

When Journalism Loses Its Senses

On Mad Cow Disease and Ritual Sacrifice

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In the days around 20th March 1996, a strange form of derangement, a mental influenza, spread through the European media. A disease of the brain known among English cattle might be catching to people, too. The responsible ministers were taken to task in the British Parliament. They didn't manage to defend themselves very well, and – his back to the wall – the Minister for Health admitted that one could not exclude the possibility that BSE – popularly known as 'mad cow disease' – which since 1986 had cost the lives of some 150,000 cows, might be communicable to human beings. It might possibly cause a disease similar to Creutzfeldt Jacob Disease (CJD, see box next page).

No evidence was available then – nor has evidence been presented since – which demonstrated how the disease might be transmitted from cow to human. Nonetheless, the issue shot to the top of the agenda of European Ministers of Agriculture. An immediate ban on exports of British beef was imposed, and British growers were enjoined to destroy millions of animals.

The issue developed very quickly in a bout of heated exchanges between a British expert commission, the British Parliament, EU (the Council of Ministers and the Commission), and a European press which gave the story top priority days on end – without, however, bothering to investigate the forces at play beneath the sensational surface. For example: If so many cows had died of BSE – almost exclusively in Great Britain – one might reasonably expect a higher frequency of the human strain (CJD) there. But such was not the case. One might also expect some hypothesis concerning how the disease may have been transmitted to human beings, but no. Only a sole – but all the more frequently cited – British MD claimed a linkage. Finally, there is the circumstance that the contagion among cows now seemed to be fully under control since British authorities banned the use of protein meal from cadavers in fodder in 1988. Only one case of BSE had been registered among cows born after 1993. None of these aspects, each of which alone might be enough to quench or at least dampen the hysteria, was broached. Not by any Danish medium, in any case.

How could the entire European press, consumer representatives and politicians so lose their heads, all in the space of a

few days – and without once raising these essential questions? What demands can we reasonably make of the press? Should newsdesks report everything that passes under their noses, or should they try to weigh the value of each item and then give it appropriate treatment? Should the press set politicians' agenda on the basis of analysis, evaluations of possible consequences and argumentation, or should it above all reflect the issues and aspects that can be guaranteed to elicit a strong emotional response on the part of the public? Is it reasonable to expect editors and journalists to stop to think, to examine the poorly documented stories which streak, comet-like across the national and global news heaven?

Chain Reaction, Short-Circuit, Avalanche, Lemming March

What we witnessed in the case of mad cow disease was a chain reaction among the media and between the media and the political system. Once media interest in a story has reached a certain intensity, a certain momentum, the political system finds itself unable to ask the press for 'time out' or to introduce new facts and evaluations into the debate. One may well ask in such cases of international media short-circuiting as occurred here, with ever shorter intervals between events and electronic news distribution, whether it is at all possible for rational analysis to make its way into the news, once the media's emotionally steered 'lemming march' has got under way.

Chain reaction, short-circuit, avalanche, lemming march. Whatever we choose to call it, it has the effect of a combination of an optical illusion and the kind of feedback 'noise' that sometimes occurs between microphone and amplifier: a small thing is projected, assumes fantastic proportions and gives rise to a reverberating media echo. Once the story has reached a certain level of intensity nationally and internationally, it seems that no medium is strong or independent enough to introduce a different angle on the story with any success.

News Value vs. the Facts of the Case

It is a mechanism analogous to the way in which 'solos', even bona fide 'scoops', are evaluated: Unless other media pick the story up, it is worthless. The point of a solo is not to direct at-

tention to some entirely new or neglected question. No, the point of a solo is to be first, be it 2 or 22 hours before anyone else, with a story which other media feel compelled to follow up. That is to say, the story should resemble other stories which have made headlines.

Entirely new problem areas do not make a good basis for a solo. Consider the case of environmental pollution. It took scientists, writers and students roughly twenty years – from the 'fifties to the 'seventies – to put environmental problems on the media agenda. And it has taken twenty more years to give the issues dignity enough to be taken seriously even in the bourgeois press. Today, the environmental angle is such a sure-fire 'joker', that we don't even need to have the facts straight to be able to exert political pressure on just about any environment-related issue via the media.

