Lost John F. Kennedy, went as follows:

To commemorate the 25th anniversary of JFK's death, NBC News has opened its archives to make available The Week We Lost John F. Kennedy...perhaps the most important video document of our time. From more than 70 hours of live, on-the-air coverage, the most dramatic, crucial segments have been skilfully woven in a special production by NBC News to give you a moment-by-moment account of the Kennedy assassination and its aftermath. This is history exactly as it happened...and happened to you. As you saw it then ^{was}.

Implicit here was the notion of providing the "real" version of events. In the next paragraph, the possibility of "owning history" was raised, when the tape was called "an extraordinary piece of history that you could not own until now". By recasting their retellings as history, NBC News made explicit one of the underlying tensions in journalists' attempts to authorize themselves as spokespeople for Kennedy's death. Such a recasting of journalistic retellings attempted to legitimate journalists as historians. Forwarding themselves as the event's rightful historians thus became part of perpetuating their authority for the events in Dallas.

This suggests that rather than regard history as an untouchable terrain, journalists have reworked the notion

of history as a semi-sacred space inside of which journalistic chronicles have their own legitimate resting place. Larger discourses both about the increased accessibility of history and the legitimacy of accessing records of the record have worked in their favor. They have cast journalistic attempts to access historical record in a positive light. In such a way, journalistic involvement in the assassination story has made irrelevant the idea of history providing a haven, where the events of Kennedy's death can eventually be granted proper articulation. Journalists have implied that there is something in-between contemporary retellings and historical record, where the meaning of the event can be negotiated not only as an interim arrangement but as a long-term one.

All of this suggests that journalists have systematically tried to perpetuate themselves as alternate keepers of the historical record. They fancy themselves as a different kind of participant-observer - one that is validated by presence, participation and proximity, rather than the remote and detached objectivity touted by traditional historians. Alongside popular historians and historians who use less traditional methods of record-keeping, journalists have established themselves as promoters of the historical record. Within larger

discourses about access to history, the salience of professional memories and the viability of accessing records, this makes sense. It has set up a legitimating framework by which journalists can promote the perpetuation of their assassination tales within the role ascribed them by history. This constitutes the final frame through which journalists have established themselves as authorized spokespeople for the assassination story. It is within such a frame that the act of perpetuating their retellings helps to consolidate them as an interpretive community, in that it makes clear that the legitimation of the profession rests not only inside journalism but outside as well.

JOURNALISTS, HISTORIANS AND THE CUSTODIANSHIP OF MEMORY

Because the assassination story remains such a vital and contested story among so many groups of retellers, their strong presence within it has undermined a number of givens about the practices of historians and their inability to uphold the privileged status of history. Journalists' activities have rendered them particularly well-suited to take on the historian's role, if not totally, then at least in tandem with historians interested in their own reflexivity.

Perpetuating journalists as retellers of events, whose authority exceeds the recognized bounds of

journalism, is therefore in a sense implicit in all journalists' attempts to perpetuate assassination tales. For by the very activity of perpetuation, journalists have sought to extend their authority for the assassination beyond the immediate temporal frame in which it occurred. Such an activity has offset what were earlier recognized as legitimate temporal boundaries separating journalistic from historical record. It has blurred the notion that journalists are responsible for the contemporaneous event, historians for the event of the past. For as time has passed, and journalists have continued to show reluctance about turning the events of Kennedy's death over to historians, such a distinction has become irrelevant. Journalists' declared interest in perpetuating certain versions of the assassination story, as well as their role in it, has upset demarcations between the two professional communities.

All of this blurs distinctions about where journalistic record ends and historical record begins. In his book Libra, Don Delillo relayed how the investigator of Kennedy's murder took refuge in his record-keeping strategies:

The notes are becoming an end in themselves. Branch has decided it is premature to make a serious effort to turn these notes into coherent history. Maybe it will always be premature. Because the data keeps coming. Because new lives

enter the record all the time. The past is changing as he writes ⁵⁹.

Journalists' unwillingness to surrender the facts to historians has emerged from concerns that the record they provide facilitates closure, perhaps prematurely. Journalistic reluctance over whether historians should lend closure has thus become an embedded message of journalist's perpetuation of their assassination tales.

Journalists have thereby refused to turn the assassination story over to historians in part because they want to remain its authoritative spokespeople. For as long as the story remains part of their domain, the perpetuation of their authority remains a viable objective. By invoking history, and passing off journalistic practice as being historically-motivated, journalists have transported themselves into the role ascribed them by history.

And what kind of history do they perpetuate? Unlike historians, who tend to make sense of what other people remember, journalists have made use of their own memories, their recording of historical events accomplished through lived recollections. It is significant that journalists' distinctiveness from historians pivots on the centrality of memory, because through memory journalists have assumed the role ascribed by history. Their assumption of that role has been facilitated by television technology. Its

repeated images and recastings of the events of Kennedy's death have allowed journalists to access the record about the record in a way that has made the idea of turning it over to historians less appealing. Television coverage has made it easier to access the archives of memory provided by television networks or news magazines than to go back to the original documents themselves. As John Connally said in 1988:

I don't think the time has come when history will really look at the Kennedy administration with a realistic eye. And how could we? When you see a beautiful little girl kneeling with her hand on her father's coffin, and when you see a handsome little boy standing with a military salute by his slain father, how can you feel anything but the utmost sympathy? It's a scene of pathos, of remorse, of tragedy, and that's the way we now view President Kennedy ⁶⁰.

Television has interfered with historical progression by not allowing memories to move beyond the images it repeatedly showed. The idea of a history frozen by images has thus worked to the advantage of journalists:

Television had no memory, it was not interested in the past, it erased the past, there was never time to show film clips of past events, and so, inevitably, it speeded up the advent of the future ⁶¹.

In this way television has helped journalists offer and perpetuate their own version of historical narrative. One observer recalled how ABC used a recreation of the shooting of Lee Harvey Oswald as a promotional trailer for a Kennedy-related mini-series. He noted: "As the fictional

clip was rebroadcast over and over again, the memories of the real event faded away. A clone had taken its place" ⁶². Television has relied, in Pierre Nora's words, on "the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image" ⁶³. It has produced a mode of historical recording that is based on archives of memory. Becoming a "veritable history machine, spewing out a constant stream of historical, semihistorical and pseudo-historical recreations" ⁶⁴, television has helped journalists create an archive of their memories that is now referenced as history itself.

This suggests an implicit regard for the memories of journalists, who are better equipped than other retellers to access them in a repeated and systematic fashion. For as long as journalists' memories remain, and can be accessed, reporters will be reluctant to yield the authority they suggest. Their emergence as custodians of memory about the assassination has made them into archivists of its story, becoming gatekeepers of their own presence. Journalists have done their best to build a history of the story through memory. Memory has become the basis of the preferred retelling of the assassination story.

In such a way, journalists have come to promote themselves as authorized historians of the events of

Kennedy's death. By perpetuating their assassination tales through the memory system offered by history, journalists have emerged as the story's legitimate preferred retellers beyond the bounds of professional journalism. They have perpetuated their tales by reconstructing their activities as something other than journalism. Drawn by the privileged status of history, they have created a record of the assassination which not only has the depth, perspective and stability of interpretation of historical record, but the proximity, personal memories and experience of journalistic accounts. Journalists have thus personalized the history of the assassination, through their own professional codes of journalistic practice, collective memory and journalistic authority. They have given texture to the historical record of Kennedy's death.

