

# **Proximity: The Name of the Ratings Game** Artículo Resumen

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**Abstract:** Due to deregulation of the broadcasting industry, television news has changed considerably during the last 10-15 years. This paper reports on a major study of changes in the Danish television news as regards news content, formats and editorial policies. In particular, the paper focuses on the development of proximity as a key news value that allows newsrooms to develop a closer relationship with their viewers. However, the editorial emphasis on proximity in selection of news stories, narrative and enunciative structure also entails a redefinition of the social character of news. Finally, the paper discusses these editorial changes in relation to broader changes in public discourse in Denmark, notably the increase in media generated populism and the rise of the "modern province".

The concept of proximity, which subsequently became very modern in all news reporting, was something we were born with.

Jens Gaardbo, Editor in Chief, TV2's News Department

In 1988, nationwide television service on a second channel was introduced in Denmark. Denmark's Radio's (DR) monopoly was broken. The newcomer, TV2, was given public service obligations, but services were to be financed primarily by the sale of air time to advertisers.

News services were the channel's 'flagship', and a good deal of energy and resources were put into news production. Those efforts were successful. In the space of only a few years TV2's evening news, *Nyhederne*, had attracted more viewers than the programme that once assembled the entire nation, DR's *TV-Avisen*. It was more than novelty effect; TV2 has continued to hold the lead throughout the 1990s. The key to the programme's success is undoubtedly a consistent and conscious emphasis on proximity, a principle that guides both TV2's news selection and style of presentation. This emphasis represented a marked contrast to television news of the monopoly era. The policy also had a palpable effect on all other Danish television news services, DR's *TV-Avisen* included.

The following analysis of TV2's *Nyhederne* and its evolution through the 1990s casts light on how and why the criterion of proximity has affected broadcast news journalism with respect to news selection, narrative structure and choice of sources. TV2's emphasis on proximity is also discussed in the context of populism. Finally, the success of *Nyhederne* is viewed in relation to an overall shift in the relationship between the capital and the provinces in Denmark, including the ways in which the two are thematized in discourses on modernity.

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## **1. The end of monopoly**

"Fiasco!" "Chaotic and amateurish." Judgments were harsh when, ten years after the fact, TV2 staff looked back on the channel's premiere newscast on 1st October 1988. It was indeed an unusual news programme: 40 minutes of items, big and small, some of which having no apparent news value. There were recipes, profiles of miscellaneous eccentrics and happenings here and there.

Whatever one may think in retrospect, the programme got essentially positive reviews – from the start. Under the headline, "Roses to Samuel Rachlin [anchor], Berlingske Tidende's (Copenhagen) critic wrote 2nd October, on the basis of a quick survey of viewer reactions: "Off to a good start!" The positive reviews of the decidedly chaotic programme may be attributed to a general enthusiasm about TV2 and positive anticipations that Nyhederne would be something new and different. Being different was an aim in itself. Managing Director Jørgen Schleimann's optimistic decision to slot the programme directly opposite DR's main evening newscast at 7:30 may be seen as an expression of the general fervour surrounding TV2. Not least the political Right hailed the channel as the challenger that would break what in their eyes was Social-Democratic dominance in DR's services.

Whereas hopes were high and sympathies strong, TV2's supporters had only rather vague ideas about what the channel should offer in the way of content. The same was true within TV2 itself. The company began assembling its news staff in the latter part of 1987. Up to then, the dominant role-model with respect to producing television news in Denmark was TV-Avisen. Efforts on the part of local television stations in the mid-1980s did not offer much in that respect (Hjarvard & Søndergaard 1988). Consequently, DR and selected foreign channels' news services formed TV2's frame of reference during the run-up. Given TV2's aspirations to be different, DR's TV-Avisen was more a negative example than a role-model.

Ulla Terkelsen, Nyhedernes first news chief, characterizes the initial programme concept:

We hoped to differ from Danmarks Radio by being closer to the people, that is, by offering more popular, less officious material [...]. Stories were to vary in length, we planned to shift tempo frequently in the course of the transmission, and we wanted to make it clear that the programme originated not in Copenhagen, but outside the metropole. The programme would be longer, but it would start at 7:30, exactly opposite TV-Avisen<sup>3</sup>.

The initial concept lasted only three months. The most urgent problem was the time slot, which kept TV2 from reaching a sizeable audience. This was not only the news department's headache; it was a ticking bomb under the entire channel, a direct threat to its survival. The evening news, Nyhederne, was the motor behind the channel's ratings. Nyhederne was expected to generate the audience for the blocks of advertising that preceded and followed it. After a few months of fair-to-middling ratings, Jørgen Schleimann abandoned the tactic of direct confrontation.

January 1989, Nyhederne was moved to 7:00 PM, the transmission was shortened and the format revamped. Although the time-slot had been the main stumbling block, there was also some dissatisfaction with a certain unevenness in the original form and content. In its original form, Nyhederne was a bit too radical a departure from the conventions of the genre and thus from viewers' expectations of a television newscast. Jens Gaardbo, a journalist on the original Nyhederne staff, describes the problem:

There are limits to how much you can change a loaf of rye, and still have it be a loaf of rye. Similarly, there are limits to how much you can change a newscast and still have it be perceived as a newscast. Viewers have a very subtle, but definite intuitive notion of what news is, and what isn't, of when they are watching something of significance and when they are being entertained. So, one could say that it didn't take long before it was clear to us that the product was a loser<sup>4</sup>.

The initial response to Nyhederne was confirmation of the conventional wisdom that news is a conservative genre; changes have to be introduced subtly, gradually. In its succeeding concept the newscast assumed a stricter form: the programme was shorter, and the content more in accordance with conventional news values. But a number of elements from the original concept remained: the popular, vernacular tone and perspective, a more dynamic tempo, and the antipathy toward the metropole all continued to be significant features of Nyhederne's identity. They were also decisive for the programme's success – which was not long in the coming.

