

THE JOURNALISTS - Notes

The set

Is an impressionistic layout of the main offices of THE SUNDAY PAPER. There is a 'cut away' called THE CENTRE SPACE where the action outside the offices is played.

In order that action and dialogue are evenly distributed over stage area, the designer must pay careful attention as to which office is near which.

But however the rest is laid out, THE NEWS ROOM must occupy a large space, for most of the final activity goes on there.

To the rear is a screen upon which are projected the huge printing presses. At a point near the end of the play the projection is taken over by a film of the presses beginning to roll.

Production

Activity must be continuous in all sections throughout the play while the plot weaves its way stopping here and there - sometimes for a lengthy exchange, sometimes for a few lines. Occasionally conversations will take place on the 'phone between individuals from different offices.

While the audience focuses on one 'frame' (section) at a time, the orchestration of what happens *at the same time* in each remaining office is a director's problem. The following may help:

The rhythm of a Sunday newspaper office is one of a slow beginning at the start of the week (Tuesday) working up to an agitated flurry, which culminates at about six in the evening on the Saturday when the button is pushed to start the printing presses rolling for the first editions.

It is important, however, to remember this: it is a Sunday paper, not a daily one; therefore a lot of the pages will be laid out early on in the week. Many articles, indeed, have been set up weeks in advance. This means that not every department is hectic on the Saturday. For example the Arts pages are well advanced, but Sport - which is waiting for stories of the Saturday matches - is frantic. The two real centres of Saturday's activity are THE STONE - where the printers and journalists lay out the pages and make the last minute changes. (This area is not shown); and THE NEWS ROOM - where the editor and his closest advisers shape up, on blank sheets, the final product. (This area is shown).

I have not indicated every action, but certain routine movements are continuous throughout - growing in intensity towards the end of the play, and the following actions can be drawn from to help the director in his orchestration:

Messengers taking copy from 'the stone' or from one department to another.

Reporters writing or subs correcting copy at their desks.

Journalists reading newspapers - endlessly! or official documents.

Journalists in conversation in each other's departments.

Journalists shaving themselves with electric razors, women making up, (could toilets be shown? they are constantly washing print off their hands).

A woman pushing a tea trolley is ever present; reporters flow to and from it for tea and sandwiches.

Reporters, secretaries at typewriters.

The constant making or receiving of telephone calls.

Individuals with special information being interviewed.

Clatter is continuous but, of course, volume of noise must be regulated or projection of dialogue will be a constant fight for the actors. Could it all be on tape? then actions could be mimed. I'm thinking particularly of typewriting.

Journalists are alert, fast thinking and fast talking individuals. The clue to achieving the right rhythm is to maintain a quick delivery of lines - but in the beginning to have long pauses *between departments* which become shorter as the play continues thus giving the impression of increasing activity.

When action takes place in THE CENTRE SPACE the rest of the action and noise freezes.

Time

This may be a problem since there are many assignments which are concertina-ed. It must be imagined that we are covering a week of five days BUT this week is also five weeks. That is to say we've taken our Tuesday from the first week, our Wednesday from the second week and so on. Time is therefore taking place on two planes, and some stories belong to the week, others to the five weeks.