In concluding, it makes sense to quote from a remark once made about historians:

Most historians would give a great deal to have had the chance of being actually present at some of the events they have described ⁶⁵.

The proximity journalists have upheld as their birthright to the assassination story can be assumed by no other reteller of the tale. The fact that journalists possess what other retellers want has allowed them to immortalize their experience of covering Kennedy's death as a preferred mode of retelling the assassination. As one

reporter said, "those of us who shared it will never forget" ⁶⁶. In perpetuating assassination tales, journalists have made certain that they will not be forgotten. Journalists' tales have upheld their presence, their participation and ultimately their memories as a preferred mode of retelling the events of Kennedy's death. Across time and space, the memory system of history has made it possible for them to do so.

¹ Richard A. Blake, "Two Moments of Grief," America (11/24/73), p. 402.

² Murray G. Murphey, Our Knowledge of the Historical Past (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973), p. 1.

³ This notion has been referenced in a variety of texts. See, for example, Daniel Boorstin, Hidden History (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

⁴ I do not mean to suggest that history is value-free, only that such an image has been sought by traditional historians. For a discussion of the various attempts by historians to define themselves differently, see Bernard Sternsher, Consensus, Conflict and American Historians (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1975).

⁵ Hayden White, "Figuring the Nature of the Times Deceased: Literary Theory and Historical Writing," in Ralph Cohen, The Future of Literary Theory (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 19.

⁶ Patrick H. Hutton, "Collective Memory and Collective Mentalities: The Halbwachs-Aries Connection," Historical Reflections 2 (1988), p. 312.

⁷ Hutton, 1988, p. 317.

⁸ The best example is Michael L. Kurtz, Crime of the Century (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), and Thomas Brown, JFK: History of an Image (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988). Kurtz in particular laments the "neglect" among professional historians about examining the events of Kennedy's death.

⁹ John Berendt, "A Look At the Record," Esquire (November 1973), p. 264.

¹⁰ Editor and Publisher (11/30/63), p. 6.

¹¹ "Assassination: History or Headlines?", Newsweek (3/13/67), p. 44.

- ¹² Malcolm Muggeridge, "Books," Esquire (October 1966), p. 14.
- ¹³ Tom Wicker, "Kennedy Without End, Amen," Esquire (June 1977), p. 65.
- ¹⁴ One notable exception to this was William G. Carleton's "Kennedy in History: An Early Appraisal," Antioch Review [(Fall 1964), pp. 277-299]. Interestingly, the article was appended with the following note, that attested to Carleton's attempt to "sequence" Kennedy before sufficient time had passed: "Carleton's qualifications for an 'early historical appraisal' of the Kennedy years are not only his stature as a political scientist but in the early 1940s...he had an opportunity to observe the Kennedy boys during their formative years" (p. 277).
- ¹⁵ Michael H. Frisch, "The Memory of History," in Susan Porter Benson et al., Presenting the Past (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), p. 11.
- ¹⁶ One of the first examples was found in Editor and Publisher (11/30/63), p. 67, but references to the historic photographs of the assassination were found over the entire time span of assassination narratives.
- ¹⁷ One of the first examples here was Richard B. Stolley's "The Greatest Home Movie Ever Made," Esquire (November 1973), but this was also found over time as well.
- ¹⁸ As with both photographs and films, claims to having made historic coverage were employed directly after the assassination [ie., see Broadcasting (12/2/63)].
- ¹⁹ David Halberstam, The Powers That Be (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p. 161. The interest in history accompanied journalistic accounts about the nature of their record-keeping for decades. Norman Mailer's Armies of the Night, for instance, which memorialized his experiences in the march on the Pentagon, was subtitled "History as a Novel/The Novel as History."
- ²⁰ Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 50.
- ²¹ Editor and Publisher (11/30/63), p. 67.
- ²² Broadcasting (12/2/63), p. 51.
- ²³ William Manchester, Portrait of a President (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962, 1967), p. x. Manchester went on to say that his book constituted journalism because it had been "written while moving along the advancing edge of the present. It is not definitive in any sense" (p. x).
- ²⁴ Theodore H. White, America In Search of Itself (New York: Warner Books, 1982), pp. 1-2.
- ²⁵ The Plot To Kill President Kennedy (Arts and Entertainment Network, 1983).
- ²⁶ "Shores Dimly Seen," The Progressive (January 1964), p. 3.

- 27 Kenneth Auchinchloss, "The Kennedy Years: What Endures?" Newsweek (2/1/71), p. 21.
- 28 Theodore H. White, "Camelot, Sad Camelot," Time (7/3/78); excerpted from In Search of History: A Personal Adventure (New York: Warner Books, 1978).
- 29 Norman Mailer, "Kennedy and After," New York Review of Books (12/26/63), reprinted in Current (January 1964), p. 14.
- 30 Gay Talese, The Kingdom and the Power (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1966), p. 34.
- 31 While historians themselves had long used newspapers and other mediated discourse as their documentation, the suggestion here that all members of the public would do so upheld the importance of memories in perpetuating assassination tales as part of historical record.
- 32 Don DeLillo, "Matters of Fact and Fiction," Rolling Stone (11/17/88), p. 117.
- 33 Roy Rosenzweig, "Marketing the Past," in Susan Porter Benson, et al., Presenting the Past (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), p. 43.
- 34 David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest (New York: Random House, 1972).
- 35 To date, only the work of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (A Thousand Days (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965) has been accepted as that of a "bona fide" historian, and this was despite the fact that the popular historians provided an extensive record of Kennedy's administration, if not of his death. See in particular Theodore Sorensen, The Kennedy Legacy (New York: MacMillan, 1969); William Manchester's Portrait of a President (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962, 1967) or David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest (New York: Random House, 1972). Other accounts of Kennedy's Presidency - such as Pierre Salinger's With Kennedy (New York: Doubleday, 1966) or Theodore White's America in Search of Itself (New York: Warner Books, 1982) could still be labelled journalistic chronicles, in that their writers consider themselves reporters, despite their fledgling attempts at historical interpretation.
- 36 For a discussion of Aries, see Hutton, 1988. For Braudel, see Fernand Braudel, On History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
- 37 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," Representations (Spring 1989), p. 13.
- 38 Murray G. Murphey, 1973, p. 11.
- 39 Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965); Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).
- 40 Still another alternate mode of historiography was represented by American Heritage magazine, which was

heralded as the successful application of photojournalism techniques to history. Like other forms of historiography, the magazine signified a mood of transition when it began to accomodate contemporary topics and abandoned the chronological emphasis of its predecessors (Rosenzweig, 1986, pp. 39, 44).

⁴¹ This included Mary McGrory, "And Did You Once See Kennedy Plain?" America (9/18/65); Meg Greenfield, "The Kiss and Tell Memoirs," The Reporter (11/30/67); and "Peephole Journalism," Commonweal (9/3/65).

⁴² "The Presidency: Battle of the Book," Time (12/23/66), p. 18.

⁴³ Mary McGrory, "And Did You Once See Kennedy Plain?" America (9/18/65), p. 279.

⁴⁴ Meg Greenfield, "The Kiss and Tell Memoirs," The Reporter (11/30/67). Greenfield held that the memoirs of Kennedy's administration suffered extensively for the over-indulgent sympathies towards Kennedy of their chroniclers.

⁴⁵ Meg Greenfield, 1967, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 15.

⁴⁷ R. Moley, "Brief, Not a History," Newsweek (12/20/65), p. 108.