Once the initial ailments were overcome, Nyhederne became Denmark's number one television newscast in the space of only a few years, with TV-Avisen being consigned, apparently once and for all, to the status of second fiddle. It is no exaggeration to say that TV2's Nyhederne is the biggest success story in Danish electronic media of the 1990s. From cheeky newcomer to market leader, and not only that:

Nyhederne also blazed the path that all Danish television news services would follow throughout the 1990s. A closer analysis of the form and content of Nyhederne therefore casts light on the keys to the programme's success, but also, more generally, on developments in Danish television news in the competitive market of the 1990s.

## 2. Journalism as voice of the common people

The kind of news reporting that Nyhederne introduced in the 1990s was imbued with an emphasis on 'proximity'. 'Proximity' is one of the classic criteria of newsworthiness (Mejlby 1996), and emphasizing 'proximity' was by no means new. What was new about Nyhederne was the degree of importance assigned to the concept. 'Proximity' was a criterion in news selection, but it also guided story development, i.e., the choice of angle and narrative style. 'Proximity' was achieved in both content (the subject matter should be within viewers' frame of reference) and narration (the anchor and reporters should address viewers in a familiar way and involve them in the story). The priority assigned to 'proximity' is an outgrowth of a particular conception of the relation between the channel and its viewers. TV2 made a conscious effort to form a contrast to the kind of 'top-down' news reporting that brought messages to the people from on high - from the central institutions of Danish society down to the people. TV2 chose instead to cultivate the perspective of the common man, conceiving of itself as a voice of the people vis-à-vis the Establishment: a channel of communication from the people to the corridors of power and influence.

This 'voice of the people' perspective would prove to be a significant competitive advantage. It also allowed TV2 to cultivate a contrast to DR, whereby DR was cast in the role of 'voice of the Establishment'.

Within the ranks of TV2 the model was called "the inverted OBS", which Jens Gaardbo considers his channel's principal point of contrast to DR, even though DR has to some extent followed suit:

I still find that TV-Avisen has trouble freeing itself from the Establishment, Kongens Nytorv [a prominent address in central Copenhagen], the Royal Theatre, and all the institutional expressions of the national identity we have in this country. They do what we call 'OBS television' or 'Information to the People about Society' [Oplysning til Borgerne om Samfundet]. Our approach is the other way around: we provide Information to Society about the People. [...] That's still the main difference, I think<sup>5</sup>.

TV2 hardly invented the concept of proximity or even this particular interpretation of the concept. It goes back to earlier tendencies in both print media (in particular tabloid journalism) and broadcasting in the monopoly era. In the mid-1980s the idea of consequence journalism was in vogue at TV-Avisen. Journalists should, more than was the practice, show the consequences of political decision-making rather than concentrating on the policy process and the political in-fighting that led up to the decision. Showing the consequences of policy might make politics more comprehensible and relevant to viewers and allow journalists to take the experience of the man on the street as a starting point. A characteristic element in consequence journalism was the use of 'consequence experts', i.e., ordinary people who are involved in the issue at hand, as sources. In contrast to traditional experts, who tend to generalize and to perceive relationships on the basis of a systemic perspective, consequence experts can explain their situation and views rather plainly and from an individual, ordinary citizen's perspective. Consequence journalism was the dominant feature of editorial policy at TV-Avisen in the mid-1980s under then Editor-in-Chief Lasse Jensen. In a newsdesk handbook from 1987, which launched the project, "New Face 87", as part of DR's preparations for coming competition, Lasse Jensen formulated the fundamental values of TV-Avisen, as follows:

Our chief guiding principle is to try to describe people's conditions, to describe the actions, processes and events which influence people's lives, either directly or indirectly. Thus, TVA [TV-Avisen] strives to describe actions, decisions, decision-making processes and decision-makers and, above all, we want to focus on the people who bear the consequences of the decisions, what you might call "experts on the consequences"<sup>6</sup>.

Consequence journalism – and particularly the use of consequence experts – was not put into practice to any greater extent during the monopoly era, however. Only in the mid-1990s did it gain full acceptance,

and then in response to keener competition. A lack of consensus within DR management and problems at the top of the news department were two factors that stood in the way of consequence journalism (Hjarvard 1999a).

As a result, the TV2 news department was free to create an identity for itself from the start by applying the principle of 'proximity'. The proximity dimension was not only a feature of the newcomer's initial rebelliousness vis-à-vis the old, official monopoly channel. Even after Nyhederne had become the market leader in Danish television news, the editors remained true to the proximity perspective and continued to develop the programme's identity on that theme. In 1997, in a publication distributed within TV2, Jens Gaardbo, who had just assumed his post as Editor-in-Chief, characterized the values that guided Nyhederne's staff:

- Significance and proximity
- We focus on the individual
- We turn OBS-television upside-down [see above]
- We look for a different and surprising angle
- We are the news medium of the Danish people (rather than authorities)<sup>7</sup>

Two observations: Significance and proximity are mentioned on a par with one another. Secondly, four of the five points are about values that stress Nyhederne's oppositional role vis-à-vis official systems thinking: a focus on the individual, the Dane, the opposite of OBS, and a surprising angle - these are pivotal in TV2's journalism.