It is my purpose in this essay to discuss this lemming mentality or tendency to snowballing chain reactions among journalists, to analyze editors' worry that they will fail to report what occupies all the other media, at home and abroad, and their desire to 'belong' – so strong at times that media will now and then report stories without even trying to verify the facts. Doing so, they sometimes put rationality in political decision-making out of play, effectively 'jamming' the themes of political discourse which are based on expert, fact-based judgements.

It is my impression that national and international media systems are increasingly prone to such frenzies, choosing to jettison classical news criteria such as significance, balance, analysis, and the ambition to explain consequences of the events reported. The trend is toward 'instant' news with a strong emotional appeal.

Speed or Accuracy?

Short-circuits of this kind tend to occur when emotions are involved, either among media professionals or when the media reflect a mental association which has accumulated over some years and allows an intuitive (rather than rationally founded) notion or perception to steer both news selection, the space and prominence accorded the story, and the 'angle' played up. In other words, a fundamental derangement of news selection and valuation processes. The only rationale that survives the heat

of the fray is the innate ability of the media to attract an audience, i.e., their commercial genius.

A classic case of putting the criteria of truth, impartiality and balance aside occurred in the first 14 days of the Gulf War. Despite the fact that information was scarce and came almost exclusively from the American armed forces, Western news media parroted the information uncritically and interpreted it just as the American forces intended. A propaganda coup unparalleled in Western media since Goebbels. The war and the intense drama of the moment neutralized journalists, disarming them of both their critical faculties and sense of proportion.

Four Questions to the Press

In emotionally charged situations like these there is a remarkable relation between the speed of media coverage, short-circuits in the political system, and most media's selective emphasis on threats and triggers of anxiety, at the expense of analysis and alternative assessments. For this reason, I would like, more or less simultaneously, to address four different aspects of journalistic chain reactions or short-circuiting:

1. Why is the reaction in the media so intense?
Here I mainly have mad cow disease in mind, but consider the case of Shell Oil and the Brent Star platform, as well.
2. What is it that brings individual media to suspend their critical faculties for the sake of speed, a big 'spread', and the publication of unconfirmed rumour and figments of the imagination?
3. Who is willing to take responsibility for the lacking sense of proportion and unfounded claims of causality, which result in a short-circuiting of political decision-making? Is it the fault of the politicians when they, for fear of losing votes, reduce their own role to that of civil servants of limited scope or simply fire-fighters in the face of media frenzy, rather than focusing on formulating and working toward objectives and priorities in the political process, i.e. the conduct of rational government?
4. Is it possible to practise a form of journalism which not only gives voice to the presumed reactions of the masses (or the journalist's personal Angst), but also contributes to

Fact Box

BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy) has been known in Great Britain since 1986, since which time some 150,000 cows have been destroyed to contain the disease. The contagion is believed to have spread as a result of cows being fed the brains of slaughtered sheep and cows, a practice officially banned in 1988. The ban seems to have been effective; only one case of BSE has been noted in a cow born after 1993, compared to 10,000 cases in cows born in 1988.

The belated reaction of British authorities to the epidemic and repeated official efforts to prevent publicity and to discourage further research into the contagion has been hot-

ly and widely debated in Great Britain since 1990. Curiously, this debate has not received media coverage in other European countries, despite the fact that England is the biggest producer of beef in the EU.

Creutzfeldt Jacob Disease (CJD) is an extremely rare disease among humans, with a frequency of about one case per million inhabitants. The frequency shows a slight upward trend in all countries, however. In Great Britain, for example, the frequency has increased from 0.3 to 0.8 per million per annum over the past twenty years. This statistical increase is most probably due to heightened alertness on the part of doctors in cases of unexplained deaths.

cool-headed analysis and the setting of priorities in public discourse?

'Common Sense' as Journalism

Before going on to consider the premisses for modern journalism and politics, let us briefly consider a few examples which may illustrate why the lemmings, now and again, all start running in the same direction. Both under the pressure of impending deadlines but, unfortunately, even under more tranquil conditions, media choose to report the man-on-the-street's common-sense views and reactions rather than engage in a discussion based on reasoned argumentation, facts, expert analysis or perhaps even science.

Reading the media debate on screen violence, for example, one gets the impression that the kind of causal relationships which characterize the natural sciences will be equally valid in the realm of human behaviour (the humanities and social sciences), where causality lacks meaning – or at least cannot be scientifically verified with anywhere near the precision the media seem to expect. It is not only a question of over-simplifying the arguments, but in some cases, of indiscriminately passing on sheer speculation and assumptions in place of honest, dispassionate analysis. Perhaps because anxiety and intuition are often the only real meat of the story, anyhow.