⁴⁸ Andy Logan, "JFK: The Stained Glass Image," American Heritage Magazine [August 1967], p. 75].

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Pierre Salinger, With Kennedy (New York: Doubleday, 1966); William Manchester, Portrait of a President (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962, 1967), The Death of a President (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); Theodore White, In Search of History (New York: Warner Books, 1978), America In Search of Itself (New York: Warner Books, 1982). This was paralleled by other attempts to wed journalistic and historical technique. American Heritage magazine, for instance, was hailed as "the lively offspring of the marriage of history and journalism" and defined as "the newsmagazine of the past" [History News 13 (February 1957), p. 26, cited in Rosenzweig, p. 32].

⁵¹ Editor and Publisher (11/30/63), p. 6.

⁵² Gay Talese, 1966, p. 34.

⁵³ New York Times (8/29/64), p. 46.

⁵⁴ Benjamin Bradlee, Conversations With Kennedy (New York: W.W.Norton, 1975), p. 8.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 8.

⁵⁶ John Berendt, "Ten Years Later: A Look At the Record," Esquire (November 1973), p. 141.

⁵⁷ Jack Anderson, Who Murdered JFK: American Expose, Saban Productions (11/2/88).

⁵⁸ The Week We Lost John F. Kennedy, NBC News (1989)

- ⁵⁹ Don DeLillo, Libra (New York: Viking Press, 1988), p. 301.
- ⁶⁰ John Connally, quoted on "The 25th Anniversary of JFK Assassination," Nightline, ABC News (11/22/88).
- ⁶¹ Halberstam, 1979, p. 407. Interestingly, similar claims were advanced about American Heritage magazine, which "because of its commitment to visualizing U.S. history" generated a different kind of historical documentation (Rosenzweig, 1986, p. 39).
- ⁶² Eric Breitbart, "The Painted Mirror," in Susan Porter Benson, et al., Presenting the Past (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), p. 116.
- ⁶³ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," Representations (Spring 1989), p. 13.
- ⁶⁴ Eric Breitbart, 1986, p. 111.
- ⁶⁵ Pardon E. Tillinghast, The Specious Past (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1972), p. 171.
- ⁶⁶ Steve Bell, Return to Camelot: The JFK Years, KYW News Productions (11/22/88).

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF JOURNALISTIC AUTHORITY

"You are, among other things, what you remember,
or believe you remember" ¹.

This study began with somewhat amorphous and tentative thoughts on the workings of journalistic authority. Suggested as a notion by which journalists assume the right to present authorized versions of events taking place in the "real" world, journalistic authority has been approached as a dimension implicit - if hidden - within the practices of contemporary American journalists. Originally defined as "the ability of journalists to authorize themselves as spokespeople for the stories they told," journalistic authority has been given no more precise definition in these pages. But this study has shown that it is neither implicit, amorphous nor tentative. Journalistic authority is found first of all in narrative, where journalists work to uphold it in a variety of ways. In a systematic and strategic fashion, journalists construct themselves as authorities for events through the stories they tell about them. This includes both who tells such stories, how they tell them, what they tell and do not tell. In short, journalistic authority is

enacted as a narrative craft, and is crafted through narrative forms.

But it does not end there. Journalists' narratives are transported into collective memory, where they are used as models for understanding the authoritative role of the journalist and journalistic community in different ways. Capturing specific narratives within larger discourses that signal different boundaries of appropriate journalistic practice puts them in the position of clarifying the boundaries of cultural authority across time and space. This is what Habermas, Weber and others have called rhetorical legitimation, the ability of speakers to legitimate, or authorize, themselves through the stories they tell in public discourse.

Rhetorical legitimation has been shown here to work in a Giddens-like fashion: Narratives beget authority, that beget memories, that beget more narratives, that beget more authority, that beget more memories. At heart of this circular process are journalists. They epitomize what Hayden White has long contended about the makers of historical discourse of all kinds: They produce a second-order fiction that attends through its craft to the needs of its chroniclers ².

While rhetorical legitimation gives journalists a way to determine the appropriate parameters of their craft,

this study has explored the full span of its workings through one critical incident, the assassination of John F. Kennedy. By examining how journalists have narratively reconstructed their role in covering Kennedy's assassination over time and space, these pages have considered a rainbow of narrative practices by which journalists uphold their own stature, credentials and positioning as authorized spokespeople for its story. By turning tales of the assassination into stories about themselves in different ways, journalists generate references to their own presence in the story. Co-opting their narratives within larger systems of remembering and forgetting across time and space additionally references the same authorized presence. Positioning and repositioning their narratives has thus allowed journalists to perpetuate specific versions of their power as cultural authorities. In such a fashion - by situating, authenticating, accessing and perpetuating their assassination tales - journalists have created themselves as an authoritative, interpretive community. They have created journalistic authority.

This does not suggest that journalistic authority exists in one whole form in any given narrative or memory system. Authority exists in bits and pieces, fits and starts. It is a synergistic construct in continual tension

with its creators, never becoming embodied by one practice. Like slices of a pie, parts of journalistic authority exist everywhere. But without the other slices, it exists nowhere.

THE ARGUMENT, REFINED

This study has traced the establishment and perpetuation of journalistic authority through practices of narrative adjustment that are employed by journalists. Journalists strategically fashion their narratives in four main ways, by situating them in viable contexts, basing their tellings on real-life acts of coverage, using technology to access them over the tales of other groups of speakers and perpetuating them through recognizable memory systems. Each stage in the process of establishing authority is connected in synergistic fashion with the others. I have argued that journalistic authority is constructed on the basis of three threads:

- Journalistic authority emanates from context. This included contextual factors both at the time of Kennedy's death and in the years that followed. At the time of the assassination, context included ongoing discourses about the boundaries of cultural authority and historical relevance, journalistic professionalism and the nascent medium of television news, and ties between journalists and the Kennedy administration; it also included the

context created by the circumstances of covering Kennedy's death itself. Journalists used their coverage as a springboard for narrative reconstruction in ways that upheld their authority. In the years that followed, larger questions about documentary process and changes in the forms of cultural authority it generated also had an imprint on assassination retellings. They produced shifts in the accessibility of collective memory, by which official memory was de-authorized and the lore of professional memories, particularly of journalists, made relevant. In all contexts, collective assessments about journalism have proved crucial to the legitimation of journalists as an authorized presence in the assassination story over time and space.

- Journalistic authority depends on collective memory. Journalistic authority was shown to derive from memory systems, or shared ways of recollecting events across time and space. Memory systems have given journalists a way to link in with ready-made interpretations of their tales. Whether through celebrity, professional lore or history, journalists have embedded their assassination tales within different systems of recollection. This has ensured effective ways of remembering the details of those tales. Assassination tales not only fit the memory systems where they were

embedded, but they accrued different parameters of cultural authority to the journalists who told them.

- Journalistic authority depends on narrative. The craft of narrative brought the other two threads - memory and context - together. Through narrative, journalists have linked contexts - about the sixties, television, documentary questioning - with memory systems - about celebrity, professional lore, history. Narrative has allowed journalists to connect larger discourses that were situated outside of journalism with smaller developments taking place inside it. More important, narrative has implicitly focused on the people who generated it, the journalists.

Journalists have worked these three threads together to produce patterns of what I call journalistic authority. Throughout the process they have embedded notions of technology and professionalism that inflect not only the contexts and memories associated with journalistic authority but the narratives - in form and content - too. In particular, invoking different configurations of space and time has helped journalists determine the appropriate boundaries of their cultural authority.