### 3. 'Human interest politics' and entertainment

When we examine the content of TV2's news reporting more closely<sup>8</sup>, we find that the emphasis on the principle of proximity has left its imprint on both the form and content of news items, and we find clear differences between TV2's Nyhederne and DR's TV-Avisen with respect to both news selection and story treatment throughout the 1990s. Figure 1 indicates the relative frequency of seven categories of news content – Power and justice (police, crime, justice, the armed forces), the Social reproduction of the welfare state (education, health and social security, administration, taxes, etc.), Dependence on Nature (natural resources, conservation, ecology), Representation of the state (diplomacy, negotiations, armed conflict, etc.), Business (industry, agriculture, the labour market, etc.), Politics (elections, politicians, civil rights issues, etc.), and Cultural life (the Arts, mass culture, religion, daily life, etc.) in DR1 and TV2 news services in 1990 and 1997.

We find that TV2 shows greater interest in "Power and justice" in 1997 than in 1990. DR also emphasizes these subjects more, but not to the same extent. Both channels have increased their attention to the "Social reproduction of the welfare state" and "Cultural life", whereas subjects relating to the political public sphere have been toned down. DR1 has increased its coverage of "Business", but TV2 carried fewer such items in 1997 than in 1990.

On the whole, the analysis indicates that both channels have come to give 'soft news' (e.g., social welfare and health issues) and entertainment (crime news and mass culture) higher priority. The change is particularly apparent when we compare DR1's and TV2's news reporting of the 1990s with DR's news reporting in the 1970s and 1980s. We also find that TV3, a commercial channel having no public service obligations, has gone even farther in these same directions (see further Hjarvard 1999a).

These trends may also be seen to reflect an emphasis on material that, either in subject matter or in form of presentation, is closer to the viewer than traditional political news. The same tendency is apparent when we consider the relative emphasis on foreign and domestic news over the period. As shown in Table 1, both channels both give markedly higher priority to domestic news in 1997 than they did in 1990. One should bear in mind, however, that the changes in Eastern Europe, escalating in 1989, most probably inflated the channels' attention to foreign news in 1990. But even in relation to DR's news reporting in

1974 and 1984, TV2's trend in the 1990s represents a definite decline in the priority accorded foreign news.

Table 1 also shows that in 1997 DR2 shows the smallest share of purely domestic news, whereas TV3 notes the greatest share. It would seem that the more commercial a channel is, the less it is inclined to emphasize foreign news.

Table 1. Domestic and foreign news as a percentage of total news items. News in morning transmissions has been excluded. The category to the right represents items that have both a domestic and a foreign dimension.

The decline in interest in foreign news becomes even more apparent when we consider item length (air time) and their position in the newscast. Between 1990 and 1997 the average length of domestic news items in Nyhederne increased from 88.6 seconds in 1990 to 125.8 seconds in 1997. This is not the case regarding foreign news. Item length for foreign news remains more or less constant at 99.3 and 98.3 seconds in 1990 and 1997, respectively.

Table 2 shows the position of domestic and foreign news items in terms of three categories: the 'top' (first three items), 'middle' (items 4-9) and 'bottom' (item 10+) of the news. The table clearly shows that foreign news items are less frequently among the top items on both DR1 and TV2 than was the case in the monopoly era. In 1984, by contrast, items having a foreign element ('Foreign' + 'Domestic and Foreign') were more frequently among the lead stories than purely domestic news. All in all, we may conclude that foreign news material has a harder time making it into a newscast when the criterion of 'proximity' is accorded importance.

Table 2. The position of domestic and foreign news items in the evening news on DR1 1984 and 1997, and on TV2 in 1997. Percent of total items; horizontal percentages.

#### 4. Made for television

From the start, TV-Avisen was criticized for producing news that did not take advantage of the medium. The premiere transmission was decried as "against the very nature of the screen" (Prehn 1980). That TV-Avisen had a decided weakness for "talking suits" had to do with a conscious editorial policy that gave priority to the significance of the story over whether or not it lent itself to visualization. Hans-Jørgen Jensen, TV-Avisen's first news chief, formulates the guiding editorial principle, as follows:

From the start, the staff and management of the news department saw it as our duty to give viewers an orientation on the political process – both national and international – and on the vagaries of the economy. We have found that our coverage of these issues live up to the criterion of significance. [...] We have striven to live up to this orientation without succumbing to the tyranny of the need for moving pictures. From the start, it has been a principle that journalistic coverage and relevance should prevail over visualization (Jensen 1973).

Although DR's TV journalism did evolve considerably, even during the monopoly era, and learned to make better use of the medium's potential, a central feature of TV2's and Nyhederne's efforts to establish an identity was to exploit that potential even more. This ambition was interpreted in the light of the principle of 'proximity' to the viewing audience: Television was better suited to rendering exciting sensations than to explaining complicated social conditions. In an interview in 1991, Ulla Terkelsen formulated Nyhederne's editorial priorities, as follows:

Some events are better suited to being documented in television news than others. We chose to focus on visually rich events and experiences rather than accountant-TV with a lot of statistics and heavy material from government at local and regional levels, which can't be explained on television, anyway. [...] In all its years as a monopoly, DR has felt a hallowed obligation to carry political and economic material. We don't. News from those sectors has to be really important to be included in our programme<sup>9</sup>.

It is not reasonable to argue that the 'essence' of television is entertainment rather than information. But TV2's journalistic self-conception presumed that what was most suited to the medium was close to the

viewer and rich in sensations and surprises. In short:entertaining. In this way the seemingly neutral and obviously valid argument that better use should be made of the medium became the lever whereby entertaining 'human interest' material gained precedence over the criterion of significance. Not only did the criterion of visualization influence how stories were told, it also influenced news selection. As a consequence, events and subjects that did not lend themselves to lively visualization did not pass easily through the editorial needle's eye. As the quantitative analysis revealed, the policy resulted in a change in the subject-matter composition of the programme. And, as the following qualitative analysis will show, TV2's priority on 'visual' news also expanded the bounds of legitimacy regarding how news stories are presented on television.