Diseased Cows

In 1995, British researchers found evidence of something similar to Creutzfeldt Jacob Disease in autopsies of ten young people who had died of neurological ailments. The findings led to the formation of a fact-finding commission. The vehemence of the reaction of the Opposition to the report of the commission is most probably the fruit of long pent-up frustration over the failure of a producer-friendly Tory Government to react to the problem of BSE much earlier. The debate in Parliament ended with the Minister for Health's admission that one could not exclude the possibility of a link between the young people's deaths and BSE. This admission precipitated a violent eruption in the European press around 20th March 1996.

Politicians throughout Europe now found themselves under tremendous pressure from a public sick to death of farmers and their heavy subsidies, not to mention all the fiddling and swindling revealed in recent years. BSE, moreover, summoned the spectre of recent years' 'food scares': doctored Italian wine, salmonella-infested poultry and eggs, etc., etc. The situation called for prompt and forceful action, even measures which (as several of the ministers have since indicated) contradicted the advice of their own countries' expertise.

The Discursive Snowball

The topics which have turned into media avalanches have certain characteristics in common. A media snowball with avalanche potential is one which develops very quickly and gets coverage in multiple media (in several countries), despite the

fact that the factual basis may have been misunderstood and is out of proportion to the coverage received. The concept of discourse is used loosely here and refers to a historically situated set of texts or usages referring to a given topic, in which the texts are related to one another as well as to historical changes in the social context (Fairclough:1 ff). Discursive trait refers to the structures which link experience (earlier media coverage as well as first-hand experience), knowledge, and emotions within a specific field of cognition.

In the case of BSE we are confronted with a cocktail of discourses which suddenly fuse: a link emerges between a fatal, mysterious and perhaps contagious disease and the strong, deep-seated emotions which 'animal-eats-animal' arouses. Here animals eating each other, and we humans eating the flesh of animals, meat. Anthropologists and food historians can relate many examples of how eating meat – particularly beef and vital organs – is a far more emotionally charged sector of our diet than, say, eating macaroni or carrots. Although the issue of BSE is primarily confined to the beef on our tables, the disease and its spread among cud-chewing animals establishes a diabolic link between our food, and thus our bodies, and the sponge-like brain substance of sick cows, which were smitten through being fed the pulverized bones and brains of diseased cattle and sheep.

How do such emotionally charged items come to top the news in thousands of media within the space of but a few days? Why are there no editors or journalists who inquire into the facts? Danish media professionals blame the hysteria, the intense and partly unfounded reaction, on the political system, on Europe's politicians themselves. But why is it suddenly their fault alone? Politicians, who had no choice but to react emphatically, given such intensive press coverage and what they presumed to be an equally broad and intense public opinion behind it. Once the story had reached the dimensions that BSE attained this past Spring, no politician or political body had the faintest chance of reasoning it away, or of ignoring it.

EU and Public Health

When it comes to threats to public health or the environment, European politicians are anxious to look steadfast. That is why they have decided to have English cows killed by the droves. The destruction of the animals alone is reported to cost thousands of millions of pounds, perhaps as much as 15 thousand-million. A reckoning which England may be expected to pass on (at least in part) to the rest of the EU.

Based on what one reads in the papers, one is hardly convinced that it is money well spent. Many of us are quite sure that it could be put to any number of far better uses. The fact is that the cause of these ten deaths has not been traced with any certainty to the cattle and, what is more, the contagion was spread perhaps 5-10 years ago, in view of the fact that in recent years British authorities have been acutely aware of BSE and in 1988 issued restrictions on the use of animal refuse in animal fodder. Consequently, it is highly unlikely that killing cows in England today will have any positive effect whatsoever on the incidence of the disease among humans.

Five Million Scapegoats

The whole affair calls to mind the ritual sacrifices of other ages, the sacrifice of a calf, a cow or a goat to placate the gods and the darker forces of nature. Today, our fear of death has become so diffuse, so irrational that newspapers (not the weeklies!) can demand the sacrifice of millions of cows simply because they constitute a psychological threat to our lives. Perhaps what we are witnessing is the witch-burnings and exorcisms of the Middle Ages in a new guise. They become necessary because deep down inside we have lost faith in our leaders and scientists, but credit only various journalistic expressions of our own inner Angst.