These pages have told the tale of how American journalists have established themselves as authorized spokespeople of the assassination story. They have shown

how journalists have turned their retellings of the assassination tale into stories about themselves, making the narrative as much a story about American journalism as about America's 34th President. The workings of journalists' rhetorical legitimation, and their ability to promote themselves as an independent, interpretive community, is shown to have been forwarded by their narratives and their systematized ways of remembering them. Journalists have used a complex and intricate set of practices of narrative adjustment to turn the assassination story on angles crucial to their own self-legitimation.

This is not to suggest that all events covered by journalists are central to their establishment as cultural authorities. Rather, certain events function like critical incidents, which journalists use to display and negotiate the appropriate boundaries of their profession. Narratives about such events thereby embody ongoing concerns about journalists as a professional and authoritative interpretive community. For instance, many critical events took place during the sixties and embodied distinctive "sixties' perceptions" about everyday life - its fusion with history and historical relevance, shifting boundaries of cultural authority, growing demands on professionalism, a spirit of reflexivity. Ongoing definitional activity

about the appropriate boundaries of ones professionalism was thus resolved in part by invoking such issues, in that journalists used their narratives about many events - the assassination, space exploration, Watergate or Vietnam - to air their concerns about history, cultural authority, professionalism or reflexivity. Through narrative, they have upheld and maintained their authoritative presence within those parameters in many tales of the time.

Nor does it suggest that the Kennedy assassination played a larger part in generating journalistic authority than did other contemporaneous events of similar stature. Watergate - the scandal which journalists uncovered - displayed the appropriate boundaries of investigative journalism. Vietnam - the war which television brought into the American home - generated questions about the responsibilities and roles of journalists in conducting wartime coverage. Space exploration - the voyage of discovery on which television brought American along - highlighted the boundaries of tele-visually connecting American audiences with unknown frontiers. News-events have given journalists different opportunities to claim special roles through the stories they tell about them. From alternate time periods have emerged different critical incidents, such as the Teapot Dome Scandal or coverage of the Falklands War. At each point in time and

space, alternate critical incidents have highlighted different issues that are central to journalism at the time of the event's unfolding, issues that become refracted as the event is retold. Critical incidents of different kinds illuminate certain rules and conventions about journalistic practice and authority over others. They thus give journalists alternative ways in which to discuss, challenge and negotiate boundaries of appropriate journalistic practice. Their discussion through narrative has allowed journalists to set up collective notions about journalistic practice, and thereby uphold themselves as an interpretive community.

In such a light, narratives about the Kennedy assassination constitute one stage among many on which journalists evaluate, challenge and renegotiate consensual notions about what it means to be a reporter. This study has thereby told a story of journalistic authority as it was crafted around one event. Journalists have used it as a way to address changing parameters of their own professionalism, their approaches to new technologies of newsgathering, their role in determining historical record, and, finally, the importance of their own memories in establishing and perpetuating their role as cultural authorities. In highlighting assassination tales over time and space, they have thus attended to a number of agendas,

many of which have little to do with the events of Kennedy's death.

Implicit in the craft of journalistic authority were thus distinct different notions about the appropriate shape of journalistic community, suggesting the degree to which journalistic authority, as a dimension of mediated discourse in everyday life, was relatively unproblematic. Journalists' stories ensured entry to certain types of journalists at the same time as it barred admittance to others. The specific shape of community implied by their stories raises questions about the effect of authority not on audiences but on members of the journalistic community, and the way that jockeying for power among themselves has engendered certain preferred versions of real-life events. In retelling the assassination, the establishment of authority casts doubt on the valid canonization of a central moment in American history, largely at the behest of the organs of national broadcast journalism.

THE CRAFT OF JOURNALISTIC AUTHORITY

The process of adjusting the fit (between what actually happened and received narratives about the past) is an ongoing one, subject to continual debate and exchanges in which memory and history may play shifting, alternately more or less contentious roles in setting the record straight" 3.

The establishment and perpetuation of journalists as authorized spokespeople for the story of John F. Kennedy's assassination was no small feat. The original laundering of the assassination tale - by which it was recast as a story of professional triumph rather than mishap - was only the first order of reconstructive work that journalists employed in relaying their story. Journalists' reliance on reconstructions of their presence, participation and memories as part of the preferred mode of retelling was a task that required careful attention over the 27 years since Kennedy died. The transformations by which journalists' narratives and memories were adjusted in accordance with larger discourses about cultural authority were systematic, constant and inventive. Problematic dimensions of original coverage of Kennedy's death were erased as larger collective questions about professionalism, technology, memory and authority came into play. Narrative retellings of the assassination thus took place in face of other developments that assisted journalists in their establishment as cultural authorities.

Realizing the craft of journalistic authority depended first on the reasoned and simultaneous workings of narrative in a number of different domains. In retellings, the narrative craft of establishing and

perpetuating authority was accomplished both through the form and content of journalists' narratives. Form referenced the storytelling practices that journalists use, content the types of stories those practices embody. Form and content in turn displayed features that were internal - within the narrative itself - and features that were external - existing beyond the narrative. Portrayed graphically, the craft of journalistic authority might look as follows:

THE CRAFT OF JOURNALISTIC AUTHORITY

	FORM (PRACTICES OF)	CONTENT (STORIES ABOUT)
INTERNAL TO EACH NARRATIVE	synecdoche rearrangement personalization	being the first being the best being the only
EXTERNAL TO EACH NARRATIVE	commemoration recycling reprinting re-using retrospectives	journalistic professionalism TV technology documentary failure professional memory

Journalists systematically and strategically incorporated references to their authoritative presence within their tales across all domains. Narrative strategies of synecdoche, personalization and rearrangement helped them adjust the internal workings of their tales in ways that efficiently referenced their presence within them.

Strategies of recycling, re-using, commemoration, reprinting and retrospectives cued journalists and news organizations into the most effective ways of gaining mileage for their tales beyond the tale's internal rhythm. Similarly, internal issues of content guided journalists in developing stories about being the first, best and only, at the same time as external discourses keyed them into issues about journalistic professionalism as a mode of cultural authority, the impact of television technology, documentary failure or the importance of memory. In other words, journalists were able to uphold their authoritative presence within their tales on each dimension of narrative they employed, leaving little doubt about their positioning as authoritative spokespeople.

At the same time, journalists needed to uphold their authoritative presence as their tales were disseminated across time and space. They did so by credentialling themselves across varying time and space configurations. These roles - of eyewitness, representative, investigator and interpreter - ensured that regardless of their own positioning vis a vis the assassination tale, journalists were able to speak authoritatively about it. Fastening journalists in authoritative roles across time and space was further upheld by repairing to memory systems. Indeed, the appeal to memory systems within retellings of the

assassination tale signalled journalists' awareness of the importance of perpetuating themselves across time and space. Memory systems offered journalists alternate ways of perpetuating their tales within meaningful systems of recollection. The fact that different memory systems have allowed journalists to perpetuate different dimensions of their retellings in itself displays the different dimensions of journalistic community: Celebrity tales have upheld the stature of individual journalists, professional tales the stature of news organizations and institutions, historical tales the structure of the profession and the role of journalism and journalistic record in chronicling the nation's impulses. Each has bred its own practices for upholding certain codes of knowledge over others, yet each dimension has emerged as important for establishing journalists as an interpretive community. This displays the circular workings of journalistic authority: Memory is codified, fed back to its codifiers, who codify it yet again. Journalists have thereby perpetuated a tightly-knit cycle of self-legitimation through narrative, suggesting the central role of discourse in determining the boundaries of community.