TV2 gave higher priority to crime news throughout the 1990s, both in the channel's newscasts and in reality shows like Station 2 ("Precinct 2"). TV-Avisen, too, gave greater priority to crime news in the era of competition, albeit the news department remained somewhat ambivalent to the subject area. On the one hand, they carried such news because it was popular and entertaining; on the other hand, it was treated without embellishment in more or less strictly factual terms. TV2, for its part, made full use of the entertaining potential in crime stories. A story carried in Nyhederne's principal newscast, 4th November 1997, serves as an illustration. (See appendix).

Under the headline, "Gang violence" the story is about the arrest of five men in Aarhus (Jutland). They were charged with crimes (assault with the intent to kill, unprovoked assault) that took place outside the trial of the accused murderer of Racheed Lawal, a boxer. The item is quite long, over three-and-a-half minutes; it is composed of two parts: a brief factual part presented by the anchor, followed by a longer story presented by a journalist. In the former part the anchor describes the arrest and the reasons for it against pictures of the tumult some weeks earlier. The pictures serve, thematically and emotionally, as a kind of overture to the following characterization of the men, who are said to be known for "violence and rowdiness". The second part profiles the so-called ACAP gang, of which the arrested men are members. The account is accomplished through interviews with law enforcement personnel, a manager of the boxing club where the victim frequently sparred, and through a supposed 'hunt' for the ACAP gang on the part of the journalist in Aarhus' nightclub district.

The journalist's nocturnal search for the ACAP gang offers considerable opportunity for pictures suggestive of the city's shadowy underworld, affording opportunities for improvisation and prolonged suspense. The pictures connote an atmosphere where many people are enjoying themselves, but where danger – personified by ACAP – may be lurking in the shadows. In the course of the hunt, the journalist is accosted and menaced by members of the group at a discothèque, and an interview proves impossible. Consequently, the only substance in the segment is a video recording of a few members of the gang as they leave a discothèque in the middle of the night. The pictures have the character of 'hidden camera', which heightens the impression of furtive investigative reporting.

This impression is also underlined by the use of a dramatic present tense in recounting the encounter with the gang members: "We ask if we may have a word, but they just tell us to go away – or else. Later,....". We also try to visit the gang in the daytime at their palisaded clubhouse, which, however, turns out to be deserted. In both instances we are given the impression that the journalist's investigation has disclosed something of significance, but in fact, all his inquiries amount to are some silhouettes of unidentified young men leaving a nightclub and a picture of a locked door. The sequence of 'investigative' reporting provides no new information about the ACAP gang. What it does do is to dramatize the item so as to enhance its entertainment value.

The interviews in the item are mainly used to underline the violent and criminal character of the group. That is the principal theme of both the police officers' statements and the journalist's own copy. The statement by the manager of Lawal's boxing club lays the ground for a broader social portrait of ACAP's members: their connections with boxing. But this aspect is not followed up. Instead, the journalist concludes his report with some notes about some family relations within the Aarhus underworld. All in all, very little is said about the social background of the ACAP gang besides a rundown on their criminal record to date: the kinds of crimes they have committed, their relations with other crime syndicates, and so forth. In this respect the news reporting adopts a police perspective on the gang and focuses on the efforts to bring them to justice, a perspective which is congruent with the journalist's self-assumed role of private investigator in Aarhus' demi-monde.

The item also makes use of production techniques previously seldom used in TV news reporting. It is, for example, accompanied by music by the British group, The 4-Skins, after whose song, "All Cops Are Bastards" the ACAP gang took its name. The visuals feature ultra close-ups and odd angles (upside-down and from below); subjective camera is used a couple of times (from the inside of a rapidly accelerating car, and from a car with 'hidden camera'). The picture is also manipulated digitally to mask the faces of members of the gang, and superimposed circles are used to point out certain individuals. These loans from other genres allow the reportage to create new layers of meaning, with greater powers to involve and entertain the viewer.

The item illustrates how an ambition to dramatize takes priority over the significance of the content. Sophisticated production values make the story come alive and excite the viewer, but the item offers little in the way of information. A comparison of TV2's coverage with DR's coverage of the same event that evening shows that the same amount of information can be conveyed in fewer minutes using much less in the way of research and production resources. But the coverage in TV-Avisen is nowhere nearly as exciting. Where TV-Avisen, especially earlier, treated crime news soberly and factually, Nyhederne has spared no effort to make use of the stories' inherent drama. This tendency is also reflected in the collaboration between Nyhederne and the crime magazine Station 2, which are both produced by the same department.

The purpose of the dramatization is to entertain, but the dramatization also has consequences regarding the choice of angle. Not only does the item have very low information value, but the journalist has also largely adopted the police force's perspective on the gang. The journalist, assuming the role of 'private eye', 'helps' the police and adopts a 'law enforcement' discourse on crime. Other discourses, such as one that considers criminality in a social context or that might be critical of the work of the police, are thereby excluded. It is a tendency which has become quite common in various television channels' treatment of crime news; the tendency is reinforced by the close collaboration between the police and journalists in the production of reality crime magazines.

TV2's enthusiastic use of crime news to entertain has not, however, led to common use of scenes of extreme violence or emotion. It is rather a matter of more common and deliberate use of the various dramaturgic tools of the medium to bring out the thrill that is inherent in most crime stories. The staff of TV2 are not unaware that making use of crime news does not always conform with the criterion of significance. Or, as news chief Jens Gaardbo puts it:

One may, on the basis of classical criteria of significance, question whether it is justifiable to carry so much crime news. Crime is something that happens all the time, like rainy weather. And, as a journalist, you cannot deny that it is a question of a fascination in the drama of the material [...]. But it can, when at its best, depict reality in important ways – beyond momentary sensation<sup>10</sup>.