And so I ask, in as calm a tone as I can muster: Might we not do more for public health and the environment with these 1-5 thousand-million pounds than using them to burn cows? The answer is easy: Without a doubt! Putting money into traffic safety, influenza vaccination programmes or the quality and safety of workplaces, in that order of priority, would without a doubt save many more lives. The last influenza epidemic in Denmark in 1995/96 caused 2,800 deaths (excess mortality); CJD, by comparison, currently strikes 2-4 Danes a year. There are vaccines against influenza, but they are not widely used. There is no way to prevent CJD. Why are we spending so much money on a far from certain approach to preventing deaths in CJD? Where is our sense of proportion? Or does disease, by definition, so belong to the realm of the irrational, also when covered by the press?

There are no rational answers. But the question arises whenever the world press, or just its Danish chapter, seems to run amok at once. Every time it happens it has had negative consequences: people's private lives, royal or common, are invaded and devastated, the focus of environmental concern is moved yet further away from the actual problems, and the working conditions of politicians – and thus democracy – are a little harder to cope with.

Keynes and Politicians' New Role

British economist John Maynard Keynes (1922) predicted this change in politics and the premisses under which our elected representatives govern. He saw it as a consequence of the ever greater complexity of the problems to be addressed, ever more difficult both to solve and to explain to the people. He predicted that the prime role of politicians would no longer be to make decisions, for that function was already delegated to cadres of advisers, experts and ombudsmen. No, the prime role of politicians would be to announce and account for the decisions reached, thereby maintaining the legitimacy of the state and the internal coherence of society.

Commenting on the openly revanchist Peace at Versailles after the first world war, Keynes explained the doings of Europe's politicians as deference to 'public opinion': "[they] knew that it was not wise and was partly impossible and endangered the life of Europe; but that public passions and public ignorance play a part in the world of which he who aspires to lead a democracy must take account". He goes on to say

that, unlike the nineteenth century, there are no longer two kinds of opinions, true vs. false, but the dichotomy is rather between the outside and the inside: "[T]he opinion of the public voiced by the politicians and the newspapers, and [on the other hand] the opinion of the politicians, the journalists and the civil servants, upstairs and downstairs and behind stairs, expressed in limited circles". It is the work of politicians to mediate between these two spheres, a function complicated by the fact that so-called outside opinions are further subdivided into what the press perceives figures to believe and stand for, and their actual views. Politicians must therefore "have enough intellect to understand the inside opinion, enough sympathy to detect the inner outside opinion, and enough brass to express the outer outside opinion". As long as politicians are caught in this vice, democracy will at best be "jockeyed, humbugged, cajoled along the right road" (33ff).

Rationality and Emotion

It is well and good that such duplicity and deception is probably not quite as easy to practise today as it was in England of the 1920s, but we still have no strategy for securing at least a modicum of political rationality in the face of short-circuiting of outside-outside and inner-outside (perhaps also inner opinions), inasmuch as the inner opinions are no longer rational. The best solution I can come up with is for the press to inject a higher degree of rationality into the discourse by exploring and evaluating the consequences of an issue, whenever the danger of a political chain-reaction and short-circuiting is mounting, i.e., exactly the opposite of what the press does today, when it fans the coals each time gang members take a shot at one another, calling for full mobilization of the police force and an emergency session of parliament. As though there were no other crimes to be solved, as though politicians hadn't enough problems governing the country, without having to drop everything to meddle in matters that properly fall in the bailiwick of administrators and the police!

Brent Spar

Let us consider another example: The decommissioning and planned dumping of Shell Oil's North Sea oil platform, Brent Spar. European media reacted strongly and in concert, exerting such strong pressure on politicians that the platform now stands, stashed away, slowly rusting to pieces, in a Norwegian fjord.

The vehemence of the media's reaction is the product of several factors of a discursive nature: We have used the sea as our rubbish bin for thousands of years, and the pollution has now reached a level where damage to both marine life and human beings can be demonstrated. Meanwhile, the real damage is done, not by old oil platforms and wrecked ships, but by the quiet, steady infusion of toxins and nitrates from agriculture and chemical industries. But because oil platforms are more easily pictured on television screens, because Greenpeace was involved, and because Shell Oil, due to other environmental, social and political misdeeds in, for example, Nigeria, practi-

cally cast itself as the villain in the drama, the media machine once again rolled into action and singled out a most expressive, emotionally charged scapegoat. They succeeded in getting a relative innocuous platform put aground, where it now awaits what may prove to be an even more detrimental destruction on land. All this instead of dealing with the real threat to the sea and sealife, viz., the systematic devastation of ground water, rivers, lakes and seas by European agriculture and industry.