TECHNOLOGY, PROFESSIONALISM AND MEMORY

These pages have suggested that the effective circulation of discourse about the Kennedy assassination

depended on refracting the event through lenses of journalistic professionalism and technology. Boundaries of journalistic practice were considered within larger concerns about amateurism, professionalism and technology. The role of technology, in particular, offered journalists alternate ways of repairing to professionalism, by helping them to classify activities realized by loosely-defined improvisory standards as professional, at the same time as it gave reporters a way to establish custodianship over memories. Mastering the technology became almost as important as mastering the coverage, linking cultural authority with successful technological mastery.

This in part reflected a reordering of the functions through which journalists have admitted the importance of technology. Technology allowed journalists to perpetuate old, or familiar, journalistic practices in their usage of old media. It also allowed them to use old practices on new media, and to develop new practices ⁴. In other words, the introduction of new technologies allowed them to experiment with new modes of social and professional interchange when using new media as well as old.

In retelling the assassination, technologies were referenced for their function of transmission, such as conveying information; documentation, as in providing new means for testing evidence; and storage, as in holding

onto assassination tales so that they could eventually be retold. In order to establish their own mastery over the tales they told, journalists often reordered these technological functions, enmeshing them with each other. For example, journalists upheld their mastery over technology by highlighting their creative usage of it, as in Walter Cronkite's usage of new technology for re-testing evidence on Nova. This prevented assassination tales from falling within the domain of tales about "great machines" that were faceless and unmanned. Journalists turned tales of unpeopled technologies into stories about how they strategically used technology to accomplish professional and social aims in new and improvisory ways²⁵. The fact that journalists worked the story of the ascent of television to their favor was testament to their persistent efforts to remain active players within the assassination tale.

This point has been adopted in the retellings of other events too, such as the Challenger incident, where journalists reordered television's functions of documentation, storage and transmission via its recording of events. Similarly, journalistic retellings of Vietnam have consistently focused on the technological sophistication by which journalists were able to record more intrusive (and potentially more damaging) dimensions

of the war. Journalists' tales of covering that story were thus determined in large part by their relationship with the technology of newsgathering.

All of this suggests that tales of technological mastery are crucial for what they continue to suggest about journalists: Reporters are portrayed as masters of presence within their tales of the "real world," willing and able to manipulate the technology-at-hand in the name of professionalism. Embedded within each story of technology is the tale of a journalist who makes it work, a point upholding technology's role in creating and maintaining journalists as cultural authorities. While certain technologies have produced more effective and plausible stories, and have given journalists an enhanced capacity for story-telling, tales of technological mastery by journalists subordinate the tale to the technology by which it is told, dislodging news from its proportional critical import as information of the "real world."

Technology is also important for what it has given journalists over time. In retelling the assassination, technology has helped journalists create archives of memory, giving them a base and a set of indices through which to reference their presence within their original tales. This suggests that it has become necessary to reference the technology in order to reference the memory.

As Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn have suggested, "Whenever memory is invoked, we should be asking ourselves: by whom, where, in what context and about what" 7.

This has led to tales which document the way in which events are originally captured, producing not only a discourse about Kennedy's death but a discourse about the technologies which shaped its collective memories. Such a discourse - about the record of the record - has generated changes in commonplace understandings of history and memory. Replaying markers in collective memory about the assassination directly references the technologies by which they were recorded. Through narrative, journalists have defrosted the frozen moments of memory and made their transmission meaningful. Their strategic and creative use of technology has established them as active masters in their relationship to it, allowing them to use technology to create archives of memory in a way that consolidates them as the assassination story's authoritative interpreters. This pattern is also repeated in other events, with journalists, for example, becoming a primary repository of memories of the Vietnam war ⁸. Journalists thereby use transmission as a way of fleshing out the significance of storage, or memory. Technology thus becomes important because it successfully stores

information, making the memory, or storage, function of technology equally important to its transmission function. This in itself is a function of ultimate importance for interpretive communities, in that it has embedded direct references to journalists within collective memory, upholding their stature as general archivists.

The fact that it has become easier for subsequent retellers to reference archives than original documents has turned the archives of memory, as created by journalists and news organizations, into a mode of documentation preferred to original documents. As Halbwachs maintained, "the reality of the past (was) no longer in the past" ⁹. Rather, it is in a present occupied by American journalists, most of whom are eager to tell their versions of the events of Kennedy's death.

Within all of these developments, journalists emerge as the authorized spokespeople of the events whose stories they tell. Because their ultimate organization of narratives takes place on the archival level, making information about the past itself archival ¹⁰ and turning public memory into what Mary Douglas called "the storage system for the social order" ¹¹, their placement as cultural authorities for a wide range of events is ensured. Through their discussions of critical incident, journalists are turned into archivists, or custodians, of

social memory. Technology has not only upheld them as professionals in their retellings of tales, but it has fostered a tightly-constructed view of their activities that turns away other competitive presences. In other words, through intricately linking professionalism, technology and social memory, journalists have established themselves not only as cultural authorities for retelling the story of John F. Kennedy's death, but for a host of other public events, such as retellings of Watergate or Vietnam.

THE SHAPE OF JOURNALISTIC COMMUNITY

The question thus remains what kind of journalistic community is implied by assassination retellings. It is firstly made evident by those segments of the community that have been filtered out of retellings. Gone are most radio journalists, who played a part in the original coverage of Kennedy's death. Gone too are many local reporters who assisted their national counterparts in covering the story. Gone are those less-renowned reporters no longer around to tell their tales. The journalists who remain are national reporters, with an emphasis on those employed by television. More important, those who remain are journalists who have retained their access to the media and who continue to possess the kind of organizational and institutional support necessary for

perpetuating their tales. The shape of journalistic community is thus to a large degree shaped by access, technology and medium, individual stature, and one's position within a news organization. Journalistic community accedes to the powerful and vocal members among its constituents, and it shapes stories which uphold such boundaries. The well-known nationally-employed journalist has been forwarded as the vanguard and prototype of the journalistic community, led by those employed by national television.

Equally important, journalists have used alternate memory systems to allow for the similar shaping of journalistic community, generating parallel categories of who is "allowed" in and who is shunted aside. The fact that a similar sense of community is generated across different memory systems - celebrity, professional lore, and history - attests to the centrality of the three levels of motivation with regard to retelling. These dimensions - of the individual journalist, the organization and institution, and the structure of the profession - figure prominently within retellings. While they are not always compatible, those retellings which have been given the most play over time by journalists are constructed as upholding issues about journalistic community that attend to all three dimensions. For

example, tales about Dan Rather not only attend to his personal career (the level of the individual journalist) but also to his news organization (the organizational/institutional level) and to the legitimacy of television news in general (the level of the structure of the profession). It is thus no surprise that they are found across all three memory systems. On the other hand, tales which only attend to the level of the individual journalist - such as stories about the exemplary investigative reporting of Penn Jones - may not have persisted because they attend to neither the dimension of the organization nor basic issues central to the profession. Each dimension is thereby configured in negotiation with the others. This suggests that journalists have used their discourse to address what they see as relevant to their constitution as an authoritative interpretive community - issues ranging from personal careers, to the prestige of specific news organizations, to the structure of the profession as a whole.