The intention to make fuller use of the potential of the television medium has two aspects. On the one hand, reference to the 'nature of the medium' – with television seen primarily as a medium of sensations and entertainment – has, in the post-monopoly era, been used to legitimize a weakening of the criterion of significance. This has been done by TV2 and other channels, as well. Secondly, the argument has in practice led – especially on TV2 – to active exploration of the expressive potential of the medium in order to find ways to tell stories in a more interesting and closer manner, in which case the material – whether significant or trivial – appears more relevant to viewers.

## 5. Dynamization and sound bite journalism

That TV2 put an emphasis on being popular and close to the viewer did not mean that Nyhederne was in any way provincial in outlook or old-fashioned in style. Characteristic of TV2 was that it strove to be at once more popular and more modern than rival DR. Against DR's myopic 'copenhagenry' TV2 mounted its provincial base; against DR's traditional forms of expression it put up a more dynamic and modern image. Ulla Terkelsen herself has commented that the faster tempo, use of a permanent anchor in an open, working editorial landscape, use of "coming up"-teasers in the middle of the programme – all this was "very American" (Terkelsen 1989:42). By borrowing forms of expression from American and similar commercial broadcasting contexts, the channel could appear more youthful and contemporary than the 'old monopoly TV'.

The dynamic form of expression is especially apparent when we consider the length of news items and the intervals between 'cuts' (changes of picture, albeit electronic) in the main programmes of evening news. Whereas TV-Avisen in 1984 devoted about 3 minutes of air time to each item on average, Nyhederne used only 2 minutes (in 1990 and 1997). TV-Avisen gradually shortened its items and by 1997 had the same length as Nyhederne, or roughly 2 minutes on average. Whereas TV-Avisen made less than 5 cuts a minute in 1984, Nyhederne cut 8 an average times a minute in 1990. In 1997, Nyhederne had heightened the tempo to about 9 cuts a minute; TV-Avisen had by this time followed suit and had roughly the same frequency of cuts.

The shorter item lengths and more frequent cuts also reflect technological changes that made it easier to produce transmission-quality images. Technology played in, but it was the competition between the two channels that led them to use the technology to heighten the tempo.

The higher tempo affected TV journalism in several respects. Shorter item length made it harder to provide background, i.e., to put the news event in context. Journalists did become increasingly proficient at telling their stories, but all else equal, shorter time means that less can be told. For the most part, Nyhederne did not utilize technological improvements to develop narrative strategies for background and in-depth material.

The quicker tempo was also a consequence of the greater number of newscasts transmitted during the day. In the monopoly era there was a single programme of evening news, subsequently supplemented by a late-night summary of the day's news. Competition has given rise to numerous newscasts each day. TV2 has been the motor force in this development, not least through the morning programme, "Good morning, Denmark", which (since December 1996) features news briefs every half hour. Frequent newscasts have created a considerably greater flow of news material from early morning to late evening, and the many transmissions have given each one more the character of an update of ongoing events. Consequently, the evening news no longer has the element of finality it once had; in general, there is less emphasis on summarizing and contextualizing the news stories.

Figure 2. The Role of the Journalist Vis-à-Vis Sources. TV-Avisen and Nyhederne

Another important consequence of the speedier tempo is a change in the relationship between journalist and sources. Persons interviewed have less air time and are more harshly edited. The journalist's role vis-à-vis sources has also changed. Again, TV2 led the way. In 1984, the average length of an interviewee's statements on TV-Avisen was nearly a minute, 54.2 seconds. The time shrank to 48.5 seconds in 1990, and 36.5 seconds in 1997. On Nyhederne the corresponding lengths for 1990 and 1997 were 28.7 and 25.7 seconds, respectively.

Meanwhile, the number of people interviewed in each news item increased. Whereas previously items carried 1-2 people's statements, the average gradually climbed to 2-3. As indicated in Figure 2, the increasing brevity of news items led to the elimination of the journalist from the interview. Earlier, TV-Avisen often had the interrogating journalist in both sound and picture; journalists were more seldom present in either sound or picture in the interviews on Nyhederne. Instead, the interviewee's statement formed part of several statements in a montage. As Figure 2 also shows, the journalist's critical question on camera, which suggests an active interrogation, generally with the purpose of examining or rebutting the source's views, has become successively less common in TV journalism.

Figure 3. Frequency of Cuts in Interviewees' Statements. TV-Avisen and Nyhederne.

The practice of tight editing of a source's statement (Figure 3), which TV2 also encouraged, has arrogated control over the context in which the statement is presented from the interviewee. Even if a cut is not necessarily synonymous with an interruption, inasmuch as the picture can be cut, but the sound continues, the rising frequency of cuts means that to an increasing degree it is the journalist who combines the various statements, "sound bites", into a meaningful whole. What points are included and the order in which they are presented are more and more the result of the journalist's intervention.

Typically, the journalist strives to dynamize and condense the statements of the source; what the source tries to say is subordinate to the overall meaning of the news item. Whereas journalists in the era of



monopoly primarily perceived their role as that of communicating the information and views of other institutions and representatives of those institutions, nowadays the statements of interviewees are used as building blocks in a construction of the journalist's making, viz., the news story. The critical role of the journalist has in a sense gradually moved from the interview situation (interrogation) into the editing room (critical selection and composition). Put simply, the role of the journalist has changed from communicating others' views to being an autonomous editor of sound bites. In response to this, professional sources such as politicians have increasingly come to formulate their views so as to offer strings of cogent, quotable sound bites (Hjarvard 1999b).