Journalists may protest, "But we have written about that!" And so they have. But my point is that the press nonetheless has distorted the problem – in this case pollution of the environment and our food – beyond recognition.

What has totally preoccupied the minds of European ministers of agriculture these past nine months (and perhaps many weeks to come) is ten deaths, which may or may not have to do with mad cows in England about seven years ago. Press hysteria over mad cows has riveted attention on a very small, very chance or random, corner of our world.

Conjecture on a Par with Fact?

How to cope with the distorted proportions of news coverage? As I see it, the media and individual journalists have a responsibility to society for stories that reach such proportions. Not all deaths make front-page headlines; editors and journalists make choices. Traffic safety, pollution of ground water, and influenza are much more serious problems for the Danish people than mad cow disease, but it is more difficult to write about them in a sensational fashion. So, we build our sensation on conjecture instead: One cannot exclude the possibility that BSE is communicable to humans. No, there any number of things that one cannot exclude which, with the same justification, might be used to whip up anxiety about some impending catastrophe. In the case of BSE, the same anxiety-arousing conjecture was repeated day after day, blown up and spread over many pages, with the result that consumers and politicians alike were led to conclude that BSE is a major problem.

Individual editors and journalists receive confirmation of their credibility and importance when virtually every mass medium in a whole continent makes the same news judgement. Without bothering either to investigate the background or assess the consequences.

In 1994, Danish and other media researchers were contemplating attending a congress of the IAMCR (International Association of Mass Communication Research) in Seoul. Many of us were hesitant to make the trip because CNN had warned – and Danish newspapers were therefore convinced – that nuclear war between North and South Korea was imminent. North Korea's nuclear threat was bumped from front-page columns the day O.J. Simpson was arrested, however. Once in Seoul that July, our Korean hosts informed us that never had reunification between North and South been so close as it had been the previous Spring. A far cry from the story CNN-steered Western media were spreading!

It can hardly be the proper function of mass media to give publicity to remarkable or sensational stories without having

researched them as best they can or trying to assess their implications for the audiences they serve. It seems to me that journalists now and then, and to an increasing degree, write their stories straight off the news services' computer screens or from CNN newscasts instead of making an effort to find the core, the substance of the story.

Failure to Analyze

Two years ago, several deaths of cancer occurred among the workforce in a certain company in Århus. The story made headline news throughout Denmark a few days running. An employee wondered (publicly) why so many of her colleagues had died of cancer over the years and suspected some cause in the workplace. No journalist made the obvious reflection: If statistics tell us that one Dane in four dies of cancer, then five deaths among the woman's workmates is nothing sensational if twenty-odd people had died in the interval in question. The 'story' evaporates. All that is left to say is: In Århus, like the rest of Denmark, one inhabitant in four dies of cancer.

As student of journalism I have often wondered why journalists go for this kind of story and so often choose to spread unwarranted anxiety among their readers. And here, in the name of justice, we are forced to examine our own profession, us mass communication researchers, as accessories after the fact.

Media Violence

Another 'mad cow' which regularly fills Nordic newspaper columns is the idea that screen violence (television and video – but not newspapers?) makes children and youth more violent. Last year this simplistic notion even caused the Danish Minister of Culture to appoint a commission, which put several months' work into the problem. Naturally, they were unable to reach any firm conclusion – for the simple reason that violent behaviour is an extremely complex phenomenon, the causes of which have more to do with personality and upbringing than they do with exposure to television. Violence has many causes, and one of the worst sins a social scientist can commit is to go looking for the cause in a single place. Moreover, since violent behaviour often represents a release of tensions built up over up to 20-40 years, it can be difficult indeed to point to any one causal relationship as the cause: say, viewing Friday the 13th and The Texas Chain- Saw Massacre, say, twenty times.