For journalists invested in such an aim, levels of the individual, organization/institution, and profession have proven a more fruitful way of retelling than stories which emphasize the differences between press and television reporters, or between different reportorial roles. This is because in their stories, journalists have

stressed how they have regularly and consistently crossed lines across media, news organization and journalistic function. Journalists have not only assumed roles across media - writing books and appearing on talk shows - but they have functioned as anchorpeople instead of reporters, as columnists instead of on-the-spot chroniclers, taking on roles that have little to do with their original function in the story. They have told their tales across media and news organization, promoting the recirculation of narratives in media that are different from the medium where they originally worked. And finally, their own narratives have been filled with references to the accounts of reporters in other media and other news organizations.

Thus central to all patterns of cross-breeding have been motivations of the individual, the organization/institution and the profession. Their salience in retold tales has largely subordinated distinctions generally made about different kinds of journalistic practice to larger issues pertaining to journalistic community. Distinctions between different kinds of reporters - such as generalists versus specialists, or anchorpersons versus print columnists - have emerged as secondary to the making of journalists as an interpretive community that favors the powerful and

vocal among them. This suggests that journalists' desire to be associated with the assassination story has generated concerns directly relevant to the making of community. In so doing, journalists have eschewed commonly-held boundaries about reportorial tasks, and have displayed their ability to involve themselves regardless of predetermined tasks, definitional roles or demarcations. While this has blurred distinctions between different kinds of reporters in retellings, it has succeeded in outlining the communal parameters of the American journalistic community. Separate motivations - of the individual, the organization/institution, and the profession - have provided fruitful illustrations of the workings of journalism as an authoritative interpretive community. This does not suggest that the columnist functions with the same authority as the anchorperson or beat reporter. But that distinction has emerged in journalists' tales as secondary to the unpacking of similarities which as a group they see themselves sharing with each other.

All of this heralds back to the role of discourse in serving a ritual function for journalists. It provides a locus by which journalists can come together as a community but in ways not necessarily heralded by formalized professional codes. While not the only event to

do so, the assassination tale has given journalists reason, cause and means through which to realize and articulate the shifting boundaries of their community. Discourse serves as an antidote to problems and issues of concern to members of the profession.

There is reason to assume that a similar pattern exists with other groups of speakers involved in public discourse. The shape of journalistic community was shown here to have emerged through discourse that extended beyond the journalistic community, displaying its similarities to other groups that validate themselves through their rhetoric. This suggests that the shape of journalistic community is in part determined through its resemblances to other groups of public speakers, many of them non-professional. For larger questions of cultural authority, it is thus in the interfaces across social and cultural groups that the significance of authority ultimately rests.

ACTS OF TRANSMISSION, NARRATIVES OF RITUAL: THE ROLE OF DISCOURSE IN SHAPING COMMUNITY

Such a point bring this discussion back to the function of narrative. These pages have forwarded the view that journalists use narrative to uphold their position and stature as an authoritative, interpretive community. Two alternate points comprise this notion: One is that

journalists function as an interpretive community, authenticating itself through its narratives. The second is that authority has ritual dimensions, designed to consolidate journalists into a cohesive group. Both points hint at how public speakers might use narrative to establish collective understandings of themselves as cultural authorities. Authority not only helps speakers consolidate themselves into an independent interpretive community, but it helps them remember events in a way that enhances their collective dignity as professionals ¹².

Was the tale of covering the body of John F. Kennedy a unique event for American journalists? On one level, it appears to have been both extreme and unpredictable: Its circumstances of coverage were characterized by unpredictability, novelty and unexpectedness. It constituted an archetypal example of what Tuchman called "what a story." Journalists were forced to employ practices, such as improvisation or relying on instinct, in ways which allowed them to re-assert their control over the event's unpredictability.

Yet beyond actual coverage, the patterns of retelling the event over time and space suggest that the assassination tale was not as unique an event as journalists have ascribed it to be. Through narrative, "covering the body" of John F. Kennedy has been turned

into a manageable occurrence. While the mere presence of patterns of narrative retelling and memory suggest that journalists were not strangers to events of its type, journalists' narratives have in effect reinstated their control over the assassination story. This suggests that even if journalists were set back by the unique circumstances of the assassination coverage, they used familiar and agreed-upon practices to construct the story as a routine news tale. Such a construction was necessary for them to establish their own presence as cultural authorities in its retelling. More important, narratives about the assassination have helped journalists make sense of themselves as a professional interpretive community.

This suggestion - that journalistic authority is maintained by instating control through narrative that journalists lose through coverage - is disturbing, largely because journalists' narrative strategies have been studiously avoided in models of journalistic professional practice. The fact that journalists use narrative to make sense of the one type of incident least explained by media researchers - the event Tuchman called "what a story" - suggests that journalists have generated their own folkloric ways of interpreting their boundaries as professionals. They have chosen to make sense of insufficiently-addressed codes of practice, knowledge and

memory through discourse. This suggests the existence of a viable community involved in constant interpretive activity about its own boundaries of action. It also underscores the failure of formalized standards of professional practice to sufficiently address all kinds of journalistic practice, a failure which has generated certain events as critical incidents for journalism professionals.

This highlights the communal, collective dimensions of journalistic retellings. Journalists use their narratives to address dimensions of performance that have been overlooked by more formal socializing agents, underscoring their need to address such issues through discourse. In so doing, they function as interpretive communities, relying as much on their tales for group authentication as on the more formal features that define boundaries of appropriate practice. Discourse about critical incidents thus address a lack in the formal conventions by which journalists are coached into the profession, allowing them to air professional concerns by strategically revitalizing certain events through tailored stories. The formal features of their constitution as an interpretive group is thereby bolstered through informal discursive practice. Narratives give journalists stages where they can rethink the hows and whys of the profession

at a number of points in time and space, according to their own agendas about what is important.

Thus in answer to the original question that motivated this study - what makes journalists better equipped than others to offer a "preferred" version of events? - the response rests within journalists' own activities. Journalists themselves perpetuate the sense that their version of reality is a preferred one. By codifying their versions of life in repetitive and systematized mediated narratives, they place themselves ahead of other potential retellers. They turn contests for the construction of reality into a one-horse race, by narratively attending to critical events that uphold their authority. This retains journalists as ultimate masters of their destiny as professionals and public speakers, allowing them to attend through narrative to those incidents which they feel most effectively reveal the parameters of appropriate practice.

This does not suggest that transmission is irrelevant to the larger picture of establishing cultural authority. Authority, ultimately, is realized through transmission. But for speakers seeking to establish themselves as the authoritative spokespeople of the events they report, the implication of transmitting information often becomes secondary to the way that information is turned back on

the group which generates it. In retelling the assassination, journalists have used transmission of the assassination story as much for what it means to audiences as for how it has been shared by journalists. This suggests the extent to which the function of community is critically embedded within the routinized relay of news narrative. It also highlights how individuals and groups can master and manipulate the technology they use when communicating, to address aims that bear little relevance to the efficacy of their transmissions.

The embedding of "narratives of ritual" within "acts of transmission" thereby highlights the real workings of cultural authority in discourse. Through narrative, speakers set up an extensive self-referential discourse through which they address, air, challenge, negotiate and alter the parameters of their practice as speakers. Authority is used as a marker of collective practice, delineating for other members of the group the parameters of what is appropriate and preferred. Within such boundaries, speakers find their place for retelling a variety of events.