## 6. The discourse of populism

Nyhederne's ambition to be the people's news medium was an outgrowth of the channel's geographical structure and location. The many regional TV2 stations and the location of channel headquarters in Odense on the island of Fyn was symbolic of a revolt against 'copenhagenry', the narrow meaning of which was DR's orientation toward the capital and the broader meaning, the social, political and cultural dominance of the social Establishment.

Establishing the channel's main office on the island of Fyn was more than symbolic; de facto it dictated a shift in the channel's editorial priorities. Thus, Ilse Olsen, sub-editor on the Nyhederne staff and with TV2 from the start, characterizes the importance of geography for the channel's news policy:

The first difference was that we broke with the talking suit, that we gave ordinary folks a platform in our newscasts, which was both an ideal and a necessity, since the politicians had decided that we should be here in Odense, which is pretty far from the corridors of power. That forced us to some extent to cover the consequences [of policy] rather than overall political decision-making<sup>11</sup>.

Opposition to "the System", to the 'talking suits' in the capital, became a part of Nyhederne's mission, and the programme saw itself – and acted – as one who stood much closer to the pulse of the people. As documented elsewhere (Hjarvard 1999a), this self-conception in time led to the emergence of a kind of populism in Danish political journalism. The notion of being "the voice of the people" was not confined to the news desk, but was adopted by the entire channel. Lasse Jensen, who was in the top ranks of TV2 management and second-in-command at Nyhederne, points out that populist tendencies imbued the entire organizational culture of TV2:

It is, I would say, inherent in the whole idea of TV2. I mean: here we are, and there they are. We are in Odense; they are in Copenhagen. We do other kinds of news than they do at 2860 Søborg [DR/TV's address]. We have a virtual monopoly, or patent, on knowing what the people, the real people, are thinking and doing<sup>12</sup>.

The term, 'populism', should be understood in its political sense and not as simply meaning that the channel adopted a plain and simple style of expression. Here it denotes a polarized conception of society: "Us" vs. "Them": "Us", the people, conceived in a popular light as representing practical common sense vs. "Them", the System, seen to be steered by bureaucratic rationality, which is often not only far removed from reality, but antagonistic to common sense. Where the people have the community and moral justice on their side, the System has power. Where the people are real, live individuals and families, the System is abstract institutions. In geographical terms, the System is 'there', in the metropole, whereas the people are 'here', in the provinces. Seen through the lenses of populism, the logic of the System leads to abuses of power, absurdities, waste, etc., which might have been avoided if only they had listened to the people and used common sense.

Populistic tendencies in TV2's news services turn up, for example, in the frequent use of stereotypes of "the people versus the System". These are used in stories about laws with unexpected effects that make life miserable for unsuspecting citizens in areas like health care, the labour market and housing. Or, stories about politicians who squander resources on 'pie-in-the-sky' projects or who are caught stealing out of the Treasury. Often, stories focus on individual cases, citizens with complaints that point up the unreasonableness or moral injustice of measures 'the System' has come up with. As a consequence, political measures tend not to be discussed as political issues, but rather as issues of morality, eliciting not opposition on political/ideological grounds, but indignation. A tax reform may, for example, be treated in

terms of the individuals who 'lose out' as a result of it rather than as a matter of economic redistribution in society as a whole. Political choices and issues of the distribution of power are treated in terms of common-sense morality, as questions of Good and Evil. Negative consequences for the victims of unfeeling wielders of power are played up; that it is a question of a difficult political choice is played down.

Of course, there are occasions when politicians do make blunders, are incompetent or dishonest. A healthy scepticism vis-à-vis politicians and wielders of power is an important element in all journalism. Criticism of how those in power use that power is not the problem, but rather the stereotyped treatment of social issues. The stereotype of 'the people' masks the existence of fundamental differences and conflicts between different groups in society. These differences are such that one may question whether it is meaningful to speak of 'the people' as a uniform phenomenon. That the stereotype has gained such influence over the practice of journalism at TV2 may be seen as the product of at least two factors: the channel's self-conception as the voice of the provinces and, secondly, the need for Nyhederne to appeal to a broad range of viewers. Populistic stereotypes are not only well-suited to telling a good story about heroes and villains; they are also a means by which a channel can assume the role of champion of the people vis-à-vis 'the System' – which represents an obvious competitive advantage.

TV2's populist discourse bears similarities to, and has links to the Neo-Liberal trend in Danish politics. Neo-Liberals, too, criticize public policy that offers 'systemic' solutions that allow little room for consideration of the individual. Neo-Liberal ideology is pivoted on the need to reduce the public sector in order to allow a freer play of private initiatives. The link between TV2's populist 'mission' and Neo-Liberal politics is not only ideological; there are personal links, as well. For example, politicians in the Liberal Party (Venstre) were avid advocates of TV2 as an alternative, not least in news reporting, to Danmarks Radio. Several appointments to the staff of TV2's news department had ties to the Liberals, which raised public doubts as to the channel's political neutrality (Poder & Østergaard-Nielsen 1997).

While the similarities are obvious, the populist perspective also differs from the Neo-Liberal discourse in several respects. For one thing, populism is skeptical of the entire political establishment, Neo-Liberals included. TV2's 'folksy' grassroots or 'contra' perspective has little sympathy for politicians as an 'estate' or profession and makes little distinction regarding the nature of individual politicians' or parties' ideas.