Of course, the media reflect rising levels of violence in a violent society, and newscasts' blood-splattered reportage from war and assaults perhaps contribute more to the brutalizing of society than fiction does. Again we are forced to admit: it is beyond the capacity of research to give any conclusive answer. And then we have, if we are to be totally concrete and rational, the peculiar paradox that whereas television viewing in Denmark has increased from an average 80 minutes per day in 1986 to about 160 minutes today, i.e., a doubling of viewing, the number of violent crimes reported to Danish police has declined slightly. An additional kink in the debate on violence, in which all seem agreed that real-world violence has increased

in recent years, is the fact that nobody knows for sure. Violence in society is impossible to measure; the only barometer we have is the number of complaints the police have agreed to act on – and which people have taken the trouble to file.

Since journalists set the agenda in the media and decide, for all the rest of us, which criteria of importance shall steer coverage, we more and more are confronted with a brand of journalism which revels in sensations and sick cows. No journalist takes any interest in the really serious problems in our society, let alone their causes – and least of all causes more than a couple of years back. For the simple reason that they would not be taken seriously by their colleagues, if they did. The criteria of importance, of newsworthiness are to an ever greater extent generated in a 'limited circle' of journalists and high-level politicians. What other sectors of the population or experts consider important more or less lacks relevance to the intraprofessional 'stock exchange' of news values.

Consult the Experts

This limited circle, which produces, and repeatedly confirms, its own news values, can and should be opened. Several measures present themselves. For example, one might bring the readers into the day-to-day work of reporting through panels, occasional forum debates and reception research. Second, the tendency of the limited circle to short-circuit in acute situations can be countered if the newsdesks develop and use a broad network of experts, whom they can consult for 'second opinions' and references to current literature, policy papers, research findings and yet other people with specialized knowledge. .

Some subject areas are almost exclusively covered by specialized journalists: e.g., sports, aviation, automotive news, and finance. Then, there are a number of areas – the arts, research, the environment – which are covered by specialists day-to-day, but whenever something 'big' happens, all-round reporters are brought in as auxiliaries to get as many interviews as possible. These are the kinds of tasks that professionals can manage on the basis of routine and common sense, but which in some cases – as has happened in the case of media violence – results in disproportionate coverage or outright campaigns, the naïve and negative impacts of which can hardly be excused by the hectic 'pulse' of news-gathering and references to the duty of the press to report whatever turns up on the newsroom computer screen.

To edit, Not Just Transmit

Newsdesks do not normally report whatever story comes their way – other than during lemming marches. Since the turn of

the century newspapers have prided themselves on their gatekeeper function, i.e., newspapers' right and duty to select the news. Some stories are discarded, others are created by the paper through interviews, etc.; some are 'buried' in the back pages, others 'played up', spread over front-page columns days in a row. These latter stories exert considerable pressure on the political system or other sectors of society.

In the case of the mad cows, the priority journalists gave the story and their treatment of it has done a disservice both to our democratic system and to the economy. It is something like Hans Christian Andersen's story of the feather turning into a hen as gossip spreads. The uproar impacts on the economy because, regardless of the outcome in fact, the price of beef will rise; someone will have to pick up the bill for the needless slaughter. Had the story about the ten deaths in England been given balanced, well-researched treatment and received coverage according to its merits, we would have seen

- that the slaughter of cows today serves no preventive health purpose inasmuch as the contagion has been contained for some years now,
- that the threat is very little;
- that many environmental and social problems have received less attention in the media as a consequence of the hysteria over BSE.

The press hysteria does a disservice to democracy in that politicians are forced to react, sensibly or not, whenever a press snowball reaches avalanche proportions with the reporters breathing down their necks. They were forced, they say, to impose export restrictions and order the destruction of animals, even if these measures have no more than a psychological effect, to give the impression that the politicians are doing something about the problem. The short-circuiting of the press on the factual, conceptual and analytical levels turns the normally beneficial function of publicity, the process which establishes contacts and knits society together, into a vicious circle of panic reactions and trial-by-the-press populism.

Solving the crisis of the welfare state – the consequence of government intervention and control of entirely too many things – is once again put off, indefinitely. Pressing social problems, such as reform of European agriculture and bringing unemployment down, cannot be solved without the solid support of mass media. It is hard when the solutions require new knowledge and a change of attitude on the part of many, many people. Come on, journalists. Do your part! Prove your worth as members of the Fourth Estate instead of rushing about to bring off yet another media 'gang bang'. Even if mad cows with sponge-like brains do make good pictures that symbolize our fear, thereby selling a lot of papers and commercial spots.

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