This suggests a view of authority as a construct anchored within community, generating "a self portrait that unfolds through time...and allows the group to recognize itself through the total succession of images"

which it generates ¹³. Authority thus not only plays a central part in authorizing acts of transmission but in legitimating narratives of ritual. It constitutes a tool by which collectives of speakers uphold themselves as viable and authoritative interpretive groups.

RHETORICAL LEGITIMATION AND CULTURAL AUTHORITY

The establishment and perpetuation of authority through narrative as an implicit dimension of maintaining community recalls the theoretical importance attributed to rhetorical legitimation earlier in this study. The reconstructive work by which speakers shape their retellings of the events of the "real world" in certain ways and not others constitutes an important dimension of how it works. The ability to shape collective visions of oneself as an independent interpretive community through narrative recalls claims by Habermas, Weber and others, that underscore the legitimating function with which speakers embellish their communicative messages. In this study, journalists have been shown to emerge as one group among many, which use narrative as an act of rhetorical legitimation.

But legitimation is not a one-on-one exercise between a speaker, and his or her tale. Rather, it involves the invocation of an intricate network of patterns of collective memory. Narratives about one incident reinforce

each other; narratives about different incidents uphold narratives about other incidents, with speakers applying the authority accrued from retelling one event to stories of another. This application of Giddens' notion of structuration, and the circular recycling of information it implies, suggests that the creation of a collective lore through codified knowledge depends on the positioning of agreed-upon discursive stages through which to air concerns about practice. Rhetorical legitimation, as a strategy, is thus shown to be circular in nature, leaning back on the community which originally sets it in motion. Rhetorical legitimation is used by speakers to make larger questions about authority in discourse explicit, clear-cut and manageable. This is made possible not only by the internal adjustments within each and every tale of critical incidents, but by the positing of adjustment as a legitimate mode of constructing reality. In other words, rhetorical legitimation underscores basic assumptions about the latitude allowed speakers in all kinds of public discourse.

ON CULTURAL AUTHORITY, MEMORY AND COMMUNITY

This study has suggested that cultural authority emerges through a circular system of practices which codify knowledge across time and space. Such a perspective, welding the perspectives of Durkheim, Giddens

and Halbwachs, has been examined through one practice - that of narrative. While "the function of narrativity in the production of the historical text" ¹⁴ bears its own impulses, this analysis suggests that it constitutes a viable and effective way for speakers to position and uphold themselves as authorities in culture.

The workings of authority in discourse across time and space results from an unequal concentration of power in the hands of those with routinized media access. This study has shown that particularly in the workings of public discourse, authority is tied in with media practices. Both the establishment of individuals and groups as authorities and the perpetuation of that status are directly dependent on media access, particularly as it plays across time and space. Media provide speakers with effective mechanisms on which to display their authority - both to themselves and others. This has most directly benefitted journalists, by helping them recycle among themselves collective codes of knowledge about what makes them an authoritative interpretive community.

Clifford Geertz long ago forwarded a notion of knowledge that held it to be firmly situated within practice. He said, "If you want to understand what a science is, you should look at what the practitioners of it do" ¹⁵. Geertz's comments are enlightening here because

they underscore the importance of practice in determining the boundaries of cultural authority. This study's emphasis on the real flesh-and-blood people behind what Christopher Lasch has termed the "assassination mythology" ¹⁶ suggests that an extensive network of strategic practices has put the mythology into place. Yet in so doing, those flesh-and-blood people have not only given life to the assassination tale. They have given life to their own authority to act as spokespeople for Kennedy's death. More important, they have given life to their authority for new generations of onlookers, who will adopt their versions of both the tales they tell and the appropriate parameters of journalistic practice and authority which such tales embody.

The implications of this analysis - of culture and cultural authority as an "acted document" ¹⁷ - raise questions about the legitimate workings of cultural authority in all kinds of public mediated discourse. They generate questions about the mechanisms by which other public speakers legitimate themselves through their stories. Why certain individuals and groups are legitimated as spokespeople for events over others depends on an intricate network of strategic practices by which they codify knowledge and use it to realize collective gains. This suggests that speakers of all sorts

systematically and routinely borrow from the codes of other groups in legitimating themselves. In a sense, then, authority is realized by mechanisms for recycling knowledge not only across members of a group but across members of many groups.

This does not suggest an elimination of the construct of professionalism for examining the American journalistic community. But it does underscore a number of similarities shared by journalists and other communities of public speakers, not necessarily professional ones. It also emphasizes yet an additional force among speakers who legitimate themselves through their rhetoric - community. Speakers consolidate themselves as independent authoritative communities because their discourse keeps them together. Acting as an interpretive community, speakers authenticate themselves through the interplay of narrative, memory and authority which make their stories credible, repeatable and memorable. A drive to keep their community intact motivates them to look within themselves for the legitimacy by which they can authenticate their actions, practices and values.

This study has thereby shown that the rhetorical legitimation of journalists has generated its own origin narratives about American journalism. Retelling the incidents that are critical to the American journalistic

community constitutes an exemplary case of the circular codification of knowledge, by which speakers have strategically authenticated themselves as cultural authorities. This suggests that group consolidation through discourse does not only function as a ritual of community and commonality. Rather, discourse also functions as a ritual of continuity, guiding and directing speakers into their own future as members of groups constantly engaged in authoritative interpretation of events of the "real world."

¹ Lance Morrow, "Of Myth and Memory," Time (10/24/88), p. 22.

² Hayden White, "'Figuring the Nature of the Times Deceased': Literary Theory and Historical Writing," in Ralph Cohen, The Future of Literary Theory (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 27.

³ Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, "Introduction," Representations (Spring 1989), p. 5.

⁴ See Carolyn Marvin, When Old Technologies Were New (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁵ A similar situation is discussed in Carolyn Marvin's "Experts, Black Boxes and Artifacts: News Categories in the Social History of Electric Media" [in Brenda Dervin et al., Rethinking Communication Vol. 2: Paradigm Exemplars (London: Sage, 1989), pp. 188-198], where Marvin discusses the ways in which social exchange is improvised with the introduction of news media.

⁶ Edward J. Epstein discusses this point in From Fact to Fiction (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

⁷ Davis and Starn, 1989, p. 2.

⁸ This point is made in Peter C. Rollins, "The American War: Perceptions Through Literature, Film and Television," American Quarterly 3 (1984), pp. 419-432.

⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, The Collective Memory (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), p. 7.

¹⁰ The notion of archival memory is discussed in Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," Representations (Spring 1989), p. 13. Also see Hayden White, 1989, p. 20.

¹¹ Mary Douglas, How Institutions Think (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), p. 70.

¹² This idea is found in Barry Schwartz, Yael Zerubavel and Bernice Barnett, "The Recovery of Masada: A Study in Collective Memory," The Sociological Quarterly 2 (1986), p. 149.

¹³ Halbwachs, 1980, p. 86.

¹⁴ The term comes from Hayden White, 1989. p. 21.

¹⁵ Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward An Interpretive Theory of Culture," in The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 5.

¹⁶ Christopher Lasch, "The Life of Kennedy's Death," Harpers (October 1983), pp. 32-40.

¹⁷ Geertz, p. 10.