TV2's orientation toward the provinces and populist discourse have had results. Ratings show that Nyhederne has a somewhat stronger appeal among the common people, that is to say, a socially broader range of viewers which includes disadvantaged groups in Danish society. After only a few years, TV-Avisen and Nyhederne were found to appeal to audiences having different profiles. TV-Avisen had a stronger appeal among middle-aged viewers, the better educated, and viewers in the capital, whereas Nyhederne had a stronger appeal among those living west of The Great Belt (Jutland and the western islands), among working class Danes and young people. Some of these differences were still apparent in 1998. Table 3 shows the ratings for TV-Avisen and Nyhederne among selected groups. Nyhederne has a more or less equal appeal in all parts of the country, whereas TV-Avisen still has a stronger appeal to viewers in the East13 (where Copenhagen is situated). TV2 attracts a good share of viewers in all social classes, with especially high ratings among elder viewers and those with fewer years of formal education. DR1 has its best ratings among middle-aged, elder and white-collar viewers. In terms of lifestyle-orientations, Nyhederne has particularly high ratings among tradition-oriented and individualistic people, whereas TV-Avisen has greater appeal among collectively oriented people. It should be noted, however, that both channels attract good numbers of viewers in all sectors of society, so that the distinctions noted here have the character of nuances rather than major differences. All in all, it is fair to say that Nyhederne's orientation to the people shows in the composition of its audience. The programme has enjoyed broad and solid popular support throughout the 1990s.

Table 3. Audience composition for the news programmes of DR1 and TV2 in 1998. Ratings as percent of selected subgroups. Source: Gallup's TV-Meter.

## 7. The modern province

From the end of the 1980s and through the 1990s there were two notable success stories among Danish media: the morning daily (7 days/week) *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten* and TV2's *Nyhederne*. The former increased its circulation from 118,298 in 1985 to 139,844 in 1990 and continued on up to 183,864 in

1998<sup>15</sup>. In the latter part of the 1990s the paper began to market itself on Sjælland and in the capital, thereby attaining the status of a truly nationally distributed newspaper. As noted in the foregoing, Nyhederne became the market leader in television news in the span of only a few years. It has retained and consolidated that position throughout the 1990s. Both media are based in the provinces, Jyllands-Posten in Viby (Jutland) and Nyhederne in Odense (Fyn).

Whereas the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s witnessed radical concentration in the newspaper industry, particularly in the provinces where many papers were forced to shut down, the last decade or so has seen a renaissance for print and electronic media in the provinces. Although both Jyllands-Posten and TV2 experienced some economic difficulties in 1999, this hardly changes the fact that the media scored tremendous successes during the 1990s. Meanwhile, the Copenhagen newspapers and Danmarks Radio have experienced stagnation or decline.

This 'revival' among provincial media should be viewed against the backdrop of certain factors: the content the media offer, certain media policy measures, and economic conditions in the sector, some of which were noted in the foregoing with respect to Nyhederne. Finally, we should note another factor, outside the media sector, which has affected the two media. It is a question of much broader – and more or less intangible – developments in Danish society, whereby both the relationship between tradition and modernity and that between the provinces and the capital have changed. In headline form: provincial has become modern.

Copenhagen has always been identified with things modern. When people moved to the capital from the countryside, i.e., the provinces, they generally experienced cultural shock. In contrast to the easily comprehensible and stable social structure in the countryside, life in Copenhagen was synonymous with a hectic pulse, many and fleeting, more or less anonymous, social contacts, and constant exposure to new and different forms of cultural expression. During the construction of the welfare state starting in the 1930s, the capital was also the seat from which the blueprints for modern Danish society were drafted and the natural location for new social and national institutions. The capital was the hub and starting point for the expansive welfare state.

The crisis in the Social-Democratic welfare state project, which started in the mid-1970s - in an ideological-symbolic sense, in any case – meant a crisis for the status of Copenhagen as the fulcrum of modernity in Danish society, as well. With successive decentralization and 'Europeanisation' in the 1980s and 1990s<sup>16</sup> the Danish Government and Parliament lost a good share of their power to local government as well as to European institutions. At the same time, Neo-Liberal ideology gained a foothold and posed a laissez-faire alternative to the social engineering philosophy of the welfare state, which undermined the legitimacy of central and public sector solutions. Instead, private, market-based forms of steering in local and transnational hands were put forward as models for the revitalization of Danish society.

This ideological shift meant that Denmark no longer perceived Copenhagen as the centre of modernity. Instead, the capital gradually came to be perceived as the centre of tradition in the sense that it was the site of traditional national and public institutions: Parliament, the Government, the ministries, the Supreme Court, the National Museum, the National Gallery, Danmarks Radio, the Royal Archives, and so forth. The capital came to be seen as the site of administration and archiving of the national heritage. In contrast, the provinces were rediscovered as economic and cultural motors in modern-day Danish society, where individual and private initiatives were in the high seat. One relationship was not inverted, however: the provinces were still associated with a popular and informal lifestyle, whereas the capital continued to be associated with sophistication and cultural refinement. What was new was that the popular was now positively linked with innovation and individual initiative.

Table 4. The discursive characteristics of the relationship between province and capital in Denmark of the 1990s.

With the help of a few catchwords, Table 4 summarizes the discourse of the 1990s regarding changes in the relationship between Copenhagen and the provinces. The characterizations are gross and only indicate the themes that have been current over the past decade. Of course, no discourse is totally dominant; other competing discourses have been carried on, as well.

As for the success of Nyhederne and Jyllands-Posten, one might venture the hypothesis that their success is due in part to an association with the new status of the provinces as locomotives of modernity – a status they have capitalized on and a discourse they have contributed to. In both their marketing and their editorial content they have latched on to discourses that provided them with a central position in a society in which individuals, 'the people', open national frontiers, innovation and private initiatives have been central values and in which their rivals, the Copenhagen press and Danmarks Radio, have seemed slightly antiquated champions of yesterday's causes: too much government, bureaucracy, tradition and public, collective solutions. Thus, Nyhederne's editorial philosophy – the concept of the 'inverted OBS' – and TV2's identity as a voice of the provinces and of the people in contrast to the 'copenhagenry' of its archrival dovetailed into an ongoing discourse, which TV2 also helped to develop and consolidate as the dominant discourse in Danish society.

When DR's and TV-Avisen's monopoly was to be broken, the challenger, TV2 and Nyhederne, was localized to the provincial city of Odense, far from the power centre of the nation and far from the political institutions which television news was expected to cover. At first, it seemed like an exile to the periphery of the polity, but in ideological terms, the location brought the channel closer to the people and gave it a unique opportunity to cast itself in the role of entrepreneur in the new centre of the 1990s: the provinces.

#### Notes

1. Interview with Jens Gaardbo, 11th November 1998.
2. TV2 10 ar, p 31.
3. Interview with Ulla Terkelsen, 30th August 1998.
4. Interview with Jens Gaardbo, 11th November 1998.
5. Interview with Jens Gaardbo, 11th November 1998.
- 6 "Project New Face", TVA Handbook, 8th April 1987.
7. "TV2 Nyhederne... om lidt", produced by Jens Gaardbo, May 1997, unpublished.
8. The following segment is based on findings from Hjarvard (1999a). The empirical basis for the quantitative analysis is the following: For 1997, a randomized sample comprising 30 days of newscasts in DR1, TV2, TV3 and DR2 in the interval, 1st May- 31st December; for 1990, all newscasts on DR1 and TV2 in the interval 26th February-25th March; for 1984, all newscasts on DR1 in the interval 1st October-4th November; and for 1974, DR's written record of newscast content in the period 1st-31st October. Finally, a small number of Tv-Avisen transmissions from each of the years 1965, 1967 and 1969 constitute the basis of what is referred to as "the 1960s". The nature of the material from 1974 and the 1960s is due to the sparsity of video recordings of entire transmissions of TV-Avisen from the early days of television news.
9. Ulla Terkelsen, as quoted in Politiken, 31st March 1991.
10. Interview with Jens Gaardbo, 11th November 1998.
11. Interview with Ilse Olsen, 11th November 1998.
12. Interview with Lasse Jensen, 20th February 1998.
13. Copenhagen with a population of one million, 20 per cent of the local population, is situated on the northeastern corner of the eastern island, Sjælland.
14. K stands for "Kompas", a Gallup lifestyles index.

15. Dansk Oplagskontrol as cited in Media Scandinavia. The figures indicate net paid circulation in the first six months of each year.

16. Denmark became a member of the European Communities in 19

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#### Appendix

Arrests in Aarhus. An item in TV2 Nyhederne,

main transmission,

4th November 1997. Third item, 219 seconds.

#### Sound

Anchor: Three men were arrested in Aarhus today. They were charged with attempted manslaughter in connection with streetfighting and shooting after the sentencing of the man convicted of murdering boxer Racheed Lawal. [Wild sound from the tumult: shouting and gunfire.]

Only three weeks after the tumult in Aarhus, police say they have captured the man behind the violence 17th October. He is 27 years old. Police say he fired a shotgun at the group of Palestinians. He is to be charged with attempted manslaughter. A 28-year-old male has been charged as an accomplice. Three others now in custody were charged for their participation in the violence outside Vestre Landsret [the courthouse].

Several of the men in custody are members of the so-called ACAP gang, police say. It is a group held together by their common hatred of ... police.

Journalist Jesper Nilausen: This video, showing two men leaving the scene of the tumult is the only visual document of the ACAP gang that has been shown to date.

ACAP is known here in the nightclub district for their violent behaviour and rowdiness. TV2 is here tonight to try to find the gang.

The name, "ACAP" is an abbreviation taken from a British rock song. The lyrics explain what keeps the gang together.

Recorded music [The 4-skins, "ACAB", 1982]: "ACAB, All Cops Are Bastards, ACAB, ACAB, ACAB. All Cops Are Bastards."

Richard Madsen, police inspector: At least several members of the gang have criminal records; some of them have committed serious crimes.

Journalist: ACAP members are persona non grata in most places, but tonight at 3 AM, we found the hard core of the gang at this discothèque. We ask if we may have a word, but they just tell us to go away - or else. Later, they leave the club. Here we see a 26-year-old member of the gang, two 27-year-olds and a 23-year-old.

Kristian Skovhus, detective inspector: We know them as a group; they are convicted criminals. We know that many of them are out of work; they basically live on welfare payments; they are heavy drinkers. And so on and so forth.

Journalist: Are they violent?

Kristian Skovhus: Yes, I'd say so.

Journalist: ACAP used to have fortress-like clubhouses, like this one at Vesterbro Torv, but for some reason they don't any more.

The special police detail say that the gang comprises some thirty men, Danes and immigrants of diverse nationalities. It is a loosely knit group with no known political agenda.

Sources close to the gang say that some members have records of violence: breaking and entering, pushing, bank robbery, and odd jobs for the Hell's Angels.

ACAP knew Lawal from his boxing club, whose fights they follow closely, but also from his job as a bouncer [nightclub doorman]. [Wild sound from a sparring match]

Journalist: Why do you think they back Lawal?

Anders Vester, manager Aarhus Athlet Club: Well, I figure they just like boxing. I know it for a fact. Racheed Lawal may have been their idol, a role model. And so maybe they just want to try to avenge his death, you know?

Journalist: But the real link between the dead boxer and ACAP is a close relative of Lawal's who is now serving time for miscellaneous violent crimes and narcotics dealing.

Kristian Skovhus, detective inspector: There are blood ties between the Lawal family and ACAP, some of the members there. That is correct.

Journalist: Time will tell whether the police will succeed in tying ACAP to the shooting and tumult in Aarhus.

Anchor: Preliminary hearings for four of the five men will be held tomorrow. Whether the fifth will be heard, the police have yet to decide.