APPENDIX A
METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

This study has posited journalistic authority as an "ideal-type", a perspective common to certain kinds of sociological studies ¹. By examining different stages or arenas which together give a fuller sense of the patterns through which notions of journalistic authority were expected to emerge, it suggested a theoretically unified perspective that was empirically eclectic. Other work has been done in a similar fashion: Eviatar Zerubavel's work on time adopted a similar approach, as did Erving Goffman's on forms of talk ². Both have utilized what Glaser and Strauss call "strategically-chosen examples" to illuminate theoretical concepts ³. Although this methodology does not aim to provide an all-inclusive or conclusive picture of the theoretical construct being examined, it has provided a clearer picture of the major patterns by which it can be expected to emerge. Therefore, by examining the establishment of journalistic authority via different kinds of public published discourse - both professional and mediated - across time, the study provides a clearer picture of some of the central patterns by which journalistic authority emerges and is perpetuated.

This study has employed diachronic textual analysis in order to elicit both tacit and explicit notions of journalistic authority. Narratives were examined in two main arenas:

1) Mediated discourse about journalism (or, how journalists talk with the general public about their coverage of the assassination). This includes mass mediated accounts through which both the original coverage of the assassination as well as discussions about the role of journalists in covering it were found. It also includes accounts of the assassination and media criticism of how those accounts were handled. This discourse was found in press and television accounts, sequelled memoirs in magazines, and biographies. The analytical focus rests with how journalists discussed their own role of media coverage.

2) Professional discourse about journalism (or, how journalists talk to other journalists about journalistic coverage of the Kennedy assassination). This discourse, in which journalists talk to themselves about themselves, was found in the trade press, published speeches, professional journalism reviews and the proceedings of various professional meetings or conventions in which the Kennedy assassination was discussed. The concern here was with the ways in which journalists talked to their peers about

their role or the role of others in covering the assassination story.

Yet a third area which comprises a less central focus than originally intended is instructional discourse. This area - whose discourse is found in textbooks, how-to manuals and other published guidelines for new journalists - was generally discarded from the study due to the voluminous quantity of material in the other two areas. However it was used when references to the assassination story were particularly salient.

These arenas of discourse were spanned over a period of 27 years, from 1963 to 1990. Such a time-span extended from the Kennedy assassination itself (November 22, 1963) to two years after the 25th anniversary of Kennedy's death. Public discourse about the role of journalists in covering the assassination story was explored via contemporaneous citations about journalistic practice and ethics, which were found in a number of public affairs indices.

TYPES OF SOURCES USED

The public affairs indices and which were scanned between 1963 and 1990 for this study included:

- New York Times Index
- Washington Post Index
- Current Guide to Periodical Literature
- Vanderbilt Archives
- CBS Archives

- NBC Archives

The trade press was scanned through the following periodicals:

- Columbia Journalism Review
- Washington Journalism Review
- Editor and Publisher
- Broadcasting
- The Quill

The proceedings of various professional associations were also surveyed, including:

- Sigma Delta Chi
- NANE (National Association of Newspaper Editors)
- NAB (National Association of Broadcasters)

Other institutions which lent support in the collecting of documentary materials included:

- John F. Kennedy Memorial Library
- Sherman Grinburg Library
- Journal Graphics, Inc.
- ABC News Transcripts
- Investigative News Group

¹ See Max Weber, Max Weber: Selections in Translation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) or George Simmel, The Sociology of George Simmel (New York: The Free Press, 1950).

² See Eviatar Zerubavel's Hidden Rhythms (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981). Also see Erving Goffman, Forms of Talk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

³ Barney Glaser and A. Strauss, The Discovery of Grounded Theory (New York: Aldine, 1967).

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III. JOURNALS AND NEWS ORGANIZATIONS SURVEYED (1963-1990)

ABC News
Broadcasting
 CBS News
Columbia Journalism Review
Editor and Publisher
 NBC News
Newsweek
New York Times
Time

IV. DOCUMENTARY FILMS, VIDEO-TAPES AND BROADCAST NEWS SEGMENTS

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 (11/25/75-11/26/75).

"Assassination: An American Nightmare," ABC Evening News,
 ABC News (11/14/75).

"Assassination: Twenty-five Years Later," eight-part
 series on CBS Evening News (11/14/88-11/23/88).

Being With John F. Kennedy (1983: 90 minutes); produced by
 Robert Drew Associates, in association with Golden
 West Television; screened by Arts and Entertainment
 Cable Network (A and E). Narrator: Nancy Dickerson.

Biography: The Age of Kennedy (1989: 60 minutes); NBC News
 Division, uses 1960s NBC News coverage (identical to
 that compiled by NBC in The Age of Kennedy: The
Presidency, Vol. II of The Week We Lost Kennedy,
 copyrighted 1966, 1988); screened by Arts and

Entertainment Cable Network (33/13/89). Narrator:
Peter Graves.

Fifty Years of Television: A Golden Anniversary [CBS News
Special (11/26/89)].

The Four Dark Days: From Dallas to Arlington (1963: 60
minutes); CBS News Division (November 1963);
Narrator: Charles Collingwood.

Four Days in November: The Assassination of President
Kennedy (1988: 120 minutes); produced by CBS News;
uses 1963 CBS News coverage; screened by CBS
(11/17/88); Narrator: Dan Rather.

Four Days in November (1964: 150 minutes); produced by
David L. Wolper for United Artists and United Press
International (Uses 1963 news coverage from networks
and local TV stations); screened by the Combined
Broadcasting Corporation (Channel 57), November,
1988. Narrator (In-film): Richard Baseheart.

Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy.

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JFK: A Time Remembered (1988:60 minutes); produced by the
Susskind Company, in association with Obenhaus Films,
Inc.; screened on PBS (11/21/88); Narrator: Mark
Obenhaus.

JFK Assassination: As It Happened (1988: 365 minutes);
produced by NBC News Division; uses 1963 NBC News
coverage; screened by the Arts and Entertainment
Cable Network (A and E), (11/22/88); Narrator: Edwin
Newman.

JFK: In His Own Words (1988: 60 minutes); Kunhardt
Productions, Incorporated; screened on HBO (November
1988).

JFK: That Day in November (1988: 60 minutes); produced by
NBC News Division (11/22/88); Narrator: Tom Brokaw.

"John F. Kennedy Remembered" (1988: 10 minutes); segment
on KYW News, Channel Four Late-Night News,
(Philadelphia); (11/22/88); Narrator/Anchor: Steve
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Kennedy v Wallace: A Crisis Up Close (1988: 60 minutes); produced by Drew Associates as 1963 film Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment; screened for The American Experience, PBS, November 1988. Narrator: David McCullough.

Kennedys Don't Cry (1978: 120 minutes); produced by Philip S. Hobel and Douglas Leiterman, for Document Associates Inc.; screened by the Arts and Entertainment Cable Network (November 1988). Narrator (In-film): Cliff Robertson.

On Trial: Lee Harvey Oswald (1988: 300 minutes); 1986 simulation of trial of Lee Harvey Oswald, produced by London Weekend Television; production of trial with Rivera inserts by Peter R. Marino for Tribune Entertainment Company; screened on Channel 17 (11/22/88-11/23/88); Narrator: Geraldo Rivera.

The Plot To Kill President Kennedy: From the De-classified Files (1983: 60 minutes); produced by M.G.Hollo, with Fox/Lorber Associates, Inc.; screened by Arts and Entertainment Cable Network (1983); Narrator: Larry McCann.

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Return to Camelot: Steve Bell and the JFK Years (1988: 30 minutes); produced by Group W Television, Inc; screened by KYW News; November, 1988. Narrator: Steve Bell.

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Vol. II: The Age of Kennedy: The Presidency (60 minutes: 1966, 1988